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STUDENTS SPEAK: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE INTERSECTION OF IDENTITY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

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by

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Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful family Martine, Frantz, Terry, and Ginette Charles. Words alone are not enough to thank you for your encouragement and support throughout my six years of graduate training. I am here because you made it possible. Mom and dad, from a young age you taught me through God, anything is possible. You both are the essence of hard work, making our ancestors proud. Thank you for your unwavering support throughout this journey. I could not have done it without you. Terry, my big brother, you have asked me many times when I am graduating. I am proud to say I've crossed the finish line. Thank you for being such a great provider and big brother. I could not leave out Remi Charles, my other half – thanks for making me a dog mom during grad school.

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Abstract

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Sexual violence remains a public health concern in the United States. Much of the research has focused on gender-binary individuals, despite the heightened vulnerability of Black, transgender, and nonbinary (BTN) individuals due to societal stigma and discrimination. Campus climate surveys have been recommended by the Obama Administration to address sexual violence, though they often underrepresent BTN students, failing to capture their unique experiences. This study aims to bridge this gap by focusing on the intersection of gender and racial identities, using an intersectional stigma framework to explore the prevalence and impact of sexual violence on BTN students and advocate for more inclusive institutional responses. The present study sought to better understand the unique experiences of BTN students via a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Three participants participated in individual interviews. Eleven subordinate themes were identified, which reflected three superordinate themes identified from college students. Participants highlighted key themes on SV at college campuses, focusing on BTN students' experiences and systemic issues. They emphasized patriarchal norms perpetuating SV, inadequate institutional responses, and BTN students' challenges in reporting due to stigma and mistrust. Cultural factors like Greek life contribute to an unsafe environment. The findings underscore the need for proactive campus leadership and inclusive environments to address SV effectively.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Sexual violence at academic institutions in the United States is a serious concern for college students. Sexual violence is defined as any unwanted sexual behavior, both penetrative and nonpenetrative acts where the perpetrator uses tactics such as force, intimidation, or coercion (Cantor et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2010). Upwards of 20% of individuals between the ages of 18-24 report meeting this definition during their time in college (Banyard et al., 2007; Conley et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2008; Krebs et al., 2007; Sinozich & Langton, 2014).

Sexual violence is linked to negative health and well-being outcomes, including physical, behavioral, psychological, and academic difficulties (Dworkin et al., 2017; Jordan et al., 2014). Moreover, up to 40% of victims report being diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI; Krebs et al., 2007; Levesque et al., 2016). STIs most frequently diagnosed following sexual violence include gonorrhea, chlamydia, and herpes (Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021; Goyal et al., 2017; Paz-Bailey et al., 2009). While being diagnosed with an STI subsequent to sexual violence, victims are less likely to seek treatment for their illness (CDC, 2016), which may pose long-term health consequences such as diminished quality of life, cancer, and mortality (Gottlieb et al., 2014).

Sexual violence can result in victims self-medicating as a means of coping (Charles et al., 2023) or rely on substances in lieu of disclosing the incident and seeking help (Ullman et al., 2018). More specifically, sexual violence is associated with increased opioid misuse among men and women who have been victimized and increase in mental

health symptomology, most notably depression and anxiety (Austin & Short, 2020). Post-victimization alcohol use is also frequently used as a way of coping to reduce negative affect and posttraumatic stress symptoms (Deliramich & Gray, 2008; Kilpatrick et al., 2003; Ullman et al., 2018).

Posttraumatic stress disorder is a commonly recognized psychological sequala of sexual violence (Goyal et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2014). Symptoms of posttraumatic stress can impact important areas of functioning such as their school and academic performance (Campbell et al., 2006). For example, women who experience sexual violence during college have lower grade point averages post-victimization, which may be due to cognitive impairments following the experience where women demonstrate difficulty concentrating and processing the course content material because of mood dysfunction (Jordan et al., 2014). Relatedly, sexual violence victimization is associated with an increased likelihood of dropping out of school suggesting that sexual victimization can negatively impact their academic performance (Bachrach & Read, 2012; Mengo & Black, 2016).

Historically, sexual violence researchers have focused on experiences of individuals who identify with the gender binary, either male or female (Conley et al., 2017; Sutton & Simons, 2015; Szekeres et al., 2020), limiting our understanding of the wide range of sexual violence experiences. Contemporary researchers have recognized the need to broaden the investigation of at-risk groups for sexual violence and include experiences of gender or individuals whose gender identities are different from their sex assigned at birth (Coulter et al., 2017; Coulter & Rankin, 2020; Johnson et al., 2016; Martin-Storey & August, 2016). Concerningly, transgender and nonbinary individuals are

at heightened risk for sexual violence compared to the general population (Stotzer, 2009). Rates of sexual violence are significantly higher (68%) for transgender women respondents than transgender men (30%), suggesting that transgender-identifying individuals are at greater risk for sexual violence than any other groups in the United States (Kenagy, 2005).

One possible explanation for the increased risk of sexual violence among gender minority individuals can be elucidated through stigma theory as a social phenomenon where physical attributes and/or group membership are perceived as deviating from societal norms, which results in devaluation, discrimination, and ostracization (Goffman, 1986). Despite societal trends moving towards acceptance, there remains a delay in the cultural acceptance of gender minority students in higher education (Cicero & Wesp, 2017). Twenty-four percent of transgender students enrolled in academic institutions experience sexual violence (Herman et al., 2016). Transgender students who report experiencing sexual violence are more likely to participate in sex work, misuse drugs or alcohol, and attempt suicide (Grant et al., 2010). Many either drop out of higher education or consider dropping out because of their victimization experiences (Grant et al., 2010). Those who consider leaving higher education report feeling fearful of violence on campus due to their gender identity (Rankin et al., 2010). Despite these concerns, transgender students are less likely to report their experiences to the university. Transgender individuals may choose to ignore or minimize experiences of sexual violence to avoid further discrimination or oppression, perceived protection with secrecy, while also feeling trapped and engage in self-deprecating behavior (Todahl et al., 2009).

It is important to note the present study will utilize the term ‘gender minority’ to reference both nonbinary and transgender individuals. While ‘gender minority’ has historically been employed as an umbrella term obscuring the diverse range of identities, we adopt a more specific focus. ‘Gender minority’ used in the context of this study acknowledges the distinct experiences of nonbinary and transgender individuals to avoid the false impression that experiences are similar across individuals.

Minimal research has centered on the experiences of nonbinary individuals in higher education. Transgender and nonbinary-identifying students are often combined and categorized as “other” or broadly described as gender minority students without acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of these identities. Identifying as nonbinary is distinct from identifying as transgender because the term ‘trans’ often refers to a binary gender (i.e., trans women, trans men; Bauer et al., 2017), whereas nonbinary is best understood as gender nonconforming where identity exists along a continuum. The present study will refer to nonbinary as defined as identities that are not exclusive to “man” or “woman” but acknowledge individuals can have elements of both “male” and “female” and/or identify as genderqueer, agender, bigender, genderfluid (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2023). Given the multidimensional nature of gender, nonbinary students often feel vulnerable because of their nonconformity (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). Approximately 5% of gender minority students endorsed campus sexual violence (Coulter & Rankin, 2017). Notably, less than one percent of all students perceive their college campuses to be inclusive of gender minority individuals (Coulter & Rankin, 2017). Like transgender students, nonbinary students continue to face challenges of stigma and discrimination because of their nonconformity with societal gender norms,

which can create vulnerability to becoming targets of hate crimes and gender-based violence (Dockendorff & Geist, 2023).

Gender minorities (i.e., transgender and nonbinary people) have elevated rates of mental health concerns as a result of their victimization experiences, which is also consistent with minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress theory posits when individuals with marginalized social identities experience prejudice and discrimination, stress is internalized and becomes integrated as a part of their lived experiences (Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, gender-based sexual violence, or violence rooted in anti-trans and nonbinary discrimination is associated with suicidal ideation, self-injurious behaviors, and higher rates of substance use (Nuttbrock et al., 2010; Rimes et al., 2017).

Inclusive campus climates may influence rates of sexual violence among transgender and nonbinary students. Drawing upon stigma theory, environments characterized by acceptance and inclusivity, assailants may be less inclined to target members from the gender minority community. Campuses where community members promote inclusive attitudes and beliefs may be associated with fewer incidences of sexual violence. Conversely, college campus cultures that endorse heteronormative beliefs about gender serves as systemic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal barriers to understanding sexual violence within the gender minority community (Eaton & Matamala, 2014). For instance, the cisheteronormative narrative for sexual violence implies that cisgender men are perpetrators and cisgender women are victims, neglecting to acknowledge cisgender women as perpetrators and failing to recognize and understand sexual violence within LGBTQ+ sexual relationships (intrapersonal), and makes same-gender sexual violence invisible to those outside of the community (interpersonal; Eaton & Matamala, 2014).

This represents a clear gap in our understanding for the intersection of identity and how it shapes lived experiences.

In addition to gender identity, race and ethnicity are additional factors that influence experiences of institutional racism and discrimination, which compound the issue of sexual violence on college campuses. The intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) explores how race, gender, and systems of oppression intersect in shaping sexual violence experiences. An intersectional perspective is important in understanding experiences of Black transgender and nonbinary (BTN) students living with multiple stigmatized identities (Turan et al., 2019) and how the combined stigmatization may serve as a risk factor for sexual violence experiences. Consistent with stigma theory, environments that are anti-LGBTQ+ and/or sexist, promote beliefs that devalue and dehumanize members of marginalized groups and in turn, engender higher rates of sexual violence (Goffman, 1986). Stigma theory posits that stigmatization of an individual's identity permits discrimination and denies the person of social acceptance (Goffman, 1986). Given that sexual violence disproportionately affects students from various groups and subgroups, utilizing an intersectional stigma framework can assist in examining some of the potential causes of sexual violence on college campuses.

Existing research on racial and ethnic disparities in sexual violence victimization is scarce due to the small number of racial and ethnic minority participants included in previous research (George et al., 2014; Porter & Williams, 2011). The limited research that does exist, however, suggests that students who identify as Black report the highest rates of sexual violence experiences in the past year compared to white, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander students (Coulter et al., 2017). Additionally, Black transgender

college students are at significantly greater risk for sexual violence compared to their white counterparts (Coulter et al., 2017). Portrayals of sexual violence in the media tend to focus on stereotypically attractive, white, cisgender, heterosexual women and men as perpetrators (Harris & Linder, 2017). This misrepresentation endorses cultural beliefs that white women are the "ideal victim" and more worthy of protection from sexual violence than Black women, which in turn, can lead to higher rates of sexual violence among Black women (Harris & Linder, 2017).

Conceptualizing sexual violence within the sociohistorical context is paramount to making Black individual's experiences visible. Sociohistorical context provides a framework for conceptualizing attitudes, beliefs, and behavior; it highlights historical and ongoing systemic injustices that have affected Black communities, as well as interrogating stereotypes and myths about the Black community that can promote more accurate and nuanced understandings of sexual violence within Black communities. As such, a history of violence among Black individuals has laid the groundwork for social injustices occurring today on college campuses. Yet, little attention is paid to the complexity of identity in the discourse of sexual violence, as BTN students are at significantly greater risk for sexual violence compared to white transgender and gender nonconforming students (Burns, 2020; R. Coulter et al., 2017). A lack of focus on identities, power, and history perpetuates and maintains systems of domination that lead to violence (Harris & Linder, 2017). The present study conceptualizes Black identity to be inclusive of individuals from diverse Black ethnic subgroups.

Black women are less likely to disclose experiences of sexual violence compared to their white counterparts out of fear of negative responses (Bent-Goodley et al., 2012).

For example, Black women reported receiving negative reactions such as apparent disregard, denying or discarding the sexual violence experience, condemning the victim, or chastising the victim for what happened to her (Long & Ullman, 2013). There are several additional factors that serve as unique barriers to disclosing sexual violence experiences among Black victims. Historically, Black women have been perceived as "unrapeable" or hypersexualized, which is rooted in the sexual exploitation of Black women during slavery (Benard, 2016). The negative stereotype upholds white patriarchy by promoting the notion that Black women enjoy sex and welcome sexual advances (Benard, 2016). Additionally, Black women are viewed as "strong," which has also served as a barrier to help-seeking and silenced their experiences of sexual violence (Bent-Goodley et al., 2012). In summary, racism, stereotypes, and other social injustices have led Black women to respond differently than their white peers when sexually victimized.

Western society also views Black men as "dangerous" and seeking control, which precludes the ability to perceive Black men as victims (Curry, 2019). Media portrayals of Black men are often rooted in implicit bias and negative stereotypes, projecting that most sexual violence acts are committed by Black men against white women (Patton & Snyder-Yuly, 2007). This narrative illuminates ingrained beliefs stemming from racist attitudes dating back to slavery. Black men were perceived as animalistic, aggressive, stronger than white men, and lusting for white women (Plous & Williams, 1995; Taylor et al., 2019). Ideologies that coincide with the institution of slavery further oppresses Black men denying them the right to be perceived as victims. However, between two and eight percent of men have experienced sexual violence victimization (Ford & Soto-

Marquez, 2016), and about six percent of Black men between the ages of 18-24 have experienced campus sexual violence (Collington et al., 2019). The stereotyping of Black men permeates all systems in a racist society, setting in motion systematic racism in environments such as academic institutions (Taylor et al., 2019). Black men become the forgotten victims of sexual violence, which can serve as a barrier to reporting sexual violence experiences. Social perceptions that deny the victimization of Black men also deny Black men access to sexual violence resources and access to mental and physical healthcare.

In response to sexual violence on college campuses, the Obama Administration's White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2014) recommended that colleges and universities implement campus climate surveys as a tool to address the issue. Campus climate surveys are geared towards understanding the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of students, faculty, and staff regarding the current campus culture (Rankin, 2005). These comprehensive assessments aim to combat sexual violence and highlight prevention techniques and gaps that need to be addressed. Campus climate surveys provide institutions with prevalence rates, reveal campus traditions (e.g., athletic tailgates and Greek events) that promote sexual violence, and can provide valuable information from a social ecological perspective (i.e., understanding the influences on the individual, relationship, community, and societal level) regarding risk for sexual violence. Additionally, surveys provide an understanding on the effect of violence prevention strategies (Krebs et al., 2016). These surveys may also assess students' sense of community, educational messages about sexual violence, perceived barriers to reporting

the incident, and their perceptions on how they believe the university responds to such incidents (Cantor et al., 2015; Krebs et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2018; Moylan et al., 2018).

However, Black transgender and nonbinary or BTN students remain inadequately sampled in campus climate surveys (Coulter & Rankin, 2020; Harris & Linder, 2017), even though the literature on gender minority people highlights unique stressors they face, such as discrimination and victimization (Coulter et al., 2017; Everett et al., 2019). Those who experience sexual violence are hesitant to speaking out due to perceived prejudice and discrimination about social identity (i.e., minority group membership), fear of retaliation, and not being believed (Brown & Herman, 2015; Spencer et al., 2017). Black women report feeling discouraged to report their sexual violence experience due to the sociohistorical context of their identities, which include stereotypes about Black sexuality (e.g., being promiscuous; Crenshaw, 1991; McNair & Neville, 1996). Additionally, transgender students perceive low levels of confidence in the adaptation of effective interventions for transgender community members in response to sexual violence (Brown & Herman, 2015; Harris, 2020). Few studies have provided students opportunities to discuss their personal narratives regarding sexual violence on campus (Coulter et al., 2017; Grimes, 2021; Harris & Linder, 2017). Additionally, there is a notable gap in research exclusively focusing on gender minority students in the context of sexual violence.

Assumptions of and Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Although a campus climate survey about sexual violence can serve useful in estimating experiences of violence on college campuses, climate surveys alone are not

sufficient in capturing experiences of sexual violence among BTN people. A qualitative approach can provide deeper insight into campus sexual violence from the perspective of students with intersecting marginalized social identities, whose voices are often absent from these conversations. Qualitative research allows students to share their stories about structural and oppressive forces in higher education that interact with their racial/ethnic and gender identities as they relate to sexual violence, which is vital in broadening services and support specific to members of these communities (Harris & Linder, 2017).

Qualitative research methodology is utilized when a phenomenon needs to be understood from the perspective of participants and lived experiences. Qualitative research is grounded in a position that is constructivist, as it focuses on "how the social and cultural world is experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context at a particular time" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018, p. 42). Constructivism acknowledges the social, cultural, and historical influence of reality and attempts to understand a phenomenon holistically (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The assumption of a constructivist theory is that reality is socially constructed and subjective meanings are made of their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Thus, researchers attempt to make meaning of the findings shared by the participants.

Qualitative research assumes that rich data embedded in a real context can only be captured via an synergetic process occurring between the researcher and participant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Both the researcher and participant bring a subjective lens to qualitative work to form the context for the research findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). By way of inductive reasoning, researchers do not look for specific findings based on preexisting theories; rather, the researcher analyzes data gathered and looks for

meaning within the subjects (Walters, 2001). Constructivist researchers recognize their own social, cultural, and historical experiences and position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their backgrounds shape researcher interpretations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Using this framework, the present study takes an idiographic approach to understanding experiences of students with marginalized social identities, and how social systems may impact experiences of sexual violence on college campuses. By exploring individual experiences, this research will enable the voices of BTN students to be heard, as much of the existing literature fuses together individuals identifying as gender and sexual minorities due to inadequate representation (Coulter & Rankin, 2020; Harris & Linder, 2017).

Strategy of Inquiry

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an approach to qualitative data analysis used to better understand how people make sense of their lived experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). One of the goals of IPA is to give voice to individuals by highlighting and reflecting on the claims and concerns of participants and their meaning-making processes via interpretation (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Hermeneutics (i.e., process of interpretating an event), phenomenology (e.g., an event or situation), and idiography (i.e., obtaining a detailed understanding of one individual) are key concepts in IPA. IPA uses an inductive approach whereby participants are asked to describe their perceptions of an event and are seen as experts of their unique experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). IPA moves away from using *a priori* hypotheses to make assumptions and challenges the researcher's understanding of a particular phenomenon by requiring them to center the participant's own meaning and

experiences (Smith et al., 2009). A contemporary approach to IPA in qualitative research draws upon the notion that our existence is inextricably present in the world and in the relationships with others (Larkin & Thompson, 2012), suggesting that the person and experience cannot be understood in isolation.

The utilization of IPA in sexuality research is well-documented in the literature, which is suitable to the sensitive and stigmatized nature of the topics being discussed (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). In fact, IPA has been used to make visible the unique psychological impact of intimate partner sexual violence on women (Tarzia, 2021) and to explore the lived experiences of male-identifying survivors of sexual abuse, who are frequently unacknowledged as victims (Das et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2011; Trottier et al., 2021).

Relatedly, perceptions of sexual violence among Black college men at predominately white institutions (PWIs) were explored using IPA to examine experiences of gendered racism (Zounlome et al., 2021). In examining the impact of oppression from gender binary systems of thinking in IPA research, findings illuminate that these binary systems are pervasive in heteronormative cultures and also contribute to intragroup oppression among LGBTQIA+ individuals (Farmer & Byrd, 2015). In sum, IPA is particularly suited to answer the proposed research questions and make meaning of the lived experiences of BTN people while also acknowledging the ever-present systems of oppression in their everyday experiences, especially on campus.

The Present Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore BTN students' experiences and perceptions of the climate on their campus surrounding sexual violence, and to use their

voices to better understand this phenomenon. Specifically, we explored students' sense of belonging or connectedness on campus, perceptions of sexual violence at their university, the university's responsiveness to sexual violence, awareness of policies and resources regarding sexual violence on campus, and views on the university's messaging and prevention efforts regarding sexual violence. We define Black identity as individuals from diverse Black ethnic subgroups, transgender is defined as individuals whose gender perception and expression are different than their gender assigned at birth, and nonbinary as individuals whose identities exist outside of the margins of man or woman. The present study is grounded in stigma theory and sociohistorical context and uses an intersectional framework that recognizes the unique forms of discrimination faced by students with multiple marginalized social identities which increase their risk for sexual violence. The dynamics of power and oppression are pervasive; continuous examination of these dynamics is essential to ensuring efforts to promote equity and inclusion are relevant and effective to various groups that are at risk for campus sexual violence. To better understand micro- and macro-level experiences, we must recognize the complexity of social identities and how they relate to power and oppression, and how such views are pervasive and remain relevant on college campuses today. Thus, this study utilized a qualitative approach to make visible perceptions of sexual violence, support services, and campus climate among BTN students We sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are BTN students' perception of sexual violence on their campus?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are BTN students' experiences of discrimination, bias, and perceptions of climate on their campus?

Chapter 2

Methodology

Study Setting

The context for the study was a mid-size, public university in the Northeast with approximately 14,947 undergraduate students; 3,310 graduate students; and 1,481 professional/medical students as of the 2023-2024 school year. The university is considered a PWI with white students accounting for more than 50 percent of student enrollment. Demographic characteristics were derived from the university's division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) assessment of student enrollment. In Fall 2023, 54% of students enrolled were women, 44% were men, and .04% were unknown. Majority of students were white (58%), 12% were Hispanic/Latino, 8% were Asian, and 10% of students were Black or African American. In Spring 2024, 55% of students enrolled were women, 44% were men, and .05% were unknown. Majority of students were white (58%), 12% were Asian, and 10% of students were Black or African American.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

Students enrolled at Rowan University campuses (i.e., Glassboro, Camden, Medical School of Rowan, and School of Osteopathic Medicine) who were 18 years of age or older and identified as both Black and transgender or nonbinary were invited to participate in in-depth individual interviews. Individual interviews allow researchers and participants to engage in discussion that becomes modified throughout the interview based on the participant's responses and allow the researcher flexibility to probe as other interesting topics arise (Smith et al., 2009). Because of the idiographic nature of IPA,

studies tend to benefit from smaller samples sizes to obtain rich data. One of the aims of IPA is to recognize perceptions and understandings of a specific group of people, rather than make generalizable claims.

Participants were recruited via referral, or snowball sampling, which is a frequently used recruitment strategy in IPA (Smith et al., 2009). A homogenous purposive sample were recruited via student groups that are dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion and create a supportive environment for students with marginalized social identities. The researcher also contacted department secretaries and utilized the University's daily email newsletter to reach students from various Rowan campuses (e.g., Camden campus, Cooper Medical School of Rowan University, Rowan-Virtua School of Osteopathic Medicine, and Glassboro campus; see Figure A1.). The primary researcher and undergraduate research assistants attended group meetings and public events to facilitate an introduction and describe the aims and purpose of the study and invite students to participate. Prior to individual interviews, participants were given study information, provided informed consent, and completed a demographic survey. All study procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Collection

The first author conducted all interviews for the study. The interview guide included 10 open-ended questions, accompanied by follow up prompts, to facilitate a natural flow of conversation with participants. Interview length ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. In-depth interviews using IPA tend to be one hour or longer (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Participants participated in a one-time interview, which is consistent with IPA's data collection process (Alase, 2017); however, they were informed if there was a

need for a follow-up interview and they consented, they would be contacted. See Figure A2 for an overview of the recruitment processes.

The semi-structured interviews took place both in-person in a private room and online via Zoom, a HIPAA compliant, web-based platform. All participants were given information regarding the nature of the study and provided their informed consent to participate. Additionally, participants were informed they have the right to withdraw participation up to the point of where data analysis begins. Participants were notified of limits of confidentiality such as data transcripts being accessible to only members of the research team. Participants were also made aware of anonymity, as confidentiality could not be guaranteed.

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to sign an audio/video addendum consent form. The recordings did not include subject names or any other identifying information. Rather, the recordings were de-identified when transcribed and were deleted from recording devices upon completion of the study. Data collection will be completed when it is determined these data provide comprehensive insights into participants' lived experiences and when further data collection does not yield new insights or themes. In lieu of identifying information, participants were assigned an identification number that is associated with their data. Recordings were stored on a secure server. All identifying information were stored separately from study data in a password-protected, HIPAA-compliant database. The facilitator provided participants with sensitive topic warnings as well as check-ins, given the sensitive nature of the study. During the interview discussion, the facilitator provided appropriate referrals to mental health services (e.g., Wellness Center), particularly if a participant experiences emotional distress.

Participations were reminded that they could decline to answer any question without providing a reason for doing so, and that they could end their participation at any time. Participants were also informed that their access to campus services would not be affected by declining participation or withdrawal from the study.

Coding Procedures and Data Analysis

Audio recordings of the individual interviews were transcribed verbatim, consistent with conventional practice for IPA (J. Smith et al., 2009), using Otter.ai, speech-to-text software that uses artificial intelligence and machine learning. Audio recordings were listened to at minimum, twice, to ensure all words were captured accurately. The researcher verified the transcription by reviewing the audio recording alongside the transcribed text to correct any errors. A phenomenological approach was used to appraise and make meaning of respondent's lived experiences in a broader context. he analytic process was informed by Smith and colleagues (2009) step-by-step guide to data analysis: 1) reading and re-reading, 2) initial coding (i.e., making descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments), 3) developing emergent themes, 4) searching for connections across emergent themes, 5) moving to the next case, 6) and looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 82-101).

Trustworthiness of Data

We used the Yardley's (2000, 2008) guidelines of assessing the quality for qualitative psychological research which include 1) sensitivity to context, 2) commitment and rigor, 3) transparency and coherence, and 4) impact and importance. First, sensitivity to context is delineated in the choice of utilizing IPA to better understand the unique experiences of BTN students and their viewpoints on the campus climate. Additionally,

careful selection and dissection of the interview guide is motivated by the researcher's pursuit to express empathy, build rapport, and “negotiate the power play” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 180). That is, the interaction between the research expert and the experiential expert during data collection. Rigor in the present study was reflected in the careful selection of participants to answer the proposed research questions, along with developing an interview guide informed by IPA’s standards that includes probing and follow up questions based on information disclosed during the interview. Transparency and coherence involve describing the research process in a clear and linear fashion. For example, the researcher describes how participants are selected, the formulation of the interview guide, how interviews are conducted, and the steps utilized in the data analysis phase. Lastly, impact and importance are in the richness of the researcher’s interpretations.

During data analysis, the first author triangulated the data to corroborate findings or interpretations through multiple courses of data. This process involved comparing information gathered from the interview and/or observations both within and across participants (Miles et al., 2020). Triangulation helps the researcher identify common themes or patterns across multiple sources, validate their interpretations, and enhance the richness and depth of their understanding of the phenomenon. As such, it aids in enhancing the rigor and reliability of the analysis.

Reflexivity

Using an interpretative paradigm acknowledges the intersubjectivity of one’s experiences (Shaw, 2010); that is, the interconnection between the researcher’s reality and other people’s realities. The tenets of phenomenology and hermeneutics positions the

researcher to be an important part of the research process (Peat et al., 2019). While IPA recognizes participants to be the experts of their experiences, the experience itself can only be revealed in the research context through the engagement and interpretation between the researcher and participant (Peat et al., 2019). Through interpretative activity, researchers attempt to understand how participants make sense of an experience, or double hermeneutics (Peat et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009). To accomplish this meaning-making process, IPA dictates that researchers engage with the hermeneutic circle: an iterative process of how we come to understand "the part" and "the whole" (Smith et al., 2009). As such, the researcher's experience represents the "whole" and the interaction between the researcher and participant symbolizes the "part." This is often achieved through reflexivity, or evaluation of one's positionality and the impact this relationship has on the research. Thus, engaging in reflexivity strengthens the trustworthiness of data. The first author documented their individual experience via memos throughout the coding process. These memos included a detailed record of the researcher's thinking, notable themes emerging from data collected, questions that arise, and notice of when the researcher's subjectivity is influencing the research process. More specifically, the researcher noted observations during the interview and described initial impressions and preliminary interpretations. Some memos highlighted how the respondent's statements support existing theories and frameworks.

Positionality

Researchers must consider how their gender, class, and ethnicity is ever-present throughout the research process (Angrosino, 2005), making their membership identity known to the participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

The primary researcher is a Black/Haitian American, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied woman from a middle-class socioeconomic background. The researcher is a master's-level graduate research assistant and trained therapist enrolled in a clinical psychology Ph.D. program and comes from a scholarly family whose extended members hold master's and doctoral degrees. The researcher has experience working in community-based organizations and researching the topic of sexual violence, which is central to understanding the phenomena for the present study. Involvement in this work has engendered a sense of personal connection and pursuit for social justice. The researcher's racial and ethnic identity represents who she is and her research interest in utilizing identity-based research methodologies. Thus, centering the voices and experiences of BTN people sparked great interest. The researcher's Black identity and empathy can serve as a mechanism for connection and rapport building throughout the research process. The researcher also seeks to interrogate the hegemonic narratives of cisheteronormativity through data collection and analysis by journaling thoughts that arose throughout the process to ensure ethical practice and reduce misrepresentation of the participants.

The primary researcher is a novice qualitative researcher and acknowledges her limited experience. This required her to remain curious, open-minded, and reflexive throughout the research process. Her oncological stance is that reality is subjective and influenced by individual experiences and interpretations. She also adopts a constructivist perspective with appreciation that knowledge is co-constructed via the interactions between the researcher and participants.

Chapter 3

Results

Of the 11 participants who expressed interest in the study, three were eligible and completed semi-structured, individual interviews (N = 3). Participants were between the ages of 18-23, and the mean age of participants were 20.6 (SD = 2.1). Further participant demographics are delineated in Table A1 (see appendices). Analyses were conducted to obtain an idiographic understanding of participant's lived experiences. Superordinate and subordinate themes were identified by focusing on the content of responses to access the idiographic accounts of respondents' experiences and perceptions. Eleven subordinate themes were identified, which reflected three superordinate themes identified from college students enrolled at Rowan University in the Glassboro campus.

Super-ordinate Theme 1: Institutional Issues

Eliza (He/Him or They/Them) conveyed socially constructed views of sexual violence. They provided narratives for understanding sexual violence within a broader context and illuminated two dominant narratives: patriarchal attitudes and tolerance for sexual violence.

Patriarchal Attitudes

Eliza described how issues leading to sexual violence at Rowan University must be understood within the framework of traditional constructs of masculinity and use of power over others. These standards of masculinity are pervasive and exists throughout society. The omnipresence of patriarchy underscores how individuals are influenced by its structures, while also contributing to its perpetuation:

> "To me it's just how… you can't stop it from happening… especially in this world where everything is based off of a *male perspective* […] our society is *dominated by men*. Like, that's just how our American society is. So, and we have, this *toxic masculine* lifestyle that our society is run, run by, like, even within even within *men, male culture*. Society is like, harmful to them as well. Like, they have to uphold, like… *patriarchy*. So, within the *patriarchy*… men have problems too... we continue to live in a *society where patriarchy* is deemed, so important. There's just going to always continue to be sexual violence, men will continue to have like, inflated thoughts or feel ownership over women, or over people in general."

Eliza described the social organization of sexual violence that is ever-present in everyday experiences. They provide a narrative of how hegemonic views of masculinity occur at multiple levels, meaning such attitudes and beliefs do not exist solely within an individual or on a micro-level. Rather, views of masculinity must be explored on macro-levels such as organizational environments, cultural contexts and the interrelationship among these beliefs and sexual violence.

Tolerance for Sexual Violence

When examining influences of sexual violence, Ariya (She/Her) expressed an attitude of "not caring" as the catalyst for incidences occurring on campus. Additionally, Eliza expressed despairing comments about how sexual violence is addressed at Rowan and across organizations, as well as attitudes influencing the issue:

> "I'd say mainly is not caring and sometimes it's just like a genuine mistake. And there's not communication of consent."

In this extract, she describes possible contributors to sexual violence as attitudes, beliefs, and consent misunderstandings/assumptions. Ariya refers to attitudes about sexual violence as "not caring," or complete disregard for the impact sexual violence can have on a victim. She communicates a particular importance through repetition of the word "care" again in the following statements:

> "I think it's hard for any type of business or organization to really have *care* or feelings, it's typically more calculated. So… I never really feel any type of *genuine*."

Ariya explains her perspective on how institutions address sexual violence. She suggested that the university's efforts to communicate solidarity and offer superficial support appear disingenuous. Her quote alludes to a perception that organizations operate in a disengaged manner that is in essence calculated. This impersonal nature of organizations also implies a sense of disillusionment that could lead to alienation or disconnection.

> "I think it happens a lot. I think a lot of people do not report anything like, like, like, within, because there's just a whole queer community within Rowan University" […] what happens instead of reporting is that we tell each other, instead, like, we don't report to the police, we don't report to, to teachers or anything like that, like instead will talk to the community and will talk to each other […] and also people won't listen to me, like people in the higher ups won't listen to me. So, I will just tell the community about this situation that happened to me, just to make sure everyone else is safe. […] Rowan *people [administration] wouldn't take as serious*. Or, you know, there's like… there's

like convoluted consent, or something like that there isn't like clearly your consent, or like, there is… there was consent, but like, somebody whose form of consent didn't like, isn't what is socially accepted, right now, all these different kinds of stuff. So… so it's like, all these different layers."

Eliza expressed despairing comments about how sexual violence is addressed at Rowan and across organizations. They identified several cultural and systemic barriers to reporting sexual violence experiences on campus. They share that students with marginalized identities often rely on their communities for support. They perceive they will receive more support from their communities that is free from judgment and bias about their victimization that would be present when seeking help from university officials. When sharing their thoughts about the issue of consent, Eliza communicated with a sense of hesitancy, which may in part be due to society's tendency to blame the victim.

Woke-Washing (Passive Advocacy)

We define "woke-washing" as the superficial use of social justice advocacy or progressive values that are DEI-related (Do Good People, n.d.). Woke-washing is considered disingenuous or aspirational in nature without meaningful action. Organizations or institutions that engage in superficial practices for social movements often do so to idealize their image rather creating substantive change. Ariya touched on the university's superficial attempts to appear supportive of social issues. She interprets their efforts as "making PR [public relations] moves" instead of engaging in meaningful, genuine efforts to address such issues.

> "I remember I was in WOCA [women of color alliance] a few days ago, and we talked about how Rowan University… whenever something serious happens, it seems more like they're making PR moves instead of like actually *caring* about certain groups like I remember."

Ariya used "caring" as a descriptor to explain what it would feel like if Rowan were to take heed or prioritize the wellbeing of certain groups and move beyond performative allyship. She recognized the university's lack of sincerity and genuine commitment behind the empty gestures. Ariya makes meaning of this as "PR moves" where the university may prioritize optics over meaningful change.

> "Most people would only *care* about a few… like, whenever something tragic or serious happens on campus, because there's always something going on. A lot of times people just they would *care*, but they wouldn't have the energy to, like, do anything about it because they'd have to take *care* of themselves. Or typically, most people here only *care* about, like, one kind of thing or group, and no one really *cares*. It's I think it's hard for people to *care* about things that don't relate to them."

Notably, in the excerpt above, Ariya repeats the word "care" in five separate areas: in the context of attempting to explain "most people would only care about a few…" before she shifts her thoughts; when describing the emotional element of advocacy in contrast with direct action; and when describing attentional bias that influences what people choose to care about. Ariya describes apathetic attitudes hindering the university from effectively addressing sexual violence as a result of

disproportionately focusing on certain aspect of a larger issue ("one kind of thing or group") and neglecting others.

Riding Coattails

When discussing her perceptions of how the university addresses sexual violence on campus, Ariya described a lack of engagement in Rowan's efforts:

> "I think the university as a whole probably doesn't do much about it. I know there are certain clubs that do, like, there are so many of women or mental health-based clubs out there who might throw something together – every once in a while. I would say it's more of, like, certain sects of the student not the university as a whole […]. Like SJICR might talk about it but have done that as a university as a whole? Just not really."

Ariya attributed credit to select campus organizations in how they address the issue of sexual violence. She indicated that the university "as a whole" has not been active in speaking out against the issue. Ariya conveys a sense of a lack of accountability or clear stance on the part of the university when addressing social issues. Additionally, she highlights the noticeable disparity between the actions of students and the response of the university administration. Students are depicted as taking a more proactive role and driving initiatives, while the university takes "credit" for their efforts. As such, students are the primary agents of change.

The Wellness Center

Naomi (She/They) brought attention to the activism and support among smaller organizations within the larger institution (i.e., the university). The Wellness Center was recognized across participants as a facility that is student-oriented and dedicated to

providing resources, support services, and raising awareness about social issues that disproportionately affect students.

> "And honestly, people should really take advantage of all the support groups that are out there in the *Wellness Center*. Because it's, you don't really get anything like, like that often. So, I love how Rowan University very, very inclusive, gender inclusive, and all that they do a really good job recognizing pronouns and all that."

Naomi's statements illuminate the significant impact one provider of student support services can have on campus culture. She praised the Wellness Center for their advocacy and support. Her quote reflects her positive perception of the support services available to students, which in turn, portrays Rowan in a favorable light. There is a conflation of efforts made by the Wellness Center and Rowan's effort to cultivate a welcoming and supportive environment for gender minority community members. Nonetheless, Naomi expresses a sense of gratitude for the resources available.

One and Done: Rowan's Relationship with Sexual Violence Messaging

Naomi illuminates the gap in the university's efforts to raise awareness and provide students with the necessary information to address and prevent sexual violence:

> "I did this precollege program here. And it was a [redacted] of high school students who come into Rowan University for like six weeks to prepare us for school. I think there was one time in the program where we had a lecture about sexual violence, and I think I have one in freshman year. The university does give it to you, but I think it's in your early years. So, I don't… and I think is like a one-time thing. So, I don't really remember, I think you have to like seek it out. Like if

you go to like, the Wellness Center or like a Psych[ology] Department, I'm sure you're going to hear more about it. But otherwise, you don't really hear that much..."

Naomi recalled participating in a specialized program that she believes provided information on sexual violence. The university provided a one-time information session about the issue during her earlier years of college. Naomi described how students must seek out additional information on their own, though she is aware the Wellness Center and Psychology Department are resources available to her. Naomi's description also suggests that some students may perceive university systems as supportive, despite these systems not being the primary entities responsible for providing support to students.

Absentee Leadership

Ariya considers Rowan leadership's presence to be hidden or absent, creating a disconnect between the administration and the general campus community.

"… we never actually see the higher ups. I mean, I'm sure they're busy. But like not, I mean, like, anytime there's an email from President or Vice President or some, like no one sees them, but that's fine. I'm sure they're busy. So, there's that disconnect."

Ariya's statements reflect a sense of invisibility of campus administrators. Administration appears almost inaccessible to students producing a "disconnect." This division among students and campus administers can erode trust and confidence in the university's ability to effectively address social issues and support students. The perception of a leadership vacuum may also hinder access to resources and support services. Additionally, a disconnect between students and leadership can maintain norms that minimize the

seriousness of sexual violence or condone victimization – resulting in students feeling further marginalized or invisible.

Additionally, Naomi sheds light on the power of campus administration vocalizing their stance on social issues, rather than relying on email communication. She explained the meaningful change and impact leadership can achieve via the power of their voice:

> "[…] But, but maybe they should speak more orally and vocally… Orally and vocally basically just speaking with your mouths without…without having a computer show it. I mean, obviously, you can use technology, you can use technology on the side to help to help you. But I would like I think it would be more emphasized with a human voice, you know, controlling the topic to get, you know, people's attention so they can take it seriously… it definitely gets people's attention more […]"

Naomi's excerpt described the positive impact of oral communication; she emphasizes the personal connection and authenticity that is conveyed when campus administrators speak out on social issues in an authentic way. Naomi distinguishes the impact of oral versus electronic communication. She identified several benefits of oral communication such as having an emotional impact, delivering a call to action, and "controlling the topic" suggesting multilayered social issues that are nuanced can be miscommunicated in written communication.

Barriers to Reporting

Eliza described the unique challenges to reporting sexual violence, particularly when the assailant is also a member of the gender minority community. It is important to

understand the complex dynamics within the transgender community that could foster additional concerns and considerations. For example, Eliza explains how they are hesitant to report sexual violence experiences to protect the community from further harm and marginalization. Rather than reporting their victimization to university officials or law enforcement, they might seek alternative forms of support that aligns with their values (i.e., allegiance or solidarity to an already vulnerable community).

> "Like I would like, I've had that experience as well. And I didn't document that; I didn't tell the police. I didn't tell anyone. Because the problem is, is that when I'm more *scared* of my, the person that I'm getting, getting, that I'm reporting getting, like, their autonomy taken away… especially if they're another trans person, like, I'm very *afraid* of them getting their autonomy taken away. And not being able to have access to medical care. Specifically, trans affirming medical care, even after they like, harm me sexually. So yeah, there's stuff like that going on."

Eliza illuminates the systemic issue of limited access to gender-affirming healthcare. The absence of these services highlights societal beliefs of discrimination and further marginalizes individuals identifying as gender minorities. Their statement highlights the complexities and ethical dilemmas that can arise in situations involving harm within communities with marginalized social identities, where concerns about protecting autonomy, justice, and access to essential resources intersect. Eliza's quote underscores the need for nuanced approaches to supporting victims of sexual violence while also addressing systemic inequalities and barriers to care within marginalized communities.

Super-ordinate Theme 2: The Student Community

Campus Sexual Violence: the Whac-A-Mole Effect

Eliza conceptualized campus sexual violence within a broader context. They commented, “Our society is dominated by men. Like, that’s just how our American society is […] To me […] you can't stop it from happening.”

They shared a perspective of grim inevitability when thinking about the issue of sexual violence, where safety and security are not guaranteed. Eliza asserted to understand sexual violence is to understand hegemonic views of masculinity. They noted men hold a dominant position in society that is deeply ingrained and systemic. Efforts to challenge or overturn existing power dynamics appear unrealistic given the entrenched nature of the status quo. As such, sexual violence is akin to a game of “Whac-A-Mole” where efforts to address the issue (e.g., policy changes, awareness campaigns) only marginally improve the visibility of problem. However, sexual violence remains a recurrent issue highlighting deeper systemic issues related to power dynamics, gender norms, and cultural attitudes.

Greek Life and Party Culture

Naomi described patterns leading to sexual violence within fraternities and among party culture. Greek life, while existing as distinct social circles, operate within the broader framework of patriarchy that permeates society. Naomi said:

> “Even though I've never been to one, probably frat parties… probably parties. I'd say probably like parties… from the things that I've saw around like, maybe the media, maybe it tends to happen, like during night gatherings, and late at night… yeah, parties, definitely. Where there's a bunch of people around, when there's no

one no one to see. And it's disgusting. When people come, they're out there to have fun, but instead, they just have a ton of traumatizing experiences that they can't look away from."

Naomi highlighted that both Greek life and party culture fosters an environment for sexual violence proclivity. She shared sexual violence can occur "when there's no one to see," or in settings with limited oversight, which creates a vulnerability for this behavior. She underscores the importance of addressing these environmental factors and implementing measures to promote safety and accountability within these social contexts.

Super-ordinate Theme 3: My Community

Dread and Disconnect

Ariya and Eliza described negative feelings associated with the campus climate. While there appears to be some commonality, each respondent used unique wording and phrasing to encapsulate their feelings about the campus community or lack thereof:

"I would say everyone – I'll say everyone's lost in their own world. That's what I would say. That's what I would say everyone's lost in their own world."

Ariya alludes to a sense of detachment among students at Rowan. She explained students are "lost in their own world" as they navigate the campus is a way that is also disconnected from the other students around them. Ariya's interpretation of the campus climate also illuminates the university lacking in cohesion; her quote implies the opposite of being "lost in their own world" would be a sense of community and connection among students, faculty, and staff.

Eliza provides a personal account of a peer's experience. She experienced a profound sense of loneliness, which was exacerbated by a lack of community support.

Eliza described the complexity of being a trans woman, a freshman, and struggling with mental health in the absence of social support. She felt invisible.

> "I had a friend who experienced that. She she's a trans woman, and she went to Rowan, and she was a freshman. But she experienced so much *loneliness* here, that she never came back to. Like, after being a freshman, she was like, I'm not coming back here. And she's from Glassboro. So, it wasn't like… it wasn't like she didn't know this culture, or anything like that, like she's from, like, coastal South Jersey, so she knows or, like, she knows what it's like to be here. It's just like, she just couldn't have a car here. She couldn't have all these other things. And her being a trans woman on top of that, and on top of that, having mental health struggles, like, she felt like she had no community support. And I feel that way as well."

Additionally, Eliza described grappling with feelings of "dread," feeling "miserable," "tired," and "scared" which impacted their daily lives and well-being. They reported "removing" themselves from the Rowan community, serving the purpose of both self-preservation and safeguarding others.

> "I've removed myself a little bit more from the Rowan community this past year than I feel as though I should… I should do but like after a while, like, I get like the sense of like *dread* sometimes because, you know, people are *miserable*. Like there's lots of students who are *miserable*, especially if you live on campus and you're like, a first-year student and you don't know anything and are just getting situated. Like you can be *miserable* and *tired* and *scared* and like, you're just trying to figure stuff out and oh, so stuff and you just need to like I just needed to

remove myself from my because it becomes so like, infect other people. And I'm not saying that's up for everyone, everyone. Um but obtained like, if you're a good population of people who are going to be *miserable* or don't have really have a community connection, really, they're just in their dorm room or like outside or something like just trying to get work done or something like that. And they don't have like, mental health support or resources or anything like that, they're going to be like, they're going to be *miserable*."

Eliza's interpretation of the unique experiences faced by trans women at Rowan highlights the impact of societal stigma and limited support systems. Eliza used a friend's personal experience to exemplify the campus climate; it also can be representative of a parallel process that illustrates a sense of community born in the face of adversity.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The present study provides a novel examination of the lived experiences of BTN students, and their perceptions of the campus climate around sexual violence at their university. To date, little is known about the intersection of identity, the campus climate, sexual violence, and systems of oppression within an intersectional stigma and socio-ecological framework. The findings illuminated the complexity of these phenomena to address gaps in current research, highlighting the idiographic perspectives of students with marginalized social identities and the multilayered influence that shape lived experiences using IPA. The major themes that emerged from analysis of the interviews provided rich understandings of BTN students' perception of sexual violence on their campus (RQ1) and the experiences of discrimination, bias, and their perceptions of the campus climate (RQ2).

Patriarchal attitudes and societal norms (Theme 1) described by participants are essential beliefs that uphold gendered views of violence. Consistent with socio-ecological model, participants underscored the traditional and dysfunctional gender scripts that have socialized men to symbolize expectations of being dominant, aggressive, and sexually assertive (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Plous & Williams, 1995; Taylor et al., 2019). Universities have also implicitly enabled a culture tolerant of sexual violence through performative allyship, lack of training about sexual violence and consent, low rates of consequences in sexual violence cases, insufficient investigative practices, and policies in place with questionable utility. These inadequate efforts can serve as a barrier to victims reporting sexual violence. Barriers for disclosure can perpetuate the silence and

invisibility of marginalized students. Consistent with minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), marginalized students may experience a fear of rejection, discrimination, or even victim-blaming when deciding to report their sexual violence experiences. Students with minoritized social identities emphasized the unique barriers to disclosing sexual violence experiences via formal channels (i.e., university administrator and/or law enforcement) such as avoiding negative experiences based on past interactions, fear of outing themselves, and preconceived negative beliefs about interactions with officials (Hackman et al., 2022). The anticipated stigma and lack of support precludes students from seeking support and reporting incidences of sexual violence. Relatedly, students emphasized community solidarity and access to supportive networks through friend groups, campus clubs, and resources such as pride centers as preferable resources to cope with victimization (Hackman et al., 2022). These affirming spaces provided a sense of belonging and support, enabling individuals to feel more comfortable opening up about mental health and experiences of sexual violence (Hackman et al., 2022).

Barriers to disclosing sexual violence can also vary based on cultural factors such as values and commitment to one another. These barriers may be influenced by broader sociohistorical contexts. For example, members of the Black community who have been victimized may choose not to acknowledge the incident publicly if the assailant is also Black. This decision stems from a desire to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes (e.g., Black men are dangerous; Washingtin, 2001). In a study examining barriers to reporting among Black women a participant commented, "[…] we are not going to be traitors to the race" (Washington, 2001). Additionally, BTN students may hesitate to report their experiences out of fear of further harm by oppressive systems (Brubaker et al., 2017).

This form of solidarity suggests that BTN students may value community and resilience over disclosure of sexual violence, and a desire to shield others from further harm or marginalization. The mistrust in systems highlights the anticipated disappointment of such systems to provide adequate and appropriate care for the unique needs of gender minority individuals. As a result, one may choose not to report sexual violence because they may not have access to gender-affirming care in prison. In many cases, the prison system may not appreciate gender-affirming care for transgender or nonbinary individuals. Through the minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), individuals with marginalized identities anticipate experiences of social harm due to structural inequities. To better understand the anticipation of further marginalization and oppression, it is important to consider the sociohistorical context of such inequities, which stem from pathologizing sexual minority orientations and gender identities as diseases (Patterson et al., 2020). As a result, victims will prioritize the safety and protection of the assailant over seeking justice via campus officials and/or law enforcement.

While universities have been encouraged by the Clergy Act and Title IX to engage in efforts that reduce campus sexual violence, many institutions lack the recourses, effective policies and procedures, and support to implement robust practices (Edwards et al., 2019). Despite these concerns, universities increasingly accept and enroll students from diverse ethnoracial and gender identity backgrounds (Lafferty et al., 2024; Lehman et al., 2021). This appears to have influenced student-led organizations to be the agents of change. The phenomenon of universities “riding the coattails” of student organizations highlights the need for greater institutional commitment and leadership in addressing campus sexual violence. Institutions must actively engage with students,

faculty, staff, and community partners to develop comprehensive strategies that prioritize prevention, support victims, and foster a campus climate of safety and accountability.

These interactions can help generate a sense of belonging and validation for Black students, who may otherwise feel marginalized or overlooked. Black students in particular are noted to benefit from faculty interaction (Cole, 2010). Having administrators who are visibly present and actively engaged with Black students demonstrates institutional commitment to DEI efforts. Institutions prioritizing students' needs tend to cultivate a climate marked by reduced racial tension and increased interpersonal engagement among community members (Hurtado et al., 2002). However, participants described the issue of absentee leadership. One possible explanation of campus' inactive role in DEI efforts may be the internalized stigma or internalized homonegativity (Meyer, 2003) where administrators prioritize the protection of white, cisgender, heterosexual women forcing the erasure of BTN from the discourse of sexual violence (Harris & Linder, 2017).

To decrease rates of sexual violence, programming must achieve attitude change among campus administrators and students, which may drive the implementation of effective policies. For example, institutional leadership should regularly assess and update sexual violence policies to ensure they are effective and inclusive of the student community. Ongoing program evaluation and feedback is crucial to improve effects addressing sexual violence and the campus climate. Rather, addressing campus sexual violence from a socio-ecological framework (individual, interpersonal, community, institutional, and societal level; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) allows intuitions to utilize comprehensive prevention strategies. For example, offering tailored resources for gender

minority students that recognizes the unique challenges faced by students with marginalized social identities. Interpersonally, promoting diverse language and social dynamics that move away from a cisheteronormative narrative during trainings, discussions and programming that can create a more inclusive and effective response to sexual violence. Institutionally, implementing practices that center the needs and experiences of BTN students, inclusive and affirming campus policies, and training staff and faculty on cultural competence and humility via an intersectional lens can yield appropriate support. On a societal level, collaborating with larger organizations and campaigns, while also interrogating stereotypes and stigma via education and activism. This holistic framework acknowledges the need for multifaceted strategies to address campus sexual violence.

Additionally, universities must implement ongoing, mandatory training on sexual violence prevention and consent for all students, faculty, and staff. Many researchers have advocated against single-session education about sexual violence that are provided earlier in their undergraduate studies that may not translate into long-lasting behavior change (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Freyd & Smidt, 2019; Lund & Thomas, 2015). Across several institutions, about 90% provided some information about sexual violence. Concerningly, most universities provided rudimentary information about sexual violence, neglecting to discuss the complexity of the issue (i.e., contributors to sexual violence; Lund & Thomas, 2015). Such efforts are necessary but not sufficient in moving the needle on addressing sexual violence. Additionally, sexual violence messaging on college campuses often communicate procedures and resources for coping with sexual violence after the incident has occurred (Lund & Thomas, 2015). It is imperative that universities

address both the aftermath of sexual violence, as well as its prevention by taking a comprehensive approach that addresses both the immediate needs of students impacted and the underlying factors contributing to the issue. As participants highlighted, campus sexual violence is a nuanced phenomenon. That said, it is equally important to promote a thorough understanding of consent and bystander intervention. When colleges only provide sexual violence information during orientation and not throughout their students' studies, it can be interpreted as a lack of ongoing commitment to addressing and preventing sexual violence, potentially leaving students uninformed and ill-equipped to navigate such situations as they arise throughout their undergraduate studies.

Theme 2 describes the persistent issue of SV on college campuses, particularly affecting BTN students. One possible explanation is the traditional approaches to addressing SV that often overlook the experiences of gender minority individuals, resulting in ineffective practices and limited resources. Institutions have largely conceptualized this phenomenon from a cisheternormative lens, which is a disservice to BTN individuals whose relationships exist outside a heterocentric dynamic. This has resulted in ineffective practices, inaction, lack of awareness, inadequate training and education, and limited resources specific to BTN. In fact, few studies have assessed student responses and the efficacy of educational campaigns on sexual violence across identities. Using an intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1991) would aid in reforming educational programs and foster cultural change on college campuses. An intersectional approach acknowledges individual experiences and how oppression and discrimination intersect creating a vulnerability to sexual violence.

Additionally, aspects like Greek life and party culture create settings conducive to SV, pointing to the necessity for a cultural transformation among student groups. Research has consistently identified environmental and community-level risk factors for sexual violence perpetration. Greek life has been under scrutiny for its characteristics of being a risky environment and fostering a culture where sexual violence may occur (Barnes et al., 2021; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Fraternities are largely male-dominated organizations creating an imbalance between men, women, and gender minority students. In the context of fraternity houses, approximately 16% of women reported victimization and at least one of them occurring at a fraternity (Barnes et al., 2021). Approximately 96% of cisgender men were also reported to have perpetrated sexual violence against cisgender women and gender minority students (Martin et al., 2020). The pervasive social influence is often present where members endorse patriarchic values and reinforce gender roles. This can cultivate an environment in which men may feel the need to conform to the hypermasculine ideals and further perpetuate the issue of sexual violence (Seabrook et al., 2018). Contextual factors such as intoxication within parties and social gatherings are also known to exacerbate sexual violence incidences impairing judgment and consent can become unclear (Barnes et al., 2021). As noted by Naomi, with the lack of oversight (e.g., university administrators), members may feel less accountable for their actions resulting in an increase of engage in sexual violence. It is important to note not all fraternity chapters or members promote hegemonic views of masculinity that lead to problematic behavior (e.g., sexual violence). The overall campus environment can seem unwelcoming and detached, especially for marginalized students, which exacerbates their feelings of invisibility and estrangement.

Theme 3 highlights the experiences of loneliness and disconnection among students at Rowan University. Participants described a campus climate characterized by isolation and individualism, particularly for those with marginalized social identities. This sense of loneliness is not a novel challenge experienced by BTN students. Notably, Black students endorsed markedly lower levels of belonging, perceiving the campus as welcoming, and feeling valued compared to their white counterparts (Telles & Mitchell, 2018). The lonely experience of BTN students expressed from participants underlines the minority stress theory that the social exclusion of minoritized students can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Meyer, 2003). In accordance with stigma theory, BTN students may be ostracized by their counterparts due to perceived "blemishes," leading to social exclusion and isolation (Goffman, 1986). Notably, students of color perceive the campus climate to be hostile and less welcoming compared to their white counterparts (Campbell-Whatley et al., 2012). Students of color are also more likely to perceive the campus climate as less favorably regarding the university's response to racism compared to white students. These data highlight discrepancies in the perceptions of the campus climate between students of color and white students which may be attributable to epistemic privilege (i.e., an ability to overlooked or avoid negative behaviors related to race compared to students of color; Campbell-Whatley et al., 2012; McIntosh, 1998).

It is important to note that participants in the current study largely discussed their perceptions about gender identity more than racial identity, which may be due to various factors. For example, it is possible that participants perceived gender-related issues are more salient in their lived experiences compared to the influence of their racial identity.

Similarly, participants may have encountered significantly greater experiences of discrimination due to their gender identity. Considering the current political climate of social movements centered on LGBTQ+ rights, the focus of gender discrimination may be relevant given the media attention on gender-related topics. Additionally, the shared characteristics between participants and the primary researcher may have influenced the interview discussion. For example, both the researcher and respondent identified as Black, potentially communicating some understanding of the sociohistorical context surrounding racial experiences and therefore unintentionally resulting in a greater focus on gender identity.

Delimitations

IPA is an approach that assists researchers in understanding how individuals make-meaning from their lived experiences via hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). One of the unique aims of IPA is to provide detailed understandings of individual perspectives and move away from generalizability. The boundaries set within the present study help define the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the study remains focused on the identified objectives. For example, participants were carefully selected to include specific characteristics of gender-identity and enrollment at Rowan University. While IPA typically involves small, purposive samples, this allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences. The present study included a small sample size (N = 3), which is consistent with IPA recommendations (Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, the present study was limited to interviewing students within Rowan University to maintain a clear focus to make meaningful interpretations of the campus climate and student perceptions on the issue of campus sexual violence. These delimitations defined above ensured that

the present study obtain and interpret findings that are relevant to the specific research questions being addressed.

Implications/Future Directions

Understanding the lived experiences of BTN students on campus and their perceptions of the climate illuminates the unique challenges at the intersection of racial and gender identity within a broader context. Researcher grounded in an intersectional stigma framework and through a socio-ecological lens amplifies the voices of students with social marginalized identities while also dismantling systems of oppression. The present study highlighted the need to increase representation of BTN individuals in research whose perspective are often absent from social science. Including diverse experiences in research can help address disparities and inequalities that would have otherwise gone unaddressed. In the context of sexual violence, campus administrators can develop evidence-based practices that are inclusive, culturally sensitive and tailored to students with marginalized social identities.

There also remains a gap in exploring the social influence of sexual violence and the experiences on campus among gender and sexual minority students. Research has shown sexual minoritized individuals engage in identity management as a coping mechanism to perceived discrimination (Shih et al., 2013). Identity management is best understood as intentional efforts to manage social identities to mitigate negative responses such as biases (Shih et al., 2013). Sexual minoritized students also frequently face the “invisible stigma” that is not always overtly expressed and recognized; rather, subtle microaggressions or institutional barriers which can lead to further marginalization. Furthermore, efforts must be made to disrupt heterocentric narratives

that communicate heterosexuality as the norm to decrease sexual violence experiences among sexual minoritized students, as well as barriers to reporting.

Future research is warranted in assessing the effectiveness of empirically based interventions across social identities to address sexual violence. Addressing the gaps in sexual violence educational campaigns and interventions must be tailored to effectively reach students with various identities. For example, providing specific content that addressed the unique experiences influenced by environmental factors and sociohistorical context of BTN students. As such, it is imperative programming centers the voices of minoritized students to adapt policies and programs that lead to meaningful change.

The findings from the present study warrant clinicians to engender a culturally sensitive and sociohistorical understanding of BTN individuals' lived experiences. Notably, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) of PTSD does not acknowledge racial or gender-based discrimination, for example, as a source of trauma despite Black individuals reporting both perceived discrimination and PTSD symptomology (APA, 2013; Holliday et al., 2018). It is crucial clinicians conduct a thorough assessment of trauma and discrimination due to social stigma. Trauma secondary to discrimination is distinctive and warrants special considerations for assessment and treatment. For example, Eliza illuminated "allegiance to my community" when describing their response to sexual violence. They identified an innate duty to protect an assailant with shared identities over inflicting further harm and marginalization. Clinicians can then use this information to validate the complexity of their experiences and explore appropriate ways of coping. It is important clinicians

recognize and acknowledge systems of power and oppression as a barrier to reporting sexual violence.

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Appendix A

Participant Summary

Table A1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Year in School
Ariya	She/Her/Hers	21	African American, Afro-Multicultural	Trans woman	Lesbian, Queer	Junior
Eliza	He/Him or They/Them	23	Black, Afro-Multiracial, Afro-Indigenous	Trans man, Nonbinary	Gay, Bisexual	Senior
Naomi	She/They	18	African American	Trans woman	Bisexual	Freshman

Table A2

Super-ordinate and Sub-ordinate Themes Across Participants

Super-Ordinate Themes	Sub-Ordinate Themes
Theme 1: Institutional Issues	Patriarchal Attitudes
	Tolerance for Sexual Violence
	Woke-washing (Passive Advocacy)
	Riding Coattails
	The Wellness Center
	One and Done: Rowan's relationship with sexual violence messaging
	Absentee Leadership
	Barriers to Reporting
Theme 2: The Student Community	Campus Sexual Violence: the Whac-A-Mole effect
	Greek Life and Party Culture
Theme 3: My Community	Dread and Disconnect

Table A3

Identifying Recurrent Themes

Super-Ordinate Themes	**Ariya**	**Eliza**	**Naomi**	**Present in Majority of Sample**
Institutional Issues	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Student Community	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
My Community	No	Yes	No	No

Appendix B

Figures

Figure B1

Recruitment Locations

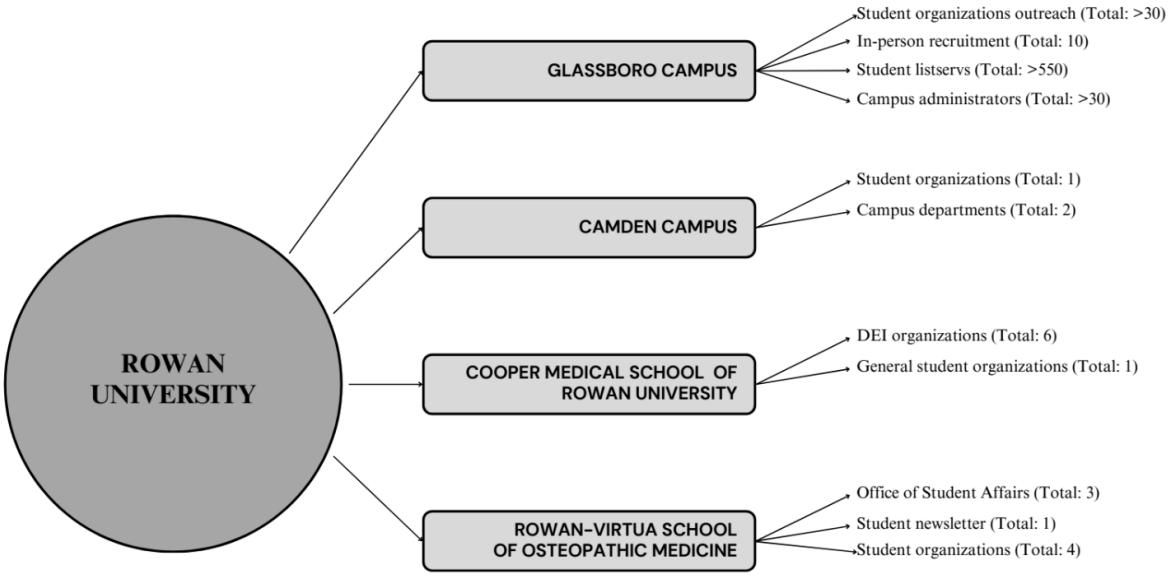


Figure B2

Recruitment Strategy

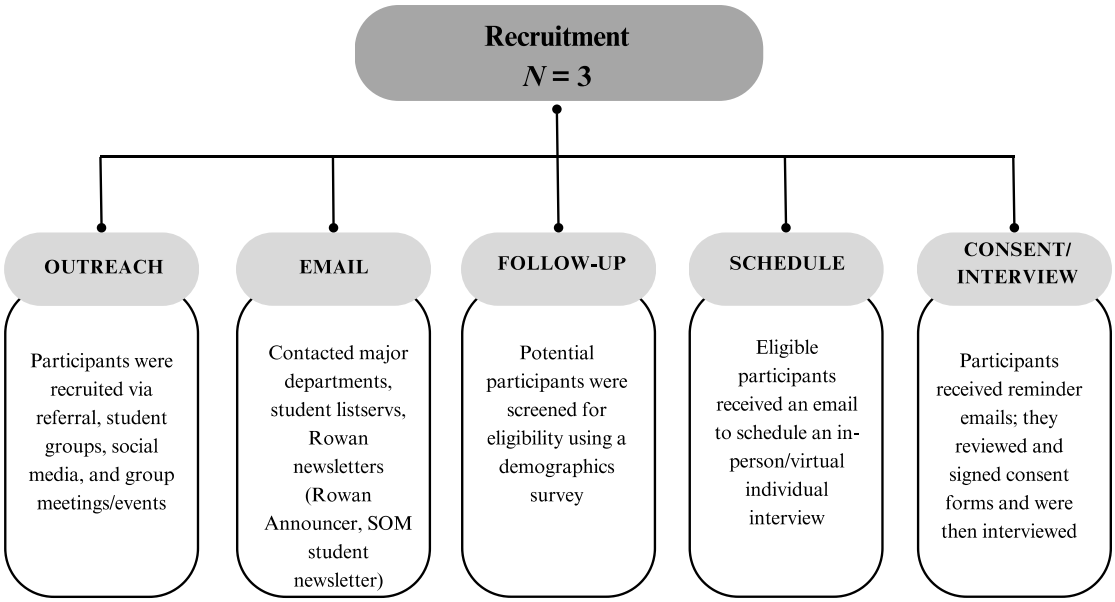
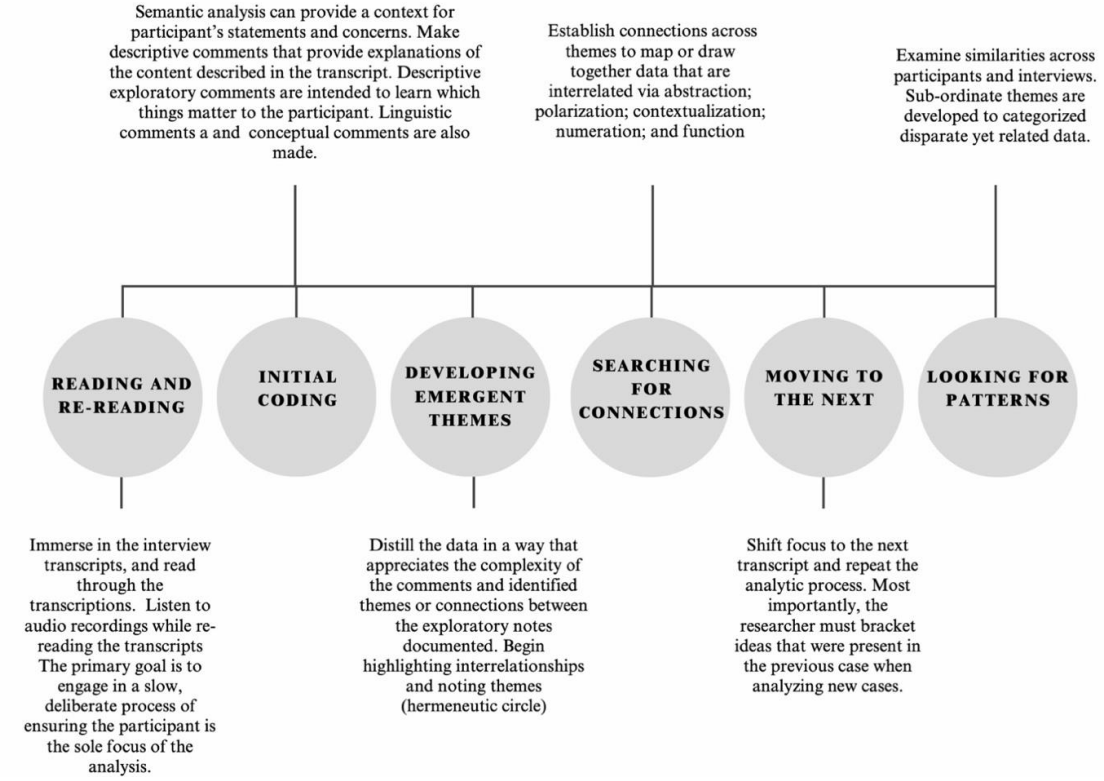


Figure B3

IPA Coding Procedure (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 82-101)



Appendix C

Interview Guide

Participant ID: _____ Date: _____
Time interview started: _____ Time ended: _____

Overview

- Brief introduction
    - Brief summary of the current study
    - Information about the consent form, disclosure, and confidentiality
    - Address any questions participant may have
- Interview
- Provide resources on services available to students

RQ1: What are BTN student's attitudes, beliefs, and experiences with campus sexual violence?

RQ2: What are BTN student's perceptions of campus sexual violence?

- Sense of belonging or connectedness on campus
- Perceptions of sexual violence at their university
- The university's responsiveness to sexual violence
- Awareness of policies and resources regarding sexual violence on campus
- Views on the university's messaging and prevention efforts regarding sexual violence.

1. Please describe how you feel about the campus community at Rowan University?
2. How much of a problem do you think sexual violence is here at Rowan University? Possible prompt: what do you think leads to these problems at RU?
3. What kinds of information have you received about sexual violence since coming to Rowan University?
4. What do you know about RU policies related to sexual violence?
5. What do you know about the resources Rowan offers to address and prevent sexual violence?
6. What do you think about how Rowan University responds to students who have experienced sexual violence?
7. How would you describe the university's efforts to address sexual violence on campus?
8. What else do you think Rowan can do to better address the issues of sexual violence on campus?
9. What do you think is missing from Rowan University concerning efforts to address sexual violence on college campuses?
10. Can you tell me about what key messages or slogans you would want to see or hear from Rowan University regarding sexual violence?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I have no asked here today?

Appendix D

Reflection Memo

Reflection: Interview Participant 100

Participant 100 is a Black trans woman using she/her pronouns. She is currently a junior Rowan University. Participant 100 presented meek, soft-spoken, and provided minimal eye contact throughout the interview. When asked about her experience on campus, she referred to it as "weird" and noted feeling "disconnected" like everyone is "in their own world." Participant 100 indicated that she believes this to be an effect of the human condition. She expressed wanting to leave Rowan several times for personal reasons that were unrelated to Rowan, though personal issues coupled with school, appeared to make those struggles more challenging [possible theme]. Throughout the interview, Participant 100 provided general and some specific examples to response to the questions regarding the campus community and the issue of sexual violence at Rowan [perhaps a reflection of rapport and comfort building]. I felt an urge to ask very specific questions to hear her share what I perceive the response to be given her marginalized social identity. I began questioning my own interview agenda and had thoughts about needing to revise them to get answers that align with my assumptions. I felt an urge to be liked and felt a sense of relatability that may have blinded me from acknowledging our differences and unique experiences. I felt nervous about misspeaking and being perceived negatively.