

CROWDSOURCING RESILIENCE: DISCOURSES OF RAPE CULTURE AND SEXUAL
VIOLENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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ABSTRACT

Responding to the Association for Feminist Anthropology's call for a greater awareness of the prevalence of gender-based violence in our society, this project aims to analyze multiple public responses to two well-documented cases of sexual violence that occurred in 2013 at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada (McChesney and Singleton 2010). This thesis considers mediated responses to these incidents, including news articles, administrative reports, and social media as important sources from which to evaluate these incidents, with special attention paid to the concept of *rape culture* and claims of its perpetuation within the institution. Drawing from a poststructuralist feminist framework, I explore the interplay between silence and voice within conversations about sexual violence, examining whose voices are amplified or stifled when responding to incidents of sexual assault in higher education and how this phenomenon shapes resistance narratives. While this research is grounded in specific case studies within the context of one Canadian post-secondary institution, it ultimately has significance among colleges and universities across North America. In 2014, for example, the Obama administration launched the "It's On Us" campaign to end campus sexual assault. In Canada, demands from the public for federal legislation to address violence against women have prompted significant expansions to sexual assault laws to protect survivors (Government of Canada 2014, Johnson and Colpitts 2013, Morris 2008, Sinha 2013). This growing focus on feminist anti-violence activism has spawned what I refer to as the "crowdsourcing of resilience," or the process by which individuals craft virtual communities of support where they can then begin to cultivate hope, draft strategies for organizing collectively and promote social change.

LAY SUMMARY

The issue of campus sexual assault has sparked much-needed conversations surrounding the concepts of consent and rape culture at college and university campuses across Canada and the United States. This thesis explores these concepts from a poststructuralist feminist standpoint as they relate to two well-documented cases of gender-based violence that occurred at The University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada in 2013. It further investigates how activism surrounding anti-violence movements has evolved over time, with a particular focus on “networked feminisms” or the growing use of digital technologies to connect victim-survivors of abuse with other anti-violence activists. Drawing upon participant observation within on-campus anti-violence organizations, this increased focus on feminist activism has spawned what I refer to as the “crowdsourcing of resilience,” or the process by which individuals craft virtual communities of support where they can begin to cultivate hope, draft strategies for organizing collectively, and promote social change.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original, unpublished, intellectual product of the author, Eva Marley.

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And finally, at its heart, this work has been an exercise in writing about campus sexual assault from the standpoint of a survivor and activist whose own relationship to the subject informed the research process. The stranger sexual assaults of 2013 marked my first introduction to UBC's institutional procedures for addressing sexual violence amidst a wave of discussions happening at college and university campuses across the United States and Canada. Still struggling to come to terms with my own assault while navigating my new surroundings as a graduate student, the 2013 attacks thrust me into a pressing debate regarding the role of institutions in preventing sexual violence. I occupied a unique position as both a victim-survivor and researcher with a personal commitment to social justice to explore this topic further through my graduate thesis (some may argue against better judgement) and, to ultimately identify the powers and narratives informing our understandings of campus sexual assault as a cultural phenomenon. The subsequent activism of the *Silence is Violence* network served as an invaluable source of support, information, and encouragement that helped propel this project to completion amidst many bouts of physical and emotional exhaustion.

INTRODUCTION

#RapeCultureIsWhen too many people think consent to drinking means consent to everything else. Nope.

#RapeCultureIsWhen: Canadian Judge Asks Sexual Assault Victim Why She Couldn't Just Keep Her Knees Together.

#RapeCultureIsWhen Victims feel unsafe reporting sexual assaults to their university faculty.

Feminist political analyst Zerlina Maxwell first coined the Twitter hashtag *#RapeCultureIsWhen* on March 25, 2014. She was responding to an opinion piece penned for *Time Magazine* by conservative American policy analyst Caroline Kitchens who contested the concept of rape culture, or the notion that sexist attitudes in society normalize the prevalence of sexual assault and gender-based violence. According to Peggy Reeves Sanday (1996), this produces “rape-prone” communities. Reacting to discussions among activists about how best to deconstruct harmful behaviour towards women, Kitchens (2014:2-3) wrote:

Though rape is certainly a serious problem, there's no evidence that it's considered a cultural norm. Twenty-First century America does not have a rape culture; what we have is an out-of-control lobby leading the public and our educational and political leaders down the wrong path... On college campuses, obsession with eliminating “rape culture” has led to censorship and hysteria.

In response, Maxwell's hashtag quickly soared to “trending” status as Twitter users around the world countered Kitchens' dismissal of rape culture by detailing their own lived experiences with sexual violence and harassment, as well as the stigma and shame that often results in victim-survivors feeling silenced and isolated.

As the number of colleges and universities in North America reported for mishandling incidents of sexual assault and harassment continues to rise (see Marshall 1991; Oehme et al. 2015; Wood 2015; Yung 2015), anthropologists working in higher education occupy a unique position to call attention to the structural barriers that prevent victim-survivors from gaining a sense of justice. Drawing upon a multi-sited analysis that includes digital networks, campus demonstrations, and traditional media, this thesis explores the phenomenon of campus sexual assault at one Canadian university at a time when public captivation with reports of sexual assault challenged the routine silencing of victim-survivors. Observing this phenomenon from the perspective of an international

(American) student, I approach this research with a comparative eye to analyse the trajectory of events at The University of British Columbia in Vancouver from September to March of the 2013-2014 academic year that sparked a series of demonstrations, policy discussions, and local and national dialogues about the growing reports of sexual assault on Canadian campuses. This research delves into the following questions: How do anti-violence activists define rape culture? What role does digital technology play in establishing communities of support and solidarity for victim-survivors and de-stigmatizing “speaking out” about experiences of sexual violence? And how might these public responses to sexual harassment and assault inform collective memory at colleges and universities and inspire policy change?

These “counterpublics” of solidarity, a term Joshua Price (2010:68) uses to refer to a “communicative sphere for oppressed or excluded groups,” are virtual spaces where anthropologists conducting digital ethnography gather their data. Digital Ethnography, as practice, consists of analyzing digital texts, images and videos within virtual spaces where online communication and interaction occur, allowing researchers to study the relationships between users and the content of their messages. The anthropologist observes these conversations and may engage as an active participant within the digital field, helping to guide discussions, ask questions, and contact individual users directly. As a first year Master’s student at the University of British Columbia in 2013, my research data revealed itself in the social media posts friends and fellow students shared about the events happening on our campus in the wake of two highly publicized incidents of sexual assault and harassment. Discussions that began on Facebook, Twitter, or campus news blogs frequently evolved into other, more engaged forms of activism, including campus protests and demonstrations, and sparked discussions among students and administrators about the need for policy reforms to protect victim-survivors. My data collection also incorporated the many news and television reports devoted to campus sexual assault at UBC, as these reports were easily shared among social media, further adding to the discussion of rape culture in academia.

Debates surrounding digital ethnography cite the methodology's inability to capture the "critical aural, gestural, and kinaesthetic cues of face-to-face interaction" (Mastin and Plowman 2003:76) resulting in data that is lacking in what Geertz (1973) termed "thick description" or the minute interactions, interpretations, and meanings that are derived from immersing one's self in a community and observing others first-hand. Digital forums may also be susceptible to online "trolls" or users who purposefully post inflammatory statements to incite arguments, leading to discrepancies in data collection. Ethical concerns of privacy and consent make this methodology challenging as researchers can observe and analyze virtual communications without users ever knowing they are being studied. However, with many activists utilizing social media spaces to communicate and organize collectively, digital ethnography is necessary to capture the evolution of social movements as they occur in real time (see Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce and Taylor 2012; Linder, Myers, Riggle and Lacy 2016; Pink and Postill 2012).

In the wake of the reported sexual assaults that occurred in 2013, I often found myself drawn to discussions of sexual violence in academia on social media to make sense of the phenomenon as it occurred on our campus. According to Krebs et al. (2007), one in five women and one in sixteen men in the United States will experience sexual assault while in college and of those, fewer than ten per cent will report the incident to campus administrators or police. In Canada, conversely, where few universities collect statistics on campus sexual assault (and where until recently, it was not required to have transparent, comprehensive response protocols for incidents of alleged sexual misconduct), grassroots anti-violence campaigns are on the front lines of demanding institutional reform (Sawa and Ward 2015). My analysis of the collective efforts of these campaigns is grounded in an anthropological literature that examines sexual violence in reference to discussions of memory, silence, and voice (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Farmer 2005; Das 2007; and Argenti and Schramm 2010).

Embedded within the many responses to the *#RapeCultureIsWhen* hashtag are the intricacies of language, which have spawned important discussions about the semantics

surrounding sexual violence. “Language,” Janet Bavelas and Linda Coates (2015:29) argue, “can never be neutral; it creates versions of reality” informed by our cultural experiences, biases and environment. The term “victim,” suggests Cindy Peternelj-Taylor (2015:63-4), often connotes a lack of agency, weakness, and “has become pejorative, which has translated into backlash against victims.” The term “survivor” is equally problematic and may impose harmful assumptions or expectations on individuals who have experienced sexual assault. The debate surrounding these labels reflects the range of physical and emotional responses to sexual violence that may change depending on circumstances and context. Ultimately, Peternelj-Taylor (2015:64) reminds activists and researchers working with individuals who have experienced sexual violence to “see the ‘person-as-a-person’ and not solely as a patient, a victim, or a survivor.” For the purpose of this research, I use the term “victim-survivor” to refer to individuals who have experienced sexual abuse as I feel it reflects the spectrum of identities with which one might associate after sexual assault.

#RapeCultureIsWhen and its collective response on Twitter and other social media platforms highlight the degree to which violence against women in our society is commonplace and institutionalized as a seemingly normal occurrence in women’s daily lives. These digital campaigns, coalescing around a single hashtag allow women to “speak up” within a virtual community of support. The *#EverydaySexism* hashtag, another social media campaign established in 2012 by British author Laura Bates, provides a swift and public outlet for women to call out instances of misogyny and sexual harassment that they witness in their daily lives. These observations frequently include references to street harassment or reports of victim-blaming rhetoric used in sexual assault cases. By coalescing hundreds of thousands of tweets around a communal hashtag, one begins to gain a sense of how widespread internalized misogyny has become in our communities.

Similarly, *#YesAllWomen* garnered traction globally on Twitter in the spring of 2014, accompanying thousands of women’s personal stories of how systemic gender violence and

harassment have influenced how they navigate and interact with the world. As Twitter users *@katekilla* and *@schemaly* recount: “Girls grow up knowing that it’s safer to give a fake phone number than to turn a guy down #YesAllWomen” and “#YesAllWomen [because] when my husband asks me to slow down when we walk together I realize he hasn’t spent his life avoiding street harassment”(Feeney 2015). Social media platforms like Twitter, combined with the communal symbolic power of a hashtag, are beginning to shift our understanding of the tools victim-survivors possess to reclaim their agency and find support. New media technologies provide a digital megaphone for women to “speak up,” share their experiences, and craft virtual communities where they are less likely to experience shame and victim-blaming rhetoric from others.

Conversely, while social media campaigns such as *#YesAllWomen* claim to shed light on the universal nature of sexism, it is also important to acknowledge the ways in which new media may overlook the subjectivities of certain groups of women, including those who do not or cannot access social media due to financial, geographic, or other demographic factors. In the United States alone, the Pew Research Centre reports that fifty-two per cent of American Twitter users are under the age of thirty, suggesting that many of the most vocal Twitter anti-violence activists are millennials who have come of age in an era of increased digital communication (Duggan 2015). This trend reflects the distinction Collins, et al. (2013:359) make between “mass media” and “networked publics,” or virtual communities that are “made up of discrete relationships between local nodes, even when scaled into the millions.” Trends such as *#EverydaySexism* and *#YesAllWomen* may gather significant traction among a diverse array of women online, but the narratives that are amplified most are likely to be those whose authors are closest to the local privileged majority – primarily young adult, college-educated women living in developed countries.

Exploring the difference between mass media and networked publics further, competing discourses on the prevalence of rape culture in North America and beyond shed light on its

different interpretations. Because the term encompasses psychological and social facets of gender-based violence, it is useful to outline my understanding of the phenomenon and its effects. Guckenheimer (2008:581-582) defines *rape culture* as “a systematic belief system supporting sexual violence throughout a particular society” that “perpetuates norms of sexual aggression while lacking an understanding of consent.”

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS: CAMPUS ASSAULTS

For many first-year students, orientation week at The University of British Columbia (UBC) is a festive introduction to university life marked by mixers, parties, and team building exercises. Older students from each faculty guide first year students to events on the sprawling campus while leading chants, singing songs, and even dressing alike to promote a sense of solidarity and inclusion within and among their respective departments. Most of these activities are convivial in nature, aimed at creating a welcoming atmosphere on campus. One incident in September of 2013, however, thrust orientation week at UBC into the spotlight when students from the Sauder School of Business were observed participating in a series of disparaging and sexually explicit chants or “cheers” as part of the Commerce Undergraduate Society’s (CUS) annual “FROSH Week” activities (“UBC Investigates Frosh Students’ Pro-Rape Chant” 2013).

While en route to an off-campus event, CUS orientation leaders instructed their first year students in a “cheer” laden with frequent mentions of sexually assaulting young women:

Y-O-U-N-G at UBC, we like ‘em young: Y is for Your sister, O is for Oh so tight, U is for Underage, N is for No consent, G is for Go to jail!

Students were also led in a pejorative cheer, some donning feathers and face paint, nicknamed the “Pocahontas chant” that alluded to a celebration of colonialism and the rape of Aboriginal women, broadening the nature of the offensive behaviour to include overt racism and misogyny. The nature of the Pocahontas chant is disturbing in any context, but even more so when performed on the traditional unceded territory of the hə́nq̓əmin̓ə́m̓-speaking Musqueam First Nation upon which the University of British Columbia stands. In promoting flippant, harmful chants condoning violence

against First Nations women, FROSH Week leaders simultaneously alienated Indigenous women and their allies from the orientation week festivities and contributed to the harmful stereotyping of Aboriginal women that Indigenous feminists have spent decades working to deconstruct (La Rocque 1994; Maracle 1996; Kuokkanen, 2009, 2012, 2014; Bourgeois 2014).

As news of these incidents spread nationwide, outrage grew. On September 6, CUS representatives dispensed a letter to the university community admitting their acts to be “harmful” and not representative of the society’s mission. In a campus-wide statement, they defended their “community engagement and external influence, and our leadership role in the education of our graduates who will go on to become influential global citizens” (Commerce Undergraduate Society 2013, The University of British Columbia 2012). While acknowledging the occurrence of the derogatory chants at Sauder-sponsored events, the letter failed to accept responsibility for the process by which the chants have become institutionalized within the CUS FROSH week tradition:

While we do our best to provide a safe and controlled environment during formal Sauder FROSH sessions, there is admittedly little we can do to completely control what some leaders may expose their students to (CUS 2013).

As several students would later explain in an administrative fact-finding report, the chants were part of a long-standing FROSH week ritual designed to embolden “people to come out of their shell” (The University of British Columbia 2013a:2). Business students who participated in the chants years prior provided further support, noting both the “naughty” nature of the chants and their exclusivity to Sauder FROSH culture (The University of British Columbia 2013a:2):

The bus cheers were taboo, a naughty thing that you got to do...a way to loosen up. It made you feel less apprehensive...it was our own thing...

[Bus cheers] are a thing for us only, a thing that only Sauder students know, a tradition, this helps build community.

It's a brotherhood type thing, an inside thing, it's inclusive in that others would not know about it.

Repeated mentions of “tradition” and transmitted teachings of the cheers between class years suggests that participating in the chants is perceived as a rite of passage, an activity reserved solely for those joining the coveted Sauder family, and a way of expressing one’s commitment to a

collective culture. As one Sauder representative described, the FROSH week chants have been “passed down year after year ... from forever, I guess.” After receiving negative backlash from administrators, students are now coached to be discreet when performing the cheers under the policy of “if it happens in the group, it has to stay in the group” (Rosenfeld 2013). Another representative of the Sauder student group suggested the chant ritual has existed for a decade or more, even though a business school administrator declared that the offensive ritual “doesn’t exist” (Rosenfeld 2013:n.p.). These statements suggest that a value system within the Sauder community existed that normalized sexual violence to promote offensive and inappropriate behaviour for the sake of community-building during the liminal period of orientation week and that one’s place within the social group is dependent on their “inside” acquiescence to this just as much as their academic merit. With repeated acknowledgments that the rape chants are performed in designated “private” spaces -- such as group busses to evade discipline by deans or other administrators -- chant leaders appeared to engage in groupthink behaviour. They recognized the inappropriate nature of their FROSH week activities while privileging a sense of belonging over a moral or ethical code of conduct (Rosenfeld 2013).

Before the dust of the Sauder scandal settled, another act of violence was revealed. A dense October fog provided ample camouflage for a violent serial attacker who, under the guise of night, preyed on female students as they walked along wooded areas that fringe the campus, grabbing them from behind and sexually assaulting them before fleeing. The perpetrator was reportedly a young man with “a broad forehead, longer rounder chin and face with a straight nose.” Obscured by a dark hooded sweatshirt, he seemed to move without raising attention, with one victim referring to him as “a shadow” (CBCNews 2013). The incidents fuelled an outcry for greater public safety measures on campus. Suggestions were made to improve lighting along footpaths, increase the number of emergency phones, and recruit more students as companion escorts for those apprehensive about walking alone at night. Despite the increased security presence on campus, the number of assaults grew with each passing weekend and frustration

among the campus community swelled. In total, six women reported assaults of a similar nature throughout 2013, four of which occurred in the month of October alone, prompting local police to believe the violence was the act of a single perpetrator.

Local and national media outlets descended upon UBC eager to capture the campus climate. Under increased scrutiny, university administrators worked with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to place hundreds of posters depicting a sketch of the alleged perpetrator's face with the message "Don't walk alone" in high-traffic areas around the university, including hallways, washrooms, elevators and student residences. Female students were encouraged to enrol in women-only self-defence classes, while neon pink rape whistles were made available in student residence buildings.

Without a suspect in custody, however, some community members were apprehensive of the ominous messages of constant vigilance promoted by the university. One UBC student, speaking to the campus newspaper *The Ubyyssey*, expressed her concern with the tone of campus prevention efforts:

There's the notion of 'don't get raped' or 'don't get sexually assaulted.' We need to switch that around and think about 'don't sexually assault' and 'don't rape,' so speaking to the greater community in terms of not exerting power and enforcing control of another person (Bigam 2013).

This approach sparked action among campus anti-violence activists capitalizing on the frustration of these seemingly random, violent stranger assaults to improve public safety measures and, more generally, promote a campus culture that emphasizes consent and respect towards women. Mass demonstrations took on the form of Take Back the Night protests and the "National Day of Action," inspired by the anti-rape performance art demonstration of Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz, who resolved to carry the dorm mattress where her sexual assault occurred on her back until her abuser was removed from campus (David 2015, Mitra 2015). Media pressure on the university intensified with calls to act in students' interests to provide safe spaces for victim-survivors of sexual violence and others to gather in displays of solidarity. These movements were particularly effective in shedding light upon the predominance of acquaintance sexual assault,

helping to expand the discussion of rape culture at UBC beyond the narrow “stranger-in-the-bushes” narrative.

Anti-violence activists, displeased with the repeated deficiencies of the university to respond to their reports of sexual and gender-based violence adequately and appropriately, have since launched multi-media campaigns with the goal of reforming institutional procedures. Drawing upon a wealth of new resources, including online support communities, national media programs, and campus safe spaces, these activists continue to advocate for victims and the larger university community in part by amplifying the voices and experiences of victim-survivors. Additionally, chants of the Sauder School of Business and the stranger sexual assaults forced UBC administrators to acknowledge the presence and persistence of sexual harassment and violence on its campus, resulting in significant policy reforms that will be outlined in a later chapter.

POSITIONING FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY

Positioning a theoretical analysis of violence against women requires us to acknowledge the cultural and societal expectations of gender and power. Silence and voice are prevalent themes within violence research, requiring anthropologists to examine whose voices are privileged in violence narratives and whose may be absent. Exploring these themes from a poststructuralist feminist standpoint, I begin by positioning the body as the primary site of struggle often involving violence, something a number of feminist scholars have suggested for a wide range of marginalized people, including men and women (See Van Vleet 2002; Stephen 1999). Violence narratives analyzed through poststructural feminist theory play an important role in understanding how gender is shaped through lenses of race, class, and social justice. Andrea Smith (1992) asserts that theory is itself practice; that the experiential standpoint of women locates us bodily in sites that are worthy of study. By focusing on the body as the primary locus of analysis, feminist researchers achieve multiple goals. An introspective approach aids in deconstructing the legacy of

ethnography as a medium that has traditionally been dominated by male voices while simultaneously highlighting the subjectivities of women by amplifying the stories they tell about themselves (See Behar 1996; Johnson 2000).

Feminist anthropology offers a useful roadmap for conceptualizing the diversity of voices within the feminist movement and their ethnographic and epistemological contributions to discussions about violence. The foundations of feminist anthropology can be traced back to the works of Margaret Mead and Zora Neale Hurston, both students of Franz Boas, whose publications *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and *Mules and Men* (1935) breathed new life into ethnography by documenting the unique access both women acquired in their researched communities via their gender to observe and analyze women's rituals and narratives. Their scholarship laid the foundation to explore gender and race imbalances within the academy. Coinciding with the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, anthropologists began questioning positivist assumptions about humanity and universal truths (Myrdal 1969). While highlighting female anthropologists' contributions to the discipline and the need for more women's voices in research, the epistemological progression towards an anthropology of women *with* women in the 1970s often failed to evolve beyond discussions of gender.

Critiques by racialized women explored the politics of difference and voice. As feminist scholar and activist Audre Lorde (1984:115) noted:

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation.

As more racialized scholars entered the academy, they generated a critique of dominant scholarship that included a predominantly white, middle class and heterosexual feminism (see bell hooks 1982; Trinh T Minh-ha 1989). In the 1980's feminist scholars challenged the objectification of the "master" concept "culture" (see Abu-Lughod "writing against culture") and demanded greater explanations for differences in human experience (Haraway 1988). Other challenges to decolonize

the discipline began by recognizing its origins within imperialism (Kathleen Gough 1968; Talal Asad 1973). Critiques urged scholars to move away from a fascination with the exotic “other” (Said 1978; Wolf 1996). An explicitly feminist anthropology sought to expand cultural critique by embracing “a new turn in American anthropology toward doing fieldwork ‘at home’ rather than in faraway places,” including within the academy itself (Behar 1996:270). Feminist theorists in anthropology advocate for scholarly research on gendered subjectivities, including issues of class, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion (see Abu-Lughod 1993; Das 1994; McClaurin 2001).

With the platform for feminist scholars to explore aspects of the research process unique to women came attention to the prevalence of sexual violence in the field. Noting that “anthropological literature is almost devoid of references to sexual violence to anthropologists,” Eva Moreno (1995:220) negotiated this silence with confusion and shame about her experience of rape in the field. At issue for women is the possible risk to their reputations as “competent” researchers. Documenting a similar experience with violence during fieldwork, Cynthia Keppley Mahmood (2012:281) demonstrates the precarious relationship she had with anthropology in the wake of sexual assault:

I had no stake in any religious or political controversies. But when others chose to use their very bodies as weapons, insulting my own at its very core, this ethnography became a very intimate matter indeed.

Forced to confront their identities at home as both scholars and victim-survivors of sexual violence, Moreno and Mahmood highlight the challenging task of negotiating a supposedly “gender-free” academy while they simultaneously bear the physical and emotional scars that remind them of the violence many women anthropologists face in the field (Moreno 1995:246). Resisting “the machine that keeps academia complicit in the silencing of abuses,” Mahmood (2012:9) calls upon anthropologists to acknowledge the history of gender inequality in the discipline and to embrace ethnography as a tool to combat social suffering in the communities where we conduct our research and in the academy itself.

This was not the first time that an anthropologist suggested that anthropology could be used to research structures of power. In 1972, Laura Nader challenged readers to “re-invent anthropology” by examining one’s own position within the academy and turning the researcher’s focus to “the culture of power” instead of “the culture of the powerless” (ibid:288). By applying this lens to college and university campuses researchers can better elucidate the intricacies of structural and interpersonal relationships between and among students, faculty, and administrators, including those who may perpetuate conditions that silence sexual violence and normalize rape culture. Just as ethnography is the practice of learning about others, it is also the practice of learning about ourselves and the ways that our own biases, judgements and experiences shape our worldviews.

TYPOLOGIES OF VIOLENCE AND ACTION

While studies of conflict lie at the heart of social theory (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Marx 1848, and Mills 1956), cultural anthropologists have only recently begun to question how we conceptualize violence -- be it physical, structural, or symbolic -- and examine how social suffering is understood within specific cultural contexts. The means by which individuals actively remember or forget incidents of violence and suffering are inherently political, rooted in history. They shape how we craft personal and cultural memories. "Memory," David Berliner (2005:200) writes, "is not these series of recalled mental images, but a synonym for cultural storage of the past, it is the reproduction of the past in the present, this accumulated past which acts on us and makes us act."

In communities where sexual violence is frequent, victim-survivors may engage in processes of active forgetting as a mechanism for maintaining social cohesion or they may resist this ritual silencing by incorporating violence narratives into their daily lives (Aydin 2017; Das 1997; Klungel 2016). Janine Klungel (2010) elaborates on the ties between sexual violence and conscious forgetting with her exploration of the intergenerational impact of rape on the lives of women in the small island community of Guadeloupe. Memory, like language, she argues, is the product of a communal process of conscious remembering and forgetting that is rehearsed and performed according to specific cultural mores (2010: 54). Klungel's case study provides a compelling look at how Guadeloupian women perceive resistance and resilience. She probes the interconnectedness of physical, symbolic, and structural violence to examine how they are institutionalized as rape culture through culturally sanctioned processes that implicate social remembering and forgetting.

The concept of rape culture has gained significant traction among contemporary feminist scholars and activists. It is a site where women may coalesce in their struggle to end sexual violence. Feminist writer Susan Brownmiller (1975) first propelled discussions of rape into mainstream media with her work *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. In it, Brownmiller asserts that rape and sexual assault are violent acts of power perpetuated first by individuals and

second by collective societal attitudes of misogyny and ignorance. Combined, these forces create an oppressive culture by which women are discouraged from speaking out and demanding justice.

Anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday (1996:193) explores these themes further with her analysis of university fraternities and what she terms “rape-prone” and “rape-free” societies. Rape-prone societies such as fraternities, she argues, are those that sanction rape as a ritualized display of masculinity. In conjunction, Sanday argues that fraternity culture subjects new male recruits to ritualized abuse in which hyper-masculine attitudes are crafted through violence and competition. These acts, she writes,

stamp the pledge with two collective images: one image is of the cleansed and purified ‘manly’ self bonded to the brotherhood; the second image is of the despised and dirty feminine, ‘nerdy,’ and ‘faggot’ self bonded to the mother...The traumatic means employed to achieve these goals introduces a state of consciousness that makes abuse of women a repetition of cleansing the self of the inner, despised female as brothers renew their fraternal bonds (Sanday [1990] 2007:165).

This process of ritualizing violence against women exposes how certain aspects of campus culture, such as fraternity life, may contribute to institutional blindness and promote active forgetting. Sanday’s research suggests that perhaps the most effective means for transforming universities from “rape-prone” to “rape-free” communities lies not in training women how to avoid rape, but in deconstructing negative expectations of masculinity that harm both women and men (Sanday 1996).

Regardless of gender, victims and survivors of sexual violence in rape-prone surroundings often report experiencing immense pressure from abusers, law enforcement, and even peers to remain silent (Renzetti 2014). An attitude of helplessness often follows as survivors are reminded that, historically, both the judicial system and the public are more likely to question what the victim was wearing or how much they had to drink than the perpetrator’s motives for committing assault. By succumbing to silence, victim-survivors are resigned to live in a society that works to consciously forget their experiences while simultaneously tolerating and protecting perpetrators seen as part of the masculine fabric of the university campus, for example. Campbell and Raja (2001:1239) refer to this normalization of shaming and re-victimization as “the second assault”

marked by what Klungel (2010:46) sees as the communal abandonment of the survivor as “when people in society and the justice system react in hostile ways to the rape, blaming the persons raped themselves and doubting their story.”

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Perhaps the most troubling facet of violence in academia is the nature with which sexual violence in and among campus communities can promote environments of fear and helplessness. Bourdieu conceptualizes this kind of phenomenon as *symbolic violence*, or “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002:167). Classical examples of symbolic violence include gendered forms of social organization such as hiring practices in the workplace or divisions of labour in the home where women are considered the weaker sex. These relationships become embedded within the social consciousness of individuals, informing their dispositions, habits, and actions, forming the *habitus*. When gender-based violence becomes accepted and incorporated into our daily practice, perhaps by avoiding certain spaces or not walking alone at night, it manifests in the form of symbolic violence, which can be experienced both externally and internally. Externally, messages from institutions and peers operating within the social field instruct us to modify our behaviour to avoid predatory behaviour. Internally, these messages permeate other spheres of social interaction and are embodied as *habitus*, creating a culture of fear and transforming the individual’s sense of self.

At the University of British Columbia, administrators promoting the message of “Don’t walk alone” cultivated a culture of fear and a sense of threat for women. At every bus stop, classroom, and café, students, especially women, were reminded that their campus was no longer safe and they should adjust their behaviour accordingly. Campus activists interpreted this institutional response as a contributor to rape culture at the university instead of the effective bare bones prevention campaign administrators envisioned. As one student described,

It's been over a year since any violent stranger assaults have been reported on campus, but take a moment to remember the atmosphere it triggered in the fall of 2013: the weeks of thick fog that covered campus; the hushed conversations; posters, bus announcements, professors and peers admonishing us 'Don't walk alone.' I saw women check in with each other constantly, asking, 'Do you have a ride home?' and a few well meaning men discussing vigilante action plans (none of which came to fruition). The anxiety hung thick in the air, and suddenly conversations about sexual assault that some of us have been having for years were in the forefront of everyone's minds. It was as if the anxiety and fear some of us have felt our entire lives was suddenly released, and suddenly visible to everyone (Fukumoto 2015).

The sudden visibility of "anxiety and fear" Fukumoto details in the wake of the 2013 assaults demonstrates the extent to which women (and men), regardless of their position in the university, were led to recognize and incorporate the risk of sexual violence into their daily lives.

For victim-survivors, the internalization of fear associated with gender-based violence also has the likely potential to manifest in the form of shame and, ultimately, guilt. Fuchs (2003:235) suggests,

...shame becomes guilt when the social norms are internalized as one's own feelings of value when the self-condemnation anticipates public exposure. This presupposes the development of a personal centre, with the beginning capacity to regard oneself as the originator of one's actions, to evaluate and feel responsible for them.

In these instances, it becomes increasingly difficult for victim-survivors of campus sexual assault to distinguish institutional failure from personal shortcomings. Victims may interpret the blame for their assault internally, rationalizing violence as deserved or inevitable instead of a product of a culture that upholds structures of inequality.

SILENCE AND VOICE

The interplay between silence and voice, be it expressed in the form of journal entries, tweets, blog posts, or performed in commemorative displays, is one of the spaces in feminist anthropology where discussions of power and agency continue to emerge. Particularly among anti-violence activists, victims-survivors are encouraged to "break the silence" and share the details of their abuse with the goal of reclaiming one's autonomy over their body and narrative to prevent future acts of harm through consciousness-raising efforts (Lorde 1977, Roberts 1994). While some women find speaking out in the wake of sexual violence to be an empowering act of resistance,

many must weigh the risks of physical and emotional harm from their abusers, stigmatizing responses, or interrogative procedures by law enforcement institutions and others who may challenge or deny their claims. Analysing spaces where discussions of sexual violence are sanctioned, protected and encouraged allows activists to cultivate strategies for raising awareness of violence against women in ways that preserve victim-survivors' autonomy and safety. Social media has emerged as an important stepping stone in helping many victimized women connect with others to share stories of support and resilience before seeking other, more direct, forms of action such as police intervention and counselling.

An analysis of recent trends in sexual assault reporting in Canada sheds light on the factors that prohibit many women from seeking help from law enforcement. According to the Uniform Crime Report Survey (UCR) which documents the number of sexual assaults reported to police: "in 2013, there were approximately 21,300 assaults reported to police, approximately 98% were classified as Level 1" involving "minor physical injuries or no injuries to the victim" and the rate of sexual assaults reported to police declined by four percent between 2012 and 2013 (Sex Information and Education Council of Canada 2015:2; Brennan and Taylor-Butts 2008a:n.p.). Coupled with this, is data obtained by the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted every five years, which asks Canadians to state if they have ever experienced a sexual assault, including those not reported to police. In 2009, more than 677,000 sexual assaults were documented in the GSS, suggesting that the number of sexual assaults occurring in Canada far outnumber those reported to police and may be as few as one in ten (Brennan and Taylor-Butts 2008b). Understanding this phenomenon of underreporting begins with an exploration of why victim-survivors feel they cannot or should not approach law enforcement officials.

Findings by Gartner and Macmillan (1995) suggest that women and men view incidents of sexual violence between intimate partners as less severe than incidents that occur between strangers, reinforcing the "stranger in the bushes" narrative as that which produces the most action among concerned publics. "Women and men come to view intimate relationships as private and (at

least some types of) legal intervention into them as an accusation of failure, a source of embarrassment and shame, and a cause of breakdowns in those relationships,” prompting many women who have been victimized to remain in abusive relationships without seeking help (Gartner and Macmillan 1995:396). These experiences may also inform why eighteen percent of female victim-survivors, as compared to nine percent of males, sampled in a 2013 report titled *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends*, stated that fear of retaliation from their partners is a significant determinant of not reporting violence to police (Sinha 2013).

The high incidence of underreported, gender-based crimes highlights the issue of how different voices within discourses of violence are amplified or stifled. Dorothy Smith’s (1990) work *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* provides a helpful roadmap for exploring the relationships among women in academia, anti-violence movements, and institutions of higher education in order to foment social change. “The standpoint of women,” she writes, “allows us to explore as insiders the social relations in which we play a part, including the social relations of objectified knowledge” (Smith 1990:61). Smith’s sociology is grounded in exploring the intersections of knowledge (or texts) created by the “local actualities” of individuals and the “impersonal and abstracted relations” of institutions (Smith 1990:68). Analysing digital responses to campus sexual assault through new media technologies thus provides a contrast to the carefully constructed texts produced by college and university administrators and offers equal weight to victim-survivors’ narratives. Social media as communication technology disseminates individuals’ reactions to and memories of gender-based violence in real time, providing an intimate and authentic portrait of events as opposed to the formal documents and accounts produced by institutions. When these individual narratives are shared with the public, they can be utilized as powerful convergence points around which anti-violence activists may coalesce and organize collectively.

BODILY AND CULTURAL MEMORY: COMMEMORATION THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION

The collective and individual memories of violence are capable of spawning action. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith (2002:1) suggest that memory “is the encounter between the ‘self’ ...and the space that resonates with history.” Our ability to translate memories through commemorative performances and rituals invites audiences to participate in the creation of collective cultural narratives as they evolve to reflect the influence of violence on a community. In conjunction, these performances also invite individuals affected by trauma back into the space by establishing arenas where the silencing of their narratives is suspended temporarily, which Klungel (2010:47) refers as “re-membering.” Drawing upon Cathy Winkler’s (1991:14) concept of “social murder,” Klungel (2010:57) describes how “rape memory is not only an individual matter, but also one that involves the entire social body in ‘re-membering’ persons who have been rendered socially dead as the result of their rape experience.” The act of collectively performing these violence memories through settings such as Take Back the Night demonstrations, commemorative marches, historical displays and even the use of hashtags in virtual spaces, serves to re-introduce victimized women to a community and society from which they might have felt excluded or silenced and preserves their narratives within the public consciousness (Bold, Knowles and Leach 2002).

Feminist scholars exploring encounters between body and history assert that, like cultural narratives transmitted between generations, the tools with which we collect and perform our pasts are themselves gendered (Klungel 2010). Memorial demonstrations encourage audiences to acknowledge histories of violence tied to colonialism, racism and patriarchal structures of power, while situating them within their local contexts. Janine Klungel’s (2010:44) *Rape and Remembrance in Guadeloupe*, for example, delves into the legacy of the small island community’s “slave heroine,” La Mulâtresse Solitude. Her conception through the rape of an African slave woman by a European sailor produced a cultural identity built upon a historical narrative of rape and resistance. Guadeloupean women today engage in public performances of their own

experiences with rape through a ritual that is transmitted across generations as a means of what Klungel terms “national recovery” and healing through community support and by commemorating the role of rape in their cultural memory (Klungel 2010:49).

In a similar spirit in locations across North America and Europe in the 1970’s, women’s marches emerged as a public form of solidarity against sexual violence. Public displays of rape and resistance narratives are performed through collective movements such as *Take Back the Night* and the *Women’s Memorial March* of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. Since its inception as a memorial rally, to its re-emergence as a global non-profit organization, *Take Back the Night* encourages allies to gather after dark to reclaim spaces deemed unsafe for women and commemorate the lives of those lost to gender-based violence. The *Women’s Memorial March*, held on Valentine’s Day in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood is an annual ritual to mourn and remember the community’s missing and murdered women, many of whom are Indigenous. The event confronts the negative stereotypes associated with the area, reviving the complex histories and identities of women whose lives have been lost to violence through place-based memorial performances (Culhane 2003). Indigenous march organizers guide participants to locations where murdered women were last seen alive to commemorate their physical place within the vibrant, diverse social fabric of the DTES neighbourhood. These commemorative practices highlight processes by which individual bodily memories may transform into collective, cultural narratives through performances that draw attention to violence and allow us to explore possibilities for social and structural change.

University campuses are ideal spaces for anti-violence movements such as *Take Back the Night* and *Carry That Weight* to develop organically as college students possess a high degree of biographical availability, given the “absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities” (McAdam 1986:70). However, one of the greatest obstacles campus anti-violence activists encounter when working to promote structural change is the high turnover of students that

ultimately effects institutional memory and presents difficulty maintaining sustained involvement. Coupled with low reporting figures and lengthy investigative processes, individual accounts of campus sexual assault and harassment are likely to be forgotten or shrouded in vague anonymity due to bureaucratic processes that protect the reputation of the institution, unless made public through collective calls for action and reform.

Social media is a powerful tool to combat forgetting that occurs due to a lack of institutional memory, procedural silencing, or cultural shaming that often accompanies sexual assault. It enables activists and bystanders to document and preserve their reactions to events on campus and to organize collectively. These living records, in the form of tweets, texts, Facebook and Instagram posts, blog submissions, etc., capture the ideological and emotional sentiments of students in the moment as a form of documentation and social remembering that is easily preserved, accessible, and transferable. They memorialize reactions to violence and amplify voices of women affected by violence that may otherwise get lost in the cacophony of frustration and outrage. As these discussions spread among campus communities and reach other areas of the academy, they highlight the important role anthropologists have in bringing previously silenced violence narratives into public spaces through ethnographic research to promote positive social change.

In what follows, I explore social media as a tool for assisting anti-violence activists in organizing collectively and translating survivor narratives into stories that may then be transmitted rapidly across broad audiences. I discuss recent sexual assault prevention social media campaigns, followed by an analysis of “networked counterpublics” as virtual spaces for amplifying survivor narratives. I then turn to the application of these campaigns in environments such as the University of British Columbia.

NETWORKED FEMINISMS AND THE CROWDSOURCING OF RESILIENCE

Gender studies researcher Finn Enke (2007:19) notes that feminist movements have historically embraced a dynamic approach to collective action, challenging barriers to inequality in academia and beyond through innovative technologies and approaches:

Self-identified feminists formed thousands of large and small organizations throughout the United States during the 1960s and 1970s; they wrote, mimeographed, and published innumerable essays, tracts, and manifestos proclaiming feminism's goals and the best strategies for attaining them. But people also enacted feminism through a dazzling array of action that was spontaneous, unattached to named organizations, and left little record in print. As much as some feminists sought to directly change structural and institutionalized inequities, even more women found ways to build lives and generate movement against the day-to-day barriers that told them to 'stay in their place.'

Enke's observations highlight the prolific innovative actions associated with feminist work at the grassroots level. Over time, these acts chip away at the entrenched, institutionalized values that have prevented women and others from obtaining equal status in society.

Recognizing this, contemporary feminist activists embrace the legacy of subversive resistance through a strategic use of social media networks, shifting power of public speech into the hands of individuals from marginalized communities. These networks allow women to reclaim what Mehreen Kasana (2014:244) terms "the Otherized body," suggesting that while social media "may not entirely uproot a society's tendency to delineate some bodies as superior to others," it does foster "a richness of space and voice for those who wish to reclaim their identities and bodies." Manuel Castells (2015) echoes these sentiments, but proposes that the power of the networked society extends even further with the potential to eclipse political regimes and institutions of violence, as observed through movements such as *Occupy Wall Street* (2011), the *Arab Spring* uprisings of 2011 and more recently, *Idle No More* (2012) and *#BlackLivesMatter* (2013). All began as spontaneous expressions of outrage against systems of inequality and then materialized into occupations of urban space that attracted thousands of in-person participants and millions of spectators worldwide.

While the success of these contemporary movements remains subject to debate, Castells (2015:2) contends that the symbolism of networked social movements cannot be ignored:

By sharing sorrow and hope in the free public space of the Internet, by connecting to each other, and by envisioning projects from multiple sources of being, individuals formed networks, regardless of their personal views or organizational attachments. They came together. And their togetherness helped them overcome fear, this paralyzing emotion on which the powers that be rely in order to prosper and reproduce, by intimidation or discouragement, and when necessary by sheer violence, be it naked or institutionally enforced.

Social media, in essence, provides a public space for freedom of expression beyond conventional institutional channels. As communication technologies become more accessible, so too do the narratives of individuals vulnerable to sexual violence as users begin crafting virtual communities of resilience.

The recent attention to campus sexual assault and harassment across North America can be linked, in part, to a number of anti-violence campaigns whose social media presence has served to shift discourses about violence against women away from victim-blaming rhetoric, towards a more survivor-centric approach emphasizing collective vigilance and bystander intervention. In the United States, President Obama launched the *It's On Us Campaign to End Campus Sexual Assault* in 2014, marking a monumental shift for both victim-survivors and administrators at institutions. In an effort to target younger Americans, particularly young men, the Obama administration collaborated with digital content creators including popular YouTube personalities Grace Helbig, Rhett McLaughlin and Charles "Link" Neal and others whose combined audience includes more than 16 million viewers worldwide (Helbig 2014, The White House 2016). Rather than alienating college males from what has long been perceived as a "women's issue," *It's On Us* summons men to participate through the mechanism of easily-sharable data that captures viewers' attention and spawns conversations about the ways societal expectations of masculinity perpetuate violence. In an effort to encourage accountability, the campaign also urges individuals to sign a pledge promising "to recognize that non-consensual sex is sexual assault; to identify situations in which sexual assault may occur; to intervene in situations where consent has not or cannot be given" and "to create an environment in which sexual assault is unacceptable and survivors are supported" (www.itsonus.org). While the full effect of the *It's On Us* campaign remains to be seen, it

maintains a sustained presence in American media, marking a hoped-for shift in Americans' willingness to address the issue of sexual violence at colleges and universities.

In contrast, feminist movements in Canada have arguably taken a more piecemeal – although no less significant – approach to promoting institutional reform for curbing sexist attitudes and behaviour. Unlike the United States, where feminist campaigns often require the attention and endorsement of celebrities or other media elites to gain traction and legitimacy, feminist organizations in Canada operate under a strength-in-numbers approach which Toronto-based blogger Aalya Ahmad (2014) argues is tied to themes of national identity. “Being a feminist in Canada,” she writes, “where a prevailing (and questionable) myth of national identity is that we are nice, shy, polite folks, has never really been about being ‘prominent.’” Instead, Ahmad suggests Canada’s young feminists are “more like the stars in the northern skies: if you don’t see us, you might not be looking long or hard enough, or maybe there’s something else getting in the way.” Activists are utilizing social media to craft “networked counterpublics” within the Internet reserved solely for the discussion of women’s issues that have often been considered taboo, including sexual violence and harassment (Mendes 2015:159).

Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow women to circumvent spatial, temporal, and financial barriers to collective organization (Kavada 2010, Fotopolou 2013). The decentralized, asynchronous dynamic of social networks means that feminist activists, working individually or collectively, can continue the effort of disseminating information and mobilizing resources pertinent to their cause around the clock regardless of their geographical location. Additionally, tools such as secret and private discussion groups on Facebook, as well as private messaging functions, allow survivors to establish protected spaces for discussing their experiences with sexual violence, sharing messages of support and hope, and cultivating strategies for resilience without fear of retaliation from abusers or institutions. As a participant and observer of some of these “underground” anti-violence campaigns, I have been inspired by the resounding

commitment among young feminist activists to create virtual spaces of care and solidarity for one another, always emphasizing inclusivity, safety, and autonomy among members.

Graduate students at the University of British Columbia introduced a project under the name *Silence is Violence* (SiV) in reaction to what they perceived as institutional inadequacies to curb incidents of sexual violence and harassment on campus and, more broadly, at universities across Canada. Launched in October 2015, the campaign declares a commitment “to push back on the damaging culture of silence perpetrated at UBC’s Vancouver campus” and to offer “a supportive community of people who can provide insight and perspective” on the school’s sexual assault response procedures (Silence is Violence – UBC Chapter 2015). In contrast to secret messaging groups, SiV has always maintained a public presence on social media as evidenced by its accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, a popular blogging website.

As a graduate student in the university’s Department of Anthropology, I was invited to participate in the *Silence is Violence* campaign by following the group’s Facebook page. The creators were quick to designate this as a virtual safe space for anyone to discuss matters relevant to sexual assault and harassment. SiV organizers spent time crafting their digital message to followers by sharing stories and links from other feminist activists. Many of these resources focused on the issue of sexual assault at UBC specifically, while others educated readers about more general themes of sexual violence in society-- including the concept of rape culture -- as harmful for both women *and* men.

As the site amassed more followers, news spread of a documentary feature produced by the CBC’s investigative program, *The Fifth Estate* that addressed the topic of campus sexual assault in Canada. While the program’s premiere date was uncertain (even to the small group of UBC students featured in the documentary), SiV organizers maintained a countdown on the group’s Facebook page accompanied by articles and statistics stressing the continued failure of Canadian post-secondary institutions to effectively address sexual violence (Sheehy 2012; Tamburri and Samson 2014; Senn, et al. 2014). In one instance, a member writing for the blog *FeministGrit*

crafted a post outlining discrepancies in the university's low numbers of reported assaults, primarily in the wake of the stranger sexual assaults of 2013-2014 despite reports that nearly one-in-five college-aged women will experience sexual assault (Krebs, et al 2007). "There is a serious disconnect at UBC between how they want to be perceived and the actual broad understandings of assault demonstrated by those with influence over the way sexual violence is recognizable and reportable at UBC," she wrote (Thornton 2016). It was during this time that *Silence is Violence – UBC* began collaborating, exchanging, and publishing resources in conjunction with the SiV chapter at Toronto's York University (the founding SiV site from which UBC's local chapter emerged). As part of SiV York's approach, activists established a crowdfunding site to collect donations to cover the costs of victim-survivors' legal fees should they wish to file complaints against their universities.

The two student-led organizations, separated by more than 3,000 kilometres and three time zones, capitalized on the convenience and expediency of social media to coordinate strategies. Their collaborative efforts produced a resounding collective voice in the face of campus sexual assault at Canadian universities through re-tweets and engagement on each other's Facebook pages, which, in turn, lifted their campaigns' visibility in the public eye and spawned satellite groups at universities across Canada. As Kaitlynn Mendes (2015:163), in her analysis of the international SlutWalk movement suggests, this type of virtual community building "is something many feminist activists do unconsciously, and is a natural part of engaging with the web 2.0 platforms, which facilitates the sharing and circulation of content via community networks."

Coupled with the content on *Silence is Violence*, campaign organizers also draw upon other material published to "alternative" blogging websites that serve as counter-narratives to the university-sanctioned media. These virtual spaces have become increasingly valuable sites of resistance for victim-survivors and others in vulnerable positions. As Mendes (2015:159) states, feminist organizations are especially adept at establishing networked counterpublics or digital spaces for challenging the silencing structures embedded within university policies. In one

example, a complainant took to the blogosphere to detail her experience with reporting a perpetrator to the administration. She wrote that administration representatives informed her “the university would not speak with [the assailant], that as an alumna (of six weeks) I had no business taking an interest in the matter, and that I should be quiet” (Kirchmeyer 2015). Other student activists have since echoed these complaints, drawing attention to the slow response of UBC personnel to investigate multiple reports of sexual misconduct by a male graduate student towards women living in an on-campus residence. Among the complaints by student activists was the failure to appoint graduate student representatives to the school’s Non-Academic Misconduct Committee, the only body assigned to address allegations of misconduct beyond the classroom (Mayor 2015).

Another resource SiV-UBC utilized frequently was *The Talon*, a blog that designates itself as “UBC’s Alternative Student Press,” publishing articles covering topics from decolonization to queer issues. A quick search of the “feminism” tag produced dozens, if not hundreds, of articles penned by student activist collectives and individuals (some of whom are anonymous), that reflect the many faces of contemporary intersectional feminism (Anonymous 2016, 2014; Burning 2015; Concerned Graduate Students at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice Research 2015; Fukumoto 2015; Krause 2015). The sheer volume of essays imbued with passion, vulnerability, and outrage suggests *The Talon* serves as an alternative platform for students seeking support and solidarity from others at UBC who have had similar experiences.

In conjunction with *Silence is Violence, Women Against Violence Against Women* (WAVAW), a Vancouver-based non-profit organization, launched a Feminist Frosh Week event at universities across the lower mainland in 2016 as a mechanism for countering traditional Frosh Week activities that too often lead to incidents of sexual assault and harassment. This event includes: a “Take Back the Campus” march; poster campaigns with sexual assault fact sheets; workshops on bystander intervention; and, conferences with feminist scholars and anti-violence activists that are free and open to the public. Coupled with SiV-UBC’s consciousness-raising

efforts, the events help to channel the enthusiasm of online activists into tangible, on-the-ground efforts that help make social change a reality.

With the ability to transcend spatial and temporal barriers via tweet or blog post, the dynamic approach facilitates what I refer to as the crowdsourcing of resilience -- a process by which sexual assault victim-survivors and anti-violence activists form virtual communities, develop initiatives for policy reform, and enact social change in the face of institutional obstacles. Castells' (2010:508) exploration of the growth of the networked society further supports this notion. He argues individuals are increasingly structuring their lives around the sharing of information "because of the convergence of historical evolution and technological change" resulting in a cultural shift in social engagement and configuration. The flows of communication connect us to loved ones and strangers, in our own homes and across the globe, allowing us to foster sustained, meaningful relationships and organize collectively regardless of geographic, cultural or environmental constraints. The trajectory of social media-based movements at UBC that emerged through *Silence is Violence*, *The Talon*, and WAVAW demonstrates a continued commitment to innovation and inclusion by challenging traditional flows of power and influence.

Whether or not networked feminism has reached its full potential in curbing violence against women, the movement utilizes new media technologies in arming survivors with tools to share their stories to supportive, chosen audiences and, in turn, resist the silence and shame that surrounds acts of sexual harassment and assault. Analyzing public memorials commemorating victims and survivors of sexual violence, researchers at the University of Guelph suggest that uniquely feminist spaces (including virtual communities), combat the process of social forgetting, actively producing cultural counter-memories that return authority over one's experience back into the hands of survivors. With these narratives, we may further develop digital networks for amassing resilience narratives, raising the voices of those on the front lines of sexual assault prevention while also recognizing and addressing the unique needs of victim-survivors.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND THE ROLE OF THE SURVIVOR NARRATIVE

One cool evening in late October 2013, I embarked on my usual walk from the Anthropology building on the Pacific edge of UBC's campus towards the school's central bus terminal. A thick ocean fog cast dark shadows over the campus grounds. Suddenly my path was interrupted by a blinding light, in front of which stood the silhouette of a man holding a small pad of paper. The contrast between the spotlight and its darkened surroundings left me startled and disoriented until I recalled that our campus was now crawling with journalists and reporters in the wake of the stranger sexual assaults. I skirted by the news crew, hoping to stay out of frame. Cognizant that they were not yet broadcasting live, the reporter turned and approached me.

“Excuse me, ma’am, mind if I ask if you carry a whistle with you?”

“A whistle?”

“Yes, a rape whistle. Like on your keys or in your bag?”

“No, I’m sorry. I don’t have one of those.”

The reporter uttered a quick “thank you,” then moved on to a woman walking behind me. When she too responded “No,” he proceeded down the line of students snaking their way to the bus stop, careful to approach only women, until he located a female student with a bright pink whistle attached to her key ring. I felt a tinge of fear in the air that night brought on by the series of violent stranger sexual assaults that seemed to be escalating in frequency and severity. The peaceful campus, known for its sweeping ocean views, lush rainforest, and laidback student culture, was now consumed with the hunt for a perpetrator whose face appeared in police sketches broadcast on nightly news programs across the country (Bailey and Bradshaw 2013; Hume 2016; The Huffington Post B.C. 2013).

Much of the media's response focused on the trepidation that spread quickly among the Vancouver campus community as fliers stating: “Don't walk alone” covered the walls of hallways, classrooms, and dormitories. Administrators, working closely with the local RCMP detachment, advised women to travel in groups, be aware of their surroundings, and utilize the university's security devices, including a volunteer companion service for students walking alone, emergency

phones, and rape whistles, if necessary. In the weeks following, I grew accustomed to dodging news vans and reporters stationed around UBC and even entertained the thought of how many newscasts I had unknowingly appeared in while walking to class.

More importantly, the sudden media focus on the Point Grey campus placed university representatives in the spotlight, encouraging them to respond to the institution's public relations dilemma and sparking conversations about the need to promote "consent culture" on campus. Consent culture refers to a pragmatic shift within contemporary feminist practice to move away from the traditional "no means no" approach to sexual assault prevention. Instead, consent culture promotes enthusiastic and affirmative consent before engaging in sex that is referred to as the "yes means yes" model. The phrase also applies to institutions that have acknowledged the presence of rape culture within their communities and addressed issues of gender-based violence with survivor-centred policies, such as responding to claims promptly and avoiding victim-blaming rhetoric.

The scrutiny of the press between September, when the FROSH Week chants occurred and November, when the campus community was still grappling with the stranger sexual assaults, placed UBC officials under a microscope and encouraged them to adopt a number of safety measures; notably, an increase in RCMP officers patrolling the campus at night, brighter light fixtures, improved landscaping, the repair of broken or out-dated blue emergency phones, and rape whistles placed at the front desk of most student residence buildings (The University of British Columbia 2013). While these decisions may have cooled some of the immediate concern, they represented little beyond a surface-level attempt at tackling sexual assault at UBC. The 400-hectare campus, surrounded by sprawling forests on three sides and ocean beaches on the other, provides a stunning backdrop for campus life but may in fact be hindering prevention efforts as the campus's RCMP force cannot possibly patrol the entire area. The intense focus on the series of "proowler" attacks in 2013 did little to confront the much more likely event of a woman being sexually assaulted by a friend or acquaintance – a fact that would later capture national attention with the *Silence is Violence* movement. What many student activists were demanding, in

comparison, was a bottom-up approach to sexual assault education and prevention that incorporates young men into the conversation to discuss the reasons why rape culture persists and ways they can be involved in the process of creating a consent culture.

It was this institutional response, which many saw as too little too late, that prompted six female UBC graduate students to collaborate with the CBC's *The Fifth Estate* on the production of an hour-long documentary investigating the university's process for addressing complaints of sexual assault and harassment. Branded as *School of Secrets*, the feature followed four female graduate students in the wake of a year-and-a-half long battle with UBC administrators. At the time, a male Ph.D. student living in a graduate residence community was alleged to be a serial perpetrator of sexual misconduct. Of the four graduate students featured in the documentary, three became prominent voices in the UBC *Silence is Violence* campaign, drawing on the group's established social networks to garner publicity for the premiere of the documentary.

Just prior to *School of Secrets* aired, the members of *Silence is Violence-UBC* organized a press conference "concerning systemic failures at UBC in relation to reports of sexual assault and harassment that put students at risk" (CBC News 2015). Word of the press conference spread via social media and SiV supporters flocked to the small meeting room in the university's Student Union building to support the women featured in the documentary. As television media crews readied their cameras, adjusted their lights and tested their microphones, I joined a group of SiV activists (including students, faculty and alumni) huddled in a nearby hallway. Black t-shirts printed with the organization's logo were handed out quickly. We stood pressed against the walls of the narrow hallway, speaking only in hushed voices for fear of missing important instructions from the organizers. We found ourselves overwhelmed by the lenses of nearly a dozen cameras pointed towards a table with three empty seats, but readied ourselves for the onslaught of questions. Some members eased their nervous energy by pacing and rehearsing their response if asked to comment while others stood silently holding hands. As the three women featured in the

documentary readied themselves to take their seats, we were invited to stand behind in a display of solidarity with all survivors of sexual assault at UBC.

Without notice, the cameras turned on and the press conference began before we could enter the room. We stood, gathered in the hallways, puzzled as to whether we should interrupt our friends' opening statements to join them in front of the cameras or, simply sneak in as discreetly as possible to observe quietly from the back. One SiV member entered the room, tiptoed around the wall of cameras and reporters, and settled for an empty space along a back wall. The rest of us followed suit, careful not to make too much noise with our heavy coats and backpacks and within minutes the room had swelled to capacity. As the three women discussed the documentary, their discouraging experiences with UBC administrators, and their aims for preventing further incidents of sexual harassment and assault, it became clear that the victims and survivors of sexual violence at UBC were finally receiving the message "we hear you," from the community at large.

Demands were made for the university to draft a comprehensive sexual assault response plan to prevent future acts of violence and to develop a campus culture that ensures all students feel supported when reporting incidents of sexual misconduct. A campus culture of this nature would inform survivors of their options for reporting, inspiring confidence in the institutional process through swift and transparent investigations while also providing survivors the means for emotional and academic support. The influence of *School of Secrets* and other investigative media into the UBC sexual assault cases can be observed by the nation-wide response the documentary spurred. The program thrust the issue of campus sexual assault beyond the hushed conference rooms of the university and into viewers' homes where they could connect with the survivors' narratives more personally. While traditional media may not engender the same immediate engagement as new media platforms, the events at UBC demonstrate the significance of print media and television in transmitting detailed narratives of survivors' experiences to the broader public. This may, in turn, inspire more individuals to research campus sexual assault and its effects on university communities, producing greater demands for transparency of support procedures and

accountability to protect students' safety among institutions and increased support for victims and survivors.

CONCLUSION

Since the *School of Secrets* documentary aired, the University of British Columbia has enacted a number of significant institutional reforms to better respond to the unique needs of survivors in accordance with provincial legislation and shifting sociocultural attitudes towards sexual harassment and assault. British Columbia Bill 23-2016: *Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act* requires all post-secondary institutions establish and implement sexual misconduct policies that “address sexual misconduct, including sexual misconduct prevention and responses to sexual misconduct” (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia 2016). In accordance with Bill 23, the UBC Board of Governors established a number of committees to consult with students and community members on the adoption of a comprehensive, sexual misconduct response policy. These groups, such as the University Sexual Assault Panel and the Steering Committee on Sexual Assault, combined the institutional expertise of campus administrators with the on-the-ground knowledge of student representatives to gain a bottom-up perspective of sexual harassment and assault at UBC.

On April 13, 2017, the UBC Board of Governors announced the implementation of *Policy #131: Sexual Assault and Other Sexual Misconduct*. *Policy #131* marks a substantial move towards victim-centred sexual assault response policies at the university, utilizing feminist language such as *rape culture* to acknowledge gender-based violence in Canadian society. As section 1.3 states:

UBC is committed to providing comprehensive and inclusive Sexual Misconduct education, prevention, and response initiatives. Through these initiatives, UBC is committed to countering rape culture, a term that describes broader social attitudes about gender, sex and sexuality that normalize Sexual Misconduct and undermine equality (The University of British Columbia Board of Governors 2017:1).

The policy also recognizes the distinct challenges the university setting presents survivors, noting that “the university is a unique environment, in which power imbalances are inherent. These factors, along with an individual’s personal history, impact individual experiences of Sexual Misconduct, the ability to access supports, and choices with regard to recourse” (The University of

British Columbia Board of Governors 2017:1). Beyond the ideological shifts are mandates for the establishment of a Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office on both the UBC Vancouver and Okanagan campuses, with designated Directors of Investigation to serve as liaisons for students not wanting to report directly to the RCMP.

One question that often emerges in discussions of violence and campus culture is why so few college students report incidents of sexual assault and harassment to the police, particularly at institutions such as UBC that are equipped with their own RCMP detachments. Veronyka J. James and Daniel R. Lee (2015:2451) outline a number of factors conveyed by surveyed sexual assault survivors on campus. Students are cautious to approach law enforcement for a number of reasons: fear of being blamed for the assault, worries of retaliation or reprisal from the perpetrator (or others), feelings of shame and/or guilt, questioning the nature of the assault and whether it is “serious enough” to warrant an official investigation, and concerns that law enforcement officers are biased against victims and will not prosecute claims appropriately (see also Canadian Department of Justice 2015; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen and Turner 2003; Karjane, Fisher, and Cullen 2005; Lizotte 1985). Police investigations are often lengthy, disruptive to the victim-survivor’s daily life, and may provoke unwanted attention from the public. As one UBC student (Anonymous 2014) recounts:

I didn’t want to report. I didn’t want to report because my rapist existed in so many of my social and academic circles. I imagined that the devastation caused by a court trial would destroy our tight-knit community and cause me to be alienated. What if no one believed me? What if I went through all the trauma of engaging with the racist, sexist, oppressive court system and he went unconvicted like 99% of rapists? What if his popular status, like that of [Canadian musician and former CBC radio broadcaster] Jian Ghomeshi, called people to support him and silence me? What if people assumed it could explain my queerness? What if people used it against me in feminist discourse? What if it discredited me in job prospects? What if I had to relive the ordeal over and over again?

This young woman’s description details the many ways rape culture permeates victim-survivors’ decision-making processes and impedes their prospects of reporting. She demonstrates the fixation on questions of “*What if?*” that often accompany survivor narratives, a manifestation of the oppressive attitudes bound within the concept of rape culture that convince women they alone are

responsible for acts of violence against their bodies and that reporting these incidents to authorities will do more harm than good. Further compounded with low prosecution rates of just five percent of reported rape cases resulting in felony convictions, many victim-survivors already burdened by the physical and emotional symptoms of their assault may determine that the risks associated with pursuing an investigation with the criminal justice system far outweigh the benefits (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network 2013).

The significance of networked feminism therefore lies in its ability to circumvent traditional channels for reporting by providing victim-survivors a platform to tell their stories, receive immediate support and validation, and raise awareness of the prevalence of gender-based violence in their communities. Recent collective demands to move away from policy-only reporting, where victim-survivors may feel intimidated or ignored, has resulted in a shift towards more trauma-informed models for university investigations recognizing signs of investigator bias and how violence affects memory and behaviour. Access to more communication networks means greater opportunities for women (and men) to share information about violent individuals, connect with audiences willing to listen to their complaints and, most importantly, believe them instead of place blame.

The *#MeToo* social media movement, launched informally in October 2017 in the wake of sexual abuse allegations against several high-profile men in Hollywood, continues to demonstrate the extent to which sexual assault and harassment goes unreported alongside the digital feminist activism of *#YesAllWomen* and *#SilenceIsViolence*. Women, responding on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram cited incidents ranging from catcalls and male co-workers cracking lewd jokes at the office to painful accounts of violent sexual abuse. What about *#MeToo* sets it apart from previous digital anti-violence campaigns? One answer lies in its strength-in-numbers approach, challenging the tendency towards victim-blaming rhetoric among “he said, she said” cases of single accusers. As psychologist Nichola Raihani suggests, “the sheer number of stories may overcome our natural tendency for disbelief,” asserting that “our ‘just world’ psychology finds it fairly easy to cast doubt

on one individual but struggles to do so when confronted with many all saying the same thing” (Raihani 2017:24). This safety in numbers approach lends legitimacy to victim-survivors’ accounts and ideally provides protection should abusers retaliate or pursue legal action. Additionally, the growing number of women in positions of power may contribute to victim-survivors feeling more emboldened to speak out knowing they have allies, be it in politics or the workplace, who will listen to their concerns and who, in fact, may likely also share their concerns.

Combined, the anti-violence campaigns of *#RapeCultureIsWhen*, *#SilenceIsViolence*, and *#MeToo* point to a shift in feminist discourse and social movement organization that connects women around the globe in digital counterpublics where they can speak openly about their experiences, gather immediate support and guidance, and own their violence narratives without shame. In doing so, they craft a virtual memorial honouring diverse displays of resistance that can inform future generations of anti-violence activists. These conversations direct us towards an evolving understanding of how individuals are choosing to exert agency and demonstrate resilience in the context of violence. Digital media, in all of its complexities, is just one of the many tools activists may now utilize to cultivate resources and support for their campaigns and, in turn, amplify the voices of victim-survivors whose experiences and knowledge were previously overlooked. It serves to connect a vast network of women who, if unable to access safe spaces for healing and support in their own communities, can craft this in digital spaces.

Despite the startling statistics of sexual and gender-based violence at university campuses, hope lies in the stories of young women like those featured in *School of Secrets* whose personal traumas and experiences with structural inequality fuel a commitment to reforming institutional policies on a local level. Along with feminist organizations, such efforts spur the strategy discussions and legislation required to curb campus sexual assault at both the provincial and federal levels. Hope lies in the work of women like Zerlina Maxwell, Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, and Eva Moreno who use their unique positionalities as writers, researchers, and social commentators to challenge cultural and institutional shaming and silencing of victim-survivors and instead cast a

magnifying glass on the many ways violence permeates our daily lives. And hope resides in the heart of every victim-survivor, many of whom will remain anonymous or unknown, whose act of surviving is itself a profound act of resistance.

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