

Introduction

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Despite decades of attention to the problem of gender based violence (GBV) on campus, in 2019, it is still so prevalent as to warrant this special issue of *Violence Against Women*. As part of a wider resurgence of feminist activism, the decades of attention given to the issue in the U.S. and Canada, and more recently in the UK, other European countries, it is timely to consider whether current efforts to address GBV on campus are adequate. Should we turn attention to attempts to *transform* rather than simply *adapt*, university environments? If so, how might that work best be accomplished? This special issue seeks to explore those questions and reveal the challenges posed by efforts at transformation, as well as the successes.

Recent attention to GBV has been amplified due to recent exposure of violent and abusive behaviour by men across numerous institutional settings, including the Catholic church, the entertainment industry, and both amateur and professional sport. These abuses have been particularly pernicious within post-secondary education. High profile examples such as the prosecution of Michigan State/U.S. Gymnastics Team Doctor Larry Nassar and the recent indictment of Michigan State President Lou Anna Simon, the conviction of Stanford student, Brock Turner and of lecturer Lee Salter in the UK, and the recent multi-million dollar lawsuit brought by survivors against Dartmouth College remind us that even as awareness of GBV has grown enormously, it continues to happen, seemingly unabated.

Fortunately, visible and committed resistance to this state of affairs is evident, particularly in the realm of social media. High profile reporting of these incidents has given rise to and reflects a resurgence of energy and anger about GBV represented by global social media initiatives to expose it (e.g. #metoo, #himtoo, #TimesUp, #BalanceTonPorc, #NiUnaMenos, #YoTambien, #MetooIndia, #EverydaySexism, #IBelieveHer and #HollaBack). The offences exposed in these campaigns, and many others like them, have opened up conversations about

sexual relations, consent and male entitlement to women's bodies which are taking place globally, in social media, and in mainstream media.

Although many scholars, activists and practitioners in the U.S. and Canada have argued for more radical approaches, efforts to address GBV on campus have too often focused on changing institutional policy by ramping up legalistic responses, and applying programmatic interventions (such as bystander frameworks) that appear to have fallen victim to neoliberal commodification. Prioritizing systems of auditing, monitoring, and data-collecting in anti-sexual violence work signals the emergence of what Marine and Nicolazzo (2017) refer to as "compliance culture." Many of these interventions also ignore the experiential distinctions among various campus populations, and fail to account for or address the higher rates of violence committed against Women of Color and LGBTQ survivors (Cantor, et al., 2015; Harris & Linder, 2017). There has also been a tendency to focus on sexual violence to the exclusion of other forms of GBV, such as intimate partner abuse. While many of these interventions appear to be promising, very few currently adopted by universities are backed up by evidence of measurable change (NASPA, 2018). Arguably, these developments restrict the scope for radical transformational change to gender relations and do little to counteract the normalization of GBV. While efforts to eradicate GBV from universities or societies might seem ambitious, or even naive, a failure to set ambitious targets can lead to a focus on 'managing' violence rather than boldly imagining and working towards GBV-free worlds.

The work of transformation, while elusive in current practice, is nonetheless crucial to center. This special issue attempts to begin filling the gap in scholarship about attempts to achieve cultural transformation in universities. Anti-rape campus activism in the U.S. began in the 1970s, and was punctuated by student protests, sit-ins, and the establishment of the first

campus based rape crisis centers (Heldman, Ackerman, & Breckenridge-Jackson, 2018). In the UK, although students and academic staff have been active against sexual violence for decades, it is only since the recent upsurge in global feminist activism that efforts to challenge university-based sexual violence have gained ground. Arguably, the strategies employed by activists across these varying national settings are typified by a demand for culture change. Furthermore, these approaches are consciously attentive to centering the agency and dignity of survivors, a practice that ensures that such movements are and will remain survivor-led (Rentschler, 2018).

As we prepared the call for proposals for this volume, we felt it was important to ask: What 'counts' as transformation? The manuscripts in this special issue indicate that transformation includes activism by students, staff, and faculty aimed at long-term progressive changes in cultures, norms and behaviours and/or the systemic inequalities underlying problematic cultures. Transformational change thus has both cultural and structural ramifications. To achieve and maintain transformation, problematic binaries of 'before' and 'after' must be transcended; Instead, transformative activism demands effort that is ongoing and iterative, rather than reduced to a single intervention. Transformation appears to be rarely a result of sudden change (although sudden events can provide the catalyst for transformation), and is more likely to result from persistent application of effort which is refined, developed, and extended through generations of the student cohort. The work is vigilantly attended to, and constantly appraised for effectiveness and adapted to respond to the cultural context, the emerging cultural zeitgeist and current events. Transformation, as evidenced in the articles in this volume, often comes out of struggle and conflict, and through a reckoning with how poorly universities have responded to struggles around GBV. It is catalyzed by anger and a sense of injustice, as activists strive to rectify these failings.

To be effective, such activism must critically engage with wider issues of inequality in institutions; transformational work is embedded in the realities of institutional power structures typified by masculinist, neoliberal institutions (Aleman, 2014). However, it does not stop at critique but rather builds on critique to “work the space of neoliberalism” (Laurie & Bondi, 2006) and identify scope for transformative potential in local contexts. While the manuscripts in this issue are each specifically place-bound, our intention is to provide readers with material to imagine possibilities of transformation that could be applied to their own communities, as we move away from generic, ‘one size fits all’ programmes. The work of the authors in this special issue instead opens a conversation about transformation as translational practice, whereby blueprints are offered to be adapted to different varying contexts.

This special issue examines a selection of contemporary transformative efforts to end GBV and GBV-condoning cultures on campus. It includes a variety of transformative responses to GBV practiced by students, faculty and staff, and in some cases, collaborations of all three. The articles engage critically with institutional policies and practices in terms of how they contribute to, or inhibit, cultural transformation. Cultures that promote GBV, often described as rape culture (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2014), lad culture (Phipps, 2018), and laddism (Lewis, Marine, & Kenney, 2016), are actively resisted in these selections, as the authors describe. A unifying thread-- naming and exposing the institutional, cultural, and societal norms that contribute to GBV-- is embodied in each manuscript, though the ways of thinking and acting on that opposition are diverse.

Ricci and Bergeron lead off the special issue, with a detailed and stirring account of how a variety of actors, tactics and events have generated progressive change on a Canadian university campus. Drawing on the process of designing, conducting and disseminating findings

of their research about sexual harassment and violence at Quebec universities, they reflect on the opportunities for change offered by a feminist activist research approach. They provide evidence to suggest this change has the potential to be transformative; only time will tell whether the institutional policy changes and other responsive actions they hastened will yield a shift in incidents of violence at Université du Québec Au Montréal.

Page, Bull, and Chapman write from the perspective of activist academics, some of whom have experienced staff misconduct while they have been students, and describe the process of making a complaint. They urgently call for increased attention to a relatively neglected area; abusive behaviour by university staff towards students. Highlighting the ways in which abuse by staff has been hidden, they thoughtfully explore 'slow activism' - tactics that operate at varying levels of speed and at different levels of the sector to enact change that can achieve the important goal of making visible this form of GBV.

Atkinson and Standing problematize the notion of 'cultural change,' a term used by UUK (the advocacy organisation for UK universities, whose membership is Vice-Chancellors) in their report, *Changing the Culture*, which marked a step change in UK institutional approaches to GBV. They persuasively argue that attempts at 'cultural change' must go beyond policy reform, zero tolerance and condemnation to address the ways in which sexism, intersecting with other structures of oppression, plays out in the neoliberal university. Advocating for the role of feminist academic activists in resisting the neoliberal project of modern universities, they note that the focus on students as both the problem and the solution to GBV on campus enables delegation of responsibility for cultural change to student bodies. Their critique reminds us this approach sidesteps accountability for senior leaders to address underlying patriarchal, misogynistic institutional cultures.

The special issue also includes two contributions from scholar activists exploring broader thematic issues-- the precarity of contingency, and the potential of enhanced faculty advocacy. Sharoni and Klocke explore the role of faculty in challenging GBV, particularly in the US context where the Trump/de Vos regime signals regressive steps that will likely damage the hard-won rights for victim/survivors. Documenting the inspiring, tireless work of the activist group Faculty Against Rape, the authors make a persuasive case for the urgency of faculty to re-engage in the work of culture change on their campuses. Sharoni and Klocke rightly advise against faculty passivity, providing examples of FAR's change work that, while based in U.S. frameworks, has great potential to be adapted to transform multiple university and national contexts.

Finally, Deborah Cohan contributes an activist/advocate note that makes linkages between serving as a contingent faculty member and teaching about gender based violence. Cohan's experiences of navigating the deeply complex issues raised in her courses on interpersonal violence, while also navigating the precarity of contingency, offers important insights about the investment of time, and both intellectual and emotional energy, required to teach about violence in ways that seek to transform. The consciously cultivated depth of Cohan's connection to students who are also survivors points to the crucial yet time intensive work of empowerment. This work is typically "inefficient" in the neoliberal university context and thus is "incompatible" with the demands of part-time faculty status. Cohan reminds us that the rewards of this investment are great, yet the costs are high, requiring faculty to make intensely personal calculations of feasibility.

While these pieces open the conversation in rich and fruitful ways, and bring both new insight and time-tested strategies to the fore, we would be remiss not to name the persistent

unanswered questions they also raise. Each piece highlights the enduring barriers to transformational work; the structural, ideological and cultural obstacles that attempts at transformational change seek to overcome. In focusing on attempts at transformation, we cannot overlook the perniciousness of the power structures in which GBV thrives, and the ongoing puzzlement how such power structures can be effectively challenged. Moreover, while each piece in this special issue provides an example of change that appears to ‘work,’ we must consider how transformation should be assessed, evaluated, and appraised. As argued earlier, neoliberal frames dependent on quantification are generally not useful here. These strategies call for new ways of thinking about how we know whether the work is shifting culture and in fact, reducing (and eventually eliminating) violence. Each submission we received was, by necessity, embedded in a particular context, and thus contextually limited in the ways it engaged with a full interrogation of interlocking systems of oppression, particularly pertaining to race/ethnicity, (dis)ability, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, and nationality. Future scholarship on transformative strategies must continue, and deepen, effective interrogation into these multiple vectors of identity, inclusion, and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Given the recent evidence that trans and gender nonbinary individuals on university campuses are more likely to experience sexual and intimate partner violence (Cantor, et al., 2015), transformative strategies must attend in more complex ways to interrogating what is ‘gendered’ about GBV. In addition, while the attention to transforming rape culture provides rich insights into the harms it generates, the question remains why these forms of GBV are considered to the neglect of others, such as intimate partner violence. The concept of the “continuum” of GBV (Kelly, 1988, p.76) helpfully draws our attention away from single acts or types of violence to reflect the ways they are experienced - as different forms of violence which share ‘a basic common character’

(*ibid*). Future scholarship would also do well to attend to the overlapping and intersecting types of GBV and approaches which seek to end them.

Finally, this special issue frames transformation as, by definition, beneficial, but the harrowing stories retold by the scholar activists in this issue remind us that attending to the work of transformation comes at a considerable effort of time, energy and work by activists who are working against the prevailing norms of the neoliberal academy. How might we discern whether the costs are 'worth it'? In other words, how might we best reconcile the costs of oppositionality?

As it addresses these and other pressing questions, we envision that the next frontier of resistance to GBV in universities will include identification of transformative strategies that can be shared across different contexts, national and otherwise. All social movements can benefit from cross-teaching and cross-learning, and from the iterative evolution of resistance which yields the raw material for framing a theory of transformation. To this utopian end, the central question remains: *How can we assure that all institutions of higher education are safe for all?* And what ways of thinking and being in the world must we embody to ensure liberation from harm? These questions prod us onward, serving as a vital reminder that until and unless we are all safe, we will never be free.

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