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Non-Reporting: A Systemic Epidemic

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Granville, Ohio

2020/ 2021

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ABSTRACT

College sexual assault is a widely discussed problem in higher education; however, the dominant discourse inadequately considers the social drivers of sexual assault. Likewise, the problem of non-reporting is widely discussed, yet this discussion is inattentive to the systemic barriers to reporting. This research investigates the problem of non-reporting by exploring how the campus environment reacts to sexual assault allegations, how the reporting landscape impacts reporting outcomes, and how social conditions serve to deter reporting. My theoretical framework is grounded in the concept of structural violence, which allows me to re-cast sexual assault and non-reporting as structural problems rather than simply individual concerns. I administered an open-ended survey to investigate how Denison students understand the process of sexual assault reporting and to discern if there are socially produced deterrents and barriers to reporting. Additionally, I interviewed four members of the Denison community deeply involved in sexual respect organizations to critically study the relationship of the campus environment to the Title IX office and to the reporting landscape. In addition, these interviews assisted with discerning the social conditions that impact reporting. My ethnographic data makes evident that not only are students structurally deterred from reporting due to the social environment, but they arrive on campus structurally unprepared to be sexual citizens, a situation that contributes to non-reporting. Given this, a radical re-education and sexual socialization of students upon their arrival to college is necessary to counter their inadequate socialization and ameliorate structural sexual assault and systemic non-reporting.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

During my senior year of high school, I witnessed rape culture in a tragically enlightening context; one of my close friends was sexually assaulted and then silenced and further oppressed by a toxic culture. The assailant did everything he could to shift any blame onto my friend, the victim; after confessing to her in a seemingly genuine apology, he completely falsified the narrative and declared that he was a victim of my friend's lies. The whole school turned on my friend and ostracized her, the survivor. Rumor and lies transformed her narrative into one that was not her own, augmenting the burden of her assault. One would think that the school administration would be exempt from this toxic culture but this was sadly not the case. The school administration not only displayed a lack of support for a survivor of sexual assault but intensified the injustice by intentionally silencing her-- multiple of my friends were admonished by the principal for refusing to be silent and wanting her story to be known. The power of rumor stripped my friend of her agency and turned her sexual assault narrative into one that was not her own, thereby inflicting further violence on a survivor of sexual assault.

As I witnessed a toxic culture silence a survivor trying to exercise agency by advocating for herself, I grew a desire to ameliorate the culture that plagues reporting sexual assault. This experience pulled open the curtain on the deeply problematic culture around sexual assault that prevails in society: a culture in which justice is obstructed through the silencing of survivors. Without me even knowing, this experience ignited my sociological imagination; I often found affirmation and a weird sense of comfort in researching rape culture and victim-blaming, understanding that the trouble these caused my friend is reflective of a larger societal issue to which many, many others are subject. This experience further makes evident that cultural contexts around sexual assault and reporting adversely impact young people before they step foot

on a college campus, which underlines the need to holistically address overlapping social variables concerning sexual assault.

Coming to Denison, I was not oblivious to the prevalence of sexual assault and the issue of non-reporting; I understood the gravity of the issue, aware that one in five women experience sexual assault while in college which is likely an underestimate as campus assault is not well reported. More deeply, I understood the complexities that reporting entails. I witnessed my friend be silenced by a toxic culture in which an individual's social status renders a rape narrative believable or not and rumor has the power to strip survivors of their narrative and agency. Knowing this, I understood why so many victims are reluctant to report; I deeply empathized with the internal cognitive dissonance that reporting entails, understanding what is at stake due to social factors. Although I had not developed this vocabulary, I recognized that there are socially produced, systemic barriers to reporting.

I did not realize until later in my Denison career, however, the pervasive extent of non-reporting. When allowed to conduct a semester-long ethnographic research project for my Field Research Methods course, I did not hesitate in deciding to investigate sexual assault at Denison. Through studying how sexual assault is discussed and treated on Denison's campus, I discovered that the campus culture negatively impacts reporting. I was able to discern key issues with Denison's culture through a series of semi-structured interviews; I performed two long individual interviews with participants affiliated with the Denison Coalition for Sexual Respect (DSCR), and one group interview with eight Denison students not affiliated with DCSR. These interviews collectively reflected a theme in which social conditions that emerge from the size of the student body at Denison serve to deter reporting. Namely, rumor, social fate, and social power emerged as key components to the reporting landscape. These findings instilled in me a

deep desire to expound on the social deterrents of reporting with an eye towards ameliorating non-reporting and creating a culture in which students embody sexual respect in all facets of their behavior.

Critically, this research elucidated the extent of the problem of non-reporting on Denison's campus; according to the data gathered by the National College Health Assessment survey, only 7% of sexual assaults are reported at Denison. This statistic underlines the pertinent need for deep qualitative research on systemic barriers to reporting as it is necessary to understand why there is such a discrepancy between the number of people who experience sexual assault and the number who actually report the experience. My previous research suggests that the size of Denison is in itself a barrier to reporting, due to how it augments the visibility of social status and proliferates the role social fate plays in a survivor's decision to report. I use social fate to refer to the significant role social relations play in mediating an individual's sense of well-being and belonging as an integrated member of the campus community. Consequently, students are keenly aware of how their social status and, ultimately, the quality of their life on campus, lie in a precarious place as a rumor or accusation can be disruptive to the harmony of their social circles and can result in institutional ramifications. My research further illustrated the silencing power of a pervasive rumor culture embedded in the campus environment.

It is necessary to deeply understand these social phenomena, as well as other social barriers and cultural hurdles to reporting. Given this, my research situates non-reporting within the campus environment and culture, as well as in wider cultural contexts, such as poor sex education. Exploring wider cultural contexts is paramount as investigating how cultural and social contexts overlap in a manner that is conducive to sexual assault and non-reporting will allow for profound new insights.

Campus environments undeniably impact whether a survivor has agency over their sexual assault narrative and whether they are empowered to report. In this way, the campus environment and cultural contexts are the unit of my analysis, a shift that departs from the bulk of literature on this topic in which the individual is the unit of analysis. To facilitate a culture on Denison's campus that empowers survivors to report and affirms their agency to do so, it is necessary to understand ethnographically and deeply the socially produced systemic barriers to reporting. Understanding the complexity of the decision to report by situating it in a system of socially produced barriers to reporting may help ameliorate the problem of non-reporting as elucidating these barriers may detract from both their power and pervasiveness.

It is widely understood that campus sexual assault is not well reported; most sexual assaults are committed by peers or friends of a victim, which often complicates the survivors' understanding of the action and deters them from reporting (Karjane 2005). Sexual assault is an ambiguous concept, which effectively deters survivors from reporting as misconceptions of the meaning and appearance of sexual assault make victims themselves question if their claim is valid. The ambiguity surrounding some types of sexual assault puts into question the support survivors do or do not receive from their institution and if they can experience justice. By studying the problem of non-reporting at Denison systemically and holistically, I hope to contribute valuable insights that may inform policies and interventions aimed at mitigating the disparity between those who experience sexual assault and those who report it. Beyond this, I hope this research redirects how the institution as a whole thinks about both sexual assault and non-reporting and demonstrates the immense stake they have in the conversation; cultivating a campus of sexual respect should be treated with the rigor it deserves.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I. A Systemic Epidemic

This project seeks to elucidate the problem of non-reporting by holistically understanding sexual assault as a systemic epidemic within which structural and social factors deter reporting. Through observing the campus culture around sexual assault in the context of a small, residential, liberal arts college, this research situates sexual assault in a social system in which systemic barriers prevent reporting. In this way, my analytical approach departs significantly from previous research on the topic, which often seeks to understand sexual assault and non-reporting on an individual basis. Analyzing the non-reporting of sexual assault on an individual basis is a disservice to the topic as sexual assault is a form of structural violence that is embedded in social and cultural power relations; thus, it is pertinent to view the issue of non-reporting as a systemic problem, not an individual one.

Jennifer Hirsch and Shamus Khan (2020) pioneered a new approach to studying sexual assault on college campuses by shifting the unit of analysis from individuals to cultural contexts and systems that promote sexual assault. These researchers build on previous scholarship from a unique approach of deep ethnographic engagement, which allowed them to “contextualize and enrich [their] findings, yielding fresh insights” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: xi). In many ways, this project is an extension of their findings as I am applying their framework to the issue of non-reporting to allow for novel insights into why so many victims fail to report sexual assault. I have been deeply immersed in the social environment I am focusing on, as Hirsch and Khan’s team were, which has allowed me to contextualize my ethnographic data in profound ways. Their focus was the “social roots of sexual assault” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: xi); along the same lines,

my focus is on the social roots of non-reporting in connection to the social roots of sexual assault.

To elucidate the structural existence of sexual violence, I am engaging literature on sexual victimization and sexual violence on and off college campuses. Minnotte and Legerski (2019) “contextualize structural vulnerabilities” by focusing on the role of power when analyzing sexual harassment through intersections of gender, power, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (1). Minnotte and Legerski allege that the complex way in which power dynamics are embedded in workplace organizations mitigates the likelihood that female employees formally report sexual harassment (2019: 3). In this way, power prevails across gendered lines in a manner that augments structural vulnerabilities to sexual harassment while also working to silence these victims. Outside of affirming the structural nature of sexual violence, Minnotte and Legerski’s findings demonstrate that it is paramount to study sexual violence through a prism of intersecting structural vulnerabilities concerning power and reporting to ameliorate the problem of non-reporting.

II. Intrinsic Complexities in Understanding and Defining Sexual Assault

Central to the issue of sexual assault non-reporting lies the convoluted nature of understanding and defining sexual assault; how sexual assault is understood socially and culturally impacts whether survivors recognize their experience as such and are mobilized to report. Despite efforts on the behalf of feminists and scholars of various social science disciplines to broaden legal and cultural definitions of sexual assault, dominant narratives informed by stereotypes about “real rape,” legitimate victims, and likely perpetrators prevail and contribute to a harmful discourse (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018).

Sexual violence encompasses sexual assault, and sexual assault encompasses rape; in this way, definitional understandings are intrinsically complex. Drawing from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, Black et al. (2010) define rape as

Any completed or attempted unwanted vaginal . . . , oral, or anal penetration through the use of physical force . . . or threats to physically harm and includes times when the victim was drunk, high, drugged, or passed out and unable to consent (Black et al. 2010: 17).

More broadly, reflecting the intention of the authors to redefine sexual assault, Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson (2018) define rape and sexual assault “as sexual acts committed against someone who does not or cannot consent” (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018: 100). Evidently, definitions of sexual assault range, which complicates understanding the embodiment of sexual assault.

Most researchers draw a sharp distinction between sex and rape. Hirsch and Khan (2020) diverge from this as part of their attempt to holistically understand sexual assault and position it in social systems to trace how it is systemically produced. They indicate that their approach is unique:

While many insist that rape and sex are fundamentally different things, we maintain that understanding what young people are trying to accomplish with sex, why, and the contexts within which sex happens are all essential for a comprehensive analysis of sexual assault (Hirsch and Khan 2020: xii).

This position is critical when studying sexual assault on college campuses due to the phenomenon that young people struggle with the ambiguity around the distinction between sex and sexual assault. Concerning reporting, this is profound as it indicates that some survivors may see their assault as sex they were uncomfortable with, as opposed to sexual assault. In this way,

sharp definitions of sexual assault may serve to mitigate reporting and do a disservice to victims who are struggling to come to terms with their assault.

At the heart of the convoluted nature of recognizing sexual assault is the phenomenon of unacknowledged sexual violence. According to Ceelen et al. (2016;2019), “unacknowledged sexual violence occurs when an individual experiences a sexually violent incident, but the event is not labeled as sexual abuse by the victim” (Ceelen et al. 2016;2019: 1972). They expound on this phenomenon by articulating that victims may first conceptualize sexual violence with more “benign labels” such as “miscommunication” or “bad sex” and that these primary conceptualizations may change over time (Ceelen et al, 2016;2019: 1972). These experts leverage this phenomenon to indicate that surveys screening for sexual assault should instead “focus on behaviorally descriptive items about sexual contact rather than using terms such as *rape*.” (Ceelen et al. 2016;2019: 1972). This echoes the problem that reporting poses; survivors are unlikely to report if they do not define their experience as sexual assault, which is common. Given this, reporting statistics are doomed to be inaccurate.

A certain ambiguity and uncomfortability around defining sexual assault mitigates reporting. Survivors may struggle with the intrinsic complexities of sexual assault in which definitional understandings may diverge from their experience, or how they perceived their experience, in turn, deterring them from reporting. On college campuses, conversations around defining sexual assault revolve around the concept of consent. In this way, it is pertinent in my data collection to discern how students at Denison understand consent and how these play into a general definition of sexual assault.

III. Intrinsic Complexities & The Gendered Divide

Central to the complexities that haunt understanding sexual assault is the fact that men and women interpret sexual violence divergently; the gendered divide in understanding sexual interactions produces sexual scripts that augment the inability to recognize sexual assault. Gavey (2005) analyzes how gendered roles and behaviors contribute to cultural understandings of sex and assault. Gavey (2005) pioneered a model of heterosexuality in which men pursue sex and women resist; in such a way, “women’s supposed coyness plays a foil to masculine aggression” (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018; 102). In this cultural understanding of heterosexuality, women are passive objects to men’s sexual pursuit and their pleasure is not expected, rendering the distinction between “normal” heterosexual intercourse and sexual assault difficult to discern (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018). This model, which is dominant in cultural understandings of heteronormativity, renders sexual assault narratives perniciously perceptible to rape myths. Rape myths attribute false associations and beliefs to the emergence and prevalence of sexual assault (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018). One rape myth is that what a woman wears may constitute consent in itself, mitigating the blame on behalf of the rapist. Very problematically, rape myths are widely employed and believed across multiple segments of society (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018). Rape myths are leveraged to shift the blame of sexual victimization from the assailant to the target, which further complicates recognizing sexual assault.

How men and women are socialized further contributes to the gendered complexities of perceiving sexual assault. Research indicates that boys learn how to produce gendered power while in school (Gansen 2017; Pascoe 2012). By employing humor while discussing sexual assault, young men construct gendered norms that tie masculinity to dominance and femininity to

vulnerability (Pascoe 2012). Paradoxically, men denounce sexual violence to conform to modern and superlative expectations, while simultaneously joking about sexual violence and oppression in their peer groups, augmenting their status in these groups (Pascoe & Hollander 2016). In this way, subconsciously, men construct understandings of sexual violence that serve their masculinist behavior while simultaneously displaying empathy through denouncing sexual violence to serve their interests.

It is imperative to analyze the impetus behind the divergent ways women and men experience sexual violence and oppression through engaging theory on the social construction of gender. Schwalbe (1992) argues that the requirements of masculinity rely on the narrowing of the moral self. Schwalbe leverages the concept of “male supremacy” to illustrate the source of problematic masculinity: as men are more highly valued than females “they command vastly more institutional power” (92). Schwalbe asserts that men’s inability to display empathy for women lies in how they are socialized to be *masculine*; drawing on Mead’s theory of the self as a social structure, Schwalbe explains how “boys” and “girls” are produced by different responses to male and female impulses (31). Gender socialization creates a precarious context for sexual assault as men are not only awarded more social power but are groomed to be masculine by suppressing their empathy.

Concerning sexual harassment, Schwalbe argues that “sexual harassment issues naturally from the masculinist self” and “occurs within the bounds of normal behavior as defined by male supremacy” (44). For men, sexual harassment is natural to their rhetoric and behavior, so they do not recognize it as such nor “is its harm evident to those who routinely perpetrate it” (Schwalbe 1992:44). Schwalbe employs the Thomas-Hill hearings as a case study to attest to this as none of the male senators were able to perceive Hill as a victim due to their masculinist stance. Schwalbe

proclaims that often the masculinist self is also the racist and elitist self, which indicates the need for an intersectional approach. Given this, gender role socialization prevents men from empathizing with sexual assault which impedes their ability to recognize it and even authorizes them to perpetrate it.

A gendered divide in understanding sexual violence undoubtedly contributes to the social context that allows for sexual assault. Quinn (2002) analyzes the divergent ways in which women and men understand sexual harassment. Quinn centers her analysis around the phenomenon of “girl watching” which refers to “the act of men's sexually evaluating women, often in the company of other men” (387). Quinn follows Schwalbe's analysis of empathy and the formation of masculine identities, arguing that “girl watching” demonstrates male objectification of women through the suppression of empathy for her. She offers gender role socialization as an explanation for the inability of men to display empathy for women: “the more men and women adhere to traditional gender roles, the more likely they are to deny the harm in sexual harassment and to consider the behavior acceptable or at least normal” (Quinn 2002: 388). Hence, by denying the harm in sexual harassment, men experience “girl watching” as a form of play that is “productive of masculine identities and premised on a studied lack of empathy with the feminine other” and functions “as a potentially powerful site of gendered social action”(Quinn 2002: 391). Girl watching exemplifies the belief that men hold that they have the right to sexually evaluate women and reduce them to an object without inflicting harm-- a precarious misunderstanding. This phenomenon demonstrates how men view sexual oppression divergently from women, underlining the gendered divide in understanding sexual violence that augments the complexity of the issue.

In an analysis of gendered behavior, Goffman (1977) contends that interactional expectations encourage and promote sexual advances on the behalf of men while simultaneously forcing women to reject such unwanted advances politely. Jones (2010) extends this understanding with an intersectional lens by examining how Black women maneuver gendered cultural codes concerning interpersonal violence. Collins (2004) further demonstrates that femininity norms are particularly narrow for Black women, which augments the difficulty of navigating sexual violence. Given this, constructions of masculinity and femininity are incredibly pernicious, especially under an intersectional lens.

Robust literature suggests that gender inequality is central to sexual violence (Armstrong et al. 2018; Pascoe & Hollander 2016; Schwalbe 2014; Uggen & Blackstone 2004). Feminists have long argued that gendered power relations produce sexual violence (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson, 2018: 100). However, feminists as such have been critiqued for ignoring other axes of oppression (Crenshaw 1989). Sexual violence, regardless of the form or context “maintains and creates power asymmetries” (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018: 100). As sexual assault functions through power, it is a form of oppression: “Sexual violence is about domination—across race, nation, class, gender, and other dimensions of inequality” (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018: 100). Therefore, holistically studying the problem of sexual assault and non-reporting necessitates invoking an intersectional lens.

IV. Sexual Assault and Intersectionality

A further anthropological and sociological exploration of the topic of sexual assault is critical due to the marginalization of sexual violence in sociology. Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson (2018) contend that the “core of sociology has been virtually silent on sexual violence”

as the American Journal of Sociology, the American Sociological Review, and the Annual Review of Sociology collectively published 13 articles between 1975 and 2017 directly related to sexual violence (100). Quite powerfully, these researchers call on sociologists to integrate sexual violence into the discipline to yield deeper explanations of the social processes that contribute to it; they powerfully assert that “failure to do so renders sociology complicit in the silencing of sexual violence” (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018: 112). It is imperative to actively work against the silencing of sexual violence by critically engaging it in the discipline. Moreover, as “sexual violence sits at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity” it is incredibly germane to the disciplines of anthropology and sociology (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson, 2018: 112).

It is fruitful to define an intersectional perspective, as this indicates its utility for dissecting power in sexual violence. A pioneer of intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins (1990), declares that “instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class, and religion” it is pertinent to see “these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination” (414). For Collins, intersectionality is not only about recognizing how variables such as race, class, and sexuality further oppress women, but instead, it is about understanding and embracing the “paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression” as this allows for the reconceptualization of “social relations of dominance and resistance” (1990: 413). It is paramount that sexual violence as a gendered issue is studied under an intersectional paradigm as power operates in convoluted ways. Avery Gordon (1997) confirms this understanding of power when she asserts that “power relations that characterize any historically embedded society are

never transparently as clear as the labels we give them” (488). Invoking an intersectional approach is necessary to scrutinize how power functions with sexual violence.

Sexual violence is a site in which multiple power asymmetries intersect; it is both a cause and effect of intersectional inequality. Collins eloquently underlines this when she contends that violence “may serve as the conceptual glue that binds” systems of domination together (Collins 1998: 919). Collins (1990) contends that inherent to political domination is violence; she asserts that systems of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, and age interlock as the *matrix of domination* (Collins 1990). In the case of sexual violence, it is pertinent to focus on intersectional experiences of violence and discrimination to highlight the violence that prevails against women of color.

Sexual assault as a site of racial domination must be situated in its historical context; white people historically leveraged false accusations of sexual violence against Black men as a justification for lynching which exemplifies the historical racial domination of Black men through the myth of the Black rapist (Wells-Barnett 1892; Davis 1983). Black women as well as Black men have been historically oppressed through sexual assault; during slavery, enslaved Black women’s sexual victimization by their white owners was legal (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018). The use of sexual violence as a tool of white oppression did not cease in slavery, but instead, persisted through emancipation, the civil rights movement, and into the twenty-first century (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018). Even definitions of rape and who should be considered a rapist depended on a person’s gender, race/ethnicity, and class (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018). It is pertinent to recognize the history of racialized sexual oppression as this history has shaped contemporary applications of the law

through “enduring state violence against women of color and the lack of legal protections for nonwhite, non-wealthy survivors” (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018: 105).

Without a doubt, one’s social location profoundly impacts their experience with sexual violence. In investigating the divergent ways in which sexual harassment is understood, sociologists Blackstone, Houle, and Uggen (2014) point out that legal definitions of sexual assault “tell us little about how people experience and understand sexual harassment in their daily lives” which fuels an obligation for sociologists to discern “how social position, life course processes and historical context shape understandings of harassment” (315). Following current trends in the discipline of sociology on the topic of sexual harassment, these researchers situate varying perceptions of sexual assault in social and historical contexts with cognizance of gender, ethnicity, and race. These sociologists hold that robust evidence from previous sociological studies indicates that perceptions of sexual oppression vary by gender, race, and sexuality (Blackstone, Houle & Uggen 2014).

Minnotte and Legerski (2019) hold that “Sexual harassment has much to be gained from taking an intersectional lens that considers the various ways in which multiple social locations shape the experience of harassment in the workplace” (6). Following this, Minnotte and Legerski affirm that an intersectional lens allows researchers to recognize the phenomena in which women of color face the double oppression of race and gender. These sociologists expound on this phenomenon further when analyzing how the intersection of race and gender impacts the type of sexual harassment that women of color are subject to; Minnotte and Legerski leverage the intersection of race and power to contend that Black women are more vulnerable to “more serious forms of sexual harassment” in that they “may encounter greater levels of unwanted sexual attention and coercion” in comparison to white women who are more likely to be subject

to gender harassment (2019: 6). Given this, intersectionality is pertinent concerning the social roots of sexual assault as one's social location impacts their experience with assault.

The intersection of multiple axes of oppression that occurs with sexual violence has very real, adverse effects for survivors and reporting. In reporting, survivors of sexual assault are burdened by providing evidence of their assault and "holding organizations accountable for civil rights violations" (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018: 107). Reporting may be unappealing due to the fear of many survivors that by submitting complaints of discrimination and sexual violence, they may be subject to retaliation (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson 2018). Intersecting markers of oppression may serve to augment the fear of retaliation and lack of faith in the reporting process; in this way, intersectional oppression is a key variable to the issue of non-reporting.

It is paramount to consider the intersectional components of systemic non-reporting. Fisher et al. (2003) research the relationship between intersectionality and non-reporting as part of their investigation of college non-reporters. They contend that "income level, education level, and race of survivors "appeared to affect the reporting of sexual victimization" (Fisher et al. 2003: 12) They further specify that race impacts negatively impacts reporting as Black women are less likely to report assault or rape to the police. In general, they conclude that minority women are less likely to report to the police which they attribute to "evidence that those groups that have been historically distrustful of the police" and thus are "less likely to see reporting to them as a desirable alternative" (Fisher et al. 2003: 12). Intersectionality is critical concerning systemic non-reporting as reporting is impacted by power relations that have historical roots.

In sum, it is pertinent that the issue of sexual assault is analyzed with a sociological perspective that invokes an intersectional framework as this type of research constitutes a gap in

the discipline. Moreover, concerning reporting, it is necessary to utilize an intersectional lens as intersecting markers of oppression impact whether a victim is mobilized to report their sexual victimization.

V. Sexual Assault on College Campuses

Sexual assault on college campuses is a topic analyzed robustly in literature; however, the widespread analytical approach has placed the individual as the unit of analysis. In this way, scholarship has lacked a rich sociological perspective. As previously mentioned, Hirsch and Khan (2020) shifted the unit of analysis to the campus community and the interplay of cultures and systems within that community. In their landmark study of sexual assault on college campuses, Hirsch and Khan frame their research on sexual assault as building on earlier feminist work “emphasizing gender inequality, sexuality, and power” while adding an intersectional dimension by exploring race, socioeconomic status, and age (2020: xi). Expounding on their theoretical perspective, Hirsch and Khan emphasize the need to think about sexual misconduct as a public health crisis as this “expands the focus from individuals and how they interact to systems” (2020: xi). Viewing sexual assault and non-reporting as a systemic epidemic is pertinent to discern the social roots of sexual assault and socially produced barriers to reporting.

Hirsch and Khan invoke survey data from a robust survey, SHIFT, revolving around the issue of sexual assault on college campuses; they explain the sociological richness of the SHIFT survey in that “instead of thinking in terms of predators or post-assault procedures, SHIFT examined the social drivers of assault, to develop new approaches to making assault a less common feature of college life” (2020: xi). They contend that “this approach situates individuals, along with their problem behaviors, in the broader context of their relationships, their pre-college

histories, the organizations they are a part of, and the cultures that influence them” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: xi). In this way, their analysis is invaluable to my research as they systemically analyze sexual assault through the lens of the social drives of assault. I will mirror this same framework in my research as it is critical to view sexual assault and the issue of non-reporting as socially produced and influenced by power and intersectional inequality. In the same way, it is paramount to understand that the issue of non-reporting is not an individual problem, but a social issue. Given this, I will situate sexual assault and non-reporting in broader cultural contexts as well as the campus environment.

Hirsch and Khan (2020) performed deep ethnographic research at Columbia University, which they assert is similar to other institutions of higher education in its statistical makeup of sexual assault. Hirsch and Khan affirm the need to understand sexual assault and reporting on college campuses holistically when they assert that “there is untapped potential in looking at the many modifiable dimensions of the campus environment” (2020: 256). Hirsch and Khan comprehensively conceive sexual assault by employing three broad and encompassing theoretical concepts: “sexual projects,” “sexual geographies,” and “sexual citizenship.” They leverage these concepts to explain students’ experiences and “understand why sexual assault is a predictable consequence of how our society is organized, rather than solely of individual bad actors” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: xiii). Each of these concepts has a theoretical and conceptual influence on my research questions, theoretical framework, and design.

According to Hirsch and Khan, “Sexual citizenship denotes the acknowledgment of one’s own right to sexual self-determination and, importantly, recognizes the equivalent right in others” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: xvi). They contend that sexual citizenship is not something that some are born with and others are not, instead “sexual citizenship is fostered, and institutionally

and culturally supported [...] we mean a socially produced sense of enfranchisement and right to sexual agency” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: xvi). How they develop this concept in the context of structural conditions is paramount as it indicates that sexual assault exists in a system of socially produced behavior. Sexual citizenship is a critical concept in the context of college sexual assault as college students are structurally ill-equipped to function as empowered and autonomous sexual citizens, due to how they are embedded in a culture that is uncomfortable discussing sex, especially concerning young people. Moreover, as sexual citizenship is institutionally fostered, college is an impeccable time to aid young people in embodying sexual citizenship.

Hirsch and Khan (2020) leverage the concept of “sexual geographies” to illustrate that physical space is central to sexual assault in that it offers some people power and takes agency away from others: “Far more than many of us realize-- and particularly in college settings-- sexual outcomes are intimately tied to the physical spaces where they unfold” (2020: xix). Sexual geography undeniably impacts reporting as agency and power are central to the issue of non-reporting. In Hirsch and Khan’s words, “space has a social power that elicits and produces behavior. Within the social sciences, there’s an enormous amount of work that points to how space influences actions and interactions” (2020: xix). They affirm how power functions in physical spaces to augment sexual oppression when they assert that “sexual geographies intensify power inequalities” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: 256). Moreover, they allude to the impact this has on reporting when they assert that “power inequalities can produce silence” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: 262). Silence and reporting are inextricably linked, thus, sexual geography is a critical area to investigate. The phenomenon of physical space producing systemic vulnerabilities to sexual assault is supported by previous literature: Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson (2018) assert that how university arrangements—ranging from residence hall assignments to

men's control of the party scene—produce campus sexual assault, further underlining that structural power asymmetries increase opportunities for abuse.

Hirsch and Khan (2020) argue that part of the reason that sexual assault is so prevalent on college campuses comes down to the fact that students are not taught how to understand what they want from sex and recognize that they have control of their sexual interactions based on their desires. Hirsch and Khan define their concept of “sexual projects” as the following: “A Sexual Project encompasses the reasons why anyone might seek a particular sexual interaction or experience” (2020: xiv). This places sexual assault, and particularly the convoluted nature of sexual assault, in the context of young people's uncomfortability around sex and consent; Hirsch and Khan point to various social factors that produce this discomfort, such as poor sex education. The theorists use this concept to illustrate that when students are unsure of what they want from sex, they are more likely to self-blame when assaulted or they are unable to define it as assault although they may feel that it is-- this, in turn, deters reporting. They indicate that this ambiguity on the behalf of young college students concerning what they want and what they are comfortable with sexually has palpable systemic roots that trace back to students' pre-college experiences and education. They assert that “all of us have allowed social conditions to persist in which many young people come of age without a language to talk about their sexual desires, overcome with shame, unaccustomed to considering how their relative social power may silence a peer” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: 255). Ostensibly, structural conditions emerge from widespread cultural contexts long before college that proliferate vulnerability to sexual assault. The idea of silence, which is evidently socially produced, is critically tied to non-reporting; this indicates the need to further study socially produced silence.

Although I am invoking a similar framework, my project diverges from the Hirsch and Khan (2020) study by focusing on the issue of non-reporting. In this way, my research uniquely builds on this topic while maintaining the theoretical contention of analyzing sexual assault as a socially produced issue influenced by complex systemic factors. Somewhat anachronistically, I will now engage previous literature that does not adhere to my theoretical framework and research design, to shed light on the historical context of research in this area. Employing literature that encompasses a more typical, traditional approach is necessary as these studies have allowed for a tangible and rich analysis of the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses.

Within scholarship on sexual assault on college campuses, perhaps the most widely cited study is Koss, Gidycz, and Wusienwski's (1987) "The scope of rape: Incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students." These researchers found that the victimization rate for women peaks in the 16-19-year-old age group, which alludes to how age provides structural vulnerabilities. They further found that 27.5% of college women reported experiencing and 7.7% of college men reported perpetrating an act that met the legal definition of rape, which includes attempts. This disconnect between the number of women who report being assaulted and the number of men who report assaulting someone underscores the profound disparities that prevail in understanding sexual assault; even if one entertains the possibility that some number of men may be assaulting multiple victims, the degree of incongruity emphasizes a problematic abstraction that endures in understanding sexual assault.

Koss, Gidycz, and Wusienwski's (1987) study was cutting-edge as it produced more encompassing data by not adhering to technical definitions of rape and sexual assault; instead "behaviorally specific items regarding rape and lesser forms of sexual aggression or

victimization were presented in a non-crime context to an approximately representative national sample of higher education students” (169). This study was not only cutting-edge but robust as it surveyed students on a national basis. Outside of the legal definition of rape, 54% of college women claimed to be sexually victimized; paradoxically only 25% of college men admitted to any degree of sexually aggressive behavior” (Koss, Gidycz, and Wusienwski 1987: 169). This not only makes evident the vast presence of assault on campus, and but also that legal definitions of rape serve to mitigate self-reporting statistics, which underlines how sexual assault definitions disadvantage survivors recognizing their experience of assault.

Fisher et al. (2003) are some of many scholars who cite and build on the Koss, Gidycz, and Wusienwski 1987 study. These theorists leverage previous studies on the prevalence of sexual assault to assert the need to study the problem of non-reporting, claiming that “despite the prevalence of sexual offenses, a large proportion of victims did not report their sexual victimization to the police or to other authorities” (Fisher et al. 2003: 7). The prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses is widely studied and analyzed through statistical data, which highlights a gap in the literature: sexual assault is prevalent, but what social factors render it so prevalent on college campuses, and what deters victims from reporting. This hole in the literature can only be filled with rich qualitative data.

Central to understanding the social roots of college sexual assault is dissecting the social meaning of consent. Kulbaga and Spencer (2019) detail how re-thinking a definition of consent and the discourse around sexual assault is necessary as the popularly understood definitions are inherently oppressive and misogynist; moreover, they argue that campuses’ “blanket policies” on sexual assault effectively mitigate victim’s agency and generate further violence. The authors assert that practices dominant on college campuses such as explaining consent as common sense

and complicating the conversation of sexual assault by including accounts of hookup culture create a dialogue in which victims are responsible for their rape; moreover, campuses exacerbate victim-blaming when they emphasize the conditions conducive to an account of sexual assault, such as if a victim was drinking or partaking in social activities. They employ a decolonial framework to position rape as a consequence of oppressive cultural norms that normalize violence and construct 'risky' behavior. Kulbaga and Spencer indicate that the way colleges teach consent and construct sexual assault policies may disservice students as these actions augment misconceptions around consent and assault.

A critical component to sexual assault on college campuses is the relationship between Title IX policies and sexual assault survivors. Driessen (2019) employs a feminist-based policy analysis to examine the role of power in campus sexual assault policies. Driessen examines the relationship between current policies and the impact they have on influencing responses to campus sexual assault; she employs McPhail's (2003) Feminist-Based Policy Analysis Framework, specifically regarding power, to make gender explicit in her analysis. Through employing this framework, Driessen finds that focusing on creating policies that protect the entire campus regardless of sex creates a tension between feminist values and the power of the institution versus the power of the student involved in mandatory reporting; moreover, Driessen claims that her results re-enforce previous findings that critique the effect of mandatory reporting on survivors. She illustrates the disconnect between campus perceptions of sexual assault and policies and the resulting need to address rape myths, which shape the culture, in the implementation, and understanding of policies. Driessen provides qualitative evidence that campus policies, specifically mandatory reporting, create a tension between the well-being of

(female) the survivor, and the power of the institution. In this way, it is paramount to scrutinize the formal and informal reporting landscape when investigating non-reporting.

Agency is undeniably critical to understanding sexual assault reporting on college campuses. Germain (2016) researches how college women respond to incidents of campus violence and analyzes how a survivor's experience of agency, and identity, affects their experience of reporting rape. Germain performed ethnographic research on a college campus which entailed talking with female survivors and observing the forms of the agency they exercised in their post-assault experience, analyzing resources available to students, and meeting with representatives of the University's sexual violence adjudication board. Germain asserts that the normalization of rape myths facilitates victim-blaming; she discusses how 'rape scripts,' especially the script of "drug-or alcohol-facilitated rape," perpetuate rape myths that inform a campus culture around sexual assault (2016: 6). She claims that a 'perfect-victim' icon mitigates a survivor's agency and deteriorates the strength of their identity since it is an unreasonable standard for all survivors against which they measure the efficacy of their actions and since others use it to judge women's decisions in a manner that perpetuates blaming of the victims and a lack of understanding in the culture. Evidently, social processes that nurture the acceptance of rape myths and sexual scripts contribute to a precarious campus sexual environment.

In sum, sexual assault is particularly salient on college campuses, particularly for women. Despite its prevalence, except for the Hirsch and Khan (2020) study, literature largely ignores the systemic drivers of sexual assault on college campuses. Recent literature has focused on power, agency, and gender in relation to sexual assault and sexual assault policy. These factors are critical in holistically examining the problem; however, much work has to be done regarding systematically understanding sexual assault and the issue of non-reporting.

VI. Deconstructing the “Classic Rape”

When most people think about sexual assault, the typical “stranger rape” narrative is what comes to mind, embodied by “an incident involving a clear survivor and a previously unknown perpetrator” (Huemmer et al. 2019: 437). Central to studying the prevalence of sexual assault on a college campus in the context of non-reporting is the hegemonic and problematic “classic rape” narrative that prevails in societies’ understandings of sexual assault. Fisher et al. (2003) describe the classic rape as “one perpetrated by a stranger in an unfamiliar, deserted place that results in obvious physical injury to the victim” (13). Dominant perceptions of the “classic rape” are incredibly problematic as “few sexual assaults resemble the archetypal rape” (Armstrong et al. 2018: 107). Robust research indicates that most victims know their assailants, which is one of many nuances of sexual assault that contrasts widespread misunderstandings and perceptions of sexual assault that are centered in the dominant embodiment of rape (Armstrong et al. 2018; Koss et al. 1987). Research further indicates that many victims do not physically resist and most assailants do not use physical force or carry a weapon, which constitutes additional nuances that contradict the socially accepted embodiment of rape (Armstrong et al, 2018). As survivors must reconcile how their experiences differ from dominant cultural representations' of assault, it is pertinent to deconstruct dominant narratives of sexual assault (Armstrong et al, 2018: 109).

In their 1988 study, Koss et al. identify a gap in previous literature around sexual assault: Most published research on the victim-offender relationship has been based on small samples that consisted mainly of women who were raped by nonintimate and nonromantic acquaintances, who viewed their experience as rape, and/or who were seeking treatment (Koss et al. 1988; 1).

This gap constitutes a weakness of sexual assault scholarship. Ignorance to the spectrum of sexual assault experiences alienates and erases survivors who are assaulted by an intimate partner or acquaintance, as their narrative does not conform to the dominant perception. In the Koss et al. (1988) study 489 rape victims were located among a national sample of 3,187 female college students by a self-report survey. The researchers distinguished between stranger rape (n = 52) and acquaintance rape (n=416), situating the traditionally accepted rape narrative into the real spectrum of sexual assault. This highlights the problematic nature of a narrow and limiting socially-produced definition of sexual assault.

The relationship between the victim and offender profoundly impacts the sexual assault narrative. Koss et al. (1988) found that the relationship context affects both the victim's and offender's behavior before, during, and after the crime. On the individual level, Weis and Borges (1973) assert that it may take a survivor who is acquainted with their offender longer to recognize their experience as rape, due to an internal investment to not labeling it as such. I believe that analyzing this phenomenon structurally by placing it in the system of social interactions on a college campus would allow for rich insight. For example, it may not just be that the victim does not want to label it rape since they are acquainted with their assaulter, but because of the adverse social effects that doing so may initiate.

The relationship between a survivor and assailant undeniably impacts a survivor's decision to report. Sales, Baum, and Shore (1984) indicate that the victim-offender relationship may be predictive of how a victim navigates their post-assault decisions, such as, whether to report, who to tell, what life changes to initiate, and what social actions to take. This is particularly insightful for college assaults; moreover, it is even more relevant to small campus communities as it is likely that the victim will indeed be acquainted with their assaulter. Katz and

Burt (1986) contend that non-stranger rape victims experience more self-blame and they further found that non-stranger victims recover less after their assault. Huemmer et al. (2019) note that “dominant social narratives about rape may be at odds with the confusion that can result from an acquaintance rape” (437). For survivors of sexual assault perpetrated by someone they know, possibly someone they love, their experience is at odds with the society’s precipitation of sexual assault, which has adverse effects for reporting.

Personal sexual assault narratives do not exist outside of sociocultural context, in which complex systems direct meaning (Polletta et al. 2011). In this way, narratives about the self are constructed through their connection and interplay with their sociocultural context. In the words of Huemmer et al. (2019),

The stories a person feels they can tell may be constrained by prevailing norms and values, institutional regulations, widely available social narratives, and so on. Individuals will have an acute awareness of how others will perceive certain stories, as well as an internalized understanding that certain accounts of their life and/or actions are simply not to be told (438).

The dominant “classic rape” narrative is an example of a widely circulated social narrative that informs personal accounts. According to Huemmer et al. (2019), widely circulated social narratives “create a well-established framework that may be used to interpret and react to specific events or actions” (438). Unfortunately, socially circulating narratives often rely on over-simplified depictions, which constrain individuals as they do not accurately reflect the complexity of individual experiences. This, in part, explains how the dominant “stranger rape” narrative, which is at odds with many survivors’ experience, serves to deter reporting.

Koss et al. (1988) found that compared with victims of stranger rape, victims of acquaintance rape were less likely to share their experience with someone:

The percentage of respondents who discussed their experience was 65.0% among women raped by non-romantic acquaintances, 59.4 % among women raped by casual dates, 44.2% among women raped by steady dates, and 43.8% among women raped by husbands or other family members (14).

This is a profound insight concerning reporting and systemic barriers to reporting as it illustrates the profound effect that the relationship context has on whether a survivor shares their sexual assault experience.

It is widely reported that the victim-offender relationship profoundly impacts reporting. According to Fisher et al. (2003), “in general, victims have been less likely to report incidents to the police when offenders were relatives, intimates, or acquaintances than when crimes were perpetrated by strangers” (11). Fisher et al. (2003) note that, consistent with general victimization-reporting research, reporting sexual assaults is viewed as more appropriate when offenders were strangers than victims’ boyfriends. According to Peterson and Muehlenhard (2010), it may be easier for women to think of their experience with acquaintance rape as an accident or mistake than rape, allowing them to reject the rape label due to their un-comfortability with labeling men they know as rapists. The nature of the victim-offender relationship is one of many complexities in the issue of non-reporting.

The social construction of a dominant sexual assault embodiment augments society’s inability to comprehensively define and understand sexual assault. Survivors reconcile their experience with sexual assault around social understandings of sexual violence; given this, narrow constructions of assault inherently deter reporting. A certain un-comfortability renders

society unable to embrace the full spectrum of assault, which is something that warrants further investigation.

VII. The Issue of Non-Reporting

A survivor's decision to report sexual assault is informed by the social world they exist in. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, only 34% of rape and sexual assault crimes are reported in the United States (Truman & Langton, 2015). The problem of non-reporting is particularly "acute" on college campuses, which renders studying it in this context critical (Hummer et al. 2019; Fisher et al. 2003). At Denison, only 7% of sexual assaults are reported, which attests to this.

The phenomena of non-reporting has been present in studies on sexual assault for decades; on reporting sexual violence, Kirkpatrick and Kanin (1957) discovered that women were unlikely to report to the authority. From their study, the researchers concluded that exploitation, stigma, and guilt deterred women from seeking institutional support. The literature on reporting robustly indicates that victims are most likely to report when they feel that reporting will result in a positive outcome (Fisher et. al 2003). Moreover, scholarship suggests that a combination of external and internal forces contributes to a survivor's decision to report. Given these factors, it is evident that non-reporting must be critically situated in the social environment a survivor is embedded in.

As most survivors do not report, it is imperative to investigate the conditions that deter reporting. Fisher et al. (2003) contend that an analysis of incident factors "have suggested that crime seriousness, victim-offender relationship, location of the offense, and the consumption of alcohol account for some of the variation in reporting" (8). Fisher et al. (2003) focus their

attention on the non-reporting of college women; they found that only 25% of all incidents of victimization are reported to authorities. These researchers affirm that victims of sexual violence often fail to report based on both the “circumstances of the crime and on the psychological beliefs and fears of the woman herself” (Fisher et. al 2003; 9). This underlines the importance of situating reporting in how survivors interpret their experience, in addition to the conditions of the experience itself.

In a study aimed at elucidating victims’ non-reporting narratives, Weis (2011) proposed a theoretical framework for understanding the justification survivors provide for non-reporting sexual victimization. Weis (2011) found that the reporting decision is not simple as such decisions involve “a series of interpretive processes that entail recognizing an incident as a crime, determining that the situation is serious enough to warrant calling the police, and finally deciding whether reporting to the police is in their best interests” (445). In this way, reporting necessitates processing and interpreting the experience. Given this, it is necessary to analyze the social and cultural factors that impact a survivor’s interpretation of their experience.

Certain components of the assault and survivor’s interpretation of it profoundly impact reporting due to the cultural construction of a *real* rape, which I defined in the previous section on deconstructing the classic rape. These include, but are not limited to, the experience meeting the criteria of the classic rape, the seriousness and location of the events, and the victim-offender relationship (Fisher et. al 2003). Due to how these components compound to produce a distinct narrative, experiences that depart from the dominant *real rape* narrative are less likely to be reported. This indicates that *real rape* is a social construct that deters reporting and marginalizes experiences that deviate from the classic perception of rape. Along these lines, Fisher et al. (2003) found that women often do not report their sexual victimization because they do not see

themselves as victims of rape. Fisher et al. further contend that only 27% of victims whose assault met the legal definition of rape defined themselves as having been raped. If a victim does not see their experience as rape, they are less likely to report rape. Sexual assault experiences become value-laden concerning their reality through how survivors interpret the experience based on social standards, which profoundly impacts reporting and underlines the salience of social conditions to reporting.

Outside of the construction of *real rape* acting as a deterrent to reporting, Fisher et al. (2003) highlight various trends of non-reporting narrative characteristics. They note that self-blame plays a large role in deterring reporting and noted that self-blame emerges pervasive when survivors were under the influence of alcohol as “they perceived that their own actions led to them being sexually victimized” (Fisher et. al 2003; 10). Self-blame is particularly salient when the assault is tied to alcohol consumption, which is often the case as it has been reported that assailants frequently obtain non-consensual intercourse when alcohol is present (Fisher et al. 2003; Koss et al. 1987). This is particularly salient for my research considering the presence of party culture at Denison. Additionally, these researchers found that when victims thought that their actions would be judged negatively by others, they were likely to internalize blame. Moreover, survivors are deterred from reporting out of fear of retaliation; they believe that reporting would result in further victimization, so remain silent out of self-preservation (Fisher et al, 2003). Evidently, social conditions entangle with survivors’ interpretations of their experiences in a manner that deters reporting.

Assaults do not exist outside of social conditions as these conditions impact how a survivor interprets their experience. Weiss (2011) contends it is how survivors interpret their experiences that determines if they report, “not merely the presence of discernible conditions”

(446). Survivors' accounts involve “definitional negotiations” which profoundly affect reporting decisions (Weiss 2011). As previously noted, a survivors' understanding of their experience and how it fits into their understanding of sexual assault is critical concerning reporting; Koss and colleagues found in their 1987 and 1988 studies of sexual assault among college women, only 27 percent of the women whose experience meets the definition of rape identified their experience as such (Koss et al. 1987; 1988). Weiss (2011) pushes back on the conception that most survivors don't report because they do not recognize what happened to them as rape:

Acknowledging rape requires more than merely recognizing one's situation as criminal by law; it also requires that victims be willing to define an incident as rape, identify the persons who hurt them as rapists and label themselves as rape victims. Therefore, victims may choose to deny their experiences as rape because it is in their best interests to do so (446).

Weiss crucially complicates the act of a survivor acknowledging their assault by indicating how the acknowledgment of sexual assault must be situated in the survivor's identity and social existence. This underlines a critical theme to non-reporting: silence for self-preservation.

Oftentimes, survivors chose not to report to preserve their social existence, which I will expound on in my discussion.

Weiss (2011) identifies different tactics survivors employ to neutralize their experience and justify non-reporting: the denial of criminal attempt, the denial of victim innocence, the denial of serious injury, and the rejection of a victim identity. Weiss found that 12% of non-reporting victims denied criminal intent by contending the assault was unintended and not the offender's fault (451). With no “guilty” offender, there is nothing to report. This strategy of mitigating the crime is especially present for survivors who know their offenders and do not want

to admit that this individual harmed them, which is often the case on small college campuses (Weiss 2011). Approximately 16% of survivors denied serious injury as a means to lessen the severity of the experience, in turn rationalizing non-reporting (454). Ostensibly, how survivors interpret their experience and neutralize it, mitigates reporting. One way in which victims neutralize their injuries is to compare their experience to more extreme narratives, which again, points to the problematic nature of the “classic rape”.

According to Weiss (2011), 7% of non-reporting narratives contain comments suggesting that victims accept some responsibility for what happened to them. This exemplifies the phenomena in which survivors themselves victim-blame (456). Weiss (2011) contends that “Victims who feel as if their own reckless or risky behaviors made them vulnerable to rape or sexual assault will be less likely to see themselves as innocent and report to police” (458). If a victim sees the experience as a mistake on their behalf, “their incidents are reconstructed from intentional acts of aggression to mere misunderstandings caused in part by the victims’ own lack of communication” (Weiss 2011: 458). Some survivors (9%) go so far as to reject the victim identity to neutralize the event. This in turn makes reporting unnecessary and “even inappropriate under the circumstances” (Weiss 2011: 460). Survivors who see themselves as playing a participating role in their assault, believe that they facilitated the sexual violence, rendering them not-innocent victims, which justifies non-reporting.

Weiss (2011) contends that survivors who deny their own innocence, or accept some responsibility, in turn, justify their sexual victimization. Central to denying victim innocence is the social conception that women learn at an early age in which “it is their responsibility to avoid placing themselves in dangerous situations that make them vulnerable to sexual victimization” (Weiss 2011: 462). This is a gendered social driver of non-reporting. Weiss (2011) asserts that

attempts to augment reporting will not be successful “until victims no longer choose to deny unwanted sexual situations like a real and reportable crime” (462). This reflects ignorance of the structural nature of sexual assault non-reporting as the social conditions around sexual assault and reporting needs to change to make this possible.

Survivors rationalize non-reporting in dynamic ways, which attests to the difficulty of ameliorating non-reporting. In efforts to rationalize non-reporting, survivors redirect the blame to their “old-self,” constructing a narrative that makes reporting less reasonable (Huemmer et al. 2019). Analyzing the narratives of non-reporting rape survivors, Hummer et al. (2019) assert that the “agentic strategy ‘of self-blame’ allows survivors to regain a sense of agency and control” (435). They contend that as a result, survivors construct a more positive self and that reporting or pursuing justice would force them to revisit their “old” self that cannot be disentangled from their assault. Given this, survivors are not only deterred from reporting due to the social ramifications but also due to how it forces them to revisit the self they were when they were assaulted. This underlines the critical need to recast sexual assault as a systemic problem, as this could mitigate the tendency of survivors to attribute blame to themselves, and, as a result, potentially augment reporting.

Outside of individual neutralizing tactics, social conditions and expectations serve to mitigate reporting. Some survivors may view sexual assault as a private matter, which encourages them to deal with it individually and informally (Bachman 1993). This speaks to the stigma around sexual assault that may serve to deter reporting. Keeping their assault a private matter can also be understood in the embarrassment that may arise from victimization or the lack of confidence on behalf of survivors that reporting will lead to consequences for the assailant (Fisher et al. 2003). This affirms the need to educate society on the cultural and systemic roots of

assault to reduce survivor self-blame; moreover, this suggests that reporting failures fuel under-reporting, which is paramount to address. Survivors, out of empathy, may also wish to protect their families and the family of the perpetrator, thus, choosing to keep their experience private (Fisher et al. 2003). Fisher et al. contend that outside of this intrapersonal rationalizations for non-reporting, “feminists would likely maintain that patriarchal influences in society, including on college campuses, provide barriers to reporting” (2003: 32). It is necessary to situate non-reporting in both the survivors' interpersonal relationships and identity due to how these social arrangements inform perceptions of reporting.

Understanding the factors that determine whether a victim reports is crucial for researchers and policymakers as this information may critically inform the development of policy, allowing for targeted interventions aimed at improving reporting rates (Wolitzky-Taylor et al. 2011). Sufficient education about the reporting process may increase the victim's willingness to report (Ceelen et al. 2019). In this way, augmenting the available information about the reporting process may increase reporting rates (Ceelen et al. 2019). Given this, my research must discern the presence and dissemination of reporting knowledge in the campus environment.

Prior research on sexual assault non-reporters indicates that certain conditions may be conducive to a reluctance to report. Survivors who were under the influence of drugs or alcohol, who were assaulted by an intimate partner, and who did not suffer physical injuries are less likely to report (Ceelen et al. 2019). Moreover, survivors employ neutralizing tactics to justify reporting due to widespread reservations and fears of reporting (Weiss 2011). Ceelen et al. (2019) highlight how policies aimed to improve survivor support must take into account the fact that many victims that have “major reservations can be encouraged to report” (1974). They

further contend that discerning the conditions and characteristics that distinguish reporters and non-reporters is the first step in ameliorating non-reporting. Given this, the nature of my project is paramount as I am scrutinizing the social environment and cultural conditions that contribute to non-reporting. The scholarship surveyed suggests that non-reporting is a very complex and dynamic issue that entangles social conditions as well as survivor's interpretations and identities; in this way, it is necessary to situate non-reporting in a web of social, cultural, physical, psychological, and individual forces.

Previously researchers have engaged individualistic theories on symbolic interactionism and rational choice to understand the phenomena that deter reporting. The symbolic interactionist perspective "entails viewing 'rape' as a symbolic object and considering how a survivor's interpretation of the event impacts the meaning that they assign to the self" (Huemmer et al. 2019: 436). I will be departing from this approach by analyzing deterrents to reporting as socially produced phenomena and situating non-reporting as a systemic epidemic.

VIII. Systemic Barriers to Reporting

There is a major gap in the literature regarding socially produced barriers to reporting. Given this, it is pertinent to situate sexual assault non-reporting in its sociocultural context to discern structural barriers to reporting. Just as Hirsch and Khan (2020) situate sexual assault within social systems, power hierarchies, and cultural meanings to recast how sexual assault is understood, I will situate sexual assault non-reporting in social systems, power hierarchies, and cultural meanings to critically investigate the problem.

Only recently have theorists identified barriers to reporting as socially produced, systemic phenomena. Huemmer et al. (2019) indicate the importance of studying systemic barriers in

analyzing non-reporting when they assert that “A decision not to report may be the consequence of perceived social barriers that the survivor does not wish to face” (438). These theorists note that when survivors’ narratives are met with “incredulity or blame” they often choose to stop speaking about their experience altogether (Huemmer et al. 2019: 438). They further contend that sexual assault survivors are constrained by social factors in a way that makes “certain modes of action become less desirable” (Huemmer et al. 2019: 438). Hummer et. al’s (2019) study of non-reporting college students “reflects the complicated process through which decisions to report will include an active consideration of the particular constraints inherent in a specific sociocultural context” (447). Survivors are embedded in a sociocultural context situated in time and place that profoundly directs their experience and decision to report; this underlines why it is so critical to expound on the social barriers to reporting.

College campuses embody a precarious sociocultural context concerning sexual assault and non-reporting. Huemmer et al. (2019) contend that in their sample of non-reporting college students, it was clear that “the context of a college campus provides a social environment that is both particularly conducive to rape, as well as unreceptive to reporting” (445). When their participants imagined reporting “they saw a process that would not likely accomplish much and would also result in victim shaming” (Huemmer et al. 2019: 445). Lack of faith in the reporting process may result in feelings of powerlessness silencing survivors.

Critically, Huemmer et al. note that a common feeling among their subjects was “powerlessness” and “self-blame”; additionally, their study revealed survivor’s “were hyper-aware of the perceived judgments of various “others” (2019: 445). They further note that “it is widely accepted that “rape culture” contributes to internalized feelings of shame, self-blame, and self-loathing” (Huemmer et al. 2019: 445). Survivors are acutely aware of their

social and cultural context; their social embeddedness can pose problems for survivors as they may face peer judgment, or even self-judgment and blame.

For the survivors in their study, Huemmer et al. (2019) discovered that “the decision to report was perceived as a course of action that would expose them to the judgment of others and cause them further loss of control, which would ultimately keep them tethered to a self that cannot be disentangled from the rape” (445). In this way, non-reporting can be seen as a form of self-preservation. That non-reporting is a form of self-preservation for survivors speaks to the toxicity around sexual assault narratives in which sharing one’s painful experience serves to induce further suffering.

In the context of the dominant “classic rape” or *real* rape narrative, it is unsurprising that many survivors do not label their sexual assault experience as such, despite meeting the legal definitions of such crimes (Koss et al. 1987). In this way, reporting is mitigated by the difficulty of survivors to define their experience as such. Feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame adversely affect reporting. Though differentiating between potential reporters and definite non-reporters, Ceelen et al. (2019) further found that

Specific emotions such as feelings of shame, guilt, and other feelings, as well as lack of evidence, appeared to be important barriers for those potential reporters which played a role in their decision to not report to the police (1963).

Additionally, these researchers discovered that the fear of people knowing about the incident deterred potential reporters from reporting. This speaks to the role of stigma in sexual assault reporting, which is a concept I wish to further investigate. As Denison is a small campus, with an intensely interconnected student body, it may be the case that these feelings are increasingly present due to the possible visibility of the survivor’s narrative.

Sometimes, as a sensemaking strategy, survivors “normalize and/or minimize violence” (Armstrong et al, 2018; 109). Social marginalization functions to adversely inform survivors accounts of sexual assault, as “before disclosing, some survivors consider how others perceive them within existing social hierarchies” (Armstrong et al, 2018:109; McGuffey 2013). In this way, social marginalization can act as a barrier to reporting. Furthermore, social hierarchies are critical to reporting, which is paramount considering the culture at Denison as social hierarchies are embedded in the campus environment.

Research robustly indicates that victims who are intoxicated at the time of the assault were less likely to report (Ceelen et al. 2019). This can be understood in the culture of victim-blaming. In working with the narrative of non-reporters, Huemmer et al. (2019) discovered that the survivors they talked to “communicated a sense of self-blame, shame, and an awareness of the “rape culture” that surrounds them” (446). These researchers further note that “the drinking and hookup culture prevalent in many college environments may increase a survivor’s likelihood to blame their own behavior” (Huemmer et al. 2019: 446). Concerning sexual assault and reporting at Denison, party culture and hook-up culture are extremely critical contexts; given this, it is necessary to discern how these contexts impact survivors and their decision to report.

Identifying social, cultural, and structural barriers to reporting not only allows for non-reporting to be understood as a systemic problem but also allows for critically informed insight concerning policy decisions. Only through deep ethnographic engagement can these barriers be brought to light, which underlines the pertinent need for an anthropological perspective on this topic.

IX. Power and Agency

Not only is sexual assault intrinsically tied to power, but so is reporting sexual assault. Armstrong et al. (2018) contend that “Sexual violence is a product of power differentials, and thereby a site of the reproduction of multiple inequalities. It manifests in institutions and is (re)inscribed in culture, discourse, and interaction” which indicates that power is embedded into the campus environment in complex ways (104). Power profoundly impacts who is recognized as a survivor as “powerful groups maintain a privileged capacity to define (sexual) violence” (Armstrong et al. 2018; 104). Without a doubt, power is central to sexual assault and reporting as it determines who is accepted as a survivor, and in turn, who is encouraged to report.

Central to the relationship between power and sexual assault is gendered power. Gravelin, Biernat, and Baldwin (2019) analyze the role of power and gender in rape narratives; specifically, they observe how power and gender impact the likeliness of victim-blaming through the acceptance of rape myths. These researchers assert that two reactions are common in rape cases that can be very damaging to victims: the tendencies to rely on and perpetuate stereotypes about sexual assaults and the tendency to blame victims for their assault. To better understand these reactions, the authors situate rape in the context of gendered power relations. They suggest that rape myth acceptance is influenced by the extent to which one endorses power hierarchies and further complicate this by adding gender as a contributor as men induce rape myths and victim blame more commonly than women. They contend that sexual assault is motivated by gendered power, as violence against women functions to reinforce gendered relations in which men are dominant and women are exploited.

Gravelin, Biernat, and Baldwin (2019) investigate the role of power and gender on victim-blaming by “priming” participants with power or powerlessness and recording their reactions to scenarios based on their gender and power assignment. They found that men who were assigned a position of powerlessness were less likely to demonstrate victim-blaming tendencies than men who were in positions of power—they attributed this to the fact that powerlessness is inconsistent with the typical status of men, therefore, it may have heightened their empathy for the powerlessness of a victim and thusly reduced victim-blaming. Given this, power functions along gendered lines as it detracts from the empathy of men and thus their ability to sympathize with survivors.

Reporting sexual assault is intrinsically tied to agency, and agency is affected by power and the culture one exists in. As Hummer et al. (2019) contend, “Rape is not interpreted as an isolated event; it is something that is seen as caused by, connected to, and affecting the survivor’s sense of self and agency” (435). Survivors face a complex agentic decision when determining if they will report; reporting both optimizes and minimizes agency as the survivor exercises agency through reporting, but, as demonstrated, a survivor may lose agency over their narrative depending on how their account is received and scrutinized.

In the context of campus culture, various phenomena prevail that may allow for power to silence victims. One of these phenomena is rumor. In a social analysis of rumor, Veena Das (1998) describes the capacity of rumor to transform words into instruments of force; moreover, she describes the power of rumor to displace the subjectivity of everyday life. Given this, rumor is paramount to analyze as it may have the power to silence survivors and strip them of their own sexual assault narrative. Social silence and social fate are two factors I expect to analyze as systemic barriers to reporting. The tension between a campus culture in which students care

deeply about their social perception and fate and reporting, which jeopardizes this fate, is also conducive to silence. Social fate, rumor, and silence, therefore, are powerful tools of repression concerning reporting as they profoundly impact a victim's sense of agency.

Power and agency are paramount to recasting sexual assault and non-reporting as they allow for rich sociological deductions. Through analyzing how power functions in the campus environment, less evident social forces that shape the sexual assault reporting landscape become apparent. Moreover, positioning power at the center of the problem allows for a structural understanding of sexual assault non-reporting, which is pertinent, as it will become evident that non-reporting is a manifestation of structural violence. In the same way, shedding light on how the campus environment constrains agency is critical for understanding systemic non-reporting.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My methods and research questions have evolved significantly since commencing the project, which is the case a lot of times with ethnographic projects of this nature; however, some of these changes were against my will as a grueling institutional review board (IRB) process significantly constrained my project. Quite simply, institutional restraints enacted by the IRB served to impede my research. To say that the IRB process for this project was arduous is an understatement. After submitting my proposal in mid-September, the process came to a slow close in mid-December. I predicted the process may be difficult due to the "sensitive" nature of my topic; however, I did not expect the scrutiny I received on every point of my proposal, including seemingly uncontentious word choices. In this way, central to a discussion of my methodology is my journey through the IRB process, which was characterized by scrutiny and tension between the board's perception of my project and my understanding of my research

objective. The process profoundly changed my methods and delayed my project, so I believe it is of value to reflect on this.

The process I went through is indicative of how institutions can be counter-productive even when well-intended; moreover, it is emblematic of the discomfort that persists around the topic of sexual assault within the institution, something which contributes to sexual assault and non-reporting. The IRB was well-intended in that it wanted to protect students from the possible psychological harms of my research. Although these concerns were not unfounded, I explained on multiple occasions that my primary participants are frequently involved in conversations concerning sexual assault on campus, so the topic would be highly unlikely to bother them, and I further explained that I would mitigate any psychological harm by avoiding specific experiences of sexual assault. I also assured them that I would not include real names whatsoever in my research. Nonetheless, IRB members remained skeptical of my project, something I believe to be indicative of how the topic makes people uncomfortable and how, institutionally, people are possibly even afraid of the findings of such a project.

All in all, the IRB process demonstrated how difficult it is to deeply engage in conversations and research on topics related to sexual assault. This itself points to the need for a shift in culture around the topic of sexual assault: silence on the topic is not the answer. Quite ironically, a project focusing on how a campus culture may serve to constrain survivors of sexual assault, deterring reporting, was faced with resistance and altered in ways that silence the narrative. Although a difficult experience, my IRB experience is eminently emblematic of the cultural issues central to my research, which exemplifies the need for such research.

The tension between me, the researcher, and the IRB centered around the concept of harm. All of their questions and concerns were framed around the concept of harm, despite me

constantly reassuring them that I would not be asking questions around experiences of sexual assault. In every back and forth, which consisted of me answering similar questions multiple times in a very extensive and detailed manner, they came back to the point that I would be inducing harm with the questions I was asking as sexual assault is a sensitive subject. I assured them time and again that, as they could see in my questions, that I was focusing on abstract cultural aspects of the campus culture, not experiences of sexual assault. However, potential harm continued to justify preventing the start of my project. It was evident that some members of the IRB were curiously disinterested in the benefits of my work. Their exclusive focus on harms demonstrates that the board clearly had a hard time imagining any benefit.

As the objective of my proposed project was to discern how a campus culture affects the reporting of sexual assault by focusing on the phenomenon of non-reporting, I was at first confused by the nature of the IRB response, which indicated that my project involved a great degree of risk. I indicated that I am uninterested in specific, personal accounts of sexual assault as that is outside of the objective of my research; however, this remained a major point of contention throughout the process. I assured the board that my interviewees are deeply involved in conversations around sexual assault, so although reasonable in the context of the general student body, this was not a concern for my interviewees and primary participants. Despite this, this concern directed which questions were acceptable for me to ask and which were not.

The same concern, in that discussing a topic related to sexual assault may cause emotional distress, determined what methods I was able to gain approval for. The second major point of contention was that specific experiences of sexual assault might be brought up despite that not being relevant to my topic, which jeopardizes confidentiality and student privacy. This

heavily directed how I was to approach the interviews and survey questions. This also directed how I was to approach interviewees to request their participation.

Before the IRB approval process, which delayed reaching out to participants and beginning my ethnographic data collection, there were four components to my proposed methodology: an electronic survey, an extensive interview with the Denison Title IX Coordinator, interviews with Denison SHARE or DCSR executive members, and participant observation in the form of attending executive DCSR meetings and events open to the Denison community. I contended that each of these components was necessary to ascertain an abounding understanding of the treatment of sexual assault on campus and reporting. However, the IRB did not approve my methods in full, which took me by surprise as I believe that they justified themselves given the objective of my project.

It is worth noting that there was no ANSO representation on the IRB, which may have contributed to their difficulty grasping the nature and potential merits of my project. An ANSO representative usually serves on the board, but my research advisor was this representative at the time and had to recuse himself from the review of the project due to his conflict of interest. With no ANSO representative on the board to mediate their concerns regarding typical ANSO methods, tensions between the IRB's conception of my methods and my own understanding mitigated my ability to perform my research as I had proposed.

The IRB denied participant observation as a method, due to potential risks. I did not understand these risks as essentially I had already been performing participant observation informally by engaging with DCSR and SHARE through attending their events and meetings; given this, I cannot draw on my personal experiences with DCSR and SHARE, such as attending an executive meeting, a sexual respect dialogue, and various other events. It is important to note,

however, that I had connections to the organizations and their leaders before my interviews. Additionally, due to both the delayed start to my project, and how I had to embellish potential risks with intimidating language for my informed consent, I was not able to interview the Title IX Coordinator as she was advised to not participate in my project.

A lot of tension regarding methodology between the IRB and myself stemmed from the fact that anthropological research is never clear-cut and is an ever-evolving process. They did not understand how participant observation would direct my research and contribute greatly. They did not understand why immersing myself in the culture of the organizations I am working with would help me elucidate the issues central to my research. Again, for the IRB, participant observation was synonymous with risk. From my perspective, going to meetings with groups involved in conversations of sexual assault on campus posed no risk to myself or the participants; however, as they did not see the need for it, they deemed that it was an unnecessary risk. I hoped to shed light on the process of sexual assault reporting and the issue of non-reporting by performing participant observation in SHARE and DCSR; however, this was not possible. Moreover, I thought that this type of ethnographic research would allow me to come up with richer interview questions. Fortunately, due to my informal ethnographic experiences, I was able to construct fruitful questions without this component. However, the IRB even altered the nature of my interviews by requesting changes to my questions.

Ostensibly, the methodology I performed was different from my intended one. However, I was still able to use multiple methodologies to investigate the culture of sexual assault on campus. My original proposed methodology was a combination of interviews, informal participant observation, and a qualitative survey. I was still able to perform interviews with members of DCSR and SHARE and distribute a qualitative survey; however, I was unable to

interview the Title IX office and perform participant observation. Although disappointing, my data collection remained rich and insightful.

Interviewing DCSR and SHARE executive members was integral for understanding the campus landscape around sexual assault reporting as these groups are deeply involved in conversations around this topic on campus. As frequent participants in critical discussions on sexual assault at Denison, these informants possess a unique ability to shed light on how the campus environment impacts reporting. These groups are also responsible for educating students around campus, formally in the form of training sexual respect chairs for sports teams and Greek organizations, and informally through their public events on campus. Moreover, as members of DCSR and SHARE, they have experiences with survivors that allow them to critically discuss the social existence of sexual assault and reporting. Accordingly, discerning how sexual assault and reporting function in the campus environment necessitates engaging with these groups directly as they are very knowledgeable not only about the landscape of sexual assault reporting but also about Denison's campus culture around sexual assault.

To investigate the role of DCSR and SHARE on the campus culture around sexual assault and accurately conceive of the campus environment's impact on reporting, it was pertinent that I engaged with these groups directly and profoundly which entailed semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to let my participants guide the conversation. I thoughtfully put together twelve broad and encompassing questions which opened up space for a deep and complex discussion on the campus culture around reporting; moreover, these questions were directed at discerning systemic barriers to reporting. Some of these questions were intentionally abstract in nature to allow for the participants themselves to develop important

ideas and concepts. As I could not perform participant observation, my questions intentionally allowed for space in which the participant could allow their experience to direct the topic.

After each interview, my participants had the opportunity to engage in a debriefing in which they could ask me any questions regarding my research and what I learned. They are also welcome to attend my presentation on the topic and read any results they desire. As part of the debriefing process, I explained how their interview connected to the other components of my project and the literature I invoked.

The electronic survey allowed me to get a variety of responses regarding the culture around sexual assault reporting on Denison's campus. This survey was an enriching component to my methodology as it allowed me to discern what students-- who are not involved in organizations deeply engaged with these topics-- perceive as the culture around sexual assault reporting. These participants provided me with honest and informative insight into the campus environment. I was able to see if the general student population holds beliefs around sexual assault reporting and the campus culture around reporting sexual assault similar to DCSR/SHARE members; moreover, I discerned how salient the social deterrents to reporting that emerged from my interviews are to the general student body by comparing them with deterrents that survey respondents identified. Except for demographic questions and two quantitative questions designed to measure understandings around topics such as consent and the reporting process, the survey questions were open-ended in nature and grounded in the same concepts as my interview questions, although worded to suit a less expert respondent. The open-ended, qualitative nature of the survey allowed for a variety of answers. Additionally, as with the case of the interviews, these questions allowed the participants to direct the data and

allowed me to gather a holistic understanding of how survivors and their decision to report are embedded in the campus environment.

To accurately and thoroughly leverage my ethnographic data, I recorded and transcribed my interviews and transcribed my survey results into a spreadsheet. To synthesize my ethnographic data and make critical deductions, I analyzed interview data and the survey results through coding for salient themes and making discoveries grounded in the themes I coded for. Moreover, I compared the answers from each method to understand how sexual assault and non-reporting are embedded in the campus environment based on data that represents a variety of opinions and understandings of sexual assault and non-reporting. This allowed me to bring to life the social existence of sexual assault on Denison's campus, which profoundly shed light on structural and social barriers to reporting.

It is undoubtedly paramount to study sexual assault in the context of college campuses. Although college sexual assault and non-reporting have been previously researched, by taking an anthropological, and ethnographic approach, this project design allowed for fresh insights into the structural nature of sexual assault and the systemic character of non-reporting. I used Denison as a vessel for understanding how universities and their students create a campus culture around sexual assault and how this culture influences reporting; moreover, I determined what elements of this campus culture deter victims from reporting. This research allowed me to shed light on how sexual assault and non-reporting are embedded in Denison's campus environment; it also allowed me to think about campus cultures around sexual assault in general in conjunction with existing theory and research on the topic. Shedding light on how people understand, perceive, and treat sexual assault elucidated how social forces produce deterrents to reporting. This research allowed for critical insights on the complexities of the embeddedness of sexual

assault in campus environments and the socially produced barriers to reporting; in this way, this research has the potential to inform enlightened policies and initiatives aimed at ameliorating systemic barriers to reporting.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

As I indicated in my literature review, my project is departing from the traditional means of analyzing non-reporting, which focus on the individual decision to report, often utilizing symbolic interactionist and rational choice theory. Instead, I am expounding on the framework of Hirsch and Khan (2020) by exploring the system which allows for sexual assault yet deters reporting, specifically focusing on the systemic roots of non-reporting.

I am situating sexual assault underreporting within cultural systems and meanings to analyze how the embeddedness of sexual assault in both the campus environment and larger cultural system impacts survivors, reporting, and the campus culture around sexual assault. In doing so, not only will I recast how to think about survivors and their decision to report, but also how to think about perpetrators who are embedded in a culture and system that did not prevent them from assaulting. We tend to isolate campus sexual assault to something easily recognized at a specific moment, but this is not the case, as sexual assault is the by-product of multiple variables that play out in the lives of students and is deeply embedded in social networks, systems, and a larger cultural context in that students are not adequately sexually socialized. By viewing sexual assault not as an individual act of violence but as a product of a cultural system and social meanings deeply embedded in campus environments, sexual assault becomes a structural issue, not an individual one. This is not to say that sexual assault is not an individual act of oppression, but it is to say that there is a need to distinguish forms of sexual assault-- those

that fit the typical narrative of a violent act of aggression, and those that emerge from embedded social and cultural contexts, which I believe is appropriate to term *structural* sexual assault.

In the same way that understanding the social embeddedness of sexual assault allows for the recasting of sexual assault as a structural problem, understanding the social embeddedness of reporting allows for non-reporting to be understood as a structural problem, not an issue of a lack of individual action. To thoroughly understand social embeddedness requires intently dissecting the campus environment, meaning, the culture, systems, institutions, social networks, and social forces that compound to create a distinct landscape around reporting that survivors must navigate. Understanding how survivors navigate this landscape allows for the contours and nuances of the campus environment that impact reporting to emerge. Additionally, to utterly expound on the social embeddedness of sexual assault and non-reporting, it is paramount to explore widespread cultural contexts for sexual assault, as sex and sexual assault are arranged by social meanings before students arrive at college.

Power is a critical component to an analysis of sexual assault reporting due to how power is complexly intertwined in the campus environment and due to how power entangles with belief and silence. Moreover, agency is paramount to sexual assault non-reporting. Given this, I am invoking Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) due to how they articulate power and agency as structural. Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) draw on Foucault's conception of power in which "power is not wielded overtly, but rather "flows" through the very foundations of what we recognize as reason, civilization, and scientific progress" (18). In this way, power does not have to be direct, and instead, it is necessary to analyze the soft forms of power that run through the systems, networks, and institutions embedded in the campus environment. They further specify that "individuals are disciplined purposefully and explicitly through institutions, but also subtly

and unconsciously through the “knowledge/power” nexus” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009: 18). In this way, students are not only shaped by explicit institutional messaging but they are influenced more subtly through dominant understandings and discourses; paramount to this analysis is the way that students are unconsciously primed to understand social status and social fate.

Due to how I am recasting the problem of sexual assault and non-reporting as a structural one as opposed to an individual one, it is fitting to employ the concept of structural violence. Leveraging structural violence allows for the integration of the less ethnologically visible, which structures and systems encompass. Structural violence informs the story of the “machinery of oppression,” thus, as sexual violence is a tool of oppression, something my SHARE advocate participants repeatedly highlight, structural violence is eminently suited to studies of sexual assault (Farmer 2004: 307). Moreover, due to how sexual assault reporting is deeply embedded in social and institutional systems of power, employing structural violence is paramount.

Structural violence elucidates the harm that the social embeddedness of sexual violence inflicts on survivors of assault. Farmer (2004) defines structural violence:

Structural violence is violence exerted systematically—that is, indirectly—by everyone who belongs to a certain social order: hence the discomfort these ideas provoke in a moral economy still geared to pinning praise or blame on individual actors (307).

Given that I am observing how the campus environment and the systems and relationships embedded within this environment impact sexual assault reporting, structural violence is eminently relevant as it is exerted systematically by all actors involved in the social order, which underlines how sexual assault is a structural problem, not an individual one (Farmer 2004).

Moreover, due to the cultural inclination to place blame on either the victim or assailant, structural violence is paramount in recasting blame.

Farmer (2004) highlights how structural violence is embodied in the adverse consequences it has for people who are marginalized by race, gender, inequality, poverty, or intersections of these factors. In this way, incorporating a structural violence framework to studies of sexual violence inherently ameliorates the problematic nature of the previous scholarship on this topic not incorporating an intersectional perspective. Given this, a structural framework reconciles two aspirations of my research, to pay attention to intersectionality, and to recast sexual assault and sexual assault non-reporting as structural problems as opposed to individual ones.

Symbolic violence is another critical theory as it provides a different way of viewing attribution. People do not recognize the structural or social origin of what is happening, so they attribute blame to themselves, unaware that they are constrained by social conditions. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic practice highlights the phenomenon in which people faced with inequality misrecognize it as "the natural order of things" and thus blame themselves for their struggle instead of attributing this struggle to structural oppression (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009: 17). Self-blame is a dominant response to sexual assault; given this, symbolic violence adds a critical perspective as this self-blame can be understood as evidence of survivor's accepting the oppressive order of things as natural and subscribing to the cultural belief that it is their responsibility to avoid assault, which constitutes symbolic violence. With symbolic violence, inequality reproduces itself within identity and social groups as it appears natural. Due to how structural and social factors contribute to instances that could be understood as sexual

assault, and due to the tendency of survivors to self-blame and attribute their assault to an individual problem, not a structural one, symbolic violence is a critical concept.

Coupling structural and symbolic violence will allow me to holistically analyze the systemic roots of sexual assault and non-reporting in addition to elucidating the weight of the consequences of these structural roots. Moreover, these concepts allow one to not lose sight of the bigger picture as well as providing an opportunity to ask different questions. To facilitate any widespread cultural changes concerning sexual assault and non-reporting, it is paramount that sexual assault is understood as a structural problem. In this way, my discussion will highlight the cultural contexts that shape how we understand consent and sexual respect and the social and institutional contexts that impact reporting.

Chapter 5: Discussion

I. The Reporting Landscape

DCSR, SHARE & The Title IX Office

To begin an investigation of the social dynamics and structural conditions that impact sexual assault reporting on Denison's campus, it is necessary to understand the sexual assault reporting landscape that is embedded in the campus environment. After extensively interviewing four student leaders within DCSR and SHARE, it is evident that the campus environment in which sexual assault and reporting are embedded is deeply intricate and complex. For confidentiality reasons, I will use pseudonyms to refer to these interviewees; Nina, a senior, and Darcey, a junior, are DCSR executive members, and Maddie and Anna are both senior SHARE executive members who began working with SHARE their freshman year.

Due to my theoretical framework in which I am placing sexual assault and reporting within systems, institutions, and social networks to understand the structural roots of sexual assault and non-reporting, it is necessary to conceive of a holistic campus environment. In this way, for my analysis, the campus environment includes, but is not limited to, the student body culture, systems, groups, and physical space at Denison. In line with structural violence and symbolic violence theory, it is necessary not only to ethnographically understand these systems, but also understand how power, and in turn agency, function in these systems.

Possibly the most obvious components to the sexual assault reporting landscape embedded in our campus environment are DCSR, SHARE, and the Title IX office. What is not obvious, based on widespread misunderstandings of the reporting mechanisms, is exactly what these organizations do. Many students at Denison, including myself before this research and many of my survey respondents, are aware of the existence of these organizations but ignorant of the extent of their roles, opportunities, and survivor support options. For example, only during my second DCSR leader interview did I fully understand that in addition to the programs they put on for all Denisonians, they hold community meetings in which they direct members of the community to reporting options, offer peer support to survivors, and provide a space in which students can ask questions about the Title IX process or about consent specifically. When I realized that this was not only a by-product of community meetings but the intent of them I was shocked at the depth of the peer-support system available to students, as SHARE offers similar yet slightly different support services. Whereas DCSR holds group community meetings to share and spread information about survivor support and reporting, SHARE offers a rich support system for individuals and SHARE advocates are available to help students through the Title IX process if they wish to report.

Due to the depth at which I became acquainted with these groups, I believe that it is fruitful for me to expound on their roles in the campus landscape surrounding sexual assault reporting, as the work that these groups do is quite remarkable and sadly, I believe that it is overlooked. For years SHARE and DCSR functioned as completely separate organizations and peer-support systems, however, within the past year, they have joined together in that they have executive meetings together with the Title IX coordinator, and run programs together.

SHARE is a student resource that stands for Sexual Assault Resource and Education and is the longest-standing organization of this nature on campus. They started as a *confidential* (unless subpoenaed in a court case) post-assault peer support resource. However, when Anna and Maddie were sophomores, “a new campus lawyer said we could not assume confidentiality on the co-tail of whistler nurses.” In this way, due to the constraints of no longer being a confidential resource, SHARE underwent a transition. Now, SHARE sends members to complete training so that they can be offered as a *private* resource through Title IX. SHARE has further evolved in recent years in its shift towards education through their Helping Hands program that is aimed at creating a community “of informed citizens in terms of bystander support and trauma.”

The cornerstone of SHARE is their peer-support program, which Anna and Maddie contended distinguishes them from DCSR, which focuses mostly on prevention education. From the various ways in which the four leaders articulated their roles, it is evident that both groups do a lot of work with both peer support and education; however, SHARE is a more cemented and direct line of peer support. These groups do diverge, however, in how they approach and articulate sexual violence. SHARE very intentionally and specifically focuses on oppression and power in sexual assault, and according to Maddie, “that is a cornerstone in terms of how we are

shifting our education for sexual violence.” She further noted that most people view sexual violence as a crime of passion as it is related to sexual drive; in this way, SHARE very intentionally redirects how students understand sexual violence by centering the role of power and oppression. I found this educational paradigm particularly interesting as it constitutes a departure from traditional consent and sexual respect education, and is blatantly attentive to the theoretical components of sexual violence. When considering the groups required to go through SHARE education, which includes all-male sports teams, this oppression and power cornerstone is particularly unique in its blatant and direct messaging, which is incredibly praiseworthy.

In general, DCSR “is a resource about sexual violence and sexual assault and also a prevention resource.” Paramount to their position on campus, although they used to be, DCSR members are not automatically confidential reporters anymore as that requires going through state-sponsored training, which SHARE facilitates. Nina noted that DCSR has changed this year as it combined with SHARE, “so SHARE is kind of the post-assault resource, we are kind of the education prevention side and they are kind of the survivor support system.” This clarified distinctions between the two, but as each participant articulated their roles and connection slightly differently, it is evident that this is a budding partnership and I believe that their roles will become more distinct in years to come. In terms of what DCSR does on campus, Nina stated that “we do a lot of education, training-based stuff and host discussions about sexual respect and assault.” She continued to say “this semester I am really trying to push for more action because you can talk about the topic all you want but there also needs to be action.” Oftentimes I felt like my participants in these groups were much too hard on themselves, and this was one of those times. I agree that action needs to be taken, but I think that many of the programs that these groups put forth, such as the Sexual Respect Dinners in which students engage in discussions

around facilitating a campus of sexual respect, including representatives from all sports teams and Greek organizations, constitute profound action and I do not believe that conversations like these happen on all college campuses.

The last, yet maybe most critical, formal institution in Denison's landscape around sexual assault reporting is the Title IX office. Although I was unable to interview a representative of this institution directly, I was able to deeply discern the role and cultural position of the Title IX office due to how closely my participants work with the Title IX coordinator. My interviewees informed me that although DCSR and SHARE are not institutionally connected to the Title IX Office, they do a lot of work together. According to Anna, under the new Title IX coordinator, there has been a lot more work between the Title IX office and SHARE/DCSR. Maggie even stated that she works directly with the Title IX office on "pretty much any SHARE project" she has developed and that the Title IX Coordinator has "really been on the forefront of driving the rhetoric around reporting." Furthermore, the connection between DCSR and SHARE and the Title IX Office is not one-directional in that the student organizations direct students to Title IX, as the Title IX Coordinator leverages SHARE support through encouraging survivors who report to reach out to a SHARE advocate. Every single one of my interviewees lit up when talking about the new Title IX Coordinator-- it is evident that they all deeply respect her and value the work she does for the Denison community. Multiple of my interviewees noted how she frequently employs the phrase "report =support" and Maggie noted that "if you go to her she is going to let you know the ins and outs of the process but her primary concern is the well-being of the survivor." Maggie further noted that

She does not want to be known simply as the person to go to when something goes wrong but instead, she has been at the forefront of sexual respect education, consent education,

and sexual assault prevention. She recently changed the name of the office to Office of Title IX and Respect Education. She wants to be the person to get in front of the problem but also be the person there for support on the backend.

The Title IX Coordinator is intentionally entangling the Title IX Office in all aspects of the campus culture around sexual assault and reporting-- which is incredibly promising as it is evident through my data collection that students widely misunderstand the Title IX process in addition to not fully understanding what the embodiment of consent looks like. Not only does the Coordinator act as a listening resource, but she also goes through the entire process with students and is a responsive action resource. Ostensibly, the Title IX coordinator plays a dynamic role in the campus landscape around sexual assault and reporting.

Misunderstandings and Fear Surrounding Title IX

Concerning responsive action, my data reveals that the reporting mechanism at Denison is flexible and multifaceted, which, problematically, is widely unknown to students. Nina illustrated this flexibility, noting that

You can go to Title IX and just share your story but there are also many paths of action you can take such as restorative justice through conflict resolution, a more formal legal process through the school, or they can connect you to the police. Their rhetoric is that they are there for whatever a survivor may need, you can do the process however you wish and you are not bound to do it.

My ignorance of this shocked me, as I was unaware of the multiplicity of the means and extent of reporting. Given this, I followed up and asked Nina whether she thinks that people are aware that they are not required to complete any reporting process that they initiate through Title IX;

Nina contended, and this was affirmed in every single interview, that most students hold misunderstandings around Title IX due to the fear that comes with the formality of the Title IX office. She noted that “in my experience in DCSR we have always tried to communicate [that survivors have control over the process] but I think that even when students are told this they are more likely to associate the Title IX office with legal action than just a listening resource.” She continued to note that “even if they [survivors] know in some part of their brain that it is not a commitment they will still more immediately associate it with a full-fledged investigation or at least something official.”

The theme of fear around Title IX leading to misunderstandings of the Title IX process emerged robustly in each of my interviews. Part of this fear can be traced to changes in federal regulations, which received some public attention on Denison’s campus. Maddie illustrated this phenomenon:

People think that they will have to go through this process and that if they report they will have to go through a trial and face victimization, they are unaware of the fact that it is a stop when you want the process and that they have control. So the implementation and conversation around new regulations have made it so that we have to access the survivor’s guilt as much as the perpetrator, which people do not want to do.

Changes in federal legislation have to a degree augmented fear around the Title IX process, however, as many people are ignorant of these changes, I believe that this fear is more deeply rooted in social understandings of sexual assault reporting. Paramount to this discussion is the multiplicity of the reporting mechanism on Denison’s campus as in the face of these changes, the Title IX Coordinator responded that there are institutional processes that can be taken instead of these Title IX regulations. Given this, Maddie asserted that the Title IX Coordinator “has been

trying to put all the power in the survivor.” Maddie continued to highlight that “we are lucky that sexual assault violates our code of conduct so it can be dealt with in other ways.”

The rhetoric of the Title IX coordinator “has always been report equals support and we want to give the power back to the victim in their decision to report.” In this way, the Title IX Coordinator does everything she can in her rhetoric to promote reporting and debunk myths around the Title IX process, but evidently, this messaging is not enough, given that only 7% of sexual assaults are reported at Denison. When I asked Anna whether students have a preconceived notion of what Title IX is independent of a reporting experience, she stated that

I think that students absolutely have an idea of what the Title IX process is and they think it is a scary thing that they won’t have a lot of control in the process, which is not the case. So I do think a lot of students when they go into it don’t have the best idea of what it will look like, [don’t know] that they can stop whenever they want, and [don’t know] that it is very much a thing in their control. So I do think that when students decide to report it they are expecting something a lot scarier than it actually is.

I followed up this comment by asking about the impact that this misconception has on reporting and Anna asserted that having that preconceived notion scares survivors from reporting and “it is nice when people talk to us and you can see the look of relief on their face when they see that it was not that crazy scary thing they thought it was.” This speaks profoundly to the stigma around reporting and the lack of awareness on behalf of Denison students about what reporting through the Title IX office consists of.

In each of my interviews, my participants affirmed that the widespread fear and misunderstandings around Title IX serve to deter reporting. Central to this reluctance on the behalf of some students to approach Title IX is the fear that they will have to fight to be believed

and “fight to rationalize what happened” as “ formal processes invite the question of belief which is a problem for survivors.” I will expound on the role of party culture later in this discussion, but aligned with this question of belief is the self-doubt that comes with “the social stigma that is associated with sexual violence and alcohol and drugs.” Nina noted that self-doubt reduces the likelihood that a survivor will report, so belief and doubt are central to underreporting. She further noted that a lack of trust in the process prevails as survivors “will not go through that process if they do not think anything will come from it.” She continued to assert that “even though [the Title IX Coordinator] is incredible and she tries to make it as clear as possible that whatever the situation is, the Title IX Office will help you do whatever you want to do, that does not mean that the stigma and association are not there.” Darcey echoed this misconception on the behalf of survivors:

I think that another reason that survivors don’t report is that they don’t think they will be believed and because they have heard stories of like “oh you have to recount this experience and then you have to write it down, and then you have to say it again, and then you have to do it all over again.” They already said that once, why do they have to keep saying it when it traumatizes them?

Belief, or more so the fear of non-belief, is a central deterrent to reporting and is paramount concerning misconceptions around the Title IX process. I will expound on the role of belief later in the context of social status, social hierarchies, and social fate.

The fear and misconceptions around Title IX are central to the campus landscape around sexual assault. Notably, Darcey asserted that “students are still scared, or they kinda are scared of the formality of it, which is why I think that sexual organizations, such as DCSR and SHARE, are so helpful because they are getting answers from students themselves.” Denison has ample

sexual respect organizations due to the passion of student leaders with a desire to ameliorate the problem of sexual assault and sexual assault underreporting. However, it was evident that my participants experience some frustration around the lack of awareness of Denison students' around sexual assault and reporting, seeing as the groups that they are a part of put so much energy into engaging students on these topics. Darcey noted that

I think that a lot of students say they don't know what the process is, and not necessarily putting the blame on students, but you know the reason are community meetings have dwindled down a little bit, even though we have events and other programs, like the sexual respect dialogues, those opportunities are available on campus and it is a students choice to not participate or if they do participate I often feel like it is in part because they had to, I see this with some sports teams and it's like the only reason this all men's sports team is at this training right now is because they had to from Coach-- are they actually paying attention, do they think that Title IX applies to them in their daily life, or is it like, I would never assault someone so this is not my problem.

This frustration was echoed by Anna who reflected on how many students only have a desire to engage in critical conversations around sexual assault in the wake of something terrible:

“SHARE has been here, DCSR has been here, and I definitely feel like we have been giving these education programs but unfortunately it is only when something terrible happens that people are like *we need to have dialogues around this and groups for this.*” SHARE and DCSR put an immense amount of effort into facilitating conversations around consent and sexual respect education and reporting, and Anna reflected on this, asserting that “it is hard to do those educational programs and dialogues when people don't even know it is a resource that they have and it takes something bad happening for someone to either seek us out or we do something

where people recognize us.” There is only so much that formal components in the campus landscape of sexual assault and reporting can do, and it will take increasing the desire of students to engage with these groups to facilitate real change. However, students cannot be held entirely accountable, due to the impact of the cultural and social systems in which they are embedded.

Survey Data: Do People Misunderstand Reporting?

One goal of my survey was to discern whether students *actually* misunderstand reporting, and my survey data indicates that for the most part, this is the case. When I asked how aware respondents were of the reporting process, most respondents stated that they were only a little aware or pretty unaware. When I asked whether they thought most students understand the reporting process, the response was predominantly no (about 93%). Despite this, some respondents displayed substantial knowledge of the reporting process, at least to the extent that they could identify various ways to report. However, as I prefaced my survey by indicating it focused on sexual assault reporting, it is possible that some of these respondents took the survey due to their interest in the topic and their knowledge of it. Nonetheless, it is evident through my survey data that a significant portion of the Denison community is ignorant of the particulars of the reporting process. Moreover, it is obvious that large discrepancies prevail in student’s knowledge of the reporting process, which attests to the fact that ample resources are available for students to inform themselves on the process, but unfortunately, not all students do.

II. The Embeddedness of Sexual Assault and Reporting in the Campus Environment

The Size of Denison and Consequent Systemic Deterrents to Reporting

Survivors, assailants, and reporting decisions are deeply embedded in a severely intricate campus environment. Central to the make-up and activity of this campus environment is the student body, and more specifically, the size of the student body. In each of my interviews, a theme emerged in which the size of the study body acts as a constraint on survivors in their decision to report due to the dilemmas posed by a tenacious rumor culture and the dramatic visibility of social status and social fate. Cumulatively, my interview data illustrates a campus culture in which the size of the school and the consequent student body culture has the power to silence victims. The size of the student body produces embedded constraints on survivors, which is indicative of the structural roots of non-reporting.

Rumor Culture

Highlighting the pervasive yet unintended nature of the rumor mill culture at Denison, Maddie asserted that “Denison is such a small campus so stories can get out of control so easily, and suddenly everyone knows, which may contribute to someone’s tendency to keep silent and keep close who they tell.” She further underlined how the size of the school mitigates privacy in a way that can be stifling as “often things cannot be dealt with anonymously and silently due to the size.” The size of the school mitigates survivors’ agency due to a rumor culture that deters students from speaking up out of fear of rumor. In this way, the size of the student body is a pervasive structural layer of the campus environment as it feeds into other constraining phenomena: the rumor culture and the visibility of social fate.

Each of my interviewees suggested that the size of Denison is conducive to a rumor culture that can have silencing effects, and thus, is a systemic deterrent to reporting. Nina emphasized an omnipresent rumor culture, asserting that “since Denison is such a small

community that word spreads so fast even if people don't mean it to." She further reiterated that discussing assault is not often out of malintent and that people's intentions can even be good as they want to protect themselves and their friends, but that discussing campus assault still has adverse silencing effects:

The outcome is poor in reality because you are putting someone in a situation where not only have they just gone through an extremely traumatic experience which they are trying to process and find the resources for, but on top of that either they realize that everyone is talking about it and that makes it harder to report, or they don't know if people are talking about it and if they don't want people to know then why would you actively go and tell someone?

Nina further asserted that "because of the size people care a lot about each other, which is why the spread of information about assault is not badly intended but I think that a lot of times it is harmful." This underlines how power pervasively functions in the social order of the campus environment, as the social environment itself produces fear, which is silencing and thus indicative of structural violence. Farmer (2004) notes how structural violence is exerted systematically by all actors involved in the social order, which underlines how non-reporting is a structural problem, not an individual one. Ostensibly, a stubborn rumor culture is embedded in our campus environment due to the size of the student body, and this rumor culture and its silencing effects constitute a systemic deterrent to reporting, thus embodying structural violence.

As discussed earlier, in a social analysis of rumor, Veena Das (1998) illustrates how rumors can turn words into instruments of force and argues that rumor can displace the subjectivity of everyday life. The insight Das provides on rumor is useful in analyzing rumor culture and its impact on reporting. In the context of a campus culture around sexual assault,

words are turned into an instrument of force, in which they have the power to silence victims. It is also possible that the silencing power of rumor is influenced by the stigma around reporting. In a study on unwanted, offensive sexual behavior within relationships on college campuses, Kirkpatrick and Kanin (1957) concluded that exploitation, stigma, and guilt deterred victims from seeking institutional support; moreover, they found that stigma and guilt facilitate the isolation of the victim. These findings are indicative of the structural roots of non-reporting due to the power embedded in rumor in which perhaps the rumor culture exploits stigma and guilt around sexual assault and silences victims through perpetuating their guilt, silencing, and isolating them. In this way, rumor systemically deters reporting through augmenting the fears of the survivor.

Once someone's story becomes a public story, it is no longer their own-- it is attached to speculation and stigmatized. As Tyler and Slater (2018) assert in their sociological review of stigma, components of stigma unfold “when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation” (367). With rumor, the source of a story is irrelevant, separating the victim from their narrative, and words take on a life of their own; a story is subject to speculation and manipulation-- one’s narrative is no longer their own. Rumor allows for labels to emerge and stereotypes to be perpetuated-- a victim’s story is labeled believable or not, and they could be identified as brave or a liar. Rumor has the power to induce status loss and discrimination as speculation and labels can impact how the parties involved are viewed. According to Tyler and Slater, “Stigma is entirely dependent on social, economic, and political power—it takes power to stigmatize” (2018: 375). Power operates through rumor as rumor generates stigma and deters victims from making their narrative public. Rumor may proliferate the stigma around reporting as it has the power to stigmatize the narrative itself. In

this way, rumor silences victims by capitalizing on their fears concerning belief, stigma, and social fate.

Each of my interviews affirmed the silencing effects that rumor places on survivors; moreover, they highlighted the dynamic ways in which rumor acts to silence victims. Anna asserted that rumor can have a silencing effect due to the pressure of trauma as it is “hard when experiencing trauma if you are not sure if you want people to know or you are still deciding whether to report.” She further contended that “rumor can definitely be silencing” because it adds pressure to the already destructive pressure of trauma. In this way, rumor constitutes outside pressure to the already burdensome pressure of the trauma of sexual assault, and this compounding pressure can in turn silence survivor’s deciding whether to report. Underlining the complex ways that rumor produces fear and silences victims, Darcey asserted that rumor affects reporting due to fear and guilt:

I think if we had no concept of fear, ever, anything would be so much more possible-- no one would be stressed, no one would be anxious, everything would be handled to the person's discretion and they would decide. So I don't think there would be the issue of “I am scared to report” because it all comes down to other people, I think. And we fail to look at it as how it affects us because we try to save face for other people.

“Saving face for other people” implies a concept that continuously emerged in my ethnographic data: the phenomena in which survivors do not want to cause pain to others despite their suffering. The rumor culture embedded in our campus culture presents a dilemma for victims in which they have to decide if they want it to be publically known that they have impacted someone’s social fate by speaking up about their sexual assault.

The Entanglement of Students and the Visibility of Social Fate

Undoubtedly, the size of Denison further impacts survivors due to how they are embedded in intertwining peer networks and groups. Anna demonstrated the entanglement and cohesion of the student body when she asserted that “everything we do is connected in some way and we are all overlapping” which she asserted can be intimidating. Not only does this connectedness impact survivors due to the pace at which word spreads, but also due to how the role and visibility of social fate are augmented. Anna illustrated the weight that the connectedness of the student body plays on survivors when she asserted that

I think that since Denison is a small campus I think that there is a lot of fear of retaliation and people worry that once they do come forward they are going to be looked at differently. Especially because everyone at Denison feels connected in some way since so many circles overlap, [survivor’s feel] that word will spread and with that a lot of the negative things that happen when someone steps forward like people not believing them or like retaliation. So I do think that people worry when they want to report about that reaction. Especially because it is such a small campus, they fear people thinking “oh but I know that person and they would never do that” or “there’s no way, I know what you do, like your lifestyle, you’re a big partier” I think there is also fear in that or tied or that.

This profoundly attests to the structural constraints that the size of the student body imposes on survivors. The themes that emerge here, of fearing retaliation, and fearing not being believed are central to non-reporting, and are not unique to Denison’s campus; however, it is clear from my interview data that the size and connectedness of the student body, and the emerging rumor culture, augment these fears due to the visibility of social fate, status, and social hierarchies.

Central to the connectivity of our student body that rumor culture capitalizes on, in turn silencing survivors, is the fact that individuals' social fate, status, and power that their position on the social hierarchy awards them, are profoundly visible due to the social codes embedded in the campus environment. It is necessary to expound on how social fate and social hierarchies impact survivors and their decision to report, due to how the size of Denison yet again produces structural constraints.

Time and again my interviewees alluded to how the size of Denison and the connectedness of the student body compounds with the visibility of social fate to produce survivor's guilt, which is salient to non-reporting. Nina described the impact of the visibility of social fate at Denison: "if someone is to be kicked out of campus or suspended, people are going to talk about it so that definitely plays a role." She contrasted this with larger schools or institutions in which one might not see the outcome of consequences for the accused, which she alleged may make reporting easier. On the other hand, she noted that at Denison you "see fifteen people walking to class" which poses a complex problem for survivors concerning reporting as "seeing them makes it difficult but not seeing them and knowing you are the reason they are not at Denison also makes things difficult... so it is kind of a double-edged sword." In the context that statistically, and especially on Denison's campus, survivors are likely to be acquainted with their perpetrator, she highlighted that when the perpetrator is someone the survivor is in a campus organization with, on lives on their floor, or is even in the same friend group, "you see them all the time, which can play a big role in seeing the outcome of reporting because people may be hesitant to report due to the constant reminder they would have of being responsible for a negative change in someone's life even if they think that they deserve it." Reflecting on this, and deeply unfortunate consequences for reporting, she noted that this "makes it hard in terms of the

environments that people move through here, since we see people so often, that is difficult but if you report and don't see them often, that may also be a difficult reminder.”

Maddie asserted that she has “noticed the issue of social fate coming from survivors not wanting to ruin someone's life so that comes from the idea of if you go through a formal process you can not put that cat back in the bag”. This is incredibly salient as it not only highlights how the connectivity of the student body and visibility of social fate impacts survivors in their decision to report, but also that a reluctance to report out of these concerns is further rooted in misunderstandings of the Title IX process. Maddie, who has years of experience interacting with survivors, noted that she has often heard from survivors that they want their assailant to understand what they have done but “they don't want to ruin their Denison experience”. Again, this is not only indicative of the salience of survivor's guilt, but also misconceptions around Title IX as the process does not have to result in a consequence that would ruin their experience.

Again highlighting the prominence of this phenomenon of survivors guilt that emerges from the size and culture of the student body, Nina alleged that they believe something that installs fear in the survivor and holds them back from reporting is “is the idea of being responsible for the consequences that someone may face which is especially true on such a small campus where you may have a class with fifteen people and when one of those people is no longer there it is very noticeable.” The size and interconnectedness of the Denison student body is not only a problem due to the pervasive rumor culture it allows for, but also due to the visibility of social fate.

Social fate functions adversely outside of survivor's guilt due to the implications it has for belief and power. Social fate is acutely tied to power due to how identity and privilege

function to create a hierarchy of social status, and how this hierarchy disproportionality awards the social advantaged more leeway when it comes to social fate.

Darcey noted how often people feed themselves harmful narratives concerning their social position versus another, which is especially true in a rumor culture; she asserted that if a rumor goes around about an individual's assault, then they may judge whether they will be believed based on their relative social position to the assailant. She provided an example of a narrative that survivors feed themselves along these lines: "No one is going to believe you because you are a first-year and I am a senior. I'm a football player and I just threw the biggest party and everyone had a good time, so no one is going to believe you." Although this is a fictional example, my interviewee highlighted how rumor and social fate compound to produce harmful socially embedded narratives; this is evident of the ways that power operates through rumor and the social hierarchies that are embedded in our campus environment.

When I asked Darcey to consider social barriers to reporting, she claimed that the first thing to come to mind was money. She noted that similar to social status, money can make some students feed themselves something along the lines of the following narrative: "if they have that much money then they are not going to get in trouble because they can just offer something to the school". She further noted that although in reality, this may not be the case, the narrative of "this person can just get away with so many things because of their socio-economic status" is prevalent at Denison due to disproportionate concentrations of wealth across the campus environment. Furthermore, concerning the role of privilege on the survivor's side, my interviewee noted that they may be deterred from reporting due to economic reasons, in which they fear having to pay if reporting reaches a formal process. This fear may be augmented when

there are significant wealth disparities between the survivor and assailant, which is further indicative of the role of privilege and power.

Situating Sexual Assault Experiences and Reporting in Identity

Due to my desire to promote a feminist and intersectional framework when discussing sexual assault and reporting, and further due to my desire to investigate the social embeddedness of power and silence, I believe that sexual assault and reporting must be situated in identity. A theme emerged in each of my interviews of a gendered divide concerning sexual respect and sexual assault reporting prevails in the campus environment.

According to all my DCSR and SHARE participants, women respond more emphatically and intensely to allegations of sexual assault, whereas men tend to stay quieter. In terms of the campus reaction to sexual assault allegations, my participants pointed to a trend in which women, or more inclusively, non-men, are more fearful in the wake of this news, and are intentional in their efforts to rally support. Multiple interviewees highlighted the statistical and structural explanation for this, as Maddie contended:

Women are always going to be more engaged and have this fear reaction because statistically, it will be a cis man assaulting a woman or members of the LGBTQ community. So I think there is more of the “what can we do reaction” from these groups.

I definitely think there is a gendered difference.

Concerning the reluctance of men to participate in conversations around sexual assault, Darcey contended that “I think that some of them are quiet only because they feel like they don’t want to say the wrong thing, so out of good intention, but also it is not helping because you are clearly not in these conversations when they are being held.” This underlines the immensely problematic

nature of this gendered divide as it perpetuates the cultural message that women need to protect themselves and engage in ameliorating sexual assault and men need not concern themselves with this. Anna affirmed this, asserting that “unfortunately” due to how sexual assault most frequently plays out there is more fear in women and women generally take more of a stance than men do so “it is going to be women who are doing more of the work.” It has always been nonsensical to me that women are expected to immerse themselves in sexual assault education and prevention, as this augments the cultural narrative that women need to learn how not to get raped, not that men need to learn not how to rape.

Adding a layer to the gendered divide concerning sexual assault, Nina illustrates a gendered difference in accepting narratives of sexual violence:

Since women are more likely to experience sexual violence, you will see women, or non-men, believing a survivor with more ease than someone who is a cis-man because statistically speaking they are more likely to have either been in the same situation or have had peers been in the same situation.

This is incredibly significant as it underlines how gender may impact belief surrounding sexual assault narratives, and as discussed, the idea of belief is central to reporting as survivors are deterred from reporting when they are fearful of not being believed. These gendered power dynamics further function adversely concerning male survivors of sexual assault. It is important to consider the impacts of this gendered divide on male survivors. Nina further highlighted the adverse effects of the gendering of sexual assault concerning reporting, contending that male survivors “experience a lot of stigma associated with being a survivor because if you are going on this route of the “manly man” who protects himself, it may be seen as emasculating to admit [their sexual assault] to anyone else, whether its a friend, family member or Title IX office.” This

is indicative of the pervasive and complex ways in which hegemonic masculinity impacts sexual assault and reporting. The gender-power dynamics of sexual assault profoundly direct the campus landscape around sexual assault, and this, in turn, impacts reporting.

Under an intersectional framework, it is imperative to couple an analysis of gender with an analysis of race and class. Although race did not explicitly emerge from my ethnographic data collection, race is tied to socioeconomics due to how the socio-political and economic order of society functions in a way that constrains social and economic mobility for people of color. In the context of the campus environment at Denison, socioeconomics is prominently tied to privilege and social hierarchies. As previously mentioned, privilege and social status can intertwine in a way that produces a narrative of distrust in the reporting process for survivors in which they accept the premise that the relative power of their assailant will afford them immunity and security; this narrative deters survivors from reporting as their fear that nothing will be accomplished renders reporting an unnecessary burden due to the social implications it may have. In this way, from an intersectional perspective, socioeconomics compounds with gender to silence those rendered vulnerable by their gender and class. It would be fruitful for future research to more explicitly investigate the role of race in reporting at Denison, as race intertwines with gender and class to augment vulnerability brought on by power imbalances.

Physical Space and Structural Vulnerability

Hirsch and Khan's (2020) concept of sexual geographies demonstrates that physical space augments the role of power in sexual assault as it offers some individuals power and takes agency away from others. Through my interviews with DCSR and SHARE members, I discerned the role of physical space at Denison concerning power and sexual assault reporting. Within

these conversations, party culture emerged as a deterrent to reporting due to the power imbalances embedded in party culture at Denison. When I asked Maddie the role that physical location plays in the campus environment, she asserted that “I think it plays a big role because statistics show that assaults will happen at fraternity parties and within the Greek culture, so I think location and physical space are a big deal-- also in terms of where students feel safe.” Physical space is significant due to its connection with party culture and social status, and the resulting power imbalances.

Darcey contended that power emerges distinctly from party culture as spaces in which parties mean that “someone can show their power because if it is [a certain] fraternities room, then you know who has the power in that.” She continued to eloquently assert that in such spaces in which power-imbalances induced by social status are visible, “you kind of relinquish your presence in the room because you think that someone's presence is of greater value.” Darcey further highlighted the role of power in physical space as they “once again show power.” The size and culture of Denison mean that people are often aware of who registered what spaces, thus, people know whose party “it is” and who has physical control and power.

Outside of party culture, the physical environment of dorm living creates structural vulnerabilities to sexual violence. In describing “sexual geographies,” Hirsch and Khan (2020) illustrate that the physical configuration of dorm rooms mitigates student’s agency and constitutes a structural factor that allows for sexual assault. Nina asserted that she has had conversations with the Title IX coordinator about the profound influence of the physical space of dorm rooms concerning consent and sexual assault. She highlighted how at Denison, students live in dorm rooms until senior year, and it is likely that you will be sharing a room with someone until at least senior year. She reflected on her personal experience and feelings towards

this, contending that, as a freshman, she didn't realize how small and physically limited the dorm spaces were until she was in the room with someone and realized "that we had to hang out and sit on a bed because there was no other space." She asserted that even if you just want to watch a movie, your options are often one of two beds, and "even that can be uncomfortable" or if you decide not to "you are sitting across the room from each other, that can be weird." Given this, the physical configuration of dorm rooms detracts from the sexual agency of students.

The physical setup of dorm living is not conducive to easily navigating encounters that may lead to sexual experiences. Nina acutely pointed out that this plays a big role, particularly at Denison as "when you first come into college it is not something students think about so it can come as a surprise, but then after that, it is almost like normalized in a sense that if you were to be uncomfortable with it, it might feel weird to someone else." This is immensely significant as it highlights how Denison students are socialized to not only accept but normalize the uncomfortability that comes with dorm living. She further illustrates the problematic nature of this by asserting that after freshman year "it is just so normalized that is how spaces are, and that's how things work, being in such close proximity, that if you were to not be okay with it that would definitely generate some kind of stigma or like uncomfortableness." In this way, not only are students expected to accept the established norms concerning dorm living but they are also stigmatized for questioning the status quo. Darcey affirmed the institutional component of this when she asserted that young people arriving at college already face the task of navigating a new environment and finding their identity in this environment, "so Denison forcing people into these spaces to exist without letting them change the physical landscape definitely impacts consent."

For Nina, the problem of physical space sparked a lot of reflection and discussion during our interview, cementing its importance as an element of the campus environment. She further

noted how dorm living and consent are difficult to navigate due to the pressure that asking a roommate to leave or avoid the room induces. Moreover, she noted that one style of dorm rooms on campus, “six mans”, in which three rooms of two and a bathroom are connected in a way that prevents doors from having locks, poses problems for some students that other students normalize. In these spaces, someone may walk through the room during a sexual encounter; she contends that this “something that in the eyes of a lot of people here could feel very small, but that can play a really big role in the outcome of how someone perceives a sexual interaction and how they feel after and how they feel during.” This underlines how interconnected physical space, consent, and sexual assault; moreover, it highlights how college campuses pose unique structural vulnerabilities to sexual assault as the physical space constraints individuals in their agency and further oppresses individuals due to how these spaces are normalized concerning sexual encounters.

Physical space further functions adversely concerning sexual assault and reporting due to the age-power dynamics that a four-year residential institution contributes to. Maddie asserted that “I also think that the residential community has an impact. There will always be the age-power dynamic in places of older students and there will always be power dynamics in spaces that are controlled by particular groups, organizations, and teams.” The fact that the structural condition of a four-year residential campus augments the vulnerability of students is indicative of how structural conditions not only constrain survivors in their decision to report but also embed power into the campus environment that allows for assault in the first place.

Age and Structural Vulnerability

Central to the campus environment is the social hierarchy and consequent power-imbalances determined and enforced by age. With age comes social capital, confidence,

and power, which structurally disadvantages younger students. Anna alleged that “the power dynamic of age is a real thing and I do think that younger students would be deterred from wanting to do anything if it was with an older student and someone who [...] maybe has a bit more respect because they have been here longer and more people know them”. Darcey asserted that concerning age, “when someone is older we think that they will find a way out, or that is always what I have been conditioned to think.” She further asserted that the cultural trope of respecting your elders, even though we are all students, “got translated into older people knowing what they are doing more than me.” She then acutely alleged the consequences of this:

So if I were to get assaulted, and I was a first-year, then maybe I downplay my experience of assault because I think that they’re the expert, or maybe I don’t even ask them but I am just like “oh whatever, they are the senior, they’re in this, they’re in that, I am not even going to bother because nothing is going to go anywhere because they have so much power on campus and they are loved by the administration and a good face for the university.

Although this is an extreme and fictional example, it profoundly speaks to how the power imbalances that age produces impact reporting power imbalances induced by age to contribute to systemic under-reporting.

Darcey highlighted that augmenting these age-power imbalances is the fact that unless you request and receive a single, seniors are the only students with the advantage of having their room. Additionally, first-years and seniors live the closest together in the physical spacing of campus, which constitutes a structural vulnerability when taking into account the pernicious power imbalance between eighteen-year-olds and twenty-two-year-olds.

Culturally, age is a structural vulnerability to sexual assault due to how the lack of

awareness that young people have surrounding their sexual desires and boundaries. Hirsch and Khan's (2020) concept of sexual projects underlines how young people are not taught how to understand what they want from sex and recognize their boundaries, which produces structural vulnerability to sexual assault in addition to a barrier to reporting, due to how students may struggle to reconcile their experience as sexual assault.

Systemic underreporting is deeply and multifacetedly embedded in the campus environment, and misunderstandings and fear around Title IX augment the influence of the campus environment and proliferate non-reporting. However, it must also be situated in the context of the vulnerability of young people due to poor sexual socialization, which is a wider cultural context.

III. Wider Cultural Contexts

The Effects of a Precarious Lack of Sexual Socialization

The campus landscape around sexual assault is embedded not only in a vast and complex campus environment but also in wider cultural contexts. The wider cultural context of sexual assault includes sex education, and, more so the insufficient and even destructive nature of sex education. Hirsch and Khan (2020) leverage the concept "Sexual Citizens," which is defined by the acknowledgment of one's sexual self-determination as well as recognizing this right in others, to underline how individuals are not inherently sexually socialized, but that this is something they must learn and actively engage in. They further highlight that sexual citizenship is nurtured and informed by culture and institutions; in this way, they underline that sexual assault exists in a system of socially produced behavior. Therefore, young people's sexual behavior is largely a product of the culture they are embedded in and the institutions that have shaped them.

In each of my interviews, a theme emerged in which students are systemically underprepared to talk about sex, let alone engage respectfully in it, due to the cultural context of an uncomfortability around sexually educating young people. Often, sex education is reduced to basic consent education, pregnancy, and STD prevention education, or even abstinence-only education. The problematic nature of this is augmented by the fact that young people are expected to navigate the sexual landscape of college without the sufficient means to do so respectfully and intentionally. This is a key structural aspect in the social existence of sexual assault; moreover, it gleams at systemic roots of underreporting outside of Denison's campus environment.

Informed agents in the sexual landscape at Denison, such as DCSR and SHARE members, are not unaware of this wider cultural context. Darcey noted that DCSR's goal is to spearhead conversations around sexual violence, sexual respect, and consent as "those conversations were never had, or seldom had, in high school." Students arrive at Denison ill-equipped to negotiate sexual situations, something which has profound adverse consequences and speaks to a larger problematic cultural context in which Americans are generally very uncomfortable talking about sex, especially concerning young people having sex. Darcey noted that her sex-ed "was all about abstinence even though my school wasn't private, it was a public school and it was still preachy on that. And we [DCSR] just want to be like hey actually no that's not the case."

Stemming from this widespread lack of sex education is insufficient sexual socialization in that young people are not taught to understand what they want from sex or how to recognize what others want from interpersonal relationships and experiences; given this, students arrive on campus already structurally vulnerable not only to being assaulted but also structurally

vulnerable to commit assault. Hirsch and Khan (2020) argue that due to this structural barrier to sexual socialization, students are not taught how to understand what they want from sex and recognize that they have control of their sexual interactions based on their desires; they leverage the concept of a sexual project, the reasons why individuals seek a sexual experience, to highlight how students are widely underprepared to understand and formulate their sexual project due to their uncomfortability around sex and consent, which renders them systematically vulnerable as they may struggle to recognize their experience as assault or exert agency out of self-awareness before an assault. They contend that young people's lack of sexual socialization renders them unable to recognize their relative social power to others and how their desires may not align with others. The wider cultural context of poor sexual socialization is paramount concerning sexual assault and, as I will later demonstrate, reporting.

Augmenting the problems that stem from widespread insufficient sex education and sexual socialization is the fact that students are unevenly prepared to be sexual citizens. Darcey elucidated this when she asserted that "people come from all different backgrounds and some people get really thorough sex ed and some people get none at all or just the kind of thing where you sign to abstain." Given this, not only does the wider cultural context of the sexual assault landscape produce structural vulnerabilities to sexual assault but also produces structural inequalities as students move through the campus environment with varying levels of sexual socialization and self-awareness. It is unclear how privilege contributes to this, so it would be fruitful for future research to discern inequalities in sexual socialization based on demographics and class.

Drawing on Hirsch and Khan's (2020) concept of sexual projects, I discussed with each of my interviewees whether an ambiguity around sex that results from poor sex education

prevails in a pernicious manner; a dominant theme emerged in which due to the systemic lack of sexual socialization before college, students must come to understand their relationship to their body and sexual project independently, which poses issues concerning consent. Darcey noted during our interview that with college comes a lot of freedom and the pressure to find oneself; for the first time for many students, they are on their own with no one telling them what to do. With this freedom comes the need to understand what you want to do with your body according to your timeline; this is crucial concerning giving consent and understanding when you don't consent. In her words, for someone to admit "I understand that I am providing my full consent to this," they have to deeply understand themselves, and their sexual project, and most first-year students are systemically not equipped with the tools to make this a feasible task. Moreover, peripheral social stereotypes and stigmas that are embedded in how people, especially college students, understand sex, such as pressures to engage in hookup culture and slut-shaming, augment the difficulty and confusion that comes with determining one's sexual project.

Ambiguity around one's sexual project, which can be understood as the embodiment of poor sex education and inadequate sexual socialization, is precarious concerning reporting. Darcey illustrated this when she asserted "If I am confused with my identity then I feel like I am just going to be just as confused with reporting. Because I may ask *was this serious enough for me to go and report this.*" Student's uncomfortability and lack of awareness around their sexual project constitute a systemic barrier to reporting.

Missed Opportunities: Inadequate Orientation Programming

Not only did my interviewees confirm my suspicions that a widespread lack of awareness of sexual projects on the behalf of students detracts from a campus culture of sexual respect, but they also indicated that Denison has institutionally augmented this through inadequate

orientation programs. At Denison, all first-year students go through AUGO, August Orientation, in which a variety of programs are offered to educate students on topics critical to acclimating to college. Given this, one of my SHARE interviewees contended that AUGO “would be a really good opportunity to sit students down and be like “we know you are going to want to have sex so let’s talk about how to do it safely and well.” She continued to assert that “the education there is lacking” due to the “crazy” *Sex Signals* program. Every one of my interviewee’s displayed frustration and disgust at the consent education provided at AUGO, *Sex Signals*, which consists of a skit, put on by an outsourced company, surrounding themes of consent and healthy sex. Darcey asserted that “no one” likes the Sex SSignalsprogram and “that is not even a controversial statement.” Not only does the form and content of the skit detract from the pertinent need to explain consent in a way that resonates with students, but it adds to the confusion around consent due to its comedic style. When I attended a Sexual Respect Dialogue last fall, hosted by DCSR and SHARE, my small group of students not involved in sexual respect organizations, discussed the problematic nature of this orientation programming-- evidently, this is something that needs to change.

Not only does Denison institutionally detract from the adequate sex education of students through including the “Sex Signals” program at orientation, but they further belittle the sexual socialization of students by preventing SHARE and DCSR from having a sufficient platform during orientation. As my investigation into the campus landscape around sexual assault indicated, SHARE and DCSR are the cornerstones of our campus culture around sexual respect, sexual assault prevention, and support; in this way, it is a considerable disservice to students that these organizations do not lead sexual respect and consent education themselves. Moreover, these organizations possess critical knowledge concerning Title IX and reporting that the *Sex*

Signals program does not; these groups would not only promote sexual socialization but they would also help preemptively debunk myths concerning reporting sexual assault.

My SHARE and DCSR participants are not unaware of the disorder to the sexual landscape the institution perpetrates through their selection of orientation programming. Anna asserted “I know that being a part of SHARE and coming to talk at AUGO it kind of feels like they don’t want us there-- like we have to fight to be part of the conversation.” This statement took me aback-- what did she mean they had to fight to be part of the conversation, shouldn’t they be leading the conversation? To clarify that what I was assuming was right, I asked her who she had to fight, to which she responded “the administration.” She elaborated on this for me, painting a picture of the struggle that persists between the institution and these grass-roots sexual respect organizations:

When I was coming into junior year, I was on campus for AUGO for the first time [...] but they were not good at keeping us in the loop and we did not know what our schedule was supposed to be. There was a dialogue happening, I don’t remember exactly what it was about, but one of the AUGO leaders texted [the ex-president of DSCR] and was like this seems like a thing that you guys should be at. So we headed over but of course, the students were just getting out. Stuff like that, it’s not like they are really putting in the effort and sometimes it feels like they are just checking off the boxes-- which happens in a lot of places for sure, you know like, you say you are going to have a conversation and you do but it is not done thoroughly and in a way that is comfortable to listen to.

Ostensibly, consent education is viewed as a box that simply needs to be checked off; in this way, the institution ignores the structural roots of the problem and is not sensitive to the organizations that should be spearheading these conversations due to their deep understanding of both sexual

assault and the specific campus environment and culture at Denison. This is truly a disservice to students as, in Anna's words, "being more open and honest about it right off the bat would help a lot and help people feel more safe and comfortable."

Not only could improved education proliferate sexual respect awareness and a widespread feeling of safety, but it could also help ameliorate the problem of systemic under-reporting. Anna contended that more comprehensive sexual socialization and education could help reporting statistics on two accounts. Firstly, if DCSR and SHARE helped conceive of a more holistic program, this educational opportunity would make people more aware of the resources they had and more aware of what reporting sexual assault looks like. As indicated previously, widespread misunderstandings and fear around Title IX augment non-reporting; in this way, strong programming at orientation could displace these misunderstandings. Secondly, and more profoundly, my interviewee contended that:

Knowing that their support group around them is more educated may help people feel more comfortable. There is power in numbers, there is power in going to talk to your friend, and then going with them to Title IX or just knowing they have your back-- so I think that even in the social aspects it would help a lot.

If first-year students were sexually socialized, educated on their resources, and aware that all their peers at Denison were on the same page, then the campus culture around sexual assault and reporting could shift. As Anna underlined, there is power in numbers; critically educating students, thus providing them with sexual socialization, and engaging them in conversations around reporting could profoundly alter the campus environment and mitigate the dominance of structural sexual assault and systemic under-reporting.

It is critical to note that the Title IX Coordinator has spoken at AUGO in recent years to spread information on reporting; however, this appears to be insufficient due to widespread misconceptions of the reporting mechanisms. The Title IX Coordinator speaks to students following Sex Signals to provide them with information on her role in the campus sexual landscape and the resources available to students. Darcey alluded to a reason for this: it can be difficult to critically engage seventeen and eighteen-year-olds who have already been listening to informational programming for hours or even days. She included that “on the one hand I don’t want to discredit young people, but thinking about myself during AUGO I am not sure if even I would have paid close attention.” The fact that students are expected to understand consent and sexual respect after a ludicrous comedic program and informational talk from the Title IX Coordinator concerning reporting is rendered more nonsensical when considering how difficult it is to engage students who have been subject to hours of informational programming.

Although it is impossible to avoid the burden of information that is placed on students during orientation, it is very much possible to increase the salience of sexual socialization and education through instigating more profound and engaging programming. According to my participants, the Title IX Coordinator, unsurprisingly due to her efforts to transform the campus culture around sexual assault and reporting, wants to change the programming so that DCSR members “can get their face out there” and help ameliorate the inadequacies of the programming the institution puts forth, which they are contractually obliged to continue for the near future. According to Nina, improved consent and sexual respect education would “involve combining some programming with student participation and DCSR engagement in terms of what sex and sexual respect looks like at college.” Key actors in the campus landscape around sexual respect and assault are aware of what needs to be done to shift the campus environment in favor of

reporting and to ameliorate structural sexual assault. It is on the institution, however, to facilitate this.

It is critical to highlight a few areas of education that need to be addressed. Basic consent education is inadequate due to the complexities of navigating the campus environment and the power imbalances and social phenomenon embedded within this environment. In this way, ensuring that all students *understand consent* is structurally inadequate. As Darcey illustrated, despite poor sex education, consent is widely understood on a basic level, but this is not sufficient given the complexities of the social environment:

I think even though we don't have adequate sexual education, I think consent is pretty much understood like if you have a multiple choice question and four definitions, and one was the right one, people would know. But what does the right definition of consent mean? I think that a lot of students at Denison, I think more so for first years because it is their first time getting into the college party scene, Denison's hookup culture is huge, especially with alcohol. And I think that this is where we get questions the most: "how does alcohol tie into the definition of consent."

Indisputably, the campus environment, as with all colleges, poses obstacles to recognizing what giving and receiving consent embodies and requires. Party culture is central to this; in each of my interviews, a theme emerged in which party culture functions in opposition to sexual respect and towards non-belief concerning sexual assault, which is precarious concerning reporting, due to the ambiguities that emerge when coupling alcohol and sex. According to Darcey, "party culture is huge and gives a lot of grey areas for students trying to understand consent."

Illustrating this, she highlighted that some people argue that with "a drop there is no consent able to be given" which she counted as consent can still be given and "this is also a grey area in terms

of this is your own subjective you in terms of you knowing yourself and your sexual project even.” In this way, party culture and consent are intertwined with sexual projects, as an individual must conceive of how much they can drink to feel comfortable giving consent. Darcey further asserted that people can drink and consent because “you have the liberation of that's your sexual project.” It is necessary to explicitly expound on the role of alcohol following an individual’s sexual projects to facilitate a holistic understanding of consent and sexual respect.

As part of my survey, I asked respondents to define consent to discern students, who are not necessarily involved in any sexual organizations on campus, understand consent. The responses varied significantly, with some students asserting that consent must always be verbal, and others did not indicate that it has to be verbal. One respondent mentioned that involved parties can not be “overly intoxicated” and another even said that they “really do not think consent can be given if a person is drunk.” For the most part, respondents demonstrate an understanding that consent must be ongoing and that both parties must actively and mutually agree to sexual activities.

Interestingly, I also asked respondents to define sexual respect, and a clear distinction emerged between how students understand consent and how students understand sexual respect. Except for one respondent who defined sexual respect as “not sexually assaulting people, not making sexual comments or jokes”, almost all of the definitions for sexual respect reflected more nuanced understandings of mutual empathy and respect for the people’s boundaries and desires and comfort. Notably, multiple respondents indicated that sexual respect requires more care and emotional intelligence than consent. One respondent stated that they define sexual respect as “not treating someone or letting someone treat you as an object or only wanting you for one thing.” Another respondent articulated sexual respect as “respecting someone and their body and

listening to what they want.” In the context of sexual citizenship, these articulations of sexual respect are paramount as they indicate an understanding of respecting others’ rights to sexual self-determination. Students understand sexual respect in a way that is more conducive to nurturing their sexual projects and respecting others. Given this, it would be fruitful to educate students on sexual respect, in addition to consent, as basic understandings of consent are not robust in the same way that understandings of sexual respect are concerning sexual citizenship. Hirsch and Khan (2020) assert that sexual citizenship is not something that we are born understanding, but instead is institutionally and culturally fostered. Given this, Denison could augment the sexual agency of students, and a culture of sexual respect, by institutionalizing sexual respect education.

Due to systemic constraints on the ability of students, who are already underprepared concerning sex and consent culturally and systemically, to truly recognize consent, it is necessary to conceive of sex education that embraces the complexities that arise from the social relations and power dynamics embedded in the campus environment. Given this, it is necessary to educate students on sexual citizenship concerning their own and others; moreover, it would be incredibly fruitful to socialize students in a way that allows them to understand their sexual project and further recognize what this means for them concerning how they navigate the campus environment. Furthermore, it is pertinent to underline the social dynamics that both produce structural sexual assault and deter reporting, Some of these dynamics that must be forefront when teaching consent are the very structural barriers to reporting that I have highlighted thus far: rumor culture and its silencing power, social hierarchies, power-imbalances, and how agency and power relate to physical space.

Stemming from how students have been socialized in gendered power imbalances due to dominant cultural normalities, it is necessary for a robust sex education profoundly counter to these social constructions. Integral to this is elucidating dominant sexual scripts that prevail counter to sexual respect and consent. As Darcey noted, “coercion for consent is not consent but this is a common sexual script.” Particularly in the case of heterosexual relationships, there is a cultural gendered script of men pursuing and women resisting. This script manifests problematically due to how it translates to sexual assault. A DCSR member interviewee underlined this manifestation when she asserted that some young people do not understand that “no does not mean convince me.” Darcey further contended that especially for young people coming into college, this sexual script is very harmful and confusing. Subtly, this script can manifest in how young people feel entitled to others’ bodies. Darcey noted that she has noticed young men interpret an interpersonal connection to a young woman as an opportunity for coercion. For example, she noted the script of “oh, you know, we are in class together so this is another leeway for me to message you” and she further notes that this thought process is reflective of “those little ways of trying to communicate with someone where it is kind of like this coercion.” Darcey continued to assert that this is indicative of the importance of intention as behaviors like this are not inherently coercive but can be; moreover, these behaviors can compound to eventually extract consent when given the opportunity. This gendered sexual script of “no means convince me” is just one of the many cultural scripts that augment the inadequate sexual socialization of young people.

Robust sex and consent education and sexual socialization programming have the potential to radically shift the campus environment around sexual assault and reporting. By displacing dominant sexual scripts, elucidating the role of power, highlighting the problematic

phenomenon of silence and self-preservation, and centering the importance of knowing one's sexual project and respecting others', AUGO programming could facilitate shifting the campus culture around sexual assault and reporting; moreover, it could help cement new, positive social practices and trends into the campus environment, such as more widespread participation in the sexual landscape and possibly a less pervasive rumor culture when it comes to allegations of sexual respect. Anna noted that AUGO programming alone would not be sufficient, because these conversations need to be ongoing. Although AUGO programming alone would not be sufficient, it could interpellate more students to the cause of sexual respect and cement their participation in the sexual landscape; moreover, it would initiate these conversations from the moment students get on campus, which could profoundly aid having continued conversations on this topic. Furthermore, robust programming would equip students with the tools necessary to discover their sexual project, embrace the sexual citizenship of others, and thus construct a culture in which students are more acutely aware of their and others' boundaries than ever before, which could ameliorate structural sexual assault and systemic under-reporting.

Turning to an even bigger picture, once students graduate, they are not exempt from experiencing or perpetrating sexual violence; in this way, college may be the last opportunity for young people to be institutionally nurtured concerning understanding consent and sexual respect. Denison prides itself for producing "discerning moral agents." Arguably, to embody a discerning moral agent, one must in turn embody and promote sexual respect. Moreover, one cannot be a discerning moral agent if they have contributed to structural sexual assault. Given this, if Denison wants to pride itself in producing discerning moral agents, it must engage in the sexual socialization of these students to ameliorate structural sexual assault and systemic non-reporting.

IV. Structural Sexual Assault and Systemic Non-Reporting

Following structural violence theory, situating non-reporting within cultural and social systems allows for the less ethnographically visible to come to light. After examining the social embeddedness of sexual assault and non-reporting, it is evident that cultural contexts render students ill equip to navigate the campus sexual landscape. Moreover, it is manifest that social contexts create power imbalances that are not only conducive to sexual assault but conducive to non-reporting. Institutional and social conditions constrain students in discovering their sexual project and ascertaining sexual citizenship. Furthermore, institutional and social contexts inhibit survivor's when it comes to their decision to report. The compounding of these precarious social, cultural, and institutional contexts concerning sexual assault and reporting constitutes a profound form of structural violence.

My interviews with DCSR and SHARE members, coupled with the framework put forth by Hirsch and Khan (2020), indicate that college sexual assault is a structural problem. This is not to say that individuals are not responsible for assaulting others, but it is to say that they have not been nurtured by society in a way that is conducive to recognizing their relative power or the social contexts that allow for assault to happen. Culturally, for most of many students' lives, sex has been approached with uncomfortability and maybe even shame. It is these very cultural contexts that prevent the sexual socialization of young people and hinder their ability to understand their sexual projects and sexual citizenship in general. Moreover, when students arrive on campus, they are structurally vulnerable to assault due to how they have been systemically underprepared to be intentional and empowered sexual agents. Furthermore, students are structurally vulnerable to commit assault due to how they have been socialized in a culture that is reserved when discussing sex and educating young people on sex; given this

cultural context, it is unfair to expect young people to understand the nuances of sex and consent that come with recognizing one's own and others' sexual projects.

This larger cultural context compounds with the campus culture in a pernicious manner concerning reporting. A distinct narrative emerged in which the size and interconnectedness of the student body are conducive to a pervasive rumor culture that serves to silence individuals. The silencing of survivors constitutes an embodiment of structural violence and symbolic violence; non-reporting survivors are structurally oppressed by the social order and their implicit acceptance of this reflects symbolic violence (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Farmer 2004). Adding to the adverse effects concerning reporting that the student body culture produces is the salience of social status and power, and the visibility of social fate. Moreover, misconceptions around Title IX and the reporting mechanisms augment underreporting. Given these socially produced and structural barriers to reporting, non-reporting must be understood as a systemic problem, not the result of individual decisions.

Structural Barriers to Reporting

My survey data hauntingly affirms the findings that emerged from my interviews. I expected my survey findings to be less potent, due to how the participants were not necessarily engaged in the campus sexual assault discourse-- but this was not the case. The same social and structural barriers to reporting emerged from my survey, which underlines the salience of these social phenomena in our campus sexual assault landscape.

Included in the survey was a question concerning the role that the size of Denison plays in the campus culture around sexual assault reporting, and the responses were more in line with

the understanding I've developed through my ethnographic research than I ever could have imagined. For example, one survey respondent asserted:

Being a small student body, I think there is less anonymity on campus, so survivors of sexual assault are more likely to know their assaulter. Because of this, students who want to remain anonymous might be less likely to report out of fear of their assaulter finding out, or other students finding out. Similarly, fears of being subjected to rumors may also deter students from reporting sexual assault.

Echoing this, another respondent contends that "Denison's size, there tends to be fear regarding reporting sexual assault in that whatever you say will get back to that person in any capacity."

Not only did the survey results reinforce the idea that the rumor culture can be silencing, but they also affirmed the theme in which survivors may be reluctant to speak up in fear of retaliation.

Highlighting this, one survey respondent stated that "people are scared about seeing their assaulter around campus and them knowing that they said something." It is almost haunting how distinct the campus culture around sexual assault and reporting is; coupling my survey and interview data, it is evident that leaders within the campus sexual landscape and students are congruent in believing that the size of the campus environment and embedded culture adversely affect reporting.

On the survey, I directly ask my survey respondents to identify "any factors or conditions that may deter sexual assault reporting at Denison," and again, the responses were ominously aligned with the knowledge my interviews produced. One survey respondent simply answered that a lack of knowledge on how to report and Denison's failure to act" deters reporting. This is indicative of the salience of misunderstandings concerning Title IX regarding non-reporting.

Echoing this, another respondent identified deterrents in the "Lack of knowledge about the

reporting process” and “possible distrust in authority figures.” These responses critically support my interviewees’ assertions that misunderstandings and fear around the reporting mechanisms augment non-reporting.

Outside of the theme of misconceptions around reporting proliferating non-reporting, survey respondents again underlined that the size of Denison contributes to non-reporting. One respondent claimed that “Denison is a close-knit community, where many people are connected in a variety of different ways. It is difficult to say anything to someone that might impact someone's "reputation" because everyone seems to know everyone.” Ostensibly, the campus culture deters reporting due to the ways student networks are entangled. The relationship between the survivor and their assailant is critical concerning reporting; as one respondent noted, “the relationship people have to the person that assaulted them impacts whether or not they’ll report because they might feel uncomfortable calling that person out.” Another respondent noted a congruent phenomenon, identifying a deterrent in “the fact that everyone knows each other, as someone may be super well-known or well-liked around campus which would make it harder for a victim to report them.” The interpersonal dynamics, often grounded in social hierarchies and power, constitutes a burden for the survivor as it detracts from their agency and prevents them from making an autonomous decision based on what they want. When asked to identify a condition that may deter reporting, one respondent simply stated “The campus culture.” The awareness of these survey respondents, some of whom possibly have never had to think about these questions or concepts before, is indicative of the silence of the campus culture functioning to deter reporting.

Further reinforcing the picture my interviewees collectively painted of the social barriers to reporting embedded in our campus culture, survey respondents highlighted a deterrent to

reporting that is the fear of not being believed. Expounding on this, one respondent noted that on to of a fear of not being believed, a notion that reporting won't result in anything deters reporting; clarifying this, the respondent stated "i.e. the perpetrator won't be reprimanded, especially if they are someone with a higher social status like white males or athletes." This significantly underlines yet another prevalent theme in which the relative social status of their assailant contributes to the anxiety of the potential reporter.

Extensively, survey respondents revealed that alcohol and party culture plays a substantial role in the campus culture around sexual assault. According to one respondent, party culture "creates a grey area for understanding what sexual assault even is." This is indicative of the complexities of consent and sexual assault; one of my DCSR interviewees noted that most frequently she gets questions surrounding the role of alcohol and consent, which is eminently logical given that students may not understand how party culture and alcohol impact sexual assault.

Survey responses further indicated that belief is compromised by alcohol and party culture as survivors "think that if they were drunk people won't believe their story." Moreover, survivors were under the influence, they may be "scared of what people will say when they come forward" which contributes to systemic under-reporting. Furthermore, survey responses indicated that party culture augments self-blame as if survivors were under the influence "it is likely they will not report and blame themselves for the incident." Concerning reporting, party culture systemically deters reporting by proliferating self-blame and increasing anxieties around non-belief. Highlighting the wider cultural context of this, one respondent asserted that "party culture, in general, makes it harder to report sexual assault because of a lot of pre-existing stigma around parties and sex. I.e; 'she was drunk', or 'she was dressed like a slut'." In this way, party

culture invites victim-blaming. Survey responses indicated that statements evolving around how survivors were behaving, or if they were under the influence of alcohol, are often present in discussions of an alleged sexual assault and “are often used as blame for their actions or the assaulter’s actions.” Responses further elucidated that this profoundly impacts reporting as “an keep people from reporting because they don’t want to be questioned or not taken seriously because they were under the influence.”

Notably, a respondent underlined the pernicious environment that party culture induces when they asserted that “At Denison especially there is a lot of pressure to drink and most people do when they go to a party. This makes sexual assault difficult because it is easier to just blame whatever on the alcohol and use it as a dangerous excuse.” Alcohol complicates consent and sexual assault; given this, the fact that students feel pressured to drink provides a social context for structural sexual assault as well as a systemic barrier to reporting. The phenomena in which party culture and alcohol consumption adversely impacts sexual assault and reporting is not unique to Denison; however, evidently, this cultural context compounds with other structural components destructively.

My ethnographic data verifies that social and cultural contexts produce structural barriers to reporting. Structural barriers to reporting aggregate to structural violence as survivors are structurally confined by the cultural and social systems they exist in; the social embeddedness of reporting creates a context in which survivors lack agency and power in their decision to report, due to the social constraints placed on them. Farmer (2004) contends that structural violence is embodied in the adverse consequences it has for the oppressed; non-reporting has tangible and psychological adverse consequences for survivors, which indicates that non-reporting is conducive to the embodiment of structural violence.

Silence and Self-Preservation

The weight of an unsympathetic rumor culture is augmented by the interconnectedness of our student body, and the burden of the visibility of social hierarchies and social fate compounds to produce phenomena in which survivors remain silent out of self-preservation.

Survey respondents highlighted a theme in which the survivor is deterred from reporting out of a desire to protect their reputation, and possibly the reputation of their assailant, which underlines the theme of social fate that emerged throughout my interviews. One respondent stated, “I honestly think and know of many cases that go unreported because of how small the school is and the reputation factor.” Another respondent echoed this, asserting that “Rumors also play a big role because people don’t want to give or receive a reputation that will stay with them through their time here.” It is salient that students are acutely aware of the role of social reputation considering reporting, as this underlines the fact that being responsible for one's reputation and social fate, and wanting to preserve one’s reputation, serves to silence victims. Dismally, the size and connectedness of the student body intertwine with rumor culture and the visibility of social fate to produce a phenomenon in which silence allows for self-preservation in a manner that deters reporting.

Silence for self-preservation is indicative of sexual assault non-reporting as an embodiment of symbolic violence. Survivor silence drives the problem of non-reporting, thus, this silence is a critical phenomenon. Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) illustrate that symbolic violence is characterized by the oppressed attributing their oppression to the status quo, thus justifying self-blame and in the case of sexual assault reporting, inaction. Sexual assault non-reporting should not be the natural order of things, as survivors should not accept a lack of

justice; however, evidently, the social embeddedness of reporting creates a context where non-reporting is the status quo.

V. What Now?

What can the university do to ameliorate structural sexual assault and systemic non-reporting? What can students do? What can society do?

Embarking on this project, I did not want to simply describe the social existence of sexual assault and non-reporting, instead, I wanted to be able to prescribe solutions, or, partial solutions. It is evident that the roots of structural sexual assault and systemic non-reporting form far before students arrive at Denison; given this, the social context surrounding sex and sexual assault needs to shift in wider cultural contexts, as well as at Denison, to ameliorate structural sexual assault and systemic non-reporting.

I reflect on one particular Hirsch and Khan (2020) quote almost every day, so wish to underline it one more time:

All of us have allowed social conditions to persist in which many young people come of age without a language to talk about their sexual desires, overcome with shame, unaccustomed to considering how their relative social power may silence a peer” (Hirsch and Khan 2020: 255).

The inability for students to construct enlightened sexual projects, and develop sexual citizenship in a way that mitigates sexual assault, is in the hands of every actor in society-- especially those with the power and means to counter this through the sexual socialization of young people. A potential benefit of this research is helping everyone understand that they have a stake in the game when it comes to the sexual citizenship of college students and that they can enact cultural shifts that could profoundly improve the sexual well-being of young adults across the country.

Ostensibly, a critical solution lies in the abolition of “abstinence-only” and socially limited sex education programs. It is evident from my ethnographic data that sex education is extremely limited and does not provide students the language necessary to navigate the sexual landscape of college; this is especially true for non-heterosexual students as many sex education programs are behind the times concerning including the LGBTQ community. It is paramount that before stepping foot on a college campus, which is symbolic of entering a new stage in life marked by considerably more independence and freedom, young people are equipped with the tools to understand their own desires and how to respect others desires while taking into account relative power and the reality of the situation for the other person. This necessitates radical shifts in sex education that, if possible, will take decades to saturate the entire country, especially due to the culture war phenomena that ties sex to ideology and divides the nation concerning comprehensive and inclusive sex education. Given the gravity of this task, and the vast amount of work that would go into it, this solution feels far away, and although hopefully, sex education will help ameliorate structural sexual assault, it is necessary to conceive of more immediate solutions.

The inadequate sex education and sexual socialization that prevails in society necessitate robust re-education; this is where colleges and universities have a considerable opportunity to facilitate the sexual well-being of their students and help ameliorate structural sexual assault and systemic non-reporting. If people have not been educated to be intentional and aware of their sexual interactions, then at some level, the institution is failing them in its lack of re-education concerning the sexual socialization of its students. It is insufficient to provide basic consent education, through the form of a comedic skit that perhaps adds to the fog around consent; in this

way, the institution needs to step up and radically change how they check the box for sexual assault prevention. More aggressive policy is needed to counter how we are socialized.

In part, the university is assessing the situation differently, so they need to be taught to think more aggressively. By assessing situations differently, I mean that they are naive to the spectrum of sexual assault that incorporates more nuanced embodiments of nonconsensual sexual interactions. It may be the case that a significant percentage of assaults and non-reports are by-products of the collective fog around sexual citizenship. Black and white sexual assault cases, the “classic” rape type narrative that involves a sexual perpetrator and obvious victim, and much easier to address, and maybe the university does address these cases adequately, but these are not the bulk of unreported sexual assault cases. As structural sexual assault makes manifest, some situations are potentially sexual assault but unintentionally so; it is exactly these “grey” cases that need to be prevented through improved sexual socialization.

Only once the institution truly understands the nuances of sexual assault, through the very framework and concepts that structured this project, will it understand the gravity of its role in educating and sexual socializing its students. Arguably, once this is the case, the institution will understand that sexual respect requires the same collectivist standard as the mission statement of the university embodies. The mission statement included in the “Personnel Policies Handbook for Administrative Staff” reads as follows:

Our purpose is to inspire and educate our students to become autonomous thinkers, discerning moral agents, and active citizens of a democratic society. Through an emphasis on active learning, we engage students in a liberal arts education that fosters self-determination and demonstrates the transformative power of education. We envision our students' lives as based upon rational choice, a firm belief in human dignity and

compassion unlimited by cultural, racial, sexual, religious, or economic barriers, and as directed toward an engagement with the central issues of our time. (Denison University)

Given these sentiments, one could argue that sexual citizenship should be a pillar of the university's mission to embrace the transformative power of education and foster the self-determination of students. After all, sexual citizenship comes down to self-determination, empowerment, human dignity, and engagement with a critical issue of our time. If Denison wants to genuinely produce discerning moral agents, it must construct robust re-education programs that counter how students are sexualized in precarious gendered scripts and an uncomfortability around discussing one's right to sexual self-determination and pleasure.

As indicated in my ethnographic data, August Orientation is an eminently critical time to engage students in re-education and sexual socialization programs, which should continue in some form throughout a student's college career. It would be incredibly fruitful for this educational experience to be grounded in a similar framework to the one that arranges this project; a framework that focuses on how sexual assault and non-reporting emerge from social conditions while also focusing on how individuals can counter these social conditions through embracing sexual citizenship is critical as it places the problem at the societal and individual levels. A focus on the concepts of sexual citizenship, sexual projects, and sexual geographies, as well as information on the reporting process, could profoundly change the culture that is conducive to structural sexual assault and systemic non-reporting. The institution has a tremendous support system and avenue for doing this in the student organizations in the sexual landscape: DCSR and SHARE. If students are equipped with the tools conducive to sexual citizenship at the beginning of their Denison experience, then their engagement with these

groups through events like the Sexual Respect Dialogues throughout their time on the hill could yield profound effects concerning the campus environment.

On a more concealed yet integral dimension, if the institution truly understands the nuances of sexual assault, it may be more adamant in mediating the campus culture around sexual assault. Embracing the structural roots of sexual assault and systemic deterrents to reporting may inspire the institution to take all sexual assault allegations more seriously, regardless of the narrative, which could profoundly facilitate reporting in the long term. In the context that a systemic deterrent to reporting rests in the distrust of survivors in the ability of the reporting process to provide justice, a proliferation of consequences for sexual deviance, which may also be reimagined in the context of structural sexual assault, would signal to potential reporters the efficacy of the reporting process. Under these circumstances, the institution could assist in enhancing reporting, and, in turn, support a culture in which students are acutely intentional concerning sexual respect, aware of the harm assault would inflict on both the assailant and the survivor.

The absence of conversations surrounding sexual assault on the institutional level adds to the discomfort that hampers reporting; given this, Denison plays an institutional role in both structural sexual assault and systemic reporting. My IRB process was emblematic of the uncomfortableness around the topic that prevails in the campus environment. Sexual assault made the IRB so uncomfortable that the process took three times as long as it should have, and resulted in changes to my project. Sexual assault is not something that we should be unsettled by and should certainly not be something difficult to research; the campus community should be fluent in talking about it. We need to make these discussions normative so that it isn't a problem to talk about because these institutional and social attitudes fuel structural sexual assault and

systemic non-reporting. If the institution itself is uncomfortable having productive discussions around sexual respect and sexual assault, how are students expected to be having them?

Mitigating the stigma around sexual assault that functions as a second burden for survivors and deters reporting requires normalizing discussions of sexual citizenship, sexual well-being, sexual respect, and sexual assault. This necessitates all members of the institution, and society for that matter, to be open-minded to re-imagining sexual respect and sexual assault, as it will take widespread consciousness-raising on the issue to instigate any real cultural change. Hirsch and Khan (2020) assert that they attempted to write *Sexual Citizens* from a place of empathy and hope. Approaching sexual assault from a place of empathy, through situating it in social contexts that disservice all young people, including perpetrators of sexual assault, is paramount in re-casting sexual assault; this empathy has immense potential in shifting how we as a society understand sexual assault, which has subsequent potential to mitigate the prevalence of structural sexual assault. There will always be sexual predators, but structural sexual assault is fundamentally different from these cases, which necessitates its distinction and the re-defining sexual assault.

Hope is central to this research. There is immense hope in the re-education of young people as this would not only ameliorate structural sexual assault and systemic non-reporting in the first place, but it would also have a profound domino effect. Equipping an entire generation of young people with the skills necessary to re-cast sexual assault and change the way that sexual respect is understood and embodied has extensive social implications. This generation is the nation's next parents, educators, and leaders; how this generation approaches sexual respect and sexual assault has immense implications for the social fabric concerning gender and sex for the future. Universities and colleges across the country are at the precipice of deep social change, but

will they continue to shy away from the topic and proliferate harm by contributing to the collective social fog around sexual respect and sexual assault? Or, will they rise to the challenge and change the cultural fabric of society forever?

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