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SPEAKERS

Tara Streng Schroeter, Jenn Tostlebe, Jose Sanchez



Jenn Tostlebe 00:14

Welcome to The Criminology Academy, where we are criminally academic. My name is Jenn [Tostlebe] and I'm here with my co-host Jose [Sanchez].



Jose Sanchez 00:22

Hello.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:23


And today we're speaking to our fellow doctoral student and sexual victimization scholar Tara Streng Schroeter.





Jose Sanchez 00:31


Tara is a fourth year doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Colorado Boulder. She received her master's in sociology from CU Boulder and her bachelor's in sociology and international studies at the University of Utah. She began researching campus sexual assault as an undergraduate student at Utah. Her current research focuses on rape and sexual assault, particularly on campus sexual assault


policies and federal guidance which informs those policies. Thank you for joining us, Tara.

 Tara Streng Schroeter 01:05
Thanks for having me, guys.

 Jenn Tostlebe 01:06
Thanks for joining us. So before we get going into our questions, just a brief overview of what we'll be talking with Tara about today. First, we're going to be talking about co-advicing during the Ph. D program, specifically asking about what you look for in an advisor as well as kind of the challenges associated with co-advisors as well as the benefits around having co-advisors. And then we're going to jump into some questions about Tara's current research interests on sexual assault and Title IX.

 Jose Sanchez 01:38
So jumping into advisors and co-advicing, the way that we do it at CU, at least in the Sociology the department is every first year student gets assigned a first year advisor. From there, they can choose to stay with that advisor, switch over to another advisor, and some students choose to have two advisors, which is what Tara has chosen to done. And so she has two advisors, Dr. Amanda Stevenson and Dr. Rick Rogers.

 Jose Sanchez 02:08
And before we get into the full on co-advicing discussion, Tara, if you were to give advice to incoming or current PhD students, what's important to look for in an advisor?

 Tara Streng Schroeter 02:23
Yeah, so I think the whole advising process can be so intimidating, when you're just starting out as a first year student in a graduate program. And it can be really easy to forget that you have power in the relationship as well. And that you should have power in the relationship if it's a healthy advising relationship. So with that in mind, I would say that, like first and foremost, it's really important to like your advisor, and like them as a human being. So, you know, there's a lot of scholars that you might really admire or want to work with or think are really interesting, but you just don't jive with them on that interpersonal level. And so maybe they're not a great fit for an advisor because, you know, your advisor is leading you throughout the program. And in some, sometimes it's sort of

like an apprenticeship relationship where you're really being mentored and working directly under them. And even if it's not a situation like that, I just think that it's really important that you have a good working relationship, where you feel comfortable to bring up the important things and you know, 99% of the time that's going to be related to graduate school. But I really appreciate about both of my advisors is that they have given me space to bring up the parts of my life that aren't maybe on the surface seem related to graduate school, but are really important, you know. Advice I got, when I first started graduate school is you can't really put off those life milestones that are going to happen during graduate school, you can't just think like, this is gonna be four, five, six, seven, however many years and I'll deal with X, Y, and Z at the end of it. Things are gonna come up and happen that you have to deal with. And that might like throw your whole world upside down. And it's really nice and really important, I think, to feel that you have an advisor, that when things are going sideways, you can bring up those issues with them. And they can give advice about how to navigate all of that. So I've been really grateful that both of my advisors have given me space to have those conversations.



Jenn Tostlebe 04:26

Yeah that's a really great point. I mean, that's definitely something that has come up with both Jose and I, in different ways, but being able to still deal with life situations as well as that work life balance, and having someone that understands that you need to do that.



Tara Streng Schroeter 04:43

Yeah, totally. And everyone balances that work life balance different and I think how my advisors balance it is maybe different than me and how different other faculty in our department do. But it's really important to be able to have those conversations because it's just is not sustainable to pretend like, or even to have your whole entirety 100% of your life for this long period of your life only be about school, you got to do other things that make you whole during that time, too.



Jenn Tostlebe 05:15

Yeah, definitely. So then jumping more into the co-advising discussion, what made you decide to add another advisor or have co-advisors in our department?



Tara Streng Schroeter 05:28

Yeah, so as Jose mentioned, you know, our department starts you off with a first year

advisor. And, you know, I, embarrassingly enough, I guess wasn't that familiar with Rick, Dr. Rogers work. When I came into the program. I had been pretty narrowly in undergrad really focused on campus sexual assault. And so I was familiar with the folks that were doing research. Dr. Roger's researchers health at the population level in particular, particularly about mortality, so death. Which was just, I didn't think that was relevant to what I was doing. But as I, you know, was partnered with him or placed with him by the department, I realized I really appreciated you know, the guidance and how he interacted with me. He gives me space to reach out to him when I need him. We don't have to meet, we don't have like a scheduled meeting every week or something like that. But when I reach out to him and asked to meet, he has always made himself available to me. And I really appreciated that. And also, he has a lot of, you know, he's been a professor for a long time, I think he's one of the most senior people in our department. And he has mentored lots and lots of students. And so I really appreciated the like systems that he has in place, and that he was really clear on the systems that he thinks students need to go through to successfully complete the program. So I really, I really want to stick with him, even though I hadn't originally maybe wouldn't have thought that we would have ended up in an advising relationship. And then I took a class with Amanda Stevenson during my first semester in graduate school. And I had thought she was really interesting when I was applying, and that she was someone that I had potentially wanted to work with. She does research related to program and policy evaluation, particularly related to reproductive health and contraception. And, as y'all mentioned, I'm really interested in policy. So even though it's slightly different, her passion for policy and the application of like academic study in a real world setting, that just really, really excited me, and I love the passion that she brings to the classroom and to the university at large, that really fires me up. She always will tell me that I can do anything, even if I think that maybe, maybe I can't, or it's something that I would have never thought of myself taking on. She and Rick both helped to push me in those ways and see things that maybe I wouldn't have seen for myself. So I really appreciate that both of them. Want me to expand my horizons, that's been really beneficial.



Jenn Tostlebe 08:19

Yeah, it's definitely important to have someone that's pushing you and supporting you. Because sometimes I feel like people's advisors don't necessarily do that. Which just blows my mind.



Tara Streng Schroeter 08:32

Yeah! Yeah, and sometimes, you know, that can be really hard when you're struggling, or, you know, when my advisors are giving me feedback that, you know, I thought a paper

was ready. And they don't agree, and I'm seeing other people in the program, maybe get through without as much feedback, it can be really hard not to compare yourself. But everyone has a different relationship with their advisors, and every faculty member has different things that they focus on, and maybe are going to push you on. And so, my advising relationship with them has really helped me to also remind myself that I can't compare myself to anyone else in the program. Even if we all came in at the same time, or the people that came in with the same level of experiences me, no one has the same two advisors that I have, and no one is studying the exact things that I am. So my pathway is gonna look a little bit different, maybe?



Jose Sanchez 09:30

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. Like after the first year or so, like no one is on equal footing anymore. Like I think we all come in sort of in a similar place. Now, like the first two semesters, and then after that, we'll just kind of go our own ways and do our own thing.



Tara Streng Schroeter 09:48

And that's such a hard transition when in the first year, you know, like a half or two thirds of your classes are these required classes that everyone's sitting in together and you're taking the like professional socialization seminar together, and our department really, you know, you come in as a cohesive cohort. And then pretty quickly, everyone's just going a bunch of different ways. So that's a bit of a transition, moving from like thinking as a group to thinking individually.



Jenn Tostlebe 10:20

What are some of the challenges associated with having co-advisors?



Tara Streng Schroeter 10:25

Yeah, yeah, definitely. So my advisors, one is very junior, Amanda, and one is very senior, [Rick]. So they have totally different experience with being mentors, with being professors. And so sometimes their guidance can maybe maybe be a little bit different. And thankfully, you know, I have been able to have really open conversations with them. And I will sometimes talk with Amanda first. And she has been very clear to me that if we have a discussion, I need to have a pretty similar discussion with Rick. And that both of them, we need to find a way for the three of us to coalesce on whatever my direction is. So maybe if Amanda and I talked about one thing, but Rick maybe pushes back and has a little bit

different feedback, that I need to reconsider. And so it's not necessarily that his guidance always supersedes hers, but it's that my direction, always, we need to work it out between the three of us. So come to some sort of common ground between those different perspectives. Yeah, and I mean, they're really different people like Amanda is in her 30s and a female and, and Rick is a very senior male professor. So they're coming from, and they study different things. Rick studies mortality and Amanda studies contraceptive policy. So they just have different attitudes about a lot of different things. But we work together as a team, I would say.



Jenn Tostlebe 11:58

That's awesome that they're willing and wanting to find a common ground between the two of them, too. So they're working together for you versus against each other.



Tara Streng Schroeter 12:09

Yeah, yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 12:11

I think that's important probably for co-advising: to make sure you have two people that get along and are there for you as the student.



Tara Streng Schroeter 12:20

That's a great point. And that's something that I've heard with other students, you know, in other programs or whatever, that do have co-advising. You really need to make sure if you're going into a co-advising relationship, which is not the norm, that they are advisors that are willing to work closely with each other and like each other. And so maybe when you're having those conversations like with that first advisor, if you want to add on a second one, I would really recommend to ask them if they would be willing to work with this other person, or are they willing to enter into a co-advising relationship? Some folks will not be and they are more committed to the traditional model of, you know, mentor and mentee. And that's okay, but you as a graduate student need to think about how do you want to get to this graduate program? And what do you think that you need in terms of support to finish? Because as I said before, we're here for a long time, even if you fast track it. So you need to figure out what support systems are necessary for you to not just survive, but to thrive.



Jenn Tostlebe 13:24

Do you have any other last comments about co-advising or advisors before we move on to the sexual assault and Title IX discussion?



Tara Streng Schroeter 13:34

No? Well, I guess. So as I've you know, alluded to both of my advisors do different things than what I'm exactly passionate about, which is a super narrow thing of policy related to sexual assault. But both of them are still able and willing to mentor me in that topic, and because of their different levels of expertise, can help me to consider different elements that I wouldn't consider maybe if I was working directly under someone who we're just studying the same thing. And that's super great if you're able to find him advisor that does do the same thing as you. But like I was saying earlier, they could study the exact same thing you're interested in, and you don't get along on an interpersonal level. So just, that's not the end of the world. You know, you can have a great fulfilling relationship with an advisor that study something different. And that's okay.



Jose Sanchez 14:29

Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's great. And, yeah, that sounds good. And I know, I can speak to having an advisor that does what you do. And, you know, it is nice, but it also does come with its own challenges. You know, at least for me, personally, I have to make sure that coming out of the program, that I've been able to sort of carve out my own path and sort of fight back against this perception that might creep up that I was riding David's coattails, right? Because we do similar things. So I have to find my own little niche.



Tara Streng Schroeter 15:09

Yeah, that makes sense. And that's something that I hadn't thought about because I'm not in that situation. And because my advisors do something different, I have maybe had to be creative about how I find community of people that do share similar interests. So as you know, some of the criminologists in our department recently started the working group, even though I'm still studying something different, speaking with other people that are interested in victimization, finding people through Twitter that have similar interests and not being afraid to DM them or start a relationship outside of just liking each other's tweets. So I'm in a couple different email groups of sexual violence scholars and sometimes we'll zoom in share work with each other. So you can find that community in different ways.



Jenn Tostlebe 16:00

That's awesome. Good for you for doing that.



Jose Sanchez 16:03

Yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 16:04

Yeah, that's awesome.



Jose Sanchez 16:06

So I guess we can start moving into talking about a little bit of the work that you do with sexual assault, and we're gonna talk about, specifically Title IX. And so before we get into the weeds of sexual assault, Jen and I were having a little bit of a discussion prior to this about Title IX and at least for me, personally, if I did know you, my knowledge of Title IX would be limited to equality in women and men sports in college. And that's as far as like, that's all I knew about Title IX, that and like I can't even remember if it's the same number of teams are the same amount of funding, I just know that there's has like, they have to put some amount of the same resources into both. That's all I know. And then Jenn, what did you know about Title IX?



Jenn Tostlebe 17:01

Basically nothing? Like our very brief conversations here, and then more, as we've been prepping a little bit for this episode, but yeah, not a lot.



Jose Sanchez 17:16

So for everyone that's in the same boat. Tara, can you tell us what title nine is?



Tara Streng Schroeter 17:22

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, your level of knowledge about this is how, maybe even more than what most people know about Title IX. Growing up, I had heard the term. When my mom was in college, her University got a women's soccer team, and that was like a big victory due to Title IX. So a lot of people associate Title IX with the expansion of women's

athletics, and giving women more opportunities. But at the basis, Title IX is from the educational amendments of 1972. And what the law says is that no one should be discriminated within an educational setting--I'm paraphrasing, of course--on the basis of sex. So yeah, it comes down to just discrimination is not okay on the basis of sex. And if a university is discriminating or a student experiences discrimination, while at college, university, higher education, actually education, just generally, this also applies to students as soon as they enter like, elementary school, even. If they're experiencing discrimination on the basis of sex, that's not okay, and the federal government came out and said that in 1972. So people, you know, that was raised through court cases that, well, sexual violence is discrimination on the basis of sex, which is something that maybe people wouldn't have thought about. But violence is certainly, you know, an extension of that discrimination. So through the years, it has been, there's been different cases that have made their way to the Supreme Court. And then in the past 20 years recommendations that have come from the executive branch that has suggested maybe how universities or education in general should be responding to this sexual discrimination in institutions. Does that help?



Jose Sanchez 19:17

Yeah, definitely. So can you tell us a little bit more about how specifically Title IX is relevant to campus sexual assault?



Tara Streng Schroeter 19:27

Yeah, so it has become like, perhaps it has gained the most power as I was alluding to within the past 20 years. So the first time that the executive branch said anything about Title IX, and college specifically was in 2001. So under George W. Bush's administration, they first set some recommendations just basically, that institutions need to be considering this and it defined what sexual harassment was. So then, nothing really happened for 10 years. And in 2011, the Obama administration issued the Dear Colleague letter, which really up ended things for a lot of universities. Prior to 2011. Not all universities had sexual assault policies. So, and these policies are really important because it outlines how universities are supposed to respond to students that are victimized on their campus, or students that are victimizing others, or, you know, staff or faculty members. So if you don't have a policy, how are you responding to this? And so in 2011, the Obama administration wrote this Dear Colleague letter that just outlined a little bit more, hey, you all need to have a campus sexual assault policy. And then in 2014, that was extended through the White House task force to prevent sexual assault, I believe it was called, it's usually just shortened to like Whitehouse Task Force. They published this Not Alone report. And it outlined actual specifics. So it gave recommendations in a way that the

federal government had never done for how Title IX should be applied. Granted, you know, it wasn't legislation, so it wasn't legally binding, but it outlined 10 areas that universities should include in their campus sexual assault policy. And so this ranged from everything from what the adjudication process should be, what grievance procedures should be, like, who should be handling these issues. And so just really giving like just a very basic framework, and starting to outline what rights students who are assaulted, what rights they have on campus. And so how Title IX also plays into this is if a student believes that university failed them, and they maybe through the adjudication process, investigative grievance, whatever, they are able to file a Title IX complaint against their institution with the Department of Education. And so since 2011, there has been more than 500, and 305 of those are still ongoing, so the minority of them have been resolved. And these cases could result in a university losing federal funding. To my knowledge, a university hasn't lost federal funding because of this. But what stems from these investigations is universities being investigated by the Federal Department of Education, and sometimes leads to universities overhauling their policies if it finds that they did fail their student in some way. So how are they not going to do that again? And so these investigations are something that, you know, obviously, no institution wants to be investigated by the Department of Education. So it's in their best interest to have a robust policy that protects their campus. And, you know, no, no institution should want students be experiencing sexual violence, they want their students to thrive and to be able to graduate and sexual violence is something that can often intercede in that process, you know.



Jenn Tostlebe 23:11

Alright, so before we ask some more questions about Title IX, just the more general questions about sexual assault, and then getting into a more specific question about campus sexual assault, which you were just talking about. When it comes to the reporting of sexual assault, what challenges are faced by policymakers, institutions, researchers, etc.?



Tara Streng Schroeter 23:37

Yeah, yeah. It is something that's, you know, widely known and stated, in like the start of just about every research paper on this topic, that the issue is underreported. And the biggest reasons that victims survivors report for not reporting or being afraid to report is the fear of not being believed, and/or being blamed for what happened to them. And that's something that particularly people state as concerns when reporting to law enforcement or going within the criminal justice system. So, you know, if researchers want to accurately measure this horrible thing that's happening within society, we need to

consider what are ways that we can like try to mitigate those concerns of survivors. So what are ways that we can ask about, perhaps, you know, the worst thing that has ever happened to this individual in a way that's not going to retraumatize them or make them concerned to share this experience? So you know, even though measuring sexual assault, you know, through a confidential interview or an anonymous survey is really different than reporting to law enforcement or reporting to your university, people may choose not to report for a myriad of reasons. So maybe the individual who was assaulted isn't ready to label it as sexual assault or rape, and the survey instrument that they are being interviewed, or that they are going through, asks explicitly, you know, have you ever been raped? Well, that can be an aggressive term, and it carries a lot of weight within society and a lot of baggage with it. So maybe they're not ready to, like define it as that even if you know, talking to the person, they're describing what happened to them, and it fits exactly within the legal definition of rape or sexual assault, but they just might not be ready to apply that term, or to consider themselves a victim or survivor. There's a lot of different like social implications for all of those terms. So it's really important that we think about how we're asking these questions and a lot of research that has particularly been done about sexual assault in a collegiate environment has pointed to that a better way to gather information about these experiences, is by asking like behavioral specific questions, so maybe instead of phrasing, have you ever been raped? Which is a way it's pretty close to how the National Crime Victimization Survey, which is what the federal government relies on for our annual estimates of how many people are raped annually. So that's pretty close to how they asked the question. But maybe like a more behavioral way of asking that question is, has an individual ever physically forced you to have sexual intercourse? Or have they ever done whatever insert like physical thing to you? So asking about it in terms of that, even if they're not ready to say out loud or write down or check a box for it being sexual assault or rape, that it could still be categorized as that. Because it's not necessarily, well, that's a different research question, how many people are willing to identify what happened to them as rape or sexual assault, versus how many people in society are experiencing rape and sexual assault. And I would argue that second one is more important, because if we want to make sure that these victims survivors are getting the support services they need, whether that's like getting help through, you know, social services in the community Protective Services, getting a restraining order, getting just mental health counseling, or just speaking to an advocate, if they are not, you know, they need to find a way to get connected with those services. And so understanding how big the issue really is, is really important.



Jose Sanchez 27:45

Okay, so moving towards now more specifically, campus sexual assault. Based on your research and the research of others, just how big of a problem is sexual assault on college

campuses?



Tara Streng Schroeter 28:04

The White House Task Force when they came out in their 2014 report, they said that, you know, between 20 and 25% of women experienced sexual assault during their time in college, and about one out of six men. So that's a lot of students. But we see a big disparity between what the estimates are which we gather through these anonymous or confidential reporting methods, and surveys, interviews, compared to the number of people that actually are reporting these experiences to their campuses, you know, at some institutions, maybe getting like 30 or 40 reports in a year - that's big. And these are institutions with 10s of 1000s of students. And that doesn't match up if between 30 and 40 students are saying that they were sexually assaulted. And you have a campus of say, 35,000 students and one out of four women and one out of six men, that those numbers don't jive.



Jenn Tostlebe 29:06

If you had to speculate, would the primary reason for the disparity there be related to like the reporting issue you discussed previously?



Tara Streng Schroeter 29:17

I think that's a big component of it. I think that shame plays a really big factor in that and rape myths which perpetuates that shame. So rape myths are different like attitudes or beliefs that are perpetuated within society that people may or may not believe, and that reinforced that shame or embarrassment about what's happened to them. So maybe one rape myth is: when a woman says no, she doesn't really mean it. Or if a woman is wearing, like exposed clothing that exposes her body then she is fair game for sexual advances. Or if a woman comes back to your house or apartment with you, then that means that she wants to have sex with you. So those are things that, you know, maybe people believe in different ways. And they just reinforce that, yeah okay, so you did go back to this person's apartment, but you didn't want to have sex with them, and then they forced you to have sex. So now you feel like well, that's your fault, perhaps. So I think that those are just societal buy in to these really harmful attitudes lead to lower levels of reporting, as well as if the university is not posturing that they are supportive of students. So is the campus climate one where a student feels safe to report their experience? Does a student have ways to share this information anonymously and still get connected with the services they need? Does the student even know how to report their experience to campus? This is

something like, maybe you don't want students to only find out about how to report once they need it, they need to know how to report long before they're ever victimized. And, you know, more and more universities are including this information in students orientation. But that's usually a really intense first week or a couple days before campus starts and they're getting a ton of information. So how are they going to remember everything? You know, so I think, yeah, the campus climate at large, are they making that information easy to access for students, totally inhibits reporting as well.

J

Jose Sanchez 31:42

Yeah, this sort of reminds me of 20 years ago, I don't know if you know, who Jerramy Stevens is? He was a tight end for the Seattle Seahawks, he came out of Washington. And he had allegations of sexual assault leveled at him and from everything that came out and has come out since, it sounds like Washington and King County as a whole didn't do actually, they didn't just not do anything. Like they sort of actively try to sort of sweep everything under the rug. And like there was incidences, like the King County prosecutor at the time, gave Stevens and his lawyer, like the victim statements before trial, like, and the campus decided to not investigate the allegations. But you know, this is like the high profile cases, right? It just makes you think of, like everything that's happened, that's not high profile.

T

Tara Streng Schroeter 32:40

Yeah, absolutely. And there's, you know, 1000s, and hundreds of 1000s of individuals every year in the United States who experienced this and whose stories never get told. So many people, you know, a common refrain, that people say is like, Well, why didn't you report? and that's also, you know, blaming the victim once again. Or you should really, you should tell your story to the news or if more people just knew. But people have been sharing their stories for a long time and things are still difficult for survivors. And this is a really traumatic thing. And they shouldn't have to tell their story publicly be unmasked in the news to be able to get the support that they need.

J

Jose Sanchez 33:22

And you've touched on this a little bit. And you've mentioned some of the changes to Title IX. Can you give us a little bit of a timeline of some of these changes that have happened? Sort of like, you know, you've talked about the Obama guidelines. I know the Trump administration has messed with Title IX a little bit. Can you give us a little timeline of some of these changes?



Tara Streng Schroeter 33:46

Yeah, absolutely. So a lot happening regarding Title IX right now in 2020. So, yes, these Obama administration guidelines were like the first really expanded recommendations for how campuses should be responding to sexual assault. But in 2017, the Trump administration rescinded all of those, and you know, posted, they took down a lot of the electronic resources that came from the Obama administration, they took down some websites, and they're just like archives now. And they said, basically, on the Department of Education website, refer back to the 2001 guidelines, we will give you more recommendations shortly. And they didn't release recommendations until 2020. So for three years, there was just nothing other than: no, we're not going by these 2011 and 2014 guidelines anymore, see the 2001, which is pretty nominal. You're on your own to figure this out. So you know, a lot of universities it's not like they just like tore down their policies during that time. But there was a time of a lot of uncertainty for institutions for what these new changes will be. So they were released in May of this year, 2020. And it was a 2,000 page document of regulations. And the administration has made the point that these are regulations, so they're more legally binding than recommendations. So universities, previously, while it was best practice to comply with the recommendations from the Not Alone report, they didn't legally have to. Now universities do have to. And so these, yeah, it's a big change. Would you like me to talk a little bit more about what those regulations go into?



Jenn Tostlebe 35:37

Yeah, if you could just about some of the bigger changes in regards to the sexual assault policies?



Tara Streng Schroeter 35:44

Yeah. Okay. I'd be happy to. So largely, I would say a lot of these changes are negative, but there is one positive. So I'll start with that. The positive I would say of these regulations is that they encourage universities to drop their mandatory reporting requirement. And what this requirement was that if a student came to someone who is in some sort of position of power, it was always pretty gray and really confusing on the ground, and told that individual on campus that they had experienced sexual assault or rape, that that individual was required to report that instance to the Title IX office. And you know, on face value, that sounds like a positive thing, because that would, the university would know that more cases are happening, even if students didn't directly report. But in reality, it really undermined the feeling of safety of a lot of students, or it would make, you know, maybe something really horrible happened to a student, and they cried during class or

whatever reason. And the TA would have to pull back and say, you know, if you tell me this, I'm going to have to report this. And so then it's removing this person that could have listened to them and heard their story and validated that what happened to them was not their fault, they're not alone. And you know, theoretically, then that TA in that situation, should have could have referred the student to either counseling services or the Title IX office. But you know, then that's putting the impetus on the student to reach out to those systems, and just shutting them down and saying, you know, I can't or I don't want to hear your story, whatever the students gonna hear. So I think that is a positive thing that the mandatory reporting is being removed with this new policy.



Tara Streng Schroeter 37:37

But there's also several things that are quite negative. So first, schools cannot investigate complaints of sexual misconduct that did not incur on campus or at a Greek house, even if the misconduct was between students. So even though we use the term campus sexual assault to refer to, you know, this type of sexual victimization, not all of the assaults are happening on campus, you know, most of the time when someone is assaulted, it's by someone they know. And it's either in their home or the perpetrators home. And most people don't live on campus. At some institutions everyone does, but that's a very small minority. So it's good that this is saying that Greek houses, like assaults that happen in Greek houses can still be investigated, because often, those are not technically on campus. They're just outside of the campus border. But say that they were assaulted at the house that's like the pseudo Greek house right next to the Greek house where a bunch of people move out after they're done living in the house. The university can't investigate that complaint of sexual misconduct, even though it's still their student who was assaulted and they were assaulted by another student. So that seems like the perfect example where the university really should be helping out that student and investigating and maybe setting in place some sort of grievance measures so that the student who is victimized is able to complete their education. It also removed the 60 day guidance for when an investigation must be completed. And 60 days is by no means fast.



Jenn Tostlebe 39:18

No.



Tara Streng Schroeter 39:20

So yeah, the previous guidelines, you know, recommended that university should have these investigations wrapped up in 60 days. Well, that's about half the length of a

semester. And if you've been assaulted, that can feel like forever, to know what's going to happen to you and be dealing with all of this uncertainty- is the student who hurt me still going to be allowed on campus? What's going to happen? So 60 days was not fast, but now that has been removed. So it, I believe the language is that it must be like concluded in a timely manner. But that can mean...



Jenn Tostlebe 39:56

Yeah, what does that mean? Exactly?



Tara Streng Schroeter 39:58

Yeah. And I mean, we know how On, like proceedings take in the traditional criminal justice system, they take years. And that's not acceptable if the university is starting to move towards like that sort of timeline, because students are only students for so long, and they need help now. They need help, right immediately after they're assaulted, whether that's like getting a class changed or being allowed to withdraw from a class after the drop deadline, or getting their housing changed, if they live on campus, or, you know, whatever it may be. Having to wait for a reasonable amount of time is not really that reasonable. The definition of sexual assault was also narrowed. And then the one that advocates for survivors have been most up in arms about, and I would argue, potentially do the most damage is that colleges must now allow the option of live cross examination between parties. And so that means that okay, you were brave enough to report to your institution, they are going through with an investigation, and during the adjudication process, your perpetrator has the right to directly ask you questions about what happened, or kind of say whatever they want to try to make it seem like it didn't happen. Or they could also use their attorney, they could have one of their fraternity brothers ask you questions, they could have anyone live cross examine you. And that's not something you can opt out of. And this is something that, you know, research has shown is extremely negative, and really damaging, and can be really, really, really traumatizing. That's what I mean by damaging. And a big benefit of the university system for sexual assault adjudication has been that it's different than the criminal justice system, that students don't have to go through the same lengthy process. That they don't have to potentially be cross examined. And even in the criminal system, they don't necessarily have to speak on the stand. So they wouldn't have to be cross examined, potentially. But this university system, which falls within the civil not criminal system, is with these 2,000 pages of regulations becoming more and more similar to the criminal justice system, and how sexual assault is investigated and adjudicated. And yeah, and that can potentially further reduce reporting of sexual assault, which I would argue, could allow universities to, you know, pretend that it's not a, you know, they can acknowledge that this is an issue at

large in society, on other campuses, hey, but not on my campus, less than 10 people reported last year. And just because reports go down doesn't mean the amount of sexual victimization is going down.



Jenn Tostlebe 42:47

Alright, so you kind of touched on this just now, do you see any other potential impacts that the new regulations could have for the future, whether that's actual on the ground changes or changes for researchers or policy?



Tara Streng Schroeter 43:03

Well, they have definitely, a lot of people are trying to mobilize to push back against these. But unfortunately, institutions have to comply with them. So even at some institutions, students have been lobbying their school to be as survivor friendly as possible, as these regulations allow. But there's a limit to that. They still have to comply with those couple things that I just mentioned. So organizations such as like Know Your IX, they have, like students that are organizers on campus that try to do some of that organizing to push their universities on policies. And there's another organization called End Rape on Campus that does similar work, and just try to do, like raising awareness within the community at large. So the more people that know about these regulations, the more that can speak out about how potentially harmful they can be and how reducing reporting rates is a really negative thing, even though that seems kind of counterintuitive that you'd want lower levels of reporting. But you just really want to know what the accurate level of reporting is. And if you're instituting policies that silence survivors, make them feel like, you know, they don't want to be cross examined by their perpetrator, or they were assaulted in their apartment off campus so now you can't do anything about it as institution, that's not really a good thing. So hopefully, the organizing that activists are doing will do something, but they have been doing this for a long time since Betsy DeVos and the Department of Education repealed the Obama guidance in 2017, and still these guidelines were released. And you know, some people think that these are positive, particularly men's rights activist. These guidelines, men's rights activists were consulted with about recommendations for these policies, as we're advocates and activists, but from how these regulations turned out, it seems like they definitely skew a bit more towards putting favor for the student that is accused of being a perpetrator as opposed to giving that benefit to the student that is alleging that they were assaulted. And men's rights activists and other folks with similar interests have argued that these regulations increase the due process afforded to students on campus by allowing things like cross examination, and by narrowing which cases can be investigated, what the definition is. But I would argue that,

you know, due process shouldn't come at the cost of silencing victims.



Jose Sanchez 45:49

Yeah. So where do you think we go from here, Tara with the research on sexual assault and Title IX, specifically, what is it that we're missing? And what's important for us to know for future research, policy, and practice?



Tara Streng Schroeter 46:06

Well, it's really important to understand the effects of these policies. So policy evaluation at these different institutions, as well as at the federal and at the state level. What are the potential effects of these policies? Do they disproportionately harm or keep certain students from reporting? We know that students who are generally more marginalized anyways, so LGBTQ+ students, students of color, that they already disproportionately suffer when they're experiencing campus sexual violence. And so are the policies that are in place further harming them? Or are the policies something that equitably help all students who are victims of sexual violence? That's really important for us to understand. How can we create policies that best protect students and make the campus environment a safer place at large?



Jenn Tostlebe 47:02

So on that same line, we know that you've fairly recently been more in depth thinking about your dissertation and future research and career goals that you are wanting to accomplish. So could you tell us some of the work that you're planning and how perhaps it goes off of your prior research?



Tara Streng Schroeter 47:23

Yeah, sure. So previously, my research has varied from looking at like a small subset of 10 universities and their campus sexual assault policies, and how they did or did not comply with the 2014 guidance from the Not Alone report, to building and administering a survey instrument of more than 500 students on a college campus and surveying them about their attitudes and perspectives about sexual assault, rape myths, and what a good campus sexual assault policy should look like, to most recently for my master's paper, considering the different ways that rape is measured in large national surveys, and I looked at the National Crime Victimization Survey, as I mentioned earlier, as well as the National Survey of Family Growth. So kind of spanned a little bit on that. And hopefully,

for my dissertation, as I'm thinking about that, as I'm starting my fourth year, got to get to it, hopefully, I'll be moving back towards evaluating policy. And so considering how Title IX policy and adjacent policies, how they've changed through time, how they've maybe been expanded and afforded students more rights, how they've taken away rights, what some of the conflicts on that have been, what their effects have been. And I'm also interested in policy outside of the campus environment, how policies and grants that allow rape crisis centers in the different states, how those are administered, what type of services are able to be provided because of that? So? Yeah, I'm just really passionate about policy as nerdy as that is, and just what is the most effective? What can do the most good? So hopefully, that's what I'll be digging into for the next couple of years.



Jenn Tostlebe 49:17

Maybe a little nerdy, but it's very important. So that's awesome.



Tara Streng Schroeter 49:22

I think so.



Jose Sanchez 49:23

Is there anything else you'd like to add, Tara? As we wrap up?



Tara Streng Schroeter 49:27

I don't think so. I really appreciate you guys—you all-taking the time to speak with me about this. I think this is so important. And something more and more people have been paying attention to in the last couple years. But you know, there's there's so much going on, and so many really important causes worth paying attention to and all the different things going on, so not everyone knows as much about this.



Jenn Tostlebe 49:50

Yeah. So hopefully we'll let more people know about it.



Jose Sanchez 49:56

Well, thank you so much for joining us, Tara. It was a pleasure having you.



Jenn Tostlebe 50:00

Thank you.



Tara Streng Schroeter 50:01

Yeah, thank you both.



Jose Sanchez 50:03

And is there anything you'd like to plug, any thing that is coming out soon, anything that we should watch out for in the future.



Tara Streng Schroeter 50:10

I would say most importantly, this isn't even plugging for myself. But if this is something that you're passionate about, or feel the capacity to help with in any way, I would consider doing a quick Google search to see what type of rape crisis organizations are in your local area. And if it's something that you feel like you have the capacity to volunteer in, consider doing the 40 hour crisis training. It's generally not just bricked out 40 hours in one week, it's something I used to teach before I went to grad school. And even if you don't end up volunteering, it can give you a lot of really important information to push back against those rape myths when you encounter them in society, or just be a better advocate or ally for the folks in your life that have been sexually assaulted. Because even if you think you don't know anyone who's been sexually assaulted, there's a very, very high chance that you do know, not just someone but multiple people, and they just haven't told you yet. So it's really important that we're supportive of the folks that have experienced this.



Jose Sanchez 51:08

Yeah, definitely. That sounds like a worthwhile thing to do. Then where can people find you? if they have questions or want to have a discussion with you?



Tara Streng Schroeter 51:17

Yeah, so the best place to find me is probably Twitter. I love Twitter. And so my handle is @strengschroeter, kind of long, but it's both of my last names and just connect with me there. I love, love chatting with folks on Twitter and seeing what other people are doing, passionate about researching. And I also have a website just based on my name, so

connect with me.



Jenn Tostlebe 51:45

Awesome. Thanks again, Tara.



Tara Streng Schroeter 51:47

Thanks, Jenn and Jose.



Jenn Tostlebe 51:49

Bye!



Jenn Tostlebe 51:49

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