To Report or Not to Report:
The Experience of Reporting Sexual Misconduct at Dartmouth College and Decision-Making in the Context of Student Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Sexual misconduct, a term that encompasses sexual assault, stalking, sexual and gender-based harassment, and dating violence, has been one of the topics at the forefront of Dartmouth College’s recent reforms and initiatives. The initiatives have made changes to the process of sexual misconduct reporting, including the addition of a Title IX coordinator and the creation of additional support resources for students. Though Dartmouth’s sexual violence policies are similar to other liberal arts colleges, Dartmouth’s recent changes in reporting policy present a unique opportunity to analyze how these policy implementations have translated into sexual violence survivors’ reporting experiences, especially in regards to mental health and well-being. Previous research has focused on the opinions and experiences of mainly white, heterosexual female students in the actual reporting procedure, but Dartmouth’s diverse student population also presents an opportunity to analyze the issues of race, class, gender and sexual orientation in the context of mental health between the time of an incident and reporting. Hence, Dartmouth is the perfect case to pose and answer these questions: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Dartmouth College’s sexual violence policies, especially in terms of reporters’ mental health and emotional well-being? How do various identities of race, class, gender and sexual orientation affect these perceptions and lived experiences? This inductive, mixed methods, and exploratory research works with in-depth, non-random and convenience sample interviews with 16 Dartmouth students of diverse backgrounds, as well as a non-random and convenience sample campus survey of 266 current Dartmouth undergraduate and graduate students. Both the experiences of reporters and perceptions of Dartmouth students are analyzed to interpret the direct and indirect effects of recent policy implementation on mental health and well-being, with a focus on previously under-studied groups. This research finds that race, class, gender and sexual orientation are all factors that affect both perceptions of Dartmouth’s support of survivors and their own experiences of dealing with reporting at the College. As a result, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the experiences of reporting sexual misconduct at Dartmouth College, making way for a new set of policy recommendations. These recommendations include centralizing resources for support and information, hiring and prioritizing advocates to help students with the reporting process, and a higher demonstrated level of commitment to support survivors of sexual violence.
INTRODUCTION

Sexual Violence at US Colleges and Universities

More and more cases of sexual assault and domestic violence are reported every year and, coinciding with the increased media coverage about campus assaults, educational institutions nationwide are currently being pushed by both students and the public to make decisive reforms to combat this ‘epidemic.’ These methods include instituting primary prevention that reduces the number of sexual assaults by addressing the root causes, such as requiring education programs around consent and rape culture, secondary prevention that mitigates harm as an assault is occurring, such as bystander initiative training, and tertiary prevention by appointing a Title IX Coordinator who helps to reduce the long-term harm from a sexual assault, such as a zero-tolerance policy and transparent adjudication process. All three approaches work together to prevent many sexual assaults and mitigate the consequences of the ones that do occur.

However, the reforms made to increase safety on campuses cannot be effective if they do not have the opportunity to be implemented because of low reporting rates. Reporting sexual misconduct currently focuses on the official procedures and policies of Title IX, rather than on the experience of the reporter. Hence, because of the focus on the ends rather than the means, there is relatively less concentration on making the reporting process a non-invasive and sensitive experience for the reporter. In the context of the current realities of sexual violence on college and university campuses, students are not willing to go through the reporting process, and so avoid reporting altogether. Thus, the rates of reporting sexual violence have been consistently low, making it hard to hold perpetrators accountable when incidents are largely left unreported to officials (North 2016).
We know that there are many factors that contribute to a low reporting rate; reporting to a college, university or any authority is hard to navigate mentally, emotionally and logistically. One factor that students keep at the forefront of their minds is the fact that winning a case against a perpetrator is hard to do—only a small proportion, less than one-third, of cases successfully punish the perpetrator in some way. Why would students sacrifice their time, well-being and energy for something that goes against all odds, especially without formal evidence or witnesses? Another large factor is mental health. Many issues can get in the way of pursuing a report: a survivor doesn’t come to terms with an incident of sexual violence, has to get academic accommodations, take time off school, or even has bouts of anxiety, sleeplessness, or PTSD. Any and all of these realities make the thought of reporting anything from a major inconvenience to an unimaginable burden.

*Sexual Violence at Dartmouth College*

Dartmouth College reflects the broader sexual violence policy reforms of other colleges and universities. Since being placed in violation of Title IX for sexual violence policies in 2014, Dartmouth College’s sexual violence policies have undergone a number of changes over the past few years. In 2014, the college reformed their adjudication process, and with it brought on a fulltime Title IX Coordinator and a unified sexual misconduct policy. Dartmouth has also participated in the national AAU surveys to measure perceptions and climate around sexual violence and reporting policies and procedures. These surveys have been conducted nationwide at a number of colleges and universities, and capture student’s experiences and opinions in relation to campus safety and climate in regards to sexual violence. Finally, the Student and Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault (SPCSA), a student-led group that reports directly to the President of Dartmouth College, makes annual recommendations to continually improve the College’s policies and procedures.
What still needs to be explored and addressed in light of these new reforms are the various realities and experiences of Dartmouth students in their navigations and negotiations of the reporting process. Does Dartmouth College succeed in supporting student survivors? Do students themselves feel that their safety is protected and their voices heard? Through my interviews with 16 students of different backgrounds, stories and perspectives, I have collected and synthesized their reasons for reporting, the obstacles that prevent them from doing so, and the various mental, emotional and logistical challenges they face between an incident of sexual violence and the reporting process. The single largest reason that Dartmouth students wanted to report was to protect others from being assaulted by the same perpetrator. Students point to the various obstacles that constitute the hardest part of the reporting process; that is to say, the uncertain in-between time before deciding whether or not to officially report an incident of sexual violence to the College.

Above all, three things were very clear: Firstly that students felt that they didn’t have the information they needed to make their decisions, secondly that they didn’t have adults they trusted to advocate for them and their well-being, and thirdly that the College didn’t support them as survivors. Therefore, this research specifically focuses on this vulnerable and difficult period before an official report takes place and brings forward solutions that the College must consider in order to minimize mental and logistical hardships for a survivor who wants to report.

Significance of the Study

This research is important because it brings an intimate understanding of real-life experiences that surveys and empirical studies cannot capture. Sexual violence is not only a gender issue but also a race issue, a class issue, and an LGBTQ issue. It has long been established that women, people of color, and queer people are disproportionately targets of sexual violence, as a result of historical oppression and targeted violence (Crenshaw 1991, Kalof 2001, Bubar 2010, Fagan
2011, Olive 2012, Potter 2012, National Sexual Violence Resource Center 2012). Sexual violence is about power—perpetrators will use their power in a situation to inflict violence on another. The issue of sexual violence must be viewed through multiple lenses. For example, women of color’s experience of sexual assault and its aftermath "are fundamentally different from that of white women for multiple reasons...because women of color have been subjugated to a long history of racism and socioeconomic forces...[which] include battling a long history characterized by racial violence in the United States, stereotypes and racism that mark victims as responsible for their rapes or "unrapable", poverty, distrust of and alienation from public services, and the lack of availability of resources, such as rape crisis centers and health care" (Olive 2012). If we are to support and protect all students on Dartmouth’s campus, we must understand how sexual violence impacts different communities on campus, especially minority communities, differently, and have various barriers and experiences unique to their identity. If the College believes diversity and inclusivity to be important goals, then let the issue of sexual violence on campus be a part of that.

Dartmouth’s recent participation in the 2015 Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct has brought to light new information on campus climate and student perceptions on sexual misconduct policies and procedures at the College. According to the survey, 68% of students believe it is very or extremely likely that a report of sexual assault would be taken seriously by campus officials, and 60% said that it is very or extremely likely that the individual’s safety would be protected. These are encouraging statistics that indicate some positive perceptions in Dartmouth’s policy. Yet, only 43% believe that campus officials would conduct a fair investigation in the event of a report of sexual assault or misconduct, and only 45% of students said it was very or extremely likely that campus officials would take action against the
offender. Across all of these measures, female and LGBTQ students tended to be more negative in their perceptions than male or straight students.

Consequently, we now know many descriptive statistics perceptual differences between men and women at Dartmouth through the AAU surveys, but the surveys miss intersectional aspects to students’ identities, such as the combinations and collisions of class, race and sexuality, that may inform their decision making when it comes to reporting. Also, the survey misses an integral aspect of the reporter and survivor’s experience: their state of mental health and wellbeing, both after an incident of sexual violence and during the reporting process. Hence, this research aims to fill the gap of the AAU survey and provide an introduction into experiences of reporters that describes both students’ complex identities and how these identities, along with mental health, factor into the reporting process. This research will provide an avenue for a more intimate understanding of the factors not often discussed when it comes to reporting and open the conversation surrounding mental health and its relation to the reporting process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dartmouth-Specific Policies and Definitions

This Dartmouth-specific research requires an overview of the uses of specific language, and an outline of Dartmouth’s Unified Disciplinary Procedures:

“Dartmouth College ("Dartmouth" or "the College") is firmly committed to maintaining an educational environment in which sexual and gender-based harassment and Sexual Assault (collectively, "sexual misconduct") are not tolerated, and in which persons reporting sexual misconduct are provided support and avenues of redress. When sexual misconduct is brought to
the attention of the school, Dartmouth will take prompt and appropriate action to end the misconduct, prevent its recurrence, and address its effects.”

Dartmouth College refers to sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating or domestic violence, and stalking collectively as “sexual misconduct.”¹ The College makes a commitment to address and prevent sexual violence on campus and to support the students affected. Dartmouth’s Response Procedure is made up of two stages: one of support and initial assessment, and the other the disciplinary process that is conducted by an outside investigator². The disciplinary process is completed within 60 days.

Dartmouth’s recent reforms include the hiring of a full-time Title IX Coordinator and Clery Act Compliance Officer and a counselor specializing in issues of sexual trauma, created a centralized “Sexual Respect” webpage, signed an MOU with WISE to bolster support resources, and started the Sexual Violence Prevention Project, a mandatory and comprehensive four-year sexual violence prevention program. These support Dartmouth’s aim at achieving "a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach to educating the campus community about how to prevent, respond to, and address sexual misconduct…that…considers environmental risk and protective factors as they occur on the individual, relationship, institutional, community and societal levels" (Dartmouth Annual Security and Fire Safety Report 2016) Dartmouth College commits to looking at individual, institution, communal and societal causes for sexual violence on campus, therefore using the socioecological model to address and prevent.

¹ While Dartmouth College uses the official language of “sexual misconduct,” throughout this report I use the term “sexual violence” to encompass and accurately convey the seriousness of these various acts.
² The outside investigator has no affiliation to the school, and is therefore able to complete a complete and objective assessment without any outside influence.
**Students’ Barriers and Motivations to Reporting Sexual Violence**

Student perceptions and concerns of reporting sexual violence on college campuses rest on many social, cultural, legal and logistical considerations. Socially, students may have fears that function as barriers to reporting, such as fear of embarrassment, shame, guilt, and not wanting friends to know (Sable 2006). There can be a pressure to not report, because the student deems the incident not serious enough (Ullman 2007). A survivor may also be hesitant to report because of the involvement of alcohol in the incident. This has been labeled a phenomenon known as “alcohol myopia,” where at least half of assaults involve alcohol consumption, and therefore create barriers to reporting either out of fear of getting in trouble or being blamed (Abbey 2002).

Culturally, it is assumed that the purpose of reporting is to achieve some sort of just outcome, whether for the safety of the survivor, or prevention of future incidents (James 2015). This assumption can cause the outcomes of reporting to take priority over any other aspect, including mental health and well-being of the reporter. Such an assumption, suggesting a rational and linear reporting process, disregards considerations for the effects on a reporter, both emotionally and mentally. In reality, students weigh the decision to report against any negative outcomes that could happen as a result of reporting and can feel many different ways about the process at any given point (Sable 2006).

Administratively, as well, there exist barriers to reporting. In fact, there are some instances when potential reporters may see the process of an investigation as a hindrance to healing or even potentially triggering because of outdated administrative adjudication methods that are more focused on reporting outcomes rather than the process and effect on student mental health (Amar 2014). The process of going through an investigation may be stricken with biases on the part of police investigators or college administrators, and in combination with a relative lack of
transparency of policies and procedures, students develop negative perceptions and trust levels of police or administration (James 2015). Campus administration may not have the proper mental health resources or help, which also decreases the trust in administrative reporting because of a perceived lack of caring or empathy (Amar 2014).

The Dartmouth AAU survey points to a primary socio-cultural reason why students do not report incidents to an agency or organization: They did not consider the incident serious enough. More than sixty-four percent of survivors at Dartmouth did not think their incident was serious enough to merit reporting. A significant percentage of individuals said they did not report because they did not think anything would be done about it (35.1%) or feared it would not be kept confidential (23.8%), which point to the administrative barriers to reporting (Cantor 2015). Hence, both the socio-cultural and administrative aspects of reporting play a role in students’ decision making regarding reporting.

**Importance of Mental Health in Reporting**

There is a relative lack of literature exploring the issue of mental health as a potential explanation for students’ decision-making when it comes to reporting an incident of sexual violence. The literature that exists, however, points to mental health as a crucial aspect of reporters’ overall wellness in the aftermath of a sexual violence incident (Ullman 2007). There also exists, however, the trend of colleges not being able to satisfy the mental health needs of students either by perpetuating harmful societal norms or not providing adequate resources (Campbell 2009). One such mental health obstacle arises as a result of cultural expectations of gender. It has been found that men react to mental health labels and seek for help in different ways than women because of cultural constructions of gender and masculinity (Berger 2013), therefore creating differences in how mental health resources reach and treat female versus male students. Dartmouth College may
not be equipped to handle mental health crises or immediate needs relating to sexual violence without understanding a more nuanced view of the various barriers to reaching out for help.

Survivors at Dartmouth find themselves in the crippling dilemma of having to prove their word consistently: “It's a helpless feeling if you have no real evidence, if there are no witnesses. What can you say? You know that the claim isn't going to come to fruition.” This ties into the larger issue of mental and emotional health that is instrumental to a survivor’s decision making regarding reporting. Mental health can play a large role in dis-incentivizing students from reporting after they’ve heard the horror stories of the mental strain, and sometimes abuse, that is part of many students’ reporting experience: “She went through with officially reporting it, and went in front of like a panel, and just told her story over and over again, and she said the words started to feel like they weren't her own anymore, and that her story was detached from herself.” Or, conversely, the shock and disbelief in the aftermath of sexual violence result in survivors denying the gravity of the event for weeks, months and even years: “I didn't realize there was anything I had to cope with.” Finally, the stress and the worries, the uncertainty and fears, manifest in different and subtle ways—sleep loss, academic difficulties, and heightened bouts of anxiety. For one student, “It was constantly on my mind. It was such a huge thing, it affected how well I slept, I would even have dreams about it. When I woke up, I would wish that this whole thing was a dream. It affected my work because I was distracted by wanting to do something about it.” Survivors can experience PTSD after the event, triggering a traumatic response in stressful moments, such as the reporting process (Ullman 2007). Survivors may already have to take time off school because they cannot concentrate, or they may not be able to function from day-to-day, so an added burden of reporting to authorities would surely not even cross their minds as something that would help them heal or move on.
Relative Lack of Knowledge on Diverse Experiences of Students

At Dartmouth, 27.9% female, 4.5% male, and 26.4% trans and non-binary students have experienced sexual assault "involving physical force or incapacitation" since entering college (Cantor et al 2015). However, much of the national literature on campus sexual violence reporting focuses on the trends among heterosexual, white women (Kalof 2001). Studies beyond this limited demographic are essential to gaining a more complete picture of sexual violence and decisionmaking regarding reporting on college campuses because the experiences and implications of sexual orientation and race in the reporting process remain largely unknown.

LGBTQ students face more violence and discrimination compared to their straight peers: 12.3% of Dartmouth students who identify as straight have been sexually assaulted, while those who do not identify as straight are almost twice as likely to be sexually assaulted (20.0%) (Cantor et al 2015). One study addresses the particular challenges of being an LGBT student when reporting, finding that because of difficulty in disclosing their sexual and gender orientations and potential re-victimization when seeking services from authorities, many choose to not report or disclose the an assault or incident of harassment (Potter 2012). However, the limitation of this particular study is that it focuses on bystander initiatives to alleviate these difficulties, rather than study how these difficulties affect the students’ mental health. In terms of gender, the majority of the literature frames males as perpetrators and women as victims, without a more nuanced analysis that includes male, transgender, and non-binary survivors.

Additionally, there are stark contrasts in the victimization rates by race at Dartmouth: Native students (28.5%), Black students (19.5%), White students (13.6%), and Asian students
(9.8%) (Cantor et al 2015). However, the literature on the effect of race when it comes to reporting sexual violence on college campuses also has its limitations. Though there exist a studies on racial differences sexual assault and reporting, these differences are largely only measured between white women and black women, furthering the harmful and incomplete notion of the black/white binary (Carmody 2001). This study gives no indication of how other races or genders experience sexual assault policies on college campuses. Finally, other studies (Fagen 2011, Krebs 2011) focus on comparing the rate of sexual assault of women by race, but do not focus on their experiences in reporting these assaults. These studies are done mostly focusing on women without acknowledgement of other intersectional issues such as gender and sexual orientation, which could be variables that confound race.

The research is hence missing the experiential and qualitative components of what it means for aspects of identity to impact the reporting process and one’s mental health, which is where I aim to fill the gap in the literature.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To address the gaps in the literature relating college sexual misconduct policies to issues of mental and emotional health on the part of the survivor, and especially focusing on factors of personal identity, I ask the following questions: 1) What are the perceptions and lived experiences of Dartmouth College’s sexual violence policies, especially in terms of reporters’ mental health and emotional well-being? 2) How do various identities of race, class, gender and sexual orientation affect these perceptions and lived experiences?
METHODS

Proposed Research Design

To answer my two-part research question, I first identified and operationalized my main independent and dependent variables. The main independent variables of this study are 1) Dartmouth College’s sexual violence policies and procedures, and 2) student identity. Operationalized, the College’s policy outline and students’ experiential narratives indicate the sexual violence policies and procedures in both theory and practice. The reason for having both is because the “official” policy and process is not guaranteed to be exactly the same on paper as it is in practice. It is crucial to record the students’ experience in the process, as it becomes a better indicator of what the “real” sexual violence reporting procedure is. Meanwhile, student identity is operationalized by collecting information on race, gender and sexual orientation as self-identified categories. This nominal variable data is used both quantitatively and qualitatively to collect general demographic information and reveal correlations among specific student identities.

The main dependent variable of this study is mental health. Operationalized, I measure the perceived and actual effects of reporting on mental health. To operationalize the lived effects of reporting on mental health, I identify specific code words in interview transcripts, in the form of mentions of negative outcomes on mental health, reflecting on negative experiences after the event of sexual violence, or descriptions of depression, stress, anxiety, fear or loneliness, among other indications. The reason for measuring the lived effects and experiences of mental health is to build theory both deductively and inductively. Mental health is studied deductively by building a context

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3 I will be using the term “Mental Health” throughout this report to refer to a person’s condition regarding their psychological and emotional well-being.
of students’ opinion around Dartmouth campus climate, and inductively by garnering insight into the experiential and personal aspects of mental health.

Though I considered using an instrument that can measure mental health more objectively, such as a specifically designed mental health questionnaire, my larger goal is to measure more of the subjective experiences and feelings of the reporters, rather than a calibrated ordinal level measurement, because the feelings and experiences of a potential reporter are more viscerally felt and a more powerful description through storytelling than through numbers. Because this is an exploratory study, in addition to rejecting empirical measurements of mental health in students, I also avoid drawing definite conclusions on causation. I bring up certain factors that seem to be influential in mental health and perceptions of Dartmouth’s reporting policies from the trends and patterns that I collect in interviews and the survey, but I do not draw independent conclusions as a result.

The population for this research is undergraduate and graduate students at Dartmouth College. For the interview, the population is students who have thought about reporting an incident of sexual violence to the school. This means that included in this population are those that, though they have experienced sexual violence, they may or may not have decided to report. Because I also want to understand the perspectives of those who chose not to report through the campus-wide survey, the population must be larger in order to incorporate that group. I used a non-random convenience sample, which was collected in a cross-sectional manner, from September to November 2016, during the Dartmouth Fall academic term. A convenience sample fits this research because reporters of sexual violence are in a position of heightened sensitivity and require a level of agency in choosing to be part of the research. The advantage to this sampling method is by using Dartmouth school-wide email listservs and posting flyers in public places such as the library or
student centers for easy dissemination, it cuts cost and potential invasiveness in finding participants. The emails for both the survey and interview were sent through the Dartmouth Student and Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault (SPCSA) email account. The convenience sample is an advantage in allowing an added security measure for participants to directly choose to be a part of the research rather than be selected. However, the non-random nature of the sample skews the representation in terms of students self-selecting to be part of the research, which is a disadvantage.

The security and participation of the research participants is especially important in this research because of the sensitive and confidential nature of the topic of sexual violence and reporting. Therefore, all measures of confidentiality and security are taken to obtain consent for the research. I have disassociated any identifying information from the interviews and have kept all participant information confidential. I used a research information sheet to obtain written consent for the interview and obtained oral consent after reviewing the purpose and methods of the research with the participant in advance. I disassociate all names and identifying information from the oral interview and redact it during the transcription process so that the transcript can be shared with SPCSA without any breach of confidentiality. All audio files, names and contact information of participants are kept confidential. Finally, all research materials with confidential information will be destroyed within six months of research completion, ensuring that the participants’ identifying information stays within the realm of my control and only for a minimal amount of time.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of the Research Design**

A non-random convenience sample for this research is a drawback of the research design. Because my research is designed to gain a large variety of perspectives, my aim was to interview as many different participants as possible. However, with a convenience sample, there was always
a chance that only a certain population of students would volunteer to participate, skewing the sample representation. The limitations of this sampling method, along with the small sample size, have resulted in a lack of representation and understanding of several historically under-studied groups that I had hoped to interview. I was not able to make any sound conclusions about various communities of color or discern intersections with other forms of identity that influence mental health and decision-making. I did not find significant voices to even start to represent LGBTQ or male perspectives. Most notably, I was not able to cover other forms of identity, such as disability status, that may be an important aspect to many students in the context of reporting. A final limitation of this sampling was that most participants talked about their experiences regarding sexual assault, so I was largely unable to make any conclusions on other forms of sexual violence and how they might differ in their reporting processes.

However, these limitations would also exist with probability sampling, where contacting the student and asking them to participate, especially in my position as a white female, may cause only a certain population to feel comfortable enough to agree to participate. Aside from this approach, obtaining a list of those who have reported sexual violence to the College would be unethical. With the convenience sample, I decided when the data had reached saturation, and hence make a knowledgeable decision as to how many interviews were necessary in order to get a meaningful amount of data rather than setting an arbitrary goal for the number of interviews done, as would be the case with a probability sample. Therefore, by letting the participant decide to participate independently, the research design saves time and money on outreach efforts, and sticks to ethical and effective methods of collecting participants.
Data Collection

The data collection of this research constitutes mixed methods of both qualitative interviews and a mixed methods survey. The interview is confidential, 60 to 90 minutes in length, and recorded by a voice recorder. I then transcribed the interview, coded the transcriptions, and analyzed their content for overall patterns and themes. The interviews considered the ways in which participants’ identity and voice articulated their experiences and feelings in the aftermath of an event of sexual violence. This narrative cannot be collected in any other way that is just as in-depth, personal, or effective. I conducted 17 interviews, at which point I felt that I had reached saturation in my data.

Out of the 17 interviews, I use 16 because of redacting one transcript by request of the interviewee. Of these 16 interviews, six participants (37.5%) identified as women of color, two (12.5%) as LGBTQ, and one (6.25%) as a man. Four (25%) were friends of survivors, and twelve (75%) were themselves survivors of sexual assault. The reason these numbers are so variable is because with the convenience sample, I cannot control the diversity of the sample by selecting the participants. Hence, it depended on the participants’ experiences as to how many interviews were necessary in the end. Confidentiality is imperative in these interviews to preserve the safety and interest of the participant. To protect this confidentiality, I removed any identifying information from the transcripts. The survey, on the other hand, was anonymous and sent in a Qualtrics format by campus-wide email. The survey asked questions to measure perceptions surrounding Dartmouth College’s sexual violence policies and mental health and did not require a previous experience with reporting. This survey is important to the study because it serves as a point of comparison between different groups of students and their opinions regarding Dartmouth’s sexual misconduct policies and procedures. The survey’s target sample was the undergraduate and
graduate student population at Dartmouth. Because the survey is collecting quantitative data on school perceptions, it requires a bigger sample in order to have greater reliability and validity.

With 263 responses, this survey constitutes a big enough $n$ to conduct statistical testing on the data.

Finally, for the instruments of data collection, for the interviews I use an interview guide, and for the survey I constructed a well-designed set of questions to answer my research questions. For the interview guide, I first started the process of developing my questions by asking members of the Student and Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault (SPCSA) about what questions they felt were unanswered about the reporting process and students’ mental health in relation to reporting. I collected their answers and suggestions, then vetted them for repeating questions. Then, I revised the questions to be both open-ended and in an order that would facilitate a natural narrative for the interview participant. Finally, I tested the questions on preliminary participants to collect feedback on the logic of the order of the questions and made final edits. For the survey, I first brainstormed possible methods of collecting both qualitative and quantitative data on campus perceptions through different questions, including the wording of those questions. Finally, I constructed a specific order for questions and had preliminary participants test the order and the flow of the questions before the final submission.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of the Data Collection**

The reason why I used mixed methods for this research is because the advantages of mixed data collection are immensely beneficial, especially within the context of this exploratory research. Mixed data collection allows me to collect different types of data that measure different aspects of my research questions. I wanted information on the entire school population’s perceptions of Dartmouth’s sexual violence policies in regards to mental health and also the actual, highly detailed decision-making and experiences of reporters themselves. However, there should also be
discussion on why I did not select other methods of qualitative and quantitative data collection. For example, ethnographic research can be similar in their qualitative collection to that of interviews. However, ethnographic field notes require ethical considerations in terms of confidentiality because only the reporter has direct interactions with administration when they decide to report. Because this would be the most fruitful and interesting place to take ethnographic field notes but I would not be able to do so according to school policy and ethical standards, the ethnography would not be complete in capturing the reporting experience. Additionally, because ethnographic notes are highly subjective and experiential, they would collect more of my own experience rather than those of others. This is not the data that I am aiming to collect. In relation to this, interviews allow participants to share as much as they want, in their own words, and minimize my own unconscious biases from overpowering the research. On the side of quantitative data, originally an experiment instead of a survey came to mind. An experiment would be able to isolate the independent variable by measuring its effect on the dependent variable if all else stayed the same. In the case of this research, I would have conducted an experiment measuring how different aspects of reporting practices and procedures affected the mental health of participants, depending on their race, gender and sexual orientation. However, this would bring up a number of problems. First, there would be ethical considerations, such as causing trauma and re-triggering survivors of sexual violence through an experiment that seemed too real or too probing. It would also put participants at an unnecessary and preventable risk, which violates ethical codes. Another issue is that it would be difficult to collect willing participants in a more involved experiment and be able to do it in a random way that didn’t target any individual unnecessarily. Hence, a survey was the better choice because though a collection of perceptions may be less precise than an experiment, a survey both assures anonymity and responsible research in being highly open and
transparent for all of Dartmouth’s student population to participate. It is also a shorter time commitment for participants, incentivizing more people to participate. Finally, with survey data, a number of statistical tests can be run on the data to find correlations between demographics and attitudes and perceptions.

There exist, however, some disadvantages to mixed methods. First, by doing both qualitative and quantitative methods, one can lose focus of the research if the two parts are not integrated well. I could foresee this as being a problem if the interviews ended up going a different direction from the survey data. In this case, I would have to reevaluate how I was going to utilize the data in relation to each other. Oppositely, I ended up having to be careful to not let each data, from the interviews and surveys, to rely on each other for validity. I had deficiencies in both the collection of interviews and surveys, and used the other set of data to supplement my assertions about the other. It is possible to use both data cohesively, however the data should be able to stand on their own, separate from one another. I kept this in mind as I conducted my research and evaluated my purposes for using both sets of data along the way.

**Data Analysis**

As this is an exploratory research paper, I do not draw assertive conclusions about students’ mental health and how it is affected by Dartmouth’s sexual violence policies and procedures. Rather, this research relies on the data from surveys and interviews to find trends and patterns in both reporters’ experiences and the larger perceptions about mental health from the student body. I present possibilities for further research to better inform Dartmouth of their sexual violence reporting policies and possible changes that could help both to improve students’ mental health and to indirectly raise the reporting rate because of a more inclusive and sensitive reporting process. In this way, the research is applicable because it also has the purpose of supporting policy reforms
for a more mental health-centric process, thereby increasing rates of reporting sexual violence overall. I hope to help improve Dartmouth sexual violence policies and contribute to solving the problem of low reporting rates among survivors.

Because the survey and interviews are particular to the Dartmouth student body and to sexual misconduct reporters, respectively, generalizability is minimal in this research. Generalizability is especially weak in the interviews with the combination of small numbers of participants and their highly subjective experiences. In surveys, as well, because the population is Dartmouth students rather than all college students, this data is only generalizable to Dartmouth undergraduate and graduate students. Thus, the internal generalizability is high, but the external generalizability is low. However, this does not mean that the research would be meaningless and inapplicable to other colleges. The research will produce a possible path of inquiry that may be informative of how mental health affects the reporting process and how identity affects those levels of mental health. In terms of reliability, this aspect is maximized by the survey, rather than the interviews. Surveys are designed to be highly reliable, and the increase in the number of survey respondents, especially with an \( n \) beyond 100, will heighten the reliability. The interviews will have low reliability because of the smaller number of participants and the highly variable nature of their subjective experiences, opinions and feelings. Therefore, mixed methods data collection maximizes reliability by having the strength in surveys balance its weakness in interviews. Interviews, instead, have maximum validity by conducting interviews until saturation and designing high quality coding and analysis of the transcripts.

These results were analyzed and interpreted to find larger patterns in the respective data. For interviews, the data was analyzed through transcription, coding and mapping. For surveys, descriptive statistics and Chi-square testing supports potential trends. For both the interview and
survey, it is important to consider how to code categories of identity and experience. I aimed to be as inclusive of different identities as possible by creating many possible categories and open-ended options for students to self-identify and then collapsing these categories during the data analysis. For gender, I asked participants to identify themselves in an open-ended way and then coded the responses by collapsing them into four statistically significant categories: “female”, “male”, “transgender”, and “other.” For sexual orientation, I initially used an open-ended question. Again, I collapsed the categories to have statistically significant numbers into three categories: “homosexual”, “heterosexual”, and “other.” Finally, for race, I again had an open-ended question for participants to fill in. I then coded using regular expression sorting through R programming to make two categories, “white” and “non-white.” The reason for this was because in initial stages of statistical testing, there was no reliable statistical significance between different race groups, but there was between white students and students of color.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Data Analysis**

The strengths of this research design lies in the mixed methods approach. This mixed methods research obtains a larger picture of how students are responding to sexual violence policies at Dartmouth, through both a rich source of qualitative data from interviews and an internally generalizable source of quantitative data from surveys. The data collected comes as close to the operationalized measurements of the independent variables (Dartmouth policy, race, gender and sexual orientation) and the dependent variable (lived effects on mental health) as one can get without using intrusive or unethical means to obtain this data.

The weaknesses of this research design lie in both the difficulty of collecting diverse participants for interviews and the low n for the survey sample. First, the implications of collecting interview participants through a convenience sample are important. I was aware from the beginning
that there was a distinct possibility of only some populations volunteering for my research, with potentially more vulnerable groups avoiding participation. This would not allow me to get a full understanding of all different perspectives because many perspectives, especially those not often heard, would remain unrepresented. Second, when broken into groups based on variables, the sample n needed for accurate chi-square testing could not be reached. Because this could result in potentially no clear patterns, or even misleading patterns, in relation to identity and how it affects mental health in regards to reporting, I make no claims as to the significance of the quantitative patterns in the data, asserting that future research must garner greater respondents.

However, taking both the advantages and disadvantages into account, I determined that this design is still the best way to address the research questions most thoroughly. Though representativeness may not be the strong suit of interviews, they provide a more in-depth understanding of the issue so that future research, with a bigger population or more resources, can pursue a more advanced method of securing a diverse range of identities and experiences.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the following sections, I will discuss the findings of the 16 interviews, as well as the findings of the campus-wide survey. First, I will start by setting the Dartmouth-specific context in which students talked about their experiences. Next, I will discuss the main reasons students chose to report or not report instances of sexual misconduct to the College. Then, I will discuss three main themes that were made apparent throughout the interviews; namely, the lack of centralized information on campus, the need for visible advocates, and students’ doubts in Dartmouth’s commitment to issues of sexual violence. With this, I will include the findings of the quantitative survey. Finally, I will synthesize these findings into recommendations that would address each of
these themes and serve to improve Dartmouth College’s sexual respect policy and reporting procedures.

Setting the Scene

To accurately comprehend the experiences and needs of Dartmouth students in regards to the intimately linked issues of mental health and sexual violence, we must first understand the College as a setting for student life, as it plays a crucial role in shaping student experiences. The hallmarks of the College are its accelerated ten week term, its motivated and high-achieving students, and its prevalent Greek life. This environment that the College has directly and indirectly created, one that many refer to as the Dartmouth Experience, constructs the expectation for what the “typical” Dartmouth student looks and acts like. Various factors such as a stressful workload, a perception of the Dartmouth Experience, and the Greek influence on campus sets Dartmouth College apart from other undergraduate institutions in regards to the realities of the experiences and needs of its students.

Stress and normativity are to be expected at any undergraduate setting, but because Dartmouth’s culture is one where students push each other to “work hard play hard,” the Dartmouth environment encourages the adverse effects of such a high-stress atmosphere. A major stressor at Dartmouth is the accelerated pace of a term. One student admitted that “things build up and pile up that I haven't really addressed…even just little things that I want to do, like, reading a book. It all just kind of blockades.” With such little time, mental and emotional health are not the priority for many, and can be lost under a multitude of other tasks.

Students are also expected, by each other and themselves, to reach a level of perceived normality set by the Dartmouth Experience. “Dartmouth really values this perfect Dartmouth student”, said one student. She described the perfect student as “a traditional member of their
[Greek] house…goes out [to fraternities and parties] while keeping up their work, and nothing bad ever happens to them.” This last point seems to be one that students notice—that nothing bad ever happens to a perfect student during their Dartmouth Experience. Mental and emotional health, sexual violence and other social issues are explicitly left out of the Dartmouth Experience narrative. Reflecting on the hardships of the aftermath of being sexually assaulted at Dartmouth, one Dartmouth student found it hard to speak up, because of this silence: “If you say something is wrong, people think something is wrong with you.” Not only does this silence pervade throughout campus, but speaking up against this silence may result in social consequences, such as those faced by a student who thought about reporting an incident of sexual assault but ultimately decided not to because “it quickly became clear that if I did report it, there would be a lot of socially negative consequences…I just felt frustrated and like no one was listening and I didn't want to talk about it anymore.”

Finally, in addition to the pressures and silences surrounding the Dartmouth Experience, the prevalence of Greek life on campus makes it an influencer of campus attitudes, notably around gender roles and methods of handling sexual misconduct cases. This makes Greek houses’ spaces and actions consequential to campus climate in critical ways. Greek houses, or more specifically fraternities, are the center of campus social life, and an overwhelming majority of students I interviewed brought up fraternities as where the dynamics of gender and power played out: “Basically, if everyone goes to the frats and you have brothers handing you beer, and you have to go to them for drinks, for pong, for every drinking activity, that puts the power in their hands.” The culture surrounding the fraternity scenes reflect, and contribute to, formations of gender roles and expectations that permeate throughout campus. Greek houses also set the precedent of how to deal with sexual misconduct. One particularly disturbing instance of Greek life’s role in the
reporting process was when one student’s sexual assault by a member of a fraternity was handled “internally” to avoid institutional sanctions, such as being derecognized. For the survivor, who was a freshman at the time, there was a lot of pressure from various sources to not report the incident to the College. Around campus, “people hated or showed a lot of anger towards the individuals they knew came out against those houses,” so she felt that she would be blamed and it would be her “…fault that another house gets in trouble.” She was also pressured by the President of the fraternity, who personally met with her to emphasize the interest in keeping the incident a closed matter: “He was like, I'll handle it, but if you proceed with any other action let me know first.”

This form of intimidation, along with the perceived students’ value of Greek houses over survivors, led her to give up on reporting at all. The fraternity’s punishment handed down to the perpetrator? Extra cleans. In the words of the exasperated survivor: “Cleans is not a punishment for violating someone. It's not okay.”

On the other hand, some houses, including many sororities, employ “blacklists” that bar certain individuals from entering the premises based on prior allegations of sexual misconduct. Therefore, Greek houses have a high degree of discretion and are sites of both positive and negative formations of campus climate surrounding gender and sexual violence.

**Reasons Why Survivors Do Not Report**

The interviews made clear that there are still many obstacles to reporting an incident of sexual misconduct. The overwhelming majority of students interviewed believed that reporting would not result in any meaningful action taken against the perpetrator. At Dartmouth, the three highest
reasons for females\textsuperscript{5} not contacting a Program at the College are because they didn’t think it was serious enough to report (73.7\% of victims\textsuperscript{6}), they thought that nothing would be done (26.6\%), or they felt embarrassed, ashamed, or that it would be too emotionally difficult (21.9\%) (Cantor et al 2015).

The largest reason interview participants didn’t report was simple—they didn’t even think to. Their decision to report is already made before many even realize it. For many, what happened to them didn’t fit the description of a ‘perfect victim,’ a term commonly used to describe an event that clearly was assault and can be proven. One woman decided that because her situation “wasn’t full-on rape, I thought, ‘Oh, it's not as serious’” and therefore didn’t consider her case worth bringing up to anyone. There’s a sense of the assault needing to be “big enough or important enough to merit reporting”, where below the level of ‘perfect,’ cases would be considered too inconsequential to report. Unfortunately, most participants seemed to think their cases are below that level. Dartmouth females’ rate of reporting to the College is 36.5\% when the assault is by force, and therefore clear-cut. Yet when there are substances involved, the chances of reporting drop dramatically to only 16.3\% (Cantor et al 2015). Another issue that arises after an assault or other event is the time it takes to process and realize what has happened. A participant considers the paradoxical nature of reporting a traumatic event: “Processing it takes so long, just on your own, and how do you tell someone something before you've even processed it yourself?” Most participants took at least one academic term to process what had happened, and some took 6 months or even years to realize that their case was indeed something that could be reported to the College.

\textsuperscript{5} 93.75\% of my interview sample identified as female. As a result, I will be using statistics applied to females.
\textsuperscript{6} Percent of all female victims of nonconsensual sexual touching or penetration, averaged between those involving physical force and incapacitation, weighted by the n of each group.
But once even a month has passed, many believe their time is up. When talking about whether she would report now, one participant refers to an implicit time limit to reporting: “It almost seems like I can't report at this point. Like I know that technically I can, but at this point it's always like people will say, ‘Why didn't you report it then?’” There exists an invisible time limit for reporting, which students sense and will therefore be discouraged from reporting. One participant even felt that reporting after too much time had passed would be a disadvantage to her case, as she explains, “they would be like a) do you even remember, b) why did you wait this long, and c) why did it take you this long to realize you think it's sexual assault” She felt that it would be an additional emotional toll to be put on the defensive for taking so long to decide to report.

The individuals I interviewed didn’t communicate outward shame or embarrassment, but instead expressed a sense of burden and responsibility for the punishments that the perpetrator might face as a result of the College judiciary process. One participant recounts that “there's just this real feeling of responsibility, that, strangely, leaves the victims feeling responsible for the consequences of the perpetrator's actions,” putting into words an overwhelming sense of guilt that survivors feel when considering reporting their perpetrators. Rather than outright embarrassment or shame, survivors feel responsibility for what happened, imagining the event as something that could have been prevented by them: “And I felt that what he did was bad, but I let him do it, or I was somehow responsible.” Others also felt that the emotional and mental tax of reporting wouldn’t be worth it. A former undergraduate advisor (UGA) for a residential dorm recalled that her friend who had experienced an assault “seemed to think it would be easier to crawl into a hole rather than fight” the emotional and mental hardships that go hand in hand with reporting. One participant questioned the point of even trying in the first place if the emotional and mental hardships were
sure to be immense: “Why go through the trials and tribulations of an assault reporting process that may ultimately end up hurting you more than helping you?”

Finally, the narrative of reporting being an arduous and fruitless process pervades nationally and at the community level, reinforcing the notion that nothing will be done even when a student reports sexual misconduct. As one student puts it: “I've never heard ‘She came forward, people believed her, and something changed’ and I just didn't think I would be any different.” The “horror stories” that come out of national stories, as well those of friends or fellow students at Dartmouth, contribute to the collective student understanding that survivors rarely win these cases. The Brock Turner case\(^7\) has recently made many students pessimistic after witnessing the biases of the reporting process, evidenced in the lack of severity of the punishment: “He went to jail, but for three months, and that pissed me off. So the victims can win but don't really win because these guys will be back out on the streets anyway.” A woman reflected on her negative opinion of the reporting process at Dartmouth, stating, “I think a lot of people don't know the specifics of the reporting process, but most people remember the horror stories you hear.” Those “horror stories” refer to circulated experiences of students’ private interactions with administration during the reporting process. A friend of a student who reported to the College said that it was “more real” to hear the experience from her friend than to read the policies on paper: “One friend remembers this woman grilling her, ‘What were you wearing?’ ‘Well, did you kiss him?’ ‘How many drinks did you have?’” Simply put, without any positive stories of the reporter winning their case, the College’s perceived biases and administrative obstacles “don't inspire confidence in the system.”

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\(^7\) In June 2016, Turner’s lenient punishment of 3 months jailtime for a sexual assault of an anonymous woman sparked controversy and started a national conversation about the difficulties of holding perpetrators accountable.
Reasons Why Survivors Report or Want to Report

Even with so many barriers to reporting, there are powerful reasons why students still wanted to report their perpetrators to the College. Some reasons to report included gaining a sense of closure and justice. However, the single biggest reason to report was to protect other students on campus from being targeted next by the same perpetrator.

One basic reason for reporting is to achieve a sense of closure that wouldn’t be possible without the perpetrator out of a survivor’s life. When asked what it would mean to have a report be successful, one respondent explained: “It meant that I could wipe it away, I wouldn't see him every day. I wasn't going to be with him in my head anymore.” For some, reporting is a physical need to remove the perpetrator from campus. For others, reporting is a way to regain control over their lives through emotional healing and reaching out for help. A friend of a survivor recalled that “when she was assaulted she felt very powerless in that moment,” and that for her, reporting was the path she could take to “get the help that she needed and the support she needed.”

But the largest way in which survivors felt that reporting would be important to them was through warning, and preventing the perpetrator from hurting, others. One participant explains that this desire comes more from a practical standpoint, rather than a theoretical one: “It's less about the principle of justice, and more like, I don't want this to happen to anyone else.” This same participant explained that she didn’t want to report initially, because she felt physically and emotionally unable to, so she tried to forget about it. Yet, two years later when she shared her experience with a friend, “she was like, "I know who this is. He sexually assaulted me too. And I know two other women that he's sexually assaulted." The shock of that revelation brought the participant back to the memory of her assault in her freshman year with such pain that she thought, “Oh my god. If I had said something that first term, I could have prevented so much harm.”
felt anger and regret for not reporting at the time, knowing that things would have gone differently if she had been able to get the perpetrator’s name out. Now, finally a senior, she can look back and reflect on this, but can’t forget those moments of pain: “I really hated myself for a long time…I just kept beating myself up.” Many others I have talked to feel the same pained desire to save others from harm and guilt from not being able to through the reporting process: “I could've protected other girls, and I feel shitty about that.”

The desire to protect fellow peers from the same inflictions of violence is a powerful one, yet many still do not reach the point of being able to report the perpetrator to the College because of mental or emotional obstacles, logistical obstacles, or both. Their pained decision making says it all: “And I still wish I could do something, to make it known that he's a rapist, you know? It's not fair. He gets to walk out there and victimize more girls and that's the last thing I want in this situation.” Imagine how students would be able to help and protect each other if they could report the names of their perpetrators in a way that wasn’t burdensome to the survivor. The next sections identify the points at which students deal with the most burdens mentally, emotionally, academically, and physically, and consider alternatives and recommendations to ameliorate many of these obstacles to reporting.

*Central Themes*

*“Information and Communication”*

*Katie*° dealt with a sexual assault and saw her perpetrator around campus throughout her freshman year at Dartmouth. She had reported her perpetrator to the Title IX Coordinator, the person Katie knew was responsible for dealing with this kind of thing in the spring but hadn’t

° Name has been changed to protect the individual’s identity,
decided what to do by the time the term was over. When she left campus for the summer, “the contrast was overwhelming”: she started to feel mentally, emotionally, and physically better soon after being away from his presence. Katie was finally starting to heal. Her fall term, however, brought that to a full stop: “I come back to school and I’m placed in a room right next to him. Literally, we shared a wall.” At this point, Katie knew she could not live next to him, for the sake of her own mental health and well-being. One of the first days of being back, she asked the Title IX Coordinator and the Housing Office to move the perpetrator to a different room, but he was placed only one room over, meaning that they still shared a bathroom and would still have to see each other every day. She went back to the Title IX Coordinator. During their talk, Katie found that there were no remedies to protect her. She asked, “What about a formal complaint?” The Coordinator couldn’t guarantee that the perpetrator would be moved further, because “housing is really tight.” Katie learned that she would have to win a case against him for the perpetrator, and that would be a three-month process. “So I was like, okay, are there any other options? She was like, no not really.” Katie felt unsafe where she was and like she didn’t have any other choice, so she took to sleeping on her friend’s floor on an air mattress. She tried again: “Of my own accord, I worked it out with the Housing Director of one of the dorm houses. The Title IX coordinator did nothing to help. She sent me an email, ‘I’m happy moving worked out for you.’” Katie was now inundated with meetings and the emotional stress of deciding whether, and how, to report, all on top of her classes. She described it like a full-time job in addition to being a student: “So many hours--I cannot. I mean, I spent so many hours just to change my housing, which I should not have to do. I spent time moving. I spent a lot of time talking to peers about the situation just deciding what to do. Meetings with WISE. Meetings with the Title IX Coordinator. Meetings with professors. So many meetings, I've talked to so many people.” Katie also found that she couldn’t get her
professors to move their midterms during this stressful time, who “said that they wouldn't let me
unless I emailed her [the Title IX Coordinator], which I did. And then she didn't get back to me, so
I had to take my midterms.” Katie now remembers that fall term as being the worst she’s
experienced at Dartmouth: “I feel like at this point, I'm more frustrated with the school than with
the guy who assaulted me.”

Many parts of Katie’s story show how this situation should have never happened. First, had
the College been proactive enough to take steps to ensure that a reported individual was not placed
next to the person who reported, Katie would have been saved the fear and anxiety of living next
to her perpetrator and countless hours of personal time dedicated to getting herself out of a
terrifying situation. Second, had the College been proactive enough to set up a system of
communication between professors and the Title IX office, students like Katie would not be forced
to take exams that they are not mentally or academically prepared to take. Dartmouth College
should be able to prevent the easily preventable, through communication between one office and
another. The reason why these simple steps are so imperative is because the period when a student
is deciding to report is the most difficult aspect of the process both because it is mentally taxing
and time-intensive. The more that the College can streamline and simplify common processes that
a survivor must go through to get accommodations, information or support, the easier it is on the
student. In many cases, such processes can be dramatically improved through centralized
information and communication.

Students don’t have all the answers when it comes to the reporting process. In fact, when it
comes to knowledge about what happens when a student reports sexual misconduct to the
College, a majority of students, 55.6%, know “not at all” or “a little bit” what the process of
reporting entails, and only 13.5% are confident of their knowledge of the process (Cantor et al
2015). This is a result of the assumption that “this will never happen to me,” and a lack of education and access to information about resources, policies and processes on campus. Students may not think to have the information at the forefront of their minds because no one expects to be in the situation of needing help: “I had no perception of reporting--because I never thought something like this would happen to me.” Therefore, the education and awareness efforts must come from the College rather than the expectation that the student can coherently and systematically search out their options. Expecting Dartmouth students to read the policies on sexual assault and harassment may not be realistic; according to my own research survey results, although 20.69% of students reported that they had read the entirety of the disciplinary procedures related to sexual misconduct, another 50.57% had not read any of the disciplinary procedures, or weren’t sure whether they had. Similarly, expecting students to memorize everything they should know about sexual misconduct law and disciplinary policies and procedures from an online course before their freshman year is also not realistic.

Secondly, when it comes to navigating these resources, a lack of direction and information is an obstacle for many. As one participant noted, it isn’t so much the lack of resources but rather the lack of information on what those resources offered and would mean in terms of options that frustrated her: “You have to admit, there are a lot of resources, which can be a good thing, but it can be confusing when there is no clear outline of which resources to take on first, take on second.” Another interviewee saw the way that resources are offered as “surface level” because she “knew there were resources out there somewhere, but they didn’t seem accessible enough that I would actually consider reaching out.” The reason many see this administrative approach to offering resources as “surface level” is because it is passive and suggests that it is an “administrative requirement to cover their end of the stake,” where it is “a common repeating of ‘Here's what you
can do.’” Overall, participants wanted to know what will happen, what to expect, not just given vague resources. They wanted to know their options and then have the power to make a personal decision from there.

Where exactly do students get their information from, if not through administrative or official means? The overwhelming majority of students learn from their friends. Friends are crucial to the dissemination of all aspects of important information to reporting, right from the beginning. One survivor recounts her friend’s help when she realized she didn’t know the first thing about reporting: “I was just sitting there like I don't know what's happening, I'm very overwhelmed right now. My friend, she was messaging me, here's the website, here are the options, do you want me to anonymously report for you?” Even when the information isn’t specifically related to policies or procedures, students pick up the general gist for certain reporting options. The phrase that best captures trend? “I hadn't read specific information on it, but mostly gathered information from other students.”

When students don’t have knowledgeable friends or are just starting to find their communities in their freshman year, however, the obstacles can become overwhelming. When students don’t have their own social networks for answers, they must spend time finding the information they need from countless people; this means time-intensive meetings on top of students’ already busy lives. For freshmen, it feels like “there is so much--the classes, peoples and clubs, and there's already so much in my schedule and then there's this, looming over everything.” The College should centralize its information on its sexual respect resources, policies and procedures, starting in a student’s freshman year and continually reinforcing it throughout their four years. This is why it is so important and encouraging that Dartmouth is employing its new four-year
programming, the Sexual Violence Prevention Program, and this should continue to be a priority to secure student’s safety and awareness.

One student envisions a single office that she could go to and get all her questions answered, accommodations met, and options explained: “If there was one place I could go…Not me trying to navigate all these offices…because that's what my friend went through, she just literally met with all these people, all the time, and then they all try to email each other.” This centralization of information would not only benefit students but also increase visibility of the College’s support on campus. More students would know where to go, and it would simplify the processes that so many students are currently struggling to navigate. Another important aspect to centralizing information on resources and options pertaining to sexual misconduct is to have highly visible, adult advocates that support students first.

“Advocates”

Abby, a female student at Dartmouth, had experienced an assault in the spring, and wanted to find out if her report could be accessed by law enforcement after the perpetrator graduated. She talked to a Sexual Assault Peer Advocate (SAPA)⁹, and together they decided to contact the Title IX Coordinator to get an answer to Abby’s specific question. Abby’s SAPA sent an email, confident that she would receive an answer quickly. Yet, when the email reply came back three weeks later, “It just really felt like they didn't even read what my question was.” Abby felt ignored and dismissed, like just another survivor who was written off: “It felt very cookie-cutter...not at all pertaining to my specific question.” Abby was disappointed with the tardiness of the reply, but especially was hurt by the “exact wording from the email: ‘Here's the information you requested.’

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⁹ Sexual Assault Peer Advocates are Dartmouth students trained in being confidential support and resources.
Which was not the case. That specific wording really upset me. It upset me.” Abby had waited almost a month for a reply, but still didn’t have anything to make an informed decision regarding her options to report. Not only did she feel lost, but she felt “unheard and I just felt so hurt that someone who’s trained to deal with this wasn't empathetically listening to me at all.” Abby felt disillusioned and distrustful of the person that was supposed to be the source of aid on campus for sexual misconduct. Even when the SAPA emailed a different staff member involved in sexual misconduct on campus, she was referred again to the Title IX Coordinator. “It just felt full circle of people handing off the problem to someone else, and feeling like they didn’t need to provide a direct answer to the question. Again, that feeling of supposedly trained advisers and supporters, I felt they didn't even read.” Abby was told that she should go to these advocates for help and that she would be directed to the correct information, but she felt betrayed by the extent to which she could not receive help. After a month, Abby gave up her anonymity and met with the Title IX Coordinator herself, and by that time she was closed off from potential options that she could have pursued: “If I had had my question responded a month before, things might have turned out differently, but after that month, it was too late.” When Abby thinks back on this ordeal, she keeps thinking back to how disappointed she felt in her supposed advocates on campus: “Now looking back, it still hurts.”

The Title IX Coordinator “collaborates across campus constituencies to foster a safe, welcoming, and respectful environment...provides institutional leadership in ensuring the College is in compliance with federal law and state statutes; oversees the centralized review, investigation and resolution of all complaints related to sexual assault, gender-based harassment, dating or domestic violence, and stalking; and ensures a fair, equitable, and prompt process for all involved.” None

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of these aspects of the job require specific priority of the survivor. Rather, they prioritize following the practices and procedures in place that comply with the federal government. Though these goals may sometimes overlap, in many instances students feel displaced and unheard: “I think that people tell you, if something happens, go to the Title IX coordinator, except that she’s actually so unhelpful. And I guess her job is not to advocate for students, but I think that people should send you to someone who will advocate for you.” The problem is not so much the specific characteristics of Dartmouth College’s Title IX Coordinator, but rather the structuring of the Title IX office that puts undue pressure on a singular figure who can’t possibly succeed in fulfilling all the required roles by themselves. The Title IX Coordinator is overworked and not well-known on campus, and their job requires prioritizing the College over survivors. Students need advocates that prioritize students first, are extremely visible, and are available to students at any point. WISE is an important resource that fits this role, yet it has been previously underutilized as a crucial resource. Dartmouth has successfully partnered with WISE in order to provide students with advocacy services, while the College focuses on the judicial process and legal responsibilities.

However, Dartmouth College fails to fully advertise WISE’s potentially crucial role in many survivors’ mental health and decision-making experiences.

The Title IX Coordinator is currently overworked to the point of being unresponsive to many of the questions and requests of the interview participants. Too many times students have been frustrated with how weeks could go by without any communication: “And then finally, a month after the first email, the Title IX coordinator asked to meet on the day.” This is also a problem when students look for an alternative source of support or information, but are told once again to meet with the Title IX Coordinator. Surely this situation is both unfair to the Coordinator and to the students. What happens when the Title IX Coordinator is travelling, or is too busy to meet with
students? Should survivors have to be told to “be patient” after a month of trying to get in contact, as one survivor did, all while still grappling with the incident themselves? This is an unacceptable situation that many students are continuously finding themselves in—without crucial support or information to make decisions and receive accommodations.

Along with being overworked, the Title IX office is not well known among students as the central office to go to for anything related to sexual misconduct. Among the fourteen sexual respect resources that are available to students, the Title IX coordinator is the 4th least well-known, with only 30.2% of students knowing the resource. Compared to Dick’s house (92.8%) and Safety & Security (75.2%), and even the SAPA program (65.1%), the Title IX office’s exposure to students is at a dismal level (Cantor et al 2015). Considering that this is the office where instances of sexual misconduct are supposed to be reported, the Title IX office and coordinator should be one of the top resources that students are aware of. Given the low awareness surrounding the Title IX office, it’s clear that there needs to be a larger effort in making students aware of this one resource that they should turn to for information, resources, and support after an incident of sexual violence or misconduct.

Just as friends are students’ biggest source of information regarding the reporting process, they were also the main source of emotional support for survivors on Dartmouth’s campus. Friends are the most important connections on campus for many students: “Almost all my support comes from them.” This support can be in the form of providing information, talking through options, or even just being present and supporting survivors’ everyday activities, such as one friend of a survivor who took it upon herself to “check in with her a lot, offer to walk her to appointments.” Students are also supports to each other in the form of SAPA, Movement Against Violence
(MAV)\textsuperscript{11}, UGAs and other student groups on campus that work to prevent and support survivors of sexual violence. These groups become powerful when a friend refers them to a survivor.

Survivors often mention that they don’t want to confide in “just some person sitting in an office,” but rather someone that feels personally connected to them, and someone they can trust. When a friend links up a survivor to one of these groups with connections to resources and information, it can be a game changer for a survivor trying to decide what to do next. For example, a student who was overwhelmed with her options realized that she could “talk to a few SAPAs…just because they happened to be my friends.” She was grateful to have people she could trust around her “when I was working through processing what had happened was sexual assault, that was really helpful for me.” Students in these positions also provide the advantage of having connections to other helpful resources that the survivor might not otherwise know about. UGAs, for example, have “pretty good knowledge of the reporting process,” and “very quick access to coordinators and SAPAs.” These students and friends are indispensable resources for survivors of sexual violence.

The informal networks that friends create for each other allow students to access help that was once unreachable through official means. It is not the job of students to fully support and assist survivors on campus, yet they put in much more effort and time than should be necessary. The current situation requires students to do their own labor without much support, organization or compensation from the College.

Students do not know everything there is to know about the resources on campus, how to use them, or how to file a report with the Title IX office. Nor should they have to know everything. Students should not have to exclusively satisfy the huge need for leadership, knowledge and

\textsuperscript{11} Movement Against Violence is a student group dedicated to raising awareness and preventing sexual violence on campus through group facilitations and educational programming.
support surrounding sexual violence. Students are not necessarily in a position to help themselves because they are not trained or well-connected to resources, faculty, or information. Instead, students need adults with established responsibility and who support and advocate in the interests of students, whose job is exclusively to be an ever-present and compassionate resource. Advocates also need to be well-known across campus, both to spread awareness of the resource and to build trust with the campus community. Trust is a very important aspect in sensitive disclosures such as those surrounding sexual violence. Though Dartmouth offers counseling to all students, there is currently a pervasive distrust by students of these resources, which, when combined with a culture that pressures students to cover up their mental health struggles, leads to a drastic underutilization of counseling resources by students. Thus, students who are struggling with what to do next after an assault are unlikely to reach out to counseling. Many interview participants describe how they couldn’t reach out to counseling on campus, simply because of the lack of trust and the feeling of "I don't know who this is." Students also mentioned deans being a mixed bag because many had their deans switched every year. One senior wearily described losing her dean, the only adult she felt close to on campus, and her unwillingness to go through the process of forging another relationship with her new one: “And then they changed again after three months. So I didn't have a consistent person to go to.” Students need someone who will listen to them, believe them and root for them, just as peers do. In fact, one student points to the power dynamic between students and administration as a hindrance to trusting them. She explains, “If it's between a peer-to-peer like this, I'm pretty comfortable telling you what happened, but I feel like if it were to a real adult who has an official standing and is supposed to do something, and is the person to judge whether or not this goes onto the next step of the process, I would just feel like I was on the defensive side.”
The College must satisfy the need for visible, active and trusted adult advocates on campus. The bottom line is that “students need adults they can trust.”

“Identity and Perspectives”

Nicole remembers one of many horror stories she had heard from her friends who attempted to report their perpetrators to the College: “And this kid was a legacy, his parents brought in all these lawyers, and she was an international student, and she had no resources at all other than what Dartmouth offered. It felt like she was being buried in paperwork and all the legalities of going through with everything.” Nicole watched as her friend was bogged down by the physical, mental, and logistical tolls of reporting, hopeful that all this work would be worth it when her friend would finally succeed at the end of this arduous process. “And the guy ended up...bragging about how his parents just made a donation and how this was all going to end up going away. She was just distraught. Because she felt like she had just put in so much time to make this right and make sure this never happened to anyone else.” To Nicole and her friend, it was obvious that the perpetrator’s class and wealth were advantages that helped him escape punishment, while Nicole’s friend, a lower-class international woman, was lower on the list of the College’s priorities. “It was just sick, it just went away. They were like, ‘There's not enough evidence.’ So that was that.” Without any other explanation, Nicole’s friend’s case was nullified.

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12 This event happened before recent changes in Dartmouth College’s sexual misconduct policy. Under the new Unified Sexual Misconduct Policy, "Both Reporting Persons and Responding Persons are entitled to have a single advisor and/or observer of their choice accompany them at any meeting related to the investigation. Advisors/observers may not actively participate in the case by answering questions or otherwise presenting on behalf of the parties. They may advise the parties privately but may not confer with them while the meeting is in progress, and will be subject to the same confidentiality expectations applicable to others in attendance. The Investigator may remove any person who distracts or disrupts the process."
This section is about parsing through students’ and survivors’ perceptions and experiences of Dartmouth College when it comes to its sexual misconduct policy. Though Dartmouth’s previous sexual misconduct policy has been replaced with a new unified set of rules and procedures, those reporting experiences of students which were based on the old policies still linger as a major precedence and influence on students’ current perceptions and understanding of what the College’s reporting policies look like. Though the current investigation and reporting process has implemented major reforms from past policies, there still exist the perceptions of students on campus that prevent them from reaching out to the College for help, even though those perceptions may be false. Therefore it is important that these perceptions be identified, so that the College can go about mending the mistrust that is pervasive among students when it comes to reporting sexual violence.

Dartmouth students have varying degrees of trust in the College’s sexual respect policies. Why? One way to look at the variance in student opinion is through differences in factors of identity that have huge influence over students’ experience at Dartmouth. Race, socio-economic class, gender and sexuality are all highly influential aspects that affect student perceptions and faith in Dartmouth College, including their perceptions of the reporting process, and whether the College makes sexual violence prevention a priority. It is important to note that just because the codes and guidelines surrounding Dartmouth College’s Sexual Respect policies are equitable and fair, it does not mean that there doesn’t exist unique difficulties for certain groups of students on campus.

My own survey research has shown that there are different student perceptions of
Dartmouth’s response to sexual violence correlating to groupings by race, socioeconomic class, gender and sexual orientation. Though larger sample sizes are necessary for future testing\textsuperscript{13}, the pattern is very telling and should be researched further: students in non-white, lower-class, female and queer categories consistently have more negative perceptions of Dartmouth support, as well as more negative feedback on their own mental health at school. For instance, when asked about level of agreement with the statement “Dartmouth cares about student mental health when it comes to reporting sexual violence,” male students averaged a whole point higher (5.33) in agreement over female students (4.33), on a scale of 1 to 7\textsuperscript{14}. This statement also has a similar pattern when compared to white (4.85) versus non-white (4.64) student groupings, upper-class\textsuperscript{15} (4.81) versus lower-class (4.57), and straight (4.86) versus queer (4.37). In fact, for most statements pertaining to perceptions on Dartmouth support for students, the contrasts are clear.

### Table 1a: Perceptions of Dartmouth Sexual Violence Support versus Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Trans/Non-Binary/Non-Gender-Conforming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth cares about student mental health when it comes to reporting sexual violence&quot;</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth's sexual violence policies are effective in resolving a complaint&quot;</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{13} Figures cannot be backed up by reliable chi-square analysis due to small n (<30) in most cases.

\textsuperscript{14} The scale of 1 to 7 corresponds with the statements “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” “Somewhat Agree,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree” respectively.

\textsuperscript{15} “Upper-class” category includes upper-class and upper-middle-class, “Lower class” includes lower-class and lower-middle-class.
"Dartmouth supports survivors of sexual violence"  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth cares about student mental health when it comes to reporting sexual violence&quot;</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1b: Perceptions of Dartmouth Sexual Violence Support versus Gender**

Perceptions of Dartmouth Support by Gender Identity

**Table 2: Perceptions of Dartmouth Sexual Violence Support versus Race**

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16 Qualtrics visual graph not available due “Race” being a non-multiple-choice nominal variable on the survey.
"Dartmouth's sexual violence policies are effective in resolving a complaint"  
3.69  
3.16

"Dartmouth supports survivors of sexual violence"  
4.44  
4.33

**Table 3a: Perceptions of Dartmouth Sexual Violence Support versus Sexual Orientation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Straight</th>
<th>Queer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth cares about student mental health when it comes to reporting sexual violence&quot;</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth's sexual violence policies are effective in resolving a complaint&quot;</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth supports survivors of sexual violence&quot;</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3b: Perceptions of Dartmouth Sexual Violence Support versus Sexual Orientation

Perceptions of Dartmouth Support by Sexual Orientation

Table 4a: Perceptions of Dartmouth Sexual Violence Support versus Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Upper-Class</th>
<th>Lower-Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth cares about student mental health when it comes to reporting sexual violence&quot;</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth's sexual violence policies are effective in resolving a complaint&quot;</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dartmouth supports survivors of sexual violence&quot;</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4b: Perceptions of Dartmouth Sexual Violence Support versus Class

49
Ultimately, these research findings support the assertion that dealing with sexual violence on Dartmouth’s campus is also an intersectional issue that must consider various experiences because of diversity in these various aspects of identity.

In terms of race, these interviews didn’t go nearly in-depth enough nor get enough of a representation of different racial groups to be able to make sound conclusions. At the same time, it is extremely evident that sexual violence is not a colorblind issue. One student explained some of the differences in experience she faces, noting that “you just don't feel like you're going to be as much of a priority as a black woman” on Dartmouth’s campus, especially in regards to issues of sexual violence. She notices that race has implications for which group’s problems get talked about
Dartmouth College is also an environment that is made up of students of all different socioeconomic class. Class is also, in many cases, a factor that goes into consideration for a survivor who is deciding whether or not to go through with a formal complaint or report. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face vulnerability and fear that puts them in a different set of positions, while wealthier students afford certain privileges and securities. The most harrowing of these different experiences based on class happen at the level of reporting sexual assault. The power that comes with class, even if unintentional or imagined, intimidates those who are already vulnerable and lack institutional support. For some students I interviewed, they felt an uneasy power imbalance between themselves and their perpetrators who were legacies at Dartmouth. These students used the word “legacy” as a way to indicate the wealth, privilege, and influence over the school these perpetrators had their financial leverage: “I'm pretty sure this other person had some kind of legacy connection to Dartmouth, a family connection. They're not big donors, but it still plays a part when I was thinking about reporting because I felt they were going to manipulate whatever happens.” Dartmouth College should be able to publicly affirm to students that class never plays a role in the reporting process, and there should be an intentional effort to provide resources and aid to those who would struggle financially as a result of reporting sexual misconduct at Dartmouth.

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17 The term “legacy” refers to a student who has previous familial connections to the College.
Last but not least, gender and sexuality are instrumental factors in how a survivor constructs their understanding and opinions of the reporting process. Sexual violence is inextricably tied up in hierarchies of power based on gender. Therefore, every student, regardless of identity, sees the issue of sexual violence on campus through their experiences of gender and sexuality. Similarly, personal experiences based on gender and sexuality will also inform their opinions of and faith in the College’s response to sexual violence. Largely throughout these interviews, many straight, female voices were featured because of the self-selecting nature of the interviews. However, male and LGBTQ students, while they also hold their unique set of issues and realities, are positioned in gender and sexual hierarchies that are in direct relation to the perspective of female students, and therefore we can still gain insights to understanding those positionalities. We must first understand the sets of hierarchies so prevalent at Dartmouth that make it even more difficult for men than women to report sexual violence. Male students are well aware of the unspoken, yet well-understood, strict guideline that upholds masculinity. The effort to maintain masculinity includes denying being assaulted, or ever being a victim: “I know the thing of like, if a guy has a nonconsensual sexual experience then it can't be rape, I guess.” For one male student, he felt that his situation would be made into a joke, “like something out of Wedding Crashers.” Rather than being a serious event, many would perceive it as him getting “lucky” or somehow still in control of the situation. Male students face obstacles of immense shaming and suppression that speak to the astounding statistics at Dartmouth College: out of 31 cases of sexual violence inflicted on men in the past four years, 100% of the cases were not reported to the College (Cantor et al 2015). This rate, 0% reporting, is astounding, and the lack of male survivors reporting needs to be addressed further by the College.
Students say that the main reason why they don’t trust the College and have lost faith in the school’s systems of support is because the College’s priorities do not seem to lie in student well-being, but rather outward appearances. Many students do not have a problem with the way policies are spelled out officially. One survivor admits, “I think that on paper, a lot of the policies of this school are actually decent.” The problem lies in the consequences of those policies through actual lived experiences of students. In one student’s experience of trying to report, “it feels like they don't take it seriously at all. I feel like if the Title IX coordinator can't be on my side…she could be doing a lot more to help me with this process. It just makes me feel like this school does not care about its students.” Student’s actual lived experiences, rather than codes or policies on paper, inform student opinion on campus. A sentiment shared by many is the exasperation that comes with feeling that the College says one thing and does another: “They care more about what they look like to other people rather than fixing the problem on the inside. So they kind of put a cover on it.” This is not to say that the College does not care about its students. In fact, the number of resources and funds dedicated to the issue say otherwise. At the same time, these resources must be mobilized and prioritized in a way that it gives every student on campus access to support and truly makes them feel like the College supports them.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Information and Communication:*

- Increase number of students versed in the Dartmouth sexual violence disciplinary procedures through comprehensive educational programming
- Increase number of students versed in response to sexual violence by expanding SAPA program
- Create full-time and part-time student internship positions for MAV, SAPA, and sexual violence education programs
- Increase focus on disseminating resources and information on sexual violence procedures to freshman students
• Establish maximum wait times for students’ request for information regarding sexual violence policies and procedures Advocates:

• Increase and strengthen opportunities for students to be involved in WISE at Dartmouth
• Introduce new major guidance position, outside of the Title IX office, as the main student support and resources regarding sexual violence
• Strengthen role of WISE at Dartmouth as a major resource for students and survivors
• Establish expectations for lines of communication between Title IX, deans and faculty when discussing survivors and their accommodations
• Strengthen a centralized physical Sexual Respect office on Dartmouth Campus which students know to go to for information, resources, or support

Identity and Perspectives:

• Identify intersectionality as a key component of addressing sexual violence at Dartmouth
• Draw connections between diversity initiatives and sexual violence prevention initiatives at Dartmouth
• Integrate Housing Office into complaints to streamline survivor accommodation
• Prohibit the possibility of students involved in a no-contact order or a formal complaint to live on the same floor of a building
• Prioritize survivor accommodation over Housing system
• Allow student groups the discretion to remove a student if they feel they have adequate knowledge of an instance of sexual violence

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Referencing the Belmont Report, I review the precautions I have taken to make this research respectful, safe, beneficial, and justified.

Respect for Persons

First, I will show respect for persons by securing informed consent numerous times with the participant. This will involve both written and oral consent for interviews, and only conducting any research after having reviewed the research and confidentiality process together with the participant. I will obtain consent from participants, in person, and by signature of a receipt. The consent will take place at the space of the interview, before the interview has started. The timeframe
for providing information to participants will start once the interview date is scheduled and confirmed. I will send a digital copy of the Research Information Sheet/Confidentiality Waiver by email at least 48 hours in advance. I will also bring two paper copies of the Confidentiality Waiver to the interview: one for the participant to sign and for me to keep, and one for the participant to keep. We will read over the information sheet together and confirm understanding for each of the sections. Comprehension will be insured by asking, “Do you understand the purpose and structure of this research, and are you willing to be interviewed?”, and the participant confirming this by signature.

Second, the interview, if held in a public area, could have an effect on privacy. Therefore, though the participant will have the ability to choose the preferred space to conduct the interview, I will suggest that a more private space would be preferable if the participant’s suggested space is public and could easily lead to a breach of privacy.

Third, I will also keep the data and information collected secure and confidential at all times. Some confidential information, like name and contact information, will have to be collected in order to facilitate scheduling of interviews, but not shared with anyone besides myself or beyond the limits of scheduling purposes. The security of names and identification will be kept through a number of ways. First, the participant will be assigned a participant number, which will thereby separate the interview, and all other materials beyond that, from the participant’s identity. Next, I will edit out any identifying information from the voice recordings and transcripts. After this process, others who are assisting my research, such as Dartmouth professors or members of the SPCSA, will have access to the anonymous transcriptions. Any demographic information participants provide through interviews will be voluntary and optional. Should the participant provide identifiable information that I feel would jeopardize the confidentiality of the participant,
I will take that information out of publication. I will let the participant know that by participating in this study, they would be agreeing to let selected quotes from the participant’s interview to be used directly in publications using an alias. Participants will be able view their quotes prior to publication by request. And finally, participants will be reminded multiple times that they may stop the interview or redact their participation at any time.

Finally, the participant data will be located only on my private computer, which no other individual will be able to use. Additionally, any data linked to personal identification will be destroyed within six months, to limit the risk to breach of confidentiality. Finally, the physical survey forms will not be associated with personal identification, only the participant ID number, but will still be kept in a private folder in an off-campus apartment.

**Beneficence**

In order to minimize the harm and maximize the benefits of the research, I have taken a number of steps. The largest potential risk is that of the sensitive nature of the interview, which may be emotionally and psychologically triggering for some individuals. The nature of reporting sexual violence is very personal and a sensitive subject for many, but it depends on the individual whether the interview will trigger a negative reaction. The seriousness of this risk is high, however, so triggering episodes will be treated seriously. Additionally, because I am trained as a Sexual Assault Peer Advocate and am equipped to provide resources and support to students in need, I will be able to let a student know in advance that I can help facilitate them to health or counseling resources as quickly as possible, and the interview can be stopped or terminated whenever necessary.

First, I have created a comprehensive plan as to how to be prepared for a participant being
“triggered” by the trauma of talking about their past experiences. To minimize harm, I will first be prepared by bringing a list of counseling and sexual violence reporting resources, introduce myself as a SAPA and make myself available as a resource. Being a SAPA means that I am trained to be a confidential resource and a support for students who are survivors of sexual violence, or have friends who are survivors. Before starting the interview, I will check in with the participant and give them a warning that we will be discussing topics relating to sexual violence and reporting. Also, I will be in contact with Dick’s House about the research before starting any interviews so that at least one point person will understand the possible risks and be prepared to meet the needs of any participant. Finally, I will repeatedly remind participants that the interview may be stopped, or questions skipped, at any point in time at the discretion of the participant.

To maximize the benefits, I will give a $20 gift card to participants to thank them for their time. This incentive is not too big that it becomes unethical. I will also follow up with the participant within a week of the interview to check in and see if they need anything, or if they would like to cut off contact.

Weighing the potential risks to the potential benefits of the study, I have determined that the risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits of gaining the experiences of students who would tend to not have these conversations or share their narrative in any other setting than one that has been thought out and made as safe and confidential as possible. The knowledge gained from this study would benefit the mental health and well-being of all Dartmouth students by contributing to procedures that would become more sensitive to their health needs than current procedures.
Justice

I will assure justice in the selection process of participants, by allowing them to self-select into participating for both the interview and survey, and additionally reminding interview participants that they can rescind their participation at any point.

Plan to guard against ethical violations

By planning for possible events that may happen, I will minimize the risk of violating the ethics I have set for this research.

One potential event that could occur would be distress in the interview because of a triggering subject. In this case, I would terminate the interview immediately, and stay with the participant as a support as necessary and share Dartmouth College health resources that would help to lessen the distress of the participant.

Another potential event that could occur would be the discovery of an unresolved or unreported case of sexual violence. Though as a student I would not be legally obligated to report the incident, I would support the participant as necessary and share Dartmouth College health resources and reporting options. In the case of an individual’s safety being in danger, I would involve Safety and Security and Dick’s House to address the incident. I would also let a care provider at Dick’s House know of the study so that they could be at the ready to provide support without having to ask about the issue or potentially retrigger the participant.

A final potential risk is that of confidentiality. Because the interview includes sensitive information, it is imperative that confidentiality of the participants be kept at all times, and to the greatest lengths as possible. Though the likelihood of this risk is low, the seriousness of this risk is high, because it could potentially influence the participant’s reputation among peers or by the
school administration, or put the participant at risk of harm by others. Therefore, I will use a private computer, and have a separate folder for all confidential files and information. Once all the transcripts are complete, this identifying information, along with the voice recordings, will be destroyed within six months of the completed research.

SIGNIFICANCE

At Dartmouth, only 38.9% of students believe it is very or extremely likely that campus officials would take action to address factors that may have led to sexual misconduct on campus (Cantor et al 2015). The College has to work for every student, especially for those who are the most vulnerable. We already know that too many survivors silence themselves. Students feel the shame that pervades campus in regards to the issue of sexual violence. This is why Dartmouth College must work to actively secure the trust of students by showing, through actions and mobilization of advocates and resources, that the College prioritizes student safety and mental health in the context of sexual violence. Ultimately, this research hopes to lead to further inquiry as to how to improve Dartmouth College’s sexual violence policies and procedures to reflect a better awareness for the mental health needs of students. This research has both academic and practical contributions and significance. Academically, this research contributes to previously understudied aspects of sexual violence, namely the vulnerable time in between the event of sexual assault and undergoing the official reporting process, as well as the issue of mental health in the reporting process. This research also aims to have a practical significance by better informing Dartmouth College of the effects of their sexual violence policies on students in regards to mental health, by exploring current shortcomings or negative aspects of reporting, and whether this disproportionately affects vulnerable populations at Dartmouth.
Works Cited


Cantor, David; Fisher, Bonnie; Chibnall, Susan; Bruce, Carol; Townsend, Reanne; Thomas, Gail; Lee, Hyunshik. 2015. "Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct: Dartmouth College." Westat.


"Communities of Color and the Impacts of Sexual Violence." *University of Michigan Student Life.* University of Michigan Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, Web.


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Information Sheet

RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the Study: Reporting Sexual Violence at Dartmouth College and Effects on Student Mental Health

Principal Investigator: Mae Hardebeck
Phone: 781-492-7334
Email: mae.j.hardebeck.18@dartmouth.edu
DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH
I invite you to participate in a community research study. You have been asked to participate because you attend Dartmouth College as an undergraduate or graduate student, and have previously reported or thought about reporting sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence or stalking. This study includes undergraduate and graduate students, age 18 and older.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?
If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to respond to interview questions regarding your experiences and feelings about the Dartmouth College reporting system. You will also be given an optional form to fill out demographic information. Completion of this interview will take approximately one hour. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. We will conduct the interview in a space of your preference that is safe, private and comfortable. Within a week completing the interview, I will give you a $20 VISA gift card to thank you for your time, in person. Please keep this information sheet for your records.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS OR BENEFITS TO ME?
Trigger Warning: We will be discussing in part, topics relating to sexual violence and reporting. These conversations may be triggering, and hence a potential risk. I am a trained SAPA, meaning that I am trained to be a confidential resource and support for students who are survivors of sexual violence. It should be stressed that the participant is free to end the interview at any time, decline to answer a question, or retroactively rescind a statement, even after the interview has already ended, up until the publication date.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?
The research team and I are careful to protect the identities of the people in this study. We also keep the information we collect secure and confidential. Some confidential information, like name and contact information, will have to be collected in order to facilitate scheduling of interviews, but not shared with anyone besides myself or beyond the limits of scheduling purposes. The security of names and identification will be kept through numerous ways. First, you will be assigned a participant number, and thereby separating your interview, and all other materials beyond that, from your name. Next, I will edit out any identifying information from the voice recordings and transcripts. Any demographic information you provide will be voluntary and optional, you can also selectively fill out parts of the survey or redact any of this information. Should the participant provide identifiable information that I feel would jeopardize the confidentiality of the participant, I will take that information out of publication. If you participate in this study, selected quotes from the participant’s interview may be used directly in publications using an alias. Participants may view their quotes prior to publication by request.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have any questions, please contact Mae Hardebeck at 781-492-7334.
If you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Dartmouth College Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) at 603-646-9141.
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may stop at any point.

Signature: ____________________________________________________________
(Example: Anonymous1)
Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire

SPCSA Survey
Welcome to the SPCSA Research on Sexual Violence Reporting and Mental Health survey. This research is part of an effort to center sexual violence reporting policies around students and their mental health and well-being. Dartmouth’s definition of "sexual violence" includes: sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating violence, and stalking. This research will impact the yearly recommendations to the President of the College, by substantiating students' experiences and advocating for necessary changes to the current policies. By participating in this research, you are contributing to research that will have a lasting impact in bringing about positive reforms to the College. Your answers are strictly confidential and will not be linked back to you. The survey takes about 5 minutes to complete.
Q1 How do you identify in terms of gender?
- Cisgender man (1)
- Cisgender woman (2)
- Trans/Non-Binary/Gender Non-Conforming (3)
- Not listed here: (4) ____________________

Q2 How do you identify in terms of sexual orientation?
- Heterosexual (1)
- Gay/Lesbian (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- Not listed here: (4) ____________________

Q3 How do you identify in terms of race and ethnicity?

Q4 How do you identify in terms of socio-economic class? Please select all that apply.
- Upper class (1)
- Upper-middle class (2)
- Middle class (3)
- Lower-middle class (4)
- Lower class (5)

Q5 Do you identify with any of these statements? Please check Yes or No.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes (1)</th>
<th>No (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am an international student.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a student athlete.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am affiliated with a Dartmouth Greek Organization.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6 These questions relate to student mental health. How much do you agree with each of the following statements? Click the circle that corresponds to how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly agree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Q7 Have any aspects of your identity (such as race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.) affected your mental health on campus? If yes, please explain.

Q8 These questions relate to Dartmouth's sexual violence policies and procedures. How much do you agree with each of the following statements? Click the circle that corresponds to how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

| Q7 Have any aspects of your identity (such as race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.) affected your mental health on campus? If yes, please explain. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q8 These questions relate to Dartmouth's sexual violence policies and procedures. How much do you agree with each of the following statements? Click the circle that corresponds to how much you agree or disagree with the statement. |
| **Strongly disagree (1)** | **Disagree (2)** | **Somewhat disagree (3)** | **Neither agree nor disagree (4)** | **Somewhat agree (5)** | **Agree (6)** | **Strongly agree (7)** |
| **Dartmouth cares about student mental health when it comes to reporting sexual violence. (1)** | **Strongly disagree (1)** | **Disagree (2)** | **Somewhat disagree (3)** | **Neither agree nor disagree (4)** | **Somewhat agree (5)** | **Agree (6)** | **Strongly agree (7)** |
Dartmouth’s sexual violence policies are effective in serving justice. (2)

Dartmouth supports survivors of sexual violence. (3)

I would feel lost if asked to navigate Dartmouth’s sexual violence policies and procedures. (4)

Q9 Please outline your current understanding of Dartmouth’s sexual violence policies and procedures.

Q10 In your opinion, what would you say are the top reasons why a student may face mental health issues on campus?

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Dartmouth Sexual Violence Policies and Mental Health Interview Guide

Both Report and not Report:

- Tell me about your decision regarding reporting: what decision did you make and why?
- Have you ever felt like there is a preference for which route to go?
- How much did you know about the reporting process before you made your decision?
- What kind of resources did you have in making your decision? How helpful were they?
- Can you tell me about any times when you felt pushed to make a decision in regards to reporting?
- How supported did you feel in the whole process? Mentally, emotionally?
• Can you reflect on any cultural barriers that affected your decision?
• Tell me whether and how your gender, sexual orientation and/or race affect your decision?

Reported:
• What are some words that you think would describe your experience in reporting?
• How far did you go into the reporting process?
• How much control did you feel you had throughout the whole process?
• How much did it feel like Dartmouth listened to you and cared?
• Tell me if and how the College included you in the reporting process?
• What were you most hoping for from reporting?
  o Did you achieve this?
• Can you reflect on any cultural barriers that affected your reporting experience?
• How did your gender, sexual orientation and/or race affect your experience?

Did not Report:
• Can you tell me what the main reasons were for you, for deciding not to report?
• How much did it matter to you that the reporting would have had some sort of outcome?
• Can you think of any mental health hardships that a student might face when it comes to reporting?