Campus Sexual Violence Policies and Popular Media: An Examination of Discourses of Sexual Violence

Lindsay Ostridge

Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Feminist and Gender Studies

Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa

Abstract

In the last decade there has been considerable attention paid to campus sexual violence in Canada by the media, public and politicians. Recent legislative changes now ensure that universities in some provinces must have a standalone sexual violence policy in place, along with a documented response system. But university campuses are not isolated from their social, political and economic contexts and therefore, campus sexual violence policies, like popular media, reflect the trends and values of a larger society. Currently, there is a lack of critical research examining campus sexual violence discourses in the Canadian context, and this undermines the knowledge of how these policies are created, how they work, and whether they are effective. My dissertation offers a critical contribution to fill this gap in the literature. Through the production of three inter-related and publishable papers, I address two research questions: 1) What common discourses are present in sexual violence policies and popular media; 2) What are the discourses that either reinforce or undermine change? To answer these questions, I conducted a feminist critical discourse analysis on a stand alone sexual violence policy; I conducted interviews and mapped the social relations and institutional texts of one sexual violence creation process (including institutional actors, the internal sphere of the sexual violence policy creation process and the external sphere); and finally, I investigated the world outside the campus environment – where the discourse of white feminism dominates certain texts about sexual violence.

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Acknowledgements

I am truly indebted to Dr. Mythili Rajiva, my supervisor, for her vision, expertise, support and mentorship. Under her guidance, I have grown professionally, academically and personally. I am also incredibly grateful to my committee members: Dr. Helene Berman, Dr. Christine Gervais, and Dr. Kathryn Trevenen, as well as my external examiner Dr. Elizabeth Quinlan. I am very appreciative for their thoughtful feedback and generosity. Many thanks to the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies at the University of Ottawa for providing an enriching and fruitful academic environment. Thank-you to the University of Ottawa and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for the funding to conduct this research.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my professors, my peers and participants who shared so much knowledge and kindness with me. I am fortunate to have such a caring and cooperative community.

Lastly, I could not have undertaken this journey without my family. Words cannot express my gratitude to my family for their steadfast love and support, especially my parents. Without them, none of this would be possible.

Scholarships and Awards

I am very thankful for all the visible and invisible financial support that I have received to make this research possible. Thank you to the following funders for their support:

- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Award
- University of Ottawa Admission Scholarship
- University of Ottawa Excellence Scholarships
- Ontario Graduate Scholarships
- Teaching Assistantships from the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies
- Research Assistantship from Dr. Mythili Rajiva, Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies
- Travel Award from the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies

Introduction

Purpose of the Research

Sexual violence is a complex problem that affects women[1] worldwide. Researchers estimate that one in three women will experience sexual violence at some point in their lives (Borumandnia, N., Khadembashi, N., Tabatabaei, & Majd, 2020; WHO, 2021; 2024). The World Health Organization considers sexual violence a major health concern for women and a violation of their human rights (WHO, 2024). The outcome of rape can include psychological and physical trauma. The United Nations (Special Rapporteur, 2020) calls rape "a grave, systemic and widespread human rights violation" that should be prosecuted under both international humanitarian law and international criminal law (p. 2).

Rape is one of the most underreported crimes because to disclose it can bring feelings of shame, discomfort, judgement and blame for those who experience it (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Many survivors fear retaliation, gossip, and stigma. Someone who never discloses their victimization is considered by Mary Koss (1985) to be a hidden rape victim and this person is often overlooked in research. Sheehy (2017) calls sexual assault "a crime that silences women", where the perpetrators of it, often male, rely on its silencing effect. Crenshaw (1991) argues that through the collective sharing among women, the problem of rape is considered a political issue and not a private one.

In the last decade there has been considerable attention paid to campus sexual violence in Canada by the media, public and politicians. Recent legislative changes now ensure that universities in some provinces must have a standalone sexual violence policy in place, along

[1] For the purpose of this dissertation and to create boundaries around my research, I focus on the dominant research on "women". I acknowledge that trans women or intersex people are not included in this current study. Yet, given the importance of their experiences, future studies should include a wider scope of analysis.

with a documented response system. Yet, there is a lack of critical research examining campus sexual violence policies in the Canadian context, and this undermines knowledge of how these policies were created, how they work and whether they are effective.

My dissertation offers a critical contribution to fill this gap in the literature. Through the production of three inter-related and publishable papers, I address two research questions: 1) What common discourses are present in campus sexual violence policies and popular media;[2] 2) What are the discourses that either reinforce or undermine change? To answer these questions, I conduct a critical discourse analysis on a stand alone sexual violence policy; I conduct interviews and map the social relations and institutional texts of one sexual violence policy creation process (including institutional actors, the internal sphere of the sexual violence policy creation process and the external sphere); and finally, I conduct an intersectional feminist textual analysis on the Netflix film, *Luckiest Girl Alive.*

The sequencing of the following manuscripts starts with an analysis of a stand-alone sexual violence policy at the University of Ottawa, then progresses to a larger scope of analysis. In my first paper, I argue that the policy is colourblind and multiple systems of oppression are negated. Campus officials at the university prefer to take up a neoliberal logic based on the universal woman, which individualizes sexual violence by implementing bystander training and increasing security on campus. These measures help to support rape myths on campus (i.e. stranger danger and the racialized Other). In my second paper, using an unnamed university, I investigate, through feminist semi-structured interviews, the everyday lives of people who work within the campus culture on sexual violence prevention and the ruling relations that restrict their

[2]Due to changes in my research process and direction as I wrote this dissertation, I altered the first research question to include the third paper. The question, "what are the discourses present in the sexual violence policy and prevention texts" became "what common discourses are present in campus sexual violence policies and popular media?"

actions. Using the data from fourteen participants, I trace the creation of a sexual violence policy from the task force formation to the completion of the policy and program, to responding to complainants. I map the everyday experience of many social actors and how they are restricted by a particular discourse and broader power relations (i.e. the legal framework). And finally, I investigate the world outside the campus environment – where the discourse of white feminism dominates certain texts about sexual violence. Using an intersectional feminist media analysis and an anti-racist critique of mainstream feminism and #metoo, I argue that the television film, Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive*, centers a white hero narrative that is not connected to the consciousness-raising principles of intersectional feminism. The showrunners target young women (who are vulnerable to sexual violence) who might watch a film about white victimhood, narcissism, and revenge.

In this introduction, I start with an overview of the anti-rape movement in North America to provide context to my research. Then, I provide an overview of the current research on campus sexual violence in North America, and an overview of sexual assault law and campus sexual violence policy in North America. Finally, I lay out the critical Canadian campus sexual violence research, the current project, and each manuscript.

Overview of the Anti-Rape Movement in North America

The problem of rape in North America has long been on the feminist agenda in the fight for gender equality. The anti-rape movement was a big part of second-wave feminists concerns, as was domestic violence (Bruckert & Law, 2018). Research on the topic became more prominent and widespread. In the early 1970s, rape crisis service centers began running crisis lines to provide women with immediate support (Rose, 1977). In the 1970s and 1980s, rape law

reform started to occur in Canada and the United States, moving to broader definitions and varying degrees of severity (Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Spohn, 1999).

Important feminist anti-sexual violence texts helped to raise consciousness. A popular second wave anti-sexual violence text is Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975). Brownmiller (1975) provides a white feminist perspective on rape and highlights the role of patriarchy and power, focusing on gender as the main point of oppression. Working alongside white feminists, Black feminists argue that gender and race inequality work simultaneously for non-white women, and the refusal to theorize this in the feminist movement leads to the silencing of Black women (Bruckert & Law, 2018; Davis et al., 2022). In the 1990s, Pat Hill Collins wrote *Black Feminist Thought*: *Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* and Kimberle Crenshaw wrote "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" both of which brought important insights to the broader scholarship. By speaking to an intersectional approach within feminism and critiquing second wave feminism, a third wave was ignited (Bruckert & Law, 2018). Third wave[3] feminism incorporates an analysis of power, privilege, and colonialism. By taking an anti-essentialist approach to the anti-sexual violence movement, the role of whiteness and the tropes used against women and men of colour become part of the discussion (Bruckert & Law, 2018).

Feminist understandings of sexual violence place the survivor's experience at the centre of the research and focus on the systemic issues that create women's inequality. Multiple systems of oppression are joint and interlocking, forming a complex social structure of inequality for women (Collins, 2000). One way to ensure that these and other systems of power are

[3] In this manuscript, I use the terms third wave feminism (a movement occurring after the second wave to incorporate power, privilege and colonialism), women of colour feminism (a branch of feminism that focuses on multiple forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, homophobia, ability and class) and post-feminism (a movement that considers feminism to have achieved its aim of equality between the sexes).

considered in sexual violence research, is to employ an intersectional framework and use feminist research methods, where participants can speak to their experiences and be experts in their own lives. Yet, much of what exists in the research on sexual violence continues to omit multiple systems of oppression, preferring to focus on sexual violence as a gender-only problem and an individual experience (Crenshaw, 1991). The outcome of this exclusion means that policies and programs may respond to white middle-class victims, since their experiences tend to be at the center of most research, while negating the experiences of non-white women, poor women, or trans women. Importance should be placed on investigating multiple grounds of identity, to ensure that non-white women's experiences are represented in the movement to stop sexual violence.

Feminist research methods are key to helping us understand why and how sexual violence occurs. Since much of the research on sexual violence comes from victimization surveys (Johnson & Dawson, 2011), feminist research methods help to contribute to the literature by analysing power structures and digging deeper to try to understand the context in which sexual violence arises. Sandra Harding (1987) argues that the specific choice of method should be in congruence with the epistemological stance of the researcher. It is for that reason that, in this dissertation, I have chosen methods that work with an intersectional feminist approach. The methods that I use include critical feminist discourse analysis, feminist semi-structured interviews, institutional ethnography and feminist media studies method. These methods avoid an androcentric and colonial bias that exists in the current literature around the topic of sexual violence. I start this project with an understanding that knowledge is political and that there can be many truths occurring at the same time (Naples & Gurr, 2014).

A topic that is often included in the feminist literature on sexual violence is rape culture. Men and women living in a rape culture can experience expectations of male domination, interpersonal violence, and suppressive gender roles, where men and women are considered to be separate and different (Sanday, 1981). A rape culture exists in contrast to a cooperative culture where each person, regardless of gender, is valued for giving meaningful contributions to the group, community or society (Sanday, 1981). In media, violence against women is considered entertainment, and women are objectified or worse, silenced (Phillips, 2017). Rape culture is a cultural construct (Minister, 2018), and it is deeply embedded in our institutions (such as universities), media and family (Patel, 2019). It appears in the everyday, through the words and actions of people, but also through the media's attention to the most salacious stories of sexual violence (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 2005; Sanday, 1996). Buchwald, Fletcher and Roth (2005) consider rape culture to be the following:

> a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality is violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women and presents it as the norm (p. XI).

Rape culture expects that both men and women will think of sexual violence as something that will occur as part of life. It is based on false attitudes and can be untaught.

Key to a rape culture are the rape myths that permit ongoing violence against women. Rape myths, as Burt (1980) explains, are prejudiced patterns of thinking that enable sexual violence to occur. They are toxic ideas, supported by society, that involve gender role typing and the acceptance of violence against women. They are often propagated by the media (Moorti,

2002) and reinforced by other institutional actors such as judges, police, teachers (Johnson & Dawson, 2011), university administration, professors and coaches (Fogel, 2017; Phipps, 2020). Some popular rape myths include: 1) rapists are insane, perverted, or sick; 2) women want to get raped; or 3) rapists tend to be strangers (Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Moorti, 2002). The literature shows that these myths are not based in research. Men who rape are not "abnormal" but are socialized into being predatory (Messerschmidt, 1990; Scully, 1994; Scully & Marolla, 1984). Data from interviews with rape survivors show that women do not want to be raped and they often suffer trauma in the aftermath (Moorti 2002). Due to negative emotions, and the fear of retaliation, survivors often do not want to report their rape. And, last, women are most likely to be raped by someone they know, making it more difficult to report or disclose their victimization (Moorti, 2002; Patel, 2019).

Television is another site where many rape myths appear. Moorti (2002) argues that throughout the history of television, representations of rape have been clouded with stereotypes of women and rape myths, reflecting the values of a white supremacy patriarchal rape culture. It is a common occurrence that white male broadcasters discuss the most alarming cases of sexual violence of (only) white victims in the news, projecting women as perpetual victims (Moorti, 2002). While television has evolved over time to incorporate women's perspectives and narratives, it continues to include rape myths and patriarchal understandings of rape (Patrick, 2021). For example, many television shows include acts of retribution after an allegation, which is part of a patriarchal understanding of rape (Rajiva & Patrick, 2021). But most importantly, the rapes of non-white women are often not included in news broadcasts, television serials, or crime drama. Also alarming is that television still alludes to the myth of the Black male rapist (Moorti, 2002). Angela Davis (1981) notes this rape myth emerged when the racist rape law in the US

targeted Black men with raping white women, while few white men were charged. In conjunction with the "twin rape myth [of]... the bad black woman", these myths functioned as an excuse to lynch Black men and women (Gerda Lerner, as quoted by Davis, 1981, p. 174).

In the following section, I discuss the context of campus sexual violence in North America by reviewing the literature and pointing out how the systemic problem of sexual violence is individualized through concepts such as 'risk factors.' Furthermore, in many of these theories, there is a focus on theorizing gender, but not race.

Campus Sexual Violence in North America

In approaching my research with an intersectional feminist theoretical framework and feminist methods, I am able to highlight elements of white feminist conceptualizations of sexual violence, rape culture, and rape myths that are present in all three texts. In order to gain a better understanding of why this research is needed, I discuss the current research on campus sexual violence in North America and trace the various themes of the literature occurring over time. Koss, Gidycz, and Wisneiwski (1987), were the first to conduct a national study on rape in the US, and to argue that campus sexual violence is an area that deserves special attention. Over twenty years ago, the rates of campus sexual violence victimization were estimated to be one in four women (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). Senn et al. (2014) argue that little has improved over time. Today, Phipps (2025) notes that campus sexual violence is considered a "rape crisis" in the Anglophone north (p. 64).

There are several criminological theories that try to explain campus sexual violence[4]. These theories include the red zone theory, routine activities theory, and feminist routine

[4] I have selected a particular strand of criminological theories that have limitations. Future studies should include a broader, more critical strands of criminology.

activities theory. The red zone theory is a theory that explains that there is temporal risk in a student's life that makes them more vulnerable to victimization. This temporal risk is considered to happen during the first few weeks to two months of a new school year (Flack et al., 2008). Routine activities theory explains that certain risk factors that create vulnerability in women can be isolated but there must be an environment with a proximity to crime, a lack of guardianship, a motivated offender, and a suitable target for sexual assault to occur (Cass, 2007). Feminist routine activities theory includes the addition of feminist theory to routine activities theory (Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait & Alvi, 2001; Schwartz & Pitts, 1995). This theory provides a focus on the role of patriarchal systemic oppression. In addition to the above three theories, there are theories of masculinity that focus on the effects of negative male bonding, the influence of sport culture on dating aggression (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Pakalka & White, 2006), as well as the combination of male peer support, alcohol abuse, and gendered institutional rules of places (i.e. rules about alcohol, fraternities, residences, and parties) (Armstrong, Hamilton & Sweeney, 2006; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait & Alvi, 2001).

Many of these theories look at individual 'risk' factors, such as alcohol and drug use, and sexual and lifestyle activities (Cass, 2007; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Parks, Romosz, Bradizza, & Ya-Ping, 2008; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait & Alvi, 2001). These theories focus on gender as the sole nexus of oppression, which calls upon a 'universal woman', thus, negating multiple systems of oppression and the experiences of women of colour. If the authors do include multiple forms of oppression, the discourse seems superficial. For example, Monks, Tomaka, Palacios, and Thompson (2010) investigate Hispanic university men's and women's victimization on US campuses and alcohol abuse but the authors do not theorize racism in the context of their results. The authors used a similar design of study conducted on white female

university participants and replicated it with a Hispanic population. The study design consists of using only a series of surveys to investigate sexual victimization (e.g. Sexual Experiences Survey, Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale) and alcohol use (e.g. Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test, Daily Drinking Questionnaire, Rutgers Alcohol Problems Index, The Comprehensive Effects of Alcohol Instrument). Feminist qualitative interviews, or focus groups on the other hand, could help the authors to have data to theorize race and to understand the participants' experiences and context, as opposed to a design of study that focuses on a 'colour-blind' subject. The implication of failing to theorize racism means that non-white women's experiences are not incorporated into the research on campus sexual violence. If such research provides data for developing the prevention programs and policy, then the corresponding programs and policy will be lacking nuance to appropriately respond to the needs of all women (Crenshaw, 1991).

The Greek system[5] dominates much of the American campus sexual violence literature and some of the Canadian literature, but to a much lesser extent. Several authors provide many reasons for why sexual violence occurs in the fraternity space, again pointing to 'risk factors' and ways for women to protect themselves (see Armstrong et al., 2006; Fisher, Sloan, Cullen, & Lu, 1998; Flack et al., 2007; Flack et al., 2008). Much of the data comes from participants who are sorority and fraternity members or sports team members (Armstrong, Hamilton, & Sweeney, 2006; Fisher, Sloan, Cullen, & Lu, 1998; Flack et al., 2008). Some authors argue that the biggest risk of sexual violence lies in who young women choose to spend their time with and if that

[5] The Greek system refers to fraternities and sororities at the university level that tend to be privately owned student run clubs, within residential houses. They are part of national organization or an inter-fraternity council (Armstrong et al., 2006).

individual person is predatory (Armstrong et al., 2006; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Schwartz et al., 2001).

Armstrong et al. (2006) argue that the university, as an institution, has an active role in preventing rape and sexual violence by setting residence rules on drinking, fraternity parties, and/or socializing. Other institutional 'risk factors' include a large and transient enrollment that provides offenders with anonymity and not having effective guardianship (mentor or friend) or security personnel. In this criminological research, the campus environment is deemed a dangerous place and there is the expectation that sexual violence will occur on campus as part of the status quo (Joseph, Gray & Mayer, 2013; Siegel & Raymond, 1992). Since this research does not help to explain why men are motivated to rape, it provides a list of actions that women 'should' take to prevent sexual violence. Yet, since women already engage in protective actions and limit their activity on campus due to the fear of rape, this research is of little use to sexual violence prevention (Jennings, Gover, & Pudrzynska, 2007). This type of approach tends to focus on stranger rape, the myth that strangers are more likely to rape, rather than acquaintances and dating partners (Cass, 2007; Fisher et al., 1998; Schwartz et al., 2001).

Sexual violence is often depicted in the media in the same way that it appears in the literature on campus sexual violence. Themes of fraternity parties, alcohol abuse, gang rapes, and monstrous men appear in media, film, and television shows (Phillips, 2017). In terms of campus sexual violence specifically, there are two prominent documentaries that focus on this topic. The Canadian documentary *Slut or Not* (Showker et al., 2017) features the experiences of raped PhD student Mandi Gray and the American documentary *The Hunting Ground* (Dick, 2015) details how difficult it is for students to gain answers from their university around sexual violence. Both

documentaries show how young women are disappointed, shamed and confused by the administration on campus.

Rape has arguably been a staple topic in North American mainstream media (Moorti, 2002). Shows like Netflix's *YOU, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, and Marvel's *Jessica Jones* have tried to subvert a patriarchal conceptualization of rape by presenting a female centered narrative of sexual violence, only to engage in white feminist politics that negate non-white women's experiences (Patrick & Rajiva, 2022). Providing storylines of patriarchal retribution and post-feminist sensibilities, the showrunners target young women as audiences for these shows, providing a hopeless post-rape future in an outrage culture. As the highest rate of sexual violence occurs to women between the ages of 18 to 24 years old (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2018), many women may experience sexual violence while at university and can benefit from meaningful care in the response to that harm.

Sexual Assault Law and Campus Sexual Violence Policy in North America

Sexual assault is illegal in the United States of America[6] (Rainn, n.d.) and in Canada (Criminal Code, s. 271). The United States is considered by many scholars to be a leader in the research on mandated sexual violence policies. With Title IX[7] and the Jeanne Clery Campus Safety Act[8] , US post-secondary institutions have had mandated sexual assault policies for decades, requiring institutions to report all cases of sexual violence and to abide by their mandated policy and procedures (United States Department of Education, 2011; Sheehy & Gilbert, 2015). When American universities fail to comply with the requirements of Title IX and

[6] There are varying definitions across State Law (Rainn, n.d.)
[7] Title IX is a federal civil rights law that prohibits sex discrimination in any school that received federal funding. It came into effect as part of the Education Amendments of 1972; 20 U.S.C.§1681 (Sheehy & Gilbert, 2015).
[8] The Clery Act means that universities must disclose all crime on campuses. The act is named after a raped and murdered student in 1986, Jeanne Clery.

the Jeanne Clery Campus Safety Act, federal education funds can be revoked, and the institution can be fined. Yung (2015) argues that some institutions engage in underreporting rates of sexual violence and/or coerce students to not file formal reports to protect the institution's reputation. A higher rate of reported sexual violence may be an indication of transparency and proper protocol rather than an unsafe campus (Brubaker, 2009: Yung, 2015).

There are several differences between the two countries on this topic. First, Canada's educational funding is provided by the provincial government rather than the federal government in the US (Sheehy & Gilbert, 2015). Second, the legal definition of sexual assault has a federal definition (with three levels) in Canada, and this definition can be found in the *Criminal Code* rather than by state with varying definitions. And last, the culture of American universities is arguably different. There are a larger number of institutions in the United States, and many have a Greek system of fraternities and sororities. There are fewer Canadian universities, and some do not have a formal Greek system. Beyond that, Canada has been slow to adopt provincially mandated sexual violence policies within Canadian universities.

In the US, there is a larger amount of critical research on government mandated sexual violence policies. Research shows that many American post-secondary institutions rely on either a patriarchal gender-based policy model or a gender-neutral based sexual assault policy model (Richards et al., 2017). These models are not found to offer meaningful approaches to students due to their top-down approach, and the outcomes of interacting with the response system can negatively affect students (Richards et al., 2017). Researchers also found that there is few feminist gender-based sexual assault policies and response systems. Most policies and response systems do not allow students to define their experience, engage in anonymous reporting, and have access to counselling services both on and off campus (Richards et al., 2017).

In developing a feminist gender-based policy and response system, many authors argue policy makers should incorporate qualitative research with proper representation of racialized and LGTQA2IA+ students to gain multiple perspectives. Having that interview data can help both researchers and policy makers to understand the problem of sexual violence beyond a patriarchal, gender-neutral, or mainstream feminist approach (Gunraj et al, 2015; Klein et al., 2018). Furthermore, by utilizing leading interdisciplinary experts, providing ample funding, and using research from various disciplines, there can be a great improvement in policy creation and response.

The presence of a stand-alone sexual violence policy cannot reduce the rate of sexual offending, because it is the depth, breadth, and comprehensiveness of the policy that can help women (Delong et al., 2018). A sexual violence policy alone, if it does not cover the right elements to provide meaningful care, is useless to survivors (Delong et al., 2018). Paying attention to the discourse within the policy is incredibly important. For example, Iverson (2016) notes that the discourse within American sexual violence policies shapes images of women as being ‘at-risk’ and the university as the ‘risk manager’. Institutional vocabularies such as ‘consent’, ‘willing’, and ‘verbal’, reveal a discourse of dependency. Women can appear as ‘passive’, ‘to be provided for’, and ‘protected’ by the institution. Iverson (2016) argues that very few institutions use the word, ‘survivor’, but use the words ‘victims’, ‘respondent’, and ‘alleged offender’. These words can suggest that women are the problem, with words like ‘unwanted’, ‘pressure’ and ‘unreasonable’ because these words influence subjective realities and suggest a patriarchal framing of women. Within these policies, sexual violence is not conceptualized in terms of systems of power (Iverson, 2016). Further gaps in the policies include problematic definitions, including the lack of consistency and clarity, and unintended problems with

mandatory reporting (Perkins & Warner, 2017). For example, there tends to be a general confusion as to which role must function as a mandatory reporter.

Another problem that has been highlighted in the literature is that American university sexual violence policies tend to be colour-blind. Colour-blind policies tend to speak to the concerns of white, heterosexual, middle class, sorority women (Wooten, 2017). Wooten (2017) argues that there is a "hidden curriculum of whiteness" in the US campus sexual assault policies (p. 408). The 'hidden curriculum' includes normative values of whiteness that come from a second wave feminist point of view, which incorporates a 'universal woman'. Any perspective that exists outside of this normative standard presents challenges, and often non-white women face racist and sexist stereotypes from administrators and university personnel. Colour-blind policies are considered "camouflaged racism', where sexual violence is individualized and race is considered neutral by adopting a white feminist perspective (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

In Canadian universities, there is no universally accepted definition of sexual violence among researchers, experts and advocates and this is reflected in university sexual violence policies (Crocker, Minaker, & Nelund, 2020). Shared definitions are considered important when it comes to policy because they provide a better understanding of what constitutes sexual violence at the institution. They also provide shared knowledge among faculty, service providers and students as to what types of services can be provided to survivors based on the different types of offenses (Crocker, Minaker, & Neland, 2020). Some policies reference the definition of sexual assault provided by the *Canadian Criminal Code*, and some include the provincial *Human Rights Tribunal*'s definition of sexual harassment. But, Crocker, Minaker and Nelund (2020) argue that while there is variability among universities in their definition of sexual violence,

fundamentally they are similar enough, and more importantly, they allow students to disclose sexual violence without informing the police.

Elizabeth Quinlan (2014b) argues that universities, due to a shift towards a corporate model from a governance model, are in a unique position to have but not fully utilize sexual violence prevention campaigns. Formal sexual violence complaints and negative media stories tarnish the reputation of universities as "good corporate citizens" (Quinlan, 2014b, p. 64). So, rather than put the university at risk, university administrators may either silence or pressure victims of sexual violence to pursue restorative justice avenues rather than filing formal complaints.

Campus sexual violence policies can provide an alternative to a hostile Canadian criminal justice system (Sheehy, 2017). Sheehy (2017) argues that if the university administration uses a broader definition of sexual violence, the campus sexual violence response system can be a way for survivors to access care and support without needing to engage with the Canadian criminal justice system. However, upon closer examination, much of these current policies replicate many of the same problems that arise in the criminal justice system (Nelund, 2020). Since most of these policies came about during a time of political pressure to make change, they are lacking and can be harmful (Nelund, 2020).

Rossiter, Porteous and Dhillon (2020) suggest that consent education should be part of a larger framework of policies and procedures to help build a survivor-centric response model on campus. For some, building a consent culture is incredibly important for campus sexual violence prevention (Crocker, Minaker, & Nelund, 2020; Rossiter, Porteous, & Dhillon, 2020), yet the consent framework builds off the legal system in Canada. One example of consent training is the Bystander Intervention Program. This program has been critiqued as being harmful to sexual and

racial minorities, as they may experience racism, homophobia and transphobia (Brush & Miller, 2023; McMahon, Burnham, & Banyard (2020). Francis, Giesbrecht, Henry and Turgeon (2019) explore the perspectives of students who are Indigenous, racialized, LGBTQ2+ and with mental health challenges, and their findings showed that often sexual violence prevention programming is culturally misinformed and harmful due to stereotypes and ignorance.

During the time it took to conduct this research and write this dissertation, legislative changes have occurred, and more Canadian provinces mandate their universities to include a stand-alone campus sexual violence policy. The provinces that now require universities to create a standalone sexual violence policy include, Ontario (Bill 132, 2016), British Colombia (Sexual, Violence & Misconduct Act, 2016), Quebec (Bill 151, 2017), Manitoba (Bill 15, 2017), and Prince Edward Island (Post-secondary, 2018). Since there is no national or federal mandate in Canada (Mathieu & Poisson, 2014) due to the *British North American Act*, education is under the provincial government's responsibility (Sheehy & Gilbert, 2015). Before this change in legislation, most universities would use a variety of individual policies that could include the student code of conduct, along with sexual harassment and discrimination policies.

Critical Canadian Campus Sexual Violence Research

The current Canadian feminist research on this topic tends to focus on critiques of the campus environment, isolating structures like neoliberalism, the corporatization of education, and the securitization of campuses leading to poor institutional responses to sexual violence (Quinlan, 2017b; Trusolino, 2017). Canadian feminist researchers focus on sexism and racism within the institution, but also on the intentions of administrators, and women's experiences within the institution (Gray & Pin, 2017; Haiven, 2017; Guberman, Dhrodia & Kosowan, 2017; Stermac et al., 2017).

Few Canadian universities recognize the interaction of both racism and sexism in a sexual violence policy and response. Bourassa et al. (2017) conducted an environmental scan of university websites to investigate institutional policies on campus violence and if the institution had a reporting system that acknowledged the race of the survivor. While the authors discovered few universities had policies addressing campus violence, they found that the University of British Columbia was the only institution that addressed violence against Indigenous women and had an intersectional response noted in their policy. As policies have progressed to include intersectionality, Colpitts (2022) argues that even if the university notes a commitment to an intersectional sexual violence response, they fail to acknowledge how power operates to create systemic oppression and the institutions involvement in creating those oppressions.

The university failure to theorize how power shapes student vulnerability on campus affects students' willingness to access support (Colpitts, 2022). Colpitts (2022) argues that this oversight happens when universities unknowingly rely on an 'ideal victim' in their sexual violence policies, failing to account for the experiences of non-white women and women who do not meet that criterion (Colpitts, 2022). For example, Stermac et al. (2017) argue that disclosing sexual violence is important to educational outcomes and cultural narratives can interfere with that decision to disclose. Racialized women face unique challenges when deciding to disclose experiences of sexual coercion, and familial reactions are incredibly important to their decision, thus impacting their studies. In addition, when Guberman et al. (2017) participated in the project *Build. Act. Change*. at the University of Toronto Scarborough, they noticed that while students complained of dating violence, online abuse, and stalking, some noted issues with family and community abuse. Students felt that there was a general lack of understanding by university staff and instructors about issues outside of the university campus. The authors concluded that sexual

violence prevention should include what is happening in students' lives overall, not just what is happening on campuses.

The neoliberal shifts happening within the university are affecting women's perceptions of campus life. Elizabeth Quinlan (2017b) argues that the corporatization of universities has compromised the safety of women. As the university transitions to a client/supplier model due to reduced government funding, it is finding interesting ways to gain private funding. Since private funders want a reputable university with a safe campus environment, one way for the university to create an impression of a safe university is through advertising. Quinlan (2017b) argues that the universities that are ranked higher on campus safety in Maclean's Magazine official ranking of universities are the result of larger advertising efforts.

Canadian campuses are moving towards prevention programming that centers risk assessment (Gray & Pin, 2017; Gray, Pin & Cooper, 2018; Petit-Thorne, 2021). Universities appear to be taking action but are exploiting rape myths based on stranger assault and the racialized 'Other', increasing campus security measures, and messaging on self-securitization (Gray & Pin, 2017). Gray and Pin, (2017) use York University's campaign *Safe Together* as a case study and argue that universities use sexual violence campaigns as a way to strengthen a university's brand. These efforts are not new, as it is documented that the university engaged in a similar response during York University's 'Vanier Rape' where both police and administrators engaged in messaging of self-securitization that undermined the collective efforts of autonomous women (Trusolino, 2017).

Canadian universities tend to develop task groups to respond to public events of sexual violence and offer recommendations for the university to follow. But Haiven (2017) argues that Task Groups cannot make change within a toxic university culture. She argues that a similar

level of misogyny once found in the engineering culture of the 1990s, can be found in today's business schools. A business culture where making money and not friends is the focus, in combination with a sport and drinking culture, culminates in rape culture. With few exceptions, efforts made to 'speak up' to resist campus rape culture are unsupported by the university administration and student associations (Gray, Pin & Cooper, 2018; Mason & Shankar 2024; Shankar & Mason, 2025). So, regardless of the recommendations made, sometimes task forces are not able to effect change.

In the past decade, the Canadian media has brought a large number of campus sexual violence cases to the public's attention (Sheehy, 2017). News stories include the Dalhousie University Dentistry school scandal, the University of Ottawa Hockey Team scandal, and the Western University Frosh week scandal (CBC, 2015; 2021; Foote, 2016; Quinlan, 2014a)[9]. In 2015, Mandi Gray, a former student at York University, filed a human rights complaint against her institution for failing to provide a clear set of procedures for how to report sexual assault (Hoffman, 2015). And just recently a Western University department chair was charged and convicted with sexually assaulting his colleague (Lupton, 2025).

Students are also affected by what they see in the broader media, on social media and around campus. In 2021, around twelve thousand Western university students gathered to protest rape culture and misogyny on campus (Sheehy & Ostridge, 2022; Theodore & Gould, 2021). During the walk-out, it is reported that they chanted "stop the violence, no more violence" (CBC, 2021, para 1) in support of victims of sexual violence and to demand better resources on campus.

[9] At the Dalhousie University Dentistry School 13 male students were suspended for making violent and misogynistic comments about their peers (CBC, 2015; Report of the Task Force, 2015). At the University of Ottawa, hockey players were charged with sexual assault while at an away game. The university fired the coach and suspended the team for a year (CBC, 2016). At Western University, as many as 30 students disclosed sexual assault via social media (CBC, 2021).

Just prior to the walkout, students disclosed their victimization on social media and four women filed formal complaints with the university (Sheehy & Ostridge, 2022). The university responded by creating a task force to investigate the matter and in February 2022, Western University's student council officially declared that there is a "sexual violence crisis" on campus (Mahood & Alfonso, 2022).

The Research Project

The overall topic of this dissertation is common discourses of sexual violence found in campus sexual violence policies and in popular media. To isolate the scope of the analysis, I focus on the new changes happening in the province of Ontario. Ontario is the first province in Canada to take up a mandated campus sexual violence policy with *Bill 132* (2016). In 2015, the Government of Ontario released, "*It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*." This mandate was ground-breaking for the province of Ontario, but also for Canada. It brought the problem of sexual violence to the level of public discourse by making sexual violence and harassment a mandatory issue for workplaces, and university campuses to address. In a short amount of time, the government passed *Bill 132* (2016) requiring all Ontario post-secondary institutions to create a stand-alone sexual violence policy by January 1st, 2017. This mandate set the tone for all college and university sexual violence policies. Before *Bill 132* (2016) was passed, it was reported that only nine institutions in Ontario had such a policy. Most institutions were using a 'patchwork' of student codes of conduct and sexual harassment policies which failed students by providing inconsistent and negligible care (Mathieu & Poisson, 2014; Sheehy & Gilbert, 2015). Since this mandate was in response to the public outcry over mishandled sexual violence cases at post-secondary institutions, policymakers aimed to provide a standard of prevention and response; however, *Bill 132* (2016) only provided guidelines for post-

secondary institutions to follow. Post-secondary institutions created their own stand-alone sexual violence policy and response system, often with a team of in-house experts. It is in this context that my research starts. In what follows, I discuss each manuscript in more detail.

In Manuscript one, "Speaking freely and Freedom of Speech: Why is Black Feminist Thought Left Out of Ontario University Sexual Violence Policies?", I investigate the policy at the University of Ottawa, as a case study, using an intersectional feminist theoretical framework and feminist critical discourse analysis. Specifically, I investigate the framing of the problem of sexual violence within the stand-alone sexual violence policy by using Carol Bacchi's (1999) work on the construction of policy problems. My findings reveal that the policy makers conceptualize gender in a one-dimensional manner and thus, create a colour-blind stand-alone sexual violence policy. This finding is similar to the American research on campus sexual violence policies presented in this introduction (Wooten, 2017). I explore my findings in the three following points: 1) top-down approaches to policy creation; 2) the influence of neoliberalism on Canadian university campuses; 3) stranger danger and the racialized Other, which leads to criminalizing racialized men on campus. It is only with a critical feminist approach that I can identify both patriarchal thinking in the top-down approach to policy creation, the influence of capitalism through neoliberal strategies which have nothing to do with resolving rape culture, and the usage of rape myths on campus which perpetuate rape culture and deny making meaningful change.

This manuscript is the first publication to come out of my PhD research after my proposal defense. I submitted it to a feminist journal, and this paper was included in a special edition on academic freedom. Part of the title of the paper reflects that special edition, "Speaking freely and freedom of speech" and the paper was in company with other critical feminist works. By starting

my dissertation with a critical feminist discourse analysis on the University of Ottawa sexual violence policy, I became familiar with sexual violence policies and the ways in which the discourse found within the policy is reflected in the university culture. It was published in *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice* on November 1st, 2020.

In **Manuscript two**, "Sexual violence, secrets, and work: Ruling relations of campus sexual violence policy", I broaden my theoretical and methodological analysis of my first paper. Using a different sexual violence policy, I take up institutional ethnography and incorporate feminist semi-structured interviews with those involved in creating and implementing the sexual violence policy (i.e. task force, action teams and first responders) of an unnamed Ontario university. Here, I investigate the work of task forces (and their subsequent outputs) and the many ways in which the work of sexual violence prevention is managed in the everyday by ruling relations. By using Dorothy Smith's ontology (2005), I include an analysis of the body in the process of work, and I am able to see how difficult it was to be in these groups, taking a significant toll on them. Experts at various levels were asked by management to be part of specific groups, and throughout the process some experts were deemed more valuable than others based on the dominant discourse provided by management, media, and mandates.

Drawing upon the interview data, I argue that the current sexual violence policy (at an unidentified university) is performative as it hooks into the provincial legislation. I investigate the daily practices and experiences of fourteen people involved in creating and implementing a sexual violence policy and prevention campaign at different points in the process. I map out the social relations of professors, students and front-line experts at one university, revealing a complicated web of many institutional actors and institutional texts in both the private and public spheres (Appendix F). I explore the notion of work through the social relations of campus sexual

violence prevention, the rules and regulations of the sexual violence policy, processes, and response system, and the neoliberalism of sexual violence. One of the important contributions of this article is that it speaks to the embodied experience of talking, writing, enacting or interpreting policy. Discourses mediate the work processes and lead to complicated and frustrating feelings for people who are engaging in the meaningful work of helping to prevent or respond to sexual violence.

This research extends the work that I conducted in the first paper by incorporating the body, feminist semi-structured interviews and the mapping of the public and private spheres, providing a larger scope of analysis. With a critical feminist discourse analysis, I investigate how power and ideology manifest in the wording of the document and the outcomes of that policy for students. In this second paper, I rely on the knowledge of the experts involved in creating and implementing the policy to share their everyday experiences and the challenges that they faced as an embodied experience. I delve deeper into the larger workings of the policy, from its inception and onward to show how the institutional actors are constricted by ruling relations in the doing of the policy. I map out the processes to demonstrate that the policy hooks into the legislation, restricting what a policy can look like and how painful and complicated that is. It is here that I aimed to show that even with the best of intentions, ruling relations resist change through the sexual violence policy and response system. This paper was published in the *Canadian Review of Sociology* on January 7th, 2025.

In **Manuscript three,** "Wind Me Up: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Netflix's Luckiest Girl Alive", I investigate the culture that informs the thinking around campus sexual violence. I conduct a textual analysis of the Netflix movie *Luckiest Girl Alive,* where the lead character is gang-raped by students at a high school party involving alcohol. The movie follows

the life of a young, beautiful, rich, white woman living in New York City. Ani, played by Mila Kunis, has narrative control of the film, and we, the viewer, follow her life as she attempts to 'heal' her trauma. There are similar themes in this movie to the research on campus sexual violence, such as a focus on white women as victims, white-feminism's law-and-order approach and white rage following an accusation of sexual assault. Most importantly, non-white women's experiences are ignored.

In my analysis, I use an anti-racist critique of mainstream feminist conceptualizations of sexual violence and Toni Morrison's (1992) important work on representational strategies of whiteness in American texts. I use an intersectional feminist media analysis to conduct a textual analysis, while paying attention to both the intertextual and paratextual. I take up Gray's (2010; 2018) work on the intertext to highlight how the text calls out to white audiences by making connections to crime drama with a white female victim, an accusation of crime and a retribution fantasy. In the paratextual landscape, I investigate the showrunners' choice to cast Mila Kunis, a so-called feminist; and the slippage that occurred with her connection to the Danny Masterson trial. I discuss what that might mean for the young women who are targeted as the audience for this television film.

In this paper, I take up the opportunity to think about the role of the media, the dominant discourses that resist change and the damage that cultural narratives can do to the young women that it targets. By applying a decolonial lens to my analysis to this film, I am able to point out how little change has occurred over time, as the same colonial circuit of white feminism can be found over and over again in the media. As mentioned earlier, the media has a profound influence on the minds of young white women, demonstrating what is possible, what is acceptable and what is encouraged without intervention. Black women's continued erasure, and

white feminism's violence only serves to maintain an androcentric approach and fails to disrupt the status quo of rape culture. This paper is under review at *Feminist Media Studies* (submitted on May 8th 2025).

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Theory and Methods

My dissertation follows a "dissertation by article" model, which includes three independent but interconnected papers which are either published or under submission: 1. "Speaking Freely and Freedom of Speech: Why is Black Feminist Thought Left Out of Ontario University Sexual Violence Policies"; 2. "Sexual violence, secrets, and work: Ruling relations of campus sexual violence policy"; 3. "Wind Me Up: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Netflix's Luckiest Girl Alive".

In all three articles, I investigate the common discourses found in texts of campus sexual violence prevention (policy, management texts, and film) using an intersectional feminist theoretical framework. I use feminist methods such as critical feminist policy discourse analysis, institutional ethnography and feminist media studies. I investigate intersecting power dynamics along the lines of gender, race and class to progress the feminist literature on campus sexual violence in the Canadian context.

I rely on the work of many scholars to provide the theoretical framework and methods in each of my manuscripts. Black feminist analytics and politics (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991) and a feminist discourse analysis (Bacchi, 1999; 2000; Lazar, 2005) frames my first paper as I trace how the approach of the university provides a feminist but colourblind policy. In my second paper, I use an intersectional feminist theoretical framework (Phipps, 2020; 2025) to investigate the sexual violence campaign at an unnamed university along with institutional ethnography as my methods (Smith & Griffith, 2022). An anti-racist critique of white feminism (Phipps, 2019; 2020; 2021; Moorti, 2002; 2024) and an intersectional feminist media studies method frame my final paper. In what follows, I discuss my choice of theoretical approaches and the scholars I take up, followed by my reflections on my choice of methods and how they work to complement one another.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Approaches to Sexual Violence

Feminist approaches to sexual violence move away from patriarchal viewpoints which tend to stereotype, individualize, and pathologize women. Starting with the notion that gender inequality is systemic and often embedded in everyday institutions, sexual violence is just one of the forms of violence that is part of the feminist concern. Second wave approaches to sexual violence have fought for and won certain rights, such as domestic violence law and sexual assault law. Feminists today continue to ensure that these laws are continuously monitored, amended, and maintained.

In all three manuscripts, I investigate discourses of sexual violence from a feminist approach, and I employ an intersectional feminist anti-racist critique to mainstream feminism as it appears in various texts (for example: policy, management texts, and film). More specifically, I critique the notion of a universal woman with a colourblind approach, because it overlooks experiences of racialized women. An intersectional approach is useful because it specifically investigates the ways in which white feminism (also known as the universal approach) is used in both institutional responses (Paper 1 and 2) and mainstream media. The cultural construction of women of colour through strategic representation strategies, as it often appears in media, is another source of disempowerment (Paper 3).

Manuscript One. In my first paper, I use Pat Hill Collins's (2000) concept of the "matrix of domination" from her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* to understand how multiple intersecting oppressions work together and interlock. Collins (2000) notes that Black women's knowledges are often negated in traditional scholarship and in mainstream feminist theory. She created the critical social theory Black

Feminist Thought to speak to the specific experiences of Black women and the oppressions that they face. She concludes that structures of race, class and gender are interconnected and cannot be siloed into separate and hierarchical oppressions. Collins (2000) critiques white feminism as a movement that is "racist and overly concerned with White middle-class women's issues" (p. 8). In the matter of rape, Collins (2000) argues that Black women are silenced because their bodies have unjustly been colonialized and stereotypes that date back to slavery persist, controlling Black women's sexuality and the ability to speak up against abuse.

In conjunction with Collins's (2000) framework, I use Crenshaw's (1991) work on the structural, political, and representational intersectionality with a focus on rape. Focusing on race and gender as interlocking points of oppression, Crenshaw (1991) articulates that there are differences within groups, such as women, and ignoring them can lead to tension. For example, she argues that using a white middle-class woman as a standard for rape crisis reform efforts leaves women with intersection oppressions at a loss, as they are under-served and under-funded. Furthermore, dominant social constructions of rape in the public discourse are harmful to Black women and men. Historical myths exist today in the ways in which Black men are stereotyped as 'rapists' of white women and Black women are stereotyped as hypersexual and silenced. These racist constructions of rape persist and play out in the media, law, and policy.

I use Crenshaw's (1991) work because of its power to investigate if "multiple grounds of identity" exist within the discourse of gendered violence and the analysis of what can happen when they are not considered (p. 1245). I also use a larger feminist critique of patriarchal conceptualizations of sexual violence by identifying a series of rape myths (i.e., rape is an individual event, women should prevent rape, and strangers are most likely to rape), along with Ahmed's (2012) critique of the racialized other within the university campus environment. I use

this theoretical framework in a new context of campus sexual violence policy in the Canadian province of Ontario, post-Bill 132. Since the context of a mandated stand-alone sexual violence policy was new at the time, it was a great opportunity to take up this framework that, despite being decades old, is still negated.

In taking up Pat Hill Collins's (2000) and Crenshaw's (1991) work to investigate if Black Feminist Thought is visible in the University of Ottawa sexual violence policy, I wanted to better understand the policy documents and the discourses that are found within them. I argue that Black feminist thought is negated in the policy. So, to help theorize why the university may want an individualistic, colourblind approach, I use the concepts of whiteness, neoliberalism and a critique of a privileged universal woman (Collins, 2000; Quinlan, 2017; Wooten, 2017).

Manuscript Two. In my second paper, "Sexual violence, secrets, and work: Ruling relations of campus sexual violence policy", I approach my exploration of a campus sexual violence prevention campaign through a critical feminist theoretical framework, along with institutional ethnography (Smith & Griffiths, 2022). Starting my analysis at the conception of the campus sexual violence policy, and with a focus on work as an embodied experience, I create a feminist genealogy of the policy (Smith & Griffiths, 2022).

Institutional ethnography (IE) starts with people's everyday experience. It is a collection of concepts (i.e. work, discourse and text) (Smith & Griffiths, 2022). These concepts do not explain people's behaviour; rather, they are considered tools for researchers to explore how people's lives are governed by institutional structures and relationships. This approach allows the researcher to investigate hidden power dynamics that may impede change by organizing people in a specific textually mediated way (Devault, 2006). Finding a "point of entry" (Devault, 2006) through the work of creating the sexual violence policy, IE provides an opportunity to investigate

power relations at the university and the administration's ideology around this type of work. Key to IE is mapping. Mapping is the "analytic goal of explication" and not theory building (Devault, 2006, p. 294). Mapping illustrates how local activities are managed translocally and IE works well with texts such as policy documents (Stooke, 2003).

One of the theoretical principles that I rely on is that "truth can be multiply defined or understood, and that knowledge is political" (Naples & Gurr, 2014, p. 15). In moving away from notions of universality found in traditional methods of research, a critical feminist approach embraces difference and diversity (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). This theoretical framework incorporates multiple intersecting oppressions (i.e. race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, and geography), while also valuing intra-group differences between women (including self-identified women), something that is frequently missed in the violence against women literature (Crenshaw, 1991; Rajiva, 2021). Such an approach is sensitive to the struggle against epistemic injustice within both feminism and the academy (Christian, 1988; Lorde, 1984; Million, 2014) and its resulting subjugations and oppressions.

Manuscript Three. In my third paper, I use the film, Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive* as a case study. This film follows the life of the lead character, Ani (played by Mila Kunis), as she tries to come to terms with being gang-raped at a school party when she was younger. I use an anti-colonial media analysis to argue that media engages in the dissemination of a dominant ideology of white supremacy and patriarchal capitalism (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014; Moorti, 2002; 2024; Patrick & Rajiva, 2022; Sutherland & Feltey, 2017; Wanzo, 2008). I specifically build off of the work of intersectional media scholars (e.g. Moorti, 2002; 2024; Patrick & Rajiva, 2022) who highlight representational strategies that center a white feminist conceptualization of sexual violence, while silencing dissenting voices. Often, in these female victim-centered

narratives, sexual violence is explained by a carceral logic that seeks revenge on a single perpetrator. Rape myths (i.e. the monster myth) are employed in this film as part of the white feminist politic (Petit-Thorne, 2022).

I also use the anti-racist critique of the resurgence of the #Metoo movement was underpinned by mainstream feminism (Phipps 2019; 2020; 2021, Rajiva & Patrick, 2021). I focus on the specific critique that the Metoo movement centered raced and classed "white lady tears" (Phipps, 2021). The concept of white lady tears refers to a bourgeois white victimhood that negates other points of oppression and disregards an anti-racist critique (Phipps, 2021; Oh, 2020). It is a feminism that engages in mass and public testimony that both takes up and departs from consciousness-raising principles (Phipps, 2021). It conceptualizes white women's victimhood as an individual injury, within a neoliberal framework. Focusing on power and control, it sides with the state in 'taking down' perpetrators and finding redress through criminalization (Phipps, 2019).

These tears engage a colonial circuit (Phipps, 2021) of white lady tears and white punitive male rage, often started by accusations of sexual violence. Within this circuit, as seen in MeToo, white wounded women adopt a 'hero' narrative of saving others (Phipps, 2021), by engaging in testimony to heal their trauma. Fitting perfectly with both conservative and neoliberal hero narratives and a patriarchal retribution fantasy (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001; Rajiva & Patrick, 2021), individual perpetrators get 'named and shamed' (Phipps, 2020).

This circuit happens without any incorporation of the perspectives of non-white women in the anti-sexual violence movement. In fact, non-white people are used in this circuit to perform in a colonial narrative, making the representations of anti-sexual violence about white women. I chose to use this anti-racist critique of white feminism because this theoretical

application fits very well within the theme of campus sexual violence. For example, there are scenes of gang rape, testimony, white lady tears and white male rage. In my analysis of this film, I point out strategic representational strategies that reflect this theoretical framework.

Feminist Methodology

Feminist methodology comes out of the critique that androcentric research methodology and methods disregard women's experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Scully, 1994). Feminist research instead privileges and centers gender (along with race, class, sexuality, and ability) as a category to investigate women's lived experiences and the reality of their inequality (Scully, 1994). Feminist methodology rejects two main values found in androcentric traditional knowledge production: 1) there can be scientific objectivity between the researcher and researched, and 2) the notion that there is one truth that can be discovered (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Instead, feminists believe that researchers are part of the project just as much as the researched and that there are many truths (Harding, 1991; Naples & Gurr, 2014; Olesen, 2014; Wolf, 1996). One of the main goals of feminist research is to create social change, and to uncover subjugated knowledge that research has otherwise not attended to (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Scully, 1994).

Within a feminist framework, reflexivity is a key practice. It is the understanding that the researcher is part of the research, and a neutral value-free objectivity is not possible (Harding, 1991). It requires that the researcher evaluate their own positioning with privilege and power throughout the research process. It is a way for researchers to examine the potential biases and the effects that it could have on the data (Hesse-Bieber, 2014; Olesen, 2011).

As such, I would like to provide clarity on my position as a feminist researcher because identifying, "one's positionality as a woman is crucial in gaining knowledge and understanding of other women" (Wolf, 1996, p. 13). I locate myself to give the reader a sense of positionality

and the lens through which I conduct my analysis. I am a white, middle class, cisgender, heterosexual woman and a mature student with an educational background in psychology, criminology and feminist and gender studies. I have spent numerous years working in various fields before returning to academia to continue my education. I am a Canadian citizen, from white settler decent, and have been brought up in a traditional Settler-Canadian family and society.

I challenge my privilege by engaging in self-reflexivity. Black, women of colour, and Indigenous feminists argue that we all suffer under a white settler colonial system (Smith, 2013). The solution is to create an environment that is attentive to, and resists, white privilege and white settler logic. I am a female, middle-class cis-gendered woman of white settler descent, but I am also a trained feminist researcher, and I am sensitive to the power dynamics between the researched and the researcher. In addition, because of my years of work with rape crisis centres, I strongly incorporate a trauma-informed approach that recognizes and responds to all forms of trauma and believes in supporting survivors.

I believe in an ongoing and continuing conversation on sexual violence prevention and improving research to better society. Having spent time working on a rape crisis line, I also understand the problem from a crisis worker perspective. I am trained in anti-violent practices and trauma informed care. I believe that there has been much progress due to social movements and hope that this continues to happen. Sexual violence, while still a complex and difficult topic, seems much less taboo as a point of discussion than it was twenty years ago. I think that alternative forms of justice are important, especially systems that restore community and family and encourage accountability.

Case Study Methodology

In all three manuscripts, I use a case study approach. I make use of this approach because it allows for a detailed, focused, and 'bounded' in-depth analysis of the text, or environment under study (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Allowing for a rich investigation of a 'unit', community or example, a case study allows for the incorporation of developmental factors within the context of the environment that I am studying (such as in paper 2) (Flyvbjerg 2011; Stake 2008). It is commonly useful in social research (Priya, 2020) and was developed as a means to gain insight into a context without a positivist approach (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Thus, it works well with a critical feminist approach.

COVID-19 Interruptions. While this project is partially funded by SSHRC, funds were limited and the timeframe of this PhD prevented me from investigating more campuses and their policies. In addition, Covid-19 spread over the province in early March 2020, creating a different way for many to work and live, leading to considerable disruptions. Federal and Provincial government calls to quarantine disrupted a large portion of this project as many changes in post-secondary education were happening. Courses were transferred to an online format and the university was closed to students. This project needed to be reconfigured to allow for the changes that Covid-19 brought. Initially, I proposed researching and analysing one university's standalone sexual violence campaign, using a mixed method approach. It included a feminist critical discourse analysis on a sexual violence campaign (including policy and supporting documents), 20-30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with policy creators and response providers (45 mins to an hour) and focus groups with: 1) white self-identified female students; 2) racialized self-identified female students; 3) LGBTQI2A+ students. However, due to Covid-19 challenges, this was not the project that I ended up doing. Despite having received ethics

approval for the project, I could only complete 14 interviews, which became the data for my second paper. To make up for the data that would have come from the focus groups, I conducted a textual analysis of the film, "*Luckiest Girl Alive*" to demonstrate how rape culture within film is targeting young women who are often the subject of the sexual violence policies.

Case study findings provide a starting point for many larger, more general investigations (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Since the area of sexual violence (on campuses and within media) is evolving, a case study methodology provides flexibility while providing limits to the scope of my research. A university campus is a bounded system (Paper 1 and Paper 2), and so is a film (Paper 3). In papers one and two, the university campus is the site of the case study (University of Ottawa and an unnamed Ontario university). In the third paper, I use a case study methodology for one film, *Luckiest Girl Alive*, to investigate representations and discourses of sexual violence.

Feminist Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted fourteen in-depth, feminist, semi-structured interviews at an un-named Ontario university. As a feminist researcher, it is part of my practice to have the participants guide the interviews, only using prompts if needed. Mostly, I listened to them describe their experience in their own words (Hesse-Biber, 2014). The interviews were exploratory, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, where we engaged in a process of co-creation. Attuning to the insider-outsider relationship, I was sensitive to the power dynamics between the researcher and participants (Hesse-Bieber, 2014; Smith & Griffith, 2022). As the participants were influential members of the university, my position as a mature Ph.D. student might have been beneficial in terms of offsetting any power differential. They have more status and power within the institutional hierarchy than I do, as a Ph.D. candidate, potentially levelling out the researcher/researched power inequality (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Feminist Diane Wolf (1996) considers this situation to be

"studying up," which helps to reduce the exploitation of vulnerable participants (p. 2). Furthermore, I conducted interviews with the understanding that there is no objective universal truth, but partial knowledges, which come from participants' standpoints which falls in line with the feminist approach to interviewing (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Naples & Gurr, 2014). There were obvious limitations to the interviews, due to the fact that they were online.

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured, guided by a list of questions to facilitate discussion (if needed) and were required by the ethics review process. I asked broad interview questions, including how participants perceived their role in sexual violence prevention. Other questions were about conceptualizing their motivations, experiences, challenges, and influences (e.g. literature, bodies of research), what they valued in the policy, achievements of the working group, and what remains to be done in terms of sexual violence prevention. Please see Appendix D to see a list of my questions.

Participant Recruitment. I began participant recruitment after I was granted approval from the ethics review board. After the approval was given, the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies formatted a letter of invitation on official letterhead for me to send out to participants and I created Qualtrics pages to house the consent form and demographics questionnaire.

To recruit participants, I engaged in purposeful and snowball sampling, both of which are effective and reliable methods for finding participants (Frey, 2018; Patton, 2005). With the help of publicly available documents housed on the university website and participants who suggested other people, I reached out to over 30 people and interviewed 14. In 2021, I commenced participant recruitment by sending out letters of invitation. It was quite difficult to recruit participants due to the Covid-19 crisis. For the participants who agreed to being interviewed, I used ZOOM to conduct interviews due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. After each interview,

I asked the participant if they thought I should interview someone else, and often participants mentioned other names. This is otherwise known as snowball sampling.

Most participants wanted to see the interview questions before agreeing to being interviewed. I understand that due to the political and sensitive nature of discussing this topic, and being questioned on their role, the hesitation was warranted. In order to alleviate participants' concerns, I provided an invitation to the study (Appendix B), a link to the consent form (Appendix C) and demographic form housed on Qualtrics, and the list of interview questions (Appendix D). At the end of the interview, I sent a debriefing form to participants (Appendix E). I felt that this process needed to happen to a) be completely transparent and b) provide emotional safety to participants.

Ethical Considerations. I followed all ethical considerations for this research project. I read the ethical guidelines provided by the Tri-Counsel Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans and achieved the certificate (TCPS 2, n.d.). To ensure that all ethical considerations were made, I applied to the University of Ottawa's Ethics Review Board, and included the important documents needed to be reviewed for appropriate ethics clearance. The certificate can be found in the appendices (Appendix A). I adhered to the recommendations made by the Ethics Review Board to ensure the protection of the participants from any foreseeable harm. More importantly, special care was taken when recruiting student participants, especially around their informed consent and rights.

The informed consent form (Appendix C) includes detailed information about the purpose of the study, procedures, potential benefits to the participant, potential risks or discomforts, storage of data, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, participant concerns, reporting, debriefing and the dissemination of results for the second paper. This form asks if the

participants have read and understood the study as described; has informed them that they are permitted to ask questions about the study at any time; and they may discontinue participation without penalty. The debriefing form thanks the participant for their time, ensures confidentiality, and explains the benefits of their participation. It offers contact information for the local distress centre, rape crisis centre, and student mental health services. Furthermore, the primary researcher's contact information is provided in case the participant has questions in the future. To ensure that I captured the participants' voices correctly, I offered the participants the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview. As a feminist researcher, I aimed to garner results that are both ethical and meaningful to the participants who offered their time and expertise to this research project.

In what follows, I discuss the methods that I employ in each manuscript. The following methods aim to reveal how realities are constructed through texts and how those texts have a role in influencing subjective realities (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). It is a move away from patriarchal top-down approaches and white feminist approaches that negate non-white women's experiences which is a very important contribution to the literature on sexual violence.

Feminist Methods

Manuscript One

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

In my first manuscript, "Speaking Freely and Freedom of Speech: Why is Black Feminist Thought Left Out of Ontario University Sexual Violence Policies?", I use a feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005) to investigate the discourses in the University of Ottawa sexual violence policy. I use this method because it provides a nuanced understanding of power and ideology found in discourse. It provides a pathway to investigate how power and ideology both

recreate and maintain a gendered and raced hierarchy (Lazar, 2005; Iverson, 2016; Wooten, 2017). In combination with Lazar's (2005) feminist critical discourse analysis, I also use Carol Bacchi's "policy as discourse" approach (Bacchi, 2000). Starting with an exploratory analysis, the policy-as-discourse approach, allows me, the reader, to identify the reasons why the policy might not be progressive. By looking at the ways in which the 'social problem' is created and defined, the politics of the policy can be revealed (Bacchi, 2012). The taken for granted truths can become visible and through the definition of the problem (Bacchi, 2012), the solution is crafted. This approach is very important for advancing the feminist literature on sexual violence, because it investigates the reality that is created from a text aimed at preventing it. The two approaches that I chose attend to multiple systemic oppressions and work well with my theoretical approach.

Feminist critical discourse analysis can be conducted on texts, interviews, and educational policies to examine how realities are constructed through the wording of a particular document but also through the influence of power and language (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). Critical discourse analysis is considered both a theory and a method; some consider it 'emancipatory" in its primary goal in shaping policy analysis (Allan, 2008). Carol Bacchi's (2012) work is important because of her specific approach to policy analysis, which has been used to analyse education policies and gender discrimination. She relies on a Foucauldian inspired knowledge and power analysis that includes policy makers as subjects within the policy as they shape the 'problem' in questions and subsequent solutions.

The criteria that I used in my analysis is as follows: a) each document must have a direct link to sexual violence prevention on campus at the selected university; b) it must be stated in the policy 67b as being part of a connected framework or the document must be written by an

official prevention capacity (for example, by an ombudsman, human resources, working groups); c) the document must be accessible by internet or made available by the interview participants; d) it must be written in English.

I included the following documents in my analysis a) stand-alone CSV policy, Policy 67b, b) related policies as stated in 67b including Policy 67a (Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination), Policy 66 (Violence Prevention), Policy 77 (Health and Safety and the Faculty of Medicine policy on professionalism), Policy I-19 (Accessibility) and any related academic regulations that might be mentioned in the policy.

My status as a graduate student at the University of Ottawa allowed me to have access to the sexual violence prevention campaign and policy in more ways than just online. The policy was mentioned on every course syllabus and often by professors. Through this lived experience of being in the university community, I had a better understanding of the framework of interconnected policies. Also, living and working within this institution gave me access to a better understanding of the climate on campus (e.g. campus newspapers and discourse among professors and students). I experienced the power dynamics as a student alongside other students and embodied the everyday existence of being a student on campus. My subject position as a mature graduate student gave me privilege compared to an undergraduate student. I viewed the policymakers as social actors affected by intersecting oppressions. In a feminist methodological approach, I challenged my own assumptions and critiqued the ways in which I have taken up a white feminism approach either to policy making or in suggesting meaningful responses to survivors.

Manuscript Two

Institutional Ethnography

In manuscript two, “Sexual violence, secrets, and work: Ruling relations of campus sexual violence policy”, I use Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith’s feminist research approach, institutional ethnography (Balcom, Doucet, & Dubé, 2021; Smith & Griffith, 2022). I use this theory and method because it fits well with an intersectional approach by attending to difference and differences in systems of organization. (Rankin, 2017, p. 2). Institutional ethnography is a critical feminist paradigm, and it is a “method of inquiry into the social that begins and always stays with actual people and their doings” (Smith & Griffith, 2022, p. 3). It relies on the epistemological stance that “all knowledge is socially organized; knowledge is socially constructed” and it is never neutral (Rankin, 2017, p. 2). While institutional ethnography originates from a gender standpoint, combining this paradigm with intersectionality allows for a more fulsome approach to incorporate an analysis of multiple systems of oppression and/or systems of organization. For example, Pat Hill Collins (2000), an intersectional scholar, writes about Black women’s standpoint which incorporates multiple axis of oppression such as race, class and gender. Both Dorothy Smith (2005) and Pat Hill Collins (2000) incorporate how women’s experiences are shaped by proximate social relations and by broader historical, social, political and economic circumstances, but from different subject positions.

Secondly, I chose institutional ethnography because of its focus on women’s standpoints and centering women’s daily experiences by pointing to systemic inequalities (Campbell & Gregor, 2002) but not as an attempt to explain human behaviour as a traditional theory and method (Smith & Griffiths, 2022). Scholars have expanded this approach to incorporate more than just women’s standpoints. For example, George Smith (1988) uses institutional ethnography to investigate gay men’s experiences with police at bathhouses.

Using this theory and method moves research on sexual violence forward because it avoids a top-down, individualistic approach and starts with asking how work processes are coordinated or mediated by texts and discourses (Devault, 2006). Institutional ethnography takes the work that I did in the first paper – a critical feminist discourse analysis - and incorporates other aspects of the process such as discourse, work, and text to discover power relations, otherwise known as 'ruling relations' (Smith & Griffiths, 2022). Using institutional ethnography to analyze campus sexual violence policy provides a very important contribution to the literature on sexual violence because it starts with the embodied experiences of the people who created the policy and continues the research through to the people who enact the policy in various forms today. This approach helps to show, that, yet again, politics are embedded in the policy and prevention program, coordinating individuals toward a particular type of sexual violence prevention and feminism.

The choice to use institutional ethnography came to me by the suggestion of my supervisor, after my original project needed to be redesigned. Due to Covid-19 lockdowns, I had difficulty recruiting participants, and I was unable to conduct focus groups that would allow for a larger critical discourse analysis on the policy and campus environment. Moving to Smith's (2005) institutional ethnography allowed me to incorporate the information from the interviews, institutional texts, legal documents, and media documents, to map the sexual violence policy in a timeline. Throughout this time, I discovered how the everyday is organized, trying to link activated discourse, define roles of social actors and think through the process of creating the sexual violence policy as a whole. In this practice, discourse is not considered a separate entity from a human. In reviewing the interview data, I paid attention to active language as an embodied experience, understanding that the policy can only be really understood via people.

As institutional ethnography is not a traditional form of sociology, analysing the information was not a straightforward process. My analysis included mapping the temporal sequence, charting the relationships between social actors and institutional texts, and thinking through writing the ethnography as a paper. I used Susan Turner's (2006) mapping method. From reading the annual reports on incidents of sexual violence at the university, I understood that there were reported incidents, but few. I wanted to know more about how the university and its experts came to this campaign; what the internal processes were and what participants' own thoughts were about their work. Mapping this complicated process also required me to chart out the roles of each group (e.g. task force, action team, equity rights centre, and review committee), track down documents that participants discussed (e.g. working group on harassment report), and understand how institutional texts are coordinating people's everyday actions.

I attempted to conceptualize the everyday worlds of students, sexual violence responders, and policy creators and how their experiences are being shaped by proximate social relations. In rewatching and listening to the taped ZOOM videos, I traced the concerns and consciousness of the participants and started to map out their work, texts, and discourse, along with other pieces of information such as the policy and supporting documents. The participants were considered "standpoint informants", or "expert knowers" in their daily work and realities (Rankin, 2017, p. 2) which helped to reveal how their standpoint location is organized. Each interview provided a glimpse into the institution and helped me to map out contrasting standpoints to provide an integrated viewpoint of the university (Rankin, 2017, p. 2; G. Smith, 1988). For those who did not occupy the 'chosen standpoint' (Rankin, 2017, p. 2), I picked up on a feeling of powerlessness and an inability to create change from participants. Many participants discussed the lack of transparency and the need for more gatekeeping of the university president's office,

while some were quite content with the process falling in line with the particular feminism that was taken up. I captured shortened excerpts from the interviews to explain chronologically the workflow of the various committees and groups to write the ethnography.

I argue that the local everyday actions of sexual violence prevention workers were bound by institutional forces, that are unseen, through specific texts, such as the legislation and legal language. I map the institutional texts, showing the trans local organization of the ruling relations (Smith, 2006).

Data Mapping. For this second manuscript, I produced visual and descriptive maps (Appendix F and G) to help illustrate the processes at the unnamed university and to analyse the data. Smith and Griffith (2022) argue that: "institutional ethnography is more like cartography than explanation" (p. 20). Institutional ethnography relies on the doing of the policy (Smith & Griffiths, 2022), therefore I attended to the bodily existence of the participants and mapped how these coordinating texts enter into the lives of sexual violence prevention experts. In appendix F, I map the social relations and the institutional texts chronologically, including the private and public sphere (Turner, 2006). Next, I map the institutional actor roles of the task force, action team, equity rights centre and the review committee and their responsibilities (Appendix G) and expand on the roles within the paper. Finally, I include a list of anonymized names and roles of the participants (Appendix H).

Limitations to Institutional Ethnography. Institutional ethnography requires that the interviewer learn from their participants and allow them to guide the conversation (Smith & Griffiths, 2022). But I conducted the interviews before taking up institutional ethnography as my approach. The interviews happened via ZOOM, so I did have a video recording that helped me to have a better understanding of the 'bodily being' of the participants and the concerns that they

were able to share. Furthermore, most participants wanted to see the interview questions before agreeing to being interviewed. Due to the political and sensitive nature of discussing this topic and potentially being questioned on their role, this hesitation was warranted. Yet, this could have affected the responses that I was given (for a list of questions please refer to Appendix D).

Manuscript Three

Feminist Media Studies: Film Textual Analysis

In my third manuscript, "Wind Me Up: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Netflix's Luckiest Girl Alive", I use methods from feminist media studies to examine gendered and raced power relations as they appear as representations of identity (Sutherland & Felty, 2017; Moorti, 2002; 2024; Wanzo, 2008). In conjunction with an anti-racist critique of white feminism as my theoretical perspective, I use Toni Morrison's (1992) methods of close reading to identify strategies of representation that center whiteness in American texts. In her critical examination of American literature, she argues that power is often given to white characters through a series of strategies, by white writers. The use of these strategies often reflects an author's own racial anxiety as they attempt to paint the American identity as 'white'. I specifically draw upon the three representational strategies of people of colour: 1) Black women as silent and acquiescent; 2) the racialized villain; and 3) the politically ambiguous man.

I use this method along with Moorti (2002; 2024), Wanzo (2008) and other intersectional feminist scholars to identify tropes of whiteness within the context of sexual violence, trauma, and 'healing' (see Patrick, 2017; 2021; 2022; Patrick & Rajiva, 2022; Rajiva & Patrick, 2021; Rajiva, 2022). This method is key to determining how texts influence culture but also is key in identifying the harmful recurring themes present in television and film throughout decades. I

investigate tropes of white melancholia, white fragility and white narcissism (Coulthard et al., 2018; Nadharki, 2022; Rajiva, 2022; Wehler, 2018).

In conducting a textual analysis of the film, I pay close attention to the intertext and the paratext. Jonathan Gray (2010; 2018) argues that meaning is not just created within the text itself, but that there are other sites where it can be created for audiences. These 'thresholds of interpretation' can be found in the marketing materials, such as a movie poster, helping to promote the film and engage audiences before seeing it. I use Gray's (2010; 2018) method for drawing out these connections between this film and with other texts, like *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* by investigating the similarities through narrative, discourse, visuals, logic, and politic. I specifically make connections with other shows that use affect to engage the viewer in a white feminist politic, particularly focusing on carceral logic and patriarchal revenge.

I also make connections to the material that surrounds the text and is associated with it, such as interviews, promotional materials, trailers, reviews. I investigate how the film calls to specific audiences to create meaning either before audiences view the film (in the case of paratext), to draw them in and engage politically, or during the film (in the case of intertext). In the paratextual landscape, I investigate the showrunner's choice of casting lead actress Mila Kunis and the slippage that occurs with her connection to the Danny Masterson trial. This method of examination is very important in considering and making sense of the meaning derived from Mila Kunis's involvement as a feminist in *Luckiest Girl Alive* and her support of convicted rapist Danny Masterson. But also, the intertext and paratext can show how 'new' or 'progressive' texts, such as Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive*, maintain the same harmful themes seen in crime drama. Furthermore, it is harmful to the young women who are targeted as consumers of this product.

I chose this film because of its subject matter and the choice to centre feminist Mila Kunis as the lead character and producer to the film. In the film, the main character, Ani, was gang raped in high school, confronted with her trauma later in life, and goes through a transformation of "healing' before engaging in public testimony. It is showcased on *Netflix,* which is easily accessible, and the film provides ample data to demonstrate how dominant ideologies around sexual violence are reproduced. In my process, I identified and developed themes found both in the academic literature and in the film (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014) around sexual violence, trauma, and healing (Moorti, 2024; Patrick & Rajiva, 2021). I also focused on gender and racial discourses around these themes (Moorti, 2002; 2024).

To conduct my analysis, I watched the film numerous times, making note of the interplay between gender, race and class, particularly with the strong female character of Ani. It is a contemporary film, that holds many similar representations to other texts that include female centered perspectives on sexual violence, such as *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006). But this film approached healing from sexual violence in a 'new way' that needed to be investigated, dissected, and connected to larger questions around the #metoo movement and the culture of 'testimony'. As I conducted my analysis, I engaged in self-reflexivity to understand that my own positionality can affect my interpretation. While film analysis is a non-obtrusive form of data collection (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014), I engaged in a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), recording dialogue, plot events, and sequencing (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014). Then I put this description into a workable framework of themes, assigning important observations and ideas to each theme. I asked myself, "what political work is this film asking the viewer to do (Patrick & Rajiva, 2022)?" After reaching saturation with my observations of the film, I began to write the paper with the understanding that my observations

are interconnected with my personal experiences. I attended to this issue by trying to avoid making generalized statements and ensuring that my observations are grounded in the current literature on sexual violence in the media.

In terms of speaking to the limitations of each method that I employ, I have decided not to. Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2011) notes that positivism requires discipline, regulation and the normalization of methods. She argues that qualitative research should move away from defensive modes and move into producing "different knowledge, differently" (St. Pierre, p. 613). Thus, I have decided not to include any additional samples, coding tables or evaluate each method because I would be responding in a positivist manner. This project aims to not engage in positivism. I do, however, discuss methodological challenges in the conclusion.

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Why is Black Feminist Thought Left Out of Ontario University Sexual Violence Policies?

Abstract

As of January 1, 2017, the Province of Ontario has required all post-secondary institutions to create and maintain a stand-alone sexual assault policy that includes clearly stated complaint and response procedures. This paper brings to bear the influence of Black feminist thought as an analytic tool and politic on the outcomes and omissions of the development of these policies. Analyzing the stand-alone sexual violence policy of the University of Ottawa as a case study, the author conducted a critical discourse analysis with an intersectional lens to determine if intersectionality influenced the policy creation. Findings reveal that policymakers conceptualize gender in a one-dimensional manner, without attention to intersections of sexualized violence with racism and other systems of oppression. A policy with an ill-defined focus on gender can result in a colorblind policy that suggests that the institution should treat all students the same, regardless of systemic disadvantages they might face on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or ability. This avoidance can create barriers to reporting. Neoliberalism and the changing university culture are discussed.

Introduction

Violence against women continues to be a problem on Ontario post-secondary campuses. Researchers estimate that four out of five undergraduate women have experienced dating violence (Canadian Federation of Students 2015). Brennan and Taylor-Butts (2008) report that the highest-at-risk group for sexual assault is women between the ages of 15-24. Senn et al. (2014) report that out of 899 undergraduates surveyed, over 50% of young women experienced one or more forms of sexual violence after 14 years old. Since women are not a homogenous group, many Black feminist writers urge policymakers to use intersectionality as a framework to highlight how the power dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality and ableism interact in the everyday lives of women. Understanding how multiple systems of power interact within sexual violence can give the university a greater ability to give meaningful interventions to women on campus (Bourassa, Bendig, Oleson, Ozog, Billan, Owl, & Ross-Hopley 2017; Wooten 2017). Despite widespread support for intersectional theory, there has been little change in some Canadian universities' approaches to sexual violence prevention and policy, leaving gaps and oversights that affect students' access to resources. The result can be gender-focused sexual violence policies, which tend to be colour-blind policies that aim to treat all students the same, regardless of any systemic discrimination they may face due to race, class, sexual orientation, and ability within an ever-changing university population (Wooten 2017). So, when prevention campaigns and policies focus on gender only, it negates the many voices of Black feminist writers who think of intersectionality as both a theory and politic (Collins & Bilge 2016; Crenshaw 1990; Gray & Pin 2017). The implication of ignoring multiple systems of oppression can be an inadequate institutional response to survivors seeking meaningful resources and a safe university campus environment.

The University of Ottawa is a large bilingual research-intensive university. Using this university as a case study, I argue that Black feminist thought is not visible within the discourse of this stand-alone sexual violence policy despite decades of critical thinking. The University of Ottawa's negation of multiple systems of oppression co-occurring can have serious implications for students seeking help and resources. This paper explores the political, representational, and structural problems with a gender-only focused campus sexual violence policy. I suggest that the reason for this negation is due to a preference for neoliberal logic in the university's approach to sexual violence prevention and response, enabling the university to individualize sexual violence and personal safety, increase security measures on campus and sustaining rape myths (Gray & Pin 2017; Trusolino 2017). This course of action prevents the university from addressing the core issues at the heart of sexual violence, which involve investigating multiple systems of power and control, such as racism and colonialism, alongside gender.

Methods and Methodology

A case study approach allows for a more detailed, in-depth analysis that includes the policy creation process's developmental factors and the context of the campus environment (Flyvbjerg 2011; Stake 2008). The University of Ottawa has a student population of close to 43,000 students, (58% female, 40% male, and 3% undetermined) is located in a prominent mid-size Canadian city and is considered within Canadian society as a pillar in the academic and research community, since the mid-nineteenth century (The University of Ottawa, n.d.-a). Sitting on un-ceded and un-surrendered Algonquin territory, this university is a member of the U15, a Canadian research-intensive university collective which conducts approximately eight billion dollars worth of research annually and is one of the largest French-English bilingual universities in the world (The University of Ottawa n.d.-a; U15 n.d.). The University of Ottawa is unique to

other Ontario universities. There are 22 publicly funded Ontario universities, and this university was one of the few that had a stand-alone sexual violence policy before the provincial mandate came into effect (Bill 132 2016; Ontario Universities n.d.). Mattieu and Poisson (2014) report that in 2014, only four Ontario Universities had specific policies to address campus sexual violence, with the University of Ottawa in the process of reviewing their policies at that time. Also, this university does not have a student code of conduct, ensuring that students maintain their right to protest (University of Ottawa 2015). The student population at the University of Ottawa is comprised of 83% undergraduate students, 11% master students, and 5% doctorate students (The University of Ottawa n.d.-a). An independent survey conducted by the Ontario Government (2019) reveals that in the 2017-18 school year, 22% of the University of Ottawa students experienced sexual assault and 62.4% experienced sexual harassment. In these incidents, 87% of the perpetrators were male and 49.5% was another student. Only 46% of survivors disclosed the incident of sexual violence to another person and 9.4% told an institutional member (Government of Ontario 2019).

Using an intersectional framework, I investigate how the power dynamics of race, class, gender, and ableism may factor into students' everyday lives on campus and how power is replicated in the discourse of the stand-alone sexual violence policy. In my analysis, I employ a feminist critical discourse approach to investigate the University of Ottawa's sexual violence prevention policy. I adopt the understanding that sexual violence is one form of gendered violence, and that law and policy is not equally applied to all persons within a community (Iverson 2016; Wooten 2017). Since the policy under investigation is named "Policy 67b: Prevention of Sexual Violence," I will be using the term “sexual violence” throughout this paper. I approach this document in a “policy as discourse” manner as defined by Bacchi (2000) and

with an exploratory and inductive analysis. Investigating how the policymakers represent and create the social problem of sexual violence within the policy's discourse, I pay close attention to power relations.

Within the discourse of policy, I examine how the institution articulates its stance on the issue, setting limits to the "problem," shaping a solution, and demonstrating what is possible and what is not possible for a survivor who might seek help and resources within the wording of the document (Allan 2008; Iverson 2016, Wooten 2017). Since the policymakers do not exist outside of the campus environment's politics and the societal problem of gender-based violence, I view them as social actors acting within the social constructions of race, class, sexuality, ability, and gender within Canadian society. In this review of the policy's language, I have given additional attention to any taken for granted assumptions, metaphors, and absences within the text to isolate how sexual violence is both constructed and resolved to question further why the policy takes the shape that it does (Allan 2008; Bacchi 1999, 2000; Iverson 2016). After reading the policy numerous times, I identified themes, created links, and gave meaning to the discourse (Allan 2008; Iverson 2016).

Case Study

When two high profile cases of sexual violence involving the University of Ottawa students came to public attention in 2014, there was a media and public outcry. In response, the University of Ottawa's President, Alan Rock, appointed a task force comprised of faculty, administration, students, and community members to review the problem of harassment and sexual violence and provide solutions to help create a respectful university community. The task force consulted with students, administrators, community-based experts, and other institutions during their investigation (University of Ottawa 2015). The task force operationalized sexual

violence as defined by the Government of Ontario's 2011 Sexual Violence Action Plan, in *Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives* as:

> any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. This violence takes different forms, including sexual abuse, sexual assault, rape, incest, childhood sexual abuse and rape during armed conflict. It also includes sexual harassment, stalking, indecent or sexualized exposure, degrading sexual imagery, voyeurism, cyber harassment, trafficking and sexual exploitation (University of Ottawa, 2015, 7).

While this definition does not mention that the systemic forms of oppression like racism, colonialism, sexism, homophobia, class, or ableism can co-occur in sexual violence, the task force notes that they employed a survivor-centric, values-based, intersectional approach to their analysis of the campus environment as noted in the following statement: "Our task force was also informed by a recognition of the intersectional nature of sexual violence, in which individuals' 'race'/ethnicity, ability, Indigeneity and socioeconomic status, among other factors, can render them vulnerable on multiple fronts" (University of Ottawa 2015, 7). The task force acknowledges in their report that systems of privilege and oppression could be shaped by "colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism, and patriarchy and interactions occur[ing] with connected forms of power" (University of Ottawa 2015, 7). The forms of power include "laws, policies, state governments and other political and economic unions, religious institutions and media" (University of Ottawa 2015, 7). However, the task force did not name universities as part of the interconnected forms of power.

As requested by the University of Ottawa's President, the task force created a series of recommendations. The task force recommended that the university create a stand-alone sexual

violence policy, independent of older sexual harassment and harassment and discrimination policies. Other recommendations put forth included creating a statement of values which articulates the universities position on respect and equality and committing to providing awareness training to the senior administration, students, and other specified groups (i.e. Bystander Initiatives). The task force also recommended that the university develop an ongoing collaborative relationship with community-based organizations, commit to collecting and making annual metrics on complaints of harassment, sexual violence, and discrimination publicly available and provide undergraduate courses exploring the topic of sexual violence. An action team was put in place to ensure that the recommendations were followed (University of Ottawa 2015). These initiatives comprise the university's current sexual violence prevention campaign.

While these recommendations seem like a positive move to creating a safer learning environment on campus, many stakeholders were outspoken about their lack of confidence in the administration to carry out the recommendations of the task force, having experienced the university acting unilaterally in previous efforts (University of Ottawa 2015). Stakeholders argue that the President was not transparent in how he selected and appointed members of this task force. In addition, the stakeholders expressed concern with the task force's use of sanitized language in official documents. For example, words like "equality" and "respect" are used rather than a more direct and appropriate term, such as "rape culture." These actions to disregard outside input seem to replicate the institution's failure to respond to a 2005-2006 Harassment Working Group's recommendations, made a decade before the formation of this task force. Since the Harassment Working Group's creation was in response to a student-led campaign, the institution's failure to provide more sexual harassment awareness, training, and better policies on campus disappointed many (The University of Ottawa 2015).

In 2016, the University of Ottawa completed the stand-alone sexual violence policy, apparently with the help of students, faculty experts, and community partners (The University of Ottawa 2015). The policy is 16 pages long and includes many definitions, such as “sexual violence,” “consent,” “sexual assault,” “sexual harassment,” and the “university community.” It includes a statement of values and is survivor centric. However, I did not find any mention of race, racism, or colonialism within the policy, and appears to me to be a colour-blind sexual violence policy. In other words, I find that the university appears to be framing sexual violence, along with other sexual violence-related terms, in a manner that is ahistorical, decontextualized, individualized, and mostly gender-neutral, by referring to a universal student within the university community. For example, the definition of sexual violence is:

> "Sexual violence" means any sexual act or act targeting a person's sexuality, gender identity or gender expression, whether the act is physical or psychological in nature, that is committed, threatened, or attempted against a person without the person's consent. It includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, non-consensual condom removing (stealthing), and sexual exploitation. For further clarity, sexual assault includes rape. (The University of Ottawa 2016, Section 3.2)

In reading this definition of sexual violence, it appears to me that the university defines sexual violence as something that exists outside of the interlocking power dynamics of gender, race, class, and ableism. Since the policymakers do not name multiple power systems within this definition, I suggest that the university is framing the social problem of sexual violence as an individualized problem. A possible reason for this specific framing could be because the University of Ottawa considers sexual violence to be an outlier-type event that occurs based on the specific characteristics or actions of the survivor or perpetrator (Quinlan 2017). I find that the

individualized definition of sexual violence conflicts with the stated purpose of the policy which is to “reaffirm” the university’s existing commitment to "a safe and healthy campus for work, for study, and campus community life for all members of the university community and its commitment to provide support to those members of the university community directly affected by sexual violence" (The University of Ottawa 2016; Section 1.1).

While the policymakers do not mention race and ethnicity in the wording of this document, I find they use other words that might reference race, culture, or ethnicity in the policy, words like “marginalized,” “discrimination,” and “prejudice.” For example, the term “marginalized” appears once in the document as part of the institution's values: "The University acknowledges and combats broader social attitudes about gender, sex and sexuality that normalize sexual violence and undermine women and marginalized group's equality” (The University of Ottawa 2016, Section 4.7). I consider the term “marginalized group” to be quite broad, especially since the policymakers do not define what the institution considers a marginalized group within this policy. Furthermore, I find the wording of this portion of the policy suggests that women and marginalized groups are two separate entities that do not exist concurrently, like in the everyday lives of women of colour. Also, there is no elaboration on what specific attitudes undermine women and marginalized groups, which is essential since this is the only instance that the words “women” and “marginalized groups” appear in the policy.

The term “discrimination” appears in reference to related policies. The stand-alone sexual violence policy works within a framework of policies, including harassment, discrimination, accessibility, and inclusion (The University of Ottawa Human Rights 2019). At the University of Ottawa, the human rights office manages all complaints of sexual violence, harassment and discrimination, and they report to higher levels of the university administration. The purpose of

the stand-alone sexual violence policy is to provide students with transparency, accountability, and reliable and consistent procedures (Shen 2017; The University of Ottawa Human Rights 2019). As stated within the policy, the related policies include the policy on the prevention of harassment and discrimination, the policy on violence prevention, a health and safety policy and a policy on professionalism for the Faculty of Medicine. In terms of which policy to use, the sexual violence policy is only valid when sexual violence occurs. For example, if harassment or discrimination occurs along with sexual violence, the policy advises:

> Harassment and/or discrimination: [The sexual harassment policy] and [the policy on harassment and discrimination from students] and [policy on harassment and discrimination for employees] apply to complaints of harassment and/or discrimination that do not involve sexual violence, sexual harassment or workplace sexual harassment. However, only this policy applies if the circumstances of a disclosure or a complaint of sexual violence also encompass harassment and/or discrimination. (The University of Ottawa 2016, Section 6.3)

From this section of the policy, I understand that the stand-alone sexual violence policy is valid if complaints involve sexual violence and the policies within this framework cannot be layered. So, if the university finds that the perpetrator's actions fall within the parameters of the institution's definition of sexual violence, the complainant can file their complaint under the stand-alone sexual violence policy, and the response workers will follow this policy in response. However, I find this potentially problematic since there is no anti-racist commitment within the stand-alone sexual violence policy. This absence may permit the university to treat the complaint of sexual violence in a decontextualized manner, devoid of consideration for the ongoing racism and colonialism that women of colour may face on campus.

The policy on the prevention of harassment and discrimination (Policy 67a) includes many important factors that create the context in which sexual violence occurs. For example, discrimination can include:

> a) a distinction—intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect—because of a person's race, ancestry, ethnic origin, creed, place of origin, colour, citizenship, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, pregnancy, marital status, family status, a record of offences, political affiliation, religious belief, disability or means to accommodate the disability and
>
> b) that has the effect of erecting barriers, or creating obligations, disadvantages or situations of unequal treatment that withhold or limit access to privileges, advantages or political, social or economic rights available to other members of society. (The University of Ottawa 2012, para. 23-24)

I find the University of Ottawa's definition of discrimination includes a wider scope of power inequalities that women on campus may experience. I can imagine that by layering Policy 67a with Policy 67b (the stand-alone sexual violence policy), a more nuanced understanding of how and why sexual violence happens on campus occurs can be developed. Furthermore, other key aspects of harassment and discrimination are essential in providing context to sexual violence on campus, such as systemic discrimination, harassment, poisoned environment, and workplace harassment. For example, the University of British Colombia's Sander School of Business students singing Y.O.U.N.G. rape chant and Pocahontas' chants during frosh week can provide the context and potential motivation for sexual violence (Solinsky 2013). I consider these chants to be examples of a poisonous environment and systemic discrimination since women are

targeted based on gender, race, and age, resulting in unfair treatment, thus making the environment one which is unsafe to work and study.

Colour-blind policies negate a complainant's ability to have the university consider the historical markers of inequality, like gender and race. These policies falsely assume that everyone is treated equally (Collins 2000; Wooten 2017). Critical race theorists argue that these policies normalize Whiteness and camouflage racism (Collins 2000; Wooten 2017). Colour-blind policies remove the historical markers of inequality and the purposeful degradation of women of colour. Collins (2000) notes that the emerging colour-blind philosophy constitutes a new form of racism within institutions:

> A new rhetoric of color-blindness that reproduces social inequalities by treating people the same (Crenshaw, 1997) makes it more difficult to maintain safe spaces at all. Any group that organizes around its own self-interests runs the risk of being labelled "separatist," "essentialist," and anti-democratic. The protracted attack on so-called identity politics works to suppress historically oppressed groups that aim to craft independent political agendas around identities of race, gender, class, and/or sexuality." (121)

Colour-blind policies are detrimental to women of colour's safety and security because they make it difficult for women of colour to organize within the institution politically and suggest a different narrative to an ill-defined gender-only narrative. Colour-blind policies suppress racialised perspectives by avoiding them (DiAngelo 2011). Racialised women can face unique challenges to disclosing sexual violence, such as cultural shame surrounding discussions about sexuality and sex, meanwhile disclosing sexual violence is very important to positive educational outcomes (Stermac, Horowitz & Bance 2017).

Top-Down Approaches to Policy Creation

When policymakers use a top-down approach to policy creation instead of responding to students' needs, the result can be a limited response for survivors. More specifically, a gender-focused approach to a university response can inadvertently set the standard of care based on a universal woman's needs, concealing the interconnecting power dynamics of race, class, gender, and ableism. A universal woman tends to be White, straight, cis-gendered, middle-class, Western, and non-disabled (Gray & Pin 2017). The outcome of this standard of care is an inadequate response for those needing services that go beyond this universal woman. For example, the policymakers offer little discussion on the complexity of consent and the taken for granted norms about who is afforded the right to consent. The policymakers define consent as:

> "Consent" means an active, direct, voluntary, unimpaired, and conscious choice and agreement to engage in sexual activity. These elements of consent must be present, even if alcohol or drugs have been consumed. Consent cannot be given by a person whose judgement is impaired by drugs or alcohol or by other forms of impairment. It is not acceptable for a person who is said to have engaged in sexual violence to use their own consumption of alcohol or drugs as an excuse for their mistaken belief that there was consent. For further clarity, consent: cannot be assumed nor implied; cannot be given by silence or the absence of "no"; cannot be given by an individual who is impaired by alcohol or drugs, or is unconscious; cannot be given by an individual who is asleep; cannot be obtained through threats or coercion; can be revoked at any time; cannot be given if the person who is said to have engaged in sexual violence has abused a position of trust, power or authority; might not be given properly if an individual has a condition that limits his or her verbal or physical means of interaction—in such instances, it is

> extremely important to determine how consent will be established. (The University of Ottawa 2016, Section 3.2)

From this definition, I interpret consent as an isolated act that is independent of the interconnected power dynamics of gender, race, class, and ableism. I understand that consent is an individual conscious choice, an agreement between two people, that can be given either verbally or physically, and if there is a "condition," then the University expects that consent is negotiated between the individuals involved. However, the term "condition" is not elaborated on within the policy and could mean a variety of things. More importantly, this statement might mean little to women in their everyday lives on campus, as this definition does not provide clarity and transparency as the policymakers aim to do. If "condition" refers to a disability, then this is the only time the policymakers mention it in this policy.

Simplistic depictions of consent within a stand-alone sexual violence policy avoids the complexity and the frequency of normalized hegemonic social norms towards who is afforded the ability to consent. For example, Martino (2019) notes that abled-bodied people frequently dismiss people with disabilities as not having a right to consent to sexual activity and manage their sexual relationships. In addition to disabled women, women who engage in sex work frequently face ignorant attitudes towards their ability to consent to sex or violence (Martino 2019; Ralston 2019). Since many students engage in sex work as a means to pay for their education, this gap in the policy discourse can make it difficult for a survivor to come forward out of fear that responders might be misinformed or uneducated on the realities of sex workers rights (Josic 2020). The university's avoidance of language that speaks to the complexity of consent within the policy discourse can create more problems for survivors seeking resources than resolving them.

Moreover, I learn little about women's needs by reading the public annual metrics on complaints of harassment, sexual violence, and discrimination on campus. For example, from September 2018-April 2019, the University of Ottawa's Human Rights Office reports 52 complaints of harassment, 13 cases of discrimination based on disability, 9 cases of discrimination based on race, 71 complaints of sexual violence, and 173 students requested information regarding accessibility (The University of Ottawa Human Rights 2019). The report provides no further details about the survivor in terms of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Providing minimal survivor demographic information to the general public appears to be a common practice among post-secondary institutions in Canada. In 2015, Bourassa et al. (2017) investigated 44 English speaking Canadian universities' websites by conducting an environmental scan to determine if institutional on-campus violence policies were available and whether or not each institution had a reporting system that acknowledged the survivors' ethnicity. The authors found that few universities had that system in place. Only six universities recorded the gender and/or ethnicity of the survivor, and this information was not publicly available. The University of British Columbia was the only institution in Canada that addressed violence against Indigenous women and had an intersectional response system (Bourassa et al. 2017).

The Influence of Neoliberalism on Canadian University Campuses

Many of the gaps and oversights could be due to the ongoing corporatization of Canadian universities (Quinlan 2017). Some argue that the administration has begun to use corporate strategies to organize the university, using top-down approaches such as lean management and performance indicators such as graduation and student employments rates as a focus (Gray & Pin 2017; Quinlan 2017; The University of Ottawa n.d.-b). These choices are changing the university

from a governance structure to a corporate structure where collective bargaining is difficult, strikes occur more often, and the university offers few meaningful resources to survivors (Gray & Pin 2017; Haiven 2017; Quinlan 2017).

A corporate university comes as a result of reduced government funding (starting in the mid-1990s). The need for funding has created a client/supplier relationship with students, where administrators tend to view students as "revenue-generating agents" (Quinlan 2017). At the University of Ottawa, in 2019, tuition and other fees account for $453.1 million out of the total $1,350 million in funding sources (The University of Ottawa n.d.-a). Operating grants ($317.7 million) research grants and contracts ($285.7 million) bring much less money into the university (The University of Ottawa n.d.-a). In order to remain competitive in the marketplace, universities are creating attractive high-fee boutique programs and mass marketing these programs to attract and maintain students. Some leading academics argue that the campus administrators may be working to generate a perception of a university community comprising of affluent White students, which, in turn, maintains the university space as a colonial site (Bourassa et al. 2017; Quinlan 2017). Part of these high-fee boutique programs include specialty business programs, where at the University of Ottawa's Telfer School of Management costs between $28,000 for the one-year program and $30,350 a year for a two-year program depending on the length of the program for domestic students (Telfer School of Management n.d.). This same program is between $64,000 and $68,000, respectively, for international students.

The University appears to be taking a neoliberal approach to sexual violence by individualizing trauma, preferring to place the responsibility of women's safety in students' hands (Gray & Pin 2017; Quinlan 2017). According to this logic, sexual violence can be reduced by implementing sexual violence prevention programs that aim to motivate bystanders. One

example of such a program is the Bystander Initiative (Gray & Pin 2017; Quinlan 2017). Gray and Pin (2017) argue that these programs of securitization technologies tend to prey on women's fear without fully engaging in an analysis of the multiple power structures and dynamics co-occurring on campus. Some university administrators prefer these programs because they can give the institution a visible and tangible way to respond to sexual violence (Gray & Pin 2017; Quinlan 2017). For example, administrators can rationalize the financial cost of implementing the program against a predictive and expected decrease in the rates of sexual violence post-program. However, an increase in reporting rates suggests a safer campus community and an easy campus disclosure system (Gray & Pin 2017; Quinlan 2017).

Stranger Danger and the Racialised Other

Gray, Pin, and Cooper (2019) argue that after a public incident of sexual violence, the university administration can create a perception of safety on campus by co-opting feminist language within their prevention campaign and sustaining rape myths based on “stranger danger” and the “racialised other.” In turn, the University places the focus on women to protect themselves, while reducing the onus on the university to provide meaningful resources and interventions for a safer campus.

Campus officials tend to ignore racism and misogyny within the university community and reinforce these systems of oppression by asking survivors and students to work together to create safety on campus, making individuals responsible for their safety. For example, in 2007, after the Vanier Rape at York University, where two men illegally entered Vanier College dormitory and raped a female student, university administrators and the Toronto Police engaged in messages of securitization (Trusolino 2017). Campus officials created fear among women by telling them to "lock your doors" and "protect yourself” while doing little to prevent male

students from engaging in sexual violence (Trusolino 2017). In this case, the university administration capitalised on a nearby low income racialised neighbourhood, emphasizing rape myths such as “stranger danger” and the “racialised other.” The focus on racial fear removed the institution's responsibility to provide a safe place for all students to work and study and undermined the collective efforts of autonomous women. Instead, the university increased campus security measures and reified a universal sexual assault victim by avoiding the vital work of investigating the power dynamics of race, class, and gender on campus that are often at the heart of sexual violence.

Furthermore, these messages of the “racialised other” affect racialised male students' ability to live and study on campus without harassment. For example, at the University of Ottawa, media reports brought two separate racial profiling incidents to public attention in 2019. In these incidents, the university's paid security force engaged in racist carding practices, apparently upholding “outdated” policies and procedures (Gergyek 2019). In the first case, security asked a racialised student skateboarding on campus to produce his student I.D. on the spot. When he could not, he was detained by security for police, as if to suggest that his racialised presence was enough for the security personnel to assume an “outsider” status and that he could not be a student at the university (Ahmed 2012). In a separate incident, a second racialised male student was asked to provide proof of address by the University of Ottawa’s paid security force when he used his security card to gain access to his residence. The security personnel did not card a White student who entered the residence only minutes before. Bystanders witnessed this incident, verifying the university's racist security measures (Dutil 2020). In response to ongoing racism on campus, the University of Ottawa created an anti-discrimination committee. Campus officials held two town hall meetings, one with

undergraduates and another with graduate students to discuss the prevalence and impact of institutional racism on campus. Since the University of Ottawa is located in downtown Ottawa, close to a shopping centre, multiple hotels, and a men's shelter (Codjoe 2019), some could easily rationalise these security measures due to the physical location of the university.

The state also employs the rape myths of “stranger danger” and the “racialised other” in response to sexual violence. By using a neoliberal logic that views individuals as responsible for their own safety and well-being, the state obscures its ongoing racist and colonialist actions within the legal system, family services, and law enforcement, systems that continue to fail countless women (Maynard 2017; Razack 2016). Police officers tend to treat women who report sexual violence with skepticism and distrust, often with a misunderstanding of the effects of trauma (Johnson 2017). Many officers maintain a very narrow idea of what “real” rape is, preferring to investigate stranger rape over acquaintance rape. The police often act as gatekeepers, providing care and protection to some, while neglecting and abusing others (Razack 2016; Ralston 2019). As contemporary agents of the state, the police enforce systemic oppression based on race, gender, sexual identity, and immigration with the threat of forcing “undesirables” into the prison-industrial complex (Incite! 2016, Jones & Whynacht 2019; Maynard 2017).

Black feminist thinkers argue for an anti-violent, anti-colonialist, anti-racist approach to sexual violence. In order to achieve that, a policy and response system should incorporate a consideration for multiple systems of oppression that occur simultaneously in the everyday lives of women. However, the government and some university policymakers tend to dismiss this approach (Jones & Whynacht 2019; Maynard 2017; Samaran 2019). Moreover, while many institutions report to involve students and sexual violence experts in the creation of the stand-

alone sexual violence policies, as stipulated by Bill 132 (2016), Gray, Pin, and Cooper (2019) argue that some institutions engage in avoidance tactics making it difficult for representatives to attend important consultation meetings. In sum, some administrators fail to consider and incorporate student needs, making student inclusion illusionary. In order to move forward, the university must reconsider this approach.

Conclusion

In this paper, using a large bilingual research-intensive university's sexual violence policy as a case study, I have demonstrated that the policy is colour-blind and that attention to the multiple intersections of oppression such as gender, race, class and ableism, while very important, has been negated. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how a colour-blind gender-focused policy can have detrimental implications for many women and men of colour on campus. As the discourse of the policy articulates the university's stance on sexual violence, it appears to me that this university chooses to ignore the interconnected forms of oppression that women face on campus, preferring to use a neoliberal logic to sexual violence prevention and response. I argue that this logic can result in actions such as implementing bystander training and increasing campus security, which sustains rape myths, such as “stranger danger” and the “racialised other.” This course of action enables the university to appear to be responding to sexual violence without having to respond to ongoing racism, colonialism, classism, and ableism on campus.

Since rates of disclosure about sexual assault tend to be low at post-secondary institutions, I think it is doubtful that they will improve if the policymakers continue to write policies that are colour-blind and individualistic. University administrators must understand

students' experiences to improve the disclosure process for survivors and help change the university culture to a truly safe and equitable space for all.

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Sexual Violence, Secrets, and Work: Ruling Relations of Campus Sexual Violence Policy

Abstract

Campus sexual violence complaints involving students might seem easy to record and report, but university campuses in North America have a culture of secrecy and tend to focus on neoliberal approaches. In this paper, I trace the genealogy of a sexual violence policy from an unnamed university to argue that ruling relations make the current provincially mandated stand-alone sexual violence policies into a performative tool that silences expert knowledges, coordinates institutional practices towards a particular type of sexual violence prevention, and reinforces a broader neoliberal logic in higher education. I explore my argument in three sections: the social organization of the policy and prevention campaign, the rules and regulations of the policy, and the neoliberalism of the current sexual violence discourse. As my analytical framework, I draw on Dorothy Smith's social ontology, which aims to investigate the practices and experiences of people by focusing on work and bodily existence as key points of reference. Drawing upon in-depth semi-structured interviews I conducted with fourteen participants (and one email exchange) at an unnamed Ontario university, I analyze how variously positioned people within an institutional structure negotiate relations of ruling in the specific context of campus sexual violence.

Introduction

Sexual violence on North American university campuses continues to be a problem with lasting effects. Survivors can experience significant trauma and fear of retaliation while being confronted with needing to think about avoiding the perpetrator in multiple residence spaces, classes, and on campus. Also, survivors need to consider potential material losses after the trauma, such as loss of tuition, loss of professional development (teaching and research assistantships) and the cost of healing that might come from therapy or counselling (Sheehy, 2017). Across Canadian universities, students regularly protest the current systems in place. For example, in 2021, Western University students used social media, i.e., TikTok videos, to disclose sexual violence during frosh week. Thousands of students gathered and walked out of classes to protest their university's lack of action, revealing that something was missing from the administrative response (CBC, 2021).

A recent survey of Ontario University students revealed that approximately 60% of surveyed students did not understand or know of their university's support, services, accommodations, and reporting procedures for sexual violence (Ministry of Colleges, 2019). Some of the supports of which they are unaware include counselling services, health services, and housing services, as well as academic accommodations. This lack of knowledge is particularly alarming, since, in Ontario, all universities are provincially mandated to have a stand-alone sexual violence policy, training and prevention program. Universities also need to provide sexual violence prevention materials that are publicly available from the first week of orientation and throughout students' time at the university. They need to publicly record the number of times students have inquired about reporting sexual violence and run programs that help ensure safe campuses (Government of Ontario, 2015). So, why, when it appears that so much is available to prevent sexual violence, are students still protesting and demanding change?

Although campus sexual violence complaints involving students might seem easy to record and report, university campuses in North America and beyond have a culture of secrecy (Phipps, 2020; Yung, 2015). Instead, universities tend to focus on neoliberal tactics that rely on self-securitization, increased security, and individualism while adapting market-ready logic to the university system (Phipps, 2017; Quinlan, 2017b; Trusolino, 2017). In this paper, I trace the genealogy of a sexual violence policy from an unnamed university to argue that ruling relations make the current provincially mandated stand-alone sexual violence policies into a performative tool that silences expert knowledges, coordinates institutional practices towards a particular type of sexual violence prevention, and reinforces a broader neoliberal logic in higher education.

I explore my argument in three sections: the social organization of the policy and prevention campaign, the rules and regulations of the policy, and the neoliberalism of the current sexual violence discourse. As my analytical framework, I draw on Dorothy Smith's (2005; 2006; 2022) social ontology, which aims to investigate the practices and experiences of people by focusing on work and bodily existence as key points of reference. Drawing upon in-depth semi-structured interviews I conducted with fourteen participants (and one email exchange) with faculty, staff, and students at an unnamed Ontario university, I analyze how variously positioned people within an institutional structure negotiate relations of ruling in the specific context of campus sexual violence. I examine what is supposed to happen in terms of sexual violence prevention and response alongside the everyday experiences of people working hard to prevent and respond to sexual violence in the institutional setting of the university. Therefore, my focus is on 'work,' directing my attention to the work processes of conducting sexual violence prevention and response. In the next upcoming sections, I discuss institutional ethnography, and the problem of sexual violence in universities before I discuss the case study.

Institutional Ethnography

Canadian Sociologist Dorothy Smith developed institutional ethnography during the 1970s as a feminist research approach (Balcom, Doucet, & Dubé, 2021; Smith & Griffith, 2022), which aimed to work towards a more equitable society by pointing out structural inequalities (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Branching out from traditional methods of sociology, Smith wanted to hear and validate women's knowledge and experiences, which she found were often subordinated by the authoritative knowledge of male academics and experts. In this process, Smith developed a sociology where anyone, regardless of gender, could seek knowledge instead of relying on authoritative expertise to explain their experiences (Balcom et al., 2021; Campbell & Gregor, 2002). She used people's everyday experiences to learn about the institutions that organize and rule their lives (Devault, 2006). Representing a combination of Feminism and Marxism, institutional ethnography is "an alternate sociology" (Smith, 2005, p. 1).

Many prominent sociologists have since taken up Smith's framework. For example, George Smith (1988) explores how the police control gay men's sexuality, while Rankin and Campbell (2006) investigate ruling relations in nursing, and De Montigny (1995; 2014) examines ruling relations in child protection services within social work. Some feminist researchers have also used this method to investigate campus sexual violence policies (see Gardiner, Chisholm, and Finn, 2021; MacAndrew, 2017). Institutional ethnography, thus, offers a fruitful approach to analyzing power relations and making meaningful change for students on Canadian campuses.

A central tenet of Smith's framework is to understand how work processes are coordinated or mediated by texts and various discourses (Devault, 2006). In their latest book, *Simply Institutional Ethnography*, Smith and Griffith (2022) refer to the textually mediated

process as a recipe involving three points - discourse, work, and text - to discover ruling relations. Ruling relations control work processes, and work activities ground social life and organization (Smith & Griffith, 2022). Through the discourse of task force members, action team members and those who administer sexual violence prevention and response, I explore how specific texts of the campus sexual violence campaign coordinate individuals toward a particular type of sexual violence prevention.

Smith and Griffith (2022) advise starting any analysis of work with the body, as work is an embodied experience. Therefore, I focus on how participants speak about their work as an embodied experience to learn about their daily experiences and knowledge (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Tummons, 2017) and to make visible the invisible social relations that rule them daily. In our conversations, the participants "activate" texts when speaking about their work processes, as texts "create this essential connection between the local of our (and others') bodily being and the trans-local organization of the ruling relations" (Smith, 2006, p. 118–119). In conjunction with a critical feminist methodology, I understand that each interview, as an embodied experience, provides a different perspective on the institution, and institutional ethnography helps me to map out these different perspectives to provide an integrated viewpoint of the university (G. Smith, 1988). One of the principles that I rely on is that "truth can be multiply defined or understood, and that knowledge is political" (Naples & Gurr, 2014, p. 15).

I conducted fourteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews (and one email exchange) with faculty, staff, and students at an un-named Ontario university. I asked broad interview questions to help facilitate conversations centred on their experiences but more specifically focused on how they use, engage, and understand the sexual violence policy and related texts. Due to COVID lockdown restrictions, I used ZOOM to conduct interviews. Using Susan Turner's

(2006) method, I mapped the social organization of the sexual violence campaign (see Appendix 1 & 2). In what follows, I draw upon shortened transcribed excerpts of participants' interviews for brevity and clarity, but much of the discourse remains. To better understand an integrated view of the relations of ruling, I also try to include the words of most of the participants while still selecting those who best revealed the different aspects of the university. All participants' names are anonymized (for a list of names with demographics please see Appendix 3).

Sexual Violence in Universities

Campus sexual violence is an enduring problem that spans universities in the Anglophone North (Phipps, 2024). In the United States, research suggests that 20-25 percent of female students experience either a completed or attempted sexual assault (Krebs et al., 2009). A national study of sexual violence in UK universities reveals that one in seven women experience physical or sexual assault while being a student (Phipps, 2020). The prevalence rates in Canadian universities suggest that the numbers have remained relatively stable across two decades, with approximately 33% of female university students experiencing sexual violence (DeKeseredy, Schwartz & Tait, 1993; Newton-Taylor, Dewitt, & Gliksman, 1998; Quinlan, 2017a). Nevertheless, a recent nationwide 2019 survey revealed that approximately 71% of students witnessed or experienced campus sexual violence (Burczycka, 2020).

Universities have a civic duty to ensure the safety of their students (Towl, 2016); thus, student activists continue to put pressure on universities in North America, the UK and Australia to respond and create meaningful change (Colpitts, 2022; Sheehy & Ostridge, 2022). Student perspectives are increasingly important, as demonstrated in films such as "The Hunting Ground," which features American student survivors speaking about their failed attempts to gain support from their universities (Phipps, 2024; Towl, 2016). A point of contention is that most student

activists come to sexual violence with an intersectional feminist approach to harm (Phipps, 2024; Méndez, 2020). However, much of the campus sexual violence scholarly literature, research, and policy is underpinned by a top-down crime prevention approach, often including police and security responses (Brockbank, 2021; Patel & Rosech, 2018; Phipps, 2024; Quinlan, 2017b).

Correspondingly, there has been an increased focus both locally and internationally on creating policies and legislation to respond to campus sexual violence (Patel & Roesch, 2018; Quinlan, 2017b; Sheehy & Ostridge, 2022). In 2013, the United States Congress passed the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (to work in conjunction with Title IX and the Clery Act) to ensure that all incidents of sexual violence are recorded and made public. Every university is expected to have a Title IX coordinator who records each incident, and some universities expect all staff to engage in mandatory reporting practices. Similar legislative changes have happened at Canada's provincial level, such as mandating universities to create sexual violence policies. Ontario, British Colombia, and Manitoba have made legislative changes, while Alberta and Nova Scotia have yet to, but have guided universities to create these policies (Patel & Roesch, 2018). Campus sexual violence policies are supposed to provide an alternative to the criminal justice system, which has problems such as underreporting, failure to investigate, and discriminatory processes (Sheehy, 2017).

Yet, problematically, there is a rise of neoliberal ideology and discourse within universities (Giroux, 2002; Ramírez & Hyslop-Margison, 2015) which works against touchstones of the academy such as civic discourse (Giroux, 2002). Giroux (2002) argues that there is a movement towards the "language of commercialization, privatization, and deregulation and that, within the language and images of corporate culture, citizenship is portrayed as an utterly privatized affair that produces self-interested individuals" (p. 425). Academics observe

how neoliberal ideology and discourse suppress structural dissent by ignoring social injustices and creating anxious faculty, staff and students with changes to university funding, employment conditions, and academic freedom (Giroux, 2002; King, 2015; Quinlan, 2017b). For example, the corporatizing of universities allows management to hire off the tenure track, offer fixed-term contracts and pay some academic staff hourly, giving rise to a precarious workforce (Phipps, 2024; University and College Union, 2023; Whitley, 2020). In turn, Phipps (2020) suggests that many faculty feel pressure to de-escalate any complaints of sexual violence in favour of maintaining a positive corporate image and "brush[ing] the issue under the carpet" (p. 230). After the de-escalation, she argues that the complainant may be discouraged from pursuing allegations, or the perpetrator may be quietly asked to leave, as a single person is "airbrushed" out of the school. Few papers have traced the genealogy of one campus sexual violence campaign from before the legislative changes to after; thus, this research offers valuable insights into the everyday and embodied experiences of variously positioned actors and details how ruling relations organize their lives, inhibiting the meaningful change that students call for.

In what follows, I discuss the case study followed by my analysis in three sections: the social relations of campus sexual violence prevention, the rules and regulations of the sexual violence policy, and the neoliberalism of sexual violence.

Case Study

In 2013-2014, the Canadian media published a large number of articles on sexually harmful actions at universities, which included rape chants, toxic Facebook posts and complaints of sexual assaults (for example, see CBC, 2013; 2014; CTV, 2013). The media raised points such as accurate prevalence rates of sexual violence and what women experienced trying to get accommodations through their universities after victimization (Choise, 2014; Ormiston, 2014;

Sheehy, 2017; Stermac, Horowitz & Bance, 2017). As Quinlan (2017a) argues, these stories "draw particular attention to the perniciousness of a rape culture on campus and the inadequacy of Canadian universities' prevention and response to sexual violence" (p. 1). More specifically, Mathieu and Poisson's (2014) investigative journalism revealed that few universities have a stand-alone sexual assault policy. Instead, many universities relied on older sexual harassment policies, or student codes of conduct to address sexual assault.

In 2015, Ontario's Liberal government released *"It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment,"* a document it hoped would highlight the problem of sexual violence and harassment in provincial workplaces, including universities. The action plan was supposed to address public outrage over several mishandled sexual violence cases at post-secondary institutions. Shortly after the action plan was released, the province passed *Bill 132* (Government of Ontario, 2016), which required all Ontario post-secondary institutions to create stand-alone sexual violence policies by January 1, 2017. The provincial government briefly outlined what universities must include in a stand-alone sexual violence policy in *Bill 132*. In 2022, the Ontario government made additional changes to the legislation, requiring that all universities not discipline students for alcohol or drug use in acts that involve sexual violence (Ontario Regulation 646/21).

However, before *Bill 132* became official, one university, came under media scrutiny due to significant incidents of sexual violence involving students. Shortly after news broke of allegations of sexual assault, the university quickly responded: a media conference with a university official and an announcement that the university administration was assembling a task force. The institution started implementing some of the task force recommendations before and during the legislative changes, adding to a complexity that other Canadian universities might not

have experienced. It seemed to be on track to creating a stand-alone sexual violence policy before the province required it, with subject experts available to implement a culture change in the university environment.

Like other Canadian universities, this university has a history of campus sexual violence. For example, nearly a decade earlier, students called for the university administration to implement procedures to protect students from sexual harassment. First, there was a letter campaign where many challenged the university administration to confront professors who sexually harassed students. Second, a sexual harassment working group was compiled and made recommendations to improve the university community and protect students. And lastly, the university created a student support office and put additional measures in place, such as a sexual harassment policy. I include this history to demonstrate that the university had already experienced previous problems of sexual violence and made moves that seemed quite similar to the more recent response described above.

The Social Relations of Campus Sexual Violence Prevention

Smith and Griffith (2022) contend that institutional ethnography involves a researcher listening to what people do in their everyday work and how that interacts with others' work, whether in the past, present or future. The authors take from Marx and Engels's (1973; 1976) work on investigating the everyday, as it reveals the "relations that overpower their lives" (Smith & Griffiths, 2022, p. 50). Ruling relations, thus, "impose an objectified mode on to us" (Smith & Griffiths, 2022, p. 7). In this section, I focus on the university's response to sexual violence in the media, where the university's administration or management created the task force and action teams tasked with making recommendations and writing the policy. I trace how the institution draws people into particular social relations with each other. I investigate the working

connections of sexual violence prevention experts, advocates, and university administration to analyze how they discuss and navigate the ruling relations. I also investigate the notion of 'work' as participants discuss what work is valued and not valued by the university administration. Specifically, I look at the university's emphasis on the valued work of legal experts that aligns with the provincially mandated *Bill 132* (2016), and a particular form of sexual violence response.

After a large-scale media blitz documenting sexual violence at this university, the President publicly announced the university's next steps, one of which included the creation of a task force. Next, as noted in the interviews, the President's office requested individual subject matter experts (faculty and staff) to be on the task force. However, each participant had a different entry point into the group. The experts who worked within the university were privately invited by leadership (e.g., the President or a Dean). Some experts recommended others who worked outside the university community to the President's Office, based on their perceived reputation, expertise, and connection to activism. In terms of student involvement, some student activists nominated themselves due to their previous relationship with the President's Office and some were expected to join due to their roles within the university (e.g., student union representatives).

Many of the members mentioned in interviews that they had mixed feelings about being on the task force. For example, since being on the task force was a serious commitment and hard work that was beyond a service duty, many wanted to be paid for their time. Due to this fact, many members felt that giving their time to this cause was important but were resentful that the university did not compensate them for this task. Some referred to it as a "duty", an "obligation," a time to "step up" and show their support for "feminist" leadership. Some were motivated by

being in a room with "powerful" people who worked in the area, but they also felt that universities are well funded and should put money towards these efforts. The discourse of neoliberalism was very present as the task force members discussed an increase of labour, on top of their current workload since teaching and administrative relief are not generally offered when working on such projects. But for some, it was entirely volunteer work. For example, Samantha, a white cisgendered lesbian student union representative, speaks to the university's expectations and compensation for her labour:

> I think it is a lot to ask of people. I think that the only, and I am using air quotes here, "*remuneration"* that we received for being on the committee was a cheese board that I still have. Literally a [university name] branded cheese board, and a nice little reception at the end of it. There was no compensation for time. I was happy to give the time because I was in a position to do so, and I felt it was important, but it is a big role to ask somebody to take on a volunteer basis.

Samantha voices palpable disappointment that this work should be 'volunteer' and ridicules this expectation. The suggestion is that the university administration, through the President's Office, sets the parameters of the committee to be exploitative where, ultimately, some members (students) are given a university 'branded' honorarium with some social recognition. The task force final report notes that meetings took place over nine months, and the tasks were considerable. They included writing the final report, conducting an online survey for students, attending open consultations with deans and various services, including sports, health, housing, student rights, Equity Rights Center (ERC), as well as campus unions, and violence against women community-based organizations. Also included among the tasks were getting expertise and guidance from other Canadian campus sexual violence working groups, as well as

commissioning a report from "an independent campus sexual violence social justice advocate." Finally, task force members were expected to search and review academic literature, both general and specific to this particular university context, to find best practices.

In addition to the notion of volunteered labour for some, the university administration gave people separate roles within the task force. Sophia, a white, cisgendered heterosexual female professor explains the feeling of not being a "representative group" and how that created a certain dynamic:

> We had many meetings, many discussions, and not a lot of disagreement. You know, the thing that was most difficult was the fact that we were not a representative group. There was one racialized woman on the committee and one Indigenous woman who was more an observer than an actual appointee. So, we weren't that representative in that sense.

In this specific context, the words "representative in that sense" seem to be about race and equity. Sara Ahmed (2007) thinks of whiteness as an orientation: "If we start with the point of orientations, we find that orientations are about starting points… such a world is the world that we are in, where things take place around me, and are placed around me" (p. 150-151). If most of the committee is white, the standpoint is white or, at least, the orientation is white. For the university administration to create an "observer" role for the Indigenous person and few appointee roles for racialized people resurrects a settler colonial hierarchy. In addition, there was little to no mention of two-spirit, trans or gender-diverse members being part of the group.

Along with managing who was part of the groups (task force and action teams), and the roles they had, the administration controlled the discourse/framing of campus sexual violence. For example, Anna, a student union representative, anti-racism activist and a woman of colour, remarks that many of the suggestions put forward by herself and other women of colour in the

action group (tasked with taking up the recommendations of the task force and writing the policy) were not taken up. Because of this, she recommends *more* gatekeeping, but specifically of the President's office:

> I just felt like there needed to be some kind of gatekeeping on this conversation. There were certain things that the President's university administration probably did not agree with, and they wanted to ensure that there were like-minded individuals who would make sure that certain things would not be addressed or brought into the policy and protocols for the university. And so, they had to basically give power to someone whom they understood would think and make decisions just like them and who probably was consulting them on every decision, piece, and item before coming to the table, which was later revealed that that is what was happening.

Anna comments on ruling relations within the group's everyday conversations. She calls attention to the significant (and secretive) role of the President's office in selecting like-minded people who would restrict discussions to align with the President's office. Anna's representational presence is all that the university requires, without any need to actually listen to her concerns. She is an unpaid student union representative expected to attend these meetings as part of her role. The neoliberal logic of time efficiency restricts discussions and quickens timelines while excluding the possibility of having deeper conversations that might involve intersectionality (King, 2015). Having student input, that does not need to be heeded, fulfills the requirements of *Bill 132*. The Ontario government states that a college or university "shall ensure that student input is considered, in accordance with any regulations, in the development of its sexual violence policy and every time the policy is reviewed or amended" (Bill 132, Student Input, Section 4). Anna further comments on dropping out of the process by not attending meetings. She said she

felt cautious and singled out as an “angry black woman” when working with campus administration.

Overall, many task force and action team members expressed disappointment in interviews with the lack of participation from students. Confused about why this was happening, some thought it was a lack of interest, trust, or a feeling of powerlessness within the institution. But perhaps it was that students disagreed with the particular brand of feminism that was being employed. Charlotte, a white, heterosexual cisgendered legal professor tasked with writing the policy notes:

> I think students did not trust the university to make a difference. There was a concern that protection services was not a feminist response to sexual violence. Complainants were not going to call protection services and go through a complaint process that was run entirely by the university. The university was responsible for creating a culture where sexual violence happened, and therefore, it could not also be responsible for fixing that culture.

Charlotte speaks to ruling relations working through the administration and professors’ choices to not support students’ experiences, such as setting up a policy to work with protection services and a complaint process that the university oversees and controls (see Appendix 1 and 2). The university has established a policy that protection services must be contacted in an emergency. In a non-emergency event, the Equity Rights Center (ERC) must be contacted. As well, protection services must contact the ERC after they have been reached. All in all, the ERC must be contacted if sexual violence occurs on campus, which reports to the campus administration. Therefore, the administration’s ability to entirely control the process can enable the university to engage in “airbrushing” to secure a positive university image (Phipps, 2020, p. 230).

Nevertheless, some voices were actually heard in the consultation process. For example, as a paid social justice advocate (and a white cis-gendered heterosexual woman), Caroline's expertise fell in line with the campus administration's directive:

> My voice was taken seriously, even though it was myself and basically a few student leaders but largely legal folks. My voice as a non-lawyer, as a non {university name} student was included to provide that survivor perspective. The legal team was looking at it from a liability lens, "We have to protect ourselves". I was there to say, "But that process that you are proposing is really harmful to survivors, so can we meet halfway and have something that absolutely respects the rights of the accused but also does not abandon the survivor who is making the complaint".

While Caroline speaks about survivors, she also speaks about the university's rationale to approach the policy from a legal, 'protective' framework. Because she is dominated by this discourse, in order to be heard, she needs to meet the administration halfway, even though what is being proposed is, in her view, "really harmful to survivors".

The social organization of the campaign strongly suggests that the university administration, as institutional actors, guided the entire process by selecting certain task force and action group members, listening to some during the consultation process and only partially listening to others.

Sexual Violence: The Rules and Regulations of the Policy

The aim of the sexual violence policy was to provide students with a documented pathway to disclosing campus sexual violence and to declare a university commitment to 'zero tolerance' of sexual violence. But this document provides an institutionally organized course of action for students and prevention workers. It falls in line with the requirements of *Bill 132*

(2016) as it "sets out the process for how the college or university will respond to and address incidents and complaints of sexual violence involving students enrolled at the college or university and includes the elements specified in the regulations relating to the process" (Section 17, 3b). Although the written document fulfills these requirements, it does not include the intersectional feminist thinking present in the committee meetings. Instead, liberal feminism is taken up and student's needs are overlooked as the social structures of race, class and gender are not considered. Therefore, the document has gaps and oversights that significantly marginalize some students, even if unintentionally. In this section, I discuss how participants' work of responding to students was first, coordinated by a policy that sees some and ignores others; and second, was intended to get students and staff to (mandatory) report all cases of sexual violence to the ERC office, which reports to the president's office.

Devault (2006) reveals that management texts provide rules and regulations to be followed, controlling the work processes of people providing a service. In this case, the policy acts as a management text that provides rules and regulations that the ERC officers, and others must follow. However, following the rules and regulations of the policy is difficult and limiting. For example, Arathy (a cis-gendered woman of colour) speaks to her experiences of working at the Equal Rights Office and the problem of a legal or liability lens:

> To be able to take [the policy] and do it, but at the same time say that we are a survivor-centric involves a lot of compromise, a lot of work around, a lot of rethinking. What does that mean, "we follow the law, and we follow what is written in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, but we are also survivor-centric?" There are limits to that. It is not blatant. Being able to have that conversation, learn what that means, and at the very same time

> communicate that to people who are going through trauma is complicated and requires a lot of mental work.

Arathy demonstrates how her work is textually mediated by the stand-alone sexual violence policy, *Bill 132* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code.* In each encounter with students, these texts control her interactions and institutionalize sexual violence disclosures. Being "survivor-centric" serves as a placeholder for responding to specific intersectional needs of students that come to her office; but in her view, survivor-centric approaches and the legal system are opposed. She describes a gap in what we would call the 'doing' of the document, and she is left with the mental work to fulfill this gap, by having to explain these limitations to students. But because she is equally tied to survivor and management needs, she attempts to mediate this space as part of her work.

In terms of understanding the role of policy documents, Ahmed (2012) argues it is important to focus on "what they do: how they circulate and move around" (p. 6). The policy discourse can be placed in other forms, such as the university website, where students are able to read, learn and understand at their own pace what steps and options are available to them. But the policy and related documents can also guide survivors into taking actions that legally protect the university. So, while the policy states that students are encouraged to contact the various offices such as the ombudsperson offices, student's rights, and other student centers such as the women's center and pride center, the website states that the {Equal Rights Center} "should" be the only place to go to inquire about sexual violence. For example, Lydia, the ombudswoman (a white, cisgendered female, heterosexual, lawyer) said:

> In theory, students could contact the ombuds office before or after going to the ERC. In practice (in the three years I have been at {the university}), I have had questions a couple

> of times from students looking for information about options, support services or accommodation. It is rare that they would come to us for these questions because the information on the university website is quite clear about the ERC being the point of contact.

Because the website serves as a management text, it coordinates students into believing that the ERC is the 'only' place to go, as the website is "quite clear". It is effective in its dominating power as only a few students have come to the ombudsperson for information about the process of disclosing sexual violence; most ask about accommodations, appeals, etc. This is the same at other services at the university, as it was revealed in interviews. For example, Theodore, a white, cisgendered, heterosexual male student rights advocate (who is trained as a lawyer), notes:

> I, personally, have not had a case. I would say it is really rare coming from teachers. This is not to say that it does not exist, but we do not get it often. Usually, if it is really a case of sexual assault, I would maybe tell them to go directly to the legal clinic or something like that.

Again, it appears that few to no students access services to seek guidance around campus sexual violence. Instead, most of the cases that the Student Rights Center gets are requests for "guiding students through various appeal processes such as deferring an exam, asking for retroactive withdrawal due to extenuating circumstances, dealing with allegations of fraud, and mandatory withdrawal" (Peter, heterosexual, cisgendered man of colour). In other words, students are following the "institutionally organized course of action" (Smith & Griffith, 2022, p. 94) as the administration, along with others, presents the steps listed in the sexual violence policy as the only course of action.

Moreover, the administration is not giving vital sexual violence prevention training to services that might get disclosures. For example, Ava (a queer, cis-gendered, woman of colour, front-line response worker at the women's center) notes:

> I think they need to hire more experts and representatives for the different departments and different places. They are not very educated. We have had discussions with people coming from [the office of academic support]. I was like, "You should know better than this. You should be educated in this. You should be providing these services". These are just basic services like your counsellors should be all trained in sexual violence response. Even some of them on the committee do not even have bystander training. I am like, how are you on this committee? You do not have bystander training, and it is the most basic.

Ava speaks to the university's lack of sexual violence prevention training, e.g., untrained counsellors, and unprepared staff. The university is responsible for training faculty on sexual violence prevention and ensuring that training is up to date. Quinlan (2017b) argues that "cost-efficiency is a guiding principle applied to campus programs, quantified outcomes are compared, and cost-benefit metrics are used to evaluate potential returns" (p. 63). This means that training could be reserved for the few who work for the ERC, because it is cost-effective to train fewer people, but easier to control the number of disclosures.

Also, it could be beneficial to the university for staff to *not* understand the policy and therefore, to rely on ERC experts to analyze each situation. For example, the university administration makes space for the institution to act on disclosures and pursue investigations without the participation of the survivor. In the case that a "university community member" may be at risk of harm, a "person" is at risk of harm, or an individual is at risk of harming an "identified person", the university "must" fulfill its legal obligation to investigate the case

(University Policy). This caveat suggests that disclosures could be considered reporting once spoken aloud. If this is correct, then a survivor does not control the outcome of the complaint and can be cut out of the process. According to Arathy:

> How can I expect a professor in biology, a student in psych, or a counsellor to be able to have read the policy once or twice and be able to say this is what it means? I can't. The policy is not accessible. This is complicated stuff to write a policy on, and it is hard to have a simple, "hey just do this or just do that", like we can, but I think that is where you have to have resources to go out and explain policy.

Arathy comments on how the policy was written in a way that is difficult to understand and requires 'experts' to decipher next steps. There is the option to explain the policy to the community, however, the resources to explain the policy are not offered by the university. This is another way for ruling relations, acting through institutional actors at the university, to control disclosures of sexual violence, by making the policy so difficult to understand that students are required to speak to the ERC, who hold the power to act on disclosures without their permission. The institutional course of action leaves little choice for students to disclose sexual violence without having to report it. As a result, few students reach out to this office, while staff do not understand the policy to provide help and assistance outside of the ERC.

The Neoliberalism of Sexual Violence

In this section, I discuss the effects of neoliberalism on sexual violence prevention: faculty and students experience a culture of fear[10], precarity and institutional airbrushing. A neoliberal approach to social problems contains elements of "pluralism, rational choice and

[10] I use this term to describe an environment where sexual violence occurs, it is individualized and cases of sexual violence are swept under the rug.

institutionalism" (Antony, Samuelson & Antony, 2017, p. 2). It is a tendency to "see society in individual terms" (Antony et al., 2017, p. 2), with weight placed on the individual choices that people make, because they are expected to make the best choices for themselves. Freedom, autonomy, and choice are paramount to neoliberal thinking as well as the ideology of a just social world. As universities aim to 'empower' students by responsibilizing them to make better choices with programs such as the bystander initiative (Colpitts, 2022), they sweep individual cases of sexual violence "under the rug" (Phipps, 2020, p. 230). Phipps (2020) states, "institutional airbrushing reflects particular norms and values, and an attendant reconfiguration of subjectivities…within the neoliberal university environments" (p. 231). There is a:

> General fabrication of image over substance, and in a context also characterized by constant monitoring and precarity which have a silencing effect, it is likely that sexual harassment and violence are among many issues we overlook while we try to keep our jobs (at best) or further our careers (at worst)" (Phipps, 2020, p. 231).

This fabrication of image over substance affects more than survivors and perpetrators, as the precarity of the work environment creates a climate of fear, leading some to be more concerned about their own status and job security than about violence (Phipps, 2020). The recognition of one's own precarity can lead to a silencing effect on sexual violence prevention and the response to it: from staff outside the ERC not wanting to discuss sexual violence and actively avoiding participation in sexual violence programming, to telling others to protect their careers and not disclose sexual violence (as stated in interviews). Campus administration reinforces this precarity by stepping in and making decisions on sexual violence cases secretly. They keep others in the dark about how they are handling cases, make official public reports vague, and internal reports secret and difficult to use, all to keep the official numbers of reported cases of sexual violence

down. This maintains the neoliberal notion that sexual violence is a problem of 'bad apples' and not the institution's problem.

The task force and action teams both recommended campus-wide sexual violence prevention training. This included ERC response workers going into classes and residences to introduce students to the center, as well as creating social activities. Yet, the ERC response workers found it difficult to coordinate with others. Emma (a white, cisgendered heterosexual woman and ERC response worker) discusses the reluctance to have that conversation with other departments:

> When I started, I tried to connect with different services, meet with them. But they were not ready to talk about it, or they did not know how. So, it was hard to connect with other services to say, 'Hey, can we work in collaboration to offer an activity around that?'

Emma speaks to how others appear uncomfortable around conversations about campus sexual violence. Her first year of enacting the prevention program was the most precarious because the context of the campus environment meant that people did not want to discuss sexual violence. Just previously, the cases of sexual violence were in the press nationally. All university staff and students would be aware of the task force, action teams and the creation of the stand-alone sexual violence policy. So, it seems strange to Emma that people did not want to talk about it.

As students, staff and faculty are seemingly aware of the institutional course of action, there is an expectation by administration that sexual violence prevention and reporting is part of your job, although it is not a wanted part of the job. Arathy explains this:

> There's a little piece in our policy that says the expectation of everyone who works for the university, if a disclosure is made, should refer the person to the ERC. But they do not know whether they should be sending people. So, a lot of times, out of miseducation,

> they will say things to survivors that you cannot backtrack from. They give their own personal advice, or they talk about how they dealt with it and how it did not really work. So, instead of allowing a survivor to choose how they want to proceed, the idea of 'hush it up, do not talk about it, there is actually nothing that can be done', and 'protect your career' gets reinforced.

Arathy speaks to the actual feelings of some members of the campus community gained through personal experiences, and their advice of "hush it up, do not talk about it, there is nothing that can be done". Again, the policy states mandatory referral reporting to ERC, and if people do not do that, they might risk their career. Sara Ahmed (2015) writes about sexual harassment as an institutional problem:

> If we speak of sexual harassment as organizational culture, we threaten the organization's reputation. Those who are damaged become the ones who cause damage. And the institutional response can take the form of damage limitation. There are so many ways those who speak about harassment, whether their own harassment or the harassment of others, are silenced: you don't even need to sign a confidentiality agreement to be warned of the consequence of your actions. And then, too often, the ones who are harassed end up being removed or removing themselves: if the choices are "get used to it" or "get out of it", some quite understandably "get out of it" (para 3).

In taking up Ahmed's (2015) notion that speaking about sexual harassment or sexual violence causes damage, professors and others at the university might very well be not speaking to "get out of it". While fully being aware of their duty to inform the complainant of the ERC and what is expected of them by the university administration, which is to hand over information to the administration, they do not do so, perhaps for fear of reprisals.

Even for those who do speak out about sexual violence and work within the university framework as a review committee member, there is the same sentiment from participants of wanting to "get out of it" when faced with "get used to it". For example, Daniel (a white, queer cisgendered male student volunteering on the sexual violence review committee) comments on the feeling of institutional silencing when working on a case as a sexual violence review committee member:

> I have to say, not knowing what happens after your process is done, you hand in your report back to the ERC, in theory, they just send it right away to the dean. You have no idea what happens, but that leaves you a bit in the dark, like, "Oh, I wonder what happened"?

Daniel comments on the institutional course of action that gives university deans (or the appropriate authority) the power to decide the outcome, and he is left wondering if his work makes an impact. The current institutional framework makes the process entirely internal, with the performative aspect of including a sexual violence review committee. He later mentions his frustrations with one dean's power to override decisions made by the sexual violence review committee:

> I think that is the wrong way of approaching it, that you can just override and say, "Meh". In the last year or two, the ERC has been more involved in trying to limit some of the things that we see, which I thought was unfortunate. I did my last review committee in the summer, and I do not think I will do another one because of that experience.

Daniel chooses not to continue to participate because he is being asked to "get used to it" while working on files that are heavily controlled by the ERC. It is important to note that the ERC reports to the university president's office. The ERC acts as management by further limiting

information within the university community. Daniel later comments on seeing a professor accused of severe sexual harassment of a student, walking around on campus months after his case was reviewed, suggesting that the committee's recommendations were disregarded. Phipps (2020) argues that when complaints are made against professors with high grant income or who are 'star' professors, the sexual violence complaint is not taken seriously by the university. Instead, a university gives power/value to those who provide economic resources, much like a patriarchal family.

Additionally, many of the people who are involved in the creation and implementation of the sexual violence policy and program are left out of knowing the results of their work or how their work is being used once the administration takes over. Most participants spoke about wanting to know what is happening because the reports from the university never seem to give a clear picture. During an interview, Sophia (a white, cisgender, heterosexual, woman) states: "I don't know how it's panned out. I don't know how it has been implemented, and that is always an anxiety. You put a lot of work into a policy, and I have no idea how it is being implemented". Another participant, Anthony (white, heterosexual, cisgender male, senior administrator) states:

> I could not tell you how many complaints there have been of sexual violence or what the outcomes have been. I am not really in touch with students on the level where I can say, "How are you feeling about things in this regard".

This fragmentation of work processes comes across as secretive and underhanded by campus administration. But many participants want to see full and honest reports of students' experiences in launching complaints. For example, Sophia comments:

> I would like to see a full report on what is happening. How many students have launched complaints? What has happened to those complaints? How do the students feel about it?

> How are they resolved? How were they investigated? How are they treated both in terms of responding to the allegation and in terms of the support and accommodation that they requested? I have seen reports from other universities where students are really still incredibly unhappy and feel abused by the process.

Sophia asks to see specific metrics on how the policy is being implemented. She is asking for an analysis of what students are experiencing and what they feel about it rather than general statistics. Some of these metrics are being collected but Ava explains how the administration withhold internal working documents:

> The data set is huge. It is very specific- how far processes go and who signed off on it. But what they give out is just general statistics. The ERC probably does not get a quarter of the actual instances of sexual violence because not all of the services that are supposed to use it, use it. Not a lot of people feel trustworthy inputting there. Also, the process is weird, because sometimes we have to refer people who come to us to ERC, but then if we record it, and they record it, the data doesn't make sense. And, honestly, people come here and say, “I do not want to do anything about this. I just want to talk”. So, we do not record it.

Ava reveals that the university creates one report for the general public and another for the administration. The internal file is a much larger file with specifics regarding each step of a reported sexual violence case. This document serves as a monitoring system to keep numbers down, as it is difficult to use. She comments on the ambiguities of this reporting system as it does not account for the natural movement of students. Ava speaks to the complicated process of ‘when’ to record data for the university as a front-line worker.

It is the standardization or institutionalizing of a process that requires nuance and judgement. Munira Moon Charania (2010), in her ethnographic analysis of an all-girls progressive school, draws on Patricia Williams's (1991) argument that institutions "[make] up its own breed of narrower, simpler but hypnotically powerful rhetorical truths' to avoid complications that emerge when dealing with life and human beings" (as cited by Charania, 2010, p. 322). In a similar vein, the university takes up a process based on a simpler truth of recording sexual violence, which creates a system that makes both students and staff distrust the university.

In sum, the university approaches sexual violence from a neoliberal framework. Participants speak to a culture of fear and precarity resulting in staff wanting to avoid speaking about sexual violence. They are asked by the institution to "get used to it", or "get out of it" (Ahmed, 2015). The culture produces a silencing effect because people fear speaking about sexual violence. The university, thus, operates in a patriarchal top-down fashion where campus administration makes decisions that are economically beneficial to the university, while not offering any improvements towards staff and students well-being and safety (Phipps, 2020).

Conclusion

My purpose was to investigate relations of ruling by tracing the genealogy of one university's stand-alone sexual violence policy, from the formation of the task force, and subsequent action groups, to the implementation of the policy, to the proposed future changes. I argued that the stand-alone sexual violence policy that emerged is largely performative. From the start, the social organization of the task force and action team committees included management's expectations of increased labour, institutional whiteness, and performance culture to engage the legal language of *Bill 132* (2016) and supporting a neoliberal approach to campus

sexual violence. In terms of the 'doing' of the policy and prevention campaign, the gaps, oversights, and marginalization are apparent in the everyday running of the policy and prevention programs. In this space, the first-line responders struggle with finding ways to communicate the gaps to students between survivor-centric responses and what is printed in the policy. The policy rules and regulations limit survivors' options, as the institutional course of action is to go to the ERC, where any disclosure could become a formal report. Because students do not trust the ERC, which reports to higher levels of management, few students seek help or accommodations, and staff do not know how to respond due to the unspoken mandatory reporting system. The culture of a university employing neoliberal logics also means that there is a climate of fear, precarity and secrecy that enables the university to engage in institutional airbrushing. Ruling relations, working through activated texts, control all aspects of the institutional course of action, which is designed to regulate individuals rather than address the systemic problem of sexual violence.

The stand-alone sexual violence policy and *Bill 132* (2016) are good examples of how texts can become performative tools used to that coordinate the actions of those involved in providing a particular type of campus sexual violence prevention and response, reflecting and reinforcing broader neoliberal logics in higher education. As seen in the discourse of the fourteen participants (and one email exchange), these activated texts are used to display 'management' narratives aimed at subordinating expert knowledge and creating an administratively difficult process to keep official numbers of sexual violence low. Due to the confidential nature of the topic, the university can 'hush up' the official numbers and have its own take on making public metrics on campus sexual violence to maintain a good corporate image, thereby advancing the economic and legal benefits to the institution. Using a critical feminist methodology to

challenge notions of universality, I identified some of the processed "underlying oppression and subjugation" in this particular context (Frost & Elicaoff, 2014). My analysis revealed that many stakeholders on campus are oppressed and subjugated by the ruling relations working through the performative nature of this policy, which appears to take up a feminist discourse albeit liberal feminist but is actually rooted in a neoliberal framework.

This is not to suggest that *Bill 132* (2016) and the stand-alone sexual violence policy are not working at all; they may very well be working for some students, mainly those who fall within a mainstream feminist framework of sexual violence, and those who can make 'good personal choices' within the neoliberal approach. But without full disclosure of the processes in terms of reporting how many students ask for information, the university community is either unable to ascertain the extent of the problem fully, or it is permitting the university to engage in erasing the inquiries of both students and professors. What ends up happening is that people go to the media to disclose the wrongdoings of their university and engage in "outrage culture" (Phipps, 2020, p. 235), further individualizing the problem of sexual violence, and creating an ideological circle where sexual violence is erased as a systemic problem. Disclosing sexual violence is meant to engage in accountability for both university and perpetrators on a systemic level, and finally *stop* the ruling relations from objectifying people's lives (Smith & Griffith, 2022).

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Wind Me Up: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Netflix's Luckiest Girl Alive

Abstract

In this article, I conduct a textual analysis of Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive*. Drawing on an anti-racist critique of white feminism's approach to sexual violence, intersectional feminist media scholars and Gray's intertexts and paratexts media analysis, I argue that the showrunners use specific representational strategies to create a #metoo text. First, I explore the political labour and affective states of the main character's voice, including intertexts of crime drama. Second, I explore representation of racialized characters who serve as a vehicle for white woundedness. Third, I investigate the paratextual landscape with a particular focus on Mila Kunis and the Danny Masterson case.

Introduction

Sexual violence continues to happen worldwide, affecting young women but not limited to them. UN Women (2024), an entity of the United Nations, estimates that 15 million girls between the ages of 15-19 experience forced sex, perpetrated mainly by their husbands, partners (past and present) or friends. Likewise, in Canada, girls between the ages of 15-19 years old experience the highest rates of sexual violence (Brennan &Taylor-Butts, 2008) and in the US, RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, an anti-violence organization) states that young American's are sexually assaulted every 68 seconds (n.d.). There are devastating consequences for victims, including feelings of shame, confusion, and self-blame, along with stigma, rejection, and ostracism (Johnson & Dawson, 2011).

In recent times, it appears that there has been a flurry of news stories and personal testimonies around sexual violence, trauma and recovery, but many argue that the topic of sexual violence has been a longstanding staple of the media (Moorti, 2002; Wanzo, 2008). New television shows like Netflix's *YOU* (Rajiva & Patrick, 2021), Marvel's *Jessica Jones* (Rajiva, 2022; Wehler, 2018; Nadharki, 2018) and *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Moorti, 2024; Patrick, 2021) are just some of the current popular shows that center a female narrative around sexual trauma with a Metoo[11] message. Yet, these shows have used strategies to tell a specific story about sexual violence and the effects of trauma on those around them. More specifically, in this gendered and raced ideological space, these shows use representational strategies that center around a white feminist conceptualization of sexual violence and its ugly cousin, white saviourship. This lends to a circuit of colonialism, including white lady tears, white male punitive rage and carceral logic, often ignited by accusations of sexual violence (Phipps, 2021).

[11] Metoo movement was a social media movement where survivors of sexual violence used #metoo to share their experiences of sexual violence (Canadian Women's Foundation, n.d).

I build off the work of intersectional media scholars (e.g. Moorti, 2002; 2024, Patrick & Rajiva, 2022), and Black feminist film and literary critic Toni Morrison (1992). I argue that certain mainstream feminist texts utilize particular representational strategies to centre white supremacy in the context of sexual violence and reproduce Metoo narratives. To demonstrate this, I conduct a textual analysis of Netflix's "Luckiest Girl Alive" (Barker, 2022), a recent popular movie (based on the novel by Jessica Knolls) about a teenage gang-rape. I incorporate as part of my analysis the intertexts and paratexts of the film, including specific aspects of the Metoo movement. Using an anti-racist critique of Metoo (Phipps, 2021; Moorti, 2024), my argument unfolds over three sections. First, I discuss how, the main character, Ani uses carceral logic and reproduces connections to crime drama. Second, I discuss the showrunners' choice to use the representational strategy of whiteness to progress Ani's story. Then, I discuss Gray's (2018) paratextual context, focusing on the choice to privilege actress Mila Kunis with the lead role and the slippage that occurred with her involvement in the Danny Masterson trial.

Anti-Sexual Violence Movement

Sexual violence is a large part of a general concern of violence against women (United Nations, 1993; WHO, 2021). The World Health Organization (2021) estimates that nearly 1 in 3 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence worldwide. Young women can experience extreme pressures from society to enable interpersonal violence. For example, Ismail, Berman, & Ward-Griffin (2007) found that young women were pressured by their friends, families, and society to yield to sexual violence, because the "acceptance of violence was often the preferable alternative to the risk of rejection or being viewed negatively by peers" (p. 466). Experiencing sexual violence can cause serious harm to women's physical, psychological, sexual, and reproductive health, creating ripple effects of trauma for communities as a whole

(WHO, 2021). These effects can be both short and long term, and women can suffer social and economic costs, such as unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

Beginning in the 1970s, women organized a second wave of feminism to highlight the interconnections among different forms of male violence and exploitation of women (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). This wave favoured the theory that patriarchy, both structural and ideological, was at the core of violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Defined as a hierarchical system that places male power and privilege above others (see Dworkin, 1989 and MacKinnon, 1989), men benefit from the subordination of women. Significant gains were made around the 1970s. For example, rape shield laws were put into place and taken up by Congress (Bishop, 2018). Also, the National Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape in the United States was created as part of the National Institute of Mental health, funding research and public education projects (Scully, 1994). In Canada, the first rape crisis centres offering support for sexual assault survivors began. The Rape Relief & Women's Shelter in Vancouver opened in 1973, the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre opened in 1974, and the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre opened in 1974 (Tibbits-Lamirande, 2024).

Nevertheless, second-wave theorists focused on a gender only framework within the matrix of domination (Collins, 2000). In the hopes of speaking for all women, they favoured a 'universal' approach when a more nuanced analysis was needed. Black feminist activists such as Rosa Parks, Esther Cooper Jackson, and Anne Braden made important links between anti-rape approaches, and the campaigns against the racist use of rape charges (Davis et al., 2022). These women called attention to rape cases, such as the Scottsboro Nine (1931) and Willie McGree (1945-1946), where Black men were charged (sometimes falsely) with raping white women, and faced a very cruel, racist, and unfair legal system (along with lynch mobs). In addition, Black

Feminists made essential linkages to the unfair treatment of Black women, such as the poor defence of women like Recy Taylor (1944), a Black woman who was targeted and raped by white men and received no justice from the legal system (Davis et al., 2022).

Alternatively, second-wave feminists focused on carceral solutions to gender inequality, so any reforms were without these important considerations of Black feminists (Davis et al., 2022). In addition, some of the early 1970s anti-violence activities were coopted when activists began working with state actors, and the analysis of deep systemic intersecting inequalities became incompatible with the gender essentialist conceptualization of gender-based violence (Kim, 2020). Within this conceptualization of gender-based violence, victims could not be sex workers, people of colour, or incarcerated (Davis et al., 2022). In sum, anti-rape campaigns and reforms were based on the racially privileged as a standard, leaving many women without the support they needed (Crenshaw, 1991).

Without incorporating an important anti-racist critique, the focus was placed on carceral logics as the solution to gender inequality (Davis et al., 2022). The topic of rape and sexual violence became more and more part of the media landscape (including news, television, prime time movies and talk-shows) over time. It moved from being a topic discussed in news broadcasts and male-driven crime shows with a white patriarchal normative standpoint to a topic that was discussed by women in daytime talk shows, and prime time shows that attempted to show a victim's perspective, some more successfully than others (Moorti, 2002). Soon, more shifts began to happen when crime shows like *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* focused specifically on rape from a victim perspective and introduced a type of a muddled feminist perspective that included problematic post-feminism and anti-feminist sentiments (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006). Another shift in television occurred when streaming networks aired television

shows that centered the themes of women's experiences of rape, trauma and healing with a MeToo message (Moorti, 2024).

The original hashtag was created in 2006, by American Black feminist Tarana Burke with the intention of creating community for raped minority women to support each other (Phipps, 2021). In October 2017, Alyssa Milano, a white wealthy actress involved in the heavily media documented Harvey Weinstein case, took up the hashtag, and encouraged her following and others to use the hashtag Metoo. Thousands of women tweeted Metoo and shared their experiences and The Canadian Women's Foundation (n.d.) considered it a "watershed" moment in the fight against sexual violence and violence against women. In response to the outpouring of tweets, Black actress Gabriel Union said:

> I think the floodgates have opened for white women. I don't think it's a coincidence whose pain has been taken seriously. Whose pain we have showed historically and continued to show. Whose pain is tolerable and whose pain is intolerable. And whose pain needs to be addressed *now* (Krischer, 2017).

Union expresses her anger at the media's maddingly focus on white women's pain at the expense of non-white women. Women who did not fit into the mainstream feminist agenda were sidelined and not taken seriously (Leung & Williams, 2019; Patrick & Rajiva, 2022; Robinson, 2021). Anti-racist feminist critiques help to highlight when whiteness takes center stage and sidelines other points of view. In what follows, I discuss how I use an anti-racist critique and how it informs my analysis.

Framework of Analysis

My theoretical approach takes up an anti-racist critique that the resurgence of Metoo was underpinned by mainstream feminism (see Phipps, 2019; 2020; 2021; Moorti, 2024; Patrick &

Rajiva, 2022). Mainstream feminism, or ‘white feminism’ discounts an anti-racist critique of feminism (Oh, 2020). It uses the raced and classed cultural power of ‘white lady tears’, a bourgeois white victimhood that disregards other points of oppression (Phipps, 2021, p. 90), and a culture of mass testimony that both “echoes” and “departs” from feminist consciousness-raising principals (Phipps, 2021, p. 82). It becomes an echo-chamber of white women’s pain with a focus on victimhood, conceptualized by, and focused on, individual injuries within a neoliberal framework. Highlighted by the fact that white personhood often focuses on the self rather than structural inequalities (Phipps, 2019, p. 10), Metoo was an activity of white narcissism, taking privileged risks, siding with the state, and focusing on power and control. Phipps (2019) writes, "The practice of ‘taking back’ subjectivity and control through ‘taking down’ powerful perpetrators (ironically) shape a position of dependence on the state and its institutions, as they are summoned to redress injuries through criminalization and discipline” (p. 11).

Ahmed and Stacey (2001) argue that testimony serves a purpose: "[it] comes, in part, from a recognition that the desire to tell one's own story can easily support particular neo-liberal or even conservative agendas based on a heroic construction of the individual and of the individuated self" (p. 4). The heroic construction of the self comes with sex differences and differences in the performance of feelings. White men are socially constructed to be less emotional, action-oriented, and punitive (Phipps, 2019), so, their emotions can be expressed as the socially acceptable ‘white male rage’, especially when in response to bourgeois white women’s tears. Often, ignited by allegations of rape (Phipps, 2021, p. 81), white male rage acts as a tool of white supremacy for the so-called 'protection’ of white women’s purity (Backhouse, 2012; Davis, 1981; Phipps, 2019).

White feminism has a 'law and order agenda', cooperating with state apparatuses to achieve gender equality (Bernstein, 2010) and constructs sexual violence as the fault of "bad men", who are strangers that need to be punished. More liberal approaches include notions such as "fighting crime," "naming and shaming," "family values," and building democracy overseas to 'rescue' women" (Bernstein, 2010; Phipps, 2020, p. 46). Coinciding with broader political shifts from a welfare state to a carceral state, the mainstream feminist campaign against sexual violence became "feminism as crime control" (Bernstein, 2010, p. 57; Bumiller, 2008; Phipps, 2020, p. 47) and the anti-racist critique was actively avoided (Oh, 2020). For example, during the Weinstein case, an important visual was Alyssa Milano at the trial (Petit-Thorne, 2022), who was often on camera in the background. Feminist media studies offer a critical lens to investigate representations in the text and in the next section, I discuss how I use it in my critical textual analysis of the text, along with intertextual and paratextual elements.

Methodology

My analysis relies on the work of intersectional feminist media studies scholars, who argue that mass media engages in the dissemination and repetition of strategic representational strategies that reflect a dominant ideology of white supremacy and patriarchal capitalism (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014; Moorti, 2002; 2024; Patrick & Rajiva, 2022; Sutherland & Feltey, 2017; Wanzo, 2008). More specifically, I conduct a critical textual analysis and examine how white authors use representational strategies to establish the American identity as white, with gendered and raced identities set within the white imagination (see Morrison, 1992). I take up the understanding that the strategic representations of racialized characters reflect the authors' own racial anxieties as they project a perspective onto the world, often by using representations to amplify power for white characters (Morrison, 1992). Key to a textual analysis is an awareness

of the intertext, (the relationship to one or more texts) and the paratext (the material that surrounds the text and is associated with the texts, often created by the authors) and what they offer in terms of meaning to the original text (Gray, 2018).

In my analysis of the text, I investigate the linkages to other texts, such as crime dramas, which historically have been a site where discussions of sexual violence have been had, alongside the news (Moorti, 2024). Since streaming services have arrived, other drama related shows have thematized rape and sexual violence (such as *Jessica Jones, Top of the Lake*) to include comedic shows, such as *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* which embrace Metoo and #TimesUp storylines. As intertextuality is a production strategy that allows producers to "call out to specific audiences via specific intertexts" (Gray, 2018, p. 212), I observe how the representational strategies to call out to a white audience and how the connections are “a system of bridges between texts…what meaning and audiences travel over these bridges, or how and why the bridges were constructed” (Gray, 2018, p. 210). I identify a ‘television feminism’ with a female victim-centered narrative, discourses of crime and punishment, and post-feminist and patriarchal ideology (Moorti, 2002). I also explore the erasure of Black women and the avoidance of a discussion around the myth of the Black rapist to demonstrate how the strategic choices made by the showrunners reflect both a post-feminist and patriarchal understanding of rape.

In addition, I investigate the paratextual, as it acts as a “threshold of interpretations” (Gray, 2018, p. 213), leading audiences to an interpretation of the show before they see it. I ask how the paratext works to engage the viewer in a particular form of political labour, what meaning is crafted, and what expectation and understanding does it bring (Gray, 2018, p. 213)? The paratext is the "entity that surrounds a work of art and is in some way subservient to that

work or serves as a reference to and indicator of that work" (Gray, 2018, p. 213); this includes commentary about the movie in interviews, publicity, and movie trailers, to name a few (Gray, 2010; Patrick & Rajiva, 2019).

Film Summary

The television film *Luckiest Girl Alive* (Barker, 2022) debuted in October 2022 on the streaming service Netflix. In a first-person narrative style, it follows the life of Ani Fanelli. She is white, beautiful, thin, straight, cis-gendered, gainfully employed and wealthy. She is formerly known as TifAni, a gang raped teenager, who was violated by three rich white male students that she met attending an elite private school in the US. These male students, known by teachers and students alike at their school for their violent, misogynistic actions and entitled actions, are untouchable in terms of discipline, as one teacher brings this issue to the principle and gets fired instead. Fed-up with the bullying, two male students plan and execute a school-shooting to avenge Ani's rape, murdering and injuring these violent young men and others.

Today, Ani is a writer working at a women's magazine, with a promising future. She is successful at her job and is about to marry her fiancé. She wants to leave her 'past' behind, but it haunts her every day. A documentary filmmaker, Aaron, wants to make a documentary about the school shooting that happened years ago, including interviews with those involved. One of the surviving (yet permanently injured) students, gang- rapist Dean, is participating in the documentary to tell his story; he is now an anti-gun advocate and has released a new book he would like to promote. Aaron in his meetings with Ani, asks her, "are you a hero or an accomplice (Barker, 2022)?" He wants to know what happened in the "deadliest private school shooting in history," and to hear her side of the story, since she's never publicly spoken about it. Still conflicted about telling her side, she at least wants to confront Dean's rumour that she was

involved in the planning of the school shooting but she is not sure how much detail she wants to go into. By the end of the film, she decides to tell her side of the story, including the impetus for the school-shooting, the gang-rapes and abuse by a few of the senior male students. She publishes her experience in *The New York Times*, participates in an interview by *The Today Show*, and breaks up with her fiancé to begin her new life. There are elements of crime drama, white feminism and testimony in this story. I discuss these themes in further detail in the next section.

Crime Drama, White Feminism and Testimony

Female-driven narratives in crime dramas often deploy white feminist politics and use 'affect' to justify carceral logic (Coulthard et al., 2018; Ouellette, 2023), presenting it as the 'only' solution to sexual violence (Bernstein, 2007; Davis et al., 2022; Phipps, 2019). White feminists take "a turn to the state" (Davis et al., 2022, p. 43), and within mainstream media and film, the liberal white imagination constructs sexual violence as the fault of "bad men" to individualize and privatize the issue (Petit-Thorne, 2022; Moorti, 2002; Wanzo, 2008). These "bad men" are individuals who should be named, shamed, and punished to reinstate the state as an idealistic place while avoiding addressing systemic issues that cause sexual violence in the first place (Wanzo, 2008). There are many connections between this text and other texts (such as *Gone Girl, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt, YOU,* and *Jessica Jones*), the genre of crime detective dramas, and neo-noir film. I discuss these connections and how the main character, Ani, takes up white feminist policies by relying on discourses of crime and punishment, depicts Dean as a monster, and has a retribution fantasy.

Ani has narrative control of the film and engages in discourses of crime and punishment. Mirroring crime shows, legal dramas and cop shows, these discourses are an attempt to organize

chaos with the moral code of good versus evil, to restore faith in the nation (Moorti, 2002, p. 116). The chaos is depicted in remarkably disturbing scenes of gang rape, school-shootings, and knife stabbings. Ani's take on rape and gender-based violence feeds her patriarchal retribution narrative. Often in retribution storylines the worse the violence against the protagonist, the better the revenge (Ng, 2022; Patrick & Rajiva, 2022)[12]. Director Mike Barker, whose former work includes transnational crime television shows in a post-network era, such as *Fargo*, *Broadchurch*, and *The Tunnel* (Imdb, n.d.) tapped into the aesthetics of crime shows with "embedded familiarities" such as having a white female victim and a gothic melodrama that appeals to an international audience (Klinger, 2018, p. 517). Ani, "dwell[s] in a hostile male-dominated world" and she navigates "masculine menace" (Klinger, 2018, p. 518) acting as a detective to find and reveal the 'truth'.

Ani depicts Dean, a school-shooting victim and gang rapist, as a 'monster'. Similar to depictions of real-world perpetrator Harvey Weinstein or both the fictional Kilgrave in *Jessica Jones*, and the Reverend in the *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, he is an evil man who abuses and controls others. Petit-Thorne (2022) calls this the "monster myth", a rape myth that conceptualizes abusers as devious, inexplicable, and unique to a 'normalized' masculinity. Going against feminist understandings of rape and sexual violence which incorporate a structural explanation, this rape myth focuses on an individual man, his personal attributes and the responsibility of those involved (Moorti, 2001; Petit-Thorne, 2022). Although there were other rapists, Dean is the only survivor, and as viewers, we know that we should hate Dean because Ani is obsessed with revealing him as "fucking filth." (Netflix, 2022). Acting as both detective and victim, Ani pursues 'justice' by collecting Dean's confession, which is the evidence she needs

[12] This movie adaptation is a more violent portrayal than the book, and this was the case in the white feminist film *Gone Girl* (Piotrowska, 2018).

to get retribution. This is similar to crime dramas like *Hotel Beau Sejour*, where the protagonist acts as both detective and victim, or shows like *Jessica Jones*, where a hard-boiled but traumatized character seeks justice (Coulthard et al., 2018; Nadharki, 2018; Rajiva, 2022; Wehler, 2018). However, the fact is that, as an adult, Ani is not that different from Dean. She is wealthy, connected, and enjoys intimidating others; in other words, she creates and maintains a racial and gendered hierarchy around her. She's also 'untouchable' because she stabbed and killed her best friend and never went to jail. As per Rajiva (2022), the white heroine justifies murderous actions through her white trauma.

Nadkardi (2019) argues that the female detective "must choose between the seemingly feminine coded expressions of her gender (desiring romance and a domestic life) and the more masculine-coded demands of her profession (investigating crime and its attendant violence)" (p. 76). Ani leans towards being vigilant about investigating crime and violence. But in doing a critical reading of Ani's affective states, she is anything but feminist. At times, Ani embodies a white rage mixed with displays of white melancholy by repeating the phrase, "Wind me up, and I will tell you what you want to hear" (Barker, 2022). This phrase is an acceptance of post-feminist sensibilities aimed at achieving agency and power. A similar phrasing is found in the 'cool girl' monologue from *Gone Girl* (Burke, 2018; Marston, 2018). White melancholia, white fragility and white rage are often used in neo-noir films and television (Marston, 2018; Rajiva, 2022), along with a very limited grasp of feminist understandings of rape and sexual violence (Moorti, 2002). We, the audience, hear her unfiltered white rage in her voiceover, i.e. when Ani says that that moving to the UK for Luke's job will make her "barefoot and pregnant" in a year, the acceptance into a Master of Fine Arts program is for "white girls who can't write", and his moving bonus is "fuck-your feelings" money. She is also particularly cruel to herself in her

dieting and exercise regiment, as themes of dieting and intense physical exercise are used to display white middle class to upper class femininity (Marsten, 2018).

Ani seeks retribution by writing an article for *The New York Times,* and appearing on *The Today Show*, thus amplifying a MeToo narrative structure. Feminists do argue that writing is crucial for consciousness raising, however Ani's writing simply re-centres a white feminist agenda. In most English-speaking rape-revenge films, revenge against a male rapist is carried out by a female victim who has a transformation after trauma, such as learning to defend herself or how to shoot a gun (Ng, 2022). Instead, Ani has a 'MeToo' moment after confrontations with Aaron, the documentary director, and the threat of Dean telling his story. She decides to write her side before the documentary comes out, but only after she has Dean's taped confession (as protection). Ani uses her first-person narrative, or testimonial, to center a white narcissistic injury and to 'call out' Dean. Phipps (2019) argues that the connections between white supremacy and gendered victimhood "produces a number of characteristics of political whiteness: narcissism, a will to power, and alertness to threat" (p. 10), thus, in her political whiteness, she uses her writing to produce "the symbolic position of woundedness as well as [a] interpersonal performance of fragility" (Phipps, 2019, p. 13). It is after she has published her testimonial, she achieves 'individual healing' by demonstrating her growth from a traumatized woman who refuses to speak about her trauma, into a selfless white woman who 'helps' others, thus making her the white 'hero'. Nadkarni (2019) argues that this traumatic empowerment comes at the expense of Others.

Morrison's Strategic Representation of Whiteness

Television and film have a long history of excluding Black women and giving minor roles to Black men (Hobson, 2002) and television has a long history of excluding non-white

women's experiences of rape and sexual violence (Moorti, 2002). Toni Morrison (1992) argues that in the American canon of literature, there is never an absence of race but rather a silence on racial politics, and an author's choice to centre whiteness. In any critical reading of a text, it is equally important to investigate those who perpetuate whiteness, rather than focusing solely on the effects of racism on those who experience it. I take up Morrison's (1992) literary critique of American white writers who use representational strategies to center whiteness. I focus on three strategies: 1) silent and acquiescent Black women; 2) the racialized villain; and 3) finally, the politically ambiguous black man.

To begin with, in this film, there are no Black women whose stories are told. One prominent character is Ani's boss, Lolo, played by white passing actress Jennifer Beals (Williams, 2022). Lolo supports Ani and encourages her to write her story. She pushes her to cast a larger net of culpability, beyond just the young men who raped her. Typical to rape-revenge narratives, a survivor needs to cast a wider net of culpability to include all those who stood by, were complicit, and/or facilitated the abuse, including parents, teachers, and law enforcement (Ng, 2022). Lolo asks Ani to be a guiding voice that speaks for all women, including herself. Lolo is arguing for a universal voice, revealing the slippage between a 'television feminism' and a feminist understanding of how different groups of women (such as non-white women) experience rape (Moorti, 2002). This knowledge-power nexus centers on the essentialized woman, a brand of feminism that silences Black women and Black feminist critiques.

Black women's experiences are seemingly spoken for (along with others) after Ani publishes her story in *The New York Times.* The comments to her online publication are read out by commuters as Ani rides the subway. She seemingly 'hears' women's inner dialogues as they

become voiceovers, taking over her narrative authority. The camera pans to images of women riding the subway, as the disembodied voices speak. One woman says: "I just finished reading your piece and am utterly haunted. Thank you for speaking up. From someone who has always felt like no one would listen to her anyway". The camera captures a black woman typing on her phone and the voice-over says, “I cried reading your essay. Thank you for putting it out into the world”. Another voiceover says, "I was also assaulted by a guy I thought was a friend. Hearing your story gives me hope that one day I can tell mine too". Another image of a racialized woman appears on the screen while the voice-over says, "I was raped while completely unconscious. The lines about ‘coming to’ hit me so hard" (Barker, 2022). In these moments, racialized women are given space to speak about their trauma (Petit-Thorne, 2022; Tuck & Yang, 2014) to support Ani’s narrative, where she is their white hero (Stacey & Ahmed, 2001, Petit-Thorne, 2022). The use of disembodied voices, separate from the images on screen, is a technique used to isolate Black women “from their culture, family and their iconography”, supporting Black woman’s erasure (Young, 1996 p. 192). Toni Morrison (1992) calls this type of representation a “safe participation in loss, in love, in chaos, injustice” (p.27). It is a technique, or an imaginative strategy (Morrison, 1992, p. 27) used by white authors to create Black women characters for their “own purposes of power without risk” (p. 28). The showrunners wanted “silenced, acquiescent Africanist characters” (Morrison, 1992, p. 27).

Secondly, whiteness is created in the presence of the Other, and often Ani’s affective states are uncontested by racialized characters (Wanzo, 2008). She continually displays white melancholy, white fragility, and white narcissism, but reserves a special “normalized terror” for male racialized characters (Rajiva, 2022). Racialized masculinity appears in two forms, either as the villain, or as an ambiguous Black male character that has no political value (Morrison, 1992).

The 'villain' appears when Ani is driven by a racialized man in a taxi in New York. The taxi driver is played by the Filipino Canadian actor, Byron Abalos. During the taxi ride, Ani and Luke get into a terse conversation, and he leaves the taxi mid-trip. She, then, loses all control and flashes back to the disturbing scenes of the gang rapes. Flashbacks are a well-used technique in film and television to signify trauma and brokenness of a lead character (Wehler, 2018). But, when she comes to the present moment, she is swearing and violently kicking the back of the taxi seat so hard that she breaks a heel. In this incredibly violent and scary scene, the taxi driver yells at her to get out of the taxi. Luke physically pulls her out of the taxi, and the driver drives off. Rajiva (2022) calls it the sacrificing of Others for the sake of white women's sexual trauma (p. 86). She destroys his property, insults him, puts his life at risk, and never apologizes. The viewer does not get the chance to see Ani or Luke pay the driver to compensate him for his time or apologize to him. But *he* is the villain because he calls her a "crazy ass bitch" (Barker, 2022).

Finally, Aaron Wickersham, the 'true-crime documentary maker', is played by actor Dalmar Abuzeid, who is of East African descent (Wong, 2018)[13]. Aaron, as a character, is supportive of Ani, almost presenting as the feminist voice in the film. He asks for her side of the story, demonstrating that he is motivated by learning more about her experience, but she is rude and harsh to him. At times, he could be what Toni Morrison (1992) calls the "surrogate" and "enabler" to the story (p. 51) as he is easily 'tuned out'. For example, when Ani and Aaron attempt to discuss her participation in his documentary, a painful dialogue occurs. Aaron tries to convey that he has her best interests in mind, but a loud sound takes over as he is speaking. Ani is distracted by the sound, because she is 'thinking in music' (Coulthard et al., 2018). The use of this type of distorted sound is considered an "acoustic gaze". Often employed in crime shows, it

[13] His credits include being the first Black actor to perform in Canadian *Anne of Green Gables* media franchise (a production that is over one hundred years old) and other Canadian shows like *Degrassi* (Wong, 2018).

is used by raced and gendered broken bodies like a white female detective. It is supposed to signify that female knowledge is both "emotional and inaccessible" (Coulthard et al., 2018, p. 5-6). The stare and the sound within the crime drama produce a chilling affect, and the white female victim is a gateway body that "foregrounds second-wave feminist concerns as common textual conceits" (Coulthard et al., 2018, p. 5). After she is finished staring and the sound has stopped, we see some steel being raised to a high-rise nearby, revealing the source of this excruciating sound. His words are drained out of hearing for the viewer, creating another scene of black inferiority (Williamson, 2017).

Another example includes the scene when Aaron asks Ani if she wants to be called a survivor or victim. She replies with “victim”. But, when Aaron asks the question, the camera zeros in on his mouth, where a crumb sits on his lip. The camera loses focus on his face, and we, as the viewer, are seeing *only the crumb*. Not only do the showrunners miss the opportunity to discuss the myth of the Black rapist, but they also suggest racial harmony on the topic of rape, with a white female victim who purports a patriarchal understanding of sexual violence because women are always a ‘victim’ (Moorti, 2002). She assumes white male authority directing the viewer to the crumb, and he embodies a politically ambiguous non-white character asking how she perceives her status (Moorti, 2002; Morrison, 1992). In this moment he is silenced by the camera angle and is reduced to a device to further the plot of white female woundedness.

Perhaps the showrunners wanted to avoid stereotyping men of colour as sexual offenders, particularly with racial tensions after the death of George Floyd by police. Yet, this discussion is not entirely sidestepped. Ouellette (2023) argues that the suggestion that the carceral state, (or arguably carceral logics), is the only solution to violence against women allows for sexually abusive white men to be stand-ins for blackness and brownness (Harkins, 2020; Ouelette, 2023),

thus recentering the myth. The showrunners' "invention and implications of whiteness" (Morrison, 1992, p. 52) requires more from Aaron. As he asks Ani to participate in his film, he seemingly pushes her into her trauma, and she relives it in her flashbacks. Because of this, Aaron becomes almost worse than the rapists, because she is forced to face and destroy her 'perfect' life. In his questioning, provoking, and attempts at solidarity, he acts as a bridge to those memories, thoughts, and internal conflict, and he even accidentally facilitates a meeting with Dean, her rapist. Arguably, he becomes a stand-in for the rapists. Ani is the damsel in distress, and people of colour are frightening as they provoke her. Phipps (2021) writes, "The damsel in distress evokes a protective response: and simultaneously, colonial archetypes of people of colour as aggressive and frightening come into play" (p. 84). Luke, her fiancé, makes comments about not trusting Aaron. He thinks that Aaron is making "last ditch efforts" for the documentary, and she is the 'draw' for viewers to watch the film. Luke says, "You're the story; you're the one who's never gone on record; he needs you" (Barker, 2022). Ani is the 'damsel in distress' and Aaron 'needs' her to tell her story even though it will cause her great suffering, putting her relationship with Luke at risk.

Complicity in White Supremacy: Considering the Paratextual Landscape

The targeting of young women to view this film is disconcerting because this movie recenters white women's narcissistic injury to the exclusion of Black women and creates a false sense of racial harmony by silencing dissenting voices. The decision to cast Mila Kunis, a well-known actress in television and movies since 1998, is also very alarming as it calls on young and older women who are fans of her outspoken characters in *That 70's show* and *Family Guy.* She has starred alongside Justin Timberlake, Mark Walberg, and Aston Kutcher, reaching a large audience.

Mila discusses feminist issues in the media, walks in Women's marches and is very involved in politics (Bailey, 2016; Erbland, 2018; Press Association, 2016; Pinson, 2018; Pulver, 2016). She is outspoken on Trump's racist anti-immigration policies (Pulvner, 2016), often championing refugees, being a religious refugee from Ukraine. She protests the war in Ukraine and has raised millions of dollars to help humanitarian efforts (Kinder, 2022). Her politics are reflected in her film choices, creating little distance between Mila and her celebrity profile. Starring in movies like *Bad Moms* and *The Spy That Dumped Me*, she plays funny white mainstream feminist heroines that are loved because they are complex and messy (Erbland, 2018). Most importantly, alongside her husband, actor Ashton Kutcher, she was active in the anti-sexual violence movement, acting as a board member of the anti-sex abuse organization *Thorn Foundation* (Locke, 2024).

A major draw for audiences was Mila Kunis's face on the promotional poster looking out to an audience. She makes eye contact with the viewer, " build[ing] upon the presence of performer and viewer" (Patrick, 2022, p. 228), engaging a viewer intimately.[14] With this move, Mila acts as a primary author to the film, as Ford (2024) argues the story is taken up by the actor, and the promotional materials bear their likeness and story. Audiences may feel interested in watching the film because of Mila's influence. As a creative director, she helped to rewrite the ending (Venn, 2022). Since the book ending would not work in the current political climate (in the book, Ani falls in love with her teacher), Mila decided that the ending needed to be rewritten to capture author Jessica Knoll's experience of disclosing her trauma on *The Today Show*, and the favorable response she got from women afterwards.

[14] A similar marketing technique was used in the poster of *I May Destroy You*, a Black feminist semi-autobiographical story about rape, trauma, and healing by Michaela Coel (Patrick, 2022). Released two years before *Luckiest Girl Alive*, it was incredibly successful and had viewers worldwide. Celebrated by critics, Coel won a BAFTA and Emmy for her role. Maybe this technique was used to build synergy with the text of *I May Destroy You*?

The film's trailer features Mila Kunis prominently. It is a condensed version of a MeToo narrative structure starting as soon as the character of Ani introduces herself to the audience. The same message is embedded in the written summary of the film on Netflix, asking young women to gain meaning and value for this film through the political gaze of white feminism as Ani is positioned as a post-feminist hero with agency, power and choice (Thornham, 2007; Sutherland & Feltey, 2017). In interviews, Mila speaks about Ani's character in terms that fall in line with the attributes of "perseverance, strength, and exceptionalism" (Sutherland & Feltey, 2017, p. 628), much like how Mila presents her own personal story to the media. This same sentiment was echoed in the many reviews of the film, where reviewers spoke about individual trauma, empowerment, and 'rising from the ashes' (Horton, 2022; Reddit, n.d.). Rather than unpacking Ani's violent actions after her victimization, Mila spoke about having compassion for those who have been sexually victimized, further complicating a critical feminist reading of Ani. Sutherland and Feltey (2017) argue that "in profit-driven Hollywood, empowerment is packaged as individualism" and challenges are overcome by being exceptional (p.628), even if violent. Moreover, Sjolander and Trevenen (2010) argue that mainstream media reshapes any disruptions to patriarchal, white, heterosexual models of the nation.

Slippage occurred with Mila Kunis's involvement in the Danny Masterson case. Masterson, a co-star on *That 70's Show*, and a well-known actor, was recently convicted of raping two women in 2003 (Abad-Santos, 2023). Before his sentencing, Mila wrote to the judge that Masterson has "exceptional character" and "has had a tremendous positive influence on [her] and the people around him" (Donegan, 2023, para 7). She even went on to say that he is like an older 'brother' to her (Abad-Santos, 2023), providing a very contradictory message to her fans. Ani would never consider a rapist (like Masterson) a good influence, nor would she try to

influence the judge that a rapist had ‘exceptional’ character. These actions can only be theorized through the complicated lens of white feminism. Patrick (2021) argues that in white feminism, there is no ‘sisterhood’. Mila failed to consider her role in supporting Masterson’s victims, and what that would mean to her fans who see her as a feminist and role model. Furthermore, a key part of white feminism is the refusal to hold white woman accountable, even when it is appropriate to do so (Moon & Holling, 2020).

Once the letter became public, Mila apologized via social media, defending her decision to write the letter (Locke, 2024). In the politics of white feminism, she never interrogated her privilege, or engaged with Black, Indigenous and women of colour feminists when she apologized alongside her husband in his Instagram video. In fact, even in the text of her apology video, she brought in politics of white feminism by using carceral discourse, saying that they did not mean to question the legitimacy of the judicial system” (Abad-Santos, 2023). She later resigned from her role at the *Thorn Foundation.*

A critical reading of the text and the paratext reveal that the problem of sexual violence is explained away with carceral language, faith in the system, patriarchal ideas of retribution for some (when it has market power) and not others, colorblindness, a universal woman, and individualism (as not even victims are supported by other women). Oh (2020) argues that white feminism’s policing and excluding an anti-racist critique serves only to allow white women access to white men’s privileges. While white feminism pretends to be progressive, it only serves to advance white women’s concerns and effectively is “white supremacy in heels” (Moon & Holling, 2020). Thus, this film creates a very confusing and contradictory landscape for young women and feminism.

Conclusion

In this article, I argued that the showrunners from Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive* (2022) uses particular representational strategies to centre white supremacy within the anti-sexual violence movement, becoming a Metoo text. Using an anti-racist critique of Metoo (Phipps 2019; 2020; 2021; Moorti, 2024) and Toni Morrison's (1992) work on representational strategies, my argument unfolds over three points: 1) crime drama as the intertextual; 2) representational strategies of racialized characters; and 3) Mila Kunis and the paratextual.

The fact that this television film avoided important conversations around anti-racist critiques of the sexual violence movement and feminist understandings of sexual violence reveals the showrunners' inability to wrestle with the complexity of the topic. In thinking about this television film, it is not surprising that showrunners decided to privilege a white feminist perspective in a story about rape and sexual violence; it is in keeping with the history of mainstream television (Moorti, 2002; 2024). White feminism does not offer any hope for women, and the fight against inequality. Moon and Holling (2020) argue that when white feminism takes over, things will appear the same: "injustice will thrive, but there will be more women in charge of it" (253). White feminism needs to be called out, now.

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Conclusions

The research questions that guided my doctoral thesis were: 1) What common discourses are present in sexual violence policies and popular texts and 2) What are the discourses that either reinforce or undermine change? I addressed these questions in three standalone papers. My research makes important contributions to the literature on campus sexual violence by using feminist concepts of rape culture and rape myths and investigating the discourse found in specific texts such as campus sexual violence policy and film. In addition, my papers make valuable contributions to the feminist scholarship by critiquing mainstream feminist understanding of campus sexual violence campaigns and policy, and cultural texts that influence survivors of sexual violence such as the film, Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive*. These papers inform a reader's understanding of students' experiences on university campuses and beyond. Two of my papers, "Speaking Freely and Freedom of Speech: Why is Black Feminist Thought Left Out of Ontario University Sexual Violence Policies?" and "Sexual violence, secrets, and work: Ruling relations of campus sexual violence policy" have been published in *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice* (November 1 2020) and the *Canadian Review of Sociology* (January 7 2025). My last paper, "Wind Me Up: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Netflix's Luckiest Girl Alive" is under review (May 8 2025) at *Feminist Media Studies*.

In this conclusion, I discuss the key contributions I make across the three papers and how together these papers address gaps in the literature, and progress both theory and policy. Also, I discuss the implications of my findings in practice.

Overview of the Dissertation Manuscripts

My research makes valuable contributions to the understanding of discourses of violence against women, specifically found in campus sexual violence policies and media. From these findings, I discuss the challenges of having campus sexual violence prevention policies

underpinned by discourses of white feminism. The results are a colour-blind stand-alone sexual violence policy that focuses on gender, the sidelining of experts in creating and enacting a sexual violence policy on campus, and discourses in film about sexual violence that are purposefully centring white feminist logic, targeting young women as viewers. In my three manuscripts, I set out to progress the research on feminist issues such as rape culture, rape myths, and neoliberalism as it shows up in campus sexual violence policies, prevention campaigns, and in media. In sum, I argued that mainstream approaches to campus sexual violence prevention are proving to be inadequate.

Manuscript One, "Speaking Freely and Freedom of Speech: Why is Black Feminist Thought Left Out of Ontario University Sexual Violence Policies?" In my first paper, I investigated a stand-alone sexual violence policy using the University of Ottawa as a case study. By using a critical intersectional feminist approach to sexual violence and a critical discourse analysis, I progressed the literature by analysing the discourse of a newly created stand-alone sexual violence policy at an Ontario university. I argued that the policy makers conceptualize gender in a one-dimensional manner, leading to the creation of a colour-blind and 'universal woman' approach to sexual violence prevention and policy. I argued this over three points: 1) top-down approaches to policy creation; 2) the influence of neoliberalism on Canadian university campuses; and 3) stranger danger and the racialized other. The policy leads to increased security measures, potentially putting racialized men on campus at risk and perpetuating rape myths on campus.

The university takes up a white feminist logic and thus, undermines change. The sexual violence policy is not a viable alternative to a hostile criminal justice system. Instead, by taking a white feminist approach, the university negates the safety and security of women of colour and

potentially puts racialized men at risk by increasing security measures (i.e. campus carding practices). The university individualizes and decontextualizes campus sexual violence and places safety in the hands of students (a function of whiteness). By using feminist theory and methods, I centred women's experiences within the framing of the policy and suggest other points of interest other than "at-risk" behaviour found in the mainstream campus sexual violence literature. I provided a feminist analysis of power and privilege to demonstrate how the policy influences the campus climate and beyond. I extended Iverson's (2016) work that investigates the wording of a policy and the subjective reality that it creates for women. I added an intersectional feminist framework with a feminist critical discourse theory to show that the subjective reality that is created for women of colour on campus is erased under the 'universal woman'. I extend Sara Carrigan Wooten's (2017) and Carol Bacchi's (1999; 2000) work by applying both to the Canadian context.

Manuscript Two: "Sexual violence, secrets, and work: Ruling relations of campus sexual violence policy". In my second paper, I investigated the creation of a campus sexual violence policy from the formation of the task force to the everyday running of the stand-alone sexual violence policy and response at an unnamed Ontario University. I used a feminist methodology that included using an intersectional feminist framework and Dorothy Smith's (2005) institutional ethnography which incorporates the body in the notion of 'work'.

Drawing upon interviews with fourteen important members of the university community, I argued that the policy is performative as it hooks into the provincial legislation. I examined the everyday lives of experts who created and implemented a stand-alone sexual violence policy, but who were also constricted by a particular discourse of white feminism. I attended to the multiple and interlocking systems of oppression in my analysis as I mapped out the social relations and

institutional texts over time, demonstrating how the everyday actions of these experts were managed by ruling relations. By using institutional ethnography, I was able to incorporate the body in the process of work and the consciousness of the experts that I interviewed. Some experts were valued by the university administration more than others, demonstrating that ruling relations controlled the entire process from the making of the task force to the current state of the sexual violence policy and prevention campaign.

Participants discussed wanting to see more transparency and gatekeeping regarding the university administration, disclosing that the discourse of white feminism was disruptive to providing sexual violence prevention and response services to students. Because the work of sexual violence prevention is an embodied experience, participants demonstrated that they did not have positive feelings when people were being cut out of the process of being included in meetings, or when people were restricted in their actions when providing help to students. Institutional ethnography as an approach helped me to understand this knowledge, to identify ruling relations, and map the processes so that the information can be easily disseminated and shared with others. This paper was published in *The Canadian Review of Sociology* and went through a rigorous peer review process.

Manuscript Three: "Wind Me Up: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Netflix's Luckiest Girl Alive". In my third paper, I conducted a textual analysis on Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive.* This film includes similar themes to the literature on campus sexual violence, such as fraternities, monstrous men, alcohol abuse and gang-rape, as Ani, the lead character must come to terms with the trauma that she experienced in her youth. In my analysis of this film, I investigated how cultural texts can inform the thinking around campus sexual violence,

particularly because the film centers a white, rich, cisgendered and thin woman with a revenge plan.

To conduct my analysis, I used an anti-racist critique of Metoo (Phipps 2019; 2020; 2021; Moorti, 2024) arguing that the movement was underpinned by mainstream feminism. In addition, I used Toni Morrison's (1992) work on strategic representational strategies of white authors in American literature. I also used an intersectional media analysis (Patrick & Rajiva, 2022) to conduct a textual analysis while attending to Gray's (2010; 2018) work on the intertextual and paratextual landscape. I argued that this film uses particular representational strategies to centre white supremacy within the anti-sexual violence movement, becoming a Metoo text. I made my argument over three points: 1) crime drama, white feminism and testimony; 2) strategic representations of people of colour; 3) the paratextual context of Mila Kunis' involvement with the Danny Masterson sexual assault trial.

In this film, the showrunners avoided important conversations around anti-racist critiques of the mainstream feminist movement and used representational strategies to center white women. Also important, the showrunners did not take up feminist understandings of sexual violence and instead reproduced many of the same tropes found in crime dramas. In the paratextual landscape, the showrunners chose Mila Kunis as the lead actress, an outspoken feminist, who later, wrote a letter in support of convicted rapist Danny Masterson. With all these choices that the showrunners made, this film does not provide hope to the young women that the showrunners target, who are vulnerable to being victimized themselves. This film is not feminist because it does not engage in any discussion around consciousness raising principles.

Implications of this Research for Theory, Policy, and Practice

Together, my three papers provide new findings to the current literature on violence against women and, more specifically, provide analysis to better understand the discourses that challenge and undermine sexual violence prevention. My research has important implications for both theory and policy in gender and feminist studies but also in the broader literature on campus sexual violence prevention, violence against women, and violence prevention overall.

Going Beyond Individual Factors

In my research, with the use of feminist theory and methods, I go beyond the current research on campus sexual violence that speaks to individual characteristics of victims and perpetrators, risk factors, and lifestyle choices. I take up an intersectional feminist approach to sexual violence which incorporates rape culture, rape myths and intersecting oppressions. An intersectional approach engages an anti-racist critique of mainstream feminism. I centred women's experiences by using a feminist critical discourse analysis, institutional ethnography, and feminist anti-colonial media studies. Overall, I argued that rape is not only structural, but it is resistant to change without changing the fundamental aspects of rape culture, which are embedded in law, education, and media. I also argued that non-white women's perspectives continue to be negated despite decades of activism and scholarship.

My findings make the underpinning of white feminism more visible in theory, policy and practice in campus sexual violence prevention campaigns. Much of the scholarship to date on campus sexual violence focuses on criminological and psychological frameworks of analysis and these tend to support and reproduce a white feminist approach. By using an intersectional feminist framework with feminist methods to analyse a sexual violence policy, campaign and cultural product, I can decipher the common discourse among these texts.

To return to the current campus sexual violence literature, my findings showcase several key points. Young women do not have a temporal risk to sexual violence, as the scholars who use red zone theory might want us to think. It is not lifestyle risk factors, a lack of guardianship and a motivated offender that creates the vulnerability to rape, which the scholars of routine activities theory might want to believe. It is not drinking alcohol and parties that cause gang rape. And it is not the predatory people who women choose to spend their time with that predicts whether or not rape will occur. Instead, the white epistemology that exists in the literature perpetuates this type of thinking, and the refusal to theorize race in the scholarship. In the end, sexual violence policies and campaigns could be considered outputs of rape culture, because the ones that are underpinned by white feminism reproduce false notions of hierarchical racial power and privilege.

A white feminist approach relies on a white 'universal woman'. As a result, sexual violence policies that take up white feminism are colour-blind, legally based, and serve to replicate the same type of response to women over and over again. No progress is made in terms of changing the system to meaningfully engage and respond to the harm that women experience or to provide an alternative to the legal system. If the use of rape myths continues, increased security measures and self-securitization can be justified, and may put men of colour potentially at risk. Moon and Holling (2020) consider this focus on white women to be a reproduction of white supremacy because white feminism does not aim to liberate all women. Instead, it privileges only "women within a white hegemony" and commits a "discursive violence" (Moon & Holling, 2020, p. 253). It centres a white epistemology by silencing non-white women and centering white victimhood.

White feminist logic affects the 'doing' of the policy, despite having women of colour in the room and women of colour as sexual violence responders. The information that interview participants shared with me shows that such experts are silenced either by management or management texts, as the university administration takes over managing sexual violence complaints. I argued that campus sexual violence campaigns are performative because they hook into ruling relations, replicating the problems with the hostile legal system in policy, campaign and cultural texts. Black feminists have critiqued an unfair legal system for decades, noting its role in racist treatment of non-white people (Davis et al., 2022).

Taking a wider lens to the issue of campus sexual violence brings us to the discourses found in cultural products that target young women as consumers. Netflix's *Luckiest Girl Alive*, a film that follows the life of Ani, played by Mila Kunis, as she comes to terms with the trauma of being gang-raped. But after a close reading, it is a film about white feminism, testimony and white saviourship. The showrunners reproduce strategies of representation that centre white supremacy with the retelling of a colonial narrative of white lady tears and white male rage ignited by an accusation of sexual violence (Phipps, 2019).

In my research, I have demonstrated that there are serious limitations to the common discourses found in sexual violence policies and popular media. By using white feminism as the theoretical underpinning to sexual violence prevention, sexual violence campaigns and policy are performative as the university aims to make it difficult for students to file and for anyone on campus to gain transparency. Furthermore, my research articulates how students are experiencing university campuses. More specifically, I explain how students may interpret the sexual violence campaign and policy, what their everyday experiences can be when trying to

interact with the sexual violence campaign and policy, and how they interpret their role in relation to the university administration.

Going Forward with Prevention

I first and foremost recommend that scholars, responders and activists continue to investigate discourses of sexual violence and evaluate if they either promote or undermine change. The problem of rape culture is vast, as Buchwald, Fletcher and Roth (2005, p. xiv) observed rape culture in many mediums, including television ads and programs, newspapers, novels, museum walls, and more. They note:

> We began to understand the ways girls and boys are programmed to be victims, and rapists, and we saw how training for this behaviour begins early- before nursery school, even before birth, in most cases, with our own parental notions of the (highly artificial) distinctions between male and female (p. XIV).

The authors argue that rape culture educates young children in maladaptive ways, often starting in homes. Therefore, going forward, intersectional feminist consciousness raising principles (with lessons around the social construction of white supremacy, gender and sexuality) should be taught at a young age. Adrienne Maree Brown (2019) notes that sexuality could be approached in an uplifting way and that sex education can center around consent, boundaries and desire instead of violence, disease and babies. In considering Brown's (2019) thoughts, sexual violence education should move away from fear and into a space that holds "visions of possibility" (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 2005, p. xiv) and cooperation.

Many women of colour working within a rights-based framework have offered solutions to problematic discourses of sexual violence prevention. Bierria (2017) notes that to pursue a radical anti-violence agenda**,** people need to "recenter the work". This means to place

marginalized self-identified women and people with disabilities at the centre of sexual violence prevention. By adopting a radical women of colour and disability justice model at the core of the prevention framework, those who are often an "afterthought" in the sexual violence literature can speak to the interpersonal and structural violence that they face and articulate their needs (Bierria, 2017; Francis, Giesbretcht, Henry & Turgeon, 2019). By doing so, institutions, such as the university, can move beyond an essentialist, individualist and 'inclusion' model of white feminism, to better support all students by thinking broader and systemically (Francis, Giesbretcht, Henry & Turgeon, 2019).

In my first paper, I suggested that by layering the University of Ottawa's sexual violence policy with the discrimination policy, a more nuanced understanding and recording of the event might be possible, if the policy were to stay as it is. But, during my learning process while conducting this research, I have come to understand that even by layering the policies, the most vulnerable students might be missed. At the heart of the policy is a colour blind white epistemological approach, thus "recentering the work" is needed (Bierria, 2017). Furthermore, with ruling relations in mind, as my participants informed me, responders do not record every time a student may come to them, so the aim of recording each event for transparency is not necessarily an achievable task.

As the neoliberal university operates within tight timelines, I see an opportunity for resistance with the slowing of timelines in the policy (re)creation process and engaging in more fundamental discussions about subject formation with the liberal subject (King, 2015). Tiffany Lethabo King (2015) notes that due to the neoliberal university and the urgency to "publish or perish" some scholars critique intersectionality and the time it may take to engage with this lens. But it is very important to have critical discussions about the discursive impacts of using legal

language within sexual violence prevention campaigns. So, tracing the impacts of Crenshaw's legal analysis may help to interrupt ruling relations in dictating the outcome of campus sexual violence prevention campaigns and policy. Engaging with intersectionality as a heuristic tool may help to push against neoliberal tendencies to individualize students and to focus on the structural and systemic (King, 2015). Furthermore, King (2015) argues that intersectionality: "invokes an instance (unfolding temporal space) in which time and space are not necessarily differentiated" (p. 132), thus, operating on tight timelines might not work. Adopting a decolonial and anti-racist approach to time can interrupt neoliberalism's urgency and precarity.

As part of my work to disrupt neoliberal tendencies, I plan to disseminate my findings. I am very privileged to do this research, so sharing this work is very important to me. I plan to share with scholarly, governmental, university and community spheres to ensure an impactful translation of knowledge. Two out of the three papers have been published, and the third paper is under review. So, I plan to further disseminate by presenting this research at academic conferences, such as the Canadian Sociological Association annual meeting and others. Also, I plan to share this research with rape crisis centers (both on and off campus), with university student groups such as student unions, and university administrators.

Methodological Challenges

Conducting research often presents challenges. In this section, I discuss the methodological challenges that I experienced in managing to collect and analyse the data for this dissertation.

Ethics Approval Process

The ethics review process is an important process for any project. For this project, it took a considerable amount of time. I started working on the ethics review online process and

submitted my application after passing my thesis proposal defence and receiving approval from my committee on June 22, 2020. I submitted my application on September 8th and received final approval on March 1st, 2021 (Appendix A, ethics file number H-09-20-5897). Multiple clarifications and modifications to my application were requested by the ethics review board, presumably due to the nature of the project and the pandemic context. For example, at the request of the ethics review board, I needed to add a "first come, first served criterion" to the interview invitation letter to signify to participants that I would not be exhaustively interviewing. Also, I needed to add very specific language in the consent form for the online interviews, all the while not knowing if there would be another lockdown. I was asked to clarify if the ZOOM platform kept a copy of the interview and if the interview recording was subject to the Patriot Act.

Interestingly, there were some requested modifications that I did not foresee. For example, the ethics review board asked for me to clarify why I did not consider the risk of social repercussions for participants in the focus groups of: 1) white self-identified female students; 2) racialized self-identified female students; and 3) LGBTQI2A+ students. They asked, "is there not the possibility some participants will be negatively judged by peers or marginalized for what they say during the discussion"? (Ethics Review Letter, 2020). In my experience being in undergraduate and graduate classrooms, students were often eager to discuss sexual violence and their thoughts on it. But, in light of the ethics review board's concern, I added this specification to the application. In the end, the ethics review board of the University of Ottawa required many clarifications of the application, which took time to address.

COVID-19 Interruptions Interviews, ZOOM, and Focus Groups

In March 2020, the World Health Organization announced that Covid-19 was officially a pandemic. Universities took measures to move classes online and close important resources such as libraries, classrooms, and office space. At the University of Ottawa, an email was circulated to students on March 13th, 2020 noting that the offices at the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies would be closed due to preventative measures. During the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown measures meant that the library was closed to students. This was a huge interruption to me personally because I preferred to use the library as a writing and reading space. I was restricted to an online version of the library resources, which made reading important, but older work, very difficult to do.

In terms of recruiting participants, many of the people that I reached out to were very kind and responded quickly. It took some time for many to find availability due to their busy jobs, and changing lives due to ongoing Covid-19 lockdowns. I would have preferred to conduct the interviews in person to fully engage with my feminist interviewing skills and to be exposed to body language. However, due to lock-down measures, in person interviews were not possible, so ZOOM interviews were conducted instead. As part of the consent form, I notified participants of the challenges with using an American online platform, ZOOM, and that the information was subject to American law. It did not pose any problems for the participants.

The project shifted significantly due to the Covid-19 lockdown. Initially, the proposal of this dissertation includes focus groups with students. However, with lockdowns happening, this never came to be. To mitigate this challenge, I switched supervisors and with my new supervisor, Dr. Rajiva, we reconfigured the project to allow for a better approach to address the research questions and we restructured the timelines. The new project included a variety of complimentary theoretical frameworks and methods. I consider the end result to be a much better

organized and thoughtful project. I gained many valuable insights into the research process; sometimes, when a project needs to change, a more beautiful one arises.

Time Constraints and Thesis by Article Format

There are limitations that come with writing a 'thesis by article'. Two of the main constraints were the word limits and the timelines, which were set by the journals. My manuscript drafts tended to be much longer than the word limits and they needed to be cut down significantly. This meant that I needed to remove some analysis, and either remove or condense excerpts from the policy, interviews, and film. Although, I would have liked to keep the longer manuscripts; the end results are more concise and balanced papers.

The second limitation came from the journal timelines during the publication process. Sometimes edits needed to happen quickly due to publication deadlines and while I was working on the next paper. This timing made writing this dissertation difficult at times when edits were urgently needed, followed by what felt like inactivity as the reviewers compiled their feedback. It was a wonderful learning experience, and I deeply value the time and depth of the reviewers' feedback that I received towards all three manuscripts.

Feminist Interviews and Institutional Ethnography

As this project needed to be reconfigured due to Covid-19 interruptions, there was a methodological challenge to using institutional ethnography after completing the feminist semi-structured interviews and having defined two research questions. Initially, it was my plan to use a feminist critical discourse analysis on the following information: 1) the sexual violence policy and related documents; 2) feminist semi-structured interviews; and 3) focus group data. But, since Covid-19 lockdowns were happening throughout that year, I needed to reconfigure the project with my supervisor after I had completed fourteen interviews.

So, the methodological challenge arises from using institutional ethnography and not having developed a well formulated research problematic but instead having research questions. The research problematic comes from observing the researchers' discoveries and when knowledge shifts. Rankin (2017) argues that it is key to have documented this shift, the shift occurs when "from being there is abstracted into something else" (p. 2). In this case, it would mean that I developed a series of smaller problematics that then allowed for a bigger problematic to be formulated and concentrated on. This process would have helped me to manage the amount of information that I collected and helped me to focus on how the sexual violence campaign was unfolding in the lives of students. However, by putting two different items in conversation, such as a research question and institutional ethnography can make interesting contributions to the research community by offering a different way to conduct research. For example, in other work, Mythili Rajiva (2014) draws upon both Deleuzian and Butlerian theories in her work about trauma and girlhood. Although, there is "an ontological chasm" between the two theorists, Rajiva (2014) argues that this disruption allows for new developments and concepts for feminist researchers (p. 138-9).

Future Research

There are many opportunities for future research that I hope to do and see others do. First, I would like to expand my search and analysis of the criminological and psychological literature to include more critical approaches in my future analysis. As I focused on a particular strand of criminological and psychological literature, it would be interesting to broaden it to include more critical approaches and to include trans and intersex literature in addition to anti-racist and decolonial literature.

I would like to conduct the focus groups that I was not able to do during Covid-19 lockdown and ask questions about discourses of sexual violence prevention (on campus and in media), so that I can further research students' interpretations of them.

A larger project could extend to investigating multiple institutional environments where women of colour, trans women, and people with disabilities are centered at the heart of sexual violence prevention and comparing them against environments where they are not. By evaluating the differences in discourse, the results might help to pinpoint where change can be made. Methodologically, I would like to engage in more progressive forms of analysis, such as post-qualitative work to continue to move away from positivist approaches to research. I hope to continue to research discourses of sexual violence prevention to highlight discourses that may enable change and to evaluate those that do not.

The critical literature on white feminist approaches to sexual violence prevention on campus is gaining momentum. For example, Shankar and Mason (2025) argue that white feminists within the higher education institutions are actively silencing intersectional feminists because their brand of feminism is deemed too radical and a universal woman framework is considered to be more palatable to work with in terms of university systems. Furthermore, Mason and Shankar (2024) argue that any inclusion for intersectional feminists, if any, is performative, and not substantive, making change difficult to achieve.

As the research continues to examine various campus climates (i.e. French-speaking campuses, see Bergeron et al., 2023) the findings seem to be similar. Top level recommendations are made by experts with little input on how those recommendations address power relations beyond a white feminist approach. Raising awareness around sexual violence works only if the power dynamics are included in a nuanced analysis and an intersectional approach is part of all

considerations. Silencing the experiences of non-white women and the various ways in which sexual violence affects women of colour should not continue to happen. It is not enough to say that sexual violence is happening, with prevalence rates and improved reporting systems, while not undoing the cultural pressures of policy, films, and media, which may influence students' responses. Examining whether a university has the appropriate resources is very important along with whether or not the policies are comprehensive to handle complex situations that might arise (Lee & Wong, 2017).

In 2024, five members of Canada's Junior Hockey team were charged with a sexual assault that happened in 2018 (Sadler, 2024). This news story is currently trending on the CBC with daily reports about the trial. The victim's identity is unknown, but the hockey players appear to be young, successful and white, showing once again the media's focus on whiteness and accusations of sexual assault. This has the makings of a movie, with all of the right ingredients for a film about rape (i.e. a fraternity of men, alcohol abuse, and gang rape). One of the hockey players recorded a video of the victim saying, "its all consensual" perhaps attempting to record 'consent' from an intoxicated woman (Westhead, 2025) and further complicating consent within a patriarchal neoliberal world. It is imperative that this case be discussed in classrooms today, for both young women and men to understand how the forces of rape culture are at play.

Final Thoughts

It was a privilege to do this research, write this thesis, and to have the support of my supervisor, Dr. Mythili Rajiva. It was very difficult emotionally to engage with this sticky topic and to confront the complicated ways prevention has been presented to white women, such as myself. Throughout this project, I was consistently challenging my own engagement and

entanglements with rape culture and white supremacy. It was particularly difficult to read some of the literature that engages in rape myths, providing ‘facts’ to support it and not be taken up emotionally by it. I felt feelings of confusion, anger, and self-blame. It is hard to research sexual violence and not feel objectified in the process, but I cannot imagine what it must feel like to not be included at all.

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Appendices

A. University of Ottawa Ethics Certificate

B. Letter of Invitation

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Appendix A: University of Ottawa Ethics Certificate

20/02/2023

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE I CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-09-20-5897
Titre du projet / Project Title	Creating and Implementing a Campus Sexual Violence Prevention Campaign in Ontario: A Case Study.
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Renouvelé / Renewed
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	01/03/2021
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	28/02/2024

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Lindsay OSTRIDGE	Institut d'études des femmes / Institute of Women's Studies	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Simon LAPIERRE	École de service social / School of Social Work	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Project: Creating and Implementing a Campus Sexual Violence Prevention Campaign in Ontario: A Case Study

Principal Investigator: Lindsay Ostridge, PhD Candidate at the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies at the University of Ottawa.
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Simon Lapierre, Professor, Faculty of Social Work at the University of Ottawa.

Dear,

I, Lindsay Ostridge, PhD Candidate at the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies at the University of Ottawa, invite you to participate in a research project entitled, "Creating and Implementing a Campus Sexual Violence Prevention Campaign in Ontario: A Case Study".

The purpose of this study is to get an understanding of your subjective experience in creating and implementing a campus sexual violence prevention campaign. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to fill out a consent form, demographics questionnaire, and meet for one informal interview that may be 45 minutes to one hour long. You will be asked to share your thoughts and experiences in implementing sexual violence prevention initiatives on your campus.

This research may benefit you as your knowledge will help others understand the process of creating and implementing a sexual violence prevention campaign on university campuses. This knowledge will help to create a safer campus for all and help other universities policymakers to understand and connect with your subjective experience. It will also help to improve systems of response for survivors of sexual violence. Please note that there is limited time and I will be unable to interview exhaustively.

If you are interest in participating, please contact Lindsay Ostridge via email.

If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, Tel.: (613) 562-5387.

Thank you,

Lindsay Ostridge

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (File number H-09-20-5897)

Appendix C: Feminist Semi-Structured Interviews: Consent Forms

Title of the study: Creating and Implementing a Campus Sexual Violence Prevention Campaign in Ontario: A Case Study.

Lindsay Ostridge, PhD candidate at the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies and supervised by Dr. Simon Lapierre, Professor, Social Work, University of Ottawa.

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study conducted by Lindsay Ostridge and supervised by Dr. Simon Lapierre. This is a doctoral thesis project that is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding and experiences of those who are involved in a university sexual violence prevention program and policy creation and implementation. This is a doctoral research project.

Participation: My participation will consist of meeting for one interview during which I will answer a series of open-ended questions over a ZOOM meeting. The interview has been scheduled for *(place, date and time of each session)*. The interview that I am asked to participate in may range from 45-60 minutes. The ZOOM meeting will be recorded for analysis.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I answer questions about my experiences in creating and implementing a sexual violence prevention campaign, policy, and prevention response, and this may cause me to feel some psychological discomfort, or concern about speaking about my employer. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks by ensuring that anything that I say will remain anonymous and I will not be identified in anyway, also the name of the institution will remain anonymous.

Benefits: My participation in this study will help others understand the subjective experience of those who are involved in creating a sexual violence prevention campaign, policy and or implementation in Ontario. The information that I share will contribute to a better and safer campus community for all and help to improve response systems for survivors of sexual violence.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for a thesis research project and future academic presentations and publications and that my confidentiality will be protected since all data will be anonymized and the name of the institution will not be named. Please note that Qualtrics is a secure and confidential platform and is subject to the Patriot Act since Qualtrics is an American Software. The interview will happen via ZOOM meeting (for COVID -19 precautions), the meeting will be secured with a password and email invitation. It will be subject to the Patriot Act, since ZOOM is an American software. By participating in an online or telephone interview, someone around me may overhear what I am saying. It is therefore important that I plan well for the interview in a place that provides me with a minimum of privacy. I will be given the option to review my transcript and add any

clarifications, should I wish to. I will be provided with a two- week deadline to provide any further details to my transcripts.

Anonymity will be protected in the following manner, all participants will be given a code, all transcripts, and recordings will be anonymized with no identifying information. All email addresses and consent forms will be kept separately and will have no connection to the data. There will be minimal risk to the participant since the names, identities and name of the institution will not be revealed in any future publications.

Conservation of data: The data collected, including recordings of the interviews, transcripts and copies of consent forms and email addresses and notes will be kept in a secure manner on a password protected hard drive which will be stored in a locked office at the University of Ottawa. Only Lindsay Ostridge will have access to the data, and it will be conserved for one year, then discarded.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be deleted if requested.

Acceptance: I, *(Name of participant),* agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Lindsay Ostridge PhD Candidate at the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Simon Lapierre.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.
If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5387

Participant's signature: *(Signature)* Date: *(Date)*

Researcher's signature: *(Signature)* Date: *(Date)*

Appendix D: Feminist Semi Structured Interview Guide

Feminist Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Before the interview starts: Remind the participant that the interview is being recorded and go over the informed consent form including plans for transcription and the de-identification of this recorded data.

1. Can you please tell me a little bit about how you became part of the sexual violence policy development process/training programs/prevention efforts? (Probe: Was this a new experience? Did you have experience that made you valuable to the team? Did you have an expertise in some way?)

2. What motivated you to become part of this project/these initiatives? (Probe: What did it mean to you to be selected/appointed/hired for this role?)

3. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience being part of the creating/reviewing/implementing process of the university sexual violence campaign?

4. How did you perceive/conceptualize your role and contribution within this group?

5. Did you feel any challenges either individually or collectively to performing this role or to implementing changes on campus?

6. Did you feel any challenges collectively to performing this role or to implement changes on campus? Were they resolved?

7. What influences your work, for example what literature did you find helpful?

8. What do you think are the important pieces of the policy and campaign?

9. What kinds of achievements do you think this group made?

10. What has not been done?

11. What do you think still needs to be done? And should be done in the future?

12. What are the potential challenges to getting those achievements in the future?

13. What can be learned from your experience?

Is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't covered yet? Please let me know. Finally, I'd like to thank you very much for participating in this research project. Your

responses were very helpful. If you would like a copy of the final thesis, please leave an email with me and I will send you a copy once the study is complete. This email will in no way be connected to your responses. If for some reason you change emails/jobs, feel free to send me your current contact info at any time. Thanks for all of your help and insights. It's much appreciated.

Appendix E. Debriefing Letter for Interviews

Project: Creating and Implementing a Campus Sexual Violence Prevention Campaign in Ontario: A Case Study

Sexual violence continues to be a serious problem for women and LGBTQI2A+ among all age groups, but especially for those between the ages of 15-24 years old (Brennan, 2008). Creating and implementing a sexual violence prevention campaign and policy is new to many administrators and policymakers in Ontario universities due to Bill 132. It is very important to share the experiences of those who are involved in both the creating and implementation of this policy and prevention campaign to understand the processes that come into play. It is your subjective experience that will help future policymakers and students understand what is involved when doing so. Your contributions to this research can have a positive impact on both prevention and intervention strategies and, consequently, is of vital importance for researchers, clinicians, and society. The questions that you answered will help provide important insight into sexual violence prevention policymaking/implementing at an Ontario post-secondary institution. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the process of creating and implementing a sexual violence policy and prevention campaign.

It is difficult to answer these types of questions, and your generosity and willingness to participate in this study are greatly appreciated. Your input will help contribute to the advancement of the campus sexual violence prevention campaign and policy. Sometimes people find the subject matter disturbing. If answering any of these questions led you to feel distressed and you would like to speak to someone about your thoughts, please contact one of the following:

Good2talk 24/7/365 (Bilingual) 1-866-925-5454
Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre 613-562-2333
Centretown Community Resource Centre 613-233-4443
Kind Centre Ottawa 613-563-4818
Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa 613-234-2266

We would like to ask you to maintain confidentiality about the things discussed in this interview out of respect for the other participants.

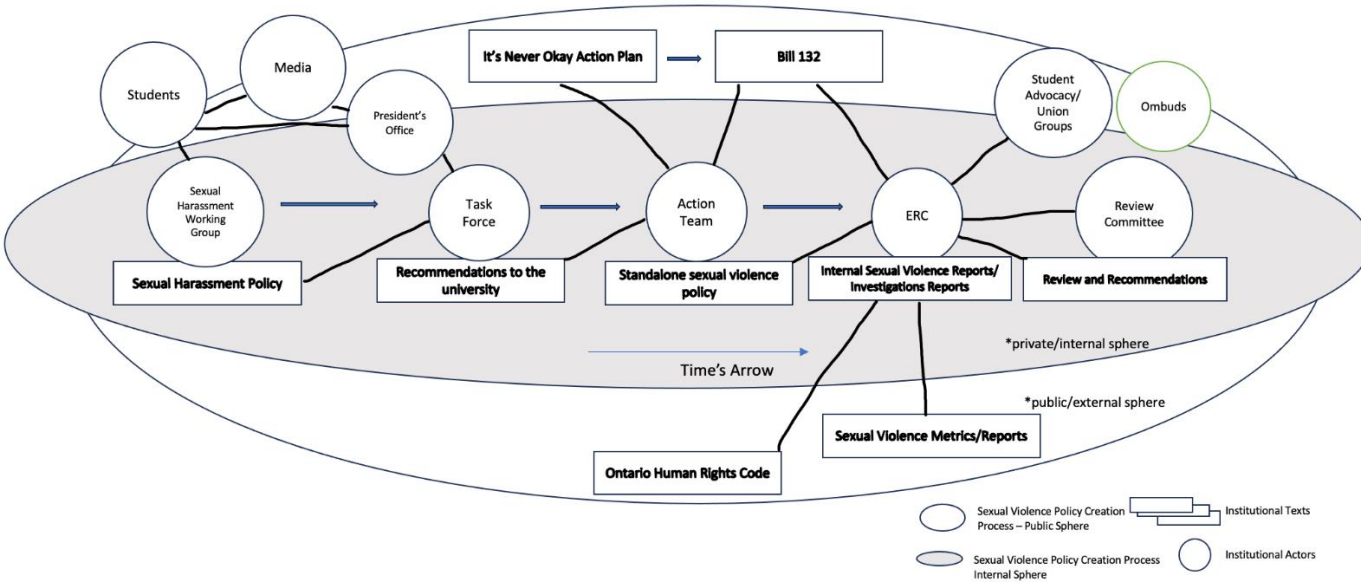
This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and the University of Ottawa policies.

If you have any complaints, concerns, or questions about this research, please feel free to contact, Lindsay Ostridge. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, Tel.: (613) 562-5387.

Thank you very much for participating!

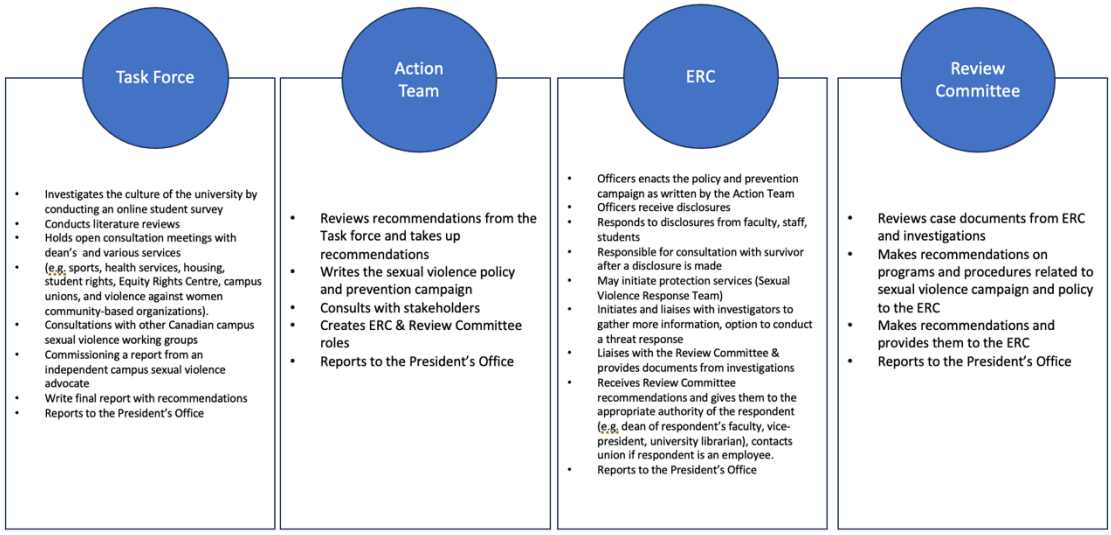
Appendix F. Mapping Social Relations and Institutional Texts

Appendix 1. *Mapping Social Relations and Institutional Texts (Turner, 2006)*



Appendix G. Institutional Actors: Roles and Responsibilities

Appendix 2. *Institutional Actors Roles and Responsibilities*



Appendix H. Participant Demographics

1. Samantha, a white lesbian cisgendered women, student union representative
2. Arathy, a queer, cis-gendered woman of colour, Equal Rights Officer
3. Sophia, white, heterosexual, cisgendered female professor on the task force
4. Anna, queer cisgendered woman of colour, anti-racism activist and student union representative in the action group
5. Charlotte, a white, heterosexual cisgendered legal professor, in the action group
6. Caroline, a white heterosexual cis-gendered woman, paid social justice advocate.
7. Lydia, white, heterosexual cisgendered, female, trained lawyer, ombudswoman
8. Theodore, white, heterosexual cisgendered male, student rights advocate, lawyer
9. Peter, white, heterosexual, cisgendered male, paid employee, student rights advocate
10. Ava, a queer, cis-gendered woman of colour, front-line response worker at the women's center.
11. Emma. white, heterosexual cisgendered woman, Equal Rights Officer
12. Daniel, white, queer cisgendered male student volunteering on the review committee
13. Anthony, white, heterosexual, cisgendered male, Senior Administrator