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Understanding student responses to gender based violence on campus: negotiation, reinscription and resistance

Ana Jordan, Sundari Anitha, Jill Jameson and Zowie Davy

This chapter presents findings from the 'Stand Together' action research project at the University of Lincoln (UOL), one of the first bystander intervention (BI) programmes designed to challenge gender based violence (GBV) in a UK university. The research accompanying this project investigated student attitudes to GBV and the potential of prevention education. The focus of this chapter is on two sites which emerged in student accounts as key spaces where acts of GBV occur, as well as where sexist and heteronormative gender norms are re-inscribed, negotiated and resisted: social media and the night-time economy (NTE).

The bystander intervention model at the University of Lincoln

Based on the recognition that there is a continuum between acts of GBV and problematic gender norms, BI programmes seek to foster a community response to shifting the dominant cultural norms that underpin GBV (Banyard et al, 2007). They seek to equip men and women with the skills and confidence to recognise gendered, violence-tolerant norms and situations where acts of GBV may take place, and to intervene effectively and safely (Moynihan and Banyard, 2008). US programme evaluations have evidenced attitudinal change, such as increased willingness to intervene (Ahrens et al, 2011), (self-reported) actual intervention behaviour (Casey and Lindhorst, 2009), and decreases in (reported) levels of GBV perpetrated (Potter et al, 2009). However, there remains a gap in understanding the nature, contexts and meanings of any intervention behaviour in relation to broader social norms around gender and sexuality.

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The programme at UOL – funded by UOL – was implemented by academics (supported by the students' union), who collaborated with three voluntary sector groups: Scottish Women's Aid (SWA – a charity working to prevent domestic violence), the White Ribbon Campaign (WRC – the England branch of the global campaign to ensure that men take responsibility for reducing GBV) and Tender (which uses theatre to work with young people to address GBV). All partner agencies involved in delivering the programme operated with a feminist understanding of GBV. Though relatively short-lived (although aspects continue through student activism), the BI programme at UOL involved a combination of activities, including social marketing through the dissemination of student-designed posters, peer education and a theatre project.

The peer education/support model using the 'Get Savi' resources (see Hutchinson, Chapter Ten in this volume) to support a train-the-trainer approach was central to the UOL programme and was delivered by SWA and WRC. SWA and WRC delivered a total of four half-day training sessions to 14 (out of 27) student volunteers enrolled in the programme (hereafter 'programme volunteers'), who went on to cascade the training to successive groups beyond the life of the project. The programme volunteers also created and implemented awareness-raising campaigns throughout the academic year. For example, when a domestic abuse conference was organised for students across different subject areas, they encouraged passers-by and conference participants to write personalised anti-violence messages to complete the statement, 'Let's "Stand Together" against gender based violence because …' These messages were displayed to create a visually powerful 'wall of voices'.

The theatre project was part of an optional 'Forum Theatre' module in the School of Performing Arts run by a member of the research team, in conjunction with Tender. Theatre students created short performances on GBV which utilised techniques such as 'red-flagging' by the audience to stop and discuss an act/expression of violence as it unfolds (Mitchell and Freitag, 2011). The scenarios were performed on campus over two evenings and selected aspects of their performances were also enacted across the campus for passers-by.

Research methods

This chapter draws on semi-structured interviews and, to a lesser extent, on observations recorded during the project. Twenty-six qualitative interviews were conducted with students aged 18–25 (seven core BI programme participants – composed of two theatre student volunteers, and of five programme volunteers who completed the

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'Get Savi' training – and 19 non-participants). There were seven men and 19 women in the sample, with no-one identifying as neither male nor female, or as having a gender identity different to that assigned at birth. Most of the men/women answered that they were either 'only or mostly attracted to' women/men respectively, with one woman stating that she was 'equally attracted to females and males', and another woman that she was 'mostly attracted to females'. Eighteen participants identified as 'White British', two as 'Asian/Asian British', three as 'Black/African/Caribbean/Black British', two as 'Mixed/Multiple Ethnic groups' and one as 'Other' – a relatively diverse sample compared to the student intake at UOL. Interviews lasted between one and two hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed. Qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 10) was used to organise and facilitate thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and fieldwork notes.

Vignettes were used in the interviews to probe students' perspectives on, and experiences of, GBV, and the practicalities and challenges of intervention behaviour in their everyday social interactions. The vignettes drew upon insights from previous research findings, issues raised by the programme volunteers, and media reports about GBV in UK universities, and were piloted to ensure that they 'rang true' for students. Ethical approval was provided by the University Research Ethics Committee.

The data do not suggest a clear-cut difference in attitudes to GBV between programme participants and non-participants. This is likely to be for a number of interrelated reasons. First, participants may not necessarily identify as feminist – violence/abuse may not be conceived of as a gendered issue. Although the 'Get Savi' materials aimed to challenge this gender neutral perspective, the training was relatively brief and may not have created feminist understandings of GBV as programme volunteers may receive/interpret information in unintended ways. Second, the range of activities on campus meant that non-participants might have encountered elements of the programme in ways which possibly influenced their views. Finally, the research topic itself might have encouraged students who previously identified as feminist, but were not programme volunteers, to sign up for interviews. Due to the lack of an overall pattern of difference between the two groups, we do not present the data analysis below in terms of a direct comparison between participants and non-participants. The purpose of this chapter is therefore not to evaluate the programme itself (which would require systematic comparison between the two groups), but to explore the complex nature and perceptions of GBV and of resistance to it in university communities.

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Gender based violence and social media: student experiences of online 'lad culture'

Social media is a key site through which young people negotiate gender norms and relationships (Renold and Ringrose, 2011) and a space where 'lad culture' is enacted and resisted (García-Favaro and Gill, 2016). Interviewees recognised 'lad culture'[1] as ubiquitous in university settings and were often critical of such behaviours: "just lads being lads […] lads want to be the guy that sleeps with most women and can drink the most and do the stupidest stuff. It's all just hypermasculine. It's so ridiculous" (Isabelle, white woman).

Women are simultaneously objectified and subjected to policing of their sexuality on social media through gendered shaming practices such as the 'rating' of women's appearance and/or sexual performance: "oh god, there used to be a [Facebook] page called rate your shag […] all about like lads on the pull" (Naila, Asian woman). Similar Facebook pages were mentioned by several interviewees, including one called "biggest sluts" where "people were taking terrible pictures of girls and posting them" (Molly, white woman). A social media application aimed at students, 'Yik Yak'[2], was identified as especially problematic due to its anonymity. Users frequently 'name and shame' individuals and target people in a manner that renders them recognisable, while remaining cloaked by anonymity themselves. A programme volunteer described Yik Yak as "an absolute gift to people who want to abuse anyone" (Ryan, white man). Programme volunteers mentioned a specific incident of abuse aimed at a university women's sports team: "they are writing vile things about them […] they're easy, they'll go with anyone, they've got STIs, like don't go near them" (Leila, white woman, programme volunteer).[3]

'Slut-shaming' practices were noted as being frequent on Yik Yak: "one I have seen is like who is the biggest slut on campus and you have to put people's names under it" (Molly). Interviewees condemned these practices as "outrageous"; "awful", and "disgusting", often using explicitly feminist language to name them as "sexist"; "misogynistic"; "degrading [to] women"; and "objectifying". Alongside this disapproval, there was a general acceptance of such behaviours as regrettable but 'normal' and just a part of life: "as awful as it is, people do stuff like that" (Zoe, white woman); "unfortunately, that's just the way it is" (Elizabeth, white woman).

The problem was conceived by some interviewees in an individualised way, as a private problem for the person abused, and as gender neutral, rather than reflecting harmful gendered structures of violence. When

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asked if rating of women on social media is 'sexist', one participant commented:

> 'I'd say most of this is sexist, but the rate your shag thing, […] it's just as bad either way, it's just as much objectifying males "shags" […] it seems quite balanced, the play on like the sexy thing […] the rugby team did like the naked photoshoot thing for the leaflets, I thought that was hilarious, but's that because it balances it out.' (Zoe)

This response mirrors a dominant 'postfeminist' perspective in which the language of feminism is taken for granted but gender is simultaneously depoliticised, rendering feminism 'an individual lifestyle choice rather than a focus for collective politics' (Jordan, 2016: 32). In postfeminist narratives, 'residual' sexism may still exist in a largely gender-equal society, but sexism affects women and men equally rather than being more harmful to women overall. In this case, male rugby players choosing to pose naked is seen as directly equivalent to the public rating of women's appearance without their consent. This resonates with the common idea that men are just as objectified as women (Gill, 2011). Postfeminism reflects neoliberal discourses which position the individual as genderless, raceless, classless, and so on, shifting focus away from social structures of power and onto simplistic notions of individual choice and empowerment (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Connell, 2011; Scharff, 2012). While postfeminist perspectives are distinct from 'backlash' politics, they may in some ways be even more difficult to challenge than overt anti-feminism due to their depoliticising effects (Jordan, 2016).

Everyday sexism was frequently dismissed in interviews as trivial, and as personal rather than political. Objectifying language used privately between friends was seen by some as harmless: "I know people use that sort of language just to describe people. And it's never in a malicious, harmful way" (Jake, white man).In contrast, a programme volunteer who identified as "quite a bit of a feminist", suggested that the "it's just banter" (Lily, white woman) response serves to legitimise sexist behaviour, which has implications for broader gender equality. Others recognised the continuum of GBV, linking casual sexism with more obvious violence:

> 'It might seem quite small to a lot of people but it can have quite serious detrimental effect and then where do you draw that line exactly. It's just the start of this "lad culture". Girls

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> are asking for it – girls leading men on […] It leads to quite serious consequences.' (Isabelle)

Some interviewees stated that women are more often objectified than men, and criticised sexual double standards: "it's always been seen as a good thing if like men have a lot of sex […] But if a woman does that, they will say, oh god, she's such a slag […] it makes me think we haven't really got much equality" (Rebecca, white woman, theatre student). When probed further, many interviewees who initially saw the issues as gender neutral, reflected that women are more likely to be harmed by public objectification/shaming due to this gendered context. For example Jake, the man who saw rating as essentially harmless, later recognised that when "girls" are "branded as the village bike" it is "more negative than being called a player". For prevention education, it may be possible to use this familiarity with problematic gender norms as a starting point for raising awareness of how they scaffold GBV. However, it is crucial that this awareness be grounded in analysis of gendered power structures (Coker et al, 2011; Katz et al, 2011).

Responses to objectification, sexism and rape culture on social media

For those who saw the issues as individualised/private, the most appropriate responses to online shaming were similarly seen as individual – for example, targets of abuse should report behaviour to social media sites. In addition, perceptions of 'lad culture' as normal were connected with a general unwillingness to challenge it as such behaviour was seen as too dominant/embedded to be worth contesting, even if it were desirable to bring about change.

Nonetheless, 'lad culture' was seen by some as a public/community problem, rather than just a private issue. There was a corresponding sense that it was students' responsibility to intervene and that resistance is possible. Several interviewees mentioned calling people out on using sexist language. One woman noted the dominance of 'lad culture' but at the same time suggested there was a clear 'backlash' among some students and collective action: "friends are saying on Facebook, being a lad isn't cool, it's not funny, it's not clever and it's just really stupid and sexist" (Isabelle). Others were less optimistic about challenging attitudes, commenting on the exhausting nature of constantly battling embedded norms:

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> 'It is difficult because it happens quite a lot […] the word slag was thrown around […] at the beginning, you say something like you shouldn't call her that […] But I think it's like common practice that you just think well – you can't just keep telling people not to say it because they're just going to keep saying it anyways […] So admittedly I think you do get quite immune to it and you just think well, it's always going to be like that.' (Rebecca, theatre student)

Interviewees reported that the idea of 'banter' was used as a strategy to close down resistance: "I was only joking, why can't you take a joke […] what's wrong with you today" (Sophie, white woman). Some of the men interviewed also commented on the difficulty of speaking out as they would be told not to be boring, to have a sense of humour. They also noted the gendered nature of the response to them as men challenging 'laddishness':

> 'you're not seen as a lad, are you, a 'lad' in inverted commas if you don't like talk about it [sex] all the time or behave in the stereotypical 'lad culture' way […] I've even been called gay for expressing that it's wrong to call people sluts and stuff like that.' (Ryan, programme volunteer)

Men who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity may be penalised by being cast as unmasculine, frequently expressed as homophobic abuse which draws on notions of gay men as not *real* men (Connell, 2005). This policing of masculinity and sexuality may shed light on why many male students are complicit in hegemonic masculinity in HE settings, even where they may be critical of it (Dempster, 2011). Further, the importance of intersectional analysis is reinforced as this illustrates the complex interaction between dominant binary constructions of gender and heteronormativity in these settings. Attempts at resistance are constrained in these contexts. Below, two prominent incidents where programme volunteers attempted to intervene are analysed to illustrate the complexities of challenging dominant campus cultures and the difficulties of defining what counts as a successful intervention.

The first incident occurred when a series of rape 'jokes' were posted on Yik Yak, including: "I called a rape advice line earlier today, unfortunately it's only for the victims"; "no + rohypnol = yes" and "if rohypnol doesn't work use a brick". When two programme volunteers pointed out the harmful effects of such jokes, the perpetrators responded with further offensive comments: "But it's not rape if you

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leave a fiver"; "statistically 9 out of 10 people enjoy gang rape". The volunteers persisted in their attempts to intervene, but reported an emotional toll as they were subjected to a barrage of personal, gendered abuse, replicating precisely the attitudes they sought to resist:

> 'Oh just fuck off you dirty little sket [derogatory slang meaning 'slut'], your [sic] probably the type who leads guys on to the point they think they're going to have sex then decide last minute that all you wanted was them to walk you home.'

The more they highlighted the serious ramifications of the jokes, the more the young women were aligned with 'political correctness' and positioned as humourless feminists: "You femmy slags […] the fact is the majority of punchline in jokes are offensive to somebody". Situating feminists as man-hating is a common discursive strategy which positions men as innocent victims of 'feminazis' (García-Favaro and Gill, 2016). Within postfeminist paradigms, pressures on young women to 'be cool' and to participate in 'lad culture' as 'honorary lads' (Gill, 2007; Scharff, 2012; Phipps and Young, 2015a, b) militate against their resistance being taken seriously. Young women (and men) who wish to challenge 'lad culture' have limited choices. Those brave enough to dissent are positioned as outsiders and their messages delegitimised, often in ways which perpetuate the very narratives they seek to alter (Phipps and Young, 2015b; García-Favaro and Gill, 2016). Ultimately, the programme volunteers were silenced by the apparent weight of dominant opinion.

During the exchange, a rape victim/survivor posted her distress at reading the jokes. The programme volunteers, having received information about sexual assault/rape services through the training programme, directed her to them. Although revealing her experiences was insufficient to silence the perpetrators, she expressed gratitude for the solidarity expressed by the volunteers. In these small ways, BI programmes may help to facilitate a more supportive culture for GBV victims/survivors, and to raise awareness of support services.

The second incident involved a more obviously 'successful' intervention by another programme volunteer. Two (women) lecturers used anonymous polling software to gain insight into students' understandings of criminological theories, whereby their responses appeared on a screen in the lecture theatre.[4] A few students persistently attempted to undermine the activity and, by extension, the lecturers. For example, when asked for their opinion on a minister's views,

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they responded: "He's a prick"; and "My cock". 'Laddish' behaviour in higher education is associated with the attitude that it is 'not cool' to take studying seriously (Jackson and Dempster, 2009; Jackson et al, 2015). When asked about types of sexual offences where reform might be feasible, one student replied: "Rape", which was quickly followed by other posts: "Don't be afraid to try anal"; "Doing anal". A programme volunteer challenged them, responding: "Making rape jokes is not cool and makes rape seem socially ok. Get savi, people". After her intervention, there were no more 'humorous' posts. In their feedback on the session via the software, a few students expressed their disapproval: "Really enjoyed it, shame some people had to ruin it."

The following factors may have increased the chances of an effective challenge in this case. First, although the attempts to undermine the lecturers could be read as gendered, the academics were nonetheless in a position of authority in that setting. The lecture was therefore a different kind of space to Yik Yak. Although challenging disruption is not without risk, other students are sometimes able to shut down behaviour which they perceive as immature and as impeding their learning (Jackson et al, 2015). Second, the comments were directed at specific individuals. This may have been seen by the majority as less acceptable than more generalised (but ultimately similar) behaviour. Given the representation of, for example, rape jokes, as victimless, this once again suggests the importance of BI campaigns/programmes communicating links between generalised sexism and other acts of abuse. Third, the reference to 'Get Savi', was perhaps an attempt to draw on a collective identity at a time when the BI programme was visible on campus and had institutional support. One of the lecturers was involved in the BI programme. This suggests that having a visible and semi-institutionalised presence on the campus can be a useful tool in legitimising resistance. Collaborations between students and lecturers are crucial to resisting 'lad culture' (Jackson and Sundaram, 2015) and programme volunteers commented on this in interviews. BI programmes in universities must also engage with gendered abuse directed at staff as gendered cultures within HE extend beyond the student body. Lectures and seminars are as much a site for GBV and of possible resistance as are halls of residence, nightclubs and social media.

Overall, the interviews suggest that social media is a contradictory site where 'lad culture' is enacted and where resistance is possible, although the latter is often constrained by dominant gendered constructions.

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Students' experiences of sexual harassment in the night-time economy: "this is just what happens"

Spaces in the NTE are utilised by women in diverse ways as they negotiate fun, friendships and group identities through shared drinking, and make sexual connections (Griffin et al, 2013). While literature documents how women negotiate new feminine identities of empowerment and sexual agency through bodily presentation and new modes of alcohol consumption (Waitt et al, 2011), sociologists have also drawn attention to the convergence between the traditional and new gender scripts within these spaces, including sexual double standards (Griffin et al, 2013).Research suggests that 'microaggressions in everyday life' (Sue, 2010) such as non-consensual sexual attention and sexual harassment are particularly common in the NTE (Kavanaugh, 2013), particularly within student-frequented venues (Ronen, 2010; Graham et al, 2016). In comparison to research documenting the prevalence of sexual harassment in the NTE, there is comparatively less exploration of how these violences are inflicted, maintained and normalised, and the many ways in which young people account for, and resist, them (for exceptions, see Brooks, 2011; Waitt et al, 2011; Tan, 2014; Nicholls, 2015).

The NTE is overwhelmingly constructed to meet the desires of a particular idea of the heterosexual man by commodifying and capitalising on female bodies. Young people who inhabit this space spoke about the processes whereby this gendered construction is packaged and conveyed to consumers:

> 'You know how they promote these club things … and it's like "oh, free drinks for you" – they target certain people. Like the women they put on leaflets most of the time – because I've walked past them; they've never offered [it to] me. The way they're dressed, kind of airbrushed celebrity, small figure and probably half-dressed or totally naked to be honest.' (Letitia, black woman)

This woman is aware of how, under a heterosexual male gaze, her body and appearance fall short of the standards of physical appearance that are deemed acceptable in certain nightclubs. Interviewees' descriptions of themed events such as 'doctors and nympho nurses' point to a hetero-pornified aesthetic of raunch culture represented by women with high heels, heavy make-up and scant clothes (Levy, 2005). The promotional literature and gatekeeping policies conform to a specific classed and

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racialised construction of an ideal bodily presentation which is not only problematic in contributing to the objectification/subjectification of all women, but particularly excludes those who are older, non-white, disabled or not slim (Gill, 2009; McRobbie, 2009).

A female interviewee who identified as 'equally attracted to both males and females', reported working with the LGBT society at her college to prevent nightclubs from circulating flyers using fetishised images of lesbian women. Representations of "girl-on-girl stuff" (Zoe) to promote events as sexy/glamourous rely on fantasies of lesbians as seen through a male gaze (Gill, 2009). As representations of gender are intertwined with constructions of sexuality, 'LGBT' women and men may experience 'lad culture' differently given the pervasive heteronormative culture of such spaces.

Interviewees described how men would routinely run their hands over women's backs, grab their bottom, and persistently invade their private space. Such harassment was seen as part of the minutiae of everyday life, as inevitable, and as something that must be tolerated by women, but simultaneously as morally unacceptable (Brooks, 2011; Graham et al, 2016; Tinkler et al, 2016). One interviewee articulated the dilemmas and contradictions in negotiating the boundaries of non-consensual sexual contact:

> Interviewee: 'It is accepted because nobody says anything about it, nobody really makes it a big enough deal.'
>
> Interviewer: 'What do you think would happen if they did make a big deal?'
>
> Interviewee: 'I don't know, but these kind of things, they seem harmless in a way. I don't agree with it. I think you should be able to say … people shouldn't have to have people slapping their bums and making them feel uncomfortable. But at the same time, it's like, oh, he only a touched a bum or he only put his arms around you, so what's the big deal … Because you just think, oh, well, did I really get harmed?' (Janice, black woman)

Paradoxical discursive strategies deployed by this young woman both normalise and minimise sexual harassment using words like "only", not a "big deal" and "did I really get harmed", but at the same time condemns it by signalling her disagreement with these narratives. Other interviewees framed their expectation of sexual harassment in

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the context of particular understandings of gender and sex, which accounted for men's actions:

> 'It's like the lads will be lads. It's not that I think that should be acceptable in society. It's basically lazy to say we don't want to deal with it, so you should just let it happen. But it shouldn't really be like that – I don't know, my flatmates think it's fine when they go out.' (Molly)

Such discursive strategies simultaneously condemn and re-inscribe gendered sexual scripts by drawing upon biological narratives about men's sexuality. These narratives suggest that simply appearing attractive – in a context where women's entry into nightclubs is premised upon a 'freely' chosen hypersexual mode of bodily presentation – encourages male sexual aggression because men's sexual appetites cannot be controlled. At the same time, traditional, as well as postfeminist, constructions of femininity commonly require women to take responsibility for managing male desire. Women may be subjected to blame if they are seen to have made themselves 'vulnerable' through ineffective gatekeeping of sexual advances (Nicholls, 2015) which 'let it happen'.Feminists have long argued that sexual harassment and violence reflects, creates and maintains, gendered and sexed hierarchies which secure relations of male domination and female subordination (MacKinnon, 1979; Sue, 2010). Our respondents utilised culturally available discourses relating to heteronormative sexual scripts to make sense of everyday harassment, violence, coercion and misogyny in the context of the NTE.

Responses to sexual harassment: building resilience, recuperating, evading and challenging

Despite the ubiquity of sexual harassment in the NTE, several interviewees reported that such behaviour seemed invisible to the bar staff and the bouncers.

> Interviewee: 'Things like that happen in front of security's eyes, but they just stand there doing nothing. If I've seen it and if I say something to them – they just turn around and laugh in my face. So it's like you just end up just keeping quiet […] They probably think, 'I'm only here to protect people from getting harmed.'

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> Interviewer: 'So you don't think they see that as harm?'
>
> Interviewee: 'Well, he hasn't fought with nobody. He hasn't punched nobody. So oh well, nothing we can do about it.' (Letitia)

This account does not mention just one incident, but describes a pattern of aggressions and help-seeking that has been ignored by bouncers who police physical conflicts between men, while seeing men's harassment of women as unproblematic (Tinkler et al, 2016). This invisibilisation of men's sexual harassment of women as a private and trivial matter between two people reiterates historic constructions of violence against women (Kelly and Radford, 1990). It was in this context that some women also viewed their experiences as 'not really harmful', even as they regarded such behaviour as unacceptable.

Programme volunteers felt that student union run venues were more cognisant of the potential 'risk' of sexual harassment and took measures to create safer drinking cultures, including having supportive bar staff. This highlights the importance for any BI programme of engaging with nightclubs in local communities – an uphill task where any such efforts may be seen as a challenge to their business model.

Most interviewees felt that the ephemeral nature of most microaggressions (a fleeting touch, an unseen hand grabbing a bottom) combined with the prevailing culture of NTEs made resistance fraught with difficulties. In particular, the gendered social scripts about making sexual connections – men as initiators and women as gatekeepers – meant that challenges were seen as risky and likely to be rebuffed with the assertion that men's 'normal' sexual advances had been misinterpreted by the women. In this cultural and institutional context, women were often forced to devise a range of strategies to inhabit these spaces of fun and pleasure while staying safe. A few women recounted going to nightclubs in groups to derive protection from each other's presence (Ronen, 2010; Graham et al, 2016). Other refusal strategies were reported. For example: "Me and my friend, we had two boys talking to us, and we felt that we couldn't leave really. So I went to the toilet and then like waited until she joined me. You shouldn't have to do that" (Rebecca, theatre student).

Feeling unable to openly challenge the persistent and unwelcome attention, this young woman and her friend felt that avoidance was the safest and most effective way out. Research indicates that such avoidance behaviour – ignoring initial sexual advances and aggressions, moving out of reach, leaving the area or avoiding the perpetrator and

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talking to other people – are the most common responses to sexual harassment in nightclubs (Ronen, 2010; Brooks, 2011; Graham et al, 2016). Women are guided by their fear of escalating the aggression through too assertive a rejection and strategise to manage risks in the NTE (Sue, 2010; Nicholls, 2015). One interviewee recalled how a female friend who rejected unwanted advances in a forthright manner was punched by a male stranger. Refusal strategies are not passive responses and need to be conceptualised as agentic behaviours shaped as much by the cultural context of the NTE as they are by broader gendered sexual scripts. While men's persistent unwanted attention is naturalised as 'what men do', women's negotiation of consent can prove to be a delicate balancing act: too forceful a rejection of men's sexual aggressions would risk positioning these women as not only unreasonable and a 'bad sport' (Sue, 2010), but rude and thereby unfeminine, and may expose them to further aggression as in the example given. Intervention from male friends was a well-rehearsed strategy used by many:

> 'Sometimes if this happens, I'd just peek from the queue. They [male friends] pick up on it – and they'll like come over and like pretend like, 'oh, I've been looking for you, where have you been?' And then the other lads will like back off because it's kind of like, so they've got their own males. They're not for us to play with anymore, they're not free girls anymore. So they step back.' (Lucy, white woman)

This interviewee utilises men's proprietary behaviour towards 'their' women to avoid unwanted sexual attention by pretending that she is "not free" for them "to play with anymore". One theatre student, who cited his frustration at the regular groping his female friends were subjected to in nightclubs as his reason for volunteering, recounted how he put his training to use through this strategy. However, he was not the only one to recount his frustration at being called upon to pretend to be a boyfriend, and noted that while lack of consent was not an effective deterrent, men willingly ceded their entitlement to another man:

> 'I might pretend to be her boyfriend. That shouldn't be a reason for them not to touch them just because they have boyfriends. They shouldn't do it anyway. But on a night out in a loud club with these idiots that seems to be the only thing they understand.' (Ethan, white man, theatre student)

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Such strategies may indeed create further risk of harassment from familiar men as women's strategic overtures towards them might then become the pretext for unwanted sexual attention from these known men. One woman and her female friend pretended that they were a lesbian couple in clubs to deflect persistent unwanted attention, a strategy that might risk drawing sexual attention from men who bring the hetero male gaze to lesbians or, indeed, risk homophobic abuse.

On the whole, while men's sexual aggressions were minimised and trivialised, women's challenges to aggressive behaviour were often constructed as problematic by bystanders, bar staff and sometimes by students themselves, and were seen as a last resort. One respondent reported how when she challenged a stranger who would not leave her alone in a nightclub, she was told by the bouncers that she was "arguing too much" and told to leave for causing trouble. A programme volunteer recounted how she argued with a bouncer to get him to take responsibility for a young woman who had passed out by his nightclub until she and her friends could summon help. Another programme volunteer mentioned initiatives that she took to "look out for" other female friends – particularly to prevent predatory men "taking advantage" of women who were too drunk to give consent – and how this had led to her being labelled a "cockblocker". Several programme volunteers articulated that making the move from understanding to action was not straightforward, given the strongly embedded norms in the NTE, but also their desire to continue to inhabit this space. Two women reported being so frustrated by these gendered expectations that they had stopped going to nightclubs.

Student accounts point to the impossible contradictions within the postfeminist cultures of consumption in the NTE. Their narratives indicate a reiteration of gendered scripts, as well as some contradictory discourses and actions, as they seek to resist dominant gendered norms within these spaces, while maintaining access to them.

Conclusion

Our findings add to evidence on the prevalence of GBV in student communities, demonstrating the need to engage with spaces within and outside universities where GBV is enacted and resisted. They also shed light on the less-explored issue of what kinds of resistance are possible (see Lewis et al, 2016; and Lewis and Marine, Chapter Six in this volume, for exceptions) and on the challenges/possibilities for prevention education. BI programmes can be effective in changing perceptions and creating confidence to act, albeit within limits

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determined by the dominant culture, institutions and by broader social structures. The findings suggest there is a research gap in terms of examining the importance of intersectionality in understanding GBV and informing BI programmes. GBV and the gender norms that underpin it may be experienced differently by students depending on (perceived) race and sexuality. Training needs to address the links between these and other axes of inequality such as class, disability and non-binary gender presentations.

The findings also demonstrate the need to engage with postfeminist equalisation discourses within which sexist and heteronormative attitudes and behaviours are re-packaged as individual, freely chosen modes of acting and being; and GBV as essentially a private matter for the victim rather than a community issue. In the postfeminist neoliberal context which de-politicises/de-genders GBV, our findings reiterate criticisms of some US initiatives which overemphasise individualised solutions to GBV and employ problematic, de-gendered concepts of 'power-based violence' (Coker et al, 2011; Katz et al, 2011: 689). Prevention education potentially can raise awareness of these complexities, including shifting de-gendered conceptualisations of GBV:

> 'I was of the opinion […] that it was sort of 50–50 split of men abusing women, women abusing men […] But now I realise that's not the case at all. And that made me really think about things differently […] They're really amazing lessons […] I would go back and be thinking about it hours later.' (Ethan, theatre student)

Another programme volunteer reported that training enabled her to make connections between the "less serious" and "more extreme" manifestations of GBV, making her less tolerant of the former. Finally, the analysis highlights both the constraints on, and possibilities for, student resistance in the context of responses from other agents (including other students, universities, social media sites and nightclubs), and the nature of 'interventions' in different contexts. What constitutes an intervention needs further interrogation, as does the possibility of defining and measuring 'success'. The Get Savi student union society, established by programme volunteers following the programme, uses social media to challenge GBV. The impact of such engagements is inherently difficult to assess. Simply by making dissent visible, their activities may create space for others including victims/survivors to find support and encounter alternative perspectives. Social media, as

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a platform, can increase the visibility of resistance, but as this space is deeply embedded in gendered (and other) inequalities, dissenting voices are often marginalised. Online anonymity can both enable students to challenge their peers more easily than in face-to-face settings, and provide indemnity for perpetrators of abuse.

The analysis of students' experiences of the NTE reveals further issues around defining intervention/resistance. In these spaces, acts of GBV are often ephemeral and embedded within dominant cultural norms, meaning collective resistance for women seeking to inhabit these spaces is particularly challenging. Understanding strategies used by students to evade or challenge GBV is therefore instructive in analysing the nature of resistance at this individual, micro-level, as well as in illuminating how available modes of resistance might serve to re-inscribe prevailing gender norms.

Institutional support from the university and engagement with external environments is vital, given that nightclubs, bars and other 'off-campus' social venues are key sites of GBV, but there are limitations. UOL blocked the use of Yik Yak through the University server (O'Dell, 2016) due to concerns about cyberbullying, but students bypassed this through their own internet access.

Prevention education can help facilitate a culture of challenging, rather than a culture of normalisation. Programme volunteers suggested training had made them more likely to intervene. However, the interviews also demonstrated the constraints on resistance. It is therefore vital that BI programmes prepare volunteers for the reality of intervention. In addition, programmes must not become a tool used by institutions to responsibilise students for their 'own' safety. As the incident in the lecture theatre suggests, collaborations between lecturers and students and visible institutional support are crucial to creating violence-free learning environments.

Notes

1. While we share concerns about the usefulness of 'lad culture' as a concept (Phipps, 2016), we employ the term as it is dominant in the literature.
2. On the 28th April, 2017, Yik Yak announced that it would be shutting down.
3. Where interviewees participated in the theatre module (identified as 'theatre student') or in the peer-training programme ('programme-volunteer'), this is indicated the first time they are quoted. This is to differentiate students who took part in the theatrical aspects of the project, but not in the bystander intervention programme itself, from those who directly participated in the BI programme. See the methods section.

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[4] Although this did not take place on social media, the context was similar in terms of the use of digital technologies and as anonymity allowed the perpetrators to feel empowered to make offensive comments.

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