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Conclusion: setting the agenda for challenging gender based violence in universities

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In the UK, we are at a pivotal moment regarding gender based violence (GBV) in universities. The preceding chapters reflect on lessons learned and directions for future approaches to tackling GBV. In this final chapter, we highlight the emerging key themes from the contributions to this volume and identify gaps and possibilities in current research and practice.

Exploring GBV as part of the continuum of violence

The chapters in this volume approach GBV as part of the continuum of violence (Kelly, 1988) that includes sexual violence and harassment, intimate partner violence, and homophobic and transphobic abuse. Rather than taking the narrower focus on sexual violence that some others adopt, especially in the US, our approach has been more broadly on the variety of forms of GBV. While focused examination of the particularities of specific forms of GBV has tremendous value for developing our understanding of the phenomenon and effective responses, it is vital we see these specific forms as part of the greater whole of the continuum of abuse that Kelly (1988) identified. Broader understanding of the various types of GBV as part of a continuum helps to highlight the connections between these different types of GBV, for example, advertising Freshers' Weeks events in ways that sexually objectify and demean women helps create a culture whereby sexual assault is normalised and victim-blaming is commonplace. This broader perspective highlights the role of not only behaviours but also attitudes and cultural norms in scaffolding sexism and misogyny, as identified by Sundaram (Chapter One in this volume) in her analysis of young people's conceptualisations of violence which lead to its toleration, normalisation and trivialisation. Understanding the attitudes and norms that underpin GBV helps recognise that interventions need to target a range of behaviours, attitudes and cultural norms; interventions such as *The Intervention Initiative* (Fenton and Mott's chapter), Stand Together

(Jordan et al's chapter) and Get Savi (Hutchinson's chapter) recognise the continuum and the connections between different manifestations of GBV.

However, some of the contributions to this book have tended to focus on sexual violence, sexual harassment and the 'wallpaper of sexism' (Lewis et al, 2015) in the context of the renewed interest in 'lad culture', rather than, for example, intimate partner violence or homophobic and transphobic abuse, both of which warrant further scholarly and policy attention. We recommend that future scholarly activity and interventions around GBV in universities continue to see the individual manifestations as part of the myriad of behaviours that constitute the continuum of GBV.

The UK's late attention to this problem means there are significant gaps in research evidence from which to develop effective practice. The NUS (2010) survey provided a valuable starting point of information about women students' experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault and, perhaps most importantly, a vital platform from which to agitate for change. A new national study of the prevalence of GBV across UK universities is required to address its shortcomings and provide a reliable evidence base to guide future policies and interventions. Such a study would ideally build on the NUS (2010) survey and would also include: a continuum of sexual violence and domestic abuse including 'coercive control' (Stark, 2009), homophobia and transphobia; experiences of GBV among men and trans people; GBV in online as well as offline environments, and staff-on-student experiences of GBV. Individual institutions need local data about the 'climate' (including incidence and impact of GBV; patterns of reporting to the institution and other formal and informal contacts; and institutional responses), and the sector as a whole needs reliable, robust national quantitative and qualitative data, using consistent definitions of the different types of GBV. This will allow, inter alia, the mapping of continuities and differences throughout the country and will make available baseline data for measuring the effectiveness of future interventions. Cantor et al (2015) report wide variations in prevalence of sexual assault and misconduct between the 27 US institutions they surveyed. The reasons for these variations are unclear but suggest that sexual assault is by no means an inevitable feature of university life and that institutional factors may prevent or facilitate sexual assault and, by extension, other forms of GBV. A new national study of GBV in the UK would help us to identify and account for any such variations in the UK, in order to understand how to transform universities into GBV-resistant environments.

A significant gap in recent scholarship and practice is around staff-on-student and staff-on-staff violations. While this has been the subject of recent media attention (see Weale and Batty, 2016a, b; Batty et al, 2017; Willgress, 2016; Pells, 2016), it has received very little academic research attention since 'workplace harassment' was first exposed by feminist campaigners and scholars in the 1970s and 1980s (see MacKinnon, 1979; Hearn and Parkin, 1987). Anecdotally, many contemporary women scholars recall their days as young students and staff when sexual advances and coercion by some male staff were part of the academic terrain and they reflect with pleasure on the changed academic environment. However, the *Guardian* investigation (Batty et al, 2017) and the publicity around Sara Ahmed's resignation from Goldsmith's reveals that this kind of sexual violation is not a thing of the past. Scholarship and campaigning in the 1970s and 1980s about sexual harassment in the workplace were part of a wider challenge to gender inequalities, and women's exclusion, marginalisation and subjugation at work; it was informed by an awareness of the power dynamics at play in environments where large numbers of women were relative newcomers. Those power dynamics are particularly stark in the relationship between a supervisor/lecturer (typically a man) and student (typically a woman) which can be exploited, especially if the institution does not take steps to set and maintain standards of behaviour. However, as women have achieved greater representation in the workplace, notwithstanding remaining inequalities, and have changed those workplaces and cultures, have we, as scholars, taken our eye off the enduring forms of gendered hierarchies which have perhaps become more hidden in response to progress achieved in the gendered academic landscape? A fresh examination of the extent of these kinds of gendered intrusions in the lives of staff and students in the academic workplace, and of the institutional responses, is warranted as part of an effort to transform universities into GBV-resistant environments.

Recognising gender, resisting gender based violence

The chapters in this volume draw strongly on a feminist analysis of GBV and share a recognition of the significance of gender and the value of a feminist, intersectional approach to tackling this phenomenon. For example, Klein highlights the limitations of research about university violence which fails to recognise gender and the 'sexist male culture of sexual aggression and exploitation'. Chapters by Hutchinson and by Donaldson et al identify that a gendered understanding of GBV at the national policy level in Scotland and Wales has generated a policy

environment conducive to initiatives that adopt a gendered approach. Fenton and Mott describe strategic efforts to de-centre gender in order to minimise (political and inter-personal) resistance to interventions. In different ways, all the contributions prioritise a gendered understanding of and approach to GBV in universities.

However, several of the chapters (for example, Jordan et al, Lewis and Marine) have highlighted the difficulties in conducting intersectional analysis of GBV in UK universities. There is then, a gap in knowledge and understanding of the intersections of different forms of oppression as part of GBV at universities. We call on future scholarship, policies and interventions about GBV in universities to explore and address the significance of gender as it intersects with, for example, racism, classism, disablism, homophobia and transphobia. As Phipps (in Chapter Two) highlights, 'lad culture' takes different forms among working class and privileged men. This begs the questions whether it also takes different forms among, for example, different ethnic groups; how are contemporary conceptualisations of young Asian men as dangerous – to national security and to women – enacted in the context of masculinities, heterosexuality, and GBV? How do homophobia and heteronormativity intersect to maintain the gender binary at a time when many young people are exploring a myriad of forms of gender and sexual identities?

A feminist intersectional framework for researching, theorising, and responding to GBV enables recognition that people are positioned differently along the various axes of power; for example, black and white men, heterosexual and queer men enjoy different kinds of 'masculine capital' (de Visser et al, 2009) which may influence their orientation to GBV. Such intersectional approaches reveal how these systems of power support each other to maintain the status quo. They also reveal how masculinity is played out differently by men according to where they are positioned in this matrix of power, revealing opportunities for disrupting problematic enactments of masculinity and promoting 'inclusive masculinities' (Anderson, 2005). By highlighting how widespread, normalised and 'everyday' sexism is experienced in different ways in different demographic and cultural groups, feminist intersectional approaches also help explain why some women support misogynistic attitudes and cultures – whether by adopting 'victim-blaming' attitudes, condoning aggressive masculinity as 'just a laugh', or by participating in ratings of sexual attractiveness and performance.

As argued in the Introduction and in chapters by Sundaram, Phipps, and Lewis and Marine, a structural intersectional feminist approach understands this violence as a form of gendered power which maintains

the patriarchal, heteronormative status quo. This understanding of GBV helps us recognise the similarities among victims'/survivors' experiences and the similarities in behaviours of perpetrators which can inform tactics for intervention. Recognition of the shared experiences reveals GBV as a *social* problem, resulting from systematic, structural, gendered inequalities in power, rather than an individual problem of 'bullying' resulting from randomly distributed power differentials.

Approaches that centre gender are likely to meet with high levels of resistance, and that poses an additional set of challenges which future research and practice need to consider. Resistance to the progressive agenda of tackling GBV in universities comes from various directions: from those eager to protect their male privilege (men's rights activists and libertarians); from individual and groups of male students who feel criticised for what they see as reasonable masculine behaviour or because they feel they are being targeted as problematic because of their gender; from some men in academia who wish to protect the privilege of their status including unchallenged sexual access to students; from senior management who may be reluctant to reveal that GBV affects their institution, especially in times of increased competition for students; from those who have some sympathy for feminist politics but who fear that the focus on GBV highlights women's 'dreaded victim status' (Baker, 2008: 59). Activists, student leaders, university management and administrators, and scholars who wish to address GBV in universities tread carefully in this minefield of resistance to their efforts.

We encourage critical engagement with resistance. Resistance is an inevitable part of this work to dismantle powerful hierarchies and, indeed, an indication of success. After all, hierarchies do not willingly relinquish power; they resist attempts to challenge their 'rightful' retention of power. They challenge, deny and silence efforts to expose their power. They depict as problematic those who bring attention to the problem (as Ahmed details in her 'feministkilljoys' blog).[1] Work to expose GBV at universities is resisted in these ways (see Hutchinson, this volume) and such resistance is an indication that our work is taking hold and having an impact, although there may be a disproportionate amount of resistance in comparison with the successful challenge to power; as Phipps argues in her chapter, 'a *sense* of victimisation on the part of the privileged does not mean victimisation has occurred'. Part of the resistance to our work is the claim that it depicts universities as sites of 'sexual paranoia' (Kipnis, 2017) where all sexual encounters are conflictual and abusive, and women and queer students are at constant risk of harassment and oppression. Such discourses are part of wider

debates about the nature of universities (should they be sites of 'free speech'? Is 'no platforming' a reasonable tactic?) and the characteristics of generations of young people (are they 'precious snowflakes' or activists imagining alternative societies?). Other attempts to theorise resistance – such as Jordan's (2016) insightful analysis of 'backlash' and postfeminism as 'active resistance to what is perceived to be the current gender order' (p 29) which has 'the potential to shape, challenge, and/or reinforce dominant constructions of ... norms around gender and gender politics' (p 42) – may prove helpful in understanding and responding to the resistance our work generates.

Resistance and the discourses generated by resistance are an inevitable part of work against GBV in universities and can be a productive force, helping the development of more nuanced, effective strategies in scholarship and practice. After all, most bodies of political thought, feminism included, have developed in response to critique and challenge from both within and outside its ranks. Resistance in GBV work warrants further attention in terms of theorising the nature of resistance and in terms of developing strategic, tactical responses which are effective at dismantling gendered power.

Moreover, our work to end GBV may also be conceived of as resistance; resistance to the status quo, to patriarchal power. We can conceive of our resistance as a sign of life, energy and hope in civic society. This resistance is part of ambitious efforts to destabilise the current gender order, to imagine and enact a world free of gender oppression. As Foucault (1997: 167 cited by Ahmed, 2017) wrote, 'if there was no resistance … it would be just a matter of obedience'.

A key element of this resistance is student activism to challenge GBV. As detailed in some of the chapters in this volume (Jordan et al, Lewis and Marine) some UK campuses are alive with feminist resistance to GBV and the contemporary gender order. However, to date, there has been relatively little research about this resurgence in university-based feminist politics. There is a pressing need, given the relatively short life and rapid regeneration of student bodies, to capture and record this activism, particularly in terms of which students participate, how they conceptualise and approach GBV (and other issues they tackle), how they strategise their activism, the relationships they build with university staff (academic, support and management) and with outside organisations, and the impacts and consequences of their activism.

Developing a jigsaw of strategies

A beneficial consequence of the slow awakening of policymakers and scholars to GBV in universities is that we can draw on the lessons learned elsewhere over the previous four decades to inform the direction and focus of our future efforts. A wealth of scholarship discusses the attempts, particularly in North America, to reform university environments through policy development and use of the law. Durbach and Grey's chapter examines the shifting institutional responses in Australia. In the UK there are several legal opportunities, outlined in Louise Whitfield's chapter, for challenging GBV in universities which could be adopted by individuals seeking redress or by activists seeking to change university practices. What is telling, perhaps, is how infrequently they have been used. In the US, despite seeming advances in policy and legal approaches, such as Title IX, scholarship in this volume (see Klein's chapter) and elsewhere highlights the pitfalls of this approach. There are lessons to be learned here about the dangers of striving for institutional accountability and change through the use of such measures, which can produce a mechanistic approach which fails to bring to the fore the wellbeing of victims/survivors. Recent work about GBV in wider contexts also raises concern about feminists' reliance on formal justice systems, with their investment in racism, patriarchy, classism and heteronormativity; Rentschler (2017) for example, proposes a 'feminist politics of transformative, anti-carceral justice' which 'requires a re-orientation of practice towards models of survivor-centred transformative justice' (p 579). However, given it is only recently that UK universities have started to consider GBV as within their responsibility, we are cautious about rejecting strategies to hold them to account and to provide some measure of protection and justice for survivors. Rather than disavow formal systems of justice and accountability, but mindful that approaches which rely on formal legal mechanisms can never be the panacea to GBV (due in part to the obstacles Whitfield highlights in her chapter), we instead propose that they are best considered as one piece in the jigsaw of strategies for tackling GBV at universities.

We call on scholars, activists and university leaders to explore, develop, pilot and evaluate a jigsaw of responses to tackle GBV. This jigsaw of strategies might include legal responses (see Whitfield's chapter), national policy frameworks (see the chapters by Donaldson et al and Durbach and Grey), institutional policies and procedures for recording, investigating and dealing with complaints (see Klein's chapter), curriculum-based initiatives such as bystander intervention

programmes and other educational initiatives (see the chapters by Fenton and Mott, Hutchinson, and Jordan et al) and consent workshops, victim/survivor-centred support services provided by universities and in collaboration with external agencies, and activist (student and community) mobilisation, which might include awareness-raising campaigns (such as those described by Lewis and Marine, and Hutchinson). With their different, sometimes opposing strategies, audiences, aims and methods, these contrasting but potentially complementary approaches can contribute to the transformation of university environments into spaces where GBV is genuinely not tolerated.

Essential to this jigsaw of responses are the actors who piece together the complementary pieces. Who are the key actors in tackling GBV in universities? University leaders – senior management in academic and support services – need to embrace the possibility of developing GBV-*in*tolerant campuses. The absence of institutional leadership to tackle this problem is reflected in the Universities UK (2016: 58) report's recommendation 'that all university leaders should afford tackling violence against women, harassment and hate crime priority status and dedicate appropriate resources to tackling it'. As the chapters in this volume illustrate, there is some very promising, innovative, coordinated practice to tackle GBV in UK universities, which is grounded in robust empirical and theoretical evidence about the problem and effective interventions. However, this is not found consistently throughout the country; not all universities have risen to the challenge. Therefore, at the institutional level, universities need to move beyond the patchwork of un-coordinated activities among academic and non-academic staff and students to develop, as Universities UK (2016) highlights, an institution-wide approach (see Towl, 2016, for an account of how one university has embraced its civic and educational responsibility and developed leadership around sexual violence).

Universities do not face this challenge alone. Higher education institutions (HEIs) can support each other to develop leadership and good practice; inter-institutional collaboration can highlight and share lessons from the range of current good practice in those institutions that have not been frightened to lead the way in tackling GBV. In addition, key agencies in the sector can support HEIs to embrace their responsibilities. For example, following the Universities UK (UUK) Taskforce to examine violence against women, harassment and hate crime, a Catalyst funding programme provided by Higher Education Funding Council of England is a valuable start for developing a programme of evidence and knowledge about effective interventions.

The development of a coordinated gendered approach to violence against women and girls in Scotland (as described in chapters by Donaldson et al and Hutchinson) provides an example of the leadership required. Moreover, university leaders can draw on the expertise within their institutions; many HEIs have academics working on issues related to GBV who can contribute to the strategic planning and cultural transformation required.

Academics have roles to play in tackling GBV both as scholars and as members of university communities who contribute to their cultures. Much of the impetus to bring attention to GBV in universities has come from scholarship that has highlighted the existence and nature of this problem (see, for example, Jackson and Dempster, 2009; Phipps and Smith, 2012; Phipps and Young, 2015; Jackson and Sundaram, 2015). Conferences, symposia and networks[2] are key to developing knowledge, but also provide support to scholars whose attempts to change their own institutions have met with resistance. These experiences can feed into our efforts to theorise and respond to resistance, as discussed earlier. Staff trade unions also have a role to play in transforming the working environment and preventing GBV among staff. UCU's work on domestic abuse, sexual harassment, bullying, gender identity and sexual orientation equality in the workplace[3] provides valuable resources for staff challenging GBV in their workplace.

Students and their local and national unions play a crucial role in addressing GBV. NUS leaders have been at the forefront of agitating for change, contributing to national debates and policy development (for example, through membership of the UUK Taskforce) and providing evidence about GBV (for example, NUS, 2010). Student activism, through students unions, feminist societies and other groupings, seems to be developing throughout the country but, as described earlier, reliable research evidence about the spread of such activism is lacking; without coordination and documentation of such efforts, an important part of the jigsaw may be lost to history.

These various actors, in collaboration and as collectives, are crucial parts of the jigsaw of strategies required to tackle GBV. They enact their roles against a backdrop of significant changes to the academic landscape, which present a unique set of challenges. Not only have neoliberal values (such as faith in the market, an audit approach to nearly every aspect of university activity, and an instrumental approach to education) taken hold as never before, but universities' nature, purpose and role in society is in flux. As we write, there remains tremendous uncertainty about the impact of Brexit, the implications of which will unfold in the coming years. And with the changed funding base

of universities which results in the highest level of student fees in the world (Kentish, 2017), the struggle to afford GBV high priority will not be easily won but we owe it to our students, current and future, to work to eradicate GBV from their experience of university.

Summary

This collection contributes to the conversation about how to avoid the missteps that have hindered efforts to address GBV and how to develop productive, effective approaches to hold universities to account, improve institutional prevention and responses to GBV, and transform university cultures so that students need not fear victimisation nor have to deal with its consequences. This is a huge task; universities do not operate in a vacuum, immune to the wider social and economic forces. GBV is a normalised, everyday aspect of the wider society of which universities are a part and, as Sundaram argues in her chapter, efforts to transform attitudes about GBV need to start before university, with young people in school. The UK's late attention to this topic means generations of students have been left unprotected from GBV and unsupported when they experience it. However, this late start does mean that we can learn from countries where institutions, activists and scholars have generated a wealth of knowledge about how the problem manifests and how it is best tackled, and we can use that as a springboard for future developments in research and practice.

Notes

1 https://feministkilljoys.com/

2 Such as Universities Against Gender Based Violence: https://uagbv.wordpress.com/

3 See www.ucu.org.uk/publications

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