



Social Media and Mobilizing Change for Community Impacts

LITERATURE REVIEW

This work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

iMPACTS: Collaborations to Address Sexual Violence on Campus; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Partnership Grant Number: 895-2016-1026, Principal Investigator and Project Director, Shaheen Shariff, Ph.D., James McGill Professor, McGill University.

Acknowledgements

The work of the Canadian Women's Foundation and the organizations we fund takes place on traditional Indigenous territories. We are grateful for the opportunity to meet and work on this land. However, we recognize that land acknowledgments are not enough. We need to pursue truth, reconciliation, decolonization, and allyship in an ongoing effort to make right with all our relations.

To start, we are learning and unlearning within the foundation itself. In 2019 and 2020, we will learn from key reports on truth and reconciliation and grow our understanding of relevant issues such as the historical impacts of "charity work" on Indigenous communities; gender rights activism led by Indigenous leaders; and how settler-based organizations can build allied relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. This will prepare us to commit to concrete action across our departments and sign onto The Philanthropic Community's Declaration of Action (link to <http://www.philanthropyandaboriginalpeoples.ca/declaration/>) developed by The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. After these initial steps, we will further pursue truth and reconciliation efforts in our organizational plans. It will include how we make grants, administer community gatherings, deepen community relationships, engage in policy and practice change work, and report on activities and outcomes along the way.

Jana Vigor

Research Assistant at the Canadian Women's Foundation & McGill iMPACTS project

Anuradha Dugal

Director of Community Initiatives & Policy at the Canadian Women's Foundation

About the Social Media and Mobilizing Change for Community Impacts Project:

Social media has become a pivot for individual level activism and community level change. This collaborative project between the Canadian Women's Foundation and the McGill iMPACTS project investigates the connections between social media and action for social change in the context of sexual assault on Canadian post secondary campuses. This literature review is the first of the project's three phases and presents a summary of current scholarship that focuses on how feminist organizing employs various social media platforms in order to educate and build movements to support survivors of sexual assault while ultimately aiming to eradicate all forms of gender-based violence. It further aims to theorize how the rise of hashtag movements like #MeToo may have offline impacts on activism, education, and policies within post-secondary institutions across Canada.

A key concern within both the online and offline activist discourses is that those most vulnerable to violence are continually under-represented, un-heard, or excluded when these are precisely the voices that should be central to any discussion of feminist organizing around gender-based violence. Racialized women, women with disabilities, Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, women with irregular immigration status, older and elderly women, queer, trans and non-binary people, exist outside of what literature has called “the ideal victim” (Randall, 2010; Trusolino, 2017) and continue to experience higher rates of violence and yet are under-represented in both media accounts of activist movements and in the academic texts that analyze them.

This literature review aims to center scholarship that focuses on these marginalized experiences in an effort to remind readers that movements attempting to eradicate occurrences of sexual violence do so in order to validate and heal the experiences of all bodies, not simply those who meet the criteria for the “ideal victim” that is, a sane, white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied woman.

Objectives

- Employ the term gender-based violence as an umbrella term for a variety of experiences that predominantly affect the lives of women, trans, and non-binary people both online and offline that stem from a pervasive and continuing rape culture
- Center experiences that are often left out of conversations concerning gender-based violence
- Highlight the importance of disclosure and how digital media are introducing a new way for survivors to seek informal justice and support after experiencing violence
- Summarize current scholarship on fourth wave feminism, ‘hashtag activism’ and the impacts on movements to end gender-based violence both online and offline
- Consider how the current climate around gender-based violence may impact post-secondary environments in Canada
- Draw connections that might clarify how students who are at risk or already identify as survivors of gender-based violence use social media to disclose their experiences, educate themselves and others, and ultimately heal, enact solidarity, and seek justice for themselves and their communities



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

About the Project

Objectives

Table of Contents

Introduction

Intersectionality & Gender Based Violence

Disclosure: Formal vs. Informal

Fourth Wave Feminism

Hashtag Feminism: Hashtag Activism & Rape Culture

Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions: Responses & Student Activism

Conclusions & Considerations

Resources

References

Introduction

It is November 2019 at the time of writing this literature review, two years after the hashtag #MeToo went viral, transforming Philadelphia-based activist Tarana Burke's "Me Too movement", created in 2006 to support women of colour who had survived sexual violence (Just Be Inc.; Jerkins, 2019), into the internationally used social media hashtag it is widely known as today. Mainstream stories of sexual violence continue to emerge as do those that question whether or not public disclosures are worth it, whether or not movements like #MeToo, have any benefit at all for those who choose to go public about their experiences (Carmon et. al, 2019; Traitster, 2019).

The #MeToo hashtag's 2017 impact is historic; it was tweeted 19 million times in the first year after actress Alyssa Milano used it to encourage others to join in posting the phrase to show the magnitude of gender-based sexual assault and has since been archived alongside other 'feminist hashtags' (Loza, 2014; Thrift, 2014; Rentschler, 2014; Rentschler, 2017; Mendes et. al., 2018; Clark-Parsons, 2019) that are used by activists to educate and organize. While mainstream discourses around the ways in which feminists are increasingly using digital platforms like Twitter, Facebook, tumblr, Instagram, and others, often assume that the use of technology in feminist consciousness raising efforts is a novel approach, feminists have been using and theorizing on the importance of digitally networked counter-publics since the 1990s (Singh, 2018). Using social media to educate from outside dominant discourses around topics like gender-based violence, sexism, racism, and ableism has come to be the defining feature of fourth wave feminism, wherein the online world is inextricable from offline experience (Powell, 2015; Sills et. al., 2016; Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016; Zimmerman, 2017).

Since going viral, #MeToo has been connected to a significant rise in global media coverage of stories of gender-based violence across industries. While there's been increased attention, the coverage often results in public discourses that replicate the dominant understanding of gender-based violence as a personal and isolated experience rather than a symptom of a pervasive rape culture that upholds gendered power hierarchies, sensationalizes gender-based violence through mass media, and silences those who continue to experience violence and oppression.

Particularly important to this project is understanding how #MeToo and other feminist hashtags and digital activism have impacted Canadian post secondary institutions. It is unclear whether we can draw certain correlations between the increase in digital feminist practices and changes to student activism, campus resources that exist to support people who have been affected by sexual violence, or policy revisions from this literature review alone. However, considering that the majority of post-secondary students are frequent users of social media and that they have access to alternate forms of digitally facilitated community learning, it is more than plausible that students' exposure to and understanding of rape culture and gender-based violence have been impacted since the rise of #MeToo. It is also

plausible that their expectations of how their educational institution will support them if they choose to make a formal disclosure will be shaped by their online experiences.

This three-phase project begins with this summary of the most current scholarship on digital feminist practices and post secondary institutional environments which will be used as a foundation from which to ask better questions about the relationship between online and offline realms associated with higher education in Canada and its relevance to preventing and responding to cases of gender-based violence.

Mainstream discussions, academic scholarship, and knowledge taken from digital counter-publics can only theorize about the experiences of people who actively participate in public conversations around gender-based violence. We recognize that those most vulnerable to violence or those still experiencing danger are the people we most need to consider when developing supports and activist interventions. These people are likely not in positions to participate in the public conversations discussed in this document due to ongoing threats to their safety, access to technology, and other factors that contribute to their isolation, silence, and invisibility.

Much of the focus of the advocacy, policy, support and prevention on post secondary campuses has been on sexual violence perpetrated against cisgender, heterosexual women in particular, however, we acknowledge the importance of future solutions that respond to the experiences that affect a diverse range of people, including transgender women and men, Two-Spirit people, cisgender women and girls, non-binary people, and people with other gender identities. The term gender-based violence will be used in this document to be inclusive of the diversity of survivors' genders and experiences while also highlighting the gendered nature of this particular violence. The terms sexual violence and sexual assault will be used when summarizing articles, chapters, or texts that refer to those experiences specifically.

Intersectionality & Gender-Based Violence

Acknowledging the diversity of lived experience is foundational to working to support survivors from an intersectional framework and to theorizing about how communities enact their organizing. The impacts of gender-based violence are diverse, often devastating, and usually long lasting. While there are some common reactions and outcomes, it is counterproductive to generalize and anticipate how a survivor will be affected or what they will need as support for their healing. No one model or framework lends itself as the only conceptualization or solution to the diversity of individuals' experiences. This project views gender-based violence through intersectional and trauma-informed frameworks to help illuminate the multi-faceted barriers survivors navigate while accessing support services or simply disclosing at their post secondary institutions.

Coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw and now a defining feature of fourth wave feminism, intersectionality is a framework which allows us to consider how power and privilege affect

our social identities and embodied experiences. An intersectional analysis of gender-based violence recognizes the interconnecting identities of the people involved which can include gender identity and expression, sex, age, racial or ethnic background, religion, language, ability, socioeconomic status, Indigeneity, and sexual orientation (Khan et. al., 2019, p. 30) as well as citizenship and/or immigration status.

Unlike some schools of thought that argue sexual assault is harmful in the ways that any physical violence is harmful or that it is experienced as a sort of metaphoric “theft”, during which someone’s sexual freedom or purity is taken from them, our framework for understanding the experience can be articulated as a violation of bodily autonomy. That is, “an undermining of a person’s ability to determine their own bodily experiences and interactions” (Cahill, 2017, p. 278). This framing allows us to understand personhood and identity as necessarily embodied. It helps us consider the ways in which gender-based violence not only affects a person’s physical body and their psychological state but also how it radically alters the foundations of their personhood and sense of self in relation to others and the communities they belong to. An acknowledgment of how sexual violence undermines bodily autonomy moves the conversation from whether or not someone consented to “a more nuanced conversation about the connections among dignity, moral worth, and the ability to have significant say over one’s embodied experience and being” (Cahill, 2017, p. 279). This framing also highlights how disruptive an experience of gender-based violence can be, particularly for students whose identities are already marginalized and for whom the experience of violence might be compounded by other forms of systemic, bureaucratic, and social oppression.

According to Reynol Junco, the seven vectors of post-secondary student identity development are: “Developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity” (2014, p. 105). Considering that a student’s sense of wellbeing in relation to others develops along the lines of gender, race, ability and the other intersecting identities mentioned earlier, it is understandable that an experience of gender-based violence might interrupt healthy development in a more multifaceted and serious way for marginalized students.

Survivors can suffer from both immediate and long term health consequences including HIV infection, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, depression, and social isolation (Quinlan, 2017b, Moylan, 2017). People may feel that their sense of autonomy, purpose, integrity, and safety become compromised and find it difficult to meet the academic demands of their program which can radically alter their academic success and personal wellbeing. Sexual victimization during the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, which often coincides with the period of time a person accesses post-secondary education, has been found to result in memory deficits and attention problems and is also associated with psychological trauma states which, when compounded, can have profound impacts on academic performance (Stermac, Horowitz, & Bance, 2017, p. 28) Commonly, post-secondary student-survivors experience days or weeks during which they have difficult sleeping, concentrating on

schoolwork, and avoid classes or certain areas of campus because the locations remind them of the victimization. (Stermac, Horowitz, & Bance, 2017, p. 35).

We know that certain populations are at greater risk of violence based on multiple intersecting oppressions and that racialized women are less likely to formally disclose an experience of sexual violence and access supports on campus, thereby increasing their risks for mental illness, isolation, and compromised academic success (Quinlan, 2017b). As mainstream discussions considering post secondary environments have largely failed to determine how colonial violence and its intersections with gender equity create unique risk factors for Indigenous women on Canadian campuses (Bourassa et. al., 2017), we echo the 2019 ‘Courage to Act’ report’s first key recommendation that post-secondary institutions “implement existing Indigenous-led solutions aimed to end gender-based violence against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and non-binary people” (Khan et. al., 2019, p. 23).

While some campuses are in the process of responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s call to action, these responses are not always enacted in ways that acknowledge the multigenerational trauma of gender-based violence on Indigenous communities. The rate of violent victimization experienced by Indigenous women is over three times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous women (Bourassa et. al., 2017). To respond to this, post secondary institutions must collaborate with Indigenous communities to develop supportive resources and programming that acknowledges the impact of gender-based violence on Indigenous communities, work to dispel stereotyping, and highlight the resilience and creativity of Indigenous peoples (Khan et. al., 2019, p. 23). Being culturally competent and trauma-informed includes not only understanding the impacts of settler colonialism but also working towards respectfully implementing culturally safe practices, programming, and protocols that actively support Indigenous students, staff, and faculty (ibid, p. 50).

An unfortunate and common reaction to an experience of violence is that survivors indicate a sense of responsibility for coping with the aftermath of victimization on their own rather than disclosing to another and asking for help (Quinlan, 2017a). Some say that they do not want to trouble their friends or family, or cite the fear that they will be blamed and further stigmatized. The experience of not being believed or being blamed by people working at educational institutions has been described as a “second assault” or revictimization, which can exacerbate the deleterious health consequences of sexual violence (Quinlan, 2017a, p. 65). The next section of this document differentiates between formal and informal disclosures and explores why the type of response a person receives to their disclosure of gender-based violence is an important indicator of whether or not they go on to access the appropriate professional and interpersonal care.

Disclosure: Formal vs. Informal

On November 1, 2019, York University’s Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education hosted a panel discussion on restorative justice processes as alternate models for post secondary institutional responses to gender-based violence. Psychiatrist Lori Haskell

cited that along with obtaining answers, experiencing validation as a legitimate victim, observing offender remorse for having harmed them, and having choice and input to the resolution of their violation, what survivors need is to be able to tell their own stories about their experiences. She suggested that people are better able to integrate and understand the harm done to them if they can tell their own story in a setting of their choice, without disruption, blame, or attack, and to be able to engage with the narrative in an emotional way that acknowledges the depth of feeling that it elicits. Similarly, Stermac et. al., suggest that disclosure is one of the most important factors associated with the overall effects of sexual victimization on a person's education. They assert that "whether, how, and with whom sexual assault survivors talk about victimization can affect their coping, what actions they take against a perpetrator, and longer-term mental health and educational outcomes" (2017, p. 29).

Literature distinguishes between formal and informal disclosures. Formal disclosures include relaying the experience to services like law enforcement, medical providers, counselling, or advocacy services, while informal disclosures include talking to friends, family members, or romantic partners (ibid, p. 30). It is worth noting that none of the literature on Canadian post secondary institutional approaches to supporting survivors of gender-based violence include a discussion of digital disclosures and storytelling like the kinds that have appeared alongside hashtags like #MeToo that will be discussed in a later section.

While the rates of false allegations are exceptionally low, only between 2-10% of campus reports are unfounded, close to half of one sample of post secondary student survivors report at least one of the following forms of institutional betrayal: being academically punished for reporting, covering up the report, having their experience dismissed, taking no proactive steps or making it difficult to further report the experience (Quinlan, 2017b, p.66). This finding is echoed in a study on Quebec's campus responses, in which the majority of their participants reported a lack of confidence in institutional channels citing a pervasive belief that the incident was considered not serious enough to report or that the institution would not take them seriously. The authors cite that an overwhelming 96.1% of their sample believe their university should adopt clear and transparent policies that inform community members about existing processes and channels to support victims of unwanted remarks or acts of a sexual nature (Ricci & Bergeron, 2019).

Aside from the physiological and psychological consequences outlined in the previous section, gender-based violence also undermines survivors' academic freedom on a bureaucratic level, as they're often unable to access the institutional support services due to stigma and pushback. The reality is that explanations for the inherent unreliability of people's allegations of gender-based violence are reaffirmed in everyday conversations, courtrooms, forensic medical examinations, and public policy. Further, racism and ableism also factor into how survivors' disclosures are received. Stermac et. al., found that racialized survivor participants of their study preferred to disclose informally rather than disclose to their institutions (2017, p.34). Some, including racialized women participants with East Asian and South Asian

backgrounds reported not disclosing at all, citing that sexuality and victimization were not appropriate topics of discussion within their ethnocultural group.

People may choose not to disclose for a number of reasons, not limited to “feeling a sense of shame, guilt and embarrassment, fear that they will be blamed if they were drinking, isolation, community stigma and not wanting their loved ones to know. Others may be concerned about confidentiality or may worry that they will not be believed. Often, people never disclose to a professional or report to the police. Instead, they may choose to disclose to friends, family, intimate partners or roommates for a variety of reasons.” (Khan et. al., 2019, p. 41) A knowledgeable response to a disclosure, one that centers the survivor’s experience, is affirming and trauma-informed, and maintains the survivor’s dignity, can have significant positive outcomes for people who have experienced violence. The process of integrating an experience of violence into the life narrative is becoming more nuanced with the rise in social media facilitated public disclosures. Survivors are turning to communities of strangers in order to tell their own stories and to educate themselves and others about their experiences.

‘Justice’ for survivors of gender-based violence often requires “information, participation, voice, validation, vindication, control and offender accountability” (Powell, 2015, p. 583). While survivors who choose to disclose informally to online networks expose themselves to a variety of risks, Powell argues that the ease of digital connection may foster a techno-space in which survivors can seek and receive a sense of informal justice. Blogs, websites, and especially social media platforms are regularly used by feminists in order to educate others about rape culture and gender-based violence. The next section outlines the specific ways in which feminists use communications technologies to facilitate new meanings and practices of informal justice in what digital media scholars call ‘technosocial subaltern counterpublics’ or simply ‘digital counterpublics’.

Fourth Wave Feminism

I remain excited by how feminism is evolving. Social media and online platforms have empowered the voices that were, for far too long, overlooked by so-called “mainstream” feminism. Social media has made it possible for many streams of feminism to coexist instead of merely a mainstream. Women of color, queer women, working class women, transgender women are all finding ways to insert ourselves into the feminist conversation, and more importantly, direct feminist conversations toward the issues that are most critical to our communities. The importance and necessity of this direction cannot be overlooked.

- Roxanne Gay, 2014

Ruxandra Looft offers a concise summary of the four waves of feminism. She asserts that the fourth wave, dated from 2008 onwards, works with the understanding that intersectionality is the common thread between the different communities and groups that link under the term ‘feminism’. A distinctive trait of the fourth wave movement is its reliance and usage of

technology and social media to connect and reach populations across cultural and national borders.” (2017, p. 894)

Regardless of their wave, feminists have used the technologies available to them to facilitate their educational and organizing efforts. Whether pamphlet, zine, radio program, or twitter account, if it has the power to reach as many people as possible, feminists have used it to expand consciousness raising movements. What we’re seeing now, during this fourth wave of feminism, is that offline activism, protest, and feminist movements are largely organized and sustained using online platforms, making the online inextricable from the offline. Media techne, that is, mediated craft or technique - *doing*, is central to contemporary feminist practices (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). Often cited Feministing’s Samhita Mukhopadhyay, claims: “feminist blogs are the consciousness raising groups of our generation” (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, p. 241).

Feminists use social media strategically as powerful tools for community building and political mobilization. Feminists build “technological, affective, and cultural infrastructures through which they produce, disseminate and share resources, ideas and knowledge” (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, p. 240). The digital realm acts as a site for cross-temporal encounters, a kind of meeting ground where contemporary feminists think about feminism together and create virtual moments of collaborative making. Whether engaging with other people currently online, or with the ideas of past feminist theorists and waves in the virtual, the digital realm allows for novel ideas to emerge in a network. This perspective offers insight into how present feminisms reverberate or resonate with past feminist activism in order to build collaboratively and strategically towards the future (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, p. 243).

Since Nancy Fraser coined the term ‘discursive counter-publics’ in 1990, media scholars have been theorizing about how marginalized groups build and use parallel discursive spaces in order to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs. Defined primarily by their intersectionality and their internet use (Zimmerman, 2017), fourth wave feminists use social media to build out digital discursive counter-publics in response to the reality that the majority of mainstream media upholds an established and constraining masculinist bias that is antagonistic to feminist concerns like gender-based violence (Sills et. al., 2016, Salter, 2013).

The internet enables survivors to build networks of solidarity beyond geographical boundaries and facilitates consciousness-raising without the physical risks involved with on the street protests (Bailey et. al., 2019). These networks of feminists have marked offline impact, affecting policy interventions, the formation of activist events, and some of the most visible, mainstream political and cultural debates about gender in our time. The rise of the technological infrastructures that enable something to ‘go viral’ make it possible for feminist thought to infiltrate the public sphere and create discourses that centre women and marginalized people. These counter-publics offer cathartic release through storytelling, build solidarity through dialogue, and make demands on society through large scale organizing -

often by bringing certain communities and voices to the forefront with the strategic use of hashtags.

While feminist counter-publics across social media platforms point towards democratic practice, they tend to replicate hierarchies that exist in the public realm, often excluding those who are most vulnerable or unheard from, recreating existing structures of misogyny, racism and ableism in the 21st century (Singh, 2018). There remains an impulse to construct singular feminist narratives that exclude intersectional experiences (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016). What often gets overlooked is that the architects of digital feminist spaces are usually white women, whose embodiment and material practices rarely seek to understand and include women of colour despite the fact that much of front line support, organizing, activism, and community leadership has historically been and continues to be enacted by women of colour (Singh, 2018).

It may be technologically easy for many groups to engage in these counter-publics, yet “there remain emotional, mental, or practical barriers which create different experiences, and legitimate some feminist voices, perspectives and experiences over others” (Mendes et al., 2018, p. 237). Just as with other types of activism, where the work is undertaken because of the individual’s desire and passion, the labour involved with running digital campaigns around gender-based violence mirrors other ‘women’s work’ in that it is highly affective, precarious and exploitative, just as it tends to be offline (Mendes et al., 2018, p. 239). Mendes et. al. question the sustainability of unpaid digital labour in light of the emotional ‘tax’ that their participants describe experiencing in response to online abuse and burn-out but also from listening to stories of abuse, harassment, and misogyny. Participants described needing to limit their interaction with their digital networks and often taking breaks from their activism for short or prolonged periods of time.

The digital realm allows for people to literally ‘re-do’ feminism (Baer, 2016) but this does not discount the challenges that come with engaging online and the various risks feminist activists expose themselves to (Clark-Parsons, 2019). The next section outlines the specific ways hashtags are used to collect and amplify the stories of gender-based violence and intersectional experiences of sexism.

Hashtag Feminism: Hashtag Activism & Rape Culture

Hashtag feminism is “a contentious performance in which activists make the personal political by making it visible, bridging the individual with the collective and illustrating the systemic nature of social injustice” (Clark-Parsons, 2019, p.1). The international #MeToo campaign still faces two opposing critiques; one that argues the movement has “gone too far”, destroying reputations and complicating men’s lives, while the other asks whether it has done enough or if it’s simply a media spectacle with no tangible impact on dismantling oppressive patriarchal

systems (Clark-Parsons, 2019). Both these critiques centre on a pivotal question concerning digital activism; can hashtags cause “real” social change?

Hashtags like #MeToo belong to the now established digital discursive practice of feminist protest known as “hashtag feminism” whose prevalence has garnered it its own digital archive ‘hashtagfeminism.com’, curated by digital media analyst and commentator Tara L. Conley (Clark, 2016, p. 788). It borrows its name from what theorists called ‘hashtag activism’ after early digital campaigns like #Blacklivesmatter went viral across multiple platforms, radically altering discursive arenas both on and offline. Explained simply, adding a particular hashtag to a post allows users to link their content to a larger digital conversation that has an explicit social justice agenda. A few other hashtags included in the growing feminist practice that have been analyzed by various scholars are #EverydaySexism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen (Loza, 2014), #RapeCultureIsWhen, #WhyIStayed (Clark, 2016), #LoSHA (Vemuri, 2018, Guha et. al., 2019), #YesAllWomen (Rodino-Colocino, 2014, Baer, 2016, Everett, 2018, Bailey et. al., 2019), #YesALLWhiteWomen (Baer, 2016, Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016) #SafetyTipsForLadies (Rentschler, 2015), #YouOKSis? (Rentschler, 2017), #StopStreetHarassment (Rentschler, 2017), and #BeenRapedNeverReported (Mendes et. al, 2018).

Formed in response to an incidence of violence or harassment either online or offline, these hashtags are used as a vehicle for personal disclosure and discussion between people on digital platforms as well as an opening for collective education through the use of re-tweets or re-posts and the creation of extensive threads that include a diverse range of compiled opinions. At their most visible, feminist hashtags are taken up by newspapers, television, and other media outlets as stories of collective public opinion (Thrift, 2014). This section explains some of the defining features of hashtag campaigns and how they accelerate and support feminist activism and the formation of digital safe spaces (Clark-Parsons, 2018) for survivors of gender-based violence.

Transnational feminist scholars observe that we are currently witnessing an international movement of people using social media platforms for support, amplification, and strength in the struggle against gender-based violence. “From South Korea to Sudan, Germany to Mexico, the U.S. to India, Bangladesh to Kenya, women have risen against sexual violence, assault, and harassment and shared their stories both online and offline, making #MeToo an ever more global movement” (Guha et. al, 2019). While optimistic, they point to the representational gaps that exist on social media due to the fact that “most online sexual violence activism ends up having a Western focus and moves away from marginalized classes.” While cyberfeminism has facilitated collaborative activism across groups, the dominant criticism is that these digitally facilitated hashtag campaigns are still assumed to be radical political movements populated and upheld by Western women.

A simplified summary of the debate around social media is as follows: techno-optimists argue that social media can create real change by democratizing access to the tools and information needed to build movements and revolutionize the public sphere and techno-pessimists argue

that networked activism is merely ‘slacktivism’, a risk-free performance of virtue-signalling that is satisfying but has little impact and distracts from real activism while opening activists up to surveillance and other dangers associated with public visibility (Clark-Parsons, 2019). It is worth considering that both might be true and that in its many dimensions, hashtag feminism might be both politically transformative and simultaneously politically problematic.

Gender-based violence is still largely considered an individual and private problem, not meant for focus in the public sphere (Bailey et. al., 2019). Women who survive violence are often questioned on their past sexual behaviour, how they dressed or their decisions to drink or walk home alone, while perpetrators of violence are rarely held accountable for their behaviour or are widely understood as individual, bad actors. This, of course, is indicative of a pervasive ‘rape culture’ which feminist scholars, practitioners and activists have, since the 1970s, defined as the social, cultural and structural discourses and practices in which sexual violence is rationalized, accepted, eroticised, minimised, and trivialised. It is largely in response to the persistence of rape culture, which intersects with other systems of oppression, namely white supremacist heteropatriarchy, that feminists take to Twitter and other networked platforms to create the counter-publics explained in the previous section.

The labelling of intimate partner violence as a ‘private issue’ is foundational to how institutions like law enforcement perceive victims of gender-based violence. Often, women who fight back are imprisoned, queer and trans people are rarely considered legitimate victims, and critiques of the cultural values that disable effective interventions are obscured. It is understandable that not only are these phenomenon reproduced in people’s everyday personal interactions and in places like post-secondary institutions, but also in the digital realm, where feminist activists, women and minorities are regular targets of technologically facilitated violence like trolling, doxxing, and swatting (Bailey et. al., 2019).

Social media facilitated ‘feminist education’ has the power to be transformative precisely because it can occur in the course of a person’s everyday, allowing new ideas and information to be introduced, shared, and taken up in a way that is easily accessible, user-friendly, and able to be widely disseminated (Sills et. al., 2016, p. 943). While past generations may have had to deliberately create and seek out feminist or social justice material, the prevalence of social media use allows for feminists to effortlessly disseminate consciousness-raising content to the masses without necessarily appearing to ‘preach’ their politics. Survivors can belong to a large and diffuse network or movement of feminists with a political will to inclusivity and respect. Young people can become easily connected with the feminist movement and also establish a sense of belonging by creating their own content, engaging and re-distributing what their peers are producing. These kinds of online spaces, which place an emphasis on kindness and support for marginalized groups, “can operate not only as healing spaces for those who have experienced sexual violence and abuse, but also to provide validation and support for anyone critical of rape culture and sexism” (Sills et. al., 2016 p. 944).

Just as intersectionality has become a defining feature of fourth wave feminism, so too has creating ‘safe spaces’ for personal storytelling, community building, and pedagogy away from

networked, online misogyny. There has been notable rise in online misogyny in response to the heightened visibility of feminist figures in the popular media landscape. Trolls and misogynists often use “disciplinary rhetoric” which seeks to silence and make digital feminists invisible (Clark-Parson, 2018, p. 2127) by way of virtual threats of violence, which can make survivors reluctant to speak out for fear of appearing humourless, weak, and censoring. For users of colour, queer and trans users, and disabled users, online misogyny is compounded when it intersects with racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism.

Digital feminists borrow from the early twentieth century archetypal feminist safe spaces which were separatist, women-only, consciousness-raising groups, where the license to speak and act freely was not only offered for its therapeutic purpose of voicing personal experience but also to identify the systemic injustices women face in order to collectively organize for change (Clark-Parsons, 2018, p. 2128). While some closed Facebook groups do literally enact a closed off enclave, the safe spaces that digital feminists are most often trying to establish have more to do with activating and monitoring the conversations that emerge in response to hashtag campaigns addressing rape culture. In large part, feminists use hashtags in order to be able to witness each others’ experiences and offer support in response to past violences but also to mitigate and defend one another against the immediate threats of misogyny that also populate the digital public. This feminist practice of witnessing, when combined with the reach and accessibility of social media platforms, creates “a networked culture of response-ability that aims to hold accountable perpetrators of sexual violence ... while also building a community among young women and among girls and older generations of women” (Rentschler, 2014; Clark-Parsons, 2018, p. 71).

The semiotic simplicity of the #MeToo hashtag, along with it being popularized by someone famous, worked to bring visibility to millions of women and people worldwide who had been victimized by gender-based violence. What’s unique about #MeToo is that it was already associated with offline activism before its virality, yet it is doubtful that it would have had the same impact without the hashtags that came before it. (Bailey et. al., 2019). It can be argued that there wouldn’t have been a landslide #MeToo moment without earlier feminist hashtags that had been working to educate about the everyday realities of gender-based violence, complicate and infiltrate mainstream discourses, and deepen the counterpublics’ intersectional politics and pedagogy.

The hashtags that will briefly be discussed here are exemplary of how these campaigns sought to offer oppositional dialogue around gender-based violence, gave survivors the space to narrate their own experiences, engage with each other in order to create more inclusive and intersectional spaces of representation, and lastly, often did this work with a sense of humour in order to foster collective and uplifting feminist joy.

#yesallwomen & #yesallwhitewomen

A 'key moment in the genealogy of feminism' and perhaps the most well known and widely covered hashtag other than #MeToo was the 2014 #YesAllWomen (Rodino-Colocino, 2014). It emerged in response to a mass shooting that took place near the campus of the University of California and sparked nationwide discussions in the United States about violence against women. Initially tweeted by Kaye M, (@gildedspine) a Muslim American woman of colour, the hashtag was quickly taken up and used to mock the recurring practice of individual men distancing themselves from misogyny by using the argument that 'not all men' act violently. Within four days it had been tweeted more than a million times.

The #YesALLWhiteWomen hashtag, coined by Dr. Jenn M. Jackson (@JennMJack), followed shortly after in an effort to bring to light how a targeted attack on Black women would be less likely to receive the same kind of media attention. The subsequent digital debates fostered conversations regarding racial hierarchies and power dynamics within the feminist counterpublic and signified the ongoing negotiations among members to define and redefine counterpublic narratives from individuals' respective perspectives and lived experiences (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016). #YesAllWomen was covered by many traditional American media outlets and theorists argue that the success of this hashtag can be measured both by its popularity and because of the other hashtags and online debates it incited (Bailey et. al., 2019, Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016). The #YesAllWomen network provided a discursive, subcultural intervention that re-directed multiple conversations to the ways misogyny and racism are normalized and celebrated in American culture.

#WhyIStayed

#WhyIStayed emerged in response to a 2014 NFL intimate partner violence controversy and more than 90,000 twitter users responded by using the hashtag to share their own experiences of domestic violence in one day. The survivorship narratives that were shared alongside this hashtag politicized the personal through acts of public testimony that challenged victim-blaming myths that shape the dominant discourse surrounding domestic violence and abuse (Clark, 2016).

Beyond any hashtag's moment of virality is the aggregation of the stories which results in a searchable archive of crowdsourced, personal experiences. While each person's experience is unique, the stories they share can influence novel ways of theorizing about experiences and create opportunities for negotiating identities and worldviews, for resisting, challenging, and perpetuating the status quo (Clark, 2016, p. 798). #WhyIStayed had tangible material impacts that exemplifies digital activism's real world impacts. Many tweets connected survivors with resources like crisis hotlines, and shelters. Several states reported significant increases in calls to domestic violence hotlines and state-funded support programs. As with other hashtags, news media amplified the movement's message, thereby influencing how reporters and audiences interpret and understand domestic violence. This hashtag created ripple

effects that illustrated the dialectical relationship between online feminist activism and offline social life (Clark, 2016, p. 800).

#BeenRapedNeverReported

Mendes et. al. analyzed over 800 pieces of digital content associated with the 2014 hashtag #BeenRapedNeverReported. The hashtag functioned similarly to #MeToo and #YesAllWomen in that it was used by girls and women to share personal stories of sexual violence and why they didn't report them to authorities. Along with analyzing the tweets, the authors interviewed people who had used the hashtag to share their experiences and found that engaging in hashtag feminism is often accompanied by a complex terrain of emotion and that for many people, their tweets are not flippant responses but rather carefully crafted testimonials that were scaffolded after sleepless nights (2018 p. 237). The interviewees in this study confessed that participating in this way was both comforting and triggering, that they received both support from strangers online in the form of favourites, tweets, and direct messages, as well as violent responses from misogynistic trolls. The authors report that survivors felt heard and encouraged to continue building networks of solidarity that serve to educate others about the structural origins of sexual violence.

Perhaps most pertinent to this project's aim of identifying how post-secondary students might be impacted by hashtag feminism, is knowing that 33% of this study's survey respondents were teenagers attending high school, who argued that Twitter provided knowledge and opportunities for learning and dialogue that their traditional schooling could not. While respondents noted that discussing feminism and rape culture online was easier than doing it in person, they also felt that the information they learn on social media might be able to help them influence their peers at school. These high school student participants did express however, that most of the negativity they experienced online came from people who they knew from their social circles, families, and offline networks. The authors surmise that younger generations are negatively impacted by the difficulties associated with identifying as a feminist and that their positive experiences with digital feminist activism are accompanied by anxiety and fear that they might be attacked for their feminist views.

#safetytipsforladies

Feminist scholars have long criticised 'risk management' approaches to gender-based violence that place the responsibility for stopping the harm onto those who are targeted instead of offering education on the impacts of a rape culture and transferring the responsibility onto those most likely to do harm. The 2013 #safetytipsforladies, tracked feminists' responses to the risk management discourse in mainstream media by employing "hyperbolic exaggeration to reveal the irrational victim blaming logic behind the idea that what women wear makes them more susceptible to sexual assault" (Rentschler, 2015, p. 354). The hashtag is also a creative and joyful example of how contemporary feminists are using social media to respond to the everyday subtleties of rape culture discourse. Further, the virality of this specific hashtag was filled with what Rentschler calls feminist delight in exposing misogyny and

illustrated how humour can nurture a politics of joy and resilience in the face of rape culture and its apologists (2015, p. 355).

#LoSHA

The lesser known 2018 hashtag #LoSHA, created by Indian feminist Raya Sarkar, is noted here for its student-led activism as well as its non-Western focus which was taken up and amplified by the international feminist community. An acronym for ‘List of Shame’, the hashtag was used to call out members of higher education who had committed acts of gender-based violence or harassment against students. Scholars note this as another powerful instant of online vigilante justice, in which a hashtag is used to draw critical attention to campus sexual violence (Vemuri, 2018; Guha et. al., 2019). The confrontational digital labour of publicly naming sexual predators associated with this hashtag is accompanied by forms of peer-based caring labour like activist collectives and survivor support networks. The list performs an ethics of care in an effort to alert other students to the existence of gender-based violence within academia and also to act as a warning against specific men. This feminist hashtag is exemplary of the feminist labour involved with “sharing testimony, bearing witness, and doing the work of believing and listening to survivors” (Vemuri, 2018, p. 500).

#HowWillIChange

#HowWillIChange was created with the explicit purpose for men to respond to the #MeToo movement. In 2017, Benjamin Law, an Australian journalist, tweeted “Guys, it’s our turn. After yesterday’s endless #MeToo stories of women being abused, assaulted and harassed, today we say #HowWillIChange” in an attempt to engage other men in the conversation on gender-based violence and asking them to post about the specific behavioural changes that they might make as allies.

Thousands of Twitter users responded with both praise and critique for the hashtag. One analysis identifies three main subgroups of users who joined the conversation: men who want to become actively engaged in dismantling rape culture, men who indignantly resist social change, and men who express hostile, often violent and demeaning resistance to the idea of social change (PettyJohn et. al., 2019). PettyJohn et. al. cite that as a result of decades of feminist theory, there has been a steady shift with men now understanding that women cannot be solely responsible for ending gender-based violence. They continue that research has demonstrated that men have a high level of influence over one another’s behaviour, suggesting that feminist programs and campaigns intending to end gender-based violence might have improved outcomes if men were to take on a larger role in prevention efforts.

PettyJohn et. al. suggest that this hashtag is representative of how engaging men as allies is a more effective way of decreasing their resistance to feminist movements like #MeToo by reframing their involvement as helpful rather than placing them in positions of blame. Research on by-stander intervention indicates that men report feeling anxious about intervening or speaking up about gender-based violence due to their fears of being perceived

as ‘weak’ or ‘gay’ by their peers. However, men who do participate in bystander intervention training report finding it important to be surrounded by like minded men and that it increases their level of comfort speaking up about feminist issues.

While not as virally successful as the others, PettyJohn et. al. assert that in the progression of hashtag activism used to denounce rape culture, #HowWillChange represents a notable shift in the landscape by intentionally engaging men and boys in the discourse. While many of the tweets in response to the hashtag are indicative of the persistence and violent quality of opinions informed by rape culture, a number of users pointed out that boys and men are also sexually victimized but perceived their trauma as not being given the same priority or recognition. While it is necessary to centre the voices still most vulnerable to gender-based violence, #HowIWillChange offers men the chance to acknowledge the ways in which their own lives continue to be negatively impacted by rape culture and toxic masculinity and challenges activists and educators to consider how best to include men in future conversations, organizing, and activism. .

What these pre and post-#MeToo hashtags illustrate is how the rise of social media and digital activism has reinforced the early feminist notion that the personal is political and that storytelling is a central component of feminist organizing which raises consciousness, creates solidarity, and intervenes in the public sphere to make way for new cultural narratives (Bailey et. al., 2019). The final section of this document looks to literature on post-secondary institutions to provide a brief overview of the Canadian campus climate and also student-led activism initiatives.

Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions: Responses & Student Activism

The ‘Courage to Act’ report cites that 4 out of 5 undergraduate students surveyed at Canadian universities reported dating violence with 29% of these reported sexual assault. The rate of self reported sexual victimization of Indigenous people was almost triple that of non-Indigenous people, while the rate of sexual assault reported by Indigenous women was more than triple that of nonIndigenous women. Gay, lesbian, transgender, and queer people are at a higher risk for sexual assault and harassment with research reporting that 49% of trans students, 43% of female bisexual students, 42% of male bisexual students, 40% of gay male students, and 33% of lesbian students experienced sexual harassment in school in 2011 (Khan et. al., 2019, p.18). The 2015 ‘Sexual Violence on Campus’ fact sheet released by the Canadian Federation of students notes that 83% of women with disabilities experience some form of violence in their lifetime and are three times as likely to be forced into sexual activity by the use of threat or force. Racialized people, as noted, are less likely to report incidents of sexual assault due to community experiences of racism from the police and other institutions.

Many on-campus sexual assaults occur during the first eight weeks of classes and more than 80% of rapes that occur on college and university campuses are committed by someone known to the victim, with half of these incidents occurring on romantic dates (2015 fact sheet). Madison Trusolino analyzes the ways in which people who are typically targeted by sexual violence have come to regulate their behaviours in an effort to stay safe from rape and other victimization. She uses the sociological term ‘responsibilization’ to explain how the prevalent victim blaming discourses result in women feeling as though they must perform the ‘ideal victim’ archetype; reasonable, rational, and responsible, demonstrating that they can make the ‘right’ choices which can keep themselves free from harm (2017, p.81-82). She argues that this ‘self-securization’, during which people internalize the belief that changing their behaviours will eliminate the chances of them becoming victimized is a common practice for most women on Canadian campuses despite extensive research demonstrating that behavioural changes like those mocked in the #safetytipsforladies campaign, have little to no effect on rates of violence.

Instead of implementing preventative measures that include educational campaigns about rape culture, the importance of disclosure, and efforts to support consensual relationships among students, Canadian campuses have opted to simply increase their campus security and promote messaging that encourage what theorists call ‘rape resistance’ language (Profitt & Ross, 2017, Sheehy & Gilbert, 2017), thereby reinforcing the rape myth that most gender-based violence occurs between strangers and can be eliminated through heightened personal safety measures. The reality is that “the level of risk of being sexually assaulted has found to be no different for students attending universities and colleges with heightened security measures, such as fenced boundaries, security checks at campus entrances, high ratios of security/patrol officers to students, self-defence courses, and off-campus safe-walk programs” (Quinlan, 2017a, p.5). This has been addressed by a uniquely intersectional safety audit from The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children, which, unlike other audits, centers on the community’s perceptions of safety in public spaces and threats of sexualized violence (Gunraj, 2017). This audit has been made available to post secondary institutions yet administrations still tend to choose outdated and ineffective security measures as those described above rather than conduct the METRAC audit.

Collaborations between post secondary institutions and community partners like METRAC, sexual assault centres, and community health resources, are a necessary factor in transforming campus rape culture. Given that the staff that work within campus sexual violence response centers are often understaffed and face vicarious trauma and high rates of burnout (Khan et. al, 2019, p.70), partnerships with community groups can create mutually beneficial possibilities for knowledge exchange and can offer alternate and complementary models of care to those that already exist within student affairs departments. Campus communities benefit by learning from community leaders’ grassroots approaches, while communities gain access to academic resources and contemporary research (Lalonde, 2017). Partnering with community groups, especially those that offer culturally competent solutions for supporting marginalized student populations, ensures that prevention measures take into

account the diverse experiences of a student body, resulting in a campus that might actually become safe and accessible for everyone.

A two year collaboration between the University of Toronto Scarborough with a local community organization, the Scarborough Women's Centre received funding to engage young people to prevent violence against women on college and university campuses. The project found that students expressed concerns about more than just sexual violence, including cyber abuse, dating violence, stalking behaviours, and fear of strangers in public places. The "violence that students were experiencing was not limited to incidents on campus—it also occurred within their homes and extended community, perpetrated by one or more members of their family—fathers, brothers, mothers and members of extended family. It took many forms—physical, sexual, emotional, financial— and ranged in severity. Students experiencing violence had various social locations in terms of culture, ethnicity, faith, race, socioeconomic status, dis/ability, sexual orientation and other identity groups. Women were not the only ones who talked about their experience of violence committed by family members; men and gender non-conforming students did as well" (Guberman et. al., 2018, p. 79).

Researchers suggest that educational and ally-ship focused bystander intervention programs, which aim to "call in" rather than activist approaches which generally aim to "call out", can result in a "series of small but persistent changes in students' thinking and behaviour that, over time, will shift the campus climate towards one that is less tolerant of sexual assault and more supportive of students who take action when intervention is called for" (Forrest & Senn, 2017, p. 175). The method of "calling in" builds on the understanding that by engaging and educating them, student populations will start to see the subtle impacts of rape culture they experience on campus and be more likely to intervene, becoming the driving force of change. Bystander intervention models are particularly effective in engaging men in the feminist movement, underscoring the importance of their roles as allies and helping them identify toxic masculinity and its associated behaviours (Wamboldt et. al., 2019, PettyJohn et. al, 2019). Bystander intervention models have four working principles: utilize expertise, embed sexual assault prevention education in the curriculum, engage students - most importantly, men - as change agents, and cultivate a spirit of mutuality (Forrest & Senn, 2017, p. 176). Particularly innovative of this approach is the choice to include a prevention based model of activism in the undergraduate curriculum, which encourages students to engage with the material in creative and applicable ways - including the creation and use of social media content and participating in role play that develops students' capacity for empathy and expands their vocabulary, skills, and intervention strategies. This approach might lend itself well to supporting already existing student activism and also offer a site in which students can discuss the online activism and viral hashtag messaging they are likely to have already been exposed to. Important as well is that these prevention models are built with the intention of cultivating a sense of interdependence and reciprocity which reaffirms the importance of a self in relation to a larger community that is so important to both post secondary student identity development and for survivors who have experienced harm.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, research identifies student activism as vitally necessary to ending gender based violence and transforming campus rape culture. Rather than dismiss student activists as overly-sensitive and complaining problem students (Ahmed, 2015), institutions should be partnering with and bolstering student activism. In her article ‘#MeToo and Student Activism against Sexual Violence’ Carrie Rentschler notes the essential work student activists do to address the problem of gender-based violence on post secondary campuses and how they make their work visible through the use of feminist digital media practices highlighted in the previous sections (2018). Rentschler suggests that contemporary student activism models what responsibility and accountability for sexual violence might look like, listing student-led blogging and social media campaigns, crowdsourced google docs, open letters written to institutions, and a student-led tool-kit intended to make Canadian campus policies more intersectional and trauma-informed.

The ‘Courage to Act’ report echoes this, citing the tremendous amount of student organizing that has occurred over the last few decades in an effort to address sexual violence at post secondary institutions. They cite activism led by student unions and groups including but not limited to the “Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, Our Turn, Students for Consent Culture, Silence is Violence, Canadian Federation of Students” which are all striving to make change in addressing sexual and GBV on campuses (Khan et. al., 2019, p.25). They suggest that strong relationships with student organizers and activists is key to making changes that impact campus culture in positive ways.

One might argue that, due to their privileged positions within the post secondary institution, the role of institutional employees is to implement “call-in” educational methods while student activists are to be encouraged in continuing their “call-out culture” (Quinlan et. al., 2017, Rentschler, 2018, Vemuri, 2018, Ricci & Bergeron, 2019). Across Canadian campuses, student activists have successfully employed the confrontational methods associated with “call out culture” which Ayesha Vemuri (2018) says is part of what constitutes the ‘feminist response-ability’ that also includes creating spaces of support, receiving and believing each other’s testimonials, and advocating for one another. Vemuri suggests that in order to provoke a response from often silent administrations that would otherwise sweep the realities of campus rape culture aside, activists hold press conferences, publish editorials both in mainstream and student newspapers, publish open letters to their administrations, and use a host of media tactics to publicly critique their universities. She argues that these publicly performed and highly mediated activisms are used to publicly name instances or patterns of oppressive behaviour and language in an effort to reveal the often inadequate and harmful institutional responses to gender-based violence (2018, p. 499-500). In this way, students are enacting the offline activism that aligns with the education, organizing, and public call outs facilitated by digital feminists online.

Aside from the student-led efforts already listed, examples of call-out culture can be seen in UQAM student activists’ sticker campaign (Ricci & Bergeron, 2019), and the campus wide postcard campaign enacted by undergraduate student organizers at York University that accompanied their demands for a campus wide METRAC audit (MacKay et. al., 2017). Both

instances of protest were criticized but effective, demanding that campus members in positions of power pay attention to student groups' calls to action and the resources needed to appropriately respond to campus rape culture and gendered power dynamics.

The challenges facing student activists are twofold: they struggle to combat violence in their communities and also struggle to have their voices heard. While often dismissed by campus authorities for being young and naive, students' analyses of campus rape culture are comprehensive, result from their lived experiences, and are often more multifaceted than the those conducted by administrators. Student and community ways of knowing are valid because communities themselves know what they need and it is through collaborative, community-based action that structural change can be enacted (Mackay et. al., 2017, p. 250).

Conclusions & Considerations

In her now infamous essay 'Against Students', feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed outlines the varying ways post secondary institutions enact a politics of dismissal against their student bodies, constructing the cultural figure of the 'problem student', who complains, censors, and is overly sensitive in the face of institutional oppression instead of responding to students' needs with the dignity and respect that should be foundational to any learning environment. She writes that those students who are dissatisfied, who complain and critique their institutions are likely to be dismissed for acting like consumers; their expectations transactional and too high. Those who censor and protest unwanted speakers off campus are dismissed for their efforts to bully and silence others. The overly sensitive student, perhaps the most threatening to the institution, is one who is characterized as demanding trigger warnings and flies into a moral panic around discussions of racist and sexist violence. Ahmed asserts, "over-sensitive can be translated as: sensitive to that which is not over." (Ahmed, 2015).

To conclude this literature review is to assert that post secondary institutions across Canada must remain sensitive to that which is not over. Gender based-violence affects an overwhelming population of college and university students, and scholars, theorists, and activists all report the need for intersectional analyses and supportive programming that center the voices and experiences of marginalized students. The introduction to this document suggests that after summarizing literature on fourth wave feminist social media activism and on the current prevention and response measures enacted and demanded across Canadian post secondary campuses, connections might be drawn between the two fields in order to hypothesize about the ways in which students, student activists, and members of the campus community might incorporate the online activist practices with their offline work and experiences. The guiding question of this project remains, 'can feminist activism online facilitate real change?'

To recap, fourth wave feminism is defined by its commitment to intersectionality, a lens through which to acknowledge that people exist within a matrix of overlaying identities that can compound their experience of gender-based violence, and by its reliance on existing

digital technologies. Employing the term gender-based violence, rather than sexual violence or sexual assault, allows for an expanded understanding of the variety of ways a person might be harassed, controlled, or subjected to violence based on their gender identity and expression. It also includes Two-Spirit, trans, non-binary and queer people who are at heightened risk for violence but are rarely centered or even included in discussions of sexual violence, as the majority of studies and mainstream discourses continue to focus on cisgender women and men.

Post secondary students are in the process of developing and understanding their place in relation to others along the lines of gender, sexuality, race, ability, religion, and Indigeneity, and gender-based violence can affect both their academic careers and their psycho-social development in drastic and diverse ways. Research suggests that disclosure is a necessary action for a survivor to make post-violence as it allows for them to take control of their narrative and also makes it possible for them to access the appropriate personal and professional care that can facilitate the individual's healing from the experience. Regardless of whether those who have been harmed disclose formally, to an official institution like their college or university, the police, or a medical professional, or informally, to a friend or family member, it is crucial that they be met with an affirming and supportive response. Research shows that people who are met with victim-blaming, disbelief, or institutional dismissal are unlikely to seek further support thereby increasing the likelihood of isolation, self harm, and the development of serious mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, or PTSD. It's clear that for certain populations, disclosing online is a more cathartic, "safe", and effective means of accessing informal community support. By turning to communities connected through social media, marginalized and racialized women, queer and trans people, and disabled people are able to voice their experiences in an effort to complicate and infiltrate the dominant discourses that so often exclude them.

The discursive counterpublics that exist online offer sites of resistance to gender-based violence and rape culture as well as opportunities for creative and collaborative feminist making across geographic borders. As fourth wave feminism is largely defined by its reliance on digital technology, the practice of contemporary feminism becomes a nuanced interplay between the offline and the online, in which embodied and emotional experience extends from the material to the virtual and back again. Feminist activists describe experiences of exhaustion and emotional turmoil in response to both their online and offline activity, citing the difficulties in being attacked and silenced online while simultaneously committing to their digital presence because of the ample community support, solidarity, and feminist joy they build together. The prevalence of networked online platforms and social media applications that enable rapid access and content sharing make it possible for offline violence to continue online, with trolling behaviour, misogynistic attitudes, and virtual stalking and threats of rape and violence populating the digital public.

In response to the prevalence of both online and offline rape culture, fourth wave feminists build out hashtag campaigns that encourage storytelling, community building, inter-community dialogues, and call-out techniques to offer nuanced interpretations of

gender-based violence. Some of the more viral feminist hashtags like #YesAllWomen, #YesAllWhiteWomen, #BeenRapedNeverReported, and the landslide moment of #MeToo are exemplary of how online activism acts as a catalyst for large-scale consciousness raising and social change. The impact of these hashtags cannot be understated when theorizing about effective educational and activist responses to ending gender-based violence.

Finally, this literature review briefly overviews the Canadian post secondary institutional landscape. Scholars and researchers assert that campus responses to gender-based violence must implement preventative measures rather than reactive, quick fixes like increasing campus security only after a case of college or university assault makes media headlines. While increasing campus security is an important and welcomed response, institutions attempting to become 'safe spaces' might look to METRAC's auditing procedure and incorporate an intersectional analysis of campus gender-based violence, and include community consultations with students and staff to identify the spaces in which students feel most vulnerable. Institutions should also veer on the side of "call-in" educational programs like the bystander initiatives that seek to educate students from an undergraduate classroom model. The programs have a particular focus on calling in men to become aware of the subtleties of rape culture and toxic masculinity and better equip them to become allies who might intervene if they are witness to an act of harassment or violence. Lastly and most importantly, institutions are called to support the radical and far-reaching student activism that has historically taken place on post-secondary campuses. Within the last few years, Canadian students have created task forces, action plans and toolkits, worked as peer support networks for survivors of violence, used social media to call out sexism and racism on their campuses, and engaged in many of the digital feminist practices to hold their institutions accountable for addressing campus cases of gender-based violence.

What is yet unclear from the existing research is how post-secondary environments have had to change in light of viral hashtag movements like #MeToo. It can be assumed that the rise of digital activism around gender-based violence has made it easier for survivors' to understand that their experiences are the result of a pervasive rape culture rather than an isolated incidence of personal violence. If teenagers entering post-secondary education have spent their high school years inundated with digital feminist activism and mainstream media stories about #MeToo and discussions of consent, how might they expect their educational institutions to navigate cases of gender-based violence? Further, how does their activism differ from the generations that came before them and how are they, a generation raised under the influence of intersectional feminism, collaborating with each other to end gender-based violence? This document lays the groundwork for the project's second phase which seeks to answer these and other questions through semi-structured interviews with student activists, scholars, post-secondary institution staff, and front-line support workers across Canada. It's been two years since the international feminist community signed on to echo Tarana Burke's empathic #MeToo, but many concerned with campus safety are still left wondering, 'now what?'

Resources

#ConsentOutsidetheBedroom and Other Projects - Advocates for a Student Culture of Consent (ASCC). <https://www.asccconsent.com/projects>

I Believe You Campaign - Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services
<https://www.ibelieveyou.info/>

Responding to Disclosures Training - Centre for Research on Violence Against Women, Western University
http://www.learningtoendabuse.ca/online-training/resp_disclosures/index.html

BRAVE Model developed by Farrah Khan used by Ryerson University's Consent Comes First Office of Sexual Violence Support and Education
<https://www.ryerson.ca/sexual-violence/give-support/>

Neighbours Friends and Family program
<http://www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca/about/about-us>

Survivor Toolkit Video Series www.Survivortoolkit.ca

Brining in the bystander
<http://cola.unh.edu/prevention-innovations/bringing-bystander%C2%AE>

Draw-the-line.ca / tracons-les-limites.ca

Decolonize and Deconstruct - Brock University.
<https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2017/03/symposium-to-take-indepth-look-at-gender-and-sexual-violence/>

Green Dot Etcetera <http://livethegreendot.com/>

Start the Conversation - Carleton University.
<http://carelton.ca/equity/sexual-assault/sexual-assault-psas/>

Campus toolkit for combatting sexual violence. Canadian Federation of students.
<http://cfsontario.ca/en/section/210>

Developing a response to sexual violence: a resource guide for Ontario's colleges and universities. Ontario's Women's Directorate. January 2013.
http://www.women.gov.on.ca/oqd/docs/campus_guide.pdf

Making the Grade? - Findings from the Campus Accountability Project on Sexual Assault Policies. SAFER: Students Active for Ending Rape. October 2013.

<http://www.safercampus.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2013-Campus-Accountability-Project-Full-Chapter.pdf>

Making Noise @ Humber: Gender Based Violence Prevention Project. Urban Alliance on Race Relations, 2014. <http://urbanalliance.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/officialgbvtoolkit.pdf>

METRAC. <http://www.metrac.org/what-we-do/safety/campus/>

METRAC. Sexual Assault Policies on Campus: A Discussion Paper. October 30, 2014.

<http://www.metrac.org/resources/sexual-assaultppolicies-on-campus-a-discussion-paper-2014/>

Chaptering on Sexual Assault: A Toolkit for Canadian Media. Femifesto. 2013.

<http://femifesto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FemifestoToolkitFinal.pdf>

Promoting a Culture of Safety, Respect and Consent at Saint Mary's University and Beyond. December 2013. <http://www.smu.ca/webfiles/PresidentsCouncilChapter-2013.pdf20>

Responding to Disclosures on Campus - The Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children. 2020.

<http://respondingtodisclosuresoncampus.com/about-training/>

Ending Rape Culture: Activity Zine - Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance.

https://www.communitysolutionsva.org/files/Rape_Culture_Pyramid_discussion_guide.pdf

One Year Later Report - Our Turn, Students for Consent Culture. 2019

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bc4e7bcf4755a6e42b00495/t/5ca4bd76652dea6fb0ec244/1554300288926/SFCC_report_en_final.pdf

References

Bailey, M., Jackson, S. J., & Welles, B. F. (2019, February 3). Women Tweet on Violence: From #YesAllWomen to #MeToo. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No. 15. 10.5399/uo/ada.2019.15.6

Baer, H. (2016). Redoing feminism: Digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(1), 17-34. doi:10.1080/14680777.2015.1093070

BCFED. (2018). Gender-based violence [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from

https://bcfed.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Gender%20Based%20Violence_0.pdf

- Bourassa, C., Bendig, M., Oleson, E.J., Ozog, C.A., Billan, J.L., Owl, N., Ross-Hopley, K. (2017). Campus violence, Indigenous women, and the policy void. In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (45-60). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Broad, K.L. (2017). Social Movement Intersectionality and Re-Centering Intersectional Activism. *Atlantis*, 38(1). 41-53.
- Cahill, A.J. (2017). In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (275-290). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Carmon, I., Schonbek, A., & Jones, S. (2019, September 30). Was It Worth It?: Is It Still? Will It Ever Be? The women (and men) who came forward about sexual assault and harassment tell about everything that came after. Retrieved from <https://www.thecut.com/2019/09/coming-forward-about-sexual-assault-and-what-comes-after.html>
- Carter Olson, C. (2016). #BringBackOurGirls: Digital communities supporting real-world change and influencing mainstream media agendas. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(5), 772-787. doi:10.1080/14680777.2016.1154887
- Clark, R. (2016). "Hope in a hashtag": The discursive activism of #WhyIStayed. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(5), 788-804. doi:10.1080/14680777.2016.1138235
- Clark-Parsons, R. (2018). #ThisEndsHere: Confronting Sexual Assault and Harassment in Our Campus Communities, *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 11(3), 475-478. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcy016>
- Clark-Parsons, R. (2019). "I SEE YOU, I BELIEVE YOU, I STAND WITH YOU": #MeToo and the performance of networked feminist visibility, *Feminist Media Studies*, 38(6), 1-19. doi: [10.1080/14680777.2019.1628797](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1628797)
- Clark-Parsons, R. (2018). Building a digital girl army: The cultivation of feminist safe spaces online. *New Media & Society*, 20(6), 2125-2144. doi:10.1177/1461444817731919
- Dikwal-Bot, D. (2019). Feminist activism and digital networks: Between empowerment and vulnerability. *Feminist Media Studies*, 19(3), 458-462. doi:10.1080/14680777.2019.1590945
- Forrest, A. & Senn, C.Y. (2017) In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (175-192). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

- Garcia, C., & Vemuri, A. (2017). Theorizing "rape culture": How law, policy, and education can support and end sexual violence. *Education & Law Journal*, 27(1), 1-17.
- Guberman, C., Dhrodia, R., & Kosowan, L. (2018). Beyond sexual violence: Considering other forms of harm experienced by post-secondary students. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 32(1), 78-82.
- Guha, P., Gajjala, R., & Stabile, C. (2019). "Introduction: Sexual Violence, Social Movements, and Social Media." *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No. 15. 10.5399/uo/ada.2019.15.1
- Gunraj, A. (2017). In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (159-174). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Hearn, J. (2018). "You, them, us, we, too? ... online-offline, individual-collective, forgotten-remembered, harassment-violence." *European journal of women's studies* 25.2 : 228-235.
- Jackson, S. J., & Banaszczyk, S. (2016). Digital standpoints: Debating gendered violence and racial exclusions in the feminist counterpublic. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 40(4), 391-407. doi:10.1177/0196859916667731
- Jaffe, S. "The Collective Power of #23 MeToo." *Dissent*. 65.2: 80-87
- Jerkins, M. (2019, October 15). The way forward for Me Too, according to founder Tarana Burke: "accountability has to happen on a spectrum." Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/10/15/20910298/tarana-burke-morgan-jerkins>
- Kaba, M., Smith, A., Adelman, L., & Gay, R. (2014, April 17). "Where Twitter and Feminism Meet." *The Nation*. Accessed October 7, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/where-twitter-and-feminism-meet/>
- Khan, F., Rowe, C. J., & Bidgood, R. (2019). *Courage to Act: Developing a National Framework to Address and Prevent Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions in Canada*. Toronto, ON: Possibility Seeds.
- Kim, C., & Ringrose, J. (2018). "Stumbling upon feminism": Teenage girls' forays into digital and school-based feminisms. *Girlhood Studies*, 11(2), 46-62. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/10.3167/ghs.2018.110205>
- Lalonde, J. (2017). In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (257-274). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

- Looft, R. (2017). #girlgaze: Photography, fourth wave feminism, and social media advocacy. *Continuum*, 31(6), 892-902. doi:10.1080/10304312.2017.1370539
- Loza, S. (2014). Hashtag feminism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the other #FemFuture. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No.5. doi:10.7264/N337770V
- Mendes, K, Ringrose, J., Keller, J. (2018) "#MeToo and the promise and pitfalls of challenging rape culture through digital feminist activism." *European journal of women's studies*, 25(2), 236-246.
- Moylan, C. A. (2017). "I fear I'm a checkbox": College and university victim advocates' perspectives of campus rape reforms. *Violence Against Women*, 23(9), 1122-1139. doi:10.1177/1077801216655623
- Morikawa, N. (2019). #YesAllWomen's language: Women's style shifting in feminist discourse on twitter. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 28, 112-120. doi:10.1016/j.dcm.2018.11.001
- Powell, A. (2015). Seeking rape justice: Formal and informal responses to sexual violence through technosocial counter-publics. *Theoretical Criminology*, 19(4), 571-588.
- Phipps, A. (2016). "Whose Personal is More Political? Experience in Contemporary Feminist Politics." *Feminist Theory* 17(3), 303-21.
- PettyJohn, M. E., Muzzey, F. K., Maas, M. K., McCauley, H. L., PettyJohn, M. E., Muzzey, F. K., . . . McCauley, H. L. (2019). #HowIWillChange: Engaging men and boys in the #MeToo movement. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 20(4), 612-622. doi:10.1037/men0000186
- Proffitt, N. J., & Ross, N. (2017). A Critical Analysis of the Report *Student Safety in Nova Scotia*: Co-creating a vision and language for safer and socially just campus communities. In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (193-218). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Quinlan, E. (2017a) In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (275-290). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Quinlan, E. (2017b). In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (275-290). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Randall, M. (2010). Sexual Assault Law, Credibility, and "Ideal Victims": Consent, Resistance, and Victim Blaming. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 22(2), 397-434.
- Rentschler, C. A. (2014). Rape culture and the feminist politics of social media. *Girlhood Studies*, 7(1), 65-82.

- Rentschler C. A. (2018). #MeToo and student activism against sexual violence. *Communication Culture & Critique*, 11, 503-507
- Rentschler, C.A. (2015). "Doing feminism: Event, archive, techné." *Feminist theory*, 16(3), 239-249.
- Rentschler, C. (2015). #Safetytipsforladies: Feminist twitter takedowns of victim blaming. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15(2), 353-356. doi:10.1080/14680777.2015.1008749
- Rentschler, C. A. (2017). Bystander intervention, feminist hashtag activism, and the anti-carceral politics of care. *Feminist Media Studies*, 17(4), 565-584. doi:10.1080/14680777.2017.1326556
- Ricci, S., & Bergeron, M. (2019). Tackling Rape Culture in Québec Universities: A Network of Feminist Resistance. *Violence Against Women*, 25(11), 1290-1308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219844607>
- Rodino-Colocino, M. (2014). #YesAllWomen: Intersectional mobilization against sexual assault is radical (again). *Feminist Media Studies*, 14(6), 1113-1115. doi:10.1080/14680777.2014.975475
- Renkl, M. (2017, October 19). The raw power of #MeToo. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/opinion/the-raw-power-of-metoo.html>
- Salvino, C., Gilchrist, K., & Pang, J. C. (2018). Our turn: A national student-led action plan to end campus violence. Ottawa, Canada: National Our Turn Committee https://ssmu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/our_turn_action_plan_final_english_web.pdf?x26516
- Sheehy, E., & Gilbert, D. (2017). Responding to Sexual Assault on Campus: What Can Canadian Universities Learn from U.S. Law and Policy? In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (291-327). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Sills, S., Pickens, C., Beach, K., Jones, L., Calder-Dawe, O., Benton-Greig, P., & Gavey, N. (2016). Rape culture and social media: Young critics and a feminist counterpublic. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(6), 935-951. doi:10.1080/14680777.2015.1137962
- Singh, R. (2018). "Platform Feminism: Protest and the Politics of Spatial Organization." *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No. 14. 10.5399/uo/ada.2018.14.6
- Stermac, L., Horowitz, S., & Bance, S. (2017). Sexual coercion on campus: The impact of victimization and disclosure on the educational experiences of Canadian women. In Quinlan, E., Quinlan, A., Fogel, C., Taylor, G. (Eds). *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change*. (27-44). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

- Stotzer, R. L., & MacCartney, D. (2016). The role of institutional factors on on-campus reported rape prevalence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 31*(16), 2687-2707. doi:10.1177/0886260515580367
- Thrift, S. (2014). “#YesAllWomen as Feminist Meme event.” *Feminist Media Studies, 16*(6), 1090-1092.
- Traitster, R. (2019, September 30). The Toll of Me Too: Assessing the costs for those who came forward. Retrieved from <https://www.thecut.com/2019/09/the-toll-of-me-too.html>
- Vemuri, A. (2018). “Calling Out” Campus Sexual Violence: Student Activist Labors of Confrontation and Care, *Communication, Culture and Critique, 11*(3), 498-502. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcy021>
- Wamboldt, A., Khan, S. R., Mellins, C. A., & Hirsch, J. S. (2019). Friends, strangers, and bystanders: Informal practices of sexual assault intervention. *Global Public Health, 14*(1), 53-64. doi:10.1080/17441692.2018.1472290
- Wright, J., Dhunna, S., Riddle, T., De Gannes, P., & Berzins, T. (January 2019). End the Silence, End the Violence: Experiences and Understandings of Sexual Violence at the University of Toronto. Toronto, Ontario: Silence is Violence.
- Zimmerman, T. (2017). #Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice, 38*(1), 54-70.



WHAT LESSENS
ONE OF US
LESSENS
ALL OF US

thanks to our advisory committee:

Masuma Khan (Advocacy Lead at Students for Consent Culture) Connor Spencer (Chair at Students for Consent Culture) Raine Liliefeldt (Director, Member Services and Development at YWCA Canada)
Arezoo Najbzadeh (Executive Director at Young Women's Leadership Network)
Lindsay Anne Cuncins (Social Service Officer at Sexual Violence Prevention and Response, Vanier College)