

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **RECEIVE, RESPOND, REPORT: FACULTY EXPERIENCES WITH STUDENTS' DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT**

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Sexual violence is a pervasive problem at institutions of higher education, contributing to a hostile environment that impedes institutional missions and individual success. Institutions are challenged to comply with regulations and laws, while responding to the needs of their communities. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of faculty members as recipients of student disclosures of sexual violence. By applying the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which situates the complex interplay of individual and institutional relationships and social and cultural values as interdependent, I sought to understand the contexts in which disclosures occurred and how such factors informed faculty responses. I endeavored to understand the ways in which institutional betrayal and rape myth acceptance influenced faculty members' perceptions of responsibilities and the actual enactment of those duties.

In order to understand faculty responses to disclosures of sexual assault, I conducted and analyzed interviews with 16 faculty members from six Maryland universities, contextualized by institutional observations and professional campus experience. I found that key to understanding faculty experiences of receiving disclosures of sexual assault was their perception of their role as

mediators between the institution and students. Faculty members' beliefs about the extent to which they should work in compliance with or in opposition to institutional policies, in combination with their understanding of the purpose of such policies and practices, informed their beliefs and actions with students. Participants demonstrated limited knowledge of policy and a disconnect between what they believed they were required to do as responsible employees and what they actually did when faced with disclosures.

Whether in their instructional or advisory roles, faculty interacted with students based on the extent to which they fostered role-based intimacy as demonstrated through their pedagogical and relational approaches and their balancing of care for the students and obligations to policy.

This work demonstrates that institutions could craft policies and practices that more effectively support survivors and remain compliant with laws by understanding faculty experiences through an ecological systems framework. Compliance will remain paramount, but responsiveness to nuanced circumstances, transparency, and a culture of trust is critical to institutional-level change.