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## "A Chilling Effect for Sexual Assault Survivors": An Examination of Campus-Based Advocacy and the Proposals to Title IX Under the Trump Administration

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“A Chilling Effect for Sexual Assault Survivors”: An Examination of Campus-Based  
Advocacy and the Proposals to Title IX Under the Trump Administration

By

Hunter J. Beckstrom

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Science

In

Gender and Women’s Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, MN

May 2020



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**Abstract**

Students attending colleges and universities across the United States are overwhelmingly affected by campus sexual violence. Research finds that between one in four and one in five female students will at some time during their college career experience campus sexual assault (Muehlenhard et al., 2017; Krebs et al., 2016; Cantor et al., 2015; The White House 2014). Although the sexual assault itself is traumatizing, students may also experience psychological responses such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, fear and guilt, mood disorders, and more (Deisinger, 2017). In addition to such responses, students are further impacted by social factors such as victim blaming in which places the blame and responsibility of the assault on victims and survivors themselves. For this reason, the position of campus-based advocates plays a crucial role in addressing the aftermath of experiencing campus sexual assault. Campus-based advocates have the ability to empower and support students who have experienced campus sexual assault while also providing them with resources and options for reporting (Brubaker, 2019). In addition to providing advocacy, campus-based advocates also have the unique opportunity to educate and bring further awareness of campus sexual assault to the wider campus community. The purpose of this thesis is to determine the perception and need for campus-based advocates on university campuses as evidenced by campus-based advocates themselves. This study will seek to assess the value of campus-based advocates from the perspective of a feminist lens intent upon supporting the awareness and experiences of student victims and survivors of sexual violence. Furthermore, several frameworks will be examined in order to situate the value of campus-based advocates such as the Trump administration’s proposals to Title IX, barriers experienced and the absence of advocates on college campuses. Qualitative research is utilized in order to interview campus-based advocates through semi-structured processes with the aim of providing this unique perspective.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *Introduction*

Campus sexual assault is a pervasive and traumatic experience that significantly impacts university students. According to research, approximately one in five female students have experienced attempted or completed forms of sexual assault or rape during their collegiate career (Muehlenhard et al., 2017, Krebs et al., 2016, Cantor et al., 2015). The resulting negative outcomes from the assault can also include substantial mental health consequences (Diesinger, 2018) along with considerable declines in academic performance (Jordan, Combs, & Smith, 2014). Due to the prevalence of student victims of campus sexual assault and the subsequent traumatic aftermath, it is vital for students to receive adequate support and resources as they heal from their experience.

Campus-based advocates on university settings have the ability to provide student victims and survivors<sup>1</sup> a variety of services through advocacy such as support, empowerment, resource referrals, and in conducting support groups. Campus-based advocates are also closely familiar with the bureaucracy of higher education and navigating policies that influence campus sexual assault in order to ensure students have an ally when making reports of their assault. This position expertly bridges the experience of student victims and legislation influencing campus sexual assault. As campus-based advocates have firsthand knowledge from student sexual assault victims

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<sup>1</sup> The labels of “victim” and “survivor” are often used interchangeably throughout research investigating sexual assault. Research by Williamson & Serna (2018) argue that the label of victim is often tied to concepts of helplessness whereas the label of survivor signifies growth and empowerment. However, the researchers also note that “not all of those who have experienced sexual assault have the same definitions of what it means to be a survivor or victim” (p. 678-79). For the purpose the current study, I will primarily use the term victim.



along with the addition of being closely familiar with campus policy and bureaucracy, those employed in such positions hold a unique perspective that is worth investigating.

The passage of Title IX under the Education Amendments in the early 1970s permitted that no individual may be discriminated upon the basis of their sex in any educational programming in which receives governmental financial assistance (Anderson, 2016). Title IX has since become the backbone for campus investigations surrounding sexual assault. Although Title IX legislation influenced the perception and handling of sexual assault on college campuses, institutions were not permitted to publicize violent crimes. As there was no requirement to make students aware of crimes, neither was there any obligations to preventing such misconduct. Although the prevalence of sexual assault on campus continued, it wasn't until decades later that such policy once again came to the forefront. Heavily influenced by the Obama administration, landmark approvals of the Dear Colleague Letter, Campus SaVE Act, and more transformed campus sexual assault in unprecedented levels. These policies outlined amendments that included a broader definition of sexual assault, further remedies of service and support for victims, and holding universities accountable for addressing and preventing sexual assault (Butler et al., 2019, Woodward Griffin et al., 2017). Although campus sexual assault unquestionably continued, the sanctions by the Obama administration brought campus sexual assault to the public eye and revealed it as an issue in need of confronting and preventing.

With the election of Donald Trump as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, the transformative policies influencing the advancements of campus sexual assault soon

came under fire. After the appointment of Betsey DeVos as the U.S. Secretary of Education, proposed amendments to Title IX were submitted in November of 2018 (Butler et al., 2019). Overall, the recommended changes from the Trump administration would not only create potential harm to student victims of campus sexual assault, but they would also reduce the responsibility of universities to hold perpetrators accountable (Butler et al., 2019). The threat of overturning crucial legislation regarding campus sexual assault would significantly diminish the ability to empower and support students who have experienced sexual assault. The opportunity to hear directly from campus-based advocates themselves on this issue establishes the importance of validating student victim experiences and continuing to progress in anti-violence prevention.

### *Historical Context*

Campus-based advocacy has historically stemmed from the roots of the second wave of feminism during the 1960s and 70s. Intent upon politicizing violence against women as a societal issue, the feminist anti-rape movement brought rape consciousness to the forefront of second wave activism. Efforts to bring awareness, education, and the prevention of violence against women became a focal point of the movement through means of direct action and grassroots organizing. The feminist anti-rape movement emphasized that the experience of rape and sexual assault held significant personal and political implications that needed to be addressed and confronted.

The second wave of feminism introduced the ideas and concepts of the anti-rape movement through communication networks and consciousness-raising (CR). According to Bevacqua (2000), these methods of awareness allowed for a shared and public

understanding of the experience of living as a woman and also experiencing violence.

Through these means of activism, three misperceptions surrounding rape were addressed and educated upon: (1) that women cannot be raped against their will (2) women really want to be raped (3) women make false accusations (Bevacqua, 2000, p. 55). Feminist activists confronted these societal myths along with countless other barriers reinforcing gender violence and continue to do so today.

Campus-based advocacy is also closely linked to the development of Rape Crisis Centers (RCCs). During their inception, RCCs often became operational because of an activist's voluntary decision to begin advocacy work out of their own home (Bevacqua, 2000). As RCCs continued to utilize grassroots organizing and consciousness-raising, they represented yet another avenue of direct action by helping to establish rape statute legislation (Campbell et al., 1998). Although advocacy grew out of radical feminism, a number of factors has since produced a noticeable shift departing from its initial feminist roots. The expansion and professionalization of the field, along with funding influences and the increase of social service industries gave rise to how advocacy is represented today (Campbell et al, 1998; Bevacqua 2000). Despite these transformations, the activism behind rape consciousness from the feminist anti-rape movement largely influenced how campus-based advocacy is practiced today.

Although not all college campuses have the benefit of offering advocacy services, those that have this opportunity typically provide advocacy through Women's Centers. With nearly 500 centers across the United States, researchers Marine, Helfrich & Randhawa (2017) share that Women's Centers "serve a centralizing role for programs

and services of special concern to women, including individual and group support, sexual violence response and advocacy, leadership development opportunities, mentoring, and networking” (p. 45-46). Furthermore, Women’s Centers also frequently come to represent the heart of feminist activism on campus as well. Overall, Women’s Centers play an essential role in providing a broad range of services to students impacted by sexual violence while also emphasizing activism, radical transformation and equality for all individuals.

### *The Current Study*

The unique perspective held by campus-based advocates was the catalyst for this research project. The current study investigates the role of campus-based advocates, their perceived value and need from the perspective of themselves, students and their institution, and to analyze the potential implications of campus sexual assault legislation proposed by the Trump administration. Because campus-based advocates serve as “the voice” for students who have experienced campus sexual assault, these individuals hold vital information as to how such amendments can impact students affected by sexual assault (Brubaker, 2019, p. 308). Furthermore, this research demonstrates that campus-based advocates hold a vital role on universities and that more positions should be implemented for student well-being and retention.

To reveal the perspective of campus-based advocates, interviews were conducted with a total of five participants from a Midwestern collegiate system. Each interview was semi-structured and conducted face-to-face. One note on participants is necessary to mention. Unfortunately, not all universities have a designated campus-based advocate

and this also proves to be the case for the collegiate system included in this research project. Building upon the work of Brubaker (2019), campus-based advocates can be defined as those who support and empower student victims of sexual violence as they navigate and interact with various higher education offices, authorities, and polices in addition to having completed advocacy certification and being a confidential resource. As some universities are unable to fulfill such a role, for the purpose of this research project, the term campus-based supporter was constructed. Although a campus-based supporter also supports and empowers student victims, such individuals may not have been specifically trained as advocates nor are they considered a confidential resource. The intent in using the term campus-based supporter is based upon several factors. Initially, there was no evidence of comparable roles to that of campus-based advocates in previously conducted research. Furthermore, although the two participants who were categorized as campus-based supporters in the study did not specifically identify themselves as such, neither did they identify with another term. Generally, the chosen term of campus-based supporter emphasizes an individual who is an ally to student victims of sexual assault and provides support but offering advocacy services is not a responsibility of their role on campus. Both advocates and supporters hold reputable positions that provide assistance to victims but for the purpose of this research project, such a distinction needed to be addressed.

### *Organization of Chapters*

The second chapter offers a review of existing scholarship in order to contextualize the research of the current study. The focus of this chapter examines a

literature review which includes three bodies of knowledge: (1) the feminist anti-rape movement, (2) literature on policy impacting campus sexual assault, and (3) literature on campus-based advocacy. The purpose of the first body of knowledge is to provide a historical context of campus-based advocacy as advocacy itself stemmed from the radical efforts of the second wave of feminism. The next section is dedicated to examining the breadth of scholarship on the legislation of campus sexual assault. This includes landmark legislation such as Title IX, the Clery Act, the Dear Colleague Letter and other vital policies influencing the interpretation and prevention of campus sexual assault. The second section ends with an analysis of the Trump administration's proposed amendments to such legislation that would further harm student victims and survivors while supporting those accused of sexual assault. The final section addresses the role of campus-based advocates on colleges campuses.

The third chapter provides an examination of the methodology in the current research study. This chapter offers a comprehensive review of the research methods that were utilized throughout the conduction of the research project. Furthermore, this section also addresses the potential biases apparent in the current study via a reflexivity statement. A brief analysis of the complex role men inhabit within anti-violence and advocacy work is also examined. The third chapter ends with a discussion of potential limitations that are to be expected from the research study.

Chapter four introduces the key themes that emerged from interviews with participants while also analyzing these concepts. This examination explores the roles of the participants in the research, the perceived value of campus-based advocates, barriers

they face and analyzing the potential impact the Trump administration's proposals would have on those affected by campus sexual assault. Finally, chapter five finishes by providing a conclusion to the current study. The final section identifies recommendations for future research into campus-based advocates and the potential fulfillment of the amendments made to Title IX by the Trump Administration.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review establishes the central role that feminism has played in consciousness raising and the prevention of campus sexual assault. In order to provide an overview of campus sexual assault, a historical context is provided on the anti-rape movement as a founding pillar of campus sexual assault advocacy and the movement's resulting awareness, education, and prevention. This historical context is then followed by an examination of literature addressing landmark legislation and policy that have influenced the way campus sexual assault is envisioned and ultimately responded to today. Furthermore, in light of the purpose and focus of this study, a comprehensive review of campus-based advocacy is assessed to determine the implementation and significance of these roles on college campuses and universities.

### *Defining Rape & Sexual Assault*

Prior to examining literature on the topic of campus sexual assault, it is necessary to address the terminology that will be utilized throughout this thesis. As of this writing, there is no universal definition of rape or sexual assault. Instead, these terms, as well as others within the umbrella of sexual violence, have historically been used interchangeably and even incorrectly at times. This section is dedicated to investigating the differences among definitions while also determining how the terms rape and sexual assault will be utilized for the purpose of this research study.

Although most institutions define rape and sexual assault quite similarly, subtle differences and the influence of language have lasting impacts on the understanding of such terminology. A plethora of terms have been historically used in describing the



forced, nonconsensual sexual contact of another person including *rape*, *sexual assault*, *sexual battery*, and *unwanted sexual contact* (Muehlenhard et al., 2017). Whereas some researchers have defined sexual assault as penetrative (Cantor et al., 2015; Muehlenhard et al. 2017), others emphasize sexual assault as being non-penetrative (Krebs et al., 2016; Roebuck et al. 2016). In the examination of the current study, *sexual violence* will be referred to as an umbrella term that encompasses sexual assault, rape and sexual harassment. However, a clear distinction between sexual assault and rape must be made. According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN, 2020), sexual assault “refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim.” Different forms of sexual assault mentioned by RAINN (2020) include attempted rape, fondling, unwanted touching and forcing someone to do sexual acts through threats or coercion. On the other hand, the U.S. Department of Justice defines rape 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 consent of the victim” (Haugen et al., 2018, p. 19). Throughout the remainder of this thesis, these definitions of sexual assault and rape will be observed.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Feminist standpoint theory, significantly influenced by Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding, is the central theoretical framework emphasized throughout this research project. According to Hesse-Biber (2014), “feminist standpoint theory [is] a general approach within feminism to refer to the many different theorists who argued for the importance of situating knowledge in women’s experiences” (p. 24). Furthermore, the

goal of this theory is to “explicate how relations of domination are gendered in particular ways” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 25). As marginalized communities, such as women, have been historically and socially silenced, this perspective centers their experiences and amplifies their voices. By situating knowledge within oppressed populations, feminist standpoint theory brings forth new and hidden experiences.

The current study centers the knowledge and experiences from individuals who assist, support and empower those who have been impacted by sexual violence. As all participants identified as women and the vast majority of the students they provided services to were also women, this research exemplifies a unique and gendered perspective. However, the participants also shared the viewpoint of student sexual assault victims. This element considers the dominance of social institutions as violence is rooted within power and control. The current study is an attempt to discover new knowledge and experiences from the perspective of campus-based advocates, supporters and student victims of sexual assault.

### **I. Feminist Anti-Rape Movement**

As activism addressing campus sexual assault is rooted within the feminist anti-rape movement, it is necessary to understand the history of these efforts. Sexual assault and rape are deeply entrenched within traditional, patriarchal society in that women have been historically framed as the property of men. In fact, according to Susan Brownmiller (1975), the very institution of marriage is dependent on “the male’s forcible abduction and rape of the female” (p. 17). Even more so, the violent assault of women’s bodies has been found in literature as early as the Code of Hammurabi and Scriptures of King David

(Brownmiller 1975; Bevacqua 2000). Rather than being visualized as an act of intimacy or a sexual experience, rape is based upon the power and control over another person through violence. The institution of patriarchy is grounded within the ideology of men's dominance and control over women's bodies. Furthermore, rape establishes a "form of female degradation designed to boost the male ego," which continues to reinforce a binarized hierarchy between men and women (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 389). Historically as well as today, sexual assault poses a very real and traumatizing experience to countless numbers of women across the world.

#### *History of the Feminist Anti-Rape Movement*

In a central text titled *Rape on the Public Agenda: Feminism and the Politics of Sexual Assault*, Maria Bevacqua (2000) examines the feminist activism and politicization of violence against women. Being a focal point of feminism in the United States, the anti-rape movement came to fruition within the development of the second wave of feminism. Starting near the end of the 1960s, "second-wave feminism gave rise to public awareness of sexual assault as a women's issue and to the anti-rape movement" (Bevacqua, 2000, p. 29). In this regard, an emphasis was placed upon the experience of rape and sexual assault not only as a traumatizing personal experience, but also one that held immense societal and political implications as well.

With the purpose of spreading awareness and education about sexual violence, the feminist anti-rape movement employed a diverse range of grassroots organizing, strategizing, and direct action. Operating through established communication networks that encompassed journals and newspapers, feminist organizations such as the Feminist

Alliance Against Rape (FAAR) and Cell 16 had the ability to develop and share anti-rape ideas and material (Bevacqua, 2000). Communication networks allowed for the radically-influenced, shared understanding of the violent experiences of living as a woman. This discovery launched a fundamental strategy of the feminist anti-rape movement; consciousness-raising. Consciousness-raising (C-R) held much significance because, rather than suffering in silence, C-R opened up the opportunity to share and address a communal understanding of men's power and violence over women's bodies (Bevacqua, 2000). Through a shared consciousness of rape coupled with the lived experience of being a woman, C-R provided a platform that was women-driven and women-centered to combat the discrimination and oppression they survived while also arguing for its political implications.

In addition to communication networks and consciousness-raising, two central events sparked the feminist anti-rape movement into what it is now considered today. The first of these events were the New York Radical Feminists' (NYRF) speak-out on rape in January 1971 while the second included their first rape conference in April of the same year (Bevacqua, 2000). Still being grounded within C-R efforts, Bevacqua (2000) describes how the NYRF addressed and debunked three myths: (1) women cannot be raped against their will (2) women really want to be raped (3) women make false accusations (p. 55). The activism by the NYRF sparked a radical shift around the political ideology and consciousness of the anti-rape movement.

Although sexual assault and rape held a considerable amount of focus throughout second-wave feminism, not all feminists agreed upon the same perspectives regarding

sexual assault and rape. This difference in thinking provoked discontent between radical, liberal, and black feminists. Among radical feminists, Bevacqua (2000) addresses four key elements of their participation within the anti-rape movement: (1) consciousness-raising (2) bringing silenced issues, such as rape, to the public sphere (3) pushing against feminine constraints (4) embodying the notion that “the personal is political.” On the other hand, the liberal feminist movement, which was linked to the National Organization for Women (NOW), did not begin to implement anti-rape organizing until the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*. Finally, the role of black feminism within anti-rape activism in the United States is crucial to emphasize as well. Much of the first and second-waves of feminism have been grounded under the perception that patriarchy, or sexism, is the ultimate source of oppression that women experience. Furthermore, white feminist organizing has historically discriminated against and silenced the experiences of women of color in addition to ignoring the intersections of race, class, and sexuality. Through the disregard of the experiences of women of color and the reinforced myth of the black male rapist, black feminists hesitated to align themselves with other second-wave movements of radical and liberal feminists (Bevacqua, 2000).

Campbell, Baker and Mazurek (1998) address the feminist influences in the role rape crisis centers (RCCs) played in providing direct services to victims and survivors of sexual violence while also being catalysts for social change. Intent upon continuing radical perspectives, feminists engaging in organizing RCCs sought to educate their communities about the institution of patriarchy along with its influence of the power over and objectification of women’s bodies. It is also noted that those involved in the forefront

of advocating for RCCs rallied for political recognition in which stemmed from the rape statutes of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Campbell et al., 1998). Despite the inauguration of RCCs being largely influenced by radical feminism, it is argued that most of these initial ideologies, particularly from radical feminism, have been effectively curtailed today. Through the societal pressures of adapting to conservative political climates, the rise of social service agencies, and influences of funding, RCCs today display a considerably different representation of the grass-roots organizing agencies they were initially created upon (Campbell et al, 1998; Bevacqua 2000).

Another central component of the feminist anti-rape movement was the induction of the “take back the night” (TBN) marches and rallies. Originating as far back as 1971, TBN encompassed the “active reclaiming of the streets at night by women” (Bevacqua, 2000, p. 71). Organizing in solidarity and speaking out against the culture of silence around violence against women and the normalization of such violence, TBN activism sought to bring rape consciousness to all platforms of society. In fact, TBN has greatly influenced other more recent political movements today. As evidenced by Carr (2013), the SlutWalk movement that began in Toronto, Canada due to a police officer’s remarks that women should be assaulted due to wearing revealing clothing, has its roots within TBN activism. A contemporary example of the continued marches of TBN, the SlutWalk turns the “objectification of women on its own head with its bold, audacious parody of the slut, and has become a unique and innovative form of protest against gender-based violence” (Carr, 2013, p. 25). The activism of TBN and the SlutWalk remain highly visible movements that serve as continued catalysts for feminist resistance and

consciousness-raising that reach across the United States and hold immense influence on colleges and universities.

### *Introducing Campus Sexual Assault and Rape*

As has been demonstrated above, the feminist anti-rape movement sparked by the second wave of feminism established a radical, grassroots-led effort to bring the social roots of violence against women into the forefront of the nation's consciousness.

Although sexual assault and rape awareness has persistently continued in its call for activism, no setting has arguably become so demonstrable than on colleges and universities. A possible underlying reason is due to the prevalent rates of sexual assault and rape students experience during their educational careers on campus. With rates of one in four to one in five female students experiencing campus sexual assault (Muehlenhard et al., 2017; Krebs et al., 2016; Cantor et al., 2015; The White House 2014), sexual violence is a prevalent issue on college campuses and remains a glaring problem across the United States despite decades of activism and progression from the feminist anti-rape movement.

## **II. Literature on Policy & Legislation Impacting Campus Sexual Assault**

According to Anderson (2016) the second wave of the feminist movement initiated efforts to pass legislation for Title IX under the Education Amendments in which heavily influences the understanding of campus sexual assault today. Title IX is responsible for investigating and determining the outcome of policy violations when it comes to campus sexual assault. Anderson (2016) references this landmark legislation in the passage below:

Congress enacted Title IX in the 1972 Education Amendments. It states: No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (p. 1971)

Although Title IX today is generally perceived to be impacting specifically campus sexual assault, the statutes reflect nondiscriminatory behavior in regards to hiring, admissions, and college athletics.

Although feminist advocacy organizations displayed significant activism within the public domain, their presence was also felt in higher education as well. According to Anderson (2016), the National Women's Law Center argued in the *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* legal case that "peer-on-peer sexual harassment could violate a student's right to an equal education" (p. 1971). This paved the way for launching the understanding that universities had a legal requirement to not only help protect students, but also hold students accountable for violating policy on sexual harassment misconduct. Furthering this activism, university students were also not silent on the issue of campus sexual assault activism. Anderson (2016) notes that in 1990, students attending Brown University were frustrated with the fact that campus administrators ignored incidents of sexual misconduct by their peers and retaliated by listing the perpetrators names on bathroom walls. Later, in 1991 after a significant amount of media attention, the university labeled sexual harassment and misconduct as an explicit violation of its code of conduct policy. These actions by organizations with feminist roots along with student activism helped shape Title IX legislation moving forward.



Although universities were beginning to recognize campus sexual assault as an issue that required attention and decision-making protocols, there was no mandatory legislation that required the publication of violent incidences on campus. It was not until the rape and murder of Lehigh University student Jeanne Clery in her dorm room in April of 1986 that this became a recognized problem (Butler et al., 2019). According to Butler, Lee and Fisher (2019), the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998 (herein Clery Act) “requires all institutions of higher education that participate in Higher Education Act Title IV financial assistance programs to annually report campus crime statistics and campus security policies” (p. 982). In essence, the Clery Act set the foundation for the statistical reporting of campus sexual assault which in turn allowed for the crime to be visualized as a problem that was necessary to address.

Yet another key piece of legislation impacting campus sexual assault as evidenced by Butler et al. (2019) was the authorization of the Dear Colleague Letter in 2011 under the Obama administration. Initially, the Office of Civil Rights broadened the prohibition and meaning of sexual violence to the following definition: “physical sexual acts perpetrated against a person’s will or where a person is incapable of giving consent due to the victim’s use of drugs or alcohol ... [or] due to the victim’s intellectual or other disability” (p. 984). Furthermore, the Office of Civil Rights argued to ensure “that all students feel safe in their school, so that they have the opportunity to benefit fully from the school’s programs and activities” (Butler et al., 2019, p. 984). Although many would

argue that these additions in fact strengthened policies regarding nondiscrimination, there were critics of these alterations.

Critics of the Dear Colleague Letter feared that universities held victims of sexual assault at an unfair advantage while risking the rights of accused students. Butler et al. (2019) examine three arguments identified by critics of the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter. Initially, and arguably the most controversial, critics argued that the “preponderance of the evidence standard” for the university grievance procedure regarding sexual assault was too low of a standard (p. 984). This level of evidence outlines the notion that it was more than likely, or not, that the form of sexual violence occurred. Critics believed this low standard would result in wrongful and possibly false disciplinary measures for

<p><b>1972:</b> <i>Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972</i> signed into law by President Richard Nixon</p> <p><b>1998:</b> <i>Gebser v Lago Vista Independent School District</i> U.S. Supreme Court decision</p> <p><b>1999:</b> <i>Davis v Monroe County Board of Education</i> U.S. Supreme Court decision</p>	<p><b>2009:</b> Barack Obama is sworn in as 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States</p> <p><b>2013:</b> <i>The Campus SaVE Act</i> is passed as part of the VAWA amendments to the Clery Act</p> <p><b>2011:</b> Dear Colleague Letter on Sexual Violence is published by the OCR</p>	<p><b>January 2017:</b> Donald J. Trump is sworn in as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States</p> <p><b>July 2017:</b> DeVos hosts "listening sessions" with survivors of CSGBV, students wrongfully accused of CSGBV, and campus representatives and CSGBV experts</p>	<p><b>November 2018:</b> DeVos proposes to amend regulations to the implementation of Title IX</p> <p><b>January 2019:</b> Public comments on DeVos's proposed rule amendment to Title IX close</p>
<p><b>1990:</b> Title II of the <i>Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act</i> (renamed <i>Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act</i> in 1998) is signed into law by President George H. W. Bush</p>	<p><b>2001:</b> <i>Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance</i> is published in the Federal Register</p> <p><b>2006:</b> Dear Colleague Letter on Sexual Harassment is published by the OCR</p>	<p><b>2014:</b> <i>Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence</i> is published by the OCR</p> <p>The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault is established and publishes its first report</p>	<p><b>January 2017:</b> The Task Force publishes its second report</p> <p><b>February 2017:</b> Betsy DeVos is sworn in as U.S. Secretary of Education</p> <p><b>September 2017:</b> The OCR rescinds the <i>2011 Dear Colleague Letter</i> and the <i>2014 Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence</i></p> <p>The OCR publishes <i>Questions and Answers on Campus Sexual Misconduct</i></p>

Graphic by Butler et al. (2019) depicting landmark policy influencing campus sexual assault.

accused students. The next argument concerns different “remedies” for the complainant (victim/survivor) which can include having access to services such as advocacy, counseling, tutoring, or having the ability to limit contact between the victim and perpetrator. Butler et al. (2019) note how critics of this legislation argue that such remedies favor the victim while simultaneously “plac[ing] a burden on the alleged perpetrator” (p. 985). The final argument critics mobilize against the Dear Colleague Letter is the presumed lack of attention toward any type of due process in regard to the perpetrator. However, Butler et al. (2019) refute this criticism as the “Letter did not *add* to or *change* any guidance on due process” but instead summarized legislation from the 2001 Revised Guidance policy that the Dear Colleague Letter was based (p. 985). Overall, the impact of the Dear Colleague Letter reverberated across the nation due to the publicity it received from the Obama administration’s seal of approval and commenced a number of social justice and campus initiatives toward advocating for the awareness and prevention of campus sexual assault.

Another key policy impacting campus sexual assault is the Sexual Assault Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). According to Woodward Griffin et al. (2017), the SaVE Act was signed by President Obama in March of 2013 as an addition to the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (VAWA). Woodward Griffin et al. (2017) claim the SaVE Act builds upon the legislation of the Clery Act in the following four ways: “(1) increasing transparency in the reporting of on-campus sexual violence (2) guaranteeing enhanced rights for victims of violence who pursue disciplinary action against offenders (3) setting standards for campus disciplinary proceedings (4) requiring

institutions to provide campus-wide prevention and education programs” (p. 402).

Through the revisions of the Clery Act made by the Obama administration, a significant transformation is made clear; rather than simply noticing and being aware of crime on campus, there are efforts to reduce and prevent them. Procedures were established to help the prevention and reduction of campus sexual assault ranging from bystander intervention initiatives, healthy relationship and consent programming, and monthly awareness events.

As has been noted, the Obama administration’s passage of both the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter and 2013 Campus SaVE Act reformed the way in which campus sexual assault was framed and thus responded to in its aftermath. On the other hand, with the election of President Donald Trump and the appointment of U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, such legislation is at risk of being nullified or significantly retracted in its breadth. Butler et al. (2019) examine efforts made by Trump and DeVos to alter regulations of Title IX since the most recent presidential election. According to Butler et al. (2019), DeVos submitted proposals of amendments to Title IX on November 29, 2018 on the following claims to argue that the revisions are “intended to promote the purpose of Title IX by requiring recipients to address sexual harassment, assisting and protecting victims of sexual harassment and ensuring that due process protections are in place for individuals accused of sexual harassment” (p. 989). While each of these revisions undoubtedly impact Title IX significantly, the individuals facing the most potential harm are victims and survivors of campus sexual assault. The final amendment addresses due process for the accused. This proposal would inhibit or eliminate remedies for student

victims and survivors which further places a burden upon these individuals despite already experiencing traumatizing events.

Butler et al. (2019) observe four main points of concern regarding the Trump administration's proposals. Initially, the definition of sexual harassment under the Trump administration's guidelines is less broad. The Obama-era policies outlined that sexual harassment is "an act of harassing conduct that is sufficiently serious that it interferes with or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program" (p. 990). On the other hand, the Trump administration defines sexual harassment as "unwelcome sexual conduct; or unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex that is so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to the recipient's education program or activity" (p. 990). This significant departure from the Obama-era guidelines considerably narrows how campus sexual assault can be perceived and investigated. Butler et al. (2019) emphasize the other concerns in the following statement:

- (1) Title IX regulation under the proposed amendment would be a significant departure from prior regulation of Title IX and from data-driven policies and practices regarding CSGBV [Campus Sexual and Gender-Based Violence]; (2) The proposed amendment would limit the scope of the school's responsibility to respond to sexual harassment; and (3) The changes would create harms to victims of sexual harassment. (p. 990)

Efforts to narrow and reduce the dedication towards preventing campus sexual assault have vast repercussions to students who have experienced sexual violence. The Trump

administration's efforts at rolling back progress within Title IX and the Dear Colleague Letter represents a vital need for feminist grassroots organizing. A feminist-centered consciousness surrounding campus sexual assault is necessary to implement in light of such proposals to support and uplift students who have been traumatized by these crimes.

### **III. Literature on Campus-Based Advocacy**

#### *Introducing the Campus-Based Advocate*

According to Brubaker (2019) and Brubaker & Mancini (2017), campus-based advocates hold a unique position on campus as they have the ability to serve and assist student victims of sexual assault while also holding the key perspective of higher education's organizational procedures. Brubaker (2019) also mentions that advocacy itself stems from the feminist-focused battered women's movement. Often provided with the privilege of being confidential (e.g. lacking the obligation to mandatorily report sexual assault), campus-based advocates have a unique insight into the experiences of student victims of sexual assault in addition to navigating the bureaucracy of higher education. Brubaker (2019) writes that campus-based advocates serve as "the voice" for student victims of sexual assault and their role is "typically to support victims by protecting their right to control the process and prioritizing their needs over those of others participating in the response to an assault" (p. 308). Furthermore, Brubaker (2019) outlines the responsibilities of campus-based advocates outside of serving student victims including coordinating with other university systems such as health providers, security officers, and Title IX directors along with educational and event programming and community outreach. The campus-based advocate is considered a key factor in the

advocacy for students experiencing campus sexual assault in addition to situating a consciousness of awareness and encouraged prevention on such violence.

Analyzing additional campus entities, Strout, Amar, & Astwood (2014) position Campus-based Women's Centers (CWC) as essential resources for student victims of campus sexual assault. According to Marine et al. (2017), "the 1960s and 70s were a time of great awakening regarding women's status in society, and college campuses – and Women's Centers – were among the first places to serve as organizing centers for women's rights" (p. 46). Demonstrating that CWCs have been historically constructed upon the activism of the second wave of feminism, Strout et al. (2014) note that CWCs are "very often the seat of feminist power on campus" (p. 136). While CWCs primary purposes do not focus on campus sexual assault like the role of campus-based advocates, it is represented as an important center of feminist power. For instance, Strout et al. (2014) describe CWCs as "providing a safe, comfortable, and supportive environment for students to discuss sensitive issues such as rape and sexual assault" (p. 136). The standpoint and unique perspectives held by both campus-based advocates and CWCs validate the experiences of students affected by campus sexual assault while also placing importance on the reduction and prevention of such crimes on behalf of the institution itself.

Although the role of campus-based advocacy is crucial in providing services to student victims of sexual assault and situating such violence as necessary to address within higher education, certain needs and improvements are required. Through interviews with advocates working at campus sexual assault centers, Carmody, Ekhomu,

& Payne (2009) identified four central needs in order to improve advocacy services: (1) an increase in funding in order to better equip campus sexual assault prevention programs, (2) further the efforts in bringing comprehensive awareness to campus sexual assault, (3) increase the participation of men in anti-violence movements, and (4) strategies to implement more international students in advocacy and prevention programs. While these needs have likely become even more strained due to President Trump and Secretary of Education DeVos's proposed amendments to Title IX legislation, they represent barriers that can be approached via further activism and awareness.

### **Conclusion**

The above literature review has demonstrated that the feminist anti-rape movement served as an inspired base of activism and knowledge leading to the development of campus-based advocates. From these feminist efforts emerged landmark policies such as the Clery Act, Dear Colleague Letter, and Campus SaVE Act that have framed how campus sexual assault is interpreted and responded to. Today, campus-based advocates help students who have experienced campus sexual assault through support and empowerment in addition to navigating the system of higher education. The goal of the research completed in this thesis relies upon the feminist knowledge and frameworks outlined in the anti-rape movement along with literature examining campus sexual assault legislation and campus-based advocates. The overall aim is to provide insight to the value and perceptions of campus-based advocates in higher education as they have a key perspective in the experience of serving students who have been affected by sexual assault and navigating the university institution.



### Chapter 3: Methodology

I have had the incredible opportunity to work in multiple roles as an advocate in both campus-based and community-based positions. As an undergraduate student, I received training to become a licensed advocate and have been practicing advocacy work for the past five years. After graduating from my undergraduate university, I went on to work as a victim advocate at a local advocacy resource center for a year. This experience motivated my interest to continue my education as a graduate student. Currently, I have the privilege of working as a graduate assistant where I have the role of providing advocacy to students who have experienced sexual and domestic violence in addition to educating the campus community. My interest in advocacy work, combined with the discovery of the Trump administration's proposed changes to policy impacting campus sexual assault, has led me to examining this intersection for my thesis. Furthermore, as campus-based advocates are of vital importance to college campuses, these individuals were identified to conduct interviews with in order to understand the unique perspective they hold.

The purpose of this study is to address the question: *What value do campus-based advocates bring to college campuses?* Campus-based advocates answered this question from their own perspective while also determining the perceived value of their position from the standpoint of their own respective university and its students. This research attempts to assess the value of such a role from the scope of advocates themselves, the university, and students but solely from the viewpoint of campus-based advocates. A variety of additional concepts will be evaluated to contextualize and support the main

research question including the responsibilities of the position; barriers the advocate may face; potential impact of the amendments made by the Trump administration to campus sexual assault legislation; and necessary changes to improve advocacy. The purpose of this research is to allow for a better understanding of the role and significance of campus-based advocates, determining the potential impact of the Trump administration's proposals and work to eliminate the barriers addressed by advocates.

#### *Choice of Participants*

The experience of campus-based advocates was specifically chosen for this research for a number of reasons. Campus-based advocates are in a unique position where they receive firsthand accounts of student victims and survivors and are also closely familiar with navigating the bureaucracy of higher education. Furthermore, Brubaker (2019) notes how campus-based advocates act as “the ‘voice’ of victims” as they are able to share the perspective of student survivors (p. 324). With the key perspective of voicing the experience of student victims, campus-based advocates have the potential to empower such students confidentially. Finally, although hearing directly from student victims of sexual assault is necessary, this also has the possibility of re-traumatizing these individuals. For the above reasons, campus-based advocates were determined to be the best participants for this study.

#### *Choice of Methods*

For the purpose of the current study's methods, face-to-face interviews were conducted with all of the participants. According to Hesse-Biber (2014), “interviewing is a particularly valuable research method feminist researchers can use to gain insight into

the world of their participants” (p. 185). The goal was to investigate firsthand experiences from the participants and learn from their perspective on this topic. Additionally, the interviews were considered semistructured and in-depth. Semistructured interviews utilize an interview guide in order to establish guidance while also leaving “room for spontaneity on the part of the researcher and interviewee” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 187). This spontaneity allows for the emergence of follow up questions and also encourages the participant to influence the flow of the interview. In-depth interviewing “seeks to understand the lived experiences of the individual” while also “getting at the subjective understanding an individual brings to a given situation” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 189). This particular method emphasizes centering the experiences of those identities and voices that have been historically marginalized. Through these approaches, this study highlights a unique feminist perspective to reveal specialized knowledge and practices.

### *Terminology*

A brief but crucial note must be made in regards to the terminology of this research. Thus far, the term “campus-based advocates” has been mentioned as the primary subject of this research project. To define this role, the work of Brubaker (2019) is used to describe *campus-based advocates* as those who support and empower student victims and survivors of sexual violence as they navigate and interact with various higher education offices, authorities, and policies in addition to having completed advocacy certification and being a confidential resource. Besides clearly defining the role of a campus-based advocate, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that not all universities have or require the position of a campus-based advocate at their institution. In preparation

of this narrative and for the purpose of this study, the role of “campus-based supporter” was developed to identify positions on universities that are similar to campus-based advocates yet decisively contrasting. *Campus-based supporters* can be defined as those who also support and empower student victims of sexual violence but are not specifically certified as an advocate nor deemed confidential. In other words, the necessary differentiation between “advocates” and “supporters” is that the former are trained as advocates and also confidential whereas the latter are not. This distinction was necessary as the sample of participants included both *campus-based advocates* and *campus-based supporters*.

#### *Procedures*

The sample of participants included a total of five individuals, each from a different university within a Midwestern collegiate system. Participants were recruited based upon their position as a campus-based advocate or campus-based supporter. Each participant was sent an email (recruitment script, Appendix #1) informing the individual of a research study they were being asked to participate in with details of the study, what they would be asked to do, and a copy of the participant consent form (research participant consent form, Appendix #2). Once the participant expressed interest to be involved with the study, a follow up email was sent inquiring about determining a date, location, and time to set up a face-to-face interview.

At the beginning of each interview, the participant was informed of the duration of the interview. Each interview lasted around one hour. Participants were also informed upon the type of documentation for the study. Two options of documentation were

provided for participants, either: (a) a voice recording device or (b) via taking notes. Prior to beginning the interview, each participant had an opportunity to read over the consent form and, once comfortable with continuing their participation in the study, provided written consent to participate in the research. Finally, each participant was informed that the student researcher would provide the participant and the employing university with a pseudonym in order to help preserve confidentiality and anonymity.

Although two options of documentation were offered, all five participants chose documentation via a recording device. Once the interviews were completed, the data from the recording device was transferred to a password protected computer and then saved onto a separate flash drive to ensure accessibility in the event of any lost or corrupted data. After the transfer of data was completed, the data from the recording device was then deleted. Upon securing the interview data on the password protected computer, transcripts were made. Transcripts were completed within a week of each interview and in a private location where confidentiality was ensured. Furthermore, in order to be protected from the possibility of corrupted data on the flash drive, the interview data was also backed up on to a protected university network. Finally, once all of the interviews were completed along with the data transfer and transcript creation, a table was made to differentiate between the participants of their respective universities. As mentioned previously, pseudonyms were provided to each participant and their university to uphold privacy and confidentiality but also to help categorize the participants as well. Only the student researcher and the principal investigator had access to the flash drive, transcriptions, table, and signed consent forms.

*Reflexivity*

In my current and former work as an advocate in multiple settings, I have had the privilege to work with many individuals whose lives have been affected by sexual assault. This experience has influenced the ways I interpret and respond to these circumstances. By practicing reflexivity within my research, I am careful to be aware of how my experience and biases may impact this project. According to Hesse-Biber (2014), reflexivity can be defined as “taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one’s own lived reality and experiences [which] can be extremely helpful in the research process” (p. 200). By examining my own livelihood, background and identities, I am able to be cognizant of the potential reasons why I chose my research topic, ask interview questions and interpret data.

Initially, I must be aware that I am the graduate assistant for the only campus-based advocate at my own university. This is also combined with the fact that it is my goal of one day becoming a campus-based advocate myself. These two circumstances have significantly influenced my decision to examine campus sexual assault and advocates as part of my research. Furthermore, I must also be conscientious of the intersecting and privileged identities I bring into this research. As a white, heterosexual and cisgender man, I live in a society that values my intersecting identities. This is a reality that I take care to acknowledge and reflect upon in all of my work.

Due to my involvement within Gender & Women’s Studies and anti-violence work, I have often been applauded for simply having an interest in such topics. Although I have many colleagues that are women who are doing the same work, my presence is

seen as more commendable. Similar to this concept is the glass escalator, a term Christine Williams (2013) defines as “the advantages that men receive in the so-called women’s professions” (p. 610). Building upon the work of Williams, Kris Macomber (2018) argues that the glass escalator also has roots within sexual and domestic violence work. In Macomber’s research, she describes the frustration by women activists who note “how ‘men are put on pedestals’ and ‘receive undue praise.’ Women frequently used terms such as ‘heroes,’ ‘superheroes,’ and ‘knights in shining armor,’ to describe the elevated status male activists enjoyed” (p. 1504). Although this has certainly been my own experience as a man in sexual and domestic violence work, I acknowledge that I have had the privilege of learning from feminist activists and my peers who have been doing this very important work for decades. I believe Macomber (2018) accurately addresses this fine balance of men’s engagement in anti-violence work in the following quote: “Although men’s increasing involvement and leadership is strategically important for ending domestic and sexual violence, it also poses new challenges as men bring deeply entrenched aspects of male-dominated culture into movement spaces” (p. 1501).

### *Potential Limitations*

Comparable to all other forms of research, this research study is not without its own limitations. Arguably the most glaring limitation is that this research project solely interviews campus-based advocates and supporters regarding their own position and asks them to assess the value of such a role. Such a perspective limits the scope of the study to the subjectivity of the participants rather than also including members of the university and students as part of the research. It is also necessary to point out that the sample comes

from a specific region within a single collegiate system. Although the roles of each participant may differ between each university in the collegiate system, there are countless such systems across the United States. Additionally, the pool of participants was lacking in sheer number and general diversity. A total of five participants were interviewed and, based upon demographic questions, each identified as female and white. While essential information was received from each interviewee, future research should aim to conduct interviews with a larger sample of participants and from more diverse backgrounds.

It is also important to mention that I am a first-time researcher. This potentially had an impact on the consistency of each interview and the accuracy of questions that were asked. Furthermore, despite attempting to maintain the highest degree of anonymity possible, another limitation may have been that participants did not want to share uncomfortable or frustrating experiences with the institution they work at. Although confidentiality was discussed and pseudonyms were assigned to each individual and their university, participants may have held back in sharing negative experiences for fear of reprisal from the university. The final chapter outlines suggestions for future research that can alleviate the potential limitations of the current study.



### Chapter 4: Results

This chapter is dedicated to the findings discovered in the current study through conducting interviews with five participants at a Midwestern collegiate system. Three of the participants were considered campus-based advocates whereas the remaining two were determined to be campus-based supporters. As mentioned previously in Chapter 3, each participant and the university they were employed at were provided with a pseudonym in order to protect the identity and anonymity of each research participant. To differentiate between each participant and their respective institution, a table has been provided below:

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Participant Institution</b>
Danielle Smith	Crenshaw State University
Emily Nelson	University of Katz
Rachel Johnson	hooks University
Grace Reynolds	Steinem State
Jane Edwards	University of Adichie

The following chapter is divided into three separate sections: (1) data analysis (2) unexpected findings (3) final thoughts. In the initial section, a series of prominent themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with the five participants will be examined. Each theme will serve as a heading and are as follows: position description and structure, perceived value, proposed amendments by the Trump administration, barriers, feminist roots, and the risky absence of advocates. The second section of this chapter analyzes themes and comments that were unique and not expected. Finally, the last section

concludes the chapter by providing a brief summary of important elements from the interviews with participants.

### **Data Analysis**

A series of demographic questions were asked of each participant at the beginning of the interview. All participants identified as female for their gender identity and as white for their race. Participants were also asked about the length of time they had spent in their current position. There was a significant range for participants as the shortest length of time in the current role was two years, whereas the longest was thirty years. With the two campus-based supporters, possible positions within this category included staff in Women's Centers, LGBTQIA+ Centers, counseling centers, and professors. Furthermore, each participant was asked to estimate how many students they provided services to in regards to sexual violence. Once again, a broad range was observed as participants estimated providing services to as few as six students, whereas the highest estimate was as high as 175 students on an annual basis. Below includes the initial section that examines main themes resulting from the interviews with participants.

#### *Position Description & Structure*

It was necessary to receive an understanding of the position description and structure of both campus-based advocates and campus-based supporters. Each campus-based advocate indicated that the primary responsibility of their position was to provide direct-service advocacy to students, faculty, and staff on campus. Although this held the most weight amongst their duties, all advocates expressed that they also had obligations of education as part of their position. For example, Emily Nelson from the University of

Katz mentioned that, along with providing professional training on gender issues and mandated reporting, her office also “teach[es] the 40-hour advocacy class” which certifies students as advocates (personal communication, January 21, 2020). Additionally, advocates also pointed out that event programming is a substantial requirement as well. Participants shared developing programs surrounding awareness months such as October as Domestic Violence Awareness month and April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and events highlighting rape culture, consent, bystander intervention, stalking, and more.

When inquiring as to how the position was structured, the intent was to determine in what ways each position differed between institutions. This was necessary to investigate because, as noted by Rachel Johnson from hooks University, colleges are not mandated to have an advocate on their campus (personal communication, January 23, 2020). That was also the intent behind interviewing campus-based supporters. Although a university may not have a full-time position dedicated to providing advocacy, that does not mean students are not receiving support or resources from other roles at the institution they are attending.

All of the advocates and one of the supporters were employed full-time by their institution and each position was financed by the university rather than receiving federal grant funding. On the other hand, campus-based supporter Jane Edwards’ position from the University of Adichie was quite different. Jane is employed by a local community advocacy center, but her university has a contract with the community agency in which she provides a small amount of on-campus, weekly hours of service to students affected by sexual violence. Despite this university’s ability to offer such services is markedly less

compared to those with full-time advocates, a crucial service is still being made available to students. Furthermore, Jane noted that, if students are unable to meet during the allotted weekly hours, the community advocacy center she is employed by services students as well.

### *Perceived Value*

The purpose for this theme emphasized why participants believed their position on campus was needed and what the perceived value of such a role was. The latter was broken down into three separate perspectives: (1) the perceived value of advocates and supporters on behalf of themselves (2) the value of the position from the perspective of students (3) the value of the position from the perspective of the institution. Although it may have been more effective to seek research participants from each category, the current study only collected data from advocates and supporters rather than students and administrative staff from each university.

When asked about the perceived value of their position, participants indicated that the prevalence of campus sexual assault and their role in supporting student victims proved the value of campus-based advocates. Danielle Smith, an advocate from Crenshaw State University, said that “statistics tell us, generally, that ages 18-24 are some of the highest incidents [of sexual assault] and [it is] especially women experiencing this abuse” (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020). This is supported by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) who state that “women ages 18-24 are at an elevated risk of sexual violence” (RAINN, 2020). Clearly, this is substantial as the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2020) notes that “the

average college enrollment rate for female students age 18-24 was 44% in 2017.” Not only are students subjected to forms of sexual violence while they attend college, many also suffer trauma prior to beginning their undergraduate education. This is reflected in the following quote by Danielle:

Many students have experienced violence and abuse before they even come to campus. When someone comes here, that might be the first time that they feel they can talk to somebody who is not connected to that small community they came from. Maybe this was something that, in their minds, was truly not affecting them until they got to college. This is another very salient reason that campus advocates should exist and be on every campus. (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020)

Because healing from trauma is a process rather than a single event, advocates can assist with identifying triggers, practicing self-care and offer options for healing as students move forward in their journey from experiencing sexual violence.

Advocates and supporters expressed that their role in supporting students was another necessary and valuable aspect of the position. Grace Reynolds from Steinem State emphasized this when she said:

One of the reasons I see this position being important is because we are the one person on that student's or staff's side, whatever the case maybe. The one person who doesn't have another agenda, who is not worried about the reputation of the school. Students need that person. Knowing there is someone you can come talk

to, who doesn't have to report, is really essential to a student's wellbeing.

(personal communication, January 27, 2020)

Grace's comment exemplifies how the entire role of an advocate is to uplift and support the student they are advocating for. Rather than being concerned about public perception or having a role in the decision-making process, advocates maintain rapport with student victims and seek to achieve the students' goals. This concept aligns with research conducted by Campbell (2006) that demonstrates how victims of sexual assault report better experiences with legal and medical services when working with advocates. Advocates are able to bridge the gap between intimidating systems while offering victim-centered support.

Another source of interest was whether or not the participants believed that students perceived campus-based advocates as valuable. Overall, participants felt as though students appreciated such a resource if they were aware of the advocacy service's presence on campus. Danielle mentioned how "students have said that it is a relief to have found the office" and that students "find value in having someone who is willing to work with them" (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020). While participants acknowledge that students are grateful for such services when in need of advocacy, Grace admitted that "students only find out about me or about the center when something bad happens" (G. Reynolds, personal communication, January 27, 2020). This is another bittersweet recognition as to why advocates are needed at universities. On the other hand, many students may also be entirely heedless of the fact that advocacy services are provided at their institution. Although this can represent a barrier for students

who are in need of advocacy but are unfamiliar with the available resources, participants utilize other methods of raising awareness. Both advocates and supporters discussed how they would visit classrooms to share the services they offer on campus, attend events, and collaborate with other campus programs in order to have students put a face to the role they hold.

Participants were also asked about if and how their institution valued their role as a campus-based advocate or supporter on campus. Generally, most participants shared that they believed their university perceived their position as being needed. Emily explained how, initially, her office and role was secluded to a “secret corner of the campus” and that the attitude around their programming and services was “apprehensive” (E. Nelson, personal communication, January 21, 2020). Fortunately, as time has passed and relationships have been formed, Emily’s university has since shown growth and initiative in collaborating with her office. Both Danielle and Jane shared having positive experiences when working with their institution but shared that improvement is always encouraged. Danielle stated that “we as a campus and community recognize that we must have the ability to respond and we are dedicated to ending this on our campus” (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020). Jane echoes Danielle as she explained that the University of Adichie took the initiative to connect with her community resource so that student sexual assault services could be on their campus. It is essential for universities to help spread awareness and engage in the prevention of campus sexual violence because such action allows for opportunities of growth and cultural change.

While praise was given to universities for their approval and recognition of advocacy services and awareness around sexual violence, those interviewed were also disappointed with their institutions actions as well. Danielle explained that universities place more value on and funding towards programs that are entertaining and generate a profit, unlike her office. While this is reasonable from an economic standpoint, institutions should not ignore the unique capability advocacy services have at reinforcing student retention on campus. This concept was reiterated by three of the participants who were interviewed. In terms of student wellbeing and retention, Grace said that “students who are provided with necessary resources are more likely to stay in school” (G. Reynolds, personal communication, January 27, 2020). On the other hand, Rachel stated that, “students are more likely to leave if they don’t receive support and services on campus because it is super isolating; they feel betrayed by the perpetrator, their friend group, by the institution” (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020). To emphasize this point further, a Huffington Post article written by Corey Bowman examined a model created by the University of Central Missouri to support students in the aftermath of a sexual assault. Students participating in the model received a variety of support services, resources and general assistance throughout the semester. Those a part of the program were retained at 78% “compared to the university’s overall retention rate of 71%” (Bowman, 2016). From this perspective, despite the fact that advocates may not necessarily generate revenue for their institution, they most certainly *save* the university money by retaining students.



Although most participants indicated an encouraging relationship with their institution and campus personnel, one participant was vocal about her negative experiences. Rachel Johnson from hooks University explained that she believed there was “an institutional resistance to campus-based advocacy” on her campus (personal communication, January 23, 2020). In fact, Rachel felt “as if the university wants to keep advocates off of the campus” due to responses from campus administrators and officials. Rachel also mentioned that there is a greater push to protect the institution’s reputation rather than supporting students who have experienced sexual violence. Although university commitments of proper sexual assault adjudication and advocacy support has been on the rise, the frustrations detailed by Rachel, and doubtlessly those who have been affected by sexual violence, is entirely warranted. Research by Yung (2015) demonstrates that “schools are undercounting incidents of sexual assault and only accurately tallying on-campus sexual violence when under heightened federal government scrutiny” (p. 6). While Yung mentions that belief systems and the acceptance of rape myths can be partially blamed for this result, another potential reason is that employees “might have professional incentives to report lower levels of sexual assaults to further career goals and preserve their institution’s reputation” (p. 6). In light of Yung’s discoveries, it is clear that universities should be held to a higher standard on the responsible and accurate reporting of campus sexual assault.

Yet another basis for this argument comes from the American Association of University Women (AAUW). According to research conducted by the AAUW (2018), “the vast majority (89%) of 11,000 college and university campuses failed to disclose

even a single reported incident of rape in 2016, despite numerous studies showing that rape is common on campuses.” As mentioned previously, with nearly one in five women experiencing forms of sexual violence during their collegiate career, these reported statistics are vastly inaccurate. While it has been established that universities underreport their own incidents of sexual violence, it is important to note that student victims rarely report such crimes as well. Studies examined by Veronyka & Lee (2015) “found that typically only 5% of assaults are reported to university authorities and/or police” (p. 2450). Though some may argue that those impacted by sexual violence should always report their crime, the choice to do so, or not, is entirely up to the victim to disclose such an experience. Furthermore, there is a broad range of reasons why a victim may not want to report to law enforcement or campus officials. Victims might fear that they will be the ones blamed for their assault, some believe their perpetrator may retaliate if they report, others might not have any faith in the justice system, or may not even consider their assault to be bad enough in the eyes of authority (Veronyka & Lee, 2015). If victims believe their assault may not be taken seriously, and that many universities underreport sexual violence, a sense of distrust is created that undermines the potential for progress.

Overall, the perceived value of campus-based advocates and supporters on behalf of themselves, students and their institution proved to be held in a favorable light. Participants pointed to the prevalence of campus sexual assault and their role in supporting victims to demonstrate the value and need for the position. Likewise, there was consensus that students who utilized advocacy services were grateful to have found an advocate on campus that aids and empowers them. In regards to the university’s

perception of advocates and supporters, most participants felt as though their institution respected the role and a collaborative relationship had been developed. However, it was also concluded that some universities discount the value of advocates and even attempt to diminish the incidents of sexual assault reported on their campuses. If students impacted by sexual violence had both the support of an advocate and the assurance that universities would handle their case appropriately, the culture surrounding sexual assault on campus would have the potential to be drastically improved.

#### *Proposed Amendments by the Trump Administration*

This section examines the proposals made by the Trump administration to Title IX and what impact such amendments would have on campus sexual assault. To reiterate, there are four main proposed amendments as mentioned by Butler et al. (2019). Initially, the definition of sexual harassment would be defined more specifically under the Trump and DeVos amendments. Secondly, they would limit the university's responsibility to respond to and investigate sexual assault. Thirdly, the university would have the choice between using either a preponderance of the evidence standard or a clear and convincing evidence standard. Finally, the proposals would allow for cross-examination between the accused and victim in hearings. The following paragraphs explore the participants' perspective of these proposed amendments.

#### Impact of the Trump Administration's Proposals

When asked what type of impact the Trump administration's proposals would have on victims of campus sexual assault, participants painted a dismal and frightening picture. Emily from the University of Katz claimed that they would have "a chilling

effect for sexual assault survivors” and would result in lower numbers of reporting all while “rolling back victims’ rights” (E. Nelson, personal communication, January 21, 2020). Jane agreed with Emily when she said that “I think it will shut victims down even more than they already are” (J. Edwards, personal communication, February 10, 2020). It is clear that the already grim circumstances of campus sexual assault would certainly be even more ominous under the Trump administration’s proposals. In fact, Butler et al. (2019) highlight one specific example that would negatively impact student victims of sexual assault. The authors note that live cross-examination “could re-traumatize victims and create an unfair advantage to students who are able to secure legal counsel” (p. 991). The reality of reliving painful details while your perpetrator is present would undoubtedly put a student victim’s wellbeing at risk.

One participant observed the proposals from a broader perspective. Rachel from hooks University argued that the “whole package of suggested changes is all about protecting the institutions and not protecting victims” (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020). In examination of the four amendments, it is difficult to argue against Rachel’s claim.

Essentially, it seems as though the proposals would ease schools’ responsibility towards campus sexual assault while likely decreasing the possibility of disciplinary procedures along with a higher standard of evidence. Moreover, there is no mention of supportive measures for victims either. The Trump administration’s amendments appear to heavily favor silencing the prevalence of campus sexual assault.

### Due Process for Perpetrators

As mentioned previously, critics of the Dear Colleague Letter expressed worry regarding the due process of accused students. In light of the Trump Administration's proposals, accused students would likely benefit from such amendments. According to Cantalupo (2019), DeVos argues that the primary goal of the proposed amendments is to "ensure that students who are accused of sexual harassment receive due process" (p. 306). Calls for due process encourage a fair and equal trial while initially maintaining a presumption of innocence. However, as Cantalupo (2019) points out, the "concern about due process has only been expressed with regard to named harassers" (p. 306). Furthermore, Cantalupo (2019) also argues that "due process actually protects and strengthens the already powerful privileges reserved for white, cisgender men" (p. 308). Although due process should be upheld for all individuals, it seems evident that the Trump administration is favoring the experience of perpetrators when examining the proposed amendments.

An additional argument against the reinforcement of due process on the behalf of perpetrators concerns Title IX investigative outcomes. For instance, the Title IX & Gender Equity Office of Brown University (2020) has released annual outcome reports of complaints regarding sexual misconduct between the years of 2015 and 2018. According to the reports, a total of 219 cases were reported to the office yet only 40 formal investigative procedures were conducted relating to sexual misconduct. However, only 11 of the cases were found to have violated the university's regulations. Overall, only about 25% of investigated cases ended in disciplinary measures over a three-year period and the

majority of the sanctions included required training or forms of suspension rather than expulsion. From a broader perspective, only 5% of all reported cases resulted in some form of discipline. These circumstances are not unique to Brown University either.

Mila Koumpilova (2020) from the Star Tribune analyzed disciplinary records of the Minnesota State system's 37 community colleges and universities. Although the research only investigated cases reported against faculty and staff, Koumpilova discovered the following:

According to data for the past five years reviewed by the Star Tribune, institutions in the Minnesota State system received about 120 complaints of sexual misconduct against employees. Of those, 104 were formally investigated. Campus administrators meted out final discipline in 17 cases: generally, written reprimands and suspensions of one to five days. (2020)

In the Minnesota State systems' case, only 16% of all investigative procedures ended in disciplinary measures. Similar to Brown University, the data from Minnesota State also revealed that the sanctions resulted in mediocre forms of punishment. The data collected from each system demonstrates that the vast majority of reported cases of sexual misconduct, even when they are investigated, do not result in any form of justice for the victim.

One final point made against the Trump administration's argument for increased due process for accused students of sexual assault concerns false reporting. According to Weiser (2017), "there is a sentiment among some people that feminist advancements with Title IX on university campuses have overcorrected the issue [of sexual assault] to the

point that many innocent college men are being unfairly persecuted” (p. 46). Despite this common belief, research has proved that the perceived high rate of false reports is actually incorrect. Through an examination of previous research and their own study, Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa & Cote (2010) state that “the prevalence of false allegations is between 2% and 10%” (p. 1318). In fact, Weiser (2017) takes this argument a step further when she says, “all told, false reports not only are uncommon; it appears that cases in which an individual is falsely accused are rare, and that it is exceedingly rare for the falsely accused to be arrested or have charges filed against them” (p. 54). Although false reports do occur, the perceived rates of such allegations are highly overestimated. Additionally, such research demonstrates why more emphasis needs to be placed on rapists being held accountable rather than believing in false allegations.

To be clear, this section is not to argue that due process should be ignored. Instead, it must be recognized that the Trump administration’s efforts to uphold students accused of sexual assault is largely illogical. Few victims ever have the opportunity to see justice come to their perpetrator and even then, most disciplinary measures are only a slap on the wrist. Despite the difficult and re-traumatizing process of Title IX investigations, many victims have to face blame or assumptions of false allegations already. These arguments strengthen the idea that the Trump administration is certainly more concerned with protecting universities and the accused rather than student victims of sexual assault.

### Services for the Accused

While it is essential that victims of sexual assault need supportive measures and fair investigative processes, this is not to say that the accused should not have services. Participants indicated that accused students also require appropriate assistance throughout the duration of a Title IX investigation. Rachel explained that “respondents (perpetrators) might need counseling or they might need someone to help them understand the process” (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020). However, Rachel also emphasized that “respondents don’t need advocates” (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020).

Although participants were adamant about the fact that victims of campus sexual assault and accused students should have separate services, not all campus personnel agree with this perspective. Danielle, an advocate from Crenshaw State University, shared an uncomfortable experience with campus administrators at her own university regarding accused students:

They have expressed worries for the accused students not having the same resources for students who are victims and survivors. I would argue that it makes sense that they wouldn’t have the same resources because those are different things. Being accused of sexual assault is not the same thing as being a victim or survivor of sexual assault, so it wouldn’t make sense that the same resources would be offered. (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020)

As Danielle mentions, experiencing sexual assault compared to perpetrating it is drastically different. An advocate emphasizes victim-centered support services and



empowerment for those who have been impacted by sexual assault. How could such services be utilized for accused students? Emily supports Danielle when she says that “to think someone in this position could serve both, I think that is absurd. It would be a disservice to both the victim and the accused. I don’t think it [would] be helpful for either party” (E. Nelson, personal communication, January 21, 2020). The potential implications for a single-service office for both victims and perpetrators could be severe. Each party may come into contact with one another, a lack of staff members could result in issues of confidentiality and such an office may unintentionally label certain students as victims or perpetrators simply because they sought out services. Although the Trump administration has not issued any proposals indicating that such a service must be administered, participants agreed that the administration has likely been a catalyst for these considerations.

#### The Influence of President Trump

Participants also acknowledged that the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States has affected views around campus sexual assault. Rachel shared her thoughts in the following quote:

The change in [presidential] administration allowed [my institution] to back away from a commitment to advocacy and I think they didn’t mind that. When you have a president who is elected after being on a hot mic talking about sexually assaulting people, that is opening up a culture that is very different than the Obama/Biden White House. It’s not surprising that you see some of that trickle

down on to college campuses. (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020)

There has been an incredible shift in perspective between the Obama and Trump administrations on campus sexual assault. The Obama administration initiated arguably the most progressive legislature regarding campus sexual assault in history. Less than a decade later, we have a president who openly jokes about sexual assault and threatens to roll back victims' rights at unprecedented levels.

Not only has President Trump impacted campus sexual assault from an institutional perspective, many victims themselves have felt personally affected. Danielle explained that some of the students she has provided services to have said that Trump's violent and entitled comments about women have negatively affected their healing:

I had a couple of students come in and explicitly say that this is affecting my healing negatively. This is affecting my ability to think that justice could be done with regards to the sexual assault that I survived. One of the students said, it makes me think that my rapist is walking around campus with impunity today feeling like [they] can be anything [they] want to, nothing can touch [them].

Definitely, those changes [to Title IX] could feel to a survivor that they're not being centered in the conversation about sexual violence. That instead, the alleged perpetrator is being centered, that their experience is more important than the victim's or survivor's. (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020)

The most unfortunate aspect of Danielle's statement is the fact that we are living in that reality; our current President of the United States, Donald Trump, has dozens of

allegations of sexual misconduct against him. According to Eliza Relman (2019) from Business Insider, “at least 25 women have made [sexual misconduct allegations] against Trump since the 1970s.” President Trump has admitted to sexually assaulting and harassing women amidst numerous allegations and yet he is still one of the most powerful individuals in the world. It is as Danielle’s student feared, the alleged perpetrator’s experience is centered while the victim is silenced.

#### University Responses to the Trump Administration’s Proposals

Although the Trump administration’s proposed amendments could have a dire impact on campus sexual assault as a whole, they are considered guidelines for a university to follow. In this case, it is up to the university or collegiate system’s administrative personnel to implement changes. As for the participants, they indicated that their institutions would continue to follow the original guidelines. Grace at Steinem State was informed that “the bylaws of the institution would overrule any federal changes” (G. Reynolds, personal communication, January 27, 2020). Similarly, Danielle said that her “campus community has communicated that they remain committed to our current method of investigating sexual assault cases” (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020). While it is likely that some universities would not implement the Trump administration’s proposals, many others may prefer to have less accountability when it comes to campus sexual assault.

#### Conclusion

As of this writing, the proposals by the Trump administration have yet to be implemented. Whether or not such amendments shall be administered, the mere

possibility of this tremendous shift in guidelines has already had resounding effects. As demonstrated by the participants, the Trump administration's proposals would push students away from reporting sexual assault and likely be further traumatized by cross-examinations. Rather than being concerned with the due process of accused students, it is clear that we still have yet to center the experience of victims in the investigative process. Additionally, the influence of President Trump as a perpetrator himself reinforces a culture that condones and accepts the normalization of sexual violence. It is necessary to oppose the adoption of the Trump administration's proposals to Title IX and continue advocating for the rights of student victims and survivors of sexual assault.

### *Barriers*

Experiencing struggles and confronting barriers was another aspect examined in the roles of campus-based advocates and supporters. Overall, the most common barrier experienced by all of the participants was funding. A small budget offers an insufficient salary, narrows the options of event programming and severely limits an employee's potential to establish awareness and prevention around sexual violence. To put this into perspective, Danielle's position at Crenshaw State University has existed for over a decade and still has not received an increase in budgetary funds. Although she acknowledged that there is the possibility of applying for federal grants, Danielle mentioned that it would be uncomfortable to have to compete for funding with community organizations. While this represents a certain struggle, simply applying for grants creates a barrier as well due to the significant time and energy that must be spent on such a process.

While some participants experienced stagnation with the funding they receive, other programs have been deliberately reduced. For example, Emily said she “had a graduate assistant position that doesn’t exist anymore” (E. Nelson, personal communication, January 21, 2020). Such a reduction in staff creates significant pressures on campus-based advocates. In fact, out of the three advocates interviewed in this research study, only one participant had the benefit of having another fellow advocate. However, this advocate was a graduate assistant rather than a full-time employee. Additionally, being the only staff representing an advocacy program produces a variety of responsibilities as well. Grace accurately summarizes this difficulty by saying, “I do all my own things. I do all of my own programming, all my own office coordinator stuff, plus advocacy, plus education. That in and of itself, three different roles in one, is challenging” (G. Reynolds, personal communication, January 27, 2020). Danielle echoes Grace by saying that “the barrier of not having more than one staff does negatively affect our campus community” (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020). As a single staff member who holds such significant responsibility, time is precious and must be distributed as efficiently as possible. If there were multiple staff in each program, not only could more students be provided with advocacy but additional programming and education would be offered to the campus community.

A key barrier experienced by all the participants who were interviewed was burnout. According to Singer, Cummings, Boekankamp, Hisaka, and Benuto (2019), “due to the nature of their work, victim advocates are at risk of burnout and compassion fatigue, as they vicariously experience their clients’ trauma on a daily basis” (p. 2).

Additionally, recall that providing advocacy is only *one* of the many responsibilities attributed to the participants' position description. Singer et al. (2019) explain that burnout and compassion fatigue can come "in the form of sleep disturbances, difficulties with interpersonal relationships, depression, anxiety, grief, physical aches and pains, and secondary traumatic stress" (p. 1). Confronting such overwhelming barriers each day has the potential to push advocates and supporters to a point where they are in need of support themselves or risk leaving the field. It is for this reason that Danielle explains that self-care and preserving one's own health are vital. Danielle utilizes self-care, grounding techniques and mindfulness to "get some of the secondary trauma out of [her] own body" (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020). Rather than imagining self-care as a concept to simply consider, it is a necessary component of working as a campus-based advocate or supporter.

One participant, Grace Reynolds from Steinem State, addressed a barrier in regards to the adjudication of campus sexual assault investigations. Grace explained that there is an intense difficulty in having to describe a realistic, yet likely unfortunate result if students decide to report a sexual assault in hopes of beginning an investigation. Grace echoes this in the following quote:

I hate having to tell students that ... it basically feels like the university doesn't [care]. But, you have the option of going through with this investigation and having nothing come of it and going through the trauma and the pain of that. I don't have faith in our processes. (G. Reynolds, personal communication, January 27, 2020)

Although Grace wants students to have the potential to feel empowered by attempting to bring their perpetrator to justice, it would be wrong to not inform them of the possible re-traumatizing experience. While this poses a barrier to campus-based advocates and supporters, the individuals most impacted by the inappropriate decisions and mishandling of investigations are the student victims of sexual violence.

A final barrier expressed by participants was that of space and location. Out of the three participants who identified as campus-based advocates, not one had their own stand-alone center that specifically provided advocacy and prevention education. Each participant explained that they shared space with another campus program such as a Women's Center, LGBTQIA+ Center, health education center, or gender and sexuality center. On the one hand, sharing space can provide great opportunity for collaboration and could allow for a wider range of visitors to the center. However, there is a possibility that student victims would be apprehensive arriving to a busy and populated space to meet with an advocate. They may feel they are outing themselves as a victim to those present. Campus-based supporters Rachel and Jane were not so fortunate as they do not have an advocacy center at their universities. Rachel shared her disappointment by saying "it really does a disservice to students when there is not a centrally located, visible, well-advertised, welcoming place for them to access advocacy services" (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020).

The barriers experienced by participants included a variety of structural and interpersonal difficulties that student victims of sexual violence must also confront. Structural problems such as funding, space, and investigative processes vastly limit the

autonomy of advocates and supporters. A flawed adjudication system silences victims and can create distrust or animosity between advocates and those seeking services. Interpersonal challenges like burnout and compassion fatigue place a heavy burden on advocates who take on the trauma of the students they serve. Transformative changes within the bureaucracy of higher education along with the application of self-care would reduce the intensity and number of barriers experienced by campus-based advocates and supporters.

### *Feminist Roots*

This section was investigated to determine how those in the field continue to implement the historical concepts of feminist praxis in their roles today. Grace reminded us how the radical roots of advocacy has transformed into a more professionalized field when she said, “I think it’s very challenging in higher education and sometimes advocacy work in general because it’s become so clinicalized” (G. Reynolds, personal communication, January 27, 2020). Recall how chapter two discussed the beginning of advocacy work being grounded within radical feminism and then reconstructed into a more professionalized field. When asked about applying feminist theory to her work, Danielle reflected on the influence of society’s powerful institutions:

We see how some of these larger societal issues are boiled down to individual relationships with the understanding that rape culture impacts the individual experiences of victims and survivors. We draw attention to the reality that the personal is very political and how the political is personal as well. These different forms of violence and abuse stem from inequity, they stem from power and



control, they stem from larger systems which are reflected in individual relationships. (D. Smith, personal communication, January 17, 2020)

It is necessary to understand that sexual violence, and the attitudes surrounding such concepts, stem from the cultural values and beliefs that society has come to normalize. In other words, as Danielle brings attention to, this type of violence is embedded within larger contexts of sexism, racism, heteronormativity and other forms of marginalization.

Another core feminist value Rachel said she brings into her work as a campus-based supporter is pedagogy. According to Shrewsbury (1987), feminist pedagogy can be defined as the following:

A theory about the teaching/learning process that guides our choice of classroom practices by providing criteria to evaluate specific educational strategies and techniques in terms of the desired course goals or outcomes. These evaluative criteria include the extent to which a community of learners is empowered to act responsibly toward one another and the subject matter and to apply that learning to social action. (p. 6)

Pedagogy relies on active engagement along with the influence of student experiences and critical thinking. Rachel's institution has a student group on campus focused on providing peer education on concepts such as gender-based violence, consent and bystander intervention. Through this education, Rachel explains that "peer advocacy has its roots within feminist pedagogy" (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020). Peer education encourages empowerment by facilitators while also reducing power dynamics that are far too apparent in traditional learning environments between a

professor and students. By going back to the roots of advocacy, these participants inspire feminist values in their work as advocates and supporters from macro-level perspectives and in their education each day.

### *Risky Absence of Advocates*

The final theme covered within this section imagines the risks of not having advocates on campuses. This concept was addressed by Rachel, a campus-based supporter, who is well aware of such downfalls as her institution does not have an advocate or advocacy center. When considering the impact of experiencing sexual assault, Rachel asks, “if you don’t have campus-based advocacy, how are you going to support all of those different, complex things?” (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020) Advocates receive intensive and specific training to provide the best possible support for victims and survivors of violence. A broad range of topics are covered such as the impact of trauma, understanding the criminal justice system, working with marginalized populations, the dynamics of interpersonal violence, the influence of social norms in such work and so much more. This is not to say that campus-based supporters should not be considered valuable or necessary. In fact, both supporters and advocates are crucial components in helping student victims and providing education to the campus community. Nonetheless, advocates’ entire role on campus is to empower, guide and stand by students impacted by sexual violence through any means necessary.

Rachel addressed additional factors that can be lost when an advocate is not present on campus. Rachel explained how, without proper education, the decision-making process of investigations has the potential to lose focus upon “trauma-informed

and survivor-centered” care (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020).

While investigators and decision-makers are considered neutral fact finders rather than advocates, that does not mean students should have to experience a potentially re-traumatizing or victim-blaming process (Brown, 2019). The presence of an advocate allows for opportunities of providing education and to oppose any potential further harm that may come to the student victim throughout the progression of the investigation.

Rachel brought up another very important concern in regards to education when she said that advocates are “also really helpful for those who the students disclose to whether they be [resident advisors] or professors or the person in the reading lab who has become [a] mentor” (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020). As previously mentioned, one of the unique privileges being an advocate is that they are confidential; they do not need to report incidents of sexual violence that are disclosed to them. However, that is not the case for all campus employees to whom students might disclose. According to Mancini, Pickett, Call, & Roche (2016), campus mandatory reporting laws dictate that certain employees “who become aware of a sex crime to immediately disclose such information to a university official, typically, a Title IX coordinator” (p. 220). A central argument for the implementation of mandatory reporting laws claims that they have the potential to “induce university accountability, better assist crime victims, and improve reporting rates of sexual assault” (Mancini et al., 2016, p. 223). On the other hand, there are critiques of these laws that argue student victims can be harmed by obligatory reporting. Mancini et al. (2016) contend that such laws eliminate a victim’s choice to report, reduce independence, create distrust and may even have a

negative impact on reporting. Rachel's comment is applicable because, if advocates are able to educate employees who are mandated to report, those individuals can inform students prior to the disclosure. The mandated employee can explain to the student that, if the student wishes to report, they are more than welcome to disclose. If the student has yet to decide or is uncomfortable with reporting, a referral can be made to a campus-based advocate. On the other hand, if the campus is lacking an advocacy center, the mandated employee should make a referral to a community advocacy organization.

It is clear that the absence of campus-based advocates negatively affects both students and the university. Whether by supporting students impacted by sexual violence or providing vital education to decision-makers, advocates bring the dynamics and influence of sexual violence to the forefront of campus communities. Rachel accurately summarizes the need for advocates in the following quote:

It seems so clear to me that having professional advocacy on campuses serves the institution by supporting students who are traumatized; [by] hopefully keeping them here, hopefully turning that awful experience into one that [they] might be able to live with, graduate with, and move on with their lives. (R. Johnson, personal communication, January 23, 2020)

Campus-based advocates benefit the community in extraordinary ways. They support the vast amount of students affected by sexual violence, provide education to those occupying all spaces within the institution and bring awareness to prevalent issues that all universities face. The absence of such a crucial role, as experienced by Rachel, diminishes avenues for healing and empowerment.

### **Unexpected Findings**

A unique discovery from the interviews came from Grace Reynolds, an advocate from Steinem State. What made Grace's position distinct from the other participants is that her institution does not have any on-campus housing as Steinem State is a commuter college. Since very few sexual assaults occur on campus, Grace explained that there is often "nothing we can do about it" (G. Reynolds, personal communication, January 27, 2020). Due to this, she is forced to refer to community advocacy centers if students are interested in pursuing any type of legal action or obtaining protective orders. While she is grateful for the community partnerships, Grace explained that it is frustrating for students who do not have the opportunity to report or follow up with investigations.

Another unexpected result was that only one participant shared experiencing uncomfortable and frustrating situations with other campus officials regarding sexual assault. All participants indicated that certain students had faced negative outcomes from personnel at the institution but this was not the case for those who were interviewed. There are several potential reasons as to why this was the case. Initially, this may have been because participants did not feel comfortable speaking against the institution that funds and supports their role on campus. Additionally, negative experiences may have occurred either prior to the participant's arrival on campus or early in their career. As a result, relationships may have strengthened or grown over this time. Finally, it may very well be the case that participants have not had any negative experiences with university officials. Although it is promising to hear of such optimistic relationships between

advocates and their campuses, there was an assumption that more participants would share negative experiences that produced barriers within their work.

### **Final Thoughts**

The interviews conducted with participants produced a wealth of intriguing information to demonstrate the need for campus-based advocates, assess the barriers they have experienced and examine the harmful proposals made by the Trump administration. It is clear from the interviews and supporting research that advocates are positioned as key components within the campus community. Not only do they support and empower those who have been affected by sexual violence, but campus-based advocates also benefit officials and the greater student body by providing education and creating awareness around such crimes. Through analyzing the Trump administration's amendments to Title IX, this research helps reveal that if these policies were to be implemented, universities and students impacted by sexual assault across the country would be severely and negatively affected.

As evidenced by participants themselves, campus-based advocates and supporters should be present upon every college campus. Additionally, efforts need to be made to further progress campus sexual assault legislation, rather than backtrack and do harm like the Trump administration's proposals would inevitably accomplish. Moving forward, more attention needs to be brought to the value campus-based advocates and supporters bring to their institutions.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates the need for campus-based advocates on college campuses and the impact they have on student sexual assault victims and the greater university community. Furthermore, it also reveals how the proposals made by the Trump administration would likely create an even more hostile environment towards student victims. Based upon the interviews conducted with each participant, the current study argues that campus-based advocates should be present on all college campuses. It is clear from this research that advocates represent an influential position on campus and have the capability to create a healthy and well-informed community.

Results from this study indicate that campus-based advocates and supporters have many responsibilities including providing support and empowerment to students while also educating the campus community. Their duty to provide advocacy to students impacted by sexual violence is also a fundamental reason as to why they are needed on campus. As Grace had mentioned, advocates are “the one person on that student’s ... side” (G. Reynolds, person communication, January 27, 2020). Advocates serve in the best interests of those impacted by sexual assault rather than preserving the reputation of the university. Furthermore, it was agreed upon by the participants that the prevalence of sexual violence on campus revealed a need for advocates as well. In light of these results, this study proposes that more campus-based advocates and supporters should be present upon universities.

While the need for campus-based advocates and supporters was apparent, the perceived value of such positions from the perspective of students and the institution

were conflicting at times. Students who used advocacy services were grateful for their existence but unfortunately only did so because of a traumatic experience. On the other hand, participants noted how many students are unaware that their resource was even present on campus. Participants attempted to combat the lack of awareness through education and outreach. Results about the perceived value from each institution included a broad range from accepting and taking initiative, to being unfriendly and restrictive. The latter experiences are disturbing as advocates and supporters work to actively establish a safe and trauma-free environment for students while also keeping them enrolled. It is necessary for universities to be cognizant of the fact that campus-based advocates benefit the entire campus community. Rather than ignoring the pervasiveness of campus sexual assault, collaborative efforts with active engagement from all levels of university personnel are needed to prevent such crimes.

This study also raised concerns about the proposals made by the Trump administration that would undoubtedly impact campus sexual assault policy. Participants unanimously agreed that if such amendments were to be put into place, the resulting consequences would be dire for students and university personnel at all levels. The proposals would rollback victim's rights even while reinforcing the due process of accused students. Despite the fact that the majority of Title IX investigations lack any type of disciplinary measures, the Trump administration continues to center the perpetrator's experience. Through these proposals and by the influence of President Trump himself, this administration has demonstrated that victims of campus sexual assault are to be silenced and left ignored.



Although campus-based advocates and supporters shared many positive experiences about their work, they also revealed having to confront significant barriers. A lack of funding proved to be the most frustrating factor for participants. Results indicated that the pool of participants experienced either a stagnation or reduction in funding. Not only does a deficiency in financial resources reduce programming opportunities and a restrictive salary, it also results in a limited amount of staff members. Advocates and supporters were often one of the few or the only representative for their program. For this reason, participants were forced to take on the responsibility of working many positions wrapped into one. These supplementary duties included administrative tasks, grant writing, programming and more. In turn, each of these barriers illustrated the dangers of burnout among participants. The vicarious trauma experienced within advocacy work, in addition to a growing number of responsibilities and barriers, produced a challenging and stressful environment for participants. Preventive measures should be taken in order to remove or reduce these barriers. Establishing a higher budget and allocating additional staff members would be a tremendous first step. This would allow for an even distribution of job assignments and the capacity to provide more programming.

The risk in not having an identifiable campus-based advocate was also explored. As one participant made clear, the absence of an advocate on campus has the potential to hurt both students subjected to sexual violence and the university itself. Student victims are likely unable to receive the appropriate advocacy and resources they require and may be forced to seek services off campus. Additionally, campus adjudication and comprehension surrounding mandatory reporting might lack a focus on trauma-informed

care at the expense of student victims. If strategies to create positions for campus-based advocates are unattainable, relationships with community partnerships are a next best step to supporting students who have experienced sexual violence.

The results of this study and the recommendations mentioned here are beneficial to a broad range of stakeholders both in the realm of higher education and those in the community. Higher education beneficiaries include adjudication decision-makers, Title IX directors, professors, mandatory reporters, students and those directly impacted by campus sexual assault. Community members encompass policymakers, activists, public law enforcement and other advocacy resources. Those who stand to benefit the most are universities and students impacted by sexual assault. Campus-based advocates help universities by encouraging proper guidance of sexual assault policies, assist in the retention of students and thus creating a financial incentive, provide crucial education on many levels and give support to those who have been affected by sexual assault. This study also encourages lobbyists to argue for more funding for campus-based advocates as it demonstrates how the lack of such positions and insufficient funding lead to substantial barriers.

Furthermore, this study has explored what to expect if the Trump administration's proposals were to be implemented. As of this writing, there has yet to be any clear indication if these amendments will be fulfilled. However, due to the extreme impact such proposals would undoubtedly have, it is essential to prepare as if these changes would come into play. The results show that the proposals would likely push students away from seeking resources and report incidences of sexual assault even less for fear of

not being taken seriously or being blamed themselves. Additionally, universities would have the opportunity to take less responsibility in their adjudication and decision-making of sexual assault cases. Although university personnel would be impacted on all levels, those directly affected by campus sexual assault would have the most to lose. If such amendments are to be passed or similar proposals are made in the future, this research demonstrates what to anticipate from the perspective of campus-based advocates.

Although this research project is informative and beneficial, several limitations have been identified. Initially, with only five total participants, the study was small and non-representative. Each participant identified as female and white. Additionally, all the participants were from a single and relatively small Midwestern collegiate system. Furthermore, the current study only relies on the perspective of advocates and supporters themselves. Future research should have a larger pool of participants from more diverse backgrounds and also investigate additional populations, such as university administrators and students, to relieve any bias on behalf of advocates and supporters. Finally, if the proposals made by the Trump administration are in fact carried out, it is essential that research be conducted on the experiences and detrimental impact such changes would produce.

It is the goal of this research to transform how campus-based advocates and supporters are perceived on universities and their role in preventing and responding to campus sexual assault. Campus-based advocates maintain a unique place within the realm of higher education. They offer victim-centered advocacy, resources, education, and ultimately, create an environment that uplifts the voices and experiences of those who

have been affected by sexual assault. More campus-based advocates are needed at universities across the country but proposals similar to the ones made by the Trump administration have the potential to rollback victim's rights and further traumatize them. It is necessary to create systems and processes that center the experiences of those who have the most to bear. Campus-based advocates are a source of transformation and empowerment in the fight against campus sexual assault.

**Appendix #1:**  
Recruitment Script

The following script will be sent via email to potential participants to inform them of a research study they are being asked to participate in:

Hello: (*Prospective Participant's Name*)

My name is Hunter and I am a graduate student in the Gender and Women's Studies Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am reaching out to you because I am conducting face-to-face interviews with potential participants for a research study. My research study is titled "Perceptions and Experiences of Campus-Based Advocates: Analyzing Campus Sexual Assault Advocacy". For your convenience, the IRBNet ID number for this research project is 1527024. It would be a privilege to have you be a part of this research study as a participant.

The purpose of this study is to determine the perception and need for campus-based advocates on university campuses as evidenced by campus-based advocates themselves. As staff members and campus employees who not only provide advocacy to students who have experienced sexual assault but also educate the campus community on sexual assault, campus-based advocates hold a unique perspective that is necessary to understand. The aim of this research seeks to assess the value of campus-based advocates from the perspective of a feminist lens intent upon supporting the awareness and experiences of student victims/survivors of sexual assault. Data will be used to better understand campus-based advocates' experiences and value on college campuses.

Your participation will involve a face-to-face interview with me where I will ask questions about your experience and feelings about your work as a campus-based advocate. A set of potential questions will be prepared but time will also be dedicated to follow up questions depending on the information you wish to share. The expected duration of participation should be about one hour. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without giving reason. Although you may feel some emotional discomfort, the risk presented by this research project is no more than experienced in everyday life.

Attached within this email you will find a consent form. This is provided in order for you to be aware of anything you may be asked to do as part of this research study so you can fully consider your willingness as a participant in the study.

If you have any questions or need clarification, please feel free to respond to this email or reach out to the Principal Investigator of this research project, Dr. Maria Bevacqua. Dr. Bevacqua can be contacted via email at [maria.bevacqua@mnsu.edu](mailto:maria.bevacqua@mnsu.edu).

At your convenience, please respond to this email indicating if you are interested in participating in this research project. If so, a secondary email will be sent inquiring about a date, time, and private location in which the face-to-face interview can take place.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you!

Salutations & Signature

**Appendix #2:**  
Research Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study involving an interview about your experiences as a Campus-Based Advocate!

**Study Title:**

Perceptions and Experiences of Campus-Based Advocates: Analyzing Campus Sexual Assault Advocacy

**Researchers:**

*Principal Investigator:*

Maria Bevacqua, Ph.D.  
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56001

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**Purpose of Research:**

The purpose of this research is to determine the perception and need for campus-based advocates on university campuses as evidenced by campus-based advocates themselves. As staff members and campus employees who not only provide advocacy to students who have experienced sexual assault but also educate the campus community on sexual assault, campus-based advocates hold a unique perspective that is necessary to understand. This study will seek to assess the value of campus-based advocates from the perspective of a feminist lens intent upon supporting the awareness and experiences of student victims/survivors of sexual violence.

**Duration of Participation:**

Each interview is anticipated to last about an hour depending on your responses to the questions. The researcher will alert you when the 60-minute mark has been reached and the researcher will ask if you would like to continue with the interview. If you decline to continue, the interview will be completed. Otherwise, if you wish to continue, the interview will resume. You will once again be informed that the interview can be stopped at any time.

**Documentation of the Interview:**

The documentation of this interview can be completed in one of two ways being either (a) recorded using an electronic recording device or (b) via hand written notes by the researcher. Choosing one option over the other will not subject you to any penalty or loss of benefits within the study. Below, please indicate your preferred method of documentation by signing your initials on the next page:

- I consent to this interview being documented by an electronic recording:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I consent to this interview being documented by hand written notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Procedures:**

1. The researcher will interview you for about an hour at the agreed upon day, time, and location established by both parties.
2. You will have the opportunity to read this form and have any questions you may have answered before the interview begins. If you agree to be a participant of this study, signed consent will be requested and a copy of this consent form will be provided.
3. After this, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym by which you will be referred to throughout the interview.
4. Then, if you consented to documentation via an electronic recording device, the researcher will begin recording the interview.
5. The researcher will ask you describe your experience and feelings about your work as a campus-based advocate based upon prepared questions while also allowing for follow up questions based upon what you share.

**Expectation of Potential Risks:**

The risk presented by this research project are no more than experienced in everyday life. Some of the interview questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to leave the interview at any time. If at any time or for any reason you may feel discomfort or stress, please feel free to access the following resource: Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) national sexual assault hotline at 800-656-4673. Additionally, a risk that participants may experience is in regard to their position on campus. As I am only interviewing a single participant from each Minnesota State University, there is a possibility of identification via comments that are made throughout the interview. In order to try and minimize this risk, as stated above, participants are asked to provide a pseudonym. Furthermore, the university you are employed by will also be labeled with a letter to further help preserve identity. Despite the precautions that are being taken, please be aware that identification is a potential risk.



**Benefits of Participation:**

As a participant of this study, there are no direct benefits for engaging in the research project. However, the information that you provide may help others better understand the role and value of Campus-Based Advocates on college campuses.

**Privacy and Confidentiality:**

We will do our best to make sure that the personal information gathered for this study is kept private. However, we cannot guarantee total privacy. If information from this study is published or presented at meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

As mentioned previously, your interview will be documented. If electronic recording documentation was indicated, this recording will be uploaded onto a secured, password protected computer and then saved to a flash drive. In preparation for the event that the flash drive becomes corrupted, interview data will be additionally backed up to a secure Minnesota State University, Mankato campus network called “MavDisk”. Once the transfer of data is complete, the interview data on the electronic recording device will be deleted. The researcher will then transcribe the interview data. The erasure of recordings and transcription of the interview data will be completed within 30 days of the interview. After the data is transcribed and compiled, the data transcriptions, consent forms, and flash drive will be securely stored in the Principal Investigator’s office. Only the researcher and Principal Investigator, Dr. Maria Bevacqua, will have access to the compiled data. After a length of 3 years Dr. Bevacqua will delete all of the files.

If documentation via hand written notes was indicated, these notes will be transcribed into a word document on a secured, password protected computer and then saved to a flash drive. In preparation for the event that the flash drive becomes corrupted, interview data will be additionally backed up to a secure Minnesota State University, Mankato campus network called “MavDisk”. Once the transcription of hand written notes to a word document is completed, the hand written notes will be shredded. The transcription of hand written notes and shredding will be completed within 30 days of the interview. The word document transcriptions from the hand written notes, consent forms, and flash drive will be securely stored in the Principal Investigator’s office. Only the researcher and Principal Investigator, Dr. Maria Bevacqua, will have access to the compiled data. After a length of 3 years Dr. Bevacqua will delete all of the files.

**Compensation:**

You will not be compensated for taking part in this study.

**Rights as a Participant:**

Taking part in this study is your choice. You may choose either to take part or not to take part in the study. You may withdraw from the study by telling the researcher to end the interview. If you choose to discontinue your participation before the data collection is complete, you will not be subjected to any penalty or loss of benefits. If a participant

wishes to discontinue after data has been collected, this data will be destroyed and not used for the purpose of the study. If you decide to take part in this study, you may leave the study at any time.

**Who do I contact if I have questions about the study?:**

If you have any questions about this research study, contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Maria Bevacqua, by phone at 507-389-5025 or by email at [maria.bevacqua@mnsu.edu](mailto:maria.bevacqua@mnsu.edu). If you wish, you may also contact the Student Investigator, Hunter Beckstrom, by phone at 507-389-3237 or by email at [hunter.beckstrom@mnsu.edu](mailto:hunter.beckstrom@mnsu.edu).

If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242.

**Consent to Participate in the Research Study:**

Participation in research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. A copy of this consent form was provided to you via email when you were asked to participate in this research study. Please feel free to print this in order to use as a reference if needed.

**IRBNet ID Number:**

1527024

Sign below to indicate your willingness to participate in this research study and to indicate that you are at least 18 years of age.

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Signature	Your Name (printed)	Date
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