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PsycARTICLES: The Kids Are Alright (Mostly): An Empirical Examination of Title IX Knowledge in Institutions of Higher Education

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# The Kids Are Alright (Mostly): An Empirical Examination of Title IX Knowledge in Institutions of Higher Education

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## Abstract

**Objective:** Mainstream media frequently report about campus sexual assault and, specifically, the failure of academic institutions to prevent and appropriately respond to sexual assault, something that is required by federal law (i.e., Title IX). However, there is no research to date that has empirically examined the extent to which college personnel are knowledgeable about Title IX regulations, nor is there research examining the extent to which rape myths are endorsed among college personnel. The purpose of the present study was to examine these gaps in the literature using a mystery shopper paradigm (to avoid response bias) and a random sample of U.S. institutions of higher education. **Method:** Of the 632 calls made to Title IX coordinators ( $N = 319$ ) and campus police/security offices ( $N = 313$ ), there was a 27.5% participation rate (174 respondents across 156 institutions). **Results:** The majority of respondents disagreed with rape myths and were aware of campus sexual assault resources. However, some findings were concerning (e.g., a significant minority of police/campus security respondents did not know the name of their Title IX coordinator; confusion about who are confidential reporters). Moreover, less than a third (27.5%) of calls were answered. Small, religious schools were more likely to provide incorrect answers and less likely to refute rape myths. **Conclusions:** Data suggest there is a need for technical assistance and education about Title IX regulations, particularly regarding which individuals on college campuses are and are not confidential resources. Small, religious institutions may be in most need of technical assistance and/or additional resources.

### KEYWORDS:

Title IX, compliance, sexual assault, college, mystery shopper

Over the past few decades, researchers have documented the concerning rates and deleterious consequences of sexual assault (e.g., unwanted contact, rape) among college students (Basile, Smith, Breiding, Black, & Mahendra, 2014; Koss et al., 2007). For example, the Association of American Universities conducted a survey of 150,072 college students at 27 institutions of higher education; results documented that 23.1% of undergraduate women had experienced a sexual assault (i.e., nonconsensual penetration or sexual touching involving physical force or incapacitation) during college (Cantor et al., 2015). At the same time, mainstream media frequently reports about campus sexual assault and, specifically, the failure of academic institutions to prevent and appropriately respond to sexual assault. However, despite such claims, there is no research to date that has empirically examined the extent to which college personnel are knowledgeable about Title IX, a federal law that requires campuses to prevent and respond to assault. There is also no research that has examined the extent to which rape myths—“prejudicial, stereotyped, or fast beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217)—are endorsed among college personnel. The purpose of the present study was to examine these gaps in the literature using a mystery shopper paradigm (to avoid response bias) and a random sample of U.S. institutions of higher education.

Although there has been significant movement in the policy arena to enhance the response to college campus sexual assault, there has not been significant research about colleges and universities' compliance with Title IX. The vast majority of research relating to college and university sexual violence has focused on prevalence (Cantor et al., 2015; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2009), social reactions (Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012; Orchowski, Untied, & Gidycz, 2013; Ullman, 2010), and institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2013), as reported by college student victims of sexual assault. Moreover, a growing body of literature has documented the deleterious psychological, social, physical, and academic outcomes associated with sexual assault among college students (Baker et al., 2016; Edwards, Dardis, Sylaska, & Gidycz, 2015; Edwards & Gidycz, 2014; Tansill, Edwards, Kearns, Gidycz, & Calhoun, 2012; Walsh et al., 2012). Although these are critical to our understanding of victims' experiences of sexual assault to inform prevention, risk reduction, and intervention efforts, it is also critical that we have an understanding of how campuses are addressing sexual assault beyond self-report data from victims, especially in light of Title IX, which outlaws sex-based discrimination in educational programs or activities receiving Federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2001, 2011). At the time the data in this study was collected (in the spring of 2016), Title IX had created obligations for universities receiving federal money to have policies, personnel, and systems in place to address how institutes receive complaints, respond to complaints, support survivors, and ensure due process of students involved in investigations. Campuses must have these systems to take prompt and effective action to stop the harassment or violence, prevent its recurrence, and address its effects (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2001, 2011).

To date, we are aware of only five studies that have examined university responses to and/or knowledge about sexual assault and related laws using nonvictim samples, and none of these studies explicitly examined college personnel's knowledge about Title IX (Edwards, Moynihan, Rodenhizer-Stämpfli, Demers, & Banyard, 2015; Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2002; Lund & Thomas, 2015; Taylor, 2018; Yung, 2015). For example, Edwards, Moynihan, et al. (2015) surveyed 353 leaders and administrators at 131 colleges and universities across New England and documented that there were on average moderate to high levels of community readiness to address sexual assault, which included some indicators of Title IX knowledge and compliance. In another study, Lund and Thomas (2015) coded the websites of 102 colleges and documented that the vast majority (88%) had information about sexual assault on their websites. Moreover, Lund and Thomas documented that the majority of websites contained the university sexual assault policy (83%) as well as contact information for various resources (e.g., police; 72%). However, less commonly included on websites was information that directly discouraged victim blaming (36%). Research also suggests that the way in which sexual assault information is presented on websites is often at a reading level that is higher than the average college students' reading comprehension (Taylor, 2018).

Similar to Title IX knowledge, the degree of rape myth acceptance among college personnel has not been empirically examined. In light of research suggesting that rape myths impact social reactions to disclosures of sexual assault (Filipas & Ullman, 2001), campus officials who exhibit higher rape myth acceptance would presumably be more likely than officials who exhibit lower rape myth acceptance to respond to sexual assault victims' disclosures in ways that are negative and unsupportive. Also, although speculative, the failure of some universities to adequately respond to campus sexual assault could be indicative of a campus climate characterized by the presence of rape myths among university administrators, campus leaders, and other personnel. For instance, research assessing the content included on school sexual assault resources and literature websites found that 35% of their sample contained information that could perpetuate rape myths through victim blaming language (e.g., telling women not to drink alcohol, telling women what they should do to protect themselves; Hayes-Smith & Hayes-Smith, 2009). Additionally, those schools also lacked language that explicitly encouraged women to report and/or telling them the incidence was not their fault, which could also serve to increase self-blame among victims (Hayes-Smith & Hayes-Smith, 2009). Given this, it is reasonable to speculate that institution officials who adhere to rape myths are less likely to be knowledgeable about Title IX policies and, thus, less likely to effectively assist victims of sexual assault.

The purpose of the current study was to document Title IX coordinators and campus police/security officers' willingness to answer questions about sexual assault as well as knowledge about sexual assault, including Title IX knowledge and the extent to which rape myths were refuted. To reduce reporting bias and obtain the most accurate portrayal of these issues, we used a mystery shopper approach in which a member of the research team posed as a college student at each of the institutions we contacted stating that the purpose of the call was to obtain information for a class paper on campus sexual assault. Typically used in physical and mental health care research to assess provider job performance, the mystery shopper approach involves the researcher posing as a consumer of a service of interest to determine the quality of the service received (Malowney, Keltz, Fischer, & Boyd, 2015; Steinman, Kelleher, Dembe, Wickizer, & Hemming, 2012).

Specific aims were as follows: Document the extent to which Title IX coordinators and campus police/security officers were agreeable to answer the pseudostudent's questions (Aim 1), knowledgeable about Title IX requirements (Aim 2), and refuted rape myths (Aim 3). As part of each of these aims, we also examined the school (e.g., private vs. public) and geographic (e.g., region of the country) correlates of whether or not call recipients were agreeable to answer the pseudostudent's questions as well as the school and geographic correlates of Title IX coordinators and campus police/security officers' responses.

## Method

### Procedures and Protocols

We randomly selected 450 schools from an online list of universities in the United States provided by the University of Texas at Austin (2014). From this list, we excluded institutions offering only graduate and/or professional degrees, institutions offering only online degrees, and institutions with a student body sizes of 100 or less given that these schools would likely have little on-campus resources, less Title IX cases, and the media's focus largely on undergraduate cases of sexual assault. An undergraduate research assistant located telephone numbers for the Title IX office and campus security/police (nonemergency) on each of the campuses. Not all institutions had both Title IX and campus security/police, and this was especially true of smaller institutions. Thus, we made a total of 632 calls to 319 Title IX offices and 313 campus security/police offices. Overall, we called 358 institutions (273 of which had both Title IX and campus security/police; 46 of which had Title IX only; 40 of which had campus security/police only). A breakdown of institution characteristics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1  
Institution Characteristics and Chi-Square Analyses of Respondent Characteristics

Respondent characteristics	Provided answers (N = 174)		Never answered (N = 458)		Total (N = 632)		$\chi^2$	p	$\Phi$
	n	%	n	%	n	%			
Office type									
Title IX	68	39.1	251	54.8	319	50.5	12.47	<.001***	.140
Campus police/safety	106	60.9	207	45.2	313	49.5			
Institution type									
Public	78	44.8	192	41.9	270	42.7	.44	.509	-.026
Private	96	55.2	266	58.1	362	57.3			
Religious affiliation									
Religious	65	37.6	161	35.4	226	36.0	.26	.610	.020
Nonreligious	108	62.4	294	64.6	402	64.0			
Title IX complaint or lawsuit filed <sup>a</sup>									
Neither	32	18.4	85	18.6	117	18.5	1.77	.622	.053
Complaint only	100	57.5	255	55.7	355	56.2			
Lawsuit only	38	21.8	97	21.2	135	21.4			
Complaint and lawsuit	4	2.3	21	4.6	25	3.9			
Past 5-year Title IX SA lawsuit <sup>b</sup>									
No	8	4.6	42	9.2	50	7.9	3.62	.057	.076
Yes	166	95.4	416	90.8	582	92.1			
Geographical region									
East	16	9.2	30	6.6	46	7.3	5.42	.609	.093
West	21	12.1	50	10.9	71	11.2			
South	24	13.8	53	11.6	77	12.2			
Southwest	11	6.3	19	4.1	30	4.7			
Southeast	18	10.3	64	14.0	82	13.0			
Northeast	46	26.4	128	27.9	174	27.5			
Midwest	37	21.3	108	23.6	145	22.9			
Pacific	1	.6	6	1.3	7	1.1			
					<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>			
Undergraduate student body size					7,074.71 (15,680.02)	Over 100--250,000 <sup>c</sup>			

Note. SA = sexual assault.

<sup>a</sup> Institutions with or without any history of any type of Title IX complaint or lawsuit or both filed against them. <sup>b</sup> Institutions with or without of sexual assault-related Title IX lawsuits filed against them. <sup>c</sup> Rough estimate to protect the identities of the included institution.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

All calls were made during typical business hours during the spring 2016 academic semester (with the exception of some campus security/police officers who asked us to call them back during the evening hours, which we did). In the data set, schools were identified by a number and thus callers were blind to the schools they were calling unless the call recipients disclosed the name of the school. We attempted to reach respondents twice; in other words, if there was no answer on the first call, we called back a second time. Calls were completed by a female faculty or graduate students facilitated by a detailed script. Schools were randomly assigned to each caller, and outcomes did not differ as a function of the person calling. The caller introduced stating the following:

Hi, I'm a student and I'm doing a class project on sexual assault and rape on campus and I was hoping to ask you a couple questions since you are part of the police department (or Title IX office). This is just to get information for my project. It will take like 5 minutes.

If call recipients were agreeable, the caller proceeded to ask the following questions:

1. *Where can a student go on campus to report or talk to someone about a sexual assault?*
2. *Will reporting a sexual assault automatically result in an investigation?*
3. *Who is the school's Title IX coordinator? (Only for police/campus security)*
4. *Who are mandatory reporters?*
5. *Who's not a mandatory reporter?*
6. *If the student who filed the report had a lot to drink before the assault, like how would that be treated by the school? (rape myth)*
7. *Do students who report sexual assault to our school ever lie and maybe just regret the sex or want attention or something? (rape myth); Follow-up (if necessary): How common is it for people to lie or something like that?*
8. (if not already disclosed) *What is your official title?*

Callers took detailed notes during the call. Moreover, the script instructed callers to do the following, when applicable:

1. If the call recipient asked for the name and contact information of the caller, the caller gave a pseudo name, a Gmail account associated with the pseudo name was created for this project and de-activated following data collection, as well as a phone number linked to a disposable cell phone purchased for the purpose of this project.
2. If the call recipient asked the caller to come for an in-person meeting, we reminded the call recipient that the questions take 5 minutes and that the project is due soon. Phone meetings were scheduled if required by the call recipient.
3. If the call recipient asked what class this was for, the caller responded it was for a social psychology course.
4. If the call recipient asked which professor this is with, the caller said "Professor Edwards."
5. If the call recipient asked if they were a student at the institution being called, callers responded affirmatively (i.e., "yes"). If at any point the call recipient stated that they did not recognize the professor's name, the pseudo name, and so forth, the caller said,

*Oh, sorry I misunderstood I thought you were just asking if I am a student. I actually am not a student here but I go to the University of New Hampshire. For my class project we have to call schools in different states.*

6. Callers were instructed to hang up if the line was being recorded. Callers were also instructed not to leave a voicemail if there was no answer.

Institutional review board approved the study protocols. Per HHS (Department of Health and Human Services) regulations (Public Welfare, 2009), the study would not have been possible if we were to seek informed consent before the call given the entire idea was to capture how campus officials respond to students with such inquiries. Second, we called individuals and asked them questions that were within the scope of their everyday jobs; in other words, the research took place in a naturalistic setting. Thus, we did not expose them to anything unusual (i.e., we are calling the individuals who interface a great deal with issues regarding sexual assault, campus police, and Title IX coordinators). Moreover, there is precedent in other studies using mystery shopper or pseudopatient paradigms not to seek informed consent; authors of these studies note that the use of such methods is the only way to get valid data on topics of critical public health importance (Malowney et al., 2015; Rhodes & Miller, 2012; Steinman et al., 2012). We also did not debrief participants because this could have led to increased risk for harm (e.g., individuals who answered questions poorly could have told supervisors which could have resulted in negative consequences) in

addition to jeopardizing the integrity of the research (e.g., participants may have alerted individuals in similar roles at other institutions about the study).

An undergraduate student, who did not assist in making calls, collected institutional data on each of the schools randomly selected. This was done by searching each school's website and online databases (Courtesy of Department of Education, OCR, 2014; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2016). The data categories included whether it was a public or private institution, if the institution had a religious affiliation, regional location, undergraduate student body size, whether the institution has had of any type of Title IX complaint or lawsuit filed against them, and whether the institution has had a Title IX lawsuit specific to sexual assault filed against them within the past 5 years. As previously stated, Title IX prohibits sex-based discrimination in education programs or activities such as campus jobs, sports, and clubs (20 U.S.C. § 1681). Therefore, when we state that a school has a history of any type of Title IX complaint or lawsuit it may not be specifically related to a sexual assault incident; a Title IX complaint could have been filed for unequal pay for a campus job or exclusion from a campus organization due to gender. Thus, we had a separate category for instances for institutions that have had a sexual assault-related Title IX lawsuit filed against them within the past 5 years.

## Data Analysis

We used content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980) to synthesize participants' verbal response. In the first steps of content analysis, coders read participants' responses repeatedly to obtain the gestalt of the data. Second, the words and phrases that addressed the open-ended questions were highlighted in an effort to identify and categorize all aspects of participants' responses. Third, similarities and differences in responses were identified, which led to the emergence of categories of participant responses for each of the questions. Whereas all three authors participated in all of the phases described thus far, the second and third authors coded participants' responses to each of the questions using the categories created collaboratively by each of the three authors. The agreement rate among the two coders was acceptable (92.9%). When the coders were in disagreement, the discrepancy was discussed among the first two authors until mutual agreement was reached. In the results section, we present frequencies of responses for each question.

The coders created the system of determining correct versus incorrect responses based on the applicable Title IX regulations that were in effect at the time of the study. Coders examined responses about what happens when a student reports and if a report is automatically investigated. When a college or university receives a report of a disclosure or a complaint of sexual violence the institution must take "immediate and appropriate steps to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred" (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2014b, pp. 19–20). These investigations can occur when a college or university learns of a disclosure or through a formal complaint logged under the school's grievance procedure (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2001). These investigations should be reliable (e.g., consistent, structured) and impartial (unbiased, unprejudiced toward either party; U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2011). In regard to the investigation, participants were marked as having a correct answer if they provided that there were different options to students or stating that an investigation does not always start right away.

Campus security officers were asked if they knew who the Title IX coordinator was on their campus. Under Title IX, institutions must designate an individual to be a Title IX coordinator (Courtesy of Department of Education, OCR, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2014b). Participant's answers were marked as correct if they named an individual or the title of the position. Callers and coders did not independently verify if the answer was correct because that would have required to know the school at the time of the call and at the time of the coding the position or person could have changed. Coders focused on whether an answer was provided.

Coders then moved to examining the questions related to mandatory reporters. Under Title IX, institutions must designate responsible employees, who are equitable to mandatory reporters, and confidential resources for students. A responsible employee is,

any employee who has the authority to take action to redress sexual violence; who has been given the duty of reporting incidents of sexual violence or any other misconduct by students to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee; or whom a student could reasonably believe has this authority or duty. (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2014b, p. 14)

Responsible employees, therefore, must report any disclosure of sexual violence to designated college or university officials. However, confidential sources, such as campus mental health counselors, pastoral counselors, social

workers, psychologists, or health center employees, are not considered responsible employees and therefore are not required to report disclosures of sexual violence to the college or university (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2014a). In addition to identifying responsible employees and confidential resources, OCR expects that colleges and universities train school officials to identify and report sexual violence (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2011). When participants were asked about responsible employees (i.e., mandatory reporters), their answers were marked as correct if they listed types of employees who are responsible. Their answers were marked incorrect if they stated that “everyone is a responsible employee” (or something along those lines). In conjunction, when asked about confidential resources (not mandatory), participants’ answers were marked as correct if they listed at least one of the following: campus mental health counselors, pastoral counselors, social workers, psychologists, or health center employees. If the participant was unable to list one of these types of employees their answer was marked as incorrect. Coders also noted if participants stated there are no mandatory reporters and that is only for child sexual abuse.

The last two questions sought to determine the extent to which participants would refute rape myths. Participant’s responses to how alcohol impacts the investigation primarily focused on to see if victims may be punished or if the investigation would not move forward if a victim was intoxicated. Responses that refuted rape myths included answers such as alcohol would not affect the investigation or if there is an amnesty policy at the institution. An amnesty policy means that victims would not face disciplinary action for drinking if they were drinking before or during the time of the sexual assault. Answers were considered to be encouraging of rape myths if participants stated victim use of alcohol at the time of the assault would halt the investigation or if the victim would face disciplinary action. Regarding false reporting, stating that a small proportion of sexual assaults are false reports was a rape myth refuting response. Answers were marked as rape myth supporting comment if the participants stated that false reports are common or that the school deals with them regularly (or something similar).

## Results

### Response Rate

Of the 632 calls made, 27.5% ( $n = 174$ ) resulted in answers by phone and/or e-mail; 229 calls (36.2%) were never answered (e.g., rang indefinitely, went to voicemail); 101 calls (16.1%) resulted in being transferred to an irrelevant office (e.g., media/public relations, legal counsel), put on hold indefinitely, requesting that the pseudostudents provide her number so someone could call her back, or some combination of these three things; 62 calls (9.8%) resulted in refusal to speak to the pseudostudent for reasons including being too busy, refusal to speak by phone or e-mail (in person required), being told to look online, or being told it was illegal to provide information on campus sexual assault to the pseudostudent; 58 calls (9.2%) resulted in being asked to send an e-mail to which no reply was received or received e-mail with only website links provided; 14 calls (2.2%) resulted in answers being provided subsequently by e-mail; and eight calls (1.3%) were being recorded and thus the researcher hung up. Of note, of the 159 answers received by phone, 48 (30.2%) of these were scheduled, whereas 111 (69.8%) were answered on the spot.

We examined the school and geographic correlates of the call outcomes. Due to some of the nonresponse categories having small cell sizes, we collapsed all such categories into one group. Therefore, in these inferential analyses, we only included the following groups: (a) received a response by phone or e-mail ( $n = 174$ ) and (b) did not receive a response ( $n = 458$ ). We conducted a series of chi-squares to determine if there were any institutional or geographic differences as a function of call outcome. The results, which can be found in Table 1, suggested there were no statistically significant associations between institution type and type of call response,  $\chi^2(1) = .44$ ,  $p = .509$ ,  $\Phi = -.026$ , religious affiliation and type of call response,  $\chi^2(1) = .26$ ,  $p = .610$ ,  $\Phi = .020$ , the school’s geographic region and type of call response,  $\chi^2(7) = 5.42$ ,  $p = .609$ ,  $\Phi = .093$ , or presence of a Title IX complaint or lawsuit and type of call response,  $\chi^2(3) = 1.77$ ,  $p = .622$ ,  $\Phi = .053$ . There was a statistically significant relationship between office type and type of call response,  $\chi^2(1) = 12.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Phi = .140$ , with results indicating that campus police/security offices were more likely to respond to calls than Title IX offices. There was a marginally significant association between presence of a Title IX sexual assault lawsuit within the past 5 years and type of call response,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.62$ ,  $p = .057$ ,  $\Phi = .076$ , such that institutions with a Title IX sexual assault lawsuit filed against them in the past 5 years were less likely to respond to our calls than those without a lawsuit. Also of note, the size of the undergraduate student body was not related to whether calls were answered,  $t(630) = .237$ ,  $p = .813$ .

### Respondent Characteristics

Of the individuals who provided responses to the questions (174 individuals across 156 different institutions), titles were as follows: campus security officer or guard, police officer, dispatcher, or detective, director of campus safety or

security, police captain, chief of police, director of compliance, disability services director or coordinator, Title IX coordinator, Title IX investigator, Title IX educator and compliance officer, head of campus life, vice president of student life, vice president for administrative affairs, director of resident life, human resource director, dean, or assistant dean of students. Also, among individuals who provided responses, 39.1% ( $n = 68$ ) were with the Title IX office and 60.9% ( $n = 106$ ) were with the campus police or campus safety. Further, 44.8% ( $n = 78$ ) of participants were at public institutions and 55.2% ( $n = 96$ ) of participants were at private institutions. Of the institutions where we could find the status of religious affiliation ( $n = 173$ ), 62.4% ( $n = 108$ ) did not have religious affiliations and 37.6% ( $n = 65$ ) had religious affiliations. Approximately one quarter of the schools who provided responses were located in the Northeast ( $n = 46$ , 26.4%), followed by the Midwest ( $n = 37$ , 21.3%), the South ( $n = 24$ , 13.8%), the West ( $n = 21$ , 12.1%), the Southeast ( $n = 18$ , 10.3%), the East ( $n = 16$ , 9.2%), the Southwest ( $n = 11$ , 6.3%), and the Pacific ( $n = 1$ , 0.6%). Additionally, 142 (81.6%) of the institutions that responded have had history of a Title IX lawsuit or complaint, of any type (e.g., gender discrimination, disability discrimination, race discrimination, etc.), taken out against them. Specifically, 57.5% ( $n = 100$ ) had a complaint only, 21.8% ( $n = 38$ ) had a lawsuit only, and 2.3% ( $n = 4$ ) had both a complaint and lawsuit filed against them; 18.4% ( $n = 32$ ) of the responding institutions did not have a history of Title IX complaints or lawsuits. We then determined whether responding institutions have had a Title IX lawsuits, specific to sexual assault cases, filed against them in the past 5 years; 4.6% ( $n = 8$ ) of institutions that responded to our calls had a lawsuit. Undergraduate student body sizes for institutions that responded varied widely. The average size was 6,834 students ( $SD = 8,331.07$ ) with a range from around 200 to over 40,000 (specific enrollment numbers are not given to protect school anonymity).

## Content Analysis of Respondents' Answers and Quantitative Correlates

In what follows, we report the frequency of coding responses specific to each of the questions asked. Percentages may exceed 100% given that respondents could have provided several different codeable responses. Within each section we also specify when the answers varied as a function of office (i.e., Title IX vs. security/police) and provide school and geographic correlates of responses.

### Where can a student go on campus to report or talk to someone about a sexual assault?

The majority (78.2%) of respondents said that students could report a sexual assault to the police. Other responses included the following: 44.8% of respondents said that students could report to a Title IX office/coordinator, 25.3% to the counseling center, 24.1% to a dean or other school administrator, 20.1% to faculty, 14.9% to hall directors or residence life, 13.8% to staff (generically), 10.9% to student life, 10.3% to residents assistants, 6.9% report to victim advocates, 4.0% to a campus ministry, 3.4% to human resources, 3.4% to a diversity and/or equity office, 2.9% to a student conduct, 1.7% to sexual medical services centers, and 1.7% to sexual assault resource centers. Also, a few respondents (2.9%) spontaneously noted that their universities had an online anonymous reporting system. Nearly one in four respondents noted specifically that students had a number of reporting options.

Regarding differences in responses as a function of office (see Table 2),

Table 2  
Correlations Between Respondent Characteristics and Options to Whom Individuals Can Report

Perceptions of Who Victims Can Report To	Correlations					
	Office type (police)	Institution type (private)	Religious affiliation	T9 complaint or lawsuit filed	Past 5 years T9 SA lawsuit	Student body size
1. Police	.402***	.019	.129	-.079	.090	.022
2. Resident assistants	-.034	.083	.045	-.043	.076	-.014
3. Hall director/resident life	.042	.091	.071	-.029	.016	-.116
4. Counseling	-.044	-.082	-.103	-.016	-.124	.065
5. SA resource center	-.074	-.057	-.013	-.144	-.181*	.102
6. Faculty	-.064	.054	.051	-.042	-.094	-.050
7. Staff	-.121	-.030	-.004	-.026	.009	-.025
8. School administrators	-.087	-.096	.085	.087	-.029	.063
9. Diversity and equity office	-.170*	-.145	-.084	.022	-.108	.161*
10. Online reporting system	-.072	-.051	.007	-.121	.038	.082
11. Student life	-.094	.172*	.145	.142	-.010	-.127
12. Human resources	-.235**	-.081	-.018	.203**	-.108	-.046
13. Campus ministry/pastoral services	-.195*	.129	.203**	-.026	.045	-.123
14. Title IX office	-.410**	-.155*	-.258**	-.080	-.076	.180*
15. Health center	-.018	-.004	.030	.118	-.230**	-.036
16. Student conduct	-.072	-.120	-.136	.127	-.290**	.192*
17. Victims advocate	-.059	-.071	-.121	-.002	-.156*	.139
18. Other students	-.095	-.084	-.060	.100	.017	.151*
19. Hospital	-.074	-.146	-.105	-.017	.029	-.009
20. Noted off-campus resources	.001	.007	.016	.014	.051	.154*
21. Lots of options	-.118	.087	.034	-.089	.056	-.080
22. Number of options	-.188*	-.033	-.032	-.028	-.189*	.041

Note. SA = sexual assault.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

campus safety/police offices were more likely than Title IX offices to suggest contacting campus safety/police. Title IX offices were more likely than campus safety/police offices to suggest contacting the following resources: diversity and equity offices, human resources, campus ministry and Title IX offices. Title IX were also more likely to provide a greater number of options than campus safety/police. Regarding differences in responses as a function of institution type, private institutions were more likely than public institutions to suggest contacting student life and less likely to suggest contacting the Title IX office to report a sexual assault. Additionally, religious institutions were more likely than nonreligious institutions to suggest contacting campus ministry and less likely to suggest contacting the Title IX office. Institutions with a history of a Title IX lawsuit and/or complaint not specifically related to sexual assault were more likely to suggest contacting human resources than institutions without such a history. In regards to differences in responses as a function of a 5-year history of a sexual assault-related Title IX lawsuit, institutions with a lawsuit history were more likely to suggest contacting the following resources than those without recent sexual-assault lawsuit history: sexual assault resource centers, health centers, student conduct, and victim advocates. Respondents from campuses with a history of recent sexual-assault related Title IX lawsuit were more likely to provide a greater number of reporting options for victims compared to respondents from campuses without a history of recent sexual-assault related Title IX lawsuit. Finally, larger institutions, compared with smaller institutions, were more likely to suggest contacting Title IX offices, diversity and equity offices, student conduct, other students (e.g., roommates, friends), and more likely to mention the presence of off-campus resources.

### Will reporting automatically cause an investigation?

About one third (35.1%) of respondents said that a student's report of a sexual assault would automatically trigger an investigation and provided no additional information. A similar percentage (31.6%) of respondents said that the school will investigate only if the victims wants the school to investigate. Additional responses included the following: It depends on who the victim tells (13.2%), if the perpetrator is a threat to campus (12.6%), said it depends without giving an explanation (5.7%), and said that the victim could make a statement without an investigation (5.2%). Regarding correlates of categories of responses regarding sexual assault investigations (see Table 3),

Table 3  
*Correlations Between Respondent Characteristics and Responses to Sexual Assault Reports Triggering an Investigation*

Perceptions of if Reporting Triggers and Investigation	Correlations					
	Office type (police)	Institution type (private)	Religious affiliation	T9 complaint or lawsuit filed	Past 5 years T9 SA lawsuit	Student body size
1. Yes, no explanation	.119	.098	.090	-.072	.066	-.081
2. No, no explanation	-.098	-.085	-.062	.102	.019	.025
3. Depends, no explanation	-.053	.037	.015	.066	-.058	-.042
4. Depends if victim wants	-.080	-.082	-.114	.000	.049	.071
5. Victim statement with no explanation	.034	-.096	-.020	.074	.057	.125
6. Depends on who victim tells	-.028	-.042	-.058	.002	-.068	-.016
7. If perpetrator is a threat to campus	-.343***	-.060	-.083	.139	.010	.084

Note. SA = sexual assault.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Title IX offices were more likely than police/security to report that a sexual assault report would automatically trigger an investigation if they believed the perpetrator was a threat to other students or the campus. All other correlations were not significant.

### Who is the school's Title IX coordinator?

Only police/security respondents were asked this question. Over half of respondents (67.3%) immediately provided the name of the Title IX coordinator on their campus, 4.7% gave the name after looking it up, and 4.7% stated the name of the position (e.g., 18.7% dean of students) of the Title IX coordinator but not the actual name. Twenty percent stated that they did not know the name of the Title IX coordinator on their campus. Lastly, 5.0% replied with noncodeable responses (i.e., "there is a lot of them," "call student services," and "look at the directory"). Regarding correlates of categories of responses regarding knowledge of Title IX coordinators (see Table 4),

Table 4  
*Correlations Between Police/Security Respondent Characteristics and Responses to Knowing the Name of the Title IX Coordinator*

Knowledge of Title IX Coordinator Name	Correlations				
	Institution type (private)	Religious affiliation	T9 complaint or lawsuit	Past 5 years T9 SA lawsuit	Student body size
1. Gave name immediately	-.150	-.141	.110	.051	.105
2. Gave name after looking it up	.009	-.007	-.083	.031	.011
3. Gave position immediately	-.080	-.007	.051	-.296**	.164
4. Did not know	.214*	.181	.002	.066	-.193*

Note. SA = sexual assault.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .



private institutions and respondents from institutions with a smaller student body were more likely to not know the name of their Title IX coordinator than respondents from public institutions and those with a larger student body.

### Who are the mandatory reporters of sexual assault?

The majority (58.6%) of respondents correctly mentioned at least one mandatory reporter. Nearly one third (29.3%) incorrectly mentioned at least one mandatory reporter. Furthermore, 2.3% of respondents said that there was no such thing as mandatory reporters of sexual assault, and 9.8% of respondents said they did not know. Regarding correlates of categories of responses regarding mandatory reporters (see Table 5),

**Table 5**  
*Correlations Between Respondent Characteristics and Responses to a Question Inquiring About Who Are Mandatory Reporters of Sexual Assault*

Perceptions of Who Are Mandatory Reporters	Correlations					
	Office type (police)	Institution type (private)	Religious affiliation	T9 complaint or lawsuit	Past 5 years T9 SA lawsuit	Student body size
1. Everyone except, correct	-.258**	-.024	-.088	.149	.058	-.011
2. Mentioned at least one correct	-.225**	-.120	-.137	.066	.000	.138
3. Mentioned at least one incorrect	-.009	.004	-.099	.063	-.030	-.060
4. Answered about child abuse	.113	-.172*	-.098	.015	.048	.152
5. No such thing	.050	-.015	.045	-.078	.036	-.074
6. Did not know	.281**	.150	.159*	-.016	.078	-.161*

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

respondents from the Title IX office were more likely to respond with correct examples of mandatory reporters than police/security. Police, religious institutions, and institutions with a smaller student body were more likely than Title IX officers, nonreligious institutions, and institutions with a larger student body, respectively, to say they were unable to identify mandatory reporters. Furthermore, respondents at public institutions were also more likely than those at private institutions to respond with answers regarding child abuse (which likely emerged due to the wording of the question that included “mandated reporters”).

### Who is not a mandatory reporter?

The majority (67.2%) of respondents correctly mentioned at least one confidential individual/office (e.g., counseling center), whereas 10.3% of respondents incorrectly mentioned at least one confidential individual/office. Furthermore 11.5% of respondents did not explicitly mention counseling services, student ministry or pastoral services, or health services as a confidential individual/office. Finally, 12.1% of respondents said that they did not know. Regarding correlates of categories of responses regarding mandatory reporters (see Table 6),

**Table 6**  
*Correlations Between Respondent Characteristics and Responses to a Question Inquiring About Who Are Not Mandatory Reporters of Sexual Assault*

Perceptions of who are NOT Mandatory Reporters	Correlations					
	Office type (police)	Institution type (private)	Religious affiliation	T9 complaint or lawsuit	Past 5 years T9 SA lawsuit	Student body size
1. Mentioned at least one correct	-.256**	.070	.148	.131	-.055	.126
2. Mentioned at least one incorrect	.041	-.065	-.153	.014	-.019	.099
3. Absence of counselor, ministry, or health	.109	.011	-.057	-.018	-.010	-.042
4. Answered about child abuse	.064	-.086	-.062	.104	.017	.189*
5. Did not know	.275**	.066	.007	-.152	.085	-.180*

Note. SA = sexual assault.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Title IX offices were more likely than campus safety or campus police to provide at least one correct confidential resource. Conversely, campus safety/police were more likely than Title IX to not know any available confidential resources. Additionally, smaller campuses were more likely than larger campuses to be unaware of confidential resources, and larger campuses were more likely than smaller campuses to respond with answers regarding child abuse.

### If a student drank before the assault, how would they be treated by the school?

The majority (70.7%) explicitly stated that there would be no impact on the student, 25.3% stated that a person cannot consent if they are intoxicated, and 20.1% stated that their university had an alcohol amnesty policy (i.e., conduct charges will not be pursued for students who are intoxicated and seek police and/or medical help in an emergency situation). Further, 4.6% of respondents said that victim alcohol use at the time of the assault could negatively impact the investigation and 2.9% explicitly stated that the victim would likely be in trouble for drinking. Finally, 2.3% of respondents said that they did not know how victim alcohol use would impact the investigation. Regarding correlates of categories of responses regarding victim alcohol use (see Table 7),

Table 7  
Correlations Between Respondent Characteristics and Perceptions Regarding How Victim Alcohol Use Could Impact a Sexual Assault Investigation

Perceptions of Victim Alcohol Use on Investigation	Correlations					
	Office type (police)	Institution type (private)	Religious affiliation	T9 complaint or lawsuit	Past 5 years T9 SA lawsuit	Student body size
1. No impact on victim	.231**	-.055	-.101	.086	-.007	-.018
2. Could impact or hurt victim	.069	.149	.117	-.145	.050	-.113
3. Cannot consent if intoxicated	-.148	-.054	-.040	.205**	.071	.143
4. Presence of alcohol amnesty policy	-.389**	-.032	.028	-.036	-.022	.092
5. Victim will be in trouble for drinking	.144	.090	.155*	.031	.039	-.053
6. Did not know	.048	.143	.122	-.017	.035	-.095

Note. SA = sexual assault.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

campus safety and police were more likely than Title IX to state that the presence of alcohol would have no impact on the victim. Conversely, Title IX offices were more likely than campus police/security to state the institution has an alcohol amnesty policy. Schools with a religious affiliation were more likely than nonreligious institutions to state the victim would get into trouble for alcohol use. Lastly, individuals at institutions with a history of a Title IX complaint and/or Title IX lawsuit were more likely to state that individuals who drank alcohol could not consent than institutions without a history of a Title IX complaint and/or lawsuit.

### Do students who report an assault ever lie? How common is it?

The majority (69.0%) of respondents explicitly stated that students rarely lie about sexual assault, whereas 12.1% of individuals said that lying about a sexual assault happens but did not state that it was low or rare. Moreover, 12.1% of respondents said that it was up to them (as police or Title IX coordinators) to investigate/proceed as normal in all sexual assault reports. Close to one in 10 (9.2%) of respondents said that they did not know if students who reported a sexual assault were lying. Regarding correlates of categories of responses regarding perceptions of victims lying about sexual assault (see Table 8),

Table 8  
Correlations Between Respondent Characteristics and Perceptions Regarding How Common It Is That Victims Lie About Sexual Assault

Perceptions of Victims Lying	Correlations					
	Office type (police)	Institution type (private)	Religious affiliation	T9 complaint or lawsuit	Past 5 years T9 SA lawsuit	Student body size
1. Does not happen or is rare	-.118	-.056	-.168*	-.005	.071	.132
2. Happens but did not say it was rare	.050	.168**	.273**	.020	.080	-.140
3. Up to the school/police to investigate	-.024	-.050	-.066	.020	.080	.059
4. Respondent perceived victim blaming	-.162*	-.245**	-.173*	.063	.047	.087
5. Did not know	.140	.054	.131	-.059	-.033	-.115

Note. SA = sexual assault.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

private and religious institutions were more likely to say that false reporting happens (without stating that it was rare) than public and nonreligious institutions, respectively. Furthermore, nonreligious institutions were more likely than religious institutions to state false reporting is rare.

## Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to conduct an "in the moment" assessment of college personnel's knowledge of Title IX requirements. There is some positive news to report. Most institutions provided a variety of sources victims could seek out to report or talk to someone about a sexual assault. The majority also correctly identified mandatory reporters and confidential services. This is especially important, as victims may not feel comfortable proceeding with an investigation, immediately if at all. Therefore, individuals in a position of authority within the university need to know the appropriate services to recommend to the victim to enhance the coordinated response on campus. Furthermore, it is important that all students upon arrival to campus are aware of confidential and nonconfidential sources available.

The majority of respondents also indicated the victim of sexual assault would not get in trouble if they had been drinking and were underage. Making university amnesty policies clear to individuals who are victims or witness of sexual assault or individuals who have engaged in underage drinking, may make them feel more comfortable with reporting and/or help-seeking. Additionally, the majority of institutions knew that false reporting of sexual assault is rare, which is quite promising.

Despite these positive findings, it is important to remember we received responses from less than one third of the institutions we contacted. It is possible there was selection bias and that these institutions were more prepared to

answer questions and thus more willing to engage with students. Indeed, individuals at campuses with a sexual assault-related Title IX lawsuit filed against them in the past 5 years were less likely to agree to answer the pseudostudents' questions. It is concerning that in over a third of calls, we received no answers even after calling twice. Some victims may wish to call campus police/security and/or the Title IX coordinator as opposed to meet in person. Victims may also feel reluctant to leave a voicemail resulting in loss of opportunity to assist an individual in need.

Furthermore, it is concerning that there was some confusion about who is and is not a confidential responder and that a number of police did not know the name of the Title IX officer. Although other responses were relatively rare (e.g., stating false reports happen without indicating that they are infrequent), these responses were more common among smaller, private, and religious institutions. Future research is needed to replicate these findings and understand the explanatory mechanisms underlying these issues.

Finally, campuses with a sexual assault-related Title IX lawsuits filed against them in the past 5 years were less likely to agree to answer the pseudostudent's questions. Yet, among universities with Title IX lawsuits that were agreeable to participate, these universities provided more accurate responses to some questions. Although speculative, it could be that campuses with Title IX lawsuits took actions to improve their responses to sexual assaults and/or became more aware about sexual assault (which was reflected in their accurate responses to questions). This is consistent with research by Yung (2015) who found that there was a 44% increase in university reports of sexual assault following auditing for Clery Act violations; the Clery Act requires universities to provide campus community members with timely warnings about crimes, including sexual assaults.

## Limitations

Despite the innovative methodology and novel information presented in this article, several limitations should be noted. First, there was likely selection bias in who was willing to answer our questions. Also, the answers are not necessarily representative of an entire school, given that we only spoke to one or two individuals per campus community. Nevertheless, for the institutions where deficits in knowledge and compliance were noted, it could be argued that this is indicative of larger, systemic issues given that these were the people fielding calls should be knowledgeable about the questions posed by the pseudostudent. Additionally, the ways in which an individual might respond to a student calling about a class paper could be different to a student calling about an actual sexual assault incident.

## Research Implications

Future research is needed to replicate and better understand the mechanisms that explain why staff associated with smaller, private, and religious institutions often provided more concerning responses than individuals at larger, public, and nonreligious institutions. Future research is also needed to determine ways to make key campus personnel more available to students given the fact that less than a third answered the phone. There is also a need to determine the extent to which Title IX compliance and low levels of rape myth endorsement among faculty and staff predict lower rates of sexual assault on campuses.

## Policy Implications

This study provides insight into the information students receive when they ask important questions regarding reporting or seeking services for sexual assault. This study provides insight into areas where campus Title IX implementation could be enhanced through trainings, technical assistance, and guidance. For example, from these data campuses need the most education around who are and are not confidential resources. Although beyond the scope of this article, a final point to consider is the extent to which Title IX sexual assault laws are actually improving the safety of college campuses. From this research and future research along these lines, policymakers could review areas where Title IX is not serving students and where improvements could be made to help campuses effectively prevent and respond to sexual violence. Although well-intentioned, we know essentially nothing about the extent to which Title IX and related laws (e.g., Clery) ensure campus safety and justice for victims.

## Final Thoughts

To conclude, this is the first study to our knowledge that has used a covert methodology to assess as objectively as possible Title IX knowledge and compliance among institutions of higher education. The most concerning findings is that the majority of campus responders did not answer the phone. Despite this, among those who did answer the phone, the overall findings are promising and suggest that contrary to popular discourses in the media, the vast majority of first responders to sexual assault on college campuses are knowledgeable about most Title IX and refuted rape myths. We hope that this article serves as a catalyst to continued local and national efforts to most effectively prevent and respond to sexual assault in addition to making sure that campuses are being recognized for

such efforts.

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