

**Policy Problems on Campus: An Exploration of Macro-Level Policy Narratives
About Sexual Violence in Higher Education**

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Thank you to my family, who taught me that I can face adversity and repeatedly encounter new life challenges without giving up on myself and my goals.

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ABSTRACT

Policy narratives can, over time, create a grand narrative around a longstanding policy problem, offering insights into how those in power use storytelling to influence policy outcomes. The problem of sexual violence in higher education has been examined in academic literature for over 60 years by scholars across disciplines and has been a subject of the federal policymaking process for nearly as long. This study seeks to answer key questions regarding the themes, underlying social and political values, and conditions for change in the public narratives of federal policymakers advocating for solutions to sexual violence in higher education. The analysis focuses on publicly available narratives from a specific period, beginning with the 2011 Dear Colleague Letter and concluding with the 2017 Dear Colleague Letter. This study uses a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the public narratives of federal policymakers to identify recurring themes, values, and conditions for change, allowing a grand narrative to emerge from the findings. Four dominant themes emerged from the data: 1) the portrayal of colleges and universities as the dominant villain in the narratives, 2) the use of appeals to evidence and expertise as a narrative strategy without providing supporting sources or documentation, 3) the use of colorful language as a narrative strategy, and 4) the strategic use of repetition. The analysis revealed safety and legality as the two underlying social values. While both values were consistently present throughout the data, the speaker's political party affiliation emerged as a condition for change, influencing the relative emphasis on safety versus legality. Recommendations for practice emphasize how higher education professionals can better understand the influence of macro-level narratives at the institutional and individual levels. Additionally, the study's findings contribute to the policy narrative research by positioning

sexual violence in higher education within the context of grand narratives about difficult problems.

Keywords: Higher Education, Policy Narratives, Sexual Violence, Narrative Policy Framework, Macro-level Narratives

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study sought to situate higher education in the public policy research domain that focuses on difficult societal problems, which are intertwined with the social values of the culture (Head, 2023), by examining the macro-level narratives about the problem. Macro-level narrative analyses examine the broader political narratives of culture by critically investigating the stories and values in a given political system (Danforth, 2016). Macro-level narratives are referred to as “grand narratives” (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018), which are collective, historical narratives that, over time, become socially constructed, societal, and cultural norms and values (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). Through hindsight, macro-level narratives help explain phenomena across time and place (Danforth, 2016). In his seminal macro-level narrative study on inclusive education policy, Danforth (2016) established narrative policy analysis research as a practical and useful approach to examining educational policies which help educational leaders understand how policy initiatives influence human behavior. As a researcher, I share Danforth’s vision of exploring the intersections of policy and behavior by studying narratives in higher education policy.

Sexual violence in higher education has been examined from a myriad of perspectives, such as education and prevention (Banyard et al., 2007), women’s mental health (Campbell et al., 2009), campus reporting (Yung, 2015), and the role of alcohol (Bird et al., 2016; Lorenz & Ullman, 2016). The research on sexual violence in higher education has been interdisciplinary and addressed in the research literature across academic disciplines such as counseling (Artime & Buchholz, 2016; Shortway et al., 2020; Yoshimura & Campbell, 2016) and higher education student affairs (Kimberly & Hardman, 2018; McMahon et al., 2017). Simultaneously, policy

scholars (Ertas & McKnight, 2019; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018) have called for expanding interdisciplinary narrative policy studies, including education, and asserted that interpretive work is essential (Jones, 2018).

Until now, higher education policy researchers have not examined the narratives used by the legislative bodies who propose and pass (or not) federal policies related to sexual violence in higher education. These narratives matter because they influence the values that trickle down to the institutional and individual levels of the policy process (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2011, 2018; Shanahan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011). According to leading policy scholars, macro-level narratives can demonstrate a culture's societal and political values toward a given problem (Ertas & McKnight, 2019; Jones, McBeth, & Shanahan, 2014). For example, societal values can be identified by examining who is assigned the role of villain, victim, or hero in policy debates, speeches, and discussions (Shanahan et al., 2011). Another example of how societal values are reflected in macro-level narratives is by examining who or what gets blamed for the problem (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Although the problem of sexual violence has been researched extensively across academic fields and at both the micro- and meso-levels, scholars have called for more research specific to those who ultimately create the policies around this problem. In this study, I apply a qualitative research method to the problem of sexual violence in higher education to explore the themes and values reflected in this problem's macro-level narratives and examine the conditions in which these values have changed over time.

Statement of the Problem

Aggregate data from studies conducted over the past 3 decades situates campus sexual violence as a historical problem. The current national data on sexual violence in higher education indicates 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 women, and 1 in 16 men experience attempted or completed assault

during their college careers. Data specific to graduate students indicate that 1 in 10 female graduate students and over 1 in 5 transgender graduate students state they have been sexually harassed by a faculty member at their university. The problem of sexual violence in higher education is not only a student problem; 58% of female academic faculty and staff have experienced sexual harassment, and academia as an industry has the second-highest rate of sexual harassment as a workplace (Cantor et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2000; Koss et al., 1987; Krebs et al., 2007; Krebs et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2018).

This problem of sexual violence in higher education is considered a social-ecological problem, meaning people are impacted by the individual, relational, community, and societal factors that lead to violence. Societal factors are factors that help create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited, as well as factors of educational and social policies. The Centers for Disease Control's social-ecological model framework for prevention emphasizes that violence prevention requires understanding all four factors (Division of Violence Prevention, 2022). Still, the policies and the policy narratives about sexual violence in higher education have not been explored, analyzed, and identified in the research literature, nor is there a comprehensive body of macro-level narrative analysis research that examines how powerful policy actors use narrative policy beliefs and strategies in their discussions and debates about sexual violence in higher education and we need this research to understand the societal norms and how they have encouraged or inhibited this problem over time. This research is necessary because macro-level narratives permeate politics and have a trickle-down impact on campus-level processes and outcomes, as well as the lived experiences of individuals (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018), and research at the larger, cultural level is still needed as a contributor to the ecological approach to sexual violence research (McMahon et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

In the case of sexual violence in higher education, the macro-level narratives in the policymaking process impact how campus-level administrators and leadership talk about this problem. These macro-level narratives may also impact how campus-level administrators implement federal policy requirements specific to the problem, impacting individual college students as victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify recurring themes, values, and conditions for change in the narratives of federally elected politicians (and their appointees) when they speak publicly about the problem of sexual violence in higher education to understand better the ways those who hold power use narratives when addressing the problem. This study aims to contribute to the current scholarship on higher education policy narrative and to provoke further research on the subject. Macro-level narratives influence those with decision-making power who talk about policy problems using policy beliefs and narrative strategies to influence public opinion (McBeth, Shanahan, & Jones, 2005; Shanahan et al., 2011). Individual members of a society are impacted by how federal policy requirements are implemented. Applying the concept of macro-level narratives and their influence on interpretation and implementation suggests that macro-level narratives shape how campus-level leaders discuss sexual violence on college and university campuses. Understanding narratives can enhance the clarity of narrative expectations at other levels and further our understanding of policy narratives in policy processes (Ertas & McKnight, 2019). This problem of sexual violence on college and university campuses in the United States has been addressed in the research literature for over 60 years, with limited research specific to the macro-level narratives about the problem. Ideally, the problem of sexual violence should be free from

rhetorical manipulation and political agenda, but the ideal is not how the policymaking process works.

Scholars have found that narrative analysis is a useful approach to examining the development and implementation of educational policies (Ertas, 2020; Ertas & McKnight, 2019). My study may contribute to future in-depth research on multiple policy dimensions by applying a qualitative research method to narratives. Analyzing public policy from a macro-level narrative perspective enables early researchers like me to provide insight and understanding of how cultural values drive human behavior through policy initiatives.

Research Questions

At the macro-level, qualitative researchers can examine the power of narratives and contribute to developing hypotheses for future research (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). I approach this study with two assumptions: (a) the cultural narrative about sexual violence in higher education contains narrative elements such as a character, and (b) social and political values have been sufficient to provide a macro-level analysis. The following questions will guide this study:

1. What are the recurring themes in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?
2. What are the underlying social and political values reflected in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?
3. What are the conditions for change in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?

Significance of the Study

Narratives are fundamental to human understanding. Policymakers use narratives to promote their position on a policy problem and do so using structural elements, beliefs, and strategies. Over time, these narratives reflect the social and political values that contribute to policy implementation and can influence the lived experiences of those impacted by the policy problem. Sexual violence in higher education is one example of a policy problem where policymakers have been using narratives to argue their stance in the federal policymaking landscape. Therefore, one can reasonably hypothesize that grand narratives can be identified and once identified, will reflect social and political values which change under identifiable conditions and may create a grand narrative of the problem at hand. Educational policy research suggests that the first step in demonstrating how narratives operate at all three levels is to identify and describe the grand narratives of the problem (Ertas, 2019). Ertas and McKnight (2019) posited that revealing the macro-level narratives “requires a theoretical and historical scholarly perspective” (p. 7), a perspective currently lacking in many policy areas. An examination of these narratives specific to sexual violence in higher education does not currently exist in the public policy literature, nor the higher education literature, nor in the literature on sexual violence in higher education. This narrative analysis study can be important because the problem of sexual violence in higher education is persistent. This narrative analysis study is meaningful because sexual violence remains a persistent issue in higher education, undermining the fundamental right of all individuals to live free from harm.

Theoretical Framework

I justify my research on higher education public policy narratives using the philosophy of pragmatism, specifically Dewey’s (1916) description of the pragmatist philosophy of education

as an “ideal ontology” because it is “a system of connectedness, examining current problems through past experiences to present the problem of study in a new experience” (p. 396). A map of this study’s epistemological and ontological relationship, inspired and informed by this ideal ontology concept, is represented in **Figure 1.1**.

Pragmatism has been referred to as the philosophy of common sense (Shields, 1998), a philosophy which some argue is America’s greatest contribution to the field of philosophy (Diggins, 1994). Pragmatism is viewed as an appropriate, if not formative, philosophy of public policy studies and research (Kaufman-Osborn, 1985) because of its contextual, problem-oriented worldview, while simultaneously, the purpose of the public policy process is to solve a public problem. Neither pragmatism philosophers nor public policy researchers claim that problem-solving is a finite process; therefore, pragmatism and public policy are an intertwined ontology and epistemology.

Concepts associated with Dewey’s (1916) definition of pragmatism are freedom, equality, and community (Shields, 1996). These concepts of freedom, equality, and community are also associated with the political governance of democracy, of which the public policy process is a foundational component. Evans (2000) presented Dewey as a person who viewed the policy process as being “democratized through the application of the scientific process” not to *find truth* but to *reduce doubt* (p. 314). Therefore, public policy narrative analysis implements philosophical pragmatism (Elmore, 1987).

Pragmatist inquiry and public policy research are qualitative in nature (Rochberg-Halton, 1987; Shields, 1998). I connect this qualitative nature to the variables in this study using four of Schram’s (2013) core assumptions of qualitative inquiry: (a) we understand the world through real-world settings (narrative analysis of policy-makers), (b) inquiry must acknowledge the

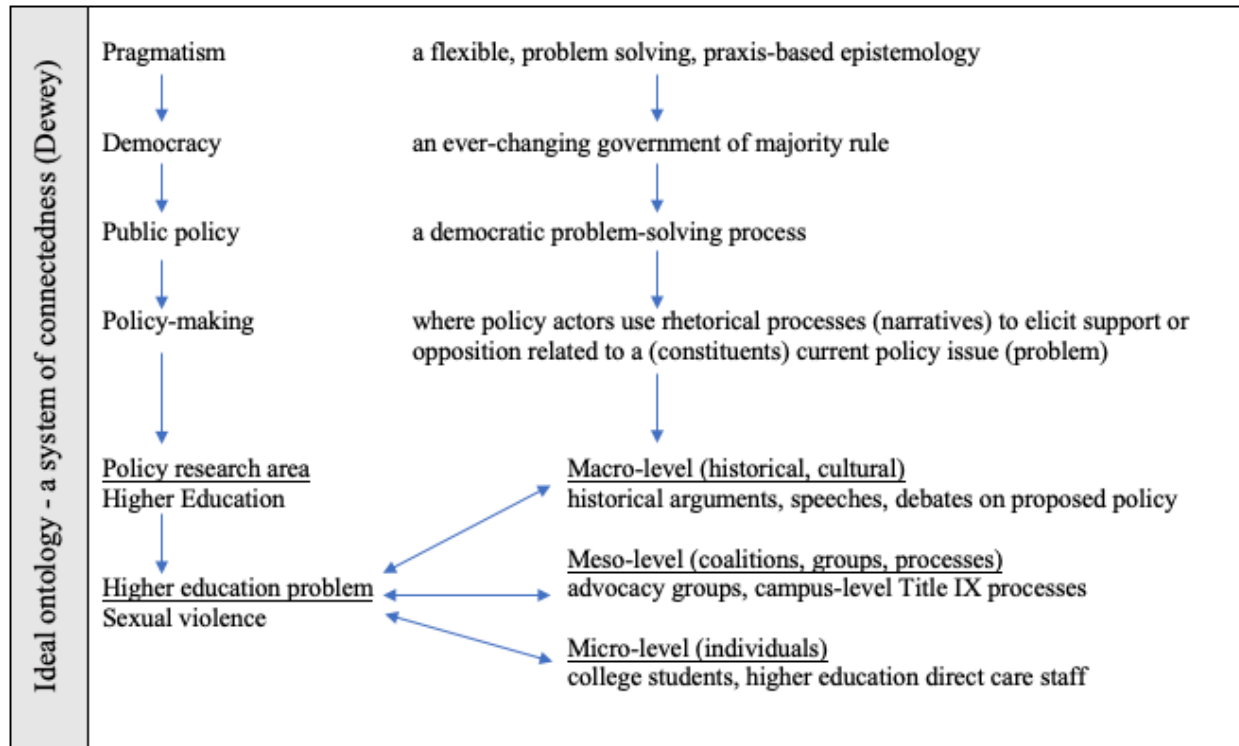


Figure 1.1. A system of connectedness: A justification for sexual violence in higher education as a public policy problem.

interactive way humans construct knowledge (macro-level analysis about a meso- and micro-level problem), (c) inquiry requires attentiveness to particulars (quantitative analysis of narrative elements and content), and (d) is an interpretive process, which seeks to explain and inspire further research (qualitative and quantitative analysis of narrative content). The approach of pragmatism has been with me since the early part of my doctoral studies and, although not intentionally, has helped to shape and inform my approach to policy narrative research. I would be remiss to exclude its contribution from this study. Theory helps early researchers make sense of the empirical landscape, and pragmatism allows for changes in the design of a study if the process warrants such a thing (Vold Hansen, 2022), an expected outcome for early researchers who are also practitioners. My interest in policy and narratives and my experience as a higher education professional meant that pragmatism was the theory informing my research, whether I wanted it to or not.

Variables in Public Policy Narratives

In its simplest form, public policy starts when policy actors identify a public problem and then attempt to solve it through legislation (Burstein & Bricher, 1997; Furlong & Kraft, 2013; Rochefort & Cobb, 1993). Policy actors, the elected officials and their appointees who propose and enact legislation use the public policy process for a variety of reasons, most of which aim to produce a socially desirable outcome by changing the behavior of individuals, groups, government agencies, and public and private organizations (Burstein & Bricher, 1997). The problems and outcomes in public policy are influenced by how these policy actors define, through shared values and discourse, the problem being addressed (Burstein & Bricher, 1997).

For this study, I examined the narratives used by federally elected officials and their appointees on the public policy problem of sexual violence in higher education. I did so using an

epistemological approach to studying the subjective topic of narratives around a range of policy issues, which I assert includes the issue of sexual violence in higher education, a public problem with a longstanding history of narrativity. Policy narrative research has been applied to a myriad of policy problems like fracking and oil drilling (Gottlieb et al., 2018), campaign finance reform (Gray & Jones, 2016), and the influence of media policy narratives on public opinion (Shanahan, McBeth, & Hathaway, 2011). Because literature specific to higher education policy narratives remains limited, this study presents an opportunity to answer the call of policy scholars who encourage others to apply policy narrative research to new areas (Jones & McBeth, 2010; Jones et al., 2014; Jones & Radaelli, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2013; Shanahan et al., 2011).

Policy scholars Jones and McBeth (2010) posited that policy narrative research could examine cultural narratives that permeate society over long periods and span multiple policy subsystems using archival or historical data (Jones et al., 2014). The concept of time, in policy narrative research at the macro-level, can focus on how policy narratives change or remain stable (Ertas, 2018; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018). Although macro-level narratives are more consistent than those at the micro- and meso-levels, macro-level narratives can create cultural shifts in beliefs and behaviors toward a particular policy problem (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018)). In macro-level narrative analysis studies, the researcher seeks to examine ideological content. For example, in their research on genocide as a public policy issue, Finkel and Straus (2012) found ideological frameworks at the highest levels of leadership shaped the leader's policy choice on genocide, a policy problem that is also a crime and violation of human rights. This led the researchers to conclude macro-level narrative analysis is an appropriate research approach to top-down policy processes, especially as a contribution to the larger body of research at the meso- and micro-levels (Finkel & Straus).

Delimitations of the Study

This study researches a problem that has persisted over time and impacts institutions and individuals at different levels and in myriad ways. The following are essential delimitations with supporting rationale.

Time—These narratives require a historical examination over time, which requires a beginning and end date. This study's timeframe begins with a Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) published in 2011 and ends with a DCL published in 2017. This timeframe is most appropriate because it is a period of robust policy activity at the federal level of government. The 2011 DCL (Ali, 2011) established clarity around processes for addressing sexual violence in higher education, and the 2017 DCL rescinded the 2011 letter and its established processes.

Sexual violence is a broad term that includes but is not limited to sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, and intimate partner sexual violence, the terms colleges and universities use to define sexual violence in their codes of conduct. This study delimits the use of the term *sexual violence in higher education* to encompass all forms of nonconsensual sex acts. It assumes this term encompasses all the different terminology used on campus to define nonconsensual sexual acts.

Law literature—A HeinOnline law literature database search returned over 90,000 entries on sexual violence in higher education between 1980 and 2020. The volume of information is so extensive and distinct it could be a separate source of narrative analysis studies. More importantly, examining themes, values, and changes in historical policy narratives does not attempt to inform or argue the law.

Rhetorical considerations—This study's data sources include video, which naturally includes rhetorical faculties of delivery such as voice quality and physical movement. To reduce

the possibility of influence by non-narrative rhetorical components that could have been present in the delivery process, I used the text provided by uncorrected Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN) closed captioning.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduce the problem of sexual violence in higher education as a problem that, despite a myriad of attempts through the policymaking process, continues to persist. I presented the significance of macro-level narrative analysis and proposed three research questions this study attempts to answer. When analyzing macro-level narrative data, the grand narrative is an expression of societal values that influence public policy processes and outcomes (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). These narratives, although more meta in scope, are established as valuable data containing narrative elements and strategies (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In Chapter 1, I provided an overview of this study's purpose, research questions, and significance, with an introduction to the qualitative research method I used to analyze the data collected during this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify recurring themes, values, and conditions for change in the narratives used by federally elected politicians (and their designees) when they speak publicly about the problem of sexual violence in higher education. This study seeks to understand better how those who hold power use narratives when addressing this problem. Additionally, this study aims to contribute to the existing higher education policy narrative scholarship and encourage further research. To establish the topic as a policy problem, I start this chapter with a historical summary of research findings on the problem of sexual violence in higher education. Then, I present, describe, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the policy narrative research to support the core assumptions of this policy narrative study.

Sexual Violence in Higher Education

Sexual violence against female college students in the United States has been recognized as a “common” occurrence for “more than a half-century” (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002, p. 93). On college and university campuses across the United States., sexual violence is a crime problem, a health problem, and a policy problem. Yet, despite more than 65 years of federal legislative policy measures on higher education and the reality that sexual violence in higher education persists, this problem in the policymaking arena appears to fluctuate over time. Fisher et al. (2000), DeKeseredy and Kelly (1993), and Koss et al. (1987) found university women are at greater risk of sexual violence than women of comparable age in the general population. As

pointed out by Wittebrood and Nieuwbeerta (2000), “For sexual offenses, the risks of victimization are higher for women at every moment in their lives than for men” (p. 112), and the college years are no exception.

The First Published Study

Over 60 years ago, the problem of women as targets for sexual assault in higher education began to appear in the academic literature when Kirkpatrick and Kanin (1957) published *Male Sex Aggression on a University Campus*, considered the first of its kind to explicitly research student sexual violence in higher education. They referred to the questionnaire respondents as “offended girls” and “non-offended girls” and found “offended girls would give higher estimates of the prevalence of offensive behavior than would non-offended girls” and “college girls should be trained in informed self-reliance” (p. 58) because the stigma of victimization reduced reliance on parents, peer groups, and formal agencies for guidance. This study represented the early work of ending sexual violence in higher education by promoting the need for victims to speak out. However, these recommendations kept the responsibility on the victim, failed to make recommendations for any additional training for male college students, and did not refer to the policymaking process. These narrative elements in Kirkpatrick and Kanin reflected cultural narrative norms of their time and serve as a data point to explore how narratives have developed since their publication.

Federally Funded Research

Some of the most cited research studies since 1957 have been funded, in part or whole, by the United States government in their efforts to inform policymakers and the policymaking process. What follows is an overview of these research studies and their findings to support my assertion that sexual violence in higher education is a historical policy problem with narratives

that reflect social and political values in the United States and their changes over time. An assertion is called for in the current literature but not explored.

By the 1980s, research was well on its way to examining the problem of sexual violence in higher education. In the early part of the decade, Koss and Oros (1982) developed the *Sexual Experiences Survey* as a research instrument designed to identify hidden cases of sexual aggression and sexual victimization. This survey was established as a reliable and valid survey instrument among women who had experienced rape (Koss et al., 1985) and subsequently used in a seminal study (Koss et al., 1987) with a national sample of 6,159 women and men enrolled in 32 institutions, which has been a significant positive contributor to scholarship with over four thousand citations since its publication. The purpose of the Koss et al. (1987) study was to collect data on two aspects of sexual violence in higher education-women's reports of experiencing sexual violence in the previous year and men's reports of perpetrating rape, attempted rape, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact during the previous year. The results of this national survey of college students indicated 27.5% of the women college students surveyed reported some type of unwanted sexual contact in the previous 1-year period (Koss et al., 1987). Despite the importance of this new survey instrument and the 1987 findings, there was reportedly too much variance in prevalence rates for any sexual violence study of the time to withstand scrutiny outside of the study's sample and other special requirements of each study. It would have been an ideal time in history for policy scholars to call for an examination of the public policy processes around sexual violence in higher education, the policy narratives in these processes, and an overall examination of the macrocultural factors.

In 1994, another large survey was administered during the spring semester to measure the extent and nature of victimization on college campuses. In a nationally representative sample of

3,472 college students from 12 randomly selected 4-year institutions of higher education, the victimization rate for rape and sexual assault was 30 per 1,000 students (Fisher et al., 1998). The theoretical orientation of this study was the lifestyle-routine activities theory, which views crime through a three-part lens, one of which is victim behavior. Fisher et al. (1998) called for policy interventions to address college student victimization, and its recommendations appear to coincide with federal policy interventions taking place during the same period. Although this study was somewhat replicated in the same decade, researchers have not explored the underlying social and political values in these extensive, federally funded research studies. Doing so could begin to identify a grand, cultural view of sexual violence in higher education by exploring its narratives.

Fisher et al. (2000) published the results of another large, seminal research study in a United States Department of Justice report, *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*. The researchers administered the National College Women Sexual Violence Survey to a sample of 4,446 randomly selected women who were attending a 2- or 4-year college or university during the Fall semester of 1996, and the results in their report indicated the rape victimization rate was 27.7 per 1,000 female college students. Respondents also reported, at a rate of 156.5 per 1,000, that during this same fall semester, they had been “repeatedly followed, watched, phoned, e-mailed, or communicated with in other ways which seemed obsessive and made the respondents feel afraid or concerned for their safety” (Fisher et al., 2000, p. 27). This report is important for future research because Fisher et al. explicitly acknowledged that sexual violence against college students had become a controversial topic, and politically conservative commentators claimed the problem of sexual violence in higher education was “rare and a mostly fictitious creation of ideologically tainted research” (p. 30). Fisher et al. concluded the interpretation of data about

sexual violence in higher education was in the “eye of the beholder” (p. 30), which made a case for macropolicy narrative research both then and now.

Later in the decade, the National Institute of Justice funded another seminal study, the Campus Sexual Assault Study (Krebs et al., 2007), which has been cited in the research literature over 500 times since its publication. In this study, surveys were conducted with a random sample of 5,446 students from two large public universities. The results of this survey revealed 19% ($n = 1,073$) of respondents ($N = 5,446$) had experienced, attempted, or completed sexual assault since entering college. The researchers gathered data on a myriad of factors such as consequences, reporting, timing, substance use, location, and assailant characteristics. The thoroughness of the questions in this survey and the researchers’ use of multivariate analyses to identify risk factors make it important foundational research that brought attention to the problem. Krebs et al. (2007) concluded that most sexual assaults occur when women are incapacitated due to their use of alcohol (primarily), and 28% of those who reported being incapacitated also reported their assailant was a fraternity member who had been drinking or using drugs at the time of the assault. This conclusion itself was not problematic so much as their recommendation for university antisexual violence messaging and the risks of substance use to all students, which implies, albeit unintentionally, both parties are responsible for the assault. The results of this study told a grand story using characters and placing blame on them, which is important because, as I reference in Chapter 1, part of policy narrative research examines where policymakers place blame. A study of macro-level narratives could reveal the absence or presence of similar patterns throughout the policymaking history of sexual violence in higher education.

Why the Past Matters

This review of large, government-funded research studies presents a historical picture of the prevalence of sexual violence in higher education, demonstrating sexual violence as a problem historically positioned in public policy (see Appendix A for a complete legislative history of campus sexual violence from 1965 to 2020). This body of research misses a macro-level examination of the narratives used by policy actors and policymakers. The historical body of research on sexual violence prevalence and frequency in higher education focused on the problem, which is a critical endeavor, but framing policy narratives as part of the larger policy process could provide an additional lens for understanding the problem, past, and future.

Politics, Policy, and Stories

It can be reasonably argued that the collective discourse within United States culture broadly condemns sexual violence. However, policymaking by nature inspires arguments and debates among policy actors; therefore, the collective voice of a culture can be overpowered and controlled by the language of policy interventions and debates (Johnson, 2017).

A primary debate in sexual violence policy concerns the individual rights of both the accuser and the accused. In these debates, victim-led justice has become synonymous with strong punitive attitudes, as reflected in the 2017 DCL issued by the United States Secretary of Education. This guidance document used legal phrases to support its intervention, like “charges against them” and “overwhelmingly stacked against the accused” (p.1), and sparked debate in the policymaking process at all levels. What is unknown is whether the narrative elements and strategies have remained consistent over time, how they have changed, and what, if any, social and political values are reflected in the changes.

Policymakers strategically use narrative strategies because these strategies directly impact how humans understand information. Researchers who examined the stories people tell supported the assumption that human communication and cognition use narratives in a fundamental way; those stories are essential to our ways of knowing about the world around us (Belenky et al., 1986; Thayer-Bacon, 2005) and are a preferred and central part of human understanding (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). Policymakers know that people are more likely to respond to narratives than to expert-based information, and this notion of humans as storytellers is central to exploring storied narratives in historical policy problems (Veselková, 2017). Narratives are fundamental to human understanding; therefore, policymakers who are human use narratives. Narratives are stories that contain elements, beliefs, and strategies; therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize this problem has policy narratives worth examining.

Socially Constructed Narratives

In public policy narrative research, social construction is defined as the meaning individuals assign to the stories humans tell (Jones et al., 2014). The policymaking process is full of socially constructed meaning from which the values of the societal culture emerge (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). Social constructions are fluid, which makes them susceptible to questioning and challenge from opposing views, which is the essence of the policymaking process (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). This concept of social construction in sexual violence narratives has been addressed in the literature but is not specific to sexual violence in higher education.

Muehlenhard and Kimes (1999) reviewed 30 years of narratives to examine how sexual violence was defined and understood by society. Their examination of historical narratives found the breadth of a definition impacts how the narratives are interpreted. They found the definition

of rape had expanded over time to include situations not previously defined as rape. With this broadening of definitions, the problem becomes systemic compared to a narrower definition that allows an audience to attribute sexual violence to a few bad actors. Muehlenhard and Kimes provided an important foundation for exploring macro-level narratives; however, their study fell short in extending the analysis to examine narratives as reflections of cultural values.

For example, one of the prominent socially constructed definition changes in rape narratives is the definition of the word *consent*, which is a keyword in higher education debates about evidentiary standards and student discipline. Bletzer and Koss (2004) conducted a narrative analysis of rape survivor interviews from a cross-cultural perspective. Nearly all the women in their study presented the account of their rape experience in the form of a narrative, and their stories presented two difficulties: (a) defining rape and (b) a focus by the victims to establish nonconsent. These findings about the word *consent* reinforce the assertions of Muehlenhard and Kimes (1999) that socially constructed definitions impact how narratives, including policy narratives, are interpreted.

Bletzer and Koss (2004) found the definition of consent varied among the three cultural groups they studied and these cultural differences in socially constructed definitions are layered onto hegemony and power. Hampton (2009) found grand narratives are influenced by hegemonic power differentials, which create the dynamic of an expert countered by a critic and leave narratives open to multiple interpretations. Policy narrative research has demonstrated those who construct definitions are the ones who promote and implement their constructed definitions through their policy narratives. The constructs of hegemony and patriarchy dominate policymaking narratives on sexual violence in higher education simply because the policymaking body is a hegemonic group (Manning, 2020). Macro-level narratives about sexual violence in

higher education are socially constructed by those who hold power, and the powerful are hegemonic. But when examining the macro-level narratives, a researcher can still look for changes in socially constructed definitions in the constructs of hegemony and power over time, which this study aims to do.

The social constructionist approach to narrative analysis asserts that storied narratives change over time and are influenced by societal acceptance. It also seeks to explore how cultural stories, when put together over time, represent a social norm of that time (Hunter, 2010). Socially constructed narratives have a cause-and-effect relationship that tends to dominate discourses (Polletta et al., 2011) and become macro-level narratives that trickle down to policy implementation and how individuals experience policy. Muehlenhard and Kimes (1999) found cultural norms reflected in the individual stories women tell about their experience with sexual violence. Researchers have suggested the presence or absence of these beliefs and values in the macro-level narratives can also be examined over time but have not done so to date (Bletzer & Koss, 2004; Young & Maguire, 2003).

Units of Analysis: Why Macro?

Over 30 years ago, public policy researcher Hank Jenkins-Smith (1990) described public policy as operating at three levels (**Table 2.1**), each of which has distinct characteristics but are also interactive. These three levels are micro (individual), meso (coalitions and advocacy groups), and macro (cultural and institutional).

Micro-level policy narratives can be understood as narrative cognition, the meaning-making and reasoning process that occurs when a person experiences narratives or stories about a public policy issue (Anderson, 2015; Jones, 2010; 2013). Micro-level policy studies seek to understand how policy narratives operate at the individual level, both how individuals interpret

Table 2.1. Units of analysis in public policy and their praxis in the policy problem of sexual violence in higher education.

Units of Analysis	Description	Praxis
Micro	Individual	Campus climate survey of student experiences and opinions of sexual violence on campus
Meso	Group/coalition	Campus advocacy groups use narrative elements (hero, villain, victim) to promote their stance on best practices
Macro	Institution/culture	Congressional members use narrative elements (hero, villain, victim) to promote their argument for one evidentiary standard over another

Note. Jenkins-Smith (1990).

policy narratives and how policy narratives impact individuals (Jones et al., 2014; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018), but not how individual cognitive experiences culminate over time into a cultural norm.

Meso-level policy narrative research examines advocacy groups, coalitions, and other networks in the policymaking process and seeks to explain how policy narratives influence policy outcomes (Jones & McBeth, 2010). The meso-level of policy is where specific outcomes, processes, programs, and other forms of problem-solving implementation begin to take form (Caldwell & Mays, 2012). Meso-level policy analysis examines the relationship or connection between communication by policy actors and operationalized public policy. At the meso-level, the primary focus is on how policy narratives are strategically constructed and used for persuasion in the policy process (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018).

In macro-level narrative analysis, the researcher uses historical debates to examine ideological content and its impact on policy outcomes or choices. The research approach of exploring macro-level narratives is one in which the researcher seeks to uncover the “grand narrative” as an expression of societal values and the influence of these narratives on public policy (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). This work is necessary to identify and describe the grand narratives of a policy problem to inform other researchers on how the problem’s narratives operate at the micro- and meso-levels (Ertas & McKnight, 2019). Because of the inherent interconnectedness in these units of analysis, a research gap in macro-level narrative studies must be filled for policy narrative research to continue evolving around any policy problem in higher education.

Danforth’s (2016) study of inclusive education narratives is often credited as seminal on macro-level narratives in education. Danforth found a gradual policy shift toward inclusive

education had occurred over time, which was driven by two distinct narratives, one that advocated for principles of education equality and one that focused on education performance data. Danforth focused on these grand narratives and their ability to leverage policy change. Knox's (2013) macro-level narrative study was designed to understand the systematic contradictions in policies and programs to restore the Florida Everglades. Knox applied Habermas' critical theory of communicative rationality to archival and secondary data and interviews as a case study, but the historical context situates it as a macro-level study. The importance of these two macro-level studies in the education literature and the policy narrative literature holds a space for macro, historical narrative research on higher education policy problems.

Macro-level Policy Narrative Research on Sexual Violence in Higher Education

Policy levels are reflected in sexual violence reduction work through the social-ecological model, a violence prevention framework used by the Centers for Disease Control to understand and prevent violence. The model's defined societal factors include health, economic, educational, and social policies that maintain inequality between groups in society. In the social-ecological model, it is necessary to examine broad cultural and societal factors that foster climates that either encourage or inhibit violence (Division of Violence Prevention, 2002) to explore the policy narratives, their themes, their values, and the conditions for change is an area of research that can contribute to the information loop used by policy actors who aim to "stop violence before it begins" (Division of Violence Prevention, 2022, p. 1). The synthesis of the social-ecological model and macro-level of policy meets the call by McMahon et al. (2019) for research at the larger cultural level.

Summary

This chapter established the problem of sexual violence in higher education as a historical policy problem. I presented the key pieces of research from the literature to establish this problem and to assert policy narratives as socially constructed stories inherent in the policy process and human understanding and that examining the themes, values, and changes in historical policy narratives about sexual violence in higher education can begin to create a grand narrative. According to leading policy narrative researchers, historical narratives are already established as valuable data that use elements, beliefs, and strategies and, over time, can become socially constructed cultural norms (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). In the next chapter, I present the research methodology employed in this study to uncover the themes, values, and conditions for change in the macro-level narratives about sexual violence in higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I outline the research methodology used in this study, starting with an overview of narrative analysis and then specifically the analysis of macro-level narratives. I undertook a systematic research process to contribute to the knowledge base of public policy research specific to higher education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My research approach is classified as basic research, which aims to extend knowledge, as opposed to its counterpart, applied research, which focuses on improving the quality of practice in a discipline (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic research is useful in the problem-solving process but is not prescriptive. In this chapter, I propose and support a qualitative application of policy narrative research to address the research problem and purpose of the study. I detail the data collection methods, variables, trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is a research method used to interpret oral, written, and visual texts that contain stories (Riessman, 2008). Analyzing public policies as narratives can enable researchers to understand how values and beliefs influence human behaviors around a policy problem (Danforth, 2016). Narratives are stories. This study approaches narratives with the assumption that policy narratives use common structural elements such as setting, characters, plots, and policy solutions and must do so to qualify as a data source (Ertas & McKnight, 2019; Jones & McBeth, 2010; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018). These guidelines for identifying narratives separate the policymakers' stories from expository texts, which are designed solely to inform an audience and tend to avoid using these common persuasive elements.

Narrative analysis in the realm of public policy is important in research because there is an assumption that narratives operate at all three levels of public policy and permeate policy processes. Policy narrative researchers operate on the core assumption that policy narratives occur at three levels: micro (individual), meso (advocacy groups), and macro (cultural). This study was designed around the assumption that these three levels constantly interact with one another. For example, the use of characters as victims or villains by an individual (micro) is usually influenced by the historical cultural-level narratives about victims and villains an individual has been exposed to over time. Therefore, policy narrative research operates on the core assumption that research on one level informs policy making and implementation on the other two levels.

Macro-level Narratives in Research

Analyzing macro-level narrative data is an approach which aims to identify the grand narrative as an expression of societal values and identify possible influences these narratives have on public policy (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). In macro-level narrative analysis, the researcher examines ideological content and its impact on policy outcomes, choices, and changes over time (Ertas & McKnight, 2019).

Danforth's (2016) research on inclusive education narratives has been cited by education and policy researchers (Ertas & McKnight, 2019; Liasidou & Symeou, 2018; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018) as an important study on the macro-level narratives, cultural ideology, and changes over time. Danforth found two grand narratives leveraged a change in inclusive education policy: one narrative, which advocates for principles of equality, and another political narrative, which is focused on performance data in education.

Research on sexual violence in higher education is abundant (Fisher et al., 2000; Koss et al., 1987; Krebs et al., 2007), and studies specific to campus sexual violence narratives exist at both micro- (Bletzer & Koss, 2004; Fasting & Sand, 2015) and meso-levels (Fernandez et al., 2020). Although studies applying an exploratory research design to historical macro-level narratives about this problem are limited, macro-level policy narrative studies have been conducted in other historically controversial policy areas. Knox (2013) used archival and secondary data to understand macro-level contradictions in environmental restoration programs by exploring narratives specific to the Florida Everglades. McBeth and Shanahan (2004) explored the macro-level narratives in the Greater Yellowstone policy conflict. Ney (2014) connected macro- and meso-levels of policy narratives in an exploratory study that examined how policymakers use macro-level values and belief systems to construct stories about policy challenges that appear to be “stubbornly resistant to resolution” (p. 207).

Qualitative Research Design

This study used a qualitative research strategy with an exploratory research design to examine the macro-level narratives about sexual violence in higher education, uncover any underlying social and political values about the problem, and reveal the conditions under which these policy narratives have changed over time. I used a qualitative research design to allow my analysis to emerge through an interrogation of archival documents (Givens, 2012). Qualitative research has two key characteristics that align with the research questions I seek to answer: (a) words are the most common form of qualitative data, and (b) the researcher’s role is to capture the implicit and explicit meanings and perceptions of people who are on the inside by giving deep attention to everyday events in their natural settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Leading policy narrative researchers have applied these traditional qualitative criteria to examine values-

based policy problems and shown variations in narrative strategies, such as how victims and harm are defined and blame is attributed (Gray & Jones, 2016).

In designing this research study, I faced a dilemma of time. My literature review gave me reason to start with a goal of using narratives from the start of Title IX more than 40 years ago, which helped me identify my research questions, an expected outcome of the literature review (Vold Hansen, 2022). Still, expert scholars advised this timespan would be too large and that I needed to bound the timeframe. Therefore, I delimited my study for manageability and relevance using boundaries of time and saturation. This study is limited to the years 2011–2017, beginning with the 2011 DCL (Ali, 2011) and ending with the 2017 DCL.

In this study, I undertook the data collection process, which included public narratives available in written and spoken word. The primary search terms for this study were *sexual violence in higher education* and *campus sexual violence*. Additional search terms included federal legislation on the problem, including *Title IX*, *the Campus Save Act*, and *the Violence Against Women Act*. The date range for this study runs from 2011 to 2017 (Ali, 2011; Jackson, 2017). The final sample of data for this study was based on saturation, with narratives analyzed until variations in the analysis no longer existed and the findings were consistently the same.

Sources of Data and Procedures

This section outlines the steps I followed to conduct this research study. The process involved several key phases:

Data Collection: I searched the C-SPAN archive using carefully selected search terms relevant to the research questions.

Data Preparation: Once the relevant data were identified, I printed text transcriptions from the data source and compiled all final documents in a readable format for analysis.

Coding and Analysis: Using the codebook I developed specifically for this study, I identified thematic findings, narrative elements, and narrative strategies while engaging in simultaneous reflexive journaling to capture my analytical reflections.

Tracking Changes Over Time: After completing the codebook for each data source, I applied open coding techniques to identify shifts and changes in narratives over time.

Additional details on data sources follow.

Archival Data

Macro-level narrative research can be conducted using narratives from historical footage of political meetings, talks, debates, and documents to uncover the values over time. Historical footage can uncover the grand cultural narratives around ongoing policy issues (Shanahan, Jones & McBeth, 2018). In this study, narratives were collected from C-SPAN (2024), a public service “providing gavel-to-gavel coverage of the workings of the United States Congress, both the House of Representatives and Senate, without editing, commentary or analysis.” Because this study focused on a problem rather than a specific policy, the definition of *sexual violence in higher education* included other terminology commonly used to reference this problem:

- campus sexual assault
- campus sexual violence
- sexual assault in higher education
- sexual violence in higher education
- stalking in higher education
- sexual harassment in higher education

The search terms included specific policies that impact sexual violence in higher education:

- Title IX of the Higher Education Act
- Title IX
- Violence Against Women Act
- Campus Save Act

I evaluated each narrative event and selected those that contained at least one character and a moral (Shannahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018). Throughout the data collection process, I evaluated for saturation in these delimitations of time and definition. I knew I had reached saturation when my search criteria produced duplicate findings about my research questions.

Codebook

The use of a codebook is a common practice in policy narrative analysis. Its purpose was to operationalize the narratives (Ertas & McKnight, 2019; Jones, McBeth, & Shanahan, 2014) by categorizing their form and content as an organized strategy, which allowed me to make measurable observations of conceptual ideas, themes, and values (McBeth et al., 2014; McBeth et al., 2005). I created the codebook for this study based on literature specific to public policy narratives (Givens, 2012; Jones, Shanahan, & McBeth, 2014; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Lane, 2013). Givens (2012) put narrative research into groups, two of which are thematic (what the story is about) and structural (how a story is composed), which she defines as the “building blocks of all narrative analysis” (Givens, 2012, p. 2). These two building blocks are reflected in the codebook I created for this study (see Appendix B).

Analysis of the Data

Content analysis is a data analysis technique used in narrative research and this study. Qualitative narrative content analysis coincides with the assumption the meaningful parts of policy narratives are socially constructed, and these meanings change over time to create new or different policy realities (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018). A qualitative approach to analyzing macro-level narrative data allowed me to identify the explicit and implicit aspects of narrative structures that collectively become an expression of societal values and influence how individuals and coalitions interact with a policy problem (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). Leading policy narrative researchers have established macro-level narratives as valuable data to explain the sociocultural factors influencing public policy at all other levels (Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018).

In the data analysis process, I recorded broad patterns and themes (Bernard, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Saldaña, 2013). Simultaneously, I identified narrative strategies and elements and documented my findings using a codebook created for this study. Focusing on two areas simultaneously allowed me to identify, study, and present the broad themes and values reflected in the grand narratives, conditions for change, and, eventually, the grand narrative, as I present in Chapter 5.

Operational Definitions

Although qualitative research leans heavily on open coding, analyzing policy narratives has some definable characteristics that researchers consider essential to uncovering the political stories about policy problems. A researcher uncovers the political stories by identifying and coding for the use or absence of these definable characteristics, which are categorized as narrative elements and narrative forms (see **Table 3.1**).

Table 3.1. Operational definitions.

Narrative Element	Definition
Statement of a problem	A policy narrative is always built around some stated problem
Characters	The participants in a policy narrative. Characters can be humans (proper nouns), groups, or organizations. Character references can be implicit or explicitly stated.
Three types of characters	
• Victim	The entity hurt by a specified condition
• Villain	The entity responsible for the damage done to the victim
• Hero	The entity designated as fixing or being able to fix the specified problem
Citing science or other evidence	Support offered intending to demonstrate a problem
Narrative strategies	Definition
Colorful language	The use of symbols or metaphors
Policy beliefs	Conveys a viewpoint on a policy issue and evolves from narratives

The following key terms are to be used throughout this dissertation to establish a common language and reduce ambiguity:

1. Sexual violence—The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Division of Violence Prevention, 2024) defined sexual violence as “sexual activity when consent is not obtained or freely given.”
2. Higher education—The definition of higher education that was adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1998) World Conference on Higher Education in 1998: “All types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent state authorities” (p. 2).
3. Policy narrative—A policy narrative must have at least one character (McBeth et al., 2014; Shanahan et al., 2013; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018) and a reference to the policy in question (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018).
4. Macro-level narratives consist of narrative elements (form and content). They are expressions of shared cultural values found in historical events and debates, including Constitutional debates (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018).

Trustworthiness and Validity

In qualitative research, validity is defined as accuracy, which is rooted in the soundness of a study’s research methods and subsequent findings (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative policy research seeks to illuminate reality to better understand a policy problem, aligning with this study's research questions. However, the need to instill rigor into a subjective process can cause problems for qualitative researchers (Whittemore et al., 2001). Therefore, taking a qualitative

approach to answer three interconnected research questions should strengthen the validity of this study because the definition of a narrative is already established in the literature.

Trustworthiness is the generally accepted criteria for establishing reliability in qualitative research. The definition of trustworthiness, as set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994), means the study and its findings possess credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity. I have aligned this study with the trustworthiness criteria published by Loh (2013) because he specifically examines the Lincoln and Guba criteria for narrative studies alongside other prominent qualitative researchers and adheres to the notion all knowledge is constructed and, therefore, never perfect (see **Table 3.2**).

Limitations

This study had many limitations. The narratives did not include advocacy groups who spoke before Congress and participated in talks with political commentators. The work of these advocates might have expanded the scope of this study to unveil a richer grand narrative or additional grand narratives.

My proposal for this study initially spanned 40 years but was significantly reduced at the recommendation of leading research scholars. The years I chose were value-laden in practice but small in scope compared to the history of this problem in policymaking.

Lastly, narrative research leaves open a philosophical debate about the role of grand narratives as mechanisms of social control as they become a type of universal truth in society (Givens, 2012). Postmodern thinkers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) posited important arguments in their rejection of grand narratives. I may have inadvertently placed myself in the debate about the value of the grand narratives despite my study not being philosophical. If I did

Table 3.2. Trustworthiness criteria.

Criteria	Technique	This Study
Transferability/external validity	Thick description	Codebook collects demographic information that is both social and cultural
Dependability/reliability	Inquiry audit	An independent researcher examines both the process and product of the research study.
Confirmability/reflexivity	Reflexive journaling audit trail	Recorded decisions, reasoning, and thinking process questions throughout the data analysis process.

enter this debate unknowingly, I welcome the consideration of my findings in such a discussion should my results warrant such.

Position Statement

As an experienced postsecondary and higher education professional, I came to this study with several notions. First, I believe no amount of sexual violence in higher education is acceptable, and minimization occurs when traditional statistical values are applied to data on a problem that violates human rights. Second, I believe there are barriers to confronting the problem of sexual violence in higher education, one of which is the way sexual violence is talked about or avoided in United States culture. Third, a predominant barrier in policy implementation processes at the campus level is that most administrators at the highest levels approach sexual violence on campus with a primary goal of minimizing legal and social disruption on campus more than eliminating sexual violence. I do not believe these barriers result from malice or ill intent and are more likely seen by administrators as part of their long-term responsibility for preserving the institution.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the methodology for this study. I established the definition of narrative analysis used for this study and specifically my support for macro-level policy narrative. I also established this study as qualitative research for the purpose of examining macro-level narratives, situating this qualitative study in my research questions. Next, I discussed the data collection process I used for this study, including data sources, search terminology, and the application of a codebook in the analysis process. Because this study and its findings may span disciplines, I defined key terminology and provided operational definitions specific to this study. I ended this chapter discussing trustworthiness, limitations, and my

position as a higher education professional. In the next chapter, I present my research findings with illustrative examples to support those results.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify recurring themes, values, and conditions for change in the narratives used by federally elected politicians (and their designees) when they speak publicly about the problem of sexual violence in higher education. This study seeks to better understand how those who hold power use narratives when addressing this problem. Additionally, this study aims to contribute to the existing higher education policy narrative scholarship and encourage further research. The value of this inquiry is built on the premise that macro-level narratives create or demonstrate the relationships between institutions and culture in public policy and may be more common among government officials (Stauffer, 2023).

This study employed a qualitative research method with an exploratory design. I used narrative content analysis to identify the components that may collectively influence how individuals interact with a nationwide policy topic like sexual violence in higher education. This study was designed to contribute to the knowledge base of higher education policy, using qualitative data from publicly available speeches and key policy documents delivered by federally elected officials and their appointees. The results presented in this chapter could be useful in problem-solving but would not solve the problem itself.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the recurring themes in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?

2. What are the underlying social and political values reflected in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?
3. What are the conditions for change in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?

Structure of this Chapter

This chapter is composed of three major sections. In the first section, I present the thematic findings, which public policy literature also refers to as the *grand narratives*. Grand narratives are expressions of shared cultural values in historical events and debates (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). Grand narratives are broad cultural or institutional policy structures that tend to take place in the background of policy debates and are revealed through an analysis of historical debates (Ertas & McKnight, 2019). In the second section, I present the underlying social values extracted from my analysis with supporting examples. In the third section, I address my findings related to the conditions for change over time. I end this chapter with a summary of my findings in preparation for the more extensive discussion in Chapter 5.

Data and Delineation

For this study, a *narrative* was defined as including a setting, at least one character, and a policy belief. This definition of narrative aligns with the literature (Ertas & McKnight, 2019; Jones & McBeth, 2010; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018) and constructs narratives as persuasive rather than expository. The setting in all the narratives was the college experience, both on and off campus. All policy narratives have characters who can play different roles (McBeth et al., 2014; Shanahan et al., 2013; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). In policy narrative research, the character types are victim, villain, hero, and other, often a

nonhuman entity assigned a character role. For example, alcohol is often revealed to be a villain in higher education policy research on fraternity hazing (Biddix, 2016). Each narrative in this study had at least one character who was the victim of sexual violence in higher education. Last, considering policy beliefs are a set of values used to orient a group of people, the policy belief in this data set was, without exception, that sexual violence in higher education is bad and needs to be addressed.

Data were retrieved from the web-based version of C-SPAN. The rationale for using this source material was to use unedited information from a source that does not receive financial gain through viewership numbers or ad revenue. C-SPAN (2024) is a cable and satellite television network created by the cable television industry as a public service. It is a private, nonprofit channel funded by cable and satellite affiliates, which are partly funded by the monthly bills of cable and satellite television customers. Although watching C-SPAN on cable or satellite requires a subscription to a provider, the online database is free. According to their website, C-SPAN provides media coverage on all federal government events, including House and Senate debates, committee hearings, events from the executive branch, the courts, and election coverage. Because this study is focused on a problem, not just a specific policy, I used various search terms to ensure I did not miss important relevant events. So, in addition to the search term *sexual violence in higher education*, I also used the following terms in the C-SPAN search feature:

- campus sexual assault
- campus sexual violence
- sexual assault in higher education
- sexual violence in higher education

- Title IX

The documents analyzed for this study were the transcripts of 12 spoken narratives and two written documents. These 14 narratives were from six public events and included Democrats and Republicans, the two dominant political parties in the United States. Three individuals who represented victims of sexual violence in college spoke at these events. **Table 4.1** shows each narrator's name, position when the narrative was delivered, the title of the speaking event broadcast on C-SPAN or the title of the document, and the date of the event or document. Following the table, each document is concisely summarized and accompanied by a justification for its inclusion in this study.

Dear Colleague Letters 2011 and 2017

According to a Congressional Research Service report titled *Dear Colleague Letters: Current Best Practices*, the letters are correspondence signed by Members of Congress (United States House of Representatives and the Senate) and distributed to their colleagues for the purpose of persuading others to cosponsor, support, or oppose a bill. They are also used to inform members about new or modified congressional operations or events connected to congressional business. The use of the term *dear colleague* dates to the start of the 20th century and refers to the salutation of this type of letter (*Dear Colleague Letters*, 2011).

The data analysis begins and ends with a DCL and its corresponding Q&A document. The 2011 DCL launches a shift to address the problem of sexual violence in higher education through a more robust interpretation of the policies already in place, including Title IX (Ali, 2011). The DCL of 2017 (Jackson, 2017) rescinded the policy statements and guidance reflected in the April 4, 2011, DCL and its clarification document titled *Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence* (Lhamon, 2014), dated April 29, 2014. The justification for including these

Table 4.1. Data list.

Narrator	Narrator Position	Title	Delivery
Russlyn Ali	Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education	Dear Colleague Letter	4.4.2011
Claire McCaskill	Senator (D) Missouri	Introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act	7.30.2014
Kelly Ayotte	Senator (D) New Hampshire	Introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act	7.30.2014
Kirsten Gillibrand	Senator (D) New York	Introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act	7.30.2014
Chuck Grassley	Senator (R) Iowa	Introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act	7.30.2014
Mark Warner	Senator (D) Virginia	Introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act	7.30.2014
Marco Rubio	Senator (R) Florida	Introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act	7.30.2014
Annie Clark	Cofounder of End Rape on Campus	Introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act	7.30.2014
Andrea Pino	Cofounder of End Rape on Campus	Introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act	7.30.2014
Barack Obama	President(D)	Launch of the It's on Us campaign	9.19.2014
Joe Biden	Vice President (D)	Launch of the It's on Us campaign	9.19.2014
Lilly Jay	Victim of sexual violence in higher education	Launch of the It's on Us campaign	9.19.2014
Betsy DeVos	United States Secretary of Education (R)	Remarks on Title IX sexual assault guidance	7.13.2017
Betsy DeVos	United States Secretary of Education (R)	Education Secretary DeVos on Title IX	9.7.2017
Candice Jackson	Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education	Dear Colleague Letter	9.22.2017

documents is that each of these letters signifies the start of an active phase in the public policy process addressing sexual violence in higher education.

Campus Sexual Assault Legislation: The Campus Accountability and Safety Act

This event was a July 30, 2014, talk by five senators (three Democrats and two Republicans) introducing The Campus Accountability and Safety Act to fight sexual assault on college campuses. This talk also featured two additional speakers, both sexual assault survivors and cofounders of EROC, an organization dedicated to ending campus sexual violence through direct support for survivors and their communities, prevention through education, and policy reform at the campus, local, state, and federal levels. The justification for including this narrative event is its bipartisan nature, proposing a policy solution to the problem of sexual violence in higher education.

Launch of the It's On Us Campaign

On September 19, 2014, United States President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, along with a student victim of sexual assault, spoke to the public about their new public awareness and education campaign called It's On Us. The campaign's purpose was to engage campus communities "in preventing sexual assault in the first place" (White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2014). The campaign was launched in partnership with the Center for American Progress' Generation Progress, along with student body leadership from nearly 200 colleges and universities nationwide, collegiate sports organizations such as the NCAA, and private companies. This event brought in the voices of the executive branch of government at that time.

Education Secretary DeVos' Remarks on Title IX Sexual Assault Guidance

The 2016 election of Republican Donald Trump replaced Democratic Barack Obama, and this narrative event reflects the policy guidance provided by the new administration. On July 13,

2017, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos took questions from reporters about the future of Title IX policies (C-SPAN, 2017b).

This Q&A with reporters took place after DeVos met with sexual assault survivors, men's rights advocates, and education officials as part of her efforts to evaluate Obama administration policies regarding sexual assault on campuses. This narrative brings the administration's voice before the release of their 2017 DCL.

Education Secretary DeVos on Title IX

This is a transcript of an address Education Secretary Betsy DeVos delivered at George Mason University on September 7, 2017 (C-SPAN, 2017a). The subject of her address was the enforcement of Title IX. During this address, Secretary DeVos said the Department of Education would launch a “notice and comment process” to replace the current system for reporting campus sexual assault. This was the first time the federal government attempted to use the “notice and comment process” for Title IX. In November 2018, Secretary DeVos released her proposed Title IX rule and opened it up for a 60-day comment period where it garnered over 100,000 comments (Chu & Lewis, 2019). Including this narrative brings the administration's voice into the data before the release of their 2017 DCL.

R1: Thematic Findings

My first research question looked for themes in the macro-level narratives about sexual violence in higher education. In macro-level narrative analysis, a researcher seeks to examine ideological content using historical narratives. When exploring macro-level narratives as qualitative research, the researcher can uncover societal values and the influence of narratives on public policy (Jones & McBeth, 2018; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018). My findings revealed four broad themes in the macro-level narratives about sexual violence in higher

education (**Table 4.2**). These themes are specific to the villain character and the use of citing evidence, colorful language, and repetition.

The Villain

Narrative elements play a role in shaping policy processes and outcomes (Jones et al., 2014), and one of these elements is the use of characters, who often play the role of villain, victim, or hero. My analysis consistently identified the victim to be the student who was assaulted. Still, in some instances, the definition of victim included all students, and in one instance, both the student who was assaulted and the accused perpetrator were victims. But overall, the victim was consistent, as one can reasonably assume when talking about a policy designed to solve a problem that is a person-on-person crime like sexual violence.

However, the villain in the narratives did not follow this same path of reasonable assumption that the perpetrator of the person-on-person crime would be the villain in the narratives. Instead, the overarching theme that emerged from my analysis was that the colleges and universities were consistently presented as the villain, the entity responsible for the problem of sexual violence in higher education. In this section, I provide illustrative examples that support this finding.

In July 2014, four Senators and two survivors held a press conference to introduce The Campus Accountability and Safety Act, a bill they created to fight sexual assault on college campuses (C-SPAN, 2014). Claire McCaskill (D-MO) explicitly set up colleges as the villain, “Colleges lack incentives to investigate or properly handle violent sexual crimes that occur on their campuses.” The five speakers who followed continued to frame colleges and universities as the villain.

Table 4.2. Thematic Findings.

Thematic Finding	Explanation	Frequency
Villain	The villain is the entity responsible for the problem	10
Citing of evidence or expertise	Evidence can strengthen support for a policy outcome when used in policy narratives, but without data they are misleading	5
Colorful language	The use of symbols and metaphors often used to evoke emotions	9
Repetition	An element of persuasion whereby one uses the same word, phrase, or sound more than once in a short passage.	6

For example, Chuck Grassley (R-IA) said,

College campuses...should be safe places where students are focused on getting an education...no student should ever face the threat of sexual assault or to be a victim of sexual violence. But we've already heard too many times, and we've seen what has happened on college campuses, and it's totally unacceptable.

Mark Warner (D-VA) implied that colleges and universities were not partnering with elected officials and their policies about sexual violence in higher education, "I think this is going to be an opportunity for responsible colleges and universities across America to step up and partner with us." Marco Rubio (R-FL) stated that colleges and universities were not doing a sufficient job of keeping their students safe. Referring to the "transparency piece" that the bill was aiming to provide, Rubio said by creating a "uniform system and reliable system," transparency "will create an even stronger incentive for colleges and universities and higher education institutions across the country to do a better job of providing for the safety and well-being of their students."

After the Senators spoke, they introduced two individuals who were identified as sexual assault survivors and cofounders of EROC (2024), which in this context made them policy actors because, according to the EROC mission statement, they aimed to directly impact policy through "policy reform at the campus, local, state, and federal levels." The first speaker was Annie Clark, "You've heard today that between 1 in 4 and 1 in 5 students graduate with the second degree, the title of survivor." Then, in reference to the "hundreds of stories" she heard that were like her own, Clark said, "But what was almost worse than the actual assault for them was witnessing how their university treated them. The institutional betrayal that these students face is sometimes worse than the assault itself." The next speaker, Andrea Pino, made colleges and universities the villain by putting forward this claim,

We live in a country that puts our children at a higher risk of experiencing sexual assault if they attend college than if they do not. But with this bill, we're taking a stand against these growing numbers and holding perpetrators and college administrators accountable. Pino then shared her policy action toward colleges and universities, "I helped found End Rape on Campus, an organization through which we have helped file complaints against over a dozen more institutions who are now under investigation and who have betrayed their students."

Last, Senator Chuck Grassley returned and closed out the press conference held to launch their legislative initiative, The Campus Accountability and Safety Act, by accusing colleges and universities of using disciplinary processes that are worse than the sexual assault: "Sometimes the victim is treated worse than the person who committed the crime. It's clear that campus proceedings designed for plagiarism or fraternity are not adequate for the task of addressing sexual assault."

The following public narrative event took place almost 60 days later to launch the It's On Us campaign, a new federal policy initiative from the President's office (Obama White House, 2014). This talk began with Lilly Jay, a survivor of sexual assault, followed by Vice President Joe Biden, and ended with President Barack Obama. These speakers put forth two villains, and one of those villains was colleges and universities. They spoke directly to "the guys out there watching this," but they presented the colleges and universities as a villain in the problem of sexual violence in higher education. Obama said, "So, we know we had an awful lot more work to do to truly change the culture, especially on college campuses. There's no doubt that colleges and universities have to step up their game." Obama provided multiple examples portraying the university as the villain: "And we reminded them that sexual violence isn't just a crime, it is a civil rights violation...holding schools accountable and making sure they stand up for students."

“Their job is to work with colleges and universities on better ways to prevent and respond to assaults,” and “In April, the task force released the first report recommending a number of best practices for colleges and universities to keep our kids safe.”

After the 2016 Presidential election, the public narratives about the problem of sexual violence in higher education continued, starting with a series of talks by the new Department of Education Secretary. DeVos said, “It was clear there are failings in this process, a system without due process...these institutions need to be our partners in the process of getting this right” (C-SPAN, 2017b) And, “survivors who have brought this issue out of the back rooms of student life offices and into the light of day” (C-SPAN, 2017a).

Last, in the DCL (2017) report, which is also the document that closes out the data frame for this analysis, the villain was presented as colleges and universities but with a nuanced difference. In this narrative, colleges and universities were the villain because they applied policy guidelines introduced by the previous administration in the 2011 DCL, the document that began my analysis period (Ali, 2011). Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, United States Department of Education Candice Jackson (2017) noted that policy guidelines “pressure universities to adopt procedures that do not afford fundamental fairness” (note 11). And the proposed policy change in the DCL put “an end to an unfair policy process that is overwhelmingly stacked against the accused. With the 2016 election, the Office of the President of the United States transferred from Democrat Barack Obama to Republican Donald Trump. The topic of sexual violence in higher education remained at the forefront of federal policy narratives, and the villain in the narratives did not change.

Citing Evidence and Expertise

Presenting scientific evidence can strengthen support for a policy outcome when used in policy narratives (Boswell, 2011). A recurring theme in the data was the consistent use of the words evidence or expertise without citing the actual evidence or explaining how the experts have earned the expertise. The audience would have needed to ask what evidence the narrator was referring to or how the experts' work and experience qualified as expertise. The words "evidence" and "expertise" were used as if they were wholly sufficient, but they were not substantiated. Each of the narrators in my analysis had access to research that spanned twenty years and could have provided clarity to the audience about the problem, but they did not use it. In the following paragraphs, I will summarize four seminal studies to demonstrate the scale of expertise and evidence available to this study's narrators.

Koss et al. (1987) published a national study of sexual violence prevalence that included 6,159 women and men enrolled in 32 institutions. This study has been a significant source for scholars to build on, with over 4,000 citations since its publication. The purpose of the study was to collect data on two aspects of sexual violence in higher education: women's reports of experiencing sexual violence in the previous year and men's reports of perpetrating rape, attempted rape, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact during the previous year. The results indicated 27.5% of the women college students surveyed reported some type of unwanted sexual contact in the previous 1-year period.

Fisher et al. (1998) published results from another large survey measuring the extent and nature of victimization on college campuses. Drawing on a nationally representative sample of 3,472 college students from 12 randomly selected four-year institutions of higher education, the researchers found the victimization rate for rape and sexual assault was 30 per 1,000 students.

Fisher et al. (2000) published a Department of Justice report, *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*. They administered the National College Women Sexual Violence Survey to a sample of 4,446 randomly selected women attending a 2- or 4-year college or university during the Fall semester of 1996. The rape victimization rate was 27.7 per 1,000 female college students. Respondents also reported, at a rate of 156.5 per 1,000, that during this same fall semester, they had been “repeatedly followed, watched, phoned, e-mailed, or communicated with in other ways which seemed obsessive and made the respondents feel afraid or concerned for their safety” (Fisher et al., 2000, p. 27).

The National Institute of Justice published the Campus Sexual Assault Study (Krebs et al., 2007). The report has been cited in the research literature over 500 times since its publication. In this study, surveys were conducted with a random sample of 5,446 students from two large public universities. Some 19% ($n = 1,073$) of respondents ($n = 5,446$) had experienced, attempted, or completed sexual assault since entering college. Krebs et al. (2007) gathered data on a myriad of factors such as consequences, reporting, timing, substance use, location, and assailant characteristics. They found most sexual assaults occurred when women were incapacitated due to their use of alcohol, and 28% of those who reported being incapacitated also reported their assailant was a fraternity member who had also been drinking or using drugs at the time of the assault.

In the 2011 DCL, which marks the beginning of my dataset, data from four students was cited 5 times (Ali, 2011). However, following this document, the spoken narrations promoted through public outlets were not supported by substantiated evidence from the speakers. Following are illustrative examples from the data that implied evidence, experts, or data without any citations or further explanation. I include my rationale in brackets for clarity. Starting with

the talk by senators and advocates to introduce The Campus Accountability and Safety Act (C-SPAN, 2014), these statements of allegation were made, with no supporting data: Senator Kelly Ayotte (D-NH) said, “Too many times, we have actually found evidence that athletic programs are investigating allegations of sexual assault” [no other details about the evidence were provided] and “This bill will end that athletic programs have no business investigating allegations of sexual assault” [restated the evidentiary statement above, without the evidence]. Mark Warner (D-VA) claimed his own experience as expertise without explaining the connection between appointing college board members and the problem of sexual violence in higher education, “I’ve been a governor and appointed literally hundreds of members of college boards [self as expert]. EROC co-founder Annie Clark said, “We live in a country that puts our children at a higher risk of experiencing sexual assault if they attend college than if they don’t” [no supporting data or reference]. But with this bill, we’re taking a stand against these growing numbers [no reference to where these numbers can be found] and hold perpetrators and college administrators accountable.”

In a public event to launch the It’s On Us initiative, the speakers failed to substantiate most of the evidence or expertise they referenced in their speeches (Obama White House, 2014). Lily Jay, a rape survivor said, “Because folks like the senators in front me know the statistics. They’re real and it’s one young girl at a time. Every one of these statistics is a life.” Vice President Biden r stated that domestic violence takes place “21,000 time a week in America” according to the report *Violence Against Women—One Week in the Life of American Women* written by women on Biden’s staff. But that claim, though substantiated, is not related to the problem of sexual violence in higher education. Biden may have presented this evidence to situate himself in the position of the “angel shift,” which in policy narrative analysis can be

understood as the glorification of one's coalition (Merry, 2019) in a policy debate. Biden presented crime statistics data about domestic violence and the abuse of women ages 16 to 24 and said, "We knew we had an awful lot more work to do to truly change the culture, especially on college campuses" (Obama White House, 2014). Although domestic violence and sexual violence have similar characteristics and are sometimes simultaneous, these two types of violence are not the same. These two issues are related but not directly connected. His presentation of statistics appears to rely on the assumption that the audience may not critically evaluate the relationship between them, effectively using numerical data to enhance credibility without establishing a clear evidentiary link.

President Barack Obama referenced the national statistic that 1 in 5 women have been sexually assaulted during college (Obama White House, 2014). This standard statistic is used by subject matter experts in this area. As well, he stated 12% of those assaults are reported and only a fraction of the offenders are punished, but he provided no source for those numbers. Obama did not substantiate this evidence with sources.

The change in President from Obama to Trump showed little difference in how the narrators cited evidence to substantiate their claims. Under the Trump administration, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos did not provide data or refer to statistics, nor did Candice Jackson, the Acting Secretary for Civil Rights who authored the 2017 DCL from the Department of Education. Secretary DeVos presented lawyers as the experts to support her policy initiatives, but their expertise was not substantiated:

The American College of Trial Lawyers also gathered experts from across the country [no explanation about who the experts were nor their area of expertise, law or sexual violence, or both] to produce reasonable responses to the current failed system. An open

letter from Harvard's Law School Faculty [implied expertise] provides important perspectives and insights that will be helpful as we pursue a better way. Another promising idea from two former prosecutors, Gina Smith and Leslie Gomes, both of whom have spent their careers litigating cases [implied expertise]. (C-SPAN, 2017a)

Using terms such as *evidence*, *experts*, and *expertise* should not be sufficient to establish credibility for an audience. However, when elected officials employ these terms, the public may be more inclined to perceive their statements as authoritative. In these instances, language operates primarily as a means of persuasion rather than representing data or expertise.

Colorful Language

Narrative strategies control policy outcomes and allow “researchers to generalize about the meaning of specific policy narrative content” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 9). In his seminal article, which launched narrative analysis, Jones et al. (2014) asserted that narrative strategy “allows researchers to generalize about the use of content in policy narratives” (p. 8). This assertion supports the two forthcoming thematic findings.

Colorful language is defined in the narrative policy literature as the use of symbols and metaphors. Symbols are an important way to make complex topics easier to understand and are an inherent part of language present in all aspects of human life (Gill & Angosto-Ferrandez, 2018). In analyzing spoken and written narratives, a symbol can be any word or phrase that suggests something else. A metaphor is a figure of speech. A metaphor is identified when a word or phrase is applied to a wholly different concept to convince an audience of an implied quality. The narrative strategy of colorful language consists of symbols and metaphors. This section provides illustrative examples that support this finding.

Mark Warner said, "A particular shout out to Senator McCaskill I know who's *moved heaven and earth* on this [Biblical reference likening McCaskill to the Old Testament God] (C-SPAN, 2014). Annie Clark said, "This bill gives the Department of Education *teeth* under Title IX and Cleary, something advocates and survivors have been asking for"[teeth are a metaphor for a powerful animal] and "You've heard today that between 1 in 4 and 1 in 5 students graduate with the *second degree*, the title of survivors [education metaphor] (C-SPAN, 2014).

In the launch of the It's On Us campaign, colorful language was prevalent throughout (Obama White House, 2014). Lily Jay said, "They give survivors permission to move our *hearts from the edge of our sleeve* back to where it belongs [a metaphor for emotional exposure]). Obama said, "A lot of people in this room have been on the *front lines* in fighting sexual assault for a long time [a war metaphor for the fiercest fighting. Obama noted, "It's a *haunting* presence when the very people entrusted with your welfare fail to protect you [supernatural metaphor]; "The trauma can *shadow* you long after one horrible attack" [this metaphor works as a noun—trauma as a dark cast shadow—or a verb—shadowing as an act of following]; and "You just get a sense of too many people in charge *dropping the ball, fumbling* something that should be taken with the most seriousness" [sports metaphor of failure].

Secretary DeVos avoided using colorful language in her July 2017 talk and throughout her September 2017 talk on Title IX (C-SPAN, 2017a). In three instances, she used metaphors of justice failing: "Where does that leave institutions which are forced to be *judge and jury*?" "The case goes to a school administrator who will act as *judge and jury*," "The failed system has clearly pushed schools to overreach with the heavy hand of Washington *tipping the balance* of her scale. The sad reality is the *lady justice is not blind* on campuses today, "This ensures that students are not tried by *tribunals* on the basis of hearsay," and "It's no wonder so many people

call these proceedings *kangaroo courts*” [metaphors that figure justice systems as out of balance, unfair, and corrupt]. And she used metaphors danger and lack of control, “Harassment codes which *trample* speech rights *derail* the primary mission of a school to pursue truth.”

Symbols and metaphors inherent in language can make complex topics easier to understand in policy narratives (Gill & Angosto-Ferrandez, 2018). They can be valuable teaching tools but can also become a strategy.

Repetition

Repetition is a narrative strategy whereby the speaker or writer repeats the same word or phrase in their discourse. This use of repetition is a rhetorical device often considered an effective narrative strategy that creates a rhythm which has a memorable impact on the person listening to or reading it. There are various types of repetition, depending on the timing and location of the rephrasing. However, this analysis does not explore these variations in depth, so an examination would be more appropriate for a rhetorical study than a narrative policy analysis. However, repetition emerged as a significant thematic finding due to its frequent use as a narrative strategy. Macro-level narratives about sexual violence in higher education often employ this strategy, likely to evoke emotion and potentially influence or manipulate the listener. In this section, I provide illustrative examples that support this finding (*italics* were added to mark colorful language or other terms germane to my analysis).

Senator Chuck Grassley (R-NY) said, “*We* admire you, *we* respect you, and *we*’re here to support you” (C-SPAN, 2014). Marco Rubio (R-FL), “Let’s make sure that when they do, they’re safe and that they have an environment where the college experience is one of *learning, learning, learning*” (C-SPAN, 2014). President Obama noted, “The truth is, it’s not ok to intervene, *it’s your responsibility. It’s your responsibility* to speak your mind, *it’s your*

responsibility to tell your buddy when he’s messing up. *it’s your responsibility* to set the right tone when you’re talking about women”; “So we’re inviting colleges and universities to join us in saying we are not tolerating this anymore—*not on* our campuses, *not in* our community, *not in* this country”; “*I took the pledge. Joe took the pledge. You can take the pledge*” (Obama White House, 2014).

Secretary DeVos used repetition: “*Due process* is foundation of any system of justice that seeks a fair outcome. *Due process* either protects everyone or it protects no one. The notion that a school must diminish *due process rights* to better serve the victim only creates more victims” (C-SPAN, 2017a). The DeVos narrative above is an example of using repetition to emphasize the underlying social value of legality, a social value reflected throughout the data. It is also the predominant social value in her narratives. I will elaborate on this in the next section on my findings about underlying social values.

R2: Underlying Social Values

Policy beliefs are the social values that orient a group of people. In policy narratives, these values serve as a way of knowing and can be a valuable part of a policy narrative analysis. This is primarily because values are widely used as a narrative strategy (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018) and are considered the foundation of narrative (McBeth et al., 2022). When presented collectively, my data analysis revealed that policy actors used two overarching policy beliefs—safety and legality—to orient audiences when speaking about sexual violence in higher education (**Table 4.3**).

Safety

Safety is a broad social value that, for the purpose of this study, is defined as being free from violence or injury. In the policy narratives analyzed for this study, safety was presented in a

Table 4.3. Prevalent values.

Policy beliefs	Definition
Safety	Being free from violence or injury
Legality	Being legal, or adherence to the law

myriad of ways, ranging from the safety of the children to parental concerns about the safety of their children and safety as an inherent civil right. The dataset for this study began with the 2011 DCL on Title IX and student-on-student sexual violence (Ali, 2011). Safety was a dominant theme in the narratives from 2011 to 2014, specifically demonstrating the use of safety as an underlying social value. The initiating DCL (2011) claimed, “The Department is committed to ensuring all students feel safe and have the opportunity to benefit fully from their school’s education programs and activities” (Ali, 2011, p. 19). Senator Rubio noted that the proposed policy would “provide information that will allow parents and students to understand the differences in colleges just as in graduation rates or just as in costs, but also in the safety they provide, in the environment they provide” (C-SPAN, 2014). President Obama noted, “Help make sure our schools are safe havens where everybody, men and women, can pursue their dreams” and be “free from fear of intimidation or violence and we owe it to our children to live up to those values” (Obama White House, 2014).

These examples present a narrative strategy using safety to orient the audience, whether in a broad context or the safety of one’s children from a parental perspective. The 2014 launch of the It’s On Us campaign included three narrators: Lilly Jay (college student and sexual assault survivor), Joe Biden (Vice President), and Barack Obama (President). Lilly Jay spoke in the role of policy actor, but Biden used her parents, who were in the audience, as a representation of safety. The parents were asked to stand up and be recognized while Biden stated, “And every parent prays for one thing from the second their son or daughter is born, just God let them be safe” (C-SPAN, 2014).

Legality

Legality broadly describes the quality or state of being legal. The open coding process revealed a myriad of common words or phrases that collectively situated legality as one of the two dominant social values reflected in the data for this study. **Table 4.4** provides a list of the words or phrases I identified and categorized under the word legality.

Legality is put forward as a social value in several sources. The first DCL (Ali, 2011) put this social value of legality in the first paragraph, emphasizing the importance of legality at the start of the document, “The sexual harassment of students, including sexual violence, interferes *with students’ right to receive an education free from discrimination and, in the case of sexual violence, is a crime*” (p. 1) At the Campus Sexual Assault legislation press conference, Kelly A. Ayotte said, “When it comes to stopping sexual violence on campus, we need *accountability, transparency, and uniformity of standards*”; “Victims will feel and know their case will be investigated”; and

Our legislation also creates a uniformed process that ensures greater coordination between schools and local *law enforcement* to ensure the allegations of sexual violence are not swept under the rug, that they are actually fully investigated by proper trained *law enforcement officials*.

Ayotte used several terms related to the legal realm:

We’re hearing in the Commerce Committee about a week ago, we had before us a *CIA official* and an issue we both [McCaskill and Grassley] raised with that official is addressed in this bill as well. Too many times, we have actually found evidence that athletic programs are *investigating* allegations of sexual assault. This bill will end that,

Table 4.4. Legality defined

Term	Definition
Due process*	The observation of the proper legal procedures in a particular context.
Fairness	honesty; impartiality, equitableness, justness; fair dealing
Law	A rule of conduct imposed by an authority
Law enforcement	Enforcement of the law
Transparent (transparency)	Easily seen through, recognized, understood, or detected; manifest, evident, obvious, clear.
Accountability	Liability to account for and answer for one's conduct, performance of duties, etc.
Legal responsibility **	a duty imposed on someone to do something whether imposed by the law or created by agreement

Note. *”Due Process” (2025). ***“Legal Responsibility” (2021).

athletic programs have no business *investigating* allegations of sexual assault. They need to be *investigated by proper law enforcement officials*. (C-SPAN, 2014)

EROOC co-founder Andrea Pino referenced legality only once but presented it as a policy solution: “I know that The Campus Accountability and Safety Act provides students with new protections that are indispensable if passed into law” (C-SPAN, 2014))

At the announcement of the It’s on Us campaign, Vice President Biden, “They [colleges] have to take *legal responsibility* and it’s a moral obligation to protect their students and hold perpetrators *accountable*.” Obama said, “As we continue to *enforce our laws* and work with colleges to improve their responses,” and “So, we’re *reviewing existing laws* to make sure they’re adequate” (Obama White House, 2014).

In her brief remarks on Title IX sexual assault guidance, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos used the phrase *due process* 3 times in one paragraph,

A system without due process for Texans ultimately serves no one in the end, *due process* protections ultimately serve no one in the end...There are substantively legal questions to be addressed, including *due process and lack of public input*...stop and reduce sexual harassment and assault *while respecting due process and the rule of law*. ” (C-SPAN, 2017b)

And again, in September 2017, in her talk on Title IX, Secretary DeVos (C-SPAN, 2017a) emphasized due process as a core value of her message: “Another student at a different school saw her rapist go free. The school found him responsible, but in doing so, the failed system denied him *due process*”; “It exerts improper pressure upon universities to adopt procedures that do not afford *fundamental fairness*”.

Due process is foundation of any system of justice that seeks a fair outcome. *Due process* either protects everyone or it protects no one. The notion that a school must diminish *due process rights* to better serve the victim only creates more victims.

DeVos consistently used this frame.

Referring to school procedures, Candice Jackson (2017) said they “lack the most basic elements of *fairness* and *due process* and are overwhelmingly stacked against the accused,” and the 2011 DCL “led to the deprivation of rights for many students-both accused students *denied fair process*” (p.1).

The narratives of Secretary DeVos and Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Jackson represent the shift in presidential administrations from Democratic to Republican. Their narrative values differed from those of the previous narratives presented by the Obama Administration in that safety was still a social value, but under the Trump Administration, the dominant value was legality.

R3: Conditions for Change

Republicans tend to use metaphors of legality. For example, in the bipartisan presentation on July 30, 2014, Republican Senator Chuck Grassley talked about sexual violence cases being “investigated” by colleges and universities. The word “investigated” triggers the frame of criminal investigations, but the distinction between criminal law and civil law in evidentiary standards is elided. Grassley returned to the podium at the end of the presentation with closing remarks that restated colleges and universities as the villain in the problem of sexual assault, using legality references and accusing these institutions and their policies of “prevent[ing] justice from being served” (C-SPAN, 2014).

The social values of the speakers were consistent by political party affiliation, and the framing (Lakoff, 2004) changed after the 2016 election because of the change of administrations. This change did not mark a change in the social values reflected in the narrative, but it did reflect how much these values were emphasized. Under Trump, legality was the primary reason for the policy changes being proposed by this administration. On September 7, 2017, Education Secretary DeVos stated that her policy proposal would end an unjust system that had only caused harm, and that schools are harming the accuser, and the accused, at very high levels (C-SPAN, 2017a). On September 22, 2017, the Department of Education issued its 2017 DCL, rescinding the 2014 DCL issued under the previous administration. In the new letter, Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Candice Jackson (2017) described the last DCL as “grossly unfair” and “overwhelmingly stacked against the accused.”

Research Question 3 explored how the narratives evolved, particularly in response to the shift in the presidency from one political party to another. Policy narrative researchers have argued that the meaningful elements of policy are socially constructed and evolve over time, shaping new or altered policy realities (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018). According to policy narrative researchers, the meaningful parts of policy narratives are socially constructed, and these meanings change over time to create new or different policy realities (Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, & Radaelli, 2018; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2018), as with Presidential changeovers. However, in my data analysis, the narratives did not change; the same themes and values were present in the Republican narratives during the Democratic presidential term at the launch of *The Campus Accountability and Safety Act*.

My analysis revealed that Democrats and Republicans were policy change advocates and framed colleges and universities as villains in their stories. Both political parties used narrative

strategies and elements to persuade the audience that their policy would fix the problem. Overall, both members of political parties either avoided mentioning the assailant or only implied their existence. An example of implied existence is in President Obama's statement on September 19, 2014, when he remarked, "It is on the parents of young men to teach them respect for women" (Obama White House, 2014). However, he did not explicitly call on parents to teach young men what constitutes sexual violence, nor did he emphasize that it is not merely an issue of respect but a criminal act. The avoidance of addressing the culpability of the perpetrators while simultaneously proposing policies focused on changes in colleges and universities rather than on the student perpetrators can be valuable data. Although the proposed policies changed based on political party affiliation, the narrative elements and strategies did not.

This finding is important in discussing macro-level narratives because, in United States culture, changes in political power could reflect significant differences in the broader policy narratives. My findings challenge this assumption, revealing that both political parties in the United States employ similar narrative techniques and strategies. As such, the narrative framing of both parties should be critically examined with an emphasis on clarifying and questioning these persuasive storytelling strategies, regardless of political affiliation.

Summary

In this chapter, I present the results of this study with examples. My analysis uncovered emergent themes. My analysis also revealed two dominant underlying social values in policy stories by federal-level elected officials and their appointees. In the next chapter, I discuss my findings and apply their relevant meaning in the context of the empirical qualitative policy narrative research conducted on the problem of sexual violence in higher education. I also provide applications of this study for higher education professionals and the broader community.

This dissertation concludes with a discussion of opportunities for future research and my concluding remarks.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify the themes, values, and conditions for change in the language politicians use about sexual violence in higher education, a problem that first appeared in the academic literature with Kirkpatrick and Kanin's (1957) publication of *Male Sex Aggression on a University Campus*, considered the first study to research student sexual violence in higher education. This problem was addressed by federal policy in 1972 when President Richard Nixon signed Title IX, a clause in the Federal Education Amendments, into law. This federal policy sought to prohibit any educational program receiving federal financial assistance from discriminating against individuals based on their sex. Although this policy was not focused on sexual violence in 1972, the 1981 sexual misconduct case of *Alexander v. Yale* used Title IX and established sexual harassment as a form of discrimination. The problem of sexual violence in higher education and the federal policy initiatives about it have continued to evolve over the past 50 years.

This qualitative case study focused on the years 2011–2017. My data set consisted of 14 narratives (two written and 12 spoken) from six different events, beginning with the launch of the robust policy guidance provided to colleges and universities by way of the 2011 DCL (Ali, 2011) from the Department of Education, and ending with the Department's 2017 DCL which rescinded the 2011 letter. I collected data from talks given by federal-level policy actors and, when applicable, the advocates they invited to speak with them to promote policy on sexual violence in higher education. Data were retrieved from the web-based version of C-SPAN, a cable and satellite television network created by the cable television industry as a public service to provide media coverage on all federal government events, including House and Senate

debates, committee hearings, events from the executive branch, the courts and election coverage. Throughout the data analysis process, I looked for broad themes while simultaneously identifying narrative strategies and elements. When my analysis reached saturation, I could identify the conditions for which change occurred and the grand narratives that emerged from my findings. I documented my findings using a codebook I created for this study.

The research questions guiding this study were

1. What are the recurring themes in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?
2. What are the underlying social and political values reflected in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?
3. What are the conditions for change in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education?

In Chapter 4, I presented the four themes and the two dominant social values I gleaned from the data, and my findings on conditions for change. The findings I presented contribute to the body of policy narrative research, specifically that of macro-level narratives, and help support previous research assertions that macro-level narratives can dominate policy discourse (Polletta et al., 2011) and become the grand narratives that leverage policy change (Danforth, 2016). In this chapter, I situate my findings and some unexpected findings within the literature, revealing the grand narrative that evolved from my research. I conclude the chapter with implications for practice and suggestions for further research.

Confirmatory Findings

This section addresses each research question and how the findings from the present study align with prior research and theory.

Thematic Findings

Stories are fundamental to our ways of knowing about the world around us (Belenky et al., 1986; Thayer-Bacon, 2005) and are a preferred and central part of human understanding (Shanahan, et al., 2018). It is widely understood among policymakers that people are more likely to respond to narratives than to expert-based information, and this notion of humans as storytellers is central to exploring storied narratives in historical policy problems (Veselková, 2017). Narratives are fundamental to human understanding. Policymakers often relate their perspectives through stories using narrative elements, beliefs, and strategies. The results of this study revealed four primary themes in the narratives, which center around the villain and where blame is placed, the use of evidence in policy narratives, and policymakers' use of language and repetition as narrative strategies. I address each of these four themes in the following paragraphs.

The characters in policy narratives include the victim, the person harmed by the problem, the villain, the person causing that harm, and heroes who can solve the problem and eliminate or reduce the harm inflicted on the victim. Within this character element, the causal plot emerges, and blame gets cast. Blame is assigned to the villain, enabling the hero to then present their proposed solution as the action which will solve the problem. The causal plot asserts the villain's actions harm the victim, whether intentionally or not (Stone, 2012; Gray & Jones, 2016). The findings in this study followed this same trajectory. The villain was overwhelmingly the colleges and universities. An absence of opposing sides was not an aspect of the narratives in my data. Leading narrative policy researchers have agreed that connecting the narrative elements, such as

the characters to one another, creates a causal plot (Gray & Jones, 2016; Knox, 2013). My findings did not follow this predicted path. There were not two groups arguing against each other about blame for the problem as in other seminal studies about longstanding policy problems, such as the historical policy problem of the Everglades restoration policy (Knox, 2013). Unlike previous qualitative policy narrative studies, my findings did not reveal differences among the policymakers in where they placed most of the blame, despite social, political, or demographic differences. Blaming colleges and universities appeared to be a bi-partisan view.

The narratives in this study consistently said the problem was caused by college and university policies and processes and, in some cases, inept staff. Deborah Stone's (1989) framework for describing stories of causality offers a useful lens through which to interpret this thematic finding. As Stone (1989) asserts, situating a problem within the causal idea is a political strategy; therefore, I will discuss this thematic finding within Stone's framework for describing stories of causality in politics. Stone's framework categorized actions into four causal categories: mechanical, intentional, accidental, and inadvertent. Stone argues that policy issues become defined as problems when someone tells a story that attributes causality in a particular way. That is, situations are framed to show that they are not random or natural, but the result of human actions or decisions—and therefore changeable through policy intervention. Stone identifies four different types of causal stories relying on intentional, inadvertent, mechanical, or accidental explanations; two of these categories may be relevant in this case.

Intentional causes refer to cases where someone is deliberately causing harm (e.g., a company polluting a river for profit). These stories evoke blame and often

demand punishment or strict regulation. Inadvertent causes refer to stories about unintended consequences of purposeful actions (e.g., urban renewal projects in poor neighborhoods causing gentrification). These often evoke calls for reform or better design. Suppose either of these theories explains my findings. In that case, both theories situate intentionality among the causal agents and, as Stone asserts, intentionality creates the strongest causal mechanism, which would explain why a federal policymaker might use intention as a policy narrative strategy. But neither category is wholly sufficient in this discussion because of the complex, longstanding history of sexual violence in higher education.

Thus far, including Stone's (1989) typology for causal mechanisms is beneficial, but the typology categories are not wholly sufficient alone. Stone's framework suggests there are policy problems which require a more complex causal model than her typology provides. Stone describes three types of complex causes, and I position this discussion in the third type, what Stone calls the *historical* or *structural* model. In Stone's description of systemic, complex causes, the problems are too complex to be caused by a single villain because the problem is longstanding (historical) and supports social systems that benefit those in power (systemic). According to Stone (1989), in this type of complex cause, the people who have the power to stop the problem benefit from the social structures that keep them in power, which may be the case with sexual violence in higher education because the perpetrators the problem and those who have the power to stop the problem, share same social structure, the cultural and political hegemony of gender. The dominant gender of sexual violence perpetrators is male, and the dominant gender of federal policymakers is also male. If the narratives used by federal policymakers were to portray men as the villains in their stories about the problem of sexual violence in higher education, the solution would likely require the deconstruction of that social

hierarchy on campus, which may require the deconstruction of that same social hierarchy in politics. Where no single causal theory best explains these findings, the body of Stone's work on complex causes might explain why the policy narratives in this study target a villain other than the perpetrator. In summary, Stone's categories of intentional cause and inadvertent help explain why colleges and universities are the primary villain in the policy narratives, and Stone's complex causal theory, which she calls historical, may explain why the perpetrator is not the primary villain in the narratives used by federal policymakers when promoting their policies on the problem of sexual violence in higher education. Interpreting this thematic finding in Stone's (1989) work provides a better understanding of the villain character in this study and introduces the absence of the perpetrator, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

In policy narrative research, citing evidence is a narrative approach by which the narrator presents supporting evidence or expertise and specifically acknowledges the source of information, much like citations in academic writing. Boswell (2011) posited presenting scientific evidence can strengthen support for a policy outcome when used in policy narratives. More recently, in their work on citing evidence in policy narratives during crises, Klatt and Blum (2023) explored how evidence was used in the narratives of New York City's school shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. They concluded citing evidence in policy narratives mainly reflects strategic uses to support specific policy solutions. My findings aligned with their assertion that the use of evidence was intended to support solutions, but I found the attempts at citing evidence inadequate. This recurring theme in the data was demonstrated consistently when narrators used words like *evidence* or *experts* without citing the actual evidence or explaining the actual expertise of the experts. The words "evidence" and "expertise" were used as if they were wholly sufficient, but they were not substantiated. Each narrator had access to research studies,

which could have clarified the audience, but they did not cite them. When elected officials employ terms like *evidence*, *experts*, and *expertise*, the public may be more inclined to perceive their statements as authoritative. In these instances, language may operate primarily as a strategy for persuasion rather than as a representation of data or expertise.

My thematic findings revealed a prevalent use of two narrative strategies: colorful language and repetition. My definition of narrative strategy followed the definition put forth by the leading policy narrative researchers Jones, McBeth, and Shanahan (2014), by which narrative strategies are broadly understood as using elements to manipulate or control policy outcomes. Further, my definition aligns with the long-established definitions from rhetoric scholars. Referring back to the earliest orators on record, Brian Vickers (1994) asserted that Cicero advised fellow orators to use metaphor frequently because it was “the commonest occurrence in language” (p. 88). In Chapter 4, I presented illustrative examples of the colorful language found in my qualitative analysis. I include two examples here as reminders, with a bold emphasis on the metaphor added for clarification and an explanation of how the words qualify as colorful language.

A particular shout out to Senator McCaskill I know who’s **moved heaven and earth** on this (Warner, 2014) – implied work of the Christian God

And,

The case goes to a school administrator **who will act as judge and jury** (Devos, 2017) – implying they are holding criminal trials

Both colorful language and repetition commonly appeared in the narratives. These themes are noteworthy because of their position as a narrative strategy. In the introduction to his book *Repetition and Emphasis in Rhetoric Theory and Practice*, Fisher (1994) asserted repetition

“may be the very basis of all perception and cognition” (p. 13), an assertion he gleaned from Attridge’s (1994) “The Movement of Meaning” (1994) where he noted “meaning itself is grounded in repetition” (p. 27). In Chapter 4, I presented illustrative examples of repetition in my qualitative analysis. I include two examples as reminders, with bold emphasis on the repetition added for clarification.

The truth is, it’s not ok to intervene, it’s your responsibility. **It’s your responsibility** to speak your mind, **it’s your responsibility** to tell your buddy when he’s messing up. **It’s your responsibility** to set the right tone when you’re talking about women. (Obama, 2014)

And,

Due process is foundation of any system of justice that seeks a fair outcome. **Due process** either protects everyone or it protects no one. The notion that a school must diminish **due process rights** to better serve the victim only creates more victims (Devos, September 2017).

Underlying Social and Political Values

In policy narratives, values serve as a way of knowing that can become a narrative strategy (Shanahan, et al., 2018). Some leading researchers consider values the core of narratives (McBeth et al., 2022). In Chapter 4, I presented my findings to research question #2, which asserted the policy narrative data in this study were laden with two overarching values—safety and legality—used to orient their audiences to policy solutions they were putting forth to solve (or reduce) the problem of sexual violence in higher education. I acknowledge the term *values* can have a myriad of definitions. Still, when revisiting the literature on this topic, Satterfield et al.’s (2000) work supported my findings and my subsequent assertion that safety and legality are

social belief systems. The open coding process revealed a myriad of common words or phrases that collectively situated safety and legality as the two dominant social values reflected in this study. Safety emerged as a value when defined as being free from violence or injury, whereas legality emerged as the quality or state of being legal or following the law. In chapter 4, **table 4.4** provided a list of the words or phrases I identified and categorized into the word *legality*, which included the following value-laded terms: due process, fairness, law and law enforcement, accountability, transparency, and legal responsibility.

In the policy narrative research, coalitions, also referred to as winners and losers, contribute to our understanding of how values can be used in policy narratives. However, due to the exploratory nature of my study, I did not seek to label policy actors in terms of coalitions or to identify coalition dynamics. Therefore, we may suggest the severity of harm caused by sexual violence may influence whether groups present as overt coalitions opposing each other. The role of the adversary in a severe, harmful, value-laden problem likely reflects poorly in such a debate. To this end, I have posited the values reflected in my data were consistent, not opposing. However, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the 2017 DCL's use of blame toward the previous administration and the policies established by their 2011 DCL. Yet, this one incidence of a winning/losing narrative was insufficient to consider the findings of coalition-based values in the data. Instead, the values that emerged from my research were socially constructed concepts of importance that unite people in the United States, both as parents and as members of a democracy. Whether or not the policy actors in these narratives were on opposing coalitions could be argued by practitioners who recall the landscape within higher education from 2011-2017. However, that argument does not fall within the scope of this study.

Conditions for Change Over Time

Safety became more prominent as a social value between 2011 and 2014, compared to the 2017 data. Although this study did not set out to identify why changes took place, it did attempt to uncover the conditions for change and glean possible mitigating factors that could have contributed to changes over time. In the data used for this study, the gap of time from 2014 to 2017 represented a change in the political party affiliation of the President. Therefore, we can reasonably assert this to be a condition for change, albeit a small one, emphasizing one value over the other as a narrative strategy to persuade the audience toward a proposed policy solution. I must restate here that I am not asserting one value or the other was absent at any point in the data analysis process, only that legality was more prevalent in the 2017 narratives of Secretary DeVos and Candice Jackson. One illustrative example to support the presence of legality under the Democratic President is from the first DCL (Ali, 2011), which emphasized the importance of legality, as defined for this study, in the first paragraph, “The sexual harassment of students, including sexual violence, interferes *with students’ right to receive an education free from discrimination and, in the case of sexual violence, is a crime*” (p. 1). As I previously asserted, legality as a value was not absent in the earlier narratives; the difference was in prevalence. Under the Republican President, in remarks on Title IX sexual assault guidance, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos used the phrase *due process* 3 times, “a system without due process for Texans ultimately serves no one in the end, *due process* protections ultimately serve no one in the end...There are substantively legal questions to be addressed, including *due process and lack of public input*...stop and reduce sexual harassment and assault *while respecting due process and the rule of law*.” (C-SPAN, 2017b). In remarks referring to the procedures of colleges and universities, Candice Jackson (2017) stated, they “lack the most basic elements of *fairness* and

due process and are overwhelmingly stacked against the accused” and the 2011 DCL “led to the deprivation of rights for many students...accused students *denied fair process*” (p.1).

The emergence of consistent values with varied emphasis by the President’s political party aligns with previous research about the use of narrative strategy. In their work on issue framing as a rhetorical strategy in public policy debates, Jerit (2008) asserted that “political elites” (p. 1) frame their policy proposals in subtle ways that can significantly impact public opinion. Jerit concluded this is a common strategy used by political actors, who emphasize only the considerations [values] that work in their favor. This aligns with my assertion that a condition for change in this study was also subtle, emphasizing one value over another rather than a shift to entirely different values.

Unexpected Findings

This section describes two unexpected findings from my analysis and how these findings align with prior research. These are findings of omission, meaning they were absent from or minimally referenced in the narratives explored in this study.

Omission: Alcohol and Fraternities

Since Martin and Hummer (1989), more research has been conducted, and findings reported specific to sexual violence among fraternity members. In the Sexual Victimization of College Women study, Fisher et al. (2000) conducted telephone surveys with a randomly selected national sample of 4,446 college women attending a 2- or 4-year college or university during the Fall 1996 semester. The researchers found most occurrences of sexual violence occurred in living quarters, with 60% being the victim’s living quarters, for both on-campus and off-campus incidents, compared to 10.3% in a fraternity setting. Krebs et al., (2007), using national data on campus sexual assault from over 5,000 respondents, concluded that most

incidents occurred when women were incapacitated due to their use of alcohol, and 28% of those who reported being incapacitated also reported their assailant was a fraternity member who had been drinking or using drugs at the time of the assault. Loh et al. (2005) and Foubert et al. (2007) found fraternity men were 3 times as likely as nonfraternity men to commit sexual violence. In a meta-analysis of 29 studies, Murnen and Kohlman (2007) reported that sexual aggression was significantly associated with membership in all-male hypermasculine groups such as fraternities.

Fraternity culture is entwined with alcohol use, which raises the risk of sexual violence (Biddix, 2016). Considering the volume of research with consistent findings about fraternities, it seems clear that the policy actors in this study should have referenced high-risk alcohol use within fraternity environments in their talks.

Omission: Citing Federally Funded Research Studies and Their Findings

I use the word *evidence* to broadly define the use of previous studies and research findings, not in the context of rigorous scientific evidence. My decision was informed by Schlauffer (2018), who challenged the use of evidence as a specific narrative element and instead suggested that evidence was a strategy that could be found throughout a narrative's form. Schlauffer identified seven roles that evidence can play in policy narratives, which may be a valuable avenue for future research. However, in this discussion, I draw on Schlauffer's broader assertion that policy actors use evidence in their narratives to serve a specific role in the story. Additionally, omitting available evidence may serve a strategic role within the narrative.

This discussion on the omission of previous knowledge, research, and findings is supported by Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten (2011) in their assertion that, although the influence of evidence and knowledge on policy narrative construction varies significantly, the reality is previous research findings are often "overlooked and even government-commissioned studies

end up gathering dust on a shelf” (p. 8). A few specific examples include Fisher et al. (2000), DeKeseredy and Kelly (1993), and Koss et al. (1987), who found university women are at greater risk of sexual violence than women of comparable age in the general public.

Fisher et al. (1998) reported findings on victimization rates for both completed and attempted rape incidents, assailant characteristics, and the social connection between assailants and victims. Then, two years later, Fisher et al. (2000) acknowledged sexual violence against college students had become a controversial topic with a claim that “some commentators” purport the problem of sexual violence in higher education was “rare and a mostly fictitious creation of ideologically tainted research” (p. 30) and leave the interpretation of data about sexual violence in higher education in the “eye of the beholder” (p. 30). This acknowledgment may make a case for examining the policy narratives for themes, values, and changes, allowing for the emergence of a grand narrative about why federal policymakers do not emphasize federal research in their policy narratives about sexual violence in higher education. Another example is the Campus Sexual Assault Study (Krebs et al., 2007), which was also funded by a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) grant and has been cited in the research literature over 500 times since its publication. One of the conclusions from this study was that most sexual assaults occurred when women are incapacitated due to their use of alcohol (primarily), and 28% of those who reported being incapacitated also reported their assailant was a fraternity member who had been drinking or using drugs at the time of the assault. These data should emerge in policy narratives of the same period.

The NIJ awarded a grant to carry out a study mandated by Congress (Public Law 105-244) to address the content of sexual assault policies, protocols, and programs that existed at institutions of higher education, related specifically to prevention efforts, victim support services,

reporting guidelines, protocols, barriers, and facilitators, adjudication procedures, and sanctions for sexual assault. The results of the study were published in a final report, *Campus Sexual Assault: How America's Institutions of Higher Education Respond* (Karjane et al., 1999). The sample size was 2,438 institutions in the United States and Puerto Rico, including all HBCUs and Native American tribal schools. Given the rigor of this study and its funding by a government agency, one might reasonably expect policymakers to cite it in their narratives as a trustworthy and reliable data source. Both studies referenced above were published within a reasonable timeframe to inform policy narratives but were absent in the narratives I explored.

The Grand Narrative

According to leading policy narrative researchers, grand narratives are expressions of shared cultural values in historical events and debates (Shanahan et al., 2018). Grand narratives are broad cultural or institutional policy structures that tend to take place in the background of policy debates and can be revealed through an analysis of historical debates (Ertas & McKnight, 2019). The process of conducting policy narrative research on macro-level narratives can reveal a grand narrative about the problem being studied. The grand narrative transcends individual narratives to develop a comprehensive understanding of the scale of action required to address the problem over time (Holden et al., 2020). In his research on sustainable mobility, Holden (2020) put forth two ideas about grand narratives, which I applied to the problem of sexual violence in higher education: 1. grand narratives must be willing to “think big,” and 2. grand narratives should “challenge the prevailing systems” (p. 5). In the following section, I will lay out the grand narratives I gleaned from my research by drawing on these two ideas.

One of the two grand narratives that emerged in this study pertains to the use of evidence in policy narratives addressing sexual violence in higher education. This grand narrative suggests

a cultural norm in which the narratives of federally elected policymakers are presumed valid without clarification or empirical support. The findings in this study indicated policymakers employed the narrative element of citing evidence vaguely, using terms such as ‘evidence,’ ‘experts,’ and ‘expertise’ without providing specific sources or substantiating their claims. When analyzing these narratives, I noted these assertions of evidence and expertise lacked verifiability, raising the possibility they could have been selectively framed with no clear means for independent clarification by the audience.

After this theme emerged, I extended the benefit of the doubt to the policymakers, given these individuals are politicians, not academic scholars. It is reasonable to suggest federal policymakers could be unfamiliar with the body of academic scholarship, including how to locate, interpret, and rigorously apply research findings. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suggest both federal policymakers and their constituents are unaware of the body of academic scholarship related to the policy problems they address. However, during the data analysis process for this study, I reflected on the research I encountered while reviewing the literature. Through this synthesis of previous findings from leading scholars and new data from this study, a grand narrative emerged about the burden of proof in the policy narratives used by federal-level policymakers when discussing sexual violence in higher education, which I present here.

Earlier in this discussion, in the section on unexpected findings, I discussed the omission of citing research studies funded, in whole or in part, by federal agencies like the Department of Justice. This omission raises a critical expectation: even if federally elected officials are not scholars, they should, at a minimum, be aware of the research that federal agencies have already conducted on the policy issues they seek to address. I posit it is reasonable to expect policymakers to ask themselves, ‘What has already been done to address this issue?’ as part of

their decision-making process. Although these questions may well be an inherent part of their process, the answers to these questions were not sufficiently present in their policy narratives. This leads to a central question: why did these policymakers feel justified in stating ‘the evidence shows’ or ‘the experts know’ without citing sources? Why is this practice of ambiguity an accepted norm? I argue this phenomenon may stem from a broader cultural acceptance in which the statements of federally elected officials are perceived by their supporters as inherently credible without the expectation of evidentiary burden. Consequently, this would mean their policy narratives function more as tools of persuasion than as vehicles for public education. In the overarching grand narrative, empirical proof is unnecessary for policy narratives. When I synthesized my unexpected findings about the omission of citing federally funded research with my conclusions about the ambiguous use of citing evidence, an identifiable narrative element within policy narratives emerged about the burden of proof in the policy narratives federal-level policymakers use when talking about sexual violence in higher education.

The second grand narrative that emerged from my findings is one of hegemony and power. Macro-level narratives about sexual violence in higher education are socially constructed by those who hold power. In the United States, the powerful are a hegemonic group. Socially constructed narratives have a cause-and-effect relationship that tends to dominate discourses (Polletta et al., 2011) and, over time, become macro-level narratives that trickle down to policy implementation and how individuals experience policy. The social constructionist approach to narrative analysis asserts narratives change over time, are influenced by societal acceptance, and seek to explore how cultural stories, when put together over time, represent a social norm of that time (Hunter, 2010). In alignment with Hunter, I propose this grand narrative may reflect the prevailing cultural norms during the period under examination.

The constructs of hegemony and patriarchy dominate policymaking narratives on sexual violence in higher education, as evidenced by consistently placing blame on the colleges and universities, making the institutions the villain in their stories and not the assailants themselves, despite years of research demonstrating men perpetrate the problem. When the conditions for change are applied, the grand narrative remains constant; the hegemonic group is the dominant demographic perpetrating sexual violence; therefore, they are omitted from the policy narrative values and solutions. One finding in this study that supports my claim is the omission of fraternity environments that serve alcohol. A “think big” policy solution that challenges the current systems could call for changes to fraternities and their collective social relationship with alcohol, such as banning parties or, bigger, prohibiting fraternities. I am not recommending either of these as a policy solution. Still, I am using them as an example to support my assertion that hegemony in social and political power could be the grand narrative about the problem of sexual violence in higher education. This longstanding problem may be exacerbated by hegemony and not adequately solved within the current system. The primary perpetrators of sexual violence in higher education are men, and men hold power in the federal policymaking space; they make up 71% of the 118th Congress that began in January 2025 (Statista, 2025), and men hold power in the higher education domain, 67% of college presidents are men (ACE, 2023). The societal level within the social-ecological model of violence prevention suggests attention be given to the broad societal factors that help create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited. These factors include social and cultural norms, which, in the case of this study, appear to support a social and cultural norm in which macro-level narratives do not focus blame on men and do not elevate the assailant as the villain.

Recommendations for Practice

The theoretical framework of pragmatism (Dewey, 1916) informs my recommendations, reflecting my perspective as an early researcher and higher education professional. Through this theoretical approach and my professional work experience, I identify four recommendations for a campus-level application based on these findings, which I discuss in further detail in this section.

Campus-Level Standardized Guidebook

The first recommendation is for a campus-level standardized resource for guiding faculty and staff on analyzing and interpreting policy narratives in real-time, offering a more straightforward approach than applied research. Praxis need not be siloed into a specific academic discipline. Sexual violence is a social problem and a crime, which makes it a problem for everyone within the institution. Based on the findings from this study, I recommend developing and distributing a short, standardized guidebook designed to help individuals of all political affiliations and all levels of education recognize narrative elements and strategies and how they are being used, albeit without the detailed understanding required of policy narrative researchers. Such a resource should be shared with college and university personnel at all levels, not just those directly who work in the discipline. Based on the findings from this study, this guidebook should also help listeners identify what is omitted from the narratives.

Expanding Access to Research Beyond Academia

I recommend expanding the dissemination of campus-based research beyond academic journals, which are not readily accessible to those outside higher education. This presents an opportunity for policy narrative scholars to share their research beyond academia, allowing the public to benefit from their expertise. I do not assert a particular mechanism for transmitting knowledge, as information is gleaned and processed by individuals differently. However, some

considerations for this practice may include publications and venues such as educational flyers, public talks, white papers, roundtables, email campaigns, and individual websites. These can be valuable mechanisms for helping key stakeholders receive evidence-based information about policy problems and the narrative they receive about those problems.

Campus-Level Leadership and Policy Narratives

I recommend campus leaders approach policy narratives with an awareness of the dominant political ideologies shaping their state and institutional landscape. For those on campus who work within the realm of sexual violence, whether in counseling, Title IX, campus law enforcement, or university presidents, I recommend a collective agreed-upon understanding of how campus leadership talks about sexual violence on their campus. Policy narrative researchers must be invited to the table. Policy narrative researchers can identify thematic findings within these value-laden narratives and use research data to help campus practitioners maintain informed discussions about campus-level narratives, policies, and processes, discussions built on evidence more than assumption or emotion. Findings from this study, and studies that may evolve from these findings, can provide campus administrators with clear, research-informed talking points to frame discussions on sexual violence in ways that challenge harmful macro-level narratives and emphasize evidence-based solutions, rather than defaulting to political rhetoric and the disagreements that can quickly follow such rhetoric.

Engaging Directly with Policymakers

Finally, I recommend direct engagement with policymakers to hold them accountable for the narratives they construct and the choices they make in framing policy discussions. Policymakers should explain why particular figures from the lived experiences on campus, such as the assailants, are absent from their narratives. Because federally elected officials shape the

grand narrative, it is essential that constituents critically examine what is being said to them and not fall victim to narrative strategies designed to manipulate voters.

Future Research

This study can inform future in-depth examinations of multiple policy dimensions that influence the creation, implementation, and impact of policy. Analyzing public policy through a macro-level narrative perspective enables researchers to provide insight and understanding of how cultural values drive human behavior through policy initiatives (Ertas, 2020; Ertas & McKnight, 2019). Below, I outline potential directions for future research.

In the initial research phase of this study, I learned the *Violence Against Women Act 2005* authorized the appropriation for the Engaging Men and Youth Program, which funded multifaceted strategies to engage men as allies and influencers of other men to develop new male leaders willing to speak up about violence against women and girls. That program was still active at the start of this study. The first funding was for fiscal year 2008, when \$2.82 million was appropriated. By January 2009, the Department of Justice stated the program was under development, with reference to a website (<http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/>) that is no longer available at the writing of this discussion. A Google search of the term “Engaging Men in Preventing Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence program” first lists the website for a program called Futures Without Violence. The second listing at the writing of this discussion is a program called The Grants to Reduce Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking on Campus Program, which supports Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities. This program could be the focus of a future narrative research study with the changing landscape of such programs and the narratives surrounding these decisions, if available. The relevance may include an expansion of the villain

and blame narratives and the ways educational programs for men attempt to engage the primary gender demographic of assailants in a problem where the assailant is not the villain but is instead touted as broad and obscure institutional policies and processes.

My thematic findings revealed the villain in the narratives was overwhelmingly the colleges and universities. In addition to identifying a consistent villain, my findings uncovered the absence of another important character, the assailant, and future research is needed to examine how the characters interact with each other within the narratives and compare those findings to how these characters interact in the colleges and universities at large (Weible & Schlager, 2014).

Another possibility for future research is to explore the policy narratives of other, less egregious federal-level policies in higher education to create a baseline of data focused on the narratives used by federally elected officials about higher education overall. Current policy problems specific to higher education, gleaned from the Office of Postsecondary Education's (2025) negotiated rulemaking in 2023–2024, include college affordability and transparency, student loan debt relief, and TRIO.

At the time of this discussion, there is an uptick in macro-level narratives that portray colleges and universities as villains, placing them at the center of blame for issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, as well as allegations of failing to act on antisemitic violence in response to free-speech protests by students (Binkley & Offenhartz, 2025; Blake & Knott, 2025). Further research on higher education policy problems, with an emphasis on the villain and where the blame is placed, should seek to answer the question of whether, or to what extent, colleges and universities may be framed as scapegoats for other policy problems and if so, how long that scapegoating has been happening. Ideally, future research would seek to help

colleges and universities mitigate or even diminish their role as the villain in narratives used by federally elected officials and their appointees when talking publicly about higher education policy.

Concluding Thoughts

This study examined the policy narratives of federal-level policymakers on the problem of sexual violence in higher education, using a qualitative research design to identify the themes and values used in the public sphere and look for changes that may occur over time. The findings encourage higher education policy scholars to further study macro-level narratives on a myriad of policy problems colleges and universities face. I would assert that policy narrative researchers and scholars should educate college and university administrators, students, and the public about how those who hold policy-making power in our political system use narrative elements and beliefs to influence or even manipulate those impacted by their proposed policy solutions. The findings in this study are the beginning of a process of bringing sexual violence in higher education into the policy narrative space, and further research is needed to delve into the nuances of character interaction, blame, and, maybe most importantly, an omission or minimization of the assailant. At the end of this study, I return to the words of Weible and Schlager (2014), which appropriately apply to my findings on the macro-level narratives about sexual violence in higher education, that somewhere in between the winning and losing narratives, “[there] might be a policy narrative where the hero fixes part of the problem, the victim continues to be harmed, and the villain continues to cause the harm” (p. 241).

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Legislative History of Sexual Violence in Higher Education

Year	Historical Legislative Event
1964	Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed
1965	Higher Education Act of 1965 passed
1967	Office for Civil Rights created as a federal agency
1971	Patsy Mink’s initial draft of Title IX formally introduced in Congress by Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, who was simultaneously failing to get the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) out of committee
1972	Legislation: Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 signed into law.
1974	Legislation: Senator John Tower introduced the Tower Amendment to exempt revenue-producing college sports from Title IX compliance. It did not pass.
1975	Final Title IX regulations approved by Congress
1979	Final policy interpretation focused on institutional obligations issued (three-prong test)
1980	Department of Education (DOE) created and given oversight of Title IX through its Office of Civil Rights (OCR)
1980	2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in <i>Alexander v. Yale University</i> recognized sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX.
1981	OCR issued a policy memo that for the first time lists sexual harassment as a form of discrimination under Title IX.
1988	Civil Rights Restoration Act mandated that Title IX apply to all educational institutions that receive direct or indirect federal funding

- 1990 Title II of the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 (Clery Act) passed as an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965
- 1990 OCR published the *Title IX Investigators Manual* (Bonnette & Daniel, 1990) to assist campus personnel in conducting Title IX complaints
- 1992 U.S. Supreme Court in *Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools* ruled a student subjected to “coercive intercourse” is a victim of sex discrimination and eligible for monetary damages under Title IX.
- 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) passed
- 1996 United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Clarification of Intercollegiate Athletics Policy Guidance: The Three-Part Test
- 1997 Sexual Harassment Guidance 1997 issued by the OCR
- 1998 U.S. Supreme Court in *Gebser v. Lago Independent School District* established a three-prong liability standard for schools: The sexual harassment must be severe enough to undercut educational opportunities, someone in authority must have “actual knowledge” of the harassment and be “deliberately indifferent” in responding.
- 1999 U.S. Supreme Court in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* affirmed that schools must address student-on-student sex harassment, including sexual assault, under Title IX.
- 2001 OCR updated its 1997 guidance on Title IX to state that schools risk losing federal funding if they do not follow the guidelines for investigating student sexual harassment complaints.

- 2006 In a letter to more than 20,000 school districts, colleges, and universities, OCR reiterated its Title IX responsibilities to stop student sexual harassment, prevent its recurrence, and remedy its effects.
- 2008 OCR (2008) *Sexual Harassment It's Not Academic* published
- 2009 White House Council on Women and Girls created by executive order to focus on issues ranging from equal pay to violence.
- 2009 OCR begins tracking sexual violence complaints as a distinct form of harassment.
- 2011 2011 Dear Colleague Letter addressing evidentiary standards used by colleges and universities in Title IX investigations issued (Ali, 2011).
- 2012 Revised definition of rape issued that includes rapes of men, which better reflects the realities of sexual assault
- 2013 Campus SaVE Act amended the Clery reporting regulations to strengthen victims' rights and obligate colleges and universities to adopt training requirements focused on sexual assault prevention (American Council on Education, 2013)
- 2013 2013 Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act amendments (Sec. 304 of S. 47) to the Clery Act extended VAWA to provide institutions of higher education with financial resources to educate students about sexual violence
- 2013 Know Your IX and End Rape on Campus, advocacy groups/coalitions, founded by college students

- 2014
January White House Council on Women and Girls (2014) and Office of the Vice President issued *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action*. President Obama established The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, cochaired by The White House Council on Women and Girls and the Office of the Vice President.
- 2014
April White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault report *Not Alone: Protecting Students from Sexual Assault* issued (Obama, 2014). This report stated 1 in 5 women are sexually assaulted while in college, most often during freshman and sophomore years, often by someone they know, most of which goes unreported. It also acknowledged the victimization of men. The report provided four preliminary action steps and recommendations for addressing sexual violence on college and university campuses: (a) identify the scope of the problem, (b) help prevent the problem, (c) help schools responded effectively, and (d) improve and make more transparent the federal government's enforcement efforts.
- 2014 DOE OCR issued the Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) titled Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence (Lhamon, 2014). This letter was issued as a supplement to the OCR's 2001 guidance titled Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties.
- 2017
(January) The White House released two reports: (a) *The Second Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault* (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2017b) and (b) *Preventing and Addressing Campus Sexual Misconduct: A Guide for University and College Presidents, Chancellors, and*

Senior Administrators (White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2017a).

- 2017 (July) Secretary of Education held Title IX listening sessions with groups of stakeholders to “discuss the impact of the Department’s Title IX sexual assault guidance on students, families, and institutions” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, para. 1).
- 2017 The OCR (2017b) announced the publication of *Q&A on Campus Sexual Misconduct*. This document described schools’ legal obligations to respond to sexual misconduct and provided guidelines for the adjudication, decision-making, and appeals of sexual misconduct cases.
- 2017 DOE OCR (2017a, 2017b) released a DCL and a Q&A on campus sexual misconduct.
- (September) This DCL explicitly rescinded the guidance previously issued in 2011 and 2014 clarification documents.
- 2018 Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving
- (November) Federal Financial Assistance (2020) was opened for comment on the Federal Public Register. This proposal sought to amend the regulations on the implementation of Title IX and was the first time a Secretary of Education attempted to make campus sexual violence regulations law.
- 2019 As of July 14, 2019, a total of 124,152 comments on DeVos’s proposed rule were submitted to the Federal Register for the 60-day comment period. To date, no comprehensive summary of all the comments has been published.
- 2020 End of this study’s research timeline

Appendix B: The Codebook

Assigned Number for Cross-Referencing _____

Document Title:

Source of the Document:

URL the narrative event was retrieved from:

Delivery type:

- Speech
- Letter
- Debate
- Other

Date the narrative was delivered: _____

Speaker/Orator Demographics:

- Name:
- Gender:
- Age at the time of the event:
- Political party affiliation:

Narrative Analysis Codebook

Coding Definitions

Narrative Elements	Definition
Statement of a problem	A policy narrative is always built around some stated problem
Characters and types of characters	The participants in a policy narrative. Can be humans (proper nouns), groups, or organizations, the narrator's reference to characters can be implicit or explicitly stated.
Victim	The entity hurt by a specified condition
Villain	The entity responsible for the damage done to the victim
Hero	The entity designated as fixing or being able to fix the specified problem
Other	A non-human entity is given a role in the problem. In sexual violence narratives, a common other is alcohol consumption
Policy Solution/Moral of the Story	A policy solution offered that is intended to solve the specified problem
Citing Science or other evidence	Support offered intending to demonstrate a problem
Causal Mechanism	A theoretical relationship denoting a cause-and-effect relationship between one or more independent variables and a dependent variable. In other words, what is causing the problem?

Plot	A story device linking the characters, evidence, causal mechanism, and moral of the story (policy solution).
Victim-blaming	Puts control of the problem in the hands of those suffering from the problem
Narrative Strategies	Definition
Colorful language	the use of symbols or metaphors
Policy Beliefs	A set of values and beliefs that orient a group of people

Document #: _____

From the source information document

What is the stated problem?

Unit of analysis: *speaker*

Narrative Elements

Are characters (participants) present in the narrative?

- Absent
- Present

Notes of clarification:

If present, what type of characters are present and who are they:

- Hero -
 - Circle one: Implicit or explicit
- Villain -
 - Circle one: Implicit or explicit
- Victim -

- Circle one: Implicit or explicit
- Other (a not human entity, ex. alcohol) -
 - Circle one: Implicit or explicit

Notes of clarification:

Is supporting evidence being cited?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, what is the evidence being cited and how is it being used:

Notes of clarification:

Is there a solution being presented to solve the problem?

- Absent
- Present

If present, what is the solution being presented

Notes of clarification:

Is there a causal mechanism in the narrative?

- No
- Yes
- If yes, what or who is causing the problem?

Notes of clarification:

Is a “blame the victim” plot present?

- Yes
- No

Notes of clarification:

Narrative Strategies

Is there a use of colorful language?

- No
- Yes
- If yes, list examples of colorful language being used

Are policy beliefs being presented in the narrative?

- No
- Yes
- If yes, describe the values and beliefs being presented to orient the group:

Other notes or important points to consider in the analysis of this narrative:

VITA

Melissa (Whatley) Grant was born and raised in Central Florida. After high school, she attended Florida Southern College in Lakeland, FL, earning a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature. Later, she earned a Master of Science in Counseling and Psychology from Troy University.

In her first career, Melissa worked as a therapist and clinical supervisor in community mental health, specializing in the treatment of trauma symptoms related to childhood sexual abuse. During this time, Melissa also taught psychology as an adjunct professor at Valencia College in Orlando, FL. Although not actively practicing, Melissa maintains her license as a mental health counselor in Florida.

Melissa transitioned from community mental health into post-secondary education, resulting in a progressive leadership career through student services and career services for-profit career education, then public higher education. Melissa began her work in for-profit career education in the first year of Sarbanes-Oxley, which gave her direct experience interpreting and implementing federal policy in an educational setting. A few years later, Melissa was promoted to Employment Services Director, coinciding with Department of Education reforms on gainful employment and misrepresentation. Once again, Melissa found herself in a role that required her to interpret and implement federal policy in an educational setting.

Melissa went to work at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where she simultaneously earned a Master of Public Administration. This focus of study directly connected her career in public higher education with her previous experience with federal education policy, and it was here that Melissa's academic interest in public policy was solidified.

Melissa moved to Knoxville, TN, to pursue her doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration, knowing her research interest would focus on policy problems in higher education. During her doctoral coursework, she taught professional development for undergraduate business students. As her doctoral coursework ended, Melissa was offered an opportunity to work full-time teaching undergraduate business students career readiness, where she continues today as a coordinator, designer, and instructor for the Haslam College of Business professional development curriculum. As a student-centered practitioner in higher education, Melissa will continue her research, primarily focusing on cultural and institutional narratives about grand policy problems in higher education.