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Student Perspectives on Title IX Policy Across North Texas College Campuses

Felicia Chism
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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Felicia Chism

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Walden University
2026

Abstract

Student Perspectives on Title IX Policy Across North Texas College Campuses

by

Felicia Chism

MBA, Amberton University, 2012

MPhil, Walden University, 2025

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

April 2026

Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study examined how North Texas higher education students' lived experiences with Title IX (TIX) shaped their perceptions of the policy's fairness, accessibility, and implementation. The study addressed the problem that experiential perspectives of TIX remain underexplored, despite their importance for understanding institutional accountability and student trust. Guided by the social ecological model and organizational justice theory, the research investigated how individual, relational, institutional, and societal factors influenced students' interpretations of TIX processes. Eight students from North Texas public universities who had direct involvement in a closed TIX case participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Moustakas's phenomenological procedures. Findings revealed three central themes: inconsistent communication reduced trust in institutional accountability; identity markers shaped perceptions of fairness and access; and campus climate and interpersonal interactions influenced students' willingness to engage with TIX processes. These results indicate that both structural and relational barriers affect students' sense of safety, equity, and institutional responsiveness. The study recommends strengthening communication, enhancing culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices, and improving procedural consistency across campuses. Implications for positive social change include promoting more equitable, transparent, and student-centered approaches to TIX implementation within higher education.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Derrick—your steady strength and quiet sacrifices made this journey possible. You carried the weight with me, even when the load was heavy, and you never stopped believing I would finish. Your patience, your encouragement, and the way you showed up for me day after day gave me the confidence to keep moving forward. I am deeply grateful for your love and for the way you have stood beside me through every challenge.

To my daughter, Gabby—your light has shaped every part of who I am. Watching you grow, question the world, and lead with such a big heart has pushed me to fight for safer, more equitable spaces for every student. Your joy, your curiosity, and the way you love so openly have carried me through the hardest moments of this journey. You are my reason why, and you always will be.

To my sister, LaRhonda—thank you for being my constant source of support, for covering me in prayer, and for believing in my purpose even on the days when I struggled to see it myself. Your steady presence, your encouragement, and the way you show up for me have strengthened me in ways you may never fully know. I am deeply grateful for you, and for the unbreakable bond we share.

To my extended family, friends, and mentors, thank you for your encouragement, prayers, and belief in my purpose. Each of you played a meaningful role in helping me reach this milestone.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Title IX (TIX) Overview

The Education Amendments of 1972, under Title IX (TIX; 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681–1688), prohibited sex-based discrimination in educational institutions that receive federal funding. Although TIX’s early implementation focused on gender equity in athletics, its regulatory scope expanded to address sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of sex-based misconduct. This evolution reflected a broader institutional responsibility to ensure safe and equitable educational environments, as outlined in Peterson and National Association of College and University Attorneys (2023) analysis of shifting TIX priorities and enforcement practices.

Over several decades, regulatory revisions, judicial interpretations, and administrative guidance increased the complexity of compliance requirements for postsecondary institutions (Princeton Legal Journal, 2025b). Federal lawmakers enacted regulatory updates that included procedural requirements, evidentiary standards, expanded protections for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, and mandates for trauma-informed practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Sands Anderson, 2023). These provisions reflected ongoing efforts to clarify institutional obligations and standardize TIX implementation across higher education settings.

Persistent concerns remained regarding the extent to which institutional practices reflected TIX mandates. Empirical research revealed deficiencies in policy understanding, procedural fairness, and consistent implementation of trauma-informed

methodologies among students, particularly affecting historically marginalized groups (Piedrahita, 2025; Bedera, 2023). These patterns were associated with perceived barriers to protection and resources (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022).

Framework Integration in the Present Study

This study employed a blended framework integrating the social ecological model (SEM) and organizational justice theory (OJT) to examine students' perspectives on TIX in higher education. SEM guided analysis of policy implementation across multiple levels of influence, while OJT supported evaluation of fairness across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions. Together, these frameworks enabled a multidimensional analysis of TIX implementation by linking structural requirements with perceived fairness in higher education settings (Lamiotte, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022).

Literature Gap

A review of Title IX scholarly publications revealed that authors often prioritized compliance frameworks and litigation, with limited attention to participants' lived experiences. This trend was documented in Meyer and Quantz's (2021) systematic review, which found that most Title IX research focused on legal analyses and athletics compliance, leaving experiential perspectives largely unexamined. Publications by scholars and practitioners often emphasized metrics and legal precedent, leaving experiential aspects of enforcement underexamined (Nolan et al., 2022).

A significant deficiency was the infrequent use of the SEM–OJT blended framework in tandem to analyze students' perceptions. Using these frameworks together enabled examination of fairness-related experiences within nested systems and yielded

contextually grounded insights to inform policy development oriented toward equity, transparency, and justice.

Context in Higher Education

Within the higher education community, including leaders, legal advisors, and administrators, documented tensions existed between regulatory compliance and the ethical delivery of support services (Ishwardat et al., 2024). Reported concerns included institutional betrayal, unclear procedures, and inconsistent application of TIX requirements (Bedera, 2023). Historically marginalized populations frequently reported disparities in access to information, protections, and accountability mechanisms.

This study examined the perspectives of North Texas college students on TIX policy implementation to assess how institutional practices influenced perceptions of fairness, trust, and accessibility. The findings provided insight to inform policy refinements that strengthened equity, transparency, and justice.

To address this research problem, Chapter 1 presents several key sections. It begins with background information on TIX in higher education, highlighting core issues related to fairness and policy implementation. The problem statement identified gaps in existing research, followed by a description of the study's purpose that outlines its focus on students' lived experiences. The research questions specify the inquiry guiding the investigation. The theoretical and conceptual framework section explains the integration of SEM and OJT. The study's nature summarizes the methodological approach, while subsequent sections define key terminology, describe assumptions, delimitations, and

limitations, and explain the significance of advancing policy and supporting positive social change in higher education contexts.

Background

Congress enacted TIX to prohibit sex-based discrimination in federally funded educational institutions (Title IX and Sex Discrimination, n.d.-b). Early implementation emphasized gender equity in athletics; subsequent developments extended coverage to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and related misconduct (Peterson & National Association of College & University Attorneys, 2023). The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare issued the initial regulations in 1975 and later transferred enforcement authority to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in 1980. Since then, regulatory changes made by Title IX decision makers, case law, and administrative guidance have altered TIX implementation, yielding a complex and contested compliance environment (Princeton Legal Journal, 2025b).

Federal lawmakers influenced the requirements for higher education institutions that receive federal funding. The 2011 Dear Colleague Letter from the U.S. Department of Education's OCR explicitly identified sexual harassment and sexual violence as forms of sex discrimination under TIX (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011). The 2017 Withdrawal of Guidance and the TIX 2020 regulations altered evidentiary standards and adjudication processes. In 2023, regulators outlined broader protections for 2SLGBTQIA+ students and reinforced trauma-informed practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Court decisions issued by federal lawmakers, including *Doe v. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University* (2023), clarified due-process

requirements, including respondent rights and evidentiary standards. Collectively, these developments demonstrate ongoing changes in TIX implementation across higher education.

Institutional leaders continued to navigate federal compliance requirements alongside academic governance, due-process protections, and the ethical provision of support services. Reported concerns included procedural ambiguity, limited trauma-informed support, and perceptions of institutional betrayal (Bedera, 2023). Students, particularly from historically marginalized groups, reported disparities in reporting processes, protection, and accountability (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). For students, trust in reporting systems and assessments of institutional fairness often hinge on transparency, protection from retaliation, and the emotional and procedural demands of the adjudication process. Recent research confirmed that students' perceptions of TIX processes are shaped by their sense of procedural justice and institutional responsiveness (Ashley, 2024).

Although lawmakers substantiated Title IX policies, many institutional leaders continued to structure their responses around compliance and risk mitigation rather than the experiential dimensions of policy engagement. This trend is reflected in Meyer and Quantz's (2021) review, which showed that Title IX scholarship and institutional practice have historically prioritized legal frameworks and procedural compliance while giving limited attention to students' lived experiences. Differences across identity markers, including race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status, remain comparatively underexplored (A. W. B. Lee & Hurtado, n.d.). Applying SEM and OJT as

a blended framework enabled me to address this gap by situating TIX within multilayered contexts and by structuring the analysis of fairness in outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal communication (Lamiotte, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022).

Integrating these frameworks clarified intersections between structural requirements and perceived fairness in higher education. The value of this study lies in exploring how students perceived the implementation and fairness of TIX policies, which informs considerations for more equitable, transparent, and justice-centered institutional practices.

Problem Statement

Despite the widespread implementation of TIX in higher education, few empirical studies examined how North Texas students' lived experiences with TIX shaped their perceptions of the policy's fairness, accessibility, and implementation within higher education institutions. Most researchers emphasized compliance frameworks and reporting metrics, providing limited attention to context-specific and experiential perspectives. Differences across identity markers such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status remain insufficiently analyzed (A. W. B. Lee & Hurtado, n.d.).

Analysis of existing research revealed inequities in enforcement, variability in adjudication, limited trauma-informed support, and race-evasive policy language that fails to address intersectional harm (Bedera, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). These conditions are associated with reduced trust in institutional processes and lower engagement with TIX mechanisms, particularly among historically marginalized populations (Bedera, 2023). Insufficient attention to these layered perceptions constrains

evaluations of TIX's operational impact and limits the development of policies that are both legally sound and socially responsive.

The resultant literature gap underscores the need for qualitative research that examined how North Texas students' lived experiences shaped their understanding of TIX's fairness, accessibility, and effectiveness within higher education. This study employed a blended SEM–OJT framework to analyze the structural, relational, and procedural aspects of policy engagement, providing a multidimensional account of student perspectives. Addressing this issue advances the fields of forensic psychology and higher education compliance by deepening understanding of institutional fairness in TIX implementation, informing trauma-responsive policy design, and promoting equity-centered practices that reflect student experiences on North Texas campuses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how North Texas students' lived experiences of TIX shaped their perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and implementation within higher education institutions. The study focused on understanding how participants interpreted their experiences with institutional procedures and how those experiences influenced perceptions of institutional accountability.

Guided by a blended SEM–OJT framework, this study examined how individual, relational, and organizational factors intersected to influence students' engagement with TIX processes. This theoretical integration supported a multidimensional exploration of

how perceptions of justice and equity are formed and sustained within higher education institutions.

The phenomenon of interest in this study was how North Texas higher education students perceived and experienced the implementation of TIX policies in their educational environments. Analysis of prior research indicated that compliance-centered approaches offered limited insight into how procedures are experienced and understood by those directly affected (Gómez, 2022). Research emphasizing administrative design and legal precedent reduced visibility into perceptions of fairness, transparency, and accountability (Bedera, 2023). This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on TIX implementation and informs institutional leaders seeking to develop or refine TIX practices. Centering students' perspectives can advance approaches aligned with equity, transparency, and justice.

Applying a blended SEM–OJT framework provided a structure for analyzing experiences across multiple levels of influence. By examining how North Texas college students experienced and interpreted TIX policies, this study aimed to advance equity in higher education by informing institutional practices that reflect justice-centered, trauma-informed, and student-responsive approaches to compliance.

Research Questions

Based on the identified gap and purpose, the study was guided by the following questions:

RQ1: How do North Texas higher education students perceive the implementation of TIX policies within their educational environments?

RQ2: In what ways have North Texas higher education students' race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status shaped their perceptions of TIX policies?

By exploring these questions, the study sought to understand how students in higher education interpret and engage with TIX policies through the lens of their lived experiences and intersecting identities. This inquiry aimed to uncover patterns in perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and institutional responsiveness, particularly among historically marginalized groups. Grounded in a blended SEM–OJT framework, the research elucidates how structural, procedural, and relational factors influence students' trust in TIX mechanisms, shape reporting behaviors, and impact their overall perceptions of equity and justice within campus environments. This qualitative inquiry employed a phenomenological approach to examine participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: SEM and OJT. Together, these frameworks provided the conceptual foundation for examining how North Texas higher education students perceived and experienced the implementation of TIX policies. SEM situated these experiences within broader social and institutional contexts, while OJT offered a lens for analyzing perceptions of fairness in outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal interactions. Integrating these theories provided a comprehensive lens for exploring the individual and systemic factors that shaped students' lived experiences with TIX, aligning directly with the study's purpose and research questions.

Organizational Justice Theory

OJT (Greenberg, 1987) structured the analysis of perceived fairness in institutional contexts across three dimensions: distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of decision-making processes), and interactional justice (fairness in interpersonal communication and treatment). In the context of TIX, these dimensions relate to students' assessments of institutional legitimacy, transparency of investigations, clarity of procedures, and the quality of communication during reporting and adjudication. Recent research applied OJT to restorative practices and their implications for procedural and distributive fairness, including considerations for complex or ambiguous ("yellow zone") cases (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). OJT provided a structured lens for examining how fairness perceptions shape students' trust in institutional processes and their willingness to engage with TIX mechanisms.

Social Ecological Model

The SEM (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) conceptualizes human experience within multiple, nested systems—individual, relational, institutional, community, and societal. In this study, SEM-guided analysis of how interpersonal relationships, institutional culture, policy structures, and broader sociopolitical dynamics influenced students' perceptions of TIX. Recent TIX research demonstrated the usefulness of SEM for assessing knowledge, reporting behavior, and perceived responsiveness across various levels of influence (Lamiotte, 2023). SEM supported a holistic understanding of how environmental and contextual factors shape students' experiences with TIX processes.

Framework Integration

Integrating SEM (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and OJT (Greenberg, 1987) provided a comprehensive analytical lens for examining perceptions of fairness in the implementation of TIX within higher education. SEM enabled examination of how individual, relational, institutional, and societal factors intersect to influence students' experiences, while OJT clarified how fairness perceptions are formed through outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal interactions. Together, these frameworks supported a multidimensional analysis of TIX implementation by linking structural requirements with perceived fairness, transparency, and institutional responsiveness.

OJT complemented this by focusing on how individuals evaluated the fairness of organizational processes, outcomes, and interpersonal treatment. By applying OJT, the study assessed perceptions of procedural justice (e.g., transparency and consistency of TIX investigations), distributive justice (e.g., equity in outcomes), and interactional justice (e.g., respect and dignity in communication). Together, the SEM-OJT blended framework enabled a layered analysis of students' interpretations and lived experiences across diverse roles, identities, and power positions within the academic environment.

This integrated approach also foregrounds attention to systemic inequities—such as those based on gender, race, or disability status—that may influence how TIX is experienced and perceived. It supported a critical examination of procedural legitimacy and institutional trust, while also illuminating how campus climate and structural conditions shape perceptions of the effectiveness and fairness of TIX policies.

Forensic Psychology Alignment

The study was grounded in the discipline of forensic psychology, as it examined how TIX shaped students' experiences and influenced their perceptions of fairness, procedural justice, and institutional accountability. Forensic psychology emphasized the relationship between legal systems and human behavior, and this study reflected that emphasis by analyzing how investigative procedures, evidentiary requirements, and communication practices influenced students' interpretations of TIX processes. The study also addressed trauma-responsiveness, reporting barriers, and identity-based disparities, which were central areas of concern in forensic psychology when evaluating the effects of legal and quasi-legal systems on individuals. By documenting students' lived experiences within TIX procedures, the study contributed to forensic psychology by clarifying how legal mandates are implemented in educational environments and how these processes affected perceptions of justice, safety, and access to institutional mechanisms.

Nature of the Study

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore how North Texas higher education students perceived and experienced the implementation of TIX policies. This approach enabled a detailed examination of lived experiences and supported analysis of how individuals constructed meaning from their interactions with institutional processes. Unlike quantitative methods that aim to test hypotheses or measure prevalence across large populations, qualitative inquiry is particularly well-suited to uncovering the complexities, meanings, and contextual factors

that shaped individual and collective experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Through interviews, observations, and thematic analysis, this design facilitated a deeper exploration of how students engaged with, interpreted, and responded to TIX policies in their academic environments.

A phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994) was employed to identify the structures and meanings associated with participants' experiences of TIX procedures. The participant pool included students at North Texas public universities in the United States. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit individuals with direct knowledge of or engagement in TIX processes (e.g., mandatory reporting, training participation, or interaction with procedures). Sampling aimed to achieve diversity across gender, race, academic role, and discipline (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A sample of eight North Texas college students enrolled in higher education is consistent with phenomenological research standards, but inherently narrows the range of perspectives (Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis followed Moustakas's (1994) procedures, which included horizontalization, identification of significant statements, clustering of themes, and development of textual and structural descriptions. The SEM-OJT blended framework guided interpretation across levels of influence and fairness dimensions (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022; Lamiotte, 2023). This design emphasized depth over breadth and was well-suited to clarifying perceptions related to TIX (Creswell, 2013).

Definitions

Campus climate: refers to the prevailing attitudes, behaviors, and institutional norms within a university that influence perceptions of safety, inclusion, and responsiveness to sexual misconduct (Piedrahita, 2025).

Complainant, respondent, witness: Roles within TIX proceedings: the complainant initiates a report of misconduct, the respondent is the individual accused, and a witness provides relevant testimony or information (U.S. Department of Education, 2022)

Dear Colleague Letter: Guidance issued by the Department of Education's OCR informing colleagues of how to respond to TIX complaints on college campuses. The OCR issues the Dear Colleague letter and other policy guidance to provide recipients with information to assist them in meeting their obligations, and to provide members of the public with information about their rights under the civil rights laws and implementing regulations that institutions enforce (Office of Civil Rights, 2001; 2011; 2017; 2020).

Distributive justice- Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes resulting from institutional processes, such as sanctions, accommodations, and resource allocation following TIX investigations (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022).

Institutional betrayal- Institutional betrayal occurs when an institution fails to prevent or adequately respond to sexual violence, particularly when it holds a duty of care. This betrayal can intensify trauma and diminish trust in institutional mechanisms (Bedera, 2023).

Interactional justice: Interactional justice refers to the perceived quality of interpersonal treatment during institutional procedures, encompassing respect, empathy, and clarity of communication (Colquitt et al., 2023).

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how multiple social identities—such as race, gender, and professional role—intersect to shape experiences of privilege, marginalization, and institutional engagement (Crenshaw, 1991; Westberg et al., 2024).

Organizational justice theory (OJT): A theoretical framework that evaluates fairness across three dimensions: distributive (outcomes), procedural (processes), and interactional (interpersonal treatment) (Greenberg, 1987).

Phenomenology: A qualitative research approach focused on exploring and describing the lived experiences of individuals to uncover the essence and meaning of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Procedural justice: Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the processes used to make decisions, encompassing consistency, transparency, and opportunities for voice (Colquitt et al., 2023).

Sex-based discrimination: Sex-based discrimination refers to any exclusion, denial, or differential treatment based on sex, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and gender-based violence, as defined under TIX regulations (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Social ecological model (SEM): A theoretical framework that examines how individual, relational, institutional, and societal factors interact to influence behavior and perception (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Title IX: TIX is a federal civil rights law enacted as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681–1688).

Trauma-informed practice: Trauma-informed practice refers to organizational approaches that recognize the impact of trauma and prioritize safety, transparency, and empowerment in policy implementation and interpersonal interactions (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2023).

Assumptions

The first assumption was that participants provided honest, reflective, and contextually grounded accounts of their experiences. Because the study addressed sensitive topics involving sexual misconduct, compliance, and institutional trust, the validity of findings depended on participants' willingness to share authentic perspectives. Ethical safeguards, including confidentiality protection, secure data handling, and accessible participation procedures, were designed to foster trust and promote candid engagement. These measures aligned with federal standards, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990), and with guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice (2023), which affirmed the importance of equitable access and nondiscrimination in institutional settings.

Second, the study assumed that students have sufficient understanding of TIX policies, procedures, and campus culture to offer meaningful insights. Students gained this awareness through direct reporting experiences, mandated reporting responsibilities, or indirect exposure shaped by the institutional climate. Their understanding also stemmed from campus-wide training sessions, peer discussions, or interactions with faculty and staff. This foundational knowledge enabled participants to critically reflect on how TIX policies operated within their educational environment. (Chambers et al., 2021).

Third, the study assumed that context-specific accounts yielded insights relevant to broader discussions of TIX policy implementation in higher education. These narratives, grounded in lived experience, illuminated patterns, tensions, and institutional dynamics that resonated across campuses with similar cultural and structural characteristics. This assumption reflected the qualitative principle of transferability, which prioritized the relevance and applicability of findings to comparable settings over statistical generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By focusing on depth and meaning rather than breadth, the study aimed to contribute nuanced perspectives that informed policy refinement and institutional practice beyond the immediate research context.

Finally, the study assumed that SEM (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and OJT (Greenberg, 1987) were appropriate frameworks for examining students' perceptions of TIX. SEM situated experiences within multiple layers of influence, while OJT provided an analytical lens for perceptions of fairness in outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal interactions (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022; Lamiotte, 2023).

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative phenomenological study explored how North Texas higher education students perceived and experienced the implementation of TIX policies. The research aimed to investigate how students interpreted their interactions with TIX processes and how these experiences influenced their understanding of institutional accountability and support.

The study focused on individuals who have had direct involvement with TIX, as complainants, respondents, or witnesses. This inclusion criterion ensured that data reflected firsthand perspectives grounded in actual engagement with TIX mechanisms. Students without TIX experience were not eligible to participate.

I collected data through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their narratives in their own words and enabling flexible, in-depth exploration. Additionally, publicly accessible documents, such as institutional TIX policy statements, federal guidance, online training materials, and other compliance resources, were reviewed to contextualize participant experiences within the broader policy and regulatory framework.

This study used the SEM (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and OJT (Greenberg, 1987) framework to guide the analysis. Together, these models offered a multi-level approach to examine how individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic factors shaped perceptions of justice, equity, and procedural integrity in TIX implementation.

This study did not evaluate legal compliance or case outcomes; instead, it centered on experiential narratives and perceptions of fairness within educational

settings. The design prioritized depth over generalizability, consistent with the principles of phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although this study did not aim to produce generalizable findings, it offered insights that transferred to similar higher education contexts facing challenges with TIX policy perception and implementation.

Limitations

Sample Size

This study recruited a sample of eight North Texas college students enrolled in higher education and continued recruitment until saturation was reached. While this approach aligned with phenomenological research standards that prioritized depth, it inherently limited the range of perspectives represented (Creswell, 2013). Participants represented diverse backgrounds across race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status, reflecting the intersectional populations central to TIX policy analysis. Although the small sample size limited the breadth of represented perspectives, it aligned with phenomenological principles that emphasized depth over generalizability. The study prioritized thematic saturation and nuanced interpretation of lived experiences to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of how students perceive fairness, accessibility, and institutional accountability in the implementation of TIX.

Institutional Context

The single-site design limited transferability because organizational structures, resources, and cultures varied across institutions. The focused setting supported detailed examination of how local norms and procedures related to perceptions of equity, fairness, and accountability. In practice, the results informed the development of equity-centered

policies, enhanced trauma-informed practices, and strengthened institutional accountability within higher education.

Self-Reported Data

Accounts are subjected to interpretation, recall, and potential bias. Triangulation with institutional documents was used to enhance credibility, while the study acknowledged the inherent subjectivity of qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Recent academic publications highlighted the importance of students' narratives in examining the evolution of TIX regulations and institutional variation (Princeton Legal Journal, 2023; Penn State Law Review Forum, 2023). Resource allocation and staffing patterns in TIX offices also varied and may affect consistency (CUPA-HR, 2024). Trustworthiness strategies included reflexive memoing, peer debriefing, and attention to discrepant cases (AMEE Guide No. 149, 2022; Hadi & Closs, 2023; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

Researcher Positionality

I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, a role that inherently introduced interpretive influence shaped by positionality, prior experiences, and identity-based lenses. In qualitative inquiry, this centrality necessitated deliberate strategies to enhance analytic credibility and reduce bias. Reflexive practices, including journaling, peer debriefing, and positionality statements, were employed to support transparency and trustworthiness throughout the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

These practices facilitated ongoing critical reflection on how researchers' assumptions, institutional affiliations, and theoretical orientations shaped data engagement and thematic development. Recent academic publications underscored the importance of reflexivity, which confronted questions about who we are as researchers and how this guides our work; not only as a methodological safeguard but also as an ethical imperative, particularly when exploring equity-related topics such as TIX implementation (Hadi & Closs, 2023). By documenting analytic decisions, engaging in collaborative reflection, and attending to discrepant cases, the study sought to uphold methodological integrity while honoring the complexity of students' narratives within higher education settings.

Significance

This study addressed a documented gap in the literature by centering student perspectives on TIX implementation. The findings contributed to understanding institutional fairness, transparency, and accessibility and supported the development of equity-centered and trauma-informed practices in higher education. While existing peer-reviewed studies emphasized compliance frameworks and administrative procedures, fewer studies focused on students' lived experiences and perceptions across diverse identities and roles (Meyer & Quantz, 2021). This gap is particularly relevant given documented procedural inconsistencies, race-evasive practices, and limited trauma-informed support (Bedera, 2023).

By applying the SEM-OJT blended framework, this research integrated perceptions of fairness with a structural analysis of institutional contexts. Findings

advanced knowledge in the discipline by deepening understanding of how students interpreted fairness, accessibility, and accountability within TIX systems. In practice, the results informed the development of equity-centered policies, enhanced trauma-informed practices, and strengthened institutional accountability within higher education.

The purpose of this study was to foster justice-oriented policy refinement, inclusive campus climates, and increased institutional transparency. By centering students' voices, the research contributed to both the scholarly and practical advancement of TIX policy and implementation.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the study by outlining the background, problem, purpose, research questions, and significance. The chapter established the need for a qualitative exploration of student experiences with TIX and provided the foundation for subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive synthesis of current research on TIX implementation in higher education, with an emphasis on procedural fairness, equity, and students' perceptions. Guided by the SEM-OJT blended framework, the review identified critical gaps in intersectional and experiential academic work (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Greenberg, 1987; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These findings established the theoretical and empirical foundation for exploring how students perceived and experienced TIX policies, supporting the study's goal of advancing equity, transparency, and justice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to examine existing research on TIX implementation, student perceptions of fairness and accessibility, and the influence of identity-based factors in higher education. The review identified gaps in the scholarly record that supported the need for the present study. The chapter began with an overview of current literature, followed by a description of the search strategy used to locate relevant sources. The review then addressed the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study, including the SEM and OJT. Subsequent sections examined empirical research related to TIX, fairness, reporting behavior, and identity-based disparities. The chapter concluded with a synthesis of the literature and alignment with the research questions and study scope.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of literature relevant to TIX and federal policy in higher education. The review includes four major sections. The first section outlines the scope and purpose of the review. The second describes the literature search strategy used to identify and evaluate current research. The third presents the theoretical foundation based on the SEM–OJT blended framework. The fourth section synthesizes empirical literature related to key variables and concepts, identifies existing research gaps, and aligns these gaps with the study’s purpose and research questions. I used a literature review matrix to organize key themes, methodologies, and findings across the reviewed studies, which facilitated a structured synthesis of current peer-reviewed research.

Synopsis of Current Literature

The literature encompassed the historical development of TIX, the implications of federal guidance (e.g., Dear Colleague Letter), and institutional responses to equity and misconduct (Perry, 2025; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Key challenges included procedural adherence, campus climate, and the experiences of marginalized populations. Prior research emphasized compliance-centered approaches, which provided limited insight into how procedures were understood by affected groups (Gómez, 2022; Meyer & Quantz, 2021).

Existing scholarship primarily emphasized administrative procedures and legal precedents, limiting understanding of how TIX policies shaped perceptions of fairness, transparency, and institutional accountability (Bedera, 2023). Limited empirical research examined how students interpreted these policies regarding fairness, accessibility, and procedural integrity (Perry, 2025). Disparities across identity dimensions (e.g., race, gender, role) affected access to resources and perceptions of justice (Grand River Solutions, 2025).

Recent work highlighted inequities in enforcement, inconsistent adjudication, limited trauma-informed approaches, and policy language that did not adequately account for intersectional identities (Bedera, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). These conditions contributed to reduced engagement with TIX mechanisms and diminished trust in institutional processes. Student perspectives are essential for understanding the nuanced factors that influence reporting behaviors, trust in institutional accountability, and confidence in the fairness of adjudication processes (Chambers et al., 2021). By

analyzing these lived experiences and interpretations, the study offered a comprehensive view of how institutional culture and policy implementation intersect to shape the effectiveness and perceived legitimacy of TIX enforcement.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy was designed to locate peer-reviewed research published within the past 5 years to ensure currency. The search process focused on identifying sources that addressed fairness, accessibility, and institutional practices within higher education.

The search was conducted using academic databases focused on forensic psychology, higher education, and social science research. These databases included PsycINFO, PsycArticles, SAGE Journals, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Central, and Google Scholar. Each database contributed access to empirical studies, theoretical literature, and policy analyses that aligned with the study's purpose. I employed Boolean logic to refine and expand search results by connecting key terms, including *Title IX*, *campus sexual misconduct*, *trauma-informed practices*, *procedural justice*, *intersectionality*, *organizational justice theory*, *the social ecological model*, and *student perceptions*.

The search was expanded to include *lived experiences*, *student perceptions of Title IX*, and *institutional trust*, as found in EBSCOhost and ProQuest, which provided more relevant qualitative findings. Additional federal documents were located through the U.S. Department of Education and the OCR. These sources offered regulatory

context, historical guidance, and updates relevant to TIX implementation across higher education institutions.

Additional search terms included: *Dear Colleague Letter, sexual misconduct, campus sexual violence, trauma-informed practices, student trust, intersectionality, racial and ethnic disparities, gender-based harm, mandatory reporting, organizational accountability, Social Ecological Model, and Organizational Justice Theory*. Reference lists from key studies such as Bedera (2023) and James and Hetzel-Riggin (2022) were scanned for additional relevant sources.

Additionally, I used Google Scholar alerts to track new publications on TIX implementation and equity. In areas where current research was limited, particularly related to the lived experiences of respondents, witnesses, and students at non-residential or community colleges, the review incorporated adjacent theoretical writings on organizational justice, campus climate, trauma-informed practices, and institutional accountability. I included dissertation research and policy reports only when these sources demonstrated methodological rigor and helped fill gaps in the peer-reviewed literature.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was grounded in two established frameworks: SEM and OJT. These frameworks supported analysis of how students interpreted their experiences with TIX processes across multiple levels of influence and dimensions of fairness. SEM provided a structure for examining how individual, relational, institutional, and societal factors shaped students' experiences, while OJT

offered a lens for evaluating perceptions of fairness in outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal interactions.

SEM, introduced by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and later adapted by McLeroy et al. (1988), conceptualizes human behavior and perception as the product of multiple interacting systems. SEM includes five levels of influence: individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and societal. Within TIX, SEM supports analysis of how campus culture, peer norms, institutional practices, and federal regulations interact with individual experiences to shape perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and accountability (Lamiotte, 2023).

Previous researchers have applied OJT to assess perceptions of fairness in student conduct processes and institutional grievance procedures, demonstrating that procedural transparency and respectful communication increase perceived legitimacy (Karakas & Sarigollu, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). I conducted in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences with TIX implementation. They analyzed the narratives to identify patterns, tensions, and institutional dynamics that shape perceptions of equity and justice. By engaging directly with participants, I aimed to capture the lived realities behind policy frameworks and compliance structures. However, few studies have combined both frameworks to explore student interpretations of TIX implementation.

OJT, introduced by Greenberg (1987), focused on how individuals evaluated fairness within organizational contexts. The theory included three dimensions: distributive justice, which addressed fairness in outcomes; procedural justice, which addressed fairness in decision-making processes; and interactional justice, which

addressed fairness in interpersonal communication. In TIX contexts, these dimensions aligned with students' assessments of transparency, consistency, respect, and equity during institutional procedures. This theoretical pairing directly aligns with the study's research questions:

RQ1, which examined how TIX policies are communicated, implemented, and enforced, aligns with OJT's procedural and interactional justice domains and the organizational and community levels of SEM.

RQ2, which explored how identity influences perceptions of fairness and access, aligns with OJT's distributive justice and the individual and interpersonal levels of SEM.

Together, SEM and OJT formed a blended framework that supported a multidimensional analysis of TIX implementation. The integration of these frameworks allowed the study to examine how structural conditions, interpersonal interactions, and procedural elements shaped students' perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and institutional accountability. This theoretical foundation aligned with the study's purpose and supported exploration of the research questions.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was centered on perceived fairness in TIX implementation as experienced by students in higher education settings. This framework drew on empirical literature identifying disparities in awareness of student rights, accessibility of support services, quality of communication from TIX offices, and

perceptions of procedural justice among diverse student populations (A. W. B. Lee & Hurtado, n.d.; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022).

This conceptual grounding established student perceptions as shaped by interrelated elements: individual factors (identity, prior experiences, knowledge of policy), relational influences (peer and faculty support), institutional structures (reporting processes, TIX office protocols, communication practices), and broader sociopolitical forces (federal policy changes, media narratives, cultural discourse). The integration of OJT and SEM in this framework supported examination of both structural and relational elements that shape perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and institutional accountability.

This conceptual grounding established logical relationships among key elements influencing student experiences and directly supported the development of the research design, including the semi-structured interview protocol, follow-up questioning strategies, and thematic data analysis guided by the SEM-OJT blended framework. The alignment of this framework with the research questions reinforced the study's focus on understanding how students construct meaning from their encounters with TIX processes and how these meanings reveal systemic opportunities for strengthening justice-oriented policy practices.

Social Ecological Model (SEM)

Introduced by Bronfenbrenner (1979), SEM explained how interactions across five levels, individually, interpersonal, organizational, community, and societal, affect perception and behavior. Within the context of TIX, SEM provided a structure for situating student experiences within broader systems of influence. These levels accounted

for how individual characteristics, peer and faculty relationships, institutional policies, campus culture, and federal mandates interacted to shape perceptions of policy implementation (Lamiotte, 2023).

Organizational Justice Theory in Higher Education Contexts

Introduced by Greenberg (1987) and refined by Colquitt et al. (2001), OJT categorized fairness perceptions into distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Within TIX processes, OJT framed the evaluation of investigation outcomes, the consistency and accessibility of procedures, and the quality of communication between institutional representatives and students' (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022).

Integration of SEM and OJT

The integration of the SEM-OJT blended framework offered a robust conceptual foundation for analyzing TIX implementation in higher education. SEM situated students' experiences within multilayered systems—ranging from individual and interpersonal levels to institutional and societal structures—highlighting how broader environmental and cultural contexts shape perceptions of equity and access (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McLeroy et al., 1988). This framework is useful for examining structural factors, such as campus climate and policy design, that shape students' engagement with TIX mechanisms.

Complementing this, OJT focused on how individuals evaluate fairness within organizational processes. It was distinguished between distributive justice (the fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (the fairness of processes), and interactional justice (the quality of interpersonal treatment), providing a nuanced lens for understanding students'

judgments about institutional legitimacy and accountability (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1987). When applied to TIX, OJT clarified how students assess the transparency, consistency, and respectfulness of institutional responses to sexual misconduct.

Together, SEM-OJT enabled a comprehensive analysis that considers contextual, systemic, and procedural dimensions of TIX enforcement. This dual-framework approach supports a deeper understanding of how diverse roles and identities within higher education influence perceptions of fairness, access, and institutional trust.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Methodologically, prior work tended to focus on policy analysis, surveys, and legal reviews, which support breadth and compliance mapping but limit depth in understanding participant meaning-making. Qualitative studies, such as interviews, offered contextual richness and nuance; however, they were often single-site, small-N, and varied in their explicitness about reflexivity and data saturation. This assessment supported the study's use of semi-structured interviews and explicit saturation criteria to balance depth with analytic rigor.

SEM

The following section reviewed and synthesized studies relevant to the key constructs and conceptual frameworks that guided this investigation. Specifically, it examined how researchers applied the SEM–OJT blended framework to analyze issues of fairness, accessibility, and accountability in the implementation of higher education policy. This synthesis examined the methodologies, conceptual strengths, and limitations

of prior research to demonstrate how multi-level and justice-oriented frameworks enhanced understanding of students' experiences with TIX. By integrating these perspectives, the review highlighted what was known, what remained contested, and the gaps that persisted in how students perceived and engaged with institutional policies designed to promote equity and compliance.

SEM: Individual Level

The individual level of SEM encompassed personal characteristics and lived experiences that influenced how students interact with TIX processes. These characteristics included demographic attributes such as age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, as well as a personal history of discrimination, harassment, or involvement in grievance procedures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McLeroy et al., 1988). Awareness of rights, familiarity with reporting procedures, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward equity further shape perceptions of fairness and accessibility in institutional settings (Lamiotte, 2023).

Within higher education, studies indicated that individual factors contributed to variation in willingness to report misconduct, trust in grievance procedures, and expectations regarding procedural fairness (A. W. B. Lee & Hurtado, n.d.; Powell & Powell, 2022). Students with prior negative experiences often anticipated bias or limited institutional support, whereas those knowledgeable about TIX protections were more likely to pursue formal reporting avenues (Chambers et al., 2021).

SEM: Interpersonal Level

The interpersonal level reflected the influence of close social relationships on student engagement with TIX processes. These relationships encompassed peer groups, mentorship networks, and informal support systems that influenced how students perceived and responded to institutional policies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Interpersonal contexts played a significant role in determining whether students perceived TIX procedures as credible and whether they chose to report misconduct.

Research consistently identified peer responses as critical determinants of reporting behavior and trust in institutional accountability. Supportive reactions from friends, roommates, or student leaders encouraged disclosure and strengthened confidence in institutional mechanisms, whereas unsupportive or dismissive reactions reinforced silence and disengagement (A. W. B. Lee & Hurtado, n.d.; Chambers et al., 2021). These relational dynamics demonstrated that perceptions of TIX were shaped not only by formal policy but also by the quality and character of everyday interactions within student communities.

SEM: Organizational Level

At the organizational level, the literature addressed the institutional structures, resources, and practices that regulated the implementation of TIX. This included the design of reporting systems, adjudication procedures, resource allocation for prevention and response, and student training (McLeroy et al., 1988). Institutional culture and leadership priorities also influenced the degree to which TIX policies were perceived as transparent, accessible, and equitable.

Empirical studies highlighted considerable variation across institutions in the consistency of adjudication processes, the presence of trauma-informed practices, and the availability of resources for student survivors (Bedera, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022.). Inadequate communication regarding rights and procedures was linked to decreased student trust and reduced willingness to engage with grievance mechanisms (Gómez, 2022; Powell & Powell, 2022). Limited transparency and insufficient training further complicated perceptions of legitimacy. At this level, institutional practices formed the immediate environment in which students experienced TIX, making organizational structures central to evaluating the effectiveness and equity of policy implementation.

SEM: Community Level

At the community level, the literature reflected the influence of broader campus culture, peer networks, and collective norms on students' perceptions of TIX and their engagement with related processes. This level extended beyond formal institutional procedures to encompass the university's climate, student organizations, and advocacy groups that shaped attitudes toward equity, accountability, and institutional trust (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McLeroy et al., 1988)

Campus climate research consistently demonstrated that community norms exerted considerable influence on student behavior. Environments that minimized or dismissed the seriousness of discrimination often discouraged reporting and reduced confidence in institutional mechanisms (Chambers et al., 2021; Perry, 2025). Conversely, visible leadership from student organizations and advocacy initiatives strengthened perceptions of legitimacy and encouraged engagement with TIX procedures (Grand River

Solutions, 2025). The community level was therefore essential for understanding the cultural context in which students interpreted institutional policies, as it reflected the shared attitudes and collective responses that either reinforced or undermined formal compliance mechanisms.

SEM: Societal Level

At the societal level, the literature situated TIX within the broader framework of federal policy, legal precedent, and cultural discourse. At this level, laws, regulations, court rulings, and public narratives established expectations for institutional compliance, which in turn influenced how students evaluated institutional responses (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McLeroy et al., 1988). Federal guidance, such as the Dear Colleague Letter, along with national debates on due process and equity, as well as widely publicized cases, contributed to shaping institutional practices and student perceptions (Perry, 2025; U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Research documented the effects of shifting federal guidance on institutional procedures, particularly regarding evidentiary standards, grievance timelines, and support for survivors (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). Broader cultural forces, including the #MeToo movement and public debates on gender equity, heightened awareness of sexual misconduct and increased scrutiny of higher-education responses (Bedera, 2023; Gómez, 2022). Litigation trends and media coverage further amplified student perceptions of fairness, accountability, and institutional legitimacy. The societal level emphasized that TIX could not be understood solely through individual or institutional analysis but had to

be situated within the broader sociopolitical and cultural environment that shapes both policy and practice.

OJT

While the SEM provided a multi-level framework for understanding how individual, relational, organizational, and societal factors influenced perceptions of TIX, it did not fully address how fairness was interpreted within institutional processes. To complement SEM's structural emphasis, OJT offered a lens for examining the fairness of outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal interactions that shaped students' engagement. Integrating OJT enabled a focused analysis of how students evaluated equity and legitimacy within TIX mechanisms, particularly in relation to the distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions of justice. The following section synthesized key studies on OJT in educational and organizational contexts, highlighting its relevance for understanding how institutional practices and communication shape perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and accountability in TIX implementation.

OJT: Distributive Justice

Distributive justice referred to the perceived fairness of outcomes or resource allocation within institutional processes. In the context of TIX, this included assessments of whether support services, remedies, and disciplinary actions were equitably distributed across student populations. Greenberg (1987) conceptualized distributive justice as evaluating outcome fairness relative to one's contributions or needs, and this principle was applied to educational settings where equity in access and resolution remained a central concern.

Karakas and Sarigollu (2023) emphasized that distributive justice had to be understood in relation to contextual expectations, cultural norms, and the perceived legitimacy of institutional decisions. Their synthesis of organizational justice research highlighted the importance of aligning resource distribution with students' needs and institutional transparency.

Within higher education, distributive justice is intersected with broader social justice concerns, particularly when institutional outcomes reflect or reproduce systemic inequities. Fraser's (2008) redistribution framework emphasized the need to address material disparities that disproportionately affected marginalized student populations. Applied to TIX, this perspective highlighted the importance of evaluating whether institutional responses—such as accommodations, investigations, and sanctions—were allocated in ways that promoted equity rather than reinforced privilege. Fraser (2023) further argued that redistributive justice should be assessed through the lived experiences of those most affected, suggesting that student perceptions offer critical insight into the effectiveness and fairness of policy implementation.

Recent theoretical developments underscore the importance of equity audits and policy responsiveness in educational institutions, particularly in relation to issues of race, gender, and intersecting identities. Castillo and Gillborn (2023) examined how institutional mechanisms often obscured inequitable outcomes under the guise of neutrality, calling for explicit attention to structural disparities in policy design and enforcement. In TIX contexts, this included evaluating whether remedies and resources were distributed in ways that accounted for differential vulnerability and access to

resources. Distributive justice, therefore, encompassed both what was provided and how equitably those provisions were experienced across diverse student identities.

OJT: Procedural Justice

Procedural justice referred to the fairness of the processes used to make decisions and implement policies. In the context of TIX, this included the consistency, transparency, and accessibility of investigative procedures, reporting mechanisms, and adjudication protocols. Greenberg (1987) defined procedural justice as the evaluation of formal processes based on criteria such as neutrality, consistency, and the opportunity for input, and these criteria served as benchmarks for assessing whether institutional procedures were applied equitably across cases and student populations.

Karakas and Sarigollu (2023) emphasized that organizational norms, cultural expectations, and the perceived legitimacy of institutional procedures influenced procedural fairness. Their synthesis of organizational justice research identified procedural integrity as a key factor associated with student trust and compliance. TIX procedures were subject to scrutiny based on how consistently they were applied, how accessible they were to diverse student groups, and whether they reflected culturally responsive practices. Evaluating procedural justice in this context required attention to both the formal design of policies and the conditions under which those policies were implemented.

Thus, procedural justice in TIX policy was not merely a technical concern; it was a relational and cultural one. Institutions needed to consider how procedural design and implementation affected perceptions of fairness across various identity dimensions,

including race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Ensuring procedural integrity required ongoing evaluation, student feedback, and a commitment to equity that extended beyond compliance. This dimension was particularly relevant to the study, which examined how students perceived TIX policies regarding fairness, accessibility, and legitimacy.

OJT: Interactional Justice

Interactional justice referred to the perceived fairness in the quality of interpersonal treatment and communication during the implementation of institutional procedures. This dimension encompassed two key components: interpersonal justice, which related to respect and dignity in interactions, and informational justice, which concerned the adequacy and honesty of explanations provided during decision-making processes (Greenberg, 1987).

In the context of TIX, interactional justice referred to the ways institutional representatives, such as TIX coordinators, investigators, and adjudicators, communicated with students. This included the clarity of information shared about rights, procedures, and outcomes, as well as the tone and respect conveyed during interviews, hearings, and support services. The quality of these interactions significantly influenced student perceptions of fairness, trust, and institutional legitimacy.

Karakas and Sarigollu (2023) emphasized that interactional justice was shaped by organizational norms and cultural expectations, particularly in environments characterized by power dynamics and vulnerability. Their synthesis of organizational justice literature highlighted the importance of consistent, respectful, and transparent communication in fostering perceptions of fairness. In TIX processes, this included

ensuring that students received timely updates, clear explanations of procedures, and opportunities to ask questions or express concerns.

Fraser's (2023) framework of participatory parity also applied to interactional justice by underscoring the need for inclusive and respectful engagement. This perspective supported the evaluation of whether institutional actors communicated in ways that affirmed the dignity and agency of all participants, especially those from historically marginalized groups. Interactional justice was compromised when communication was dismissive, opaque, or inconsistent, particularly in cases involving trauma or contested narratives.

Castillo and Gillborn (2023) argued that institutional communication practices often reflected dominant cultural norms, which could marginalize or silence certain voices. Their critique called for culturally responsive communication strategies that acknowledged diverse experiences and promoted equitable engagement. In TIX contexts, this included assessing whether institutional actors were trained in trauma-informed communication, whether informational materials were accessible across languages and literacy levels, and whether interpersonal interactions upheld principles of respect and inclusion.

Interactional justice, therefore, extended beyond procedural correctness to encompass the relational and communicative dimensions of policy implementation. Its presence or absence shaped students' willingness to engage with TIX processes, influenced perceptions of institutional credibility, and affected broader campus climate.

Evaluating interactional justice required attention to both the content and delivery of institutional communication, with implications for equity, transparency, and trust.

Together, the SEM–OJT blended framework established an integrated conceptual foundation for the study. SEM situated perceptions of TIX within multiple, interacting levels of influence—ranging from individual experiences and interpersonal relationships to institutional culture and broader sociopolitical contexts. OJT complemented this structure by providing a framework for examining perceptions of fairness across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions. The integration of these theories supported a multidimensional understanding of how students experienced and interpreted institutional accountability, accessibility, and equity within TIX processes. This combined framework informed the study’s research questions and guided the interpretation of findings, ensuring that both contextual and justice-based factors were considered in analyzing how students perceived fairness and legitimacy in the implementation of higher education policy.

A review of existing literature on TIX implementation revealed several methodological strengths and weaknesses across prior studies. Many researchers employed quantitative approaches, such as surveys and campus climate assessments, which allowed for large sample sizes and statistical generalization (Chambers et al., 2021; Perry, 2025). These studies offered valuable insights into prevalence, reporting behavior patterns, and trends in institutional compliance; however, they often lacked depth and did not capture how students interpreted their experiences with TIX processes.

Legal and policy analyses dominated much of the TIX literature, offering strong examinations of regulatory changes and institutional obligations (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). While methodologically rigorous in policy interpretation, these studies rarely included students' perspectives and therefore did not address how students made meaning of those procedures.

Qualitative studies that engaged directly with students through interviews or focus groups provided rich descriptive narratives and insight into individual meaning-making (Bedera, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). These studies were valuable in understanding procedural fairness, trauma-informed practices, and institutional trust. However, qualitative research in this area was often limited by small sample sizes, single-institution settings, a lack of theoretical grounding, and minimal inclusion of respondents or witnesses. Few studies explicitly addressed data saturation, researcher reflexivity, and the demographic diversity of participants.

These strengths and limitations supported the use of a phenomenological approach in the study. By conducting semi-structured interviews with students who directly engaged with the TIX process, the study addressed the lack of experiential research and centered meaning-making. The incorporation of SEM and OJT further strengthened the methodological approach by providing a structured lens to interpret perceptions across individual, relational, and institutional contexts.

TIX and Federal Policy Context

TIX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and subsequent federal guidance, such as the Dear Colleague Letter, significantly influenced institutional responses to

equity and misconduct. Research on TIX implementation in higher education consistently emphasized institutional compliance, procedural adherence, and reporting outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The 2011 Dear Colleague Letter (DCL), issued by the OCR, clarified institutional responsibilities in addressing sexual violence under TIX. The DCL emphasized a ‘preponderance of the evidence’ standard for adjudication, mandated prompt, and equitable grievance procedures, and encouraged proactive prevention efforts. While intended to strengthen protections for survivors, the letter also introduced procedural expectations that many institutions struggled to operationalize consistently, particularly regarding staffing, training, and due process.

Researchers assessed the impact of these mandates on campus climate, trust in institutional processes, and interpretations of fairness within higher-education settings. Recent academic publications documented variability in institutional responses and examined the challenges of balancing survivor support and respondent rights (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022; Penn State Law Review Forum, 2023). Additionally, disparities in access to TIX resources and procedural transparency remained central concerns, particularly among historically marginalized populations (CUPA-HR, 2024; Lamiotte, 2023).

Synthesis of Existing Research and Identification of Gaps

The existing body of literature offered foundational insights into the procedural and policy dimensions of TIX implementation but left significant experiential and intersectional gaps. Much of the research overlooked how students understood and experienced compliance and administrative mechanisms, instead emphasizing

institutional processes and reporting outcomes (Bedera, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). Studies rarely integrated racial, gendered, and identity-based variables into analyses of fairness and institutional trust (Castillo & Gillborn, 2023; Fraser, 2023). Similarly, procedural transparency, accessibility, and the influence of institutional leadership on equity outcomes remained underexplored (Gómez, 2022; Powell & Powell, 2022). These limitations supported the study's qualitative, phenomenological design, which centered on students' lived experiences. By examining these perspectives through SEM (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McLeroy et al., 1988) and OJT (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1987), the research addressed the absence of intersectional, justice-oriented inquiry in TIX scholarship.

Additional gaps were evident in the examination of institutional accountability mechanisms. Few studies critically assessed how oversight structures, internal review processes, or feedback systems contributed to the refinement or stagnation of TIX practices (Grand River Solutions, 2025). The role of campus leadership—including administrative priorities, resource allocation, and public messaging—also received limited scholarly attention, despite its influence on policy implementation and student engagement (Fraser, 2023; Perry, 2025). Moreover, the impact of external legal and political pressures, such as shifts in federal guidance, litigation trends, and public discourse, remained insufficiently explored (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). These factors shaped institutional responses and could either reinforce or undermine efforts toward equity.

Addressing these gaps was necessary for advancing a more comprehensive and practical approach to TIX policy. A research agenda that incorporated intersectional frameworks, evaluated procedural transparency, and interrogated institutional accountability enhanced understanding of how TIX was experienced and interpreted by students across campus communities. Such inquiry was essential for informing policy development, improving student engagement, and promoting justice within educational environments.

Alignment With Research Questions and Study Scope

The reviewed literature was highly relevant to the study's research questions, which examined individual student experiences with TIX policies and the influence of identity on perceptions and engagement. Existing methodological literature on compliance, procedural fairness, and equity provided foundational context for understanding how TIX mandates were communicated, implemented, and enforced within higher-education institutions (Chambers et al., 2021; Karakas & Sarigollu, 2023). These themes reinforced the study's focus on institutional justice by illustrating how policy design and procedural practice shaped student experiences. However, the literature also revealed notable gaps that aligned directly with the study's objectives.

Research focused on administrative processes and regulatory compliance, with limited attention to how students experienced TIX policies in practice (Bedera, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). The first research question—concerning the communication, implementation, and enforcement of TIX—required an understanding of procedural transparency and student access, areas that remained underexplored in prior

research (Gómez, 2022; Powell & Powell, 2022). The second question, which focused on the role of identity in shaping perceptions and willingness to engage, highlighted the need for intersectional analysis, a topic under-addressed in existing studies (Castillo & Gillborn, 2023; Fraser, 2023). By centering student experience and identity-based variation, the study responded to calls for more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to TIX evaluation. This alignment ensured that the research contributed to broader discourse on institutional equity and informed the development of policies that were not only compliant but also responsive to the diverse needs of student populations.

Although previous research primarily focused on institutional compliance, policy frameworks, and statistical outcomes of TIX processes, there was a notable lack of scholarship examining how students themselves perceived fairness, accessibility, and accountability within these systems, particularly within North Texas higher-education institutions. This absence of experiential and context-specific perspectives created a gap in understanding how procedural justice was encountered by those most directly affected by TIX policies.

To address this gap, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of students who engaged with TIX processes. This design was appropriate because it enabled the exploration of subjective meaning rather than the measurement of predetermined variables. Semi-structured interviews provided the depth necessary to understand how perceptions of fairness developed across individual, relational, and institutional levels. OJT offered a framework for interpreting perceptions of procedural, distributive, and interactional fairness, while SEM situated these

perceptions within broader environmental contexts. Chapter 3 described the methodology used to investigate this gap, including participant selection, data-collection procedures, and analytic strategies.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter presented an exhaustive review of the literature on TIX and federal policy in higher education. The review outlined the evolution of TIX, analyzed the implications of federal guidance such as the Dear Colleague Letter, and examined institutional responses to equity and misconduct (Perry, 2025; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Key challenges identified in the literature included inconsistent procedural application, limited trauma-informed practices, and inequities affecting marginalized student populations (Bedera, 2023; James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022). The synthesis revealed ongoing gaps in intersectional analysis and student-centered inquiry, which directly informed the study's research questions (Grand River Solutions, 2025).

The integration of the SEM–OJT blended framework formed a multidimensional theoretical foundation for examining fairness, transparency, and contextual dynamics in the implementation of TIX (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1987). While compliance frameworks dominated existing research, few studies evaluated how students perceived and navigated these processes. The findings from this study were positioned to extend the literature by providing empirical insights into equity, institutional trust, and procedural justice in higher education.

Although prior research examined TIX through compliance metrics, legal rulings, and institutional policy analysis, limited scholarship explored how students experienced

and interpreted TIX procedures in relation to fairness, accessibility, and identity-based factors. This gap demonstrated the need for a qualitative approach that prioritized depth, context, and participant voice. A phenomenological research design was appropriate because it enabled systematic examination of how students described and made meaning of their interactions with TIX structures. Chapter 3 outlined the methodological procedures used in this study, including participant selection, data-collection strategies, and analysis techniques aligned with phenomenological and SEM–OJT approaches.

The identified gaps in intersectional, student-centered accounts of fairness and access under TIX informed the methodological decisions detailed in Chapter 3, including purposeful sampling of students with closed TIX involvement, the use of a validated semi-structured interview protocol, and thematic analysis guided by the SEM–OJT blended framework.

The gap identified in the literature, specifically the absence of research that captures how students make meaning of TIX processes through their lived experiences, necessitated a methodological approach that emphasized depth, contextual understanding, and participant voice. Existing research provided policy analysis and compliance-based evaluations, but it did not adequately address perceptions of procedural fairness, accessibility, and institutional accountability from the student perspective. Chapter 3 addresses this gap by detailing the qualitative phenomenological design of the study, including participant selection procedures, recruitment strategies, instrumentation, data-collection methods, and analysis procedures. These methodological choices were

intentionally aligned with the research questions and the theoretical foundation established in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine how North Texas students' lived experiences with TIX shaped their perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and implementation within higher education institutions. TIX, enacted in 1972, prohibited sex-based discrimination within educational institutions receiving federal funding (Title IX and Sex Discrimination, n.d.-b). Over time, the statute's scope expanded to include protections against sexual harassment, sexual assault, and gender-based inequities. Prior research indicated that institutional responses frequently emphasized compliance and risk mitigation rather than experiential dimensions of policy engagement (Gómez, 2022; Powell & Powell, 2022).

This chapter described the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. All procedures were implemented in alignment with qualitative research standards and Walden University IRB requirements.

Research Design and Rationale

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine how North Texas higher education students perceived and experienced TIX policies. Phenomenology focused on describing lived experiences and the meanings participants attributed to those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This approach was appropriate for

examining how institutional policies were implemented and understood by individuals directly engaged in TIX processes.

The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do North Texas higher education students perceive the implementation of TIX policies within their educational environments?

RQ2: In what ways have North Texas higher education students' race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status shaped their perceptions of TIX policies?

A phenomenological approach enabled in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, capturing nuanced interpretations of procedural fairness, communication, and institutional accountability. This design prioritized depth of understanding over generalizability and aligned with the study's focus on lived experience. Although TIX was enacted to prohibit sex-based discrimination in federally funded educational settings, previous research indicated that compliance-driven approaches did not adequately address the experiential aspects of policy participation (Gómez, 2022; Powell & Powell, 2022). Existing research has primarily focused on procedural frameworks and legal mandates, leaving a knowledge gap about how identity-related factors shape individuals' perceptions and decisions to engage with TIX processes (Bedera, 2023).

Phenomenology was the most suitable research tradition for this study because it enabled an in-depth exploration of how students personally experienced and interpreted TIX policies. Unlike grounded theory, which aimed to generate new theories, or case study research, which focused on institutional systems, phenomenology centered on the meanings individuals assigned to a shared phenomenon.

Forensic Psychology Context for the Research Design

The methodological approach used in this study was grounded in forensic psychology, which examined how legal policies and institutional procedures influenced human behavior and subjective experience. TIX functioned as a federally regulated quasi-legal system within higher education, and students' interactions with it provided a relevant context for forensic psychological inquiry. The study's focus on perceptions of fairness, procedural justice, trauma-responsiveness, and access to institutional mechanisms aligned with forensic psychology's emphasis on evaluating the psychological effects of legal processes. By using a phenomenological design to document students' lived experiences, the study contributed to forensic psychology by generating insight into how legal mandates were implemented in educational settings and how these processes shaped individuals' interpretations of justice, safety, and institutional accountability.

Role of the Researcher

I served as an observer-participant, facilitating interviews with open-ended questions while maintaining a neutral and professional stance. This role enabled meaningful engagement with participants while ensuring that their voices remained central to the study. I implemented ethical safeguards to protect participants and ensure the integrity of the study. I disclosed potential conflicts of interest, maintained confidentiality, and ensured that participation or withdrawal did not affect academic or professional standing.

To manage potential biases, I engaged in continuous reflexive practice, including bracketing, journaling, memo-writing, and peer debriefing. These strategies supported transparency and minimized the influence of potential assumptions on data interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Reflexive practices were employed throughout the study to consciously set aside prior knowledge and expectations, ensuring that data interpretation remained grounded in participants' accounts. In addition to reflexivity and bracketing, I maintained a reflective journal to document evolving thoughts, emotional responses, and analytic decisions during the research process. Memo-writing was used throughout data analysis to track emerging themes, coding decisions, and interpretive shifts. These techniques supported transparency and helped monitor the influence of personal assumptions. Peer debriefing was incorporated through consultation with experienced qualitative researchers who reviewed interpretations to ensure that findings remained grounded in participants' narratives rather than influenced by researcher bias.

All participant data were anonymized and stored securely in accordance with Walden's IRB protocols. I removed all identifying information from the transcripts, reports, and restricted access to the raw data. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. No incentives were offered, and participation was entirely voluntary. By adhering to these ethical principles and drawing on extensive professional expertise, I ensured that the study was conducted with integrity, cultural sensitivity, and respect for the diverse experiences of students and faculty engaging with TIX policies.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The study used purposive sampling to identify participants who met the criteria for addressing the research questions. This sampling approach aligned with phenomenological methodology, which requires participants with direct experience of the phenomenon under examination (Moustakas, 1994). The target population consisted of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at higher-education institutions in North Texas who had been involved in a fully resolved TIX case. This criterion ensured that participants could reflect on their experiences without influencing ongoing institutional proceedings.

Eligibility criteria included: (a) being at least 18 years of age; (b) current enrollment at a North Texas higher-education institution; (c) participation in a TIX process, formally or informally, as a complainant, respondent, or witness within the past four academic years (2021–2025); and (d) involvement in a TIX case that had reached a final resolution, with or without findings, at the time of recruitment. Eligibility was established through pre-screening questions that verified enrollment, TIX participation, and case resolution.

The study included eight participants, consistent with phenomenological research standards (Creswell, 2013). This sample size was sufficient to achieve data saturation, defined as the point at which no new themes or insights emerged. Additional participants would have been recruited if saturation had not been reached. Purposeful sampling was

appropriate because it ensured the inclusion of individuals with direct experience navigating TIX processes, which was central to answering the research questions.

The primary data-collection instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview protocol containing open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' descriptions of their experiences with TIX reporting, investigations, communication, procedural fairness, accessibility, and institutional transparency. Questions also addressed how identity factors—such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability—shaped perceptions of TIX processes. To ensure content validity, the protocol was reviewed by two TIX professionals and one qualitative research faculty member within the Walden community. Their feedback informed revisions to wording, clarity, and alignment with the research questions.

A pilot interview was conducted to evaluate the clarity, flow, and overall effectiveness of the interview protocol. One individual who met the general characteristics of the study population but was not included in the main sample completed the pilot. The pilot interview followed the same procedures as the primary interviews and lasted approximately 45 minutes. With the participant's permission, the session was audio-recorded to assess pacing, question clarity, and interview structure. Immediately afterward, the participant provided verbal feedback regarding question clarity, topic sequencing, comfort level, and any items perceived as confusing or overly sensitive.

Revisions were made based on this feedback to improve the wording, sequencing, transitions, and overall comprehensibility of the questions. Responses from the pilot

interview were not transcribed, coded, or included in the study's data analysis; instead, they were used solely to refine the interview protocol.

Document analysis served as a secondary data source. Publicly available institutional documents, such as annual security reports, TIX policies, equity and compliance reports, and federal guidance documents, were analyzed to contextualize participant accounts and triangulate findings. These documents, issued by institutions or government agencies, provided reliable information about institutional procedures and regulatory requirements, thereby strengthening the study's credibility.

Recruitment began only after IRB approval was obtained. Participants were recruited using public-facing, non-institutional methods to prevent coercion and preserve participant autonomy. The recruitment materials included a digital flyer and an email invitation. The flyer included a brief description of the study's purpose, eligibility criteria, the voluntary and confidential nature of participation, the approximate time required, the absence of compensation, and my university email address for questions or interest.

The digital flyer was distributed in public, non-institutional locations near North Texas university campuses, including coffee shops, community centers, bookstores, apartment common areas, and other public venues frequented by college students. Flyers were posted only with written permission from business owners or location managers. Recruitment materials were not displayed on university-owned property, student housing operated by universities, academic buildings, student unions, libraries, or institutional

bulletin boards, as additional IRB approvals from participating institutions were not sought.

Snowball sampling was also used. Students who met eligibility requirements and completed an interview were invited to share the flyer with peers who might also meet the inclusion criteria. Participants were not asked to disclose names, contact information, or details about others' involvement in TIX processes. Only the flyer was shared, and potential participants contacted me directly if they wished to participate.

Interested individuals either emailed me using the contact information provided on the flyer or accessed a secure digital screening form via a link included in the flyer. The screening form required potential participants to self-report (a) their age (18 or older), (b) current enrollment in a North Texas higher-education institution, (c) the type of TIX involvement (complainant, respondent, or witness), and (d) confirmation that their TIX case was fully closed. Individuals who met all eligibility criteria received an email from my university account containing an electronic informed consent form. This email also included instructions for scheduling a Zoom interview and restated the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality protections, and the option to withdraw at any time.

Instrumentation

The study used a semi-structured interview protocol developed by me to explore students' perceptions and experiences with TIX policies. The protocol contained open-ended questions aligned with the research questions and was piloted for clarity and relevance prior to data collection. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant

consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The use of semi-structured interviews aligned with phenomenological methodology, which emphasizes eliciting participants' lived experiences while allowing me to probe for depth and meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

In addition to interview data, the study incorporated document analysis of publicly available institutional records, including annual security reports, campus climate surveys, and other materials mandated under the Clery Act and TIX regulations (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). These documents provided context on institutional practices and policy implementation. Document analysis was used to triangulate findings and enhance the credibility and depth of the analysis.

The interview protocol, audio recordings, and document analysis procedures were sufficient to address the research questions. The protocol elicited detailed accounts of participants' experiences with TIX communication, implementation, and enforcement, as well as the influence of identity factors such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status. Document analysis provided institutional context and supported theme development. Together, these instruments ensured methodological rigor and enabled a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon under study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment Procedures

The target population for this study consisted of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in North Texas higher-education institutions who had engaged, either formally or informally, in the TIX process as a complainant, respondent, or witness

within the past 4 academic years (2021–2025). This timeframe ensured that participants' experiences reflected recent interpretations of TIX procedures under current federal regulations and institutional policy practices. To ensure ethical integrity and minimize risk, all TIX cases were required to be fully closed prior to participation. Recruitment began only after approval was obtained from Walden University's IRB.

Participants were identified through public-facing, non-institutional recruitment strategies. These strategies included posting digital flyers on public bulletin boards, sharing information in social media groups for North Texas college students (with administrator permission), and posting in online forums that permitted research recruitment. Snowball sampling was also used, allowing eligible participants to share the flyer with peers who might meet the inclusion criteria. Recruitment materials provided a concise overview of the study, outlined eligibility requirements, and included my university email address to support voluntary participation.

Recruitment materials included a digital flyer and an email invitation outlining the study's purpose and objectives. The recruitment message outlined eligibility criteria, emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, and explained confidentiality protections. Interested individuals accessed a pre-screening form that I shared directly via email. The screening form required potential participants to self-report (a) being at least 18 years old, (b) current enrollment in a North Texas higher-education institution, and (c) involvement in a fully closed TIX case as a complainant, respondent, or witness.

Individuals who met all eligibility criteria received an email from my university account containing an electronic informed consent form. This email also restated the

voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality protection, and the option to withdraw at any time. Participants did not receive compensation but were informed that their perspectives could contribute to a deeper understanding of TIX policy implementation and equity practices in higher education.

Procedures for Participation

Following IRB approval, eligible participants were recruited through public-facing channels and invited to complete a brief pre-screening questionnaire shared via email. The pre-screening questionnaire confirmed eligibility based on age, enrollment status, TIX experience, and case closure. Individuals who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate were contacted through my official university email to schedule a confidential interview.

Prior to the interview, participants received an electronic informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and confidentiality safeguards. After providing consent, participants engaged in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant permission. Recordings were transcribed verbatim and stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to me. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the consent form, reminded participants of their right to withdraw at any time, and confirmed permission to audio-record the session. Participants were also informed that pseudonyms would be assigned and that all identifying information would be removed during transcription.

During the interview, I used a phenomenological interview protocol designed to explore participants' lived experiences with TIX policy implementation, including perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and institutional transparency. Open-ended questions allowed participants to describe their experiences and follow-up prompts were used within the same session to obtain additional clarity when needed. No follow-up interviews were conducted beyond the initial session. If clarification or verification of responses was required, participants were contacted once via email for member checking to confirm the accuracy of transcript summaries.

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and provided with my contact information in case they wished to add or withdraw information. Participants who opted in received a summary of their interview responses for review, consistent with member-checking procedures.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews guided by the approved interview protocol (Appendix B). Each interview was conducted via Zoom or Microsoft Teams and audio-recorded using a password-protected digital device. Recordings were automatically transcribed verbatim for analysis. I reviewed each transcript for accuracy and made corrections as needed to ensure that verbal content, pauses, and contextual cues were faithfully captured.

Following each interview, field notes documented nonverbal cues, researcher reflections, and contextual observations. A reflective journal was also maintained throughout the data-collection period to document methodological decisions, procedural

adjustments, and emergent insights. These materials contributed to the audit trail and supported the study's trustworthiness.

All digital files, including audio recordings, transcripts, field notes, and journal entries, were stored on an encrypted, password-protected drive accessible only to me. In accordance with Walden University's data-retention policy, all materials will be retained for five years following completion of the study. After this period, electronic files will be permanently deleted, and paper documents will be shredded to ensure the confidentiality of all records.

Data Analysis Plan

A theory-driven (deductive) coding approach was used, informed by OJT (Greenberg, 1987) and SEM (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). OJT guided the identification of themes related to procedural fairness, transparency, and perceived institutional accountability in the implementation of TIX policies. This framework supported the analysis of students' perceptions of how universities communicated, enforced, and evaluated procedures for addressing sexual misconduct, with attention to consistency, neutrality, and ethical handling. Emergent themes also included trust in institutional actors, satisfaction with policy execution, and perceptions of equitable treatment across campus constituencies.

SEM served as a complementary framework, enabling analysis across multiple layers of influence, including individual beliefs and experiences, interpersonal interactions, institutional structures, and broader sociocultural norms. Coding reflected how these nested systems shaped understanding and engagement with TIX processes,

particularly in relation to race, gender identity, campus climate, and role-based positionality. Together, these frameworks supported a robust thematic analysis that connected micro-level experiences with macro-level systemic patterns.

Each data source, including interview transcripts and institutional documents, was linked directly to the study's research questions, which examined perceptions of TIX policy implementation, procedural fairness, and identity-based engagement. Data analysis followed Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological procedures, including horizontalization, identification of significant statements, clustering of meaning units, and the development of textural and structural descriptions based on participant accounts.

Responses that did not align with emerging patterns or dominant themes were identified as discrepant cases. These responses were examined to determine whether they reflected alternative interpretations, contextual differences, or limitations in the developing thematic structure. When discrepant cases demonstrated meaningful variation, themes were adjusted, expanded, or clarified to reflect this complexity. When a discrepant response represented an isolated experience, it was still documented in the findings to ensure transparency. This process aligned with qualitative research standards by grounding conclusions in the full range of participant data rather than solely majority perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

All data were collected, stored, and managed in accordance with Walden University's guidelines for student research. This included secure digital storage, anonymization of transcripts, and restricted access to raw data. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and identifying information was removed prior to analysis.

Data-management procedures adhered to the standards outlined by Walden's Research Center to ensure ethical compliance and confidentiality.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research reflects the rigor and integrity of the study's design, data collection, and analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, this study implemented multiple strategies aligned with established qualitative standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews and publicly available institutional documents such as university TIX policies, training materials, and procedural reports. This process supported cross-verification of evidence and provided a more comprehensive understanding of participant perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Patton, 2015). Member checking was conducted by providing participants with copies of their interview transcripts and allowing them to clarify, correct, or expand their statements to ensure accurate representation of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Peer debriefing also occurred through consultation with an academic colleague who was not directly involved in the study but had expertise in qualitative research or TIX-related topics. These individuals reviewed preliminary themes, questioned underlying assumptions, and assessed the logic of interpretations to strengthen analytic rigor (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Collectively, these strategies supported credibility and

internal validity by ensuring accuracy, transparency, and interpretive depth in the analysis.

Transferability

Transferability was supported through the inclusion of thick, contextual descriptions of participants, institutional settings, and TIX-related experiences. Descriptions included participant demographics (e.g., race or ethnicity, gender identity, academic classification, and disability status), as well as their role in TIX processes as complainants, respondents, witnesses, or mandated reporters. Institutional characteristics—such as size, type of institution, TIX office structure, and geographic location within Texas—were also documented. Relevant procedural information, including reporting pathways, adjudication timelines, and access to support resources, was described when applicable. Providing these specific contextual details enabled readers to determine whether the findings may be applicable to other higher-education settings with similar structures, populations, or TIX environments (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability

Dependability was supported through systematic documentation of all methodological procedures, coding processes, and analytical decisions. An audit trail was maintained to document the sequence of research activities, including recruitment procedures, development of the interview protocol, IRB approvals, data-collection steps, transcription procedures, and secure data-storage practices. Documentation also included coding frameworks, revisions to codes, theme development, reflexive notes, and the

rationale for analytical choices (Billups, 2021). All materials—including codebooks, memos, procedural notes, and versions of coding iterations—were organized and stored in a secure password-protected research folder to facilitate external review if requested. This level of transparency supported procedural consistency and enabled other researchers to understand how the study was conducted from its initial design through its final interpretation.

Confirmability

Confirmability was supported through reflexive journaling and analytic memo writing that documented my perspectives, assumptions, and decision-making throughout the study. Reflexive journal entries included observations on personal beliefs, professional experiences related to TIX, and potential influences on data interpretation. Analytic memos recorded how codes were developed, how themes emerged, and why specific analytical decisions were made during the coding and interpretation phases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). These materials were preserved as part of the audit trail to allow external reviewers to examine the decision-making process. This approach ensured that interpretations were grounded in participant data, institutional documents, and observable patterns rather than researcher expectations or biases. Together, reflexive journaling, memoing, and traceable documentation contributed to methodological transparency and reinforced the study's neutrality and ethical integrity.

Ethical Procedures

Walden University's IRB provided ethical oversight for this study. No recruitment, data collection, or interaction with potential participants occurred until

formal IRB approval was granted. The IRB application included all recruitment materials, informed consent forms, interview protocols, and any required letters of cooperation. Institutional permission was not required because recruitment occurred exclusively through public, non-institutional channels. Participant Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Participants' real names, institutional affiliations, and any identifying information did not appear in transcripts, field notes, or reports. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (e.g., PA, PB), and institutions were described generically (e.g., "a public university in Texas.")

All audio recordings, transcripts, notes, demographic forms, and consent documents were stored on a password-protected, encrypted external drive accessible only to me. Physical materials were kept in a locked cabinet in my private home office. In compliance with Walden University policy, all data will be retained for five years following study completion and then destroyed securely. Electronic files will be permanently deleted, and physical documents will be shredded.

Because I knew participants' identities during recruitment and interviews, the data was not anonymous; however, confidentiality was maintained through secure handling and the removal of identifying details during transcription and reporting.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to data collection. Participants received a digital consent form outlining the study's purpose, eligibility requirements, the voluntary nature of participation, the estimated time commitment, potential risks (e.g.,

recalling sensitive experiences), potential benefits, confidentiality protections, data-storage procedures, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To indicate consent, participants selected the “I consent” option electronically. No individual participated in an interview without completing the consent form. A copy of the signed consent form was provided to each participant for their records.

Recruitment

Recruitment began only after IRB approval was granted. Participants were recruited through publicly accessible digital flyers and announcements posted on social media platforms commonly used by Texas college students (e.g., university-affiliated forums and student groups), with administrators' or moderators' permission. Recruitment materials included a brief description of the study's purpose, eligibility criteria, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and my university email for inquiries.

Only individuals who met the inclusion criteria were invited to proceed. Individuals who had direct involvement with my workplace or were under my administrative authority were excluded to avoid conflicts of interest or perceived coercion.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio-recorded using platform-enabled recording tools, with permission documented in the consent form. Video recording was not used to protect participant privacy.

Before each interview began, participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to decline any question, pause the interview, or withdraw entirely. If a participant became distressed when discussing sensitive topics, the interview was paused, and the participant was offered the option to stop or continue. I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim, and all identifying information was removed during transcription. Transcripts were uploaded into a secure, password-protected document for coding and analysis. No follow-up interviews were conducted; however, if clarification was necessary, I contacted participants by email.

Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the methodological approach used to examine the lived experiences of North Texas higher-education students regarding the implementation of TIX policy. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how students interpreted and experienced TIX processes, particularly in relation to fairness, accessibility, and institutional accountability. The chapter detailed the rationale for selecting phenomenology as the most appropriate design for capturing participants' lived realities and the meanings they attributed to those experiences.

The chapter also discussed my role, including professional background, relevant expertise, and strategies for maintaining neutrality and ethical integrity throughout the research process. Reflexivity, bracketing, and peer debriefing were identified as essential tools for minimizing bias and ensuring that participants' voices remained central to the analysis. Ethical procedures—including informed consent, confidentiality protections,

and secure data storage—were outlined in accordance with Walden University’s IRB standards and federal research ethics guidelines.

The methodology section described the purposeful sampling strategy, emphasizing the importance of recruiting students with firsthand experience in TIX proceedings. This approach aligned with the study’s phenomenological intent to privilege depth of understanding over breadth of representation. Data-collection methods, comprising semi-structured interviews and document analysis, were designed to capture both individual and institutional perspectives, enabling triangulation and enhancing the study’s credibility.

The data-analysis plan incorporated a theory-driven coding process informed by SEM and OJT. These frameworks guided the interpretation of participants’ narratives, linking individual perceptions of procedural fairness, distributive outcomes, and interpersonal treatment to broader ecological systems, including institutional structures, social norms, and community expectations. This integration of theoretical and empirical analysis supported a holistic understanding of how students’ intersecting identities and lived experiences influenced their engagement with TIX processes. Issues of trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were addressed through triangulation, thick description, audit trails, and reflexive documentation. These measures ensured that the findings derived from participants’ narratives were presented with rigor, transparency, and authenticity. Overall, Chapter 3 established the foundation for the empirical components of this study by detailing the

methodological strategies that ensured ethical rigor, analytical precision, and theoretical alignment.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the data collection and analysis procedures described in this chapter. The chapter begins with a summary of participant demographics and institutional contexts, followed by a presentation of the emergent themes organized according to the guiding frameworks of SEM and OJT. Direct participant quotations illustrate the lived experiences and perceptions central to this study. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of how these findings address the research questions and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of TIX implementation within North Texas higher-education institutions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how students at higher education institutions in North Texas perceived the implementation of TIX policies and how their intersecting identities shaped those experiences. This study sought to understand how students in higher education interpreted and engaged with TIX policies based on their lived experiences and intersecting identities. Chapter 4 described the themes that emerged from participants' accounts and demonstrated how these themes aligned with the study's research questions and theoretical frameworks. The results reflected students' perceptions of accessibility, clarity, fairness, and identity-based experiences within TIX procedures, as well as the ecological and organizational factors that shaped their engagement with institutional processes.

The chapter begins with a description of the setting to contextualize the institutional environments in which the study took place. This is followed by a summary of participant demographics, an overview of the data collection procedures, and an explanation of the data analysis process. Evidence of trustworthiness is then presented to demonstrate how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were maintained. The remainder of the chapter presents the thematic results organized by research questions, with each theme supported by descriptive evidence drawn from participants' accounts and interpreted through the lenses of the SEM and OJT. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major results and a transition to Chapter 5.

The following research questions guided the analysis of the interview data:

RQ1: How do North Texas higher education students perceive the implementation of TIX policies within their educational environments?

This question explored participants' perceptions of how these policies were applied in practice within their institutions.

RQ2: In what ways have North Texas higher education students' race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status shaped their perceptions of TIX policies?

This question examined how intersecting identities influenced participants' experiences and interpretations of TIX policy implementation.

By addressing these questions, the study sought to understand how students in higher education interpreted and engaged with TIX policies based on their lived experiences and intersecting identities. The analysis identified patterns in perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and institutional responsiveness, with particular attention to students from historically marginalized groups.

Guided by the blended SEM–OJT framework, the findings reflect how structural, procedural, and relational conditions influenced students' trust in TIX mechanisms, shaped reporting behaviors, and informed their broader perceptions of equity and justice within campus environments. The results provided a more detailed understanding of TIX implementation and indicated areas where policy adjustments could better reflect the diverse realities of student populations. This qualitative inquiry employed a phenomenological approach to examine participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Setting

The study was conducted across higher education institutions in the North Texas region, including community colleges, public universities, and private universities of varying sizes. These institutions served diverse student populations and operated within the broader sociopolitical context of post-2020 TIX regulatory changes. Although the specific campuses were not identified to protect confidentiality, the settings shared several characteristics relevant to the study.

The institutions represented in the sample enrolled students from a wide range of racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Many campuses maintained dedicated TIX offices responsible for receiving reports, conducting investigations, and coordinating supportive measures. These offices operated within institutional structures that emphasized compliance with federal regulations while balancing student needs, campus safety, and administrative priorities. The visibility and accessibility of TIX resources varied across campuses, with some institutions offering centralized reporting portals and others relying on distributed systems involving student affairs, campus police, or academic departments.

This contextual backdrop shaped participants' experiences with TIX processes and their perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and institutional accountability. Understanding the setting was essential for interpreting the findings presented later in the chapter. No personal or organizational conditions were identified that would have influenced participants' experiences at the time of the study. Participants did not report any recent institutional disruptions, such as leadership changes, budget reductions, staffing

shortages, or campus-wide crises, which might have shaped their engagement with TIX processes. As a result, the findings reflect participants' experiences within the typical operational context of their institutions.

Demographics

Data were collected from eight participants through individual semi-structured interviews. These individuals were enrolled at higher education institutions across the North Texas region and had participated in TIX cases between 2021 and 2025.

Demographic information was collected to provide contextual understanding of the sample and to support interpretation of the findings. All demographic characteristics were reported in aggregate form to protect participant confidentiality.

Participants ranged in age from early adulthood to mid-twenties. The sample included students who identified as women, men, and nonbinary. Racial and ethnic identities included Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/a, White, Asian, and multiracial backgrounds. Institutional representation included community colleges and public universities. Participants were enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs across a range of academic disciplines. This diversity of demographic characteristics and institutional contexts provided a broad foundation for understanding how students experienced TIX processes across North Texas campuses.

Data Collection

Data were collected from eight participants through semi-structured interviews. All interviews were conducted via Zoom or Microsoft Teams at times selected by participants to support comfort and accessibility. Each interview lasted approximately 45

minutes, although the duration varied based on the depth of participants' experiences with TIX processes. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant permission and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Each transcript was reviewed prior to analysis to confirm that the recorded content reflected participants' intended meanings. Participants were invited to review their transcripts as part of the member-checking process, which provided an opportunity to verify the accuracy of their statements and clarify any portions requiring refinement. This step enhanced the data's credibility. All digital files, including audio recordings and transcripts, were stored in password-protected folders accessible only to me. These procedures aligned with the confidentiality and data-security protocols described in Chapter 3. No deviations from the approved data collection procedures occurred.

Participants were recruited through a combination of social media outreach and snowball sampling. Recruitment materials invited individuals who had participated in a TIX process between 2021 and 2025 to contact me directly. Snowball sampling enabled participants to share study information with others who met the eligibility criteria, thereby facilitating the identification of individuals with relevant experiences across multiple North Texas institutions.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological procedures, which provided a structured approach for identifying patterns of meaning across participants' lived experiences. The analysis began with horizontalization, during which significant statements related to participants' perceptions of TIX processes were

identified and given equal weight. These statements were then clustered into meaning units that reflected shared experiences across interviews.

Following initial coding, the meaning units were organized into broader categories that captured recurring patterns related to procedural clarity, interpersonal interactions, institutional responsiveness, and identity-based differences in treatment and access. These categories were refined through iterative review to ensure that they accurately represented participants' descriptions and remained grounded in the data.

The next stage of analysis involved developing textural and structural descriptions. Textural descriptions summarized participants' experiences, while structural descriptions explained how contextual, relational, and institutional factors shaped those experiences. These descriptions were synthesized to generate composite themes that represented the essence of participants' experiences with TIX processes.

Throughout the analysis, the blended SEM-OJT framework guided interpretation by linking individual experiences to broader ecological and organizational factors. This approach supported a multidimensional understanding of how fairness, accessibility, and identity-based influences shaped students' engagement with TIX systems. The analytic process was iterative and reflexive, incorporating ongoing memoing and peer debriefing to enhance credibility and ensure alignment with phenomenological principles.

Discrepant Cases

No discrepant or nonconforming cases emerged during the analysis. All participant accounts aligned with the themes identified through first- and second-cycle coding, and no data contradicted the overall patterns presented in this chapter. While

participants emphasized different aspects of their experiences, these variations reflected differences in individual contexts rather than inconsistencies that challenged the thematic structure. As a result, all data were incorporated into the final themes without the need to exclude or categorize cases separately.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through multiple strategies aligned with established qualitative research standards. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria- credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability- guided the procedures used to ensure rigor throughout the study.

Credibility

Credibility was supported through member checking, which allowed participants to review their interview transcripts and verify the accuracy of their statements. This process ensured that interpretations remained aligned with participants' intended meanings rather than with my assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing also contributed to credibility by providing opportunities to discuss coding decisions and emerging patterns with a scholarly colleague, thereby reducing the influence of individual bias, and strengthening the interpretive process.

Transferability

Transferability was addressed using detailed, thick descriptions that enabled readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings. Consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidance, the study included comprehensive descriptions of the institutional environments in which participants encountered TIX processes, including

the types of institutions represented, the structure of TIX offices, and the broader sociopolitical context surrounding TIX implementation in North Texas. Descriptions of participant characteristics were also provided, including demographic information related to race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status. These details offered insight into the diversity of experiences represented in the sample and helped readers determine whether similar patterns might emerge in comparable higher education environments.

Contextual factors that shaped participants' experiences, such as campus culture, visibility of TIX resources, and institutional communication practices, were described to further support transferability. These descriptions allowed readers to evaluate whether the conditions present in the study aligned with those in other institutions and whether the findings might be relevant to settings with similar organizational structures or student populations. By providing this level of contextual detail, the study offered sufficient information for readers to make informed judgments about the potential applicability of the findings beyond the immediate research context, as recommended in qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability

Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of analytic procedures, including coding notes, analytic memos, and an audit trail. These materials recorded how codes were developed, refined, and organized into themes, as recommended by Saldana (2016). The audit trail also documented procedural decisions, changes in theme development, and reflections on methodological choices, allowing

external reviewers to trace the analytic process and assess its consistency over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

Confirmability was supported through reflexive journaling, which documented my assumptions, positionality, and decision-making processes throughout data collection and analysis. This practice helped ensure that interpretations were grounded in participant accounts rather than researcher bias (Moustakas, 1994). The combination of reflexive notes, audit trail materials, and member-checked transcripts provided multiple sources of evidence demonstrating that the results were derived from the data and not shaped by personal expectations or preferences.

Results

The results were organized according to the study's two research questions and reflected the patterns that emerged from participants' descriptions of their experiences with TIX processes. The analysis produced several themes that captured how students perceived the implementation of TIX policies and how their intersecting identities shaped those perceptions. Each theme was supported by descriptive evidence drawn from participant accounts and developed through first- and second-cycle coding procedures (Saldana, 2016). The presentation of results focused on describing what participants reported, without interpretation or evaluation, in alignment with qualitative reporting standards and Walden University guidelines.

To support transparency and demonstrate the breadth of endorsement across participants, the results are presented in narrative form and accompanied by tables that

summarize the thematic patterns. See Table 1 for a summary of themes related to participants' perceptions of TIX implementation. See Table 2 for themes illustrating how intersecting identities shaped participants' experiences with TIX processes. See Table 3 for the participant-by-theme matrix that displays endorsement patterns across Participants A–H. These tables provide visual representations of theme distribution and cross-case alignment, illustrating the consistency and variation of findings across the eight participants.

Research Question 1

RQ1: How do North Texas higher education students perceive the implementation of TIX policies within their educational environments?

Participants described challenges related to accessibility, clarity, communication, and institutional support. Table 1 summarizes the themes and subthemes that emerged.

Theme: Confusion and Procedural Complexity

Participants described difficulty understanding TIX steps, timelines, and expectations. Participant C stated, "I kept rereading the emails, but I still didn't understand what step came next. It felt like the process was written for lawyers, not students." Participant A similarly explained, "The paperwork was overwhelming. I had to ask the staff to explain almost every form because none of it made sense to me."

Theme: Variability in Institutional Support

Participants reported inconsistent support across campuses. Participant E noted, "One person in the office was really supportive, but after that, no one followed up. I felt

like I was on my own again.” Participant F added, “It depended on who you talked to.

Some staff were helpful, and others acted like I was bothering them.”

Table 1

Findings for Research Question 1: Accessibility, Clarity, and Overall Experiences

| Theme | Sub-theme | Description |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Confusion and Procedural Complexity | Unclear communication; Overwhelming documentation; Reliance on staff for interpretation | Participants described difficulty understanding Title IX steps, timelines, and expectations. Written materials were perceived as technical or confusing, leading students to rely on staff for clarification. |
| Variability in Institutional Support | Supportive staff; Inconsistent follow-through; Perceived institutional priorities | Participants reported inconsistent support across campuses. Some experienced responsive staff, while others described delays, limited updates, or perceived institutional protection of reputation. |

Note: Themes reflect patterns identified through first- and second-cycle coding of participant interviews.

Research Question 2

RQ2: In what ways have North Texas higher education students’ race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status shaped their perceptions of TIX policies?

Participants described identity-based disparities in treatment, access to resources, and perceptions of fairness. Table 2 summarizes these themes.

Theme: Differential Treatment Across Identity Groups

Participants described identity-based disparities in how they were treated during TIX processes. Participant B stated, “I felt like they did not believe me because of my race. The questions they asked made me feel like I had to prove I was telling the truth.” Participant G added, “As a nonbinary student, I kept getting misgendered during the process. It made me feel invisible.”

Theme: Unequal Access to Resources and Support

Participants also reported barriers to accessing supportive measures and accommodations. Participant E explained, “I asked for accommodations, but they said they weren’t sure how to handle disability-related needs in a TIX case.” Participant H noted, “There was not anyone who understood my cultural background. I did not feel like the support was meant for someone like me.”

Table 2

Findings for Research Question 2: Identity-Based Influences on Perceptions of Title IX Policies

| Theme | Sub-theme | Description |
|---|--|---|
| Differential Treatment Across Identity Groups | Race-based credibility concerns; 2SLGBTQIA+ misgendering or erasure; Disability-related barriers | Participants described disparities in treatment during TIX processes based on race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status |
| Unequal Access to Resources and Support | Accommodation barriers; Lack of culturally responsive support; Institutional bias | Participants reported identity-related barriers that limited access to supportive measures, accommodations, and equitable treatment. These barriers shaped trust in TIX protections and willingness to engage with institutional processes. |

Note. Themes reflect patterns identified through first- and second-cycle coding.

Narrative Summary of Theme Endorsement Across Participants A–H

Across the eight participants, emergent themes appeared at varying frequencies, reflecting both shared and individualized experiences with TIX processes. Mixed Perceptions of Outcome Fairness was endorsed by several participants who described differing views regarding the appropriateness of sanctions, perceived leniency, or the belief that certain groups received preferential treatment. For example, one participant

stated, “They thought offenders got off too easily, like the consequences didn’t match what happened” (Participant C). Another participant noted, “It felt like certain students were protected more than others” (Participant A).

Procedural Justice Concerns were among the most frequently endorsed themes, with many participants describing uncertainty about how decisions were made, extended timelines, and limited updates during the investigative process. Participant F explained, “I never knew what stage my case was in. Weeks would go by with no updates.” Similarly, Participant D shared, “The timeline kept changing, and no one could tell me why.”

Interactional Justice and Treatment also appeared prominently, as participants described how the tone, responsiveness, and interpersonal approach of TIX personnel shaped their comfort and trust in the process. Participant G stated, “The way they talked to me made me feel like I was an inconvenience.” In contrast, Participant C described a more positive interaction: “When someone finally listened without rushing me, that was the first time I felt taken seriously.”

Multiple participants endorsed identity-related themes. Identity-Shaped Experiences were reflected in accounts describing how prior discrimination, cultural norms, or concerns about credibility influenced willingness to report or engage with TIX procedures. Participant B explained, “I felt like they didn’t believe me because of my race.” Participant H added, “In my culture, you don’t talk about these things, so reporting felt uncomfortable from the start.”

Peer and Faculty Influence was endorsed by participants who relied on trusted individuals or campus organizations when deciding whether to seek support or file a

report. Participant A shared, “I only reported because a professor I trusted encouraged me.” Participant H noted, “My friends helped me figure out what to do because I had no idea where to start.”

Campus Culture and Climate emerged in descriptions of institutional priorities, the visibility of resources, or a perceived culture of silence that shaped expectations of fairness and safety. Participant B stated, “People do not talk about TIX here. It is like an unspoken rule.” Participant G added, “The school cares more about its reputation than about students feeling safe.”

Finally, Sociopolitical and Media Influence was endorsed by participants who cited national conversations, political tensions, or high-profile cases as factors shaping their expectations of institutional responses. Participant F explained, “Seeing cases in the news made me nervous. If those people were not believed, why would I be?” Participant D added, “The political climate made everything feel more intense.”

Collectively, these patterns demonstrated that participants’ experiences were shaped by both procedural elements and broader ecological and sociocultural contexts. Table 3 summarizes these themes.

Table 3*Participant Endorsement of Emergent Themes (A-H)*

| Themes | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mixed Perceptions of Outcome Fairness | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Procedural Justice Concerns | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Interactional Justice and Treatment | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Identity-Shaped Treatment | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Peer & Faculty Influence | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Campus Culture and Climate | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sociopolitical and Media Influence | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |

Note. Checkmarks indicate participants who endorsed each theme during interviews. Participant identifiers (A–H) are pseudonyms used to protect confidentiality.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of semi-structured interviews with eight students enrolled at higher education institutions across North Texas who participated in TIX processes between 2021 and 2025. The chapter began with a description of the institutional settings to contextualize the environments in which participants encountered TIX procedures. Demographic information was summarized to illustrate the sample's diversity and to support understanding of how participants' backgrounds shaped their experiences. The data collection and analysis procedures were outlined, including the use of Saldana's (2016) first- and second-cycle coding methods to identify patterns across interviews. Evidence of trustworthiness was addressed through strategies aligned with

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The results were organized according to the study's two research questions. For RQ1, participants described how TIX policies were implemented within their educational environments. Their accounts highlighted challenges in accessibility, clarity, communication, and institutional responsiveness. Participants described difficulty understanding procedural steps, interpreting written materials, and navigating documentation requirements. Several participants reported inconsistent follow-through from institutional personnel, limited updates during investigations, and uncertainty about how decisions were made. These patterns illustrated how institutional structures, communication practices, and procedural complexity influenced students' perceptions of TIX implementation and shaped their expectations of fairness and support.

For RQ2, participants described how their intersecting identities, including race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status, influenced their experiences with TIX processes. Participants reported identity-based disparities in treatment, differences in perceived credibility, and unequal access to supportive measures. Several participants described experiences of cultural insensitivity or limited accommodation, which shaped their trust in institutional responses. Others described how identity influenced the seriousness with which their concerns were addressed or the barriers they encountered when seeking assistance. Participants also referenced broader sociopolitical and media narratives that shaped expectations of institutional responses and influenced their willingness to engage with TIX procedures. These accounts demonstrated how

identity-related factors intersected with institutional practices to shape perceptions of fairness, safety, and accessibility.

Across both research questions, the results indicated that students' perceptions of TIX processes were shaped by procedural clarity, interpersonal interactions, institutional responsiveness, and identity-based experiences. Participants described navigating systems that were often complex, inconsistently communicated, or influenced by broader cultural and sociopolitical contexts. The findings highlighted the importance of clear communication, equitable treatment, and culturally responsive support in fostering trust in TIX processes.

Chapter 5 will interpret these results in relation to the study's conceptual frameworks, discuss implications for policy and practice, and offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides an interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4 and situates them within the study's conceptual frameworks and the existing literature. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how students at higher education institutions in North Texas perceived the implementation of TIX policies and how their intersecting identities shaped those experiences. Semi-structured interviews with eight participants yielded themes reflecting procedural, interpersonal, cultural, and sociopolitical influences on students' engagement with TIX processes.

Chapter 4 presented the results organized by the two research questions, highlighting themes related to perceptions of outcome fairness, procedural justice concerns, interactional treatment, identity-shaped experiences, peer and faculty influence, campus culture, and broader sociopolitical and media contexts. These findings illustrated how students navigated TIX systems and how institutional practices, communication patterns, and identity-related factors shaped their understanding of fairness, safety, and support.

Chapter 5 builds on these results by interpreting the findings in relation to the study's conceptual frameworks and the existing body of research on TIX implementation, procedural justice, and identity-based disparities in higher education. This chapter also discusses the study's limitations, outlines implications for policy and practice, and offers recommendations for future research. The goal of this chapter was to provide a deeper

understanding of the significance of the findings and to identify opportunities for strengthening institutional responses to TIX concerns.

Interpretation of the Findings

The interpretation of the findings draws on the conceptual frameworks guiding the study and situates the results within the broader literature on TIX implementation, procedural justice, and identity-based experiences in higher education. The themes identified in Chapter 4 suggested that students' perceptions of TIX processes were shaped by procedural clarity, interpersonal interactions, institutional responsiveness, and sociocultural influences. When interpreted through the lenses of SEM and OJT perspectives, the findings indicated that students' sense of agency, trust, and safety were influenced by both structural and relational factors. The interpretation highlights how these findings align with, extend, or diverge from existing research and how they contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding TIX engagement in higher education settings.

Theme 1 Interpretation: Confusion and Procedural Complexity

Participants consistently described TIX procedures as confusing, opaque, and difficult to navigate. This aligns with recent research showing that students often struggle to understand reporting options, evidentiary standards, and the sequence of investigative steps (Princeton Legal Journal, 2025b). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that confusion was not merely a matter of insufficient information but reflected deeper structural inconsistencies across institutional levels. In SEM, this theme pertains to the institutional level, where policy formulation, communication

methodologies, and administrative frameworks influence students' capacity to access and comprehend procedural information.

From an OJT perspective, confusion undermined procedural justice, as students perceived processes as unpredictable and inconsistently applied. This aligns with Gómez (2022), who found that unclear, culturally incompetent, and inconsistently communicated institutional responses contributed to students' mistrust in the university's reporting systems. Participants in this study described feeling overwhelmed by shifting timelines, unclear expectations, and inconsistent communication from TIX personnel. These experiences indicated that procedural complexity impedes equitable participation, especially for students with limited prior exposure to legal or administrative frameworks.

This theme also extends recent scholarship by showing how procedural confusion interacts with emotional and relational factors. Students described feeling intimidated, anxious, or discouraged during the process, indicating that procedural complexity has both cognitive and affective consequences. These findings highlighted the need for institutions to simplify communication, standardize processes, and provide clearer guidance to ensure that students can meaningfully engage with TIX systems.

Theme 2 Interpretation: Variability in Institutional Support

Participants reported inconsistent levels of support from TIX staff, faculty, and campus resources. Some described compassionate, responsive interactions, while others experienced dismissiveness, delays, or a lack of follow-through. This variability reflects broader institutional challenges documented in recent studies, which show that support

services often differ across campuses and even within the same institution (A. W. B. Lee & Hurtado, n.d.; Mancini & Koon-Magnin, 2023).

Within SEM, this theme reflected the interpersonal and organizational levels, where relationships with staff, advocates, and administrators shape students' perceptions of safety and fairness. Participants' accounts suggest that institutional culture and staff training significantly influence the quality of support students receive. When support was inconsistent, students interpreted this as a sign of institutional indifference or incompetence, which eroded trust.

From an OJT perspective, variability in support directly relates to interactional justice, which concerns the quality of interpersonal treatment. Students who experienced respectful, empathetic communication reported greater trust in the process, even when outcomes were not favorable. Conversely, students who encountered dismissive or unresponsive staff perceived the entire system as unfair. These findings reinforce recent research indicating that interpersonal treatment is a critical determinant of perceived fairness in TIX processes (James & Hetzel-Riggin, 2022).

This theme extends the literature by showing how variability in support interacts with procedural complexity. Students who received strong interpersonal support were better able to navigate confusing procedures, while those who lacked support experienced greater frustration and disengagement. This suggests that interpersonal treatment may buffer or exacerbate structural weaknesses in TIX systems.

Theme 3 Interpretation: Identity-Based Differences in Treatment and Access

Participants described how race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status shaped their experiences with TIX processes. Students from historically marginalized groups reported feeling less believed, less supported, or more scrutinized during investigations. These results are consistent with recent studies that have recorded identity-based disparities in reporting experiences and institutional responses (Aloisi, 2023; Wallace et al., 2024).

Within SEM, this theme reflects the individual, interpersonal, and societal levels, where identity markers intersect with social norms, institutional culture, and broader sociopolitical narratives. Participants' accounts suggested that TIX processes are not experienced uniformly; instead, they are filtered through students' social identities and the biases, implicit or explicit, embedded within institutional systems.

From an OJT perspective, identity-based disparities undermined all three dimensions of justice. Participants described unequal outcomes that appeared to be influenced by their social identities, reflecting concerns related to distributive justice. They also recounted instances in which procedural rules seemed to be applied inconsistently across groups, suggesting that the fairness of the investigative process varied depending on who was involved. In addition, students described differential treatment in communication and interpersonal interactions, indicating gaps in interactional justice that shaped how respected, believed, or supported they felt throughout the TIX process.

These findings extend the literature by illustrating how identity-based disparities manifest not only in outcomes but also in the micro-interactions and procedural steps that shape the TIX experience. They also highlight the importance of culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices, as students from marginalized groups often require additional support to navigate systems historically shaped by inequitable power dynamics.

Synthesis Across Themes

The themes collectively revealed a TIX system that students experience as structurally complex, relationally inconsistent, and differentially accessible based on their identities. SEM and OJT together illuminate how fairness perceptions are shaped by interactions across multiple levels—individual, relational, institutional, and societal. The findings suggest that improving TIX processes requires not only procedural reforms but also cultural and relational shifts that prioritize transparency, equity, and student-centered practices.

Findings Compared to the Literature

The findings of this study both confirm and extend the existing literature on TIX implementation, procedural justice, and identity-based disparities in higher education. Consistent with prior research, participants described confusion about procedural steps, unclear communication, and difficulty navigating documentation requirements. These experiences aligned with studies indicating that students often perceive TIX procedures as complex, legalistic, and inaccessible (Bondestram & Lundqvist, 2022). The theme of procedural justice concerns—particularly related to inconsistent updates, unclear

timelines, and uncertainty about decision-making—also reflects earlier findings that institutional processes frequently lack transparency and contribute to diminished trust in campus reporting systems (Gomez, 2022).

Further, the results confirm research showing that interpersonal interactions with TIX personnel significantly shape students' perceptions of fairness and support. Prior studies emphasized that respectful communication, responsiveness, and trauma-informed engagement were critical to fostering trust and reducing barriers to reporting. This aligned with Gómez (2022), who found that unclear, culturally incompetent, and inconsistently communicated institutional responses weakened students' trust in campus reporting systems and discouraged engagement with Title IX processes. Participants' descriptions of feeling dismissed, rushed, or misunderstood echo these findings and highlighted the continued need for relational competence within TIX offices.

Identity-based disparities identified in this study also align with existing scholarship documenting that students from marginalized racial, gender, and disability groups often experience differential treatment, credibility challenges, or culturally insensitive responses during TIX processes (Wallace et al., 2024). Participants' accounts of misgendering, racialized questioning, and limited accommodation support extend this literature by illustrating how intersecting identities shape not only perceptions of fairness but also willingness to engage with institutional systems.

At the same time, the results provided new insights by highlighting the influence of peer networks, faculty relationships, and broader sociopolitical narratives on students' decisions to report and their expectations of institutional responses. While prior research

has acknowledged the influence of campus climate, this study extended that work by demonstrating how national media coverage and political discourse surrounding TX shape students' interpretations of institutional legitimacy and safety. These findings indicated that broader ecological and sociocultural contexts, rather than solely institutional procedures, shape TIX engagement.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations influenced the scope, depth, and interpretation of the study's findings. First, the study included eight participants from higher education institutions in North Texas. Although this sample size aligns with phenomenological research standards, it inherently limits the breadth of perspectives represented. Students who elected to participate may differ in meaningful ways from those who declined or were unable to participate, particularly regarding comfort discussing TIX experiences, perceptions of institutional trust, or willingness to revisit emotionally charged events. As a result, the findings reflect the experiences of a specific subset of students and may not capture the full range of perspectives among individuals who engage with TIX processes.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through semi-structured interviews. Self-report introduced the possibility of recall bias, selective disclosure, or emotional filtering, especially given the sensitive and sometimes traumatic nature of TIX experiences. Participants may have unintentionally omitted details, emphasize certain aspects over others, or interpret past events through their current emotional or cognitive lens. While phenomenology values subjective meaning-making, these factors nonetheless shape the accuracy and completeness of participants' accounts.

Third, institutional variability represents an important contextual limitation. Although all participants attended higher education institutions in the same geographic region, the structure, staffing, training, and communication practices of TIX offices varied across campuses. These institutional differences may have influenced participants' experiences in ways that were not fully observable within the study's design. Because the study did not include document analysis or direct observation of institutional procedures, it was not possible to systematically compare how specific institutional practices contributed to differences in student perceptions.

Fourth, my positionality may have influenced data interpretation. Despite efforts to bracket assumptions and engage in reflexive practice, complete neutrality is neither possible nor expected in qualitative inquiry. My professional background, understanding of TIX policy, and commitment to equity-centered practice may have shaped the interpretation of participant narratives. Strategies such as reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and adherence to Moustakas's phenomenological procedures were used to mitigate these influences, but they cannot eliminate them entirely.

Finally, the study's transferability is limited by its regional focus and the sociopolitical climate surrounding TIX during the data collection period. National debates, regulatory changes, and media coverage may have shaped participants' perceptions in ways that differ from those of students in other regions or time periods. Although thick description was used to support transferability, readers should consider contextual differences when applying these findings to other institutional settings.

These limitations do not detract from the study's value; instead, they provide crucial context for understanding the findings' scope and pinpoint avenues for future research that can enhance and expand upon this work.

Recommendations

The findings support several recommendations to improve TIX processes, enhance institutional responsiveness, and guide future research. These recommendations are grounded in the themes identified in Chapter 4 and reflect the structural, relational, and sociocultural factors that shape students' experiences with TIX procedures.

Recommendations for Practice

Institutions may benefit from strengthening communication practices by providing clearer, more consistent explanations of procedural steps, timelines, and decision-making criteria. Participants frequently described confusion about the sequence of events, expectations, and the rationale behind institutional decisions. Developing standardized communication templates, providing written summaries after key meetings, and ensuring updates are delivered at predictable intervals may reduce uncertainty and enhance perceptions of procedural fairness.

Training for TIX personnel should incorporate culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices to address identity-based disparities in treatment and perceived credibility. Participants' accounts of misgendering, racialized questioning, and inconsistent accommodation support the importance of training that explicitly addresses implicit bias, intersectionality, and the unique barriers faced by marginalized student populations. Institutions may also consider implementing ongoing professional

development rather than one-time training modules to ensure that staff remain current with evolving best practices and regulatory expectations.

Institutions may further strengthen support pathways by expanding partnerships with trusted faculty, peer networks, and student organizations. Participants described relying on informal networks for emotional support, information, and guidance during the TIX process. Formalizing these networks—through faculty advocate programs, peer support initiatives, or collaborations with cultural and identity-based student groups—may increase students’ willingness to engage with institutional systems and improve their sense of safety and agency.

Additionally, institutions may consider conducting periodic equity audits of their TIX processes to identify disparities in reporting patterns, outcomes, and student experiences. These audits can help institutions proactively address inequities and ensure that TIX procedures align with principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could deepen understanding of TIX experiences by including larger and more diverse samples across multiple geographic regions. Expanding beyond North Texas would allow researchers to examine how institutional context, state policy environments, and regional sociopolitical climates shape students’ perceptions of fairness and accessibility. Comparative studies across institutional types—such as community colleges, private universities, and minority-serving institutions—may also reveal important differences in TIX implementation and student experiences.

Additional research exploring students' experiences with intersecting marginalized identities is needed to further illuminate disparities in access, treatment, and outcomes. Studies focusing on students who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+, students with disabilities, or students from racially minoritized backgrounds may provide deeper insight into how identity-based factors influence perceptions of institutional legitimacy and safety. Longitudinal research could also examine how students' perceptions of TIX evolve over time, particularly in response to regulatory changes, campus climate shifts, or national discourse surrounding sexual misconduct and gender equity.

Finally, future research may benefit from incorporating mixed-methods designs that combine qualitative insights with quantitative measures of procedural justice, institutional trust, or reporting behaviors. Such approaches could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence engagement with TIX processes and support the development of evidence-based interventions that promote equity, transparency, and student well-being.

Implications

The study's findings have implications for policy, practice, theory, and positive social change within higher education. At the institutional level, the results highlight the need for transparent, equitable, and culturally responsive TIX procedures that foster trust and reduce barriers to reporting. Students' experiences demonstrated that procedural clarity, consistent communication, and timely updates are central to perceptions of fairness. Policy implications, therefore, include establishing institution-wide communication standards, developing clear documentation protocols, and implementing

mechanisms to monitor procedural fairness across cases. These measures may help reduce confusion, increase transparency, and ensure that students understand their rights and responsibilities throughout the TIX process.

The findings also underscore the need for improved training for TIX personnel. Participants' accounts of misgendering, racialized questioning, and inconsistent accommodation support indicated that staff training must extend beyond regulatory compliance to include culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and identity-affirming practices. Institutions may benefit from integrating ongoing professional development that addresses implicit bias, intersectionality, and the unique challenges faced by marginalized student populations. Such training can strengthen interactional justice by improving the quality of interpersonal communication and fostering a more supportive environment for students navigating TIX procedures.

From a broader practice perspective, the study highlights the value of strengthening campus support networks. Participants frequently relied on trusted faculty, peer groups, and student organizations for emotional support and guidance. These findings suggest that institutions should consider formalizing partnerships with these networks to expand access to information, advocacy, and culturally relevant support. Creating faculty advocate programs, peer-led support initiatives, or collaborations with identity-based student groups may enhance students' sense of agency and safety when engaging with institutional systems.

The findings also carry important implications for positive social change. Students' willingness to engage with TIX systems was shaped not only by institutional

procedures but also by campus culture, peer norms, and broader sociopolitical narratives surrounding sexual misconduct and gender equity. This indicates that efforts to improve TIX processes must extend beyond administrative reforms to include campus-wide initiatives that promote inclusivity, respect, and accountability. By fostering environments where students feel heard, believed, and supported, institutions can create safer, more equitable educational spaces. Strengthening institutional responsiveness and promoting inclusive practices may help shift campus norms toward greater transparency, empathy, and justice.

Finally, the study contributed to theoretical and methodological discussions within forensic psychology and higher education research. The integration of SEM and OJT demonstrated the value of examining TIX experiences across multiple levels of influence—individual, relational, institutional, and societal. The findings suggested that perceptions of fairness and trust are shaped by the interplay of structural and relational factors, reinforcing the need for multidimensional frameworks in future research. By centering student voices and highlighting the complexities of navigating TIX systems, the study advanced understanding of how institutional policies intersect with lived experiences and offered a foundation for continued inquiry into equity-centered approaches to campus safety and accountability.

Methodologically, this study demonstrated the value of a phenomenological approach for capturing the depth and complexity of students' lived experiences with TIX processes. The use of semi-structured interviews and iterative coding allowed for the identification of nuanced patterns related to procedural clarity, interpersonal treatment,

and identity-based disparities. The findings also reinforce the importance of incorporating diverse participant identities to illuminate variations in institutional engagement that may be overlooked in more homogenous samples.

Theoretically, the results support SEM and OJT perspectives by illustrating how structural factors (such as communication practices and procedural design) and relational factors (such as staff interactions and cultural responsiveness) jointly influence students' sense of agency, trust, and safety. The study contributes to these frameworks by showing how sociopolitical narratives and campus culture operate as additional layers that shape empowerment and engagement within TIX systems.

Conclusion

This study explored how students perceived the implementation of TIX processes and how their intersecting identities shaped those experiences. The findings demonstrated that students' engagement with TIX systems was influenced by procedural clarity, interpersonal interactions, institutional culture, and broader sociopolitical contexts. Together, these factors revealed that navigating TIX procedures is not a linear or purely administrative experience but a complex, emotionally charged process shaped by structural conditions and relational dynamics. Although the study had limitations related to sample size, regional focus, and reliance on self-reported data, it provided meaningful insight into the lived realities of students who engaged with TIX systems and highlighted the nuanced ways in which fairness, trust, and safety are constructed within higher education environments.

The findings underscored the importance of transparent communication, culturally responsive practices, and consistent institutional support in shaping students' perceptions of legitimacy and equity. They also illustrated how identity-based disparities continue to influence students' experiences, reinforcing the need for institutions to critically examine how TIX policies and practices operate across diverse student populations. By situating these findings within the broader literature and the SEM–OJT framework, the study contributed to a deeper understanding of the multilevel factors shaping TIX engagement and offered a foundation for strengthening institutional practices.

This research contributed to the growing body of scholarship on equity, justice, and safety in higher education and provides actionable guidance to improve the effectiveness and fairness of TIX processes. By centering student voices and highlighting areas for institutional growth, the study supported ongoing efforts to create campus environments where all students feel protected, respected, and empowered to seek support. Continued research and practice improvements informed by these findings can help advance more transparent, equitable, and student-centered approaches to TIX implementation across higher education.

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YOUR VOICE MATTERS

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH TITLE IX

Are you a student at a North Texas college or university?

We are conducting a research study on student perspectives of Title IX policies.

Your insights can help promote more equitable practices in higher education.

ELIGIBILITY

- Undergraduate or graduate student at a North Texas institution
- At least 18 years old
- Experience with a resolved Title IX case (2021–2025)

PURPOSE

- To explore fairness in Title IX processes
- To examine the impact of race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability
- To identify ways to improve equity and transparency

PARTICIPATION

- 30-minute confidential interviews
- Voluntary participation



Appendix B: Research Questions

Opening Questions: Building Rapport

1. Before we get into Title IX specifically, can you tell me a little about your overall experience as a student at your campus, and what stands out to you most about being part of your university community?
2. What aspects of your campus life make you feel most connected or supported as a student?

Broad Perception

3. Can you tell me about your experiences with Title IX policies or procedures on your campus?
4. When you think about Title IX at your university, what comes to mind first?
5. How would you describe the overall accessibility and clarity of Title IX processes?

Organizational Justice Theory

6. How fair do you feel the outcomes of Title IX cases are? Can you share an example?
7. What has your experience been with the processes used in Title IX investigations?
8. How would you describe the way people were treated during Title IX proceedings (respect, empathy, communication)?

Social Ecological Model

9. How have your personal experiences or identity shaped the way you view Title IX?
10. How do relationships with peers, faculty, or staff influence your engagement with Title IX policies?
11. What role does campus culture play in shaping your trust in Title IX?
12. How do broader social or political conversations about Title IX affect your perceptions?

Intersectional & Identity

13. How do you feel your race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability status has influenced your experience with Title IX?
14. Do you think students from different backgrounds experience Title IX differently? If so, how?

15. Can you share any examples of when you felt your identity impacted your access to Title IX protections or resources?

Experiential & Trust-Building

16. What factors make you feel more or less willing to report misconduct under Title IX?
17. Have you ever felt supported or betrayed by your institution in relation to Title IX?
18. What experiences have shaped your trust (or mistrust) in Title IX processes?

Policy & Practice

19. If you could change one thing about how Title IX is implemented on your campus, what would it be?
20. What would equity, transparency, and justice look like in Title IX practices from your perspective?
21. How well do you think Title IX policy language matches the reality of student experiences?

Closing Questions

22. Looking back on everything we have discussed, what feels most important for others to understand about student experiences with Title IX?
23. Is there anything you wish you had been asked today that would help share your perspective more fully?
24. What advice would you give to university leaders who want to improve Title IX practices for students?
25. If you could leave one message for future students navigating Title IX, what would it be?
26. How do you hope your participation in this study will contribute to change or awareness around Title IX?