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## CHALLENGING NARRATIVES OF DECLINE OF THE ANTI-RAPE MOVEMENT

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**ABSTRACT**

A trend in scholarship characterizes the anti-rape movement as starting out with radical goals and achieving success in reforming rape law, but then declining because of co-optation by the state. This article challenges this narrative of decline in light of the history of the anti-rape movement and current anti-rape activism across the country. By focusing their critique on criminal justice and therapeutic approaches to sexual violence, and failing to account for the diversity of the anti-rape movement, advocates for narratives of decline ignore parts of the movement that challenge the state itself and those that seek broader cultural and community-based changes to eradicate sexual violence.

**Introduction**

Over the past several years, rape and sexual assault have repeatedly made the headlines. Events such as the highly publicized six-month sentence for the sexual assault conviction of Stanford University student Brock Turner (who was released early for good behavior), allegations that U.S. Armed Forces may be incapable of policing themselves with respect to gender-based violence, the notorious “legitimate rape” comments by 2012 Missouri Congressional candidate Todd Akin, the 2014 White House Title IX guidelines on sexual violence, and the many Department of Justice investigations of colleges and universities across the country are just some recent examples of the surge in attention to sexual assault. In light of these events, university administrators, activists, policy makers, and others, might look to the scholarship on the anti-rape movement for guidance and historical perspective.

Scholarship on the development of anti-rape activism within the contemporary women’s movement in the United States includes Susan Schechter’s *Women and Male Violence* (1982),

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Maria Bevacqua's *Rape on the Public Agenda: Feminism and the Politics of Sexual Assault* (2000), Pat Yancey Martin's *Rape Work: Victims, Gender, and Emotions in Organization and Community Context* (2005), Susan Caringella's *Addressing Rape Reform in Law and Practice* (2009) and scores of scholarly articles addressing the movement against gendered violence that have been published since the 1980s (e.g., Campbell, Baker, and Mazurek, 1998; Martin, 2009). This body of critical literature has traced the movement's histories, identified major debates among feminist activists and thinkers, and critiqued movement actors who failed to incorporate intersectionality into their activism. The literature has also focused on specific advocacy strategies and their intended and unintended results, evaluated existing laws and proposed new ones, and elaborated on the use of the courts to better address gendered violence. These scholars have offered analyses of social movement actors' successes, failures, challenges, debates, prescience, shortcomings, compromises, and persistence in the face of the immensity of sexual violence.

In recent years, however, the literature on the social movement to end gendered violence has taken a turn. This turn represents a shift toward a narrative of decline. In various ways, this narrative faults the anti-rape movement for approaches it did or did not take. The major reason given for this decline was that the movement worked too closely with the criminal justice and medical systems, leading to the cooptation of the movement by professionals who did not have the social justice aims of the movement (Corrigan, 2013; Bumiller, 2008, Gruber, 2009). This literature casts the strategies of the feminist anti-rape movement as misguided, ineffective, or, most seriously, harmful to victims. While not a new critique (see, e.g., Matthews, 1994; Brown, 1995; Gornick & Meyer, 1998), the recent resurgence of this narrative of decline warrants a response.

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This article argues that such scholars misunderstand the history of anti-rape activism and analysis, and that they mischaracterize its current manifestations by focusing too narrowly on criminal justice-oriented aspects of the movement, which are wrongly taken for the whole of the movement. Much as Gretchen Arnold and Jami Ake write of the battered women's movement (2013), this paper argues that the anti-rape movement has grown and changed since its inception in 1970, that the movement has represented and encompassed a diverse constellation of tactics, strategies, and foci, and that this movement has fundamentally altered the landscape of sexual assault experience, response, and services over nearly five decades. Arnold and Ake's description of the battered women's movement's self-correction and continual improvements applies similarly to the anti-rape movement. By focusing their critique on criminal justice and therapeutic approaches to sexual violence, narratives of decline ignore parts of the movement that challenge the state itself and seek broader cultural and community changes to eradicate sexual violence. While the early activists' goal of achieving "an end to rape as we know it" remains unfulfilled, the evidence points to a dynamic movement inspiring and encompassing generations of activists, service providers, and ordinary citizens determined to do something about sexual assault and adapting their strategies to changes in the sociopolitical environment.

This paper proposes an alternative reading of the history of anti-rape politics, practices, and activism to the narrative of decline. In the first part of this article, we review scholarship promoting a narrative of decline and challenge these recent re-readings of the anti-rape movement as oversimplified and incomplete because they underestimate the importance of legal and therapeutic reform as part of a broad-based strategy for social change. By focusing their critique on criminal justice and therapeutic approaches to sexual violence to the exclusion of other parts of the movement, declension narrative scholars ignore parts of the 1970s movement

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that challenged the state itself and sought broader cultural and community-based changes to eradicate sexual violence. In the second part of the paper, we will argue similarly that the cutting edge of the anti-rape movement today, rather than cooperating with the state, has in fact posed significant challenges to the criminal justice system and has engaged in many forms of activism that go beyond narrow criminal justice and therapeutic approaches to sexual assault. Two promising forms of activism are community-based interventions, including direct action strategies, and initiatives to change social norms related to gender and sexuality. Women of color, who have been particularly skeptical of using the criminal justice system to address rape and sexual assault, have initiated campaigns against state violence, including sexual assault by police. Young activists are using technology to engage in direct action to build safer communities. College students and K-12 students as well as anti-rape men's groups are using an array of strategies, including theater, art, and film to raise awareness and educate communities about sexual assault. These initiatives are evidence of a vibrant anti-rape movement beyond rape crisis centers and criminal law prosecutions, exemplifying the ongoing relevance of the anti-rape movement and its transformational work.

### **Part I. Taking a Part for the Whole: Narratives of Decline and Rape Law Reform in the 1970s**

Criticisms of the anti-rape movement are nothing new. Some of these may be characterized as insider critiques, such as concerns about whether the movement to address sexual assault would represent and include people of color (Ross, 1982), particularly Native women (Deer, 2015). Others are better understood as outsider takedowns, such as Katie Roiphe's scathing rejection of contemporary feminist redefinitions of sexual assault, especially

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acquaintance rape of young women (Roiphe, 1994). In her 1981 book, *The Second Stage*, Betty Friedan reduced the feminist movement against gendered violence to a “bedroom war.” In the early 1990s, theorist Sharon Marcus criticized the anti-rape movement by stating, “Attempts to stop rape through legal deterrence fundamentally choose to *persuade men* not to rape” (1992, 388; emphasis in original), without challenging the assumption that men have the power to rape. According to Gilbert (1991), Paglia (1992), and Sommers (1994), the anti-rape movement turns all women into victims who wallow in their own oppression. These scholars ignore the real impact of sexual violence on victims’ lives (Friedan), fail to contend with the self-defense and direct action strategies of the anti-rape movement (Marcus), or use an exaggerated interpretation of sexual assault activism as a platform to condemn contemporary feminism more broadly (Gilbert, Paglia, and Sommers).

Recent scholarly criticism that articulates a narrative of decline, however, has focused on the movement’s legal reform wing that has worked with the state through the criminal justice system in particular. Such authors argue that rape has come to be understood as an inevitable criminal act to which institutions respond with fairly individualized procedures rather than as a social problem requiring social change. A leading voice in this narrative of decline is Rose Corrigan, *Up Against a Wall: Rape Reform and the Failure of Success* (2013). Corrigan argues that the 1970s anti-rape movement focused on reforming criminal laws and then partnered with the state to develop the rape crisis response that is characteristic of most sexual violence service organizations today. She argues that their success in doing so, however, caused the movement to adopt an “increasingly apolitical, social service orientation” (Corrigan, 2013, 9). As a result, rape crisis centers ended up functioning within the confines of legal and medical systems that were often hostile to rape survivors, thereby losing their ability to transform those systems. She argues

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that the movement focused on legal mobilization at the expense of political mobilization that could have created real social change. Interestingly, this text does not treat legal change as social change.

A serious flaw with Corrigan's reading of the anti-rape movement, however, is her failure to include the full constellation of strategies and reforms that feminists engaged to make fundamental changes in sexual violence. Corrigan's research is based on interviews with 167 employees at 112 rape crisis centers in six different states. Corrigan excluded from her study advocates working for groups that "offer culturally specific programs for survivors of sexual violence" (Corrigan, 2013, 54) and university-based rape crisis centers. Corrigan's narrow focus on the legal reform strategies and rape crisis centers means she ignores much of the anti-rape activism that was and is occurring outside of the legal and medical systems and then denies that it is happening. This includes anti-rape work by women of color, consciousness-raising events, Take Back the Night marches, self-defense instruction, campus activism, education for men and boys, and media campaigns to draw attention to a new feminist understanding of sexual violence. Corrigan's study focuses on one aspect of a multifaceted movement, then draws broad conclusions about the movement as a whole while. Corrigan also declines to consider the intersections of numerous forms of identity and how these intersections inform the sexual assault experience and, therefore, services. Corrigan says she had intended to focus on the "racial dimensions of institutional responses to rape" (Corrigan, 2013, 56), but found it "fascinating" that she "heard very little talk about race from advocates" (Corrigan, 2013, 56) whom she interviewed. In fact, this is not surprising, especially considering she did not interview advocates at "culturally specific programs" (Corrigan, 2013, 54). But as Kimberle Crenshaw states in her pivotal article on intersectionality, "the violence that many women experience is often shaped by



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other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (Crenshaw 1991, 1242). Corrigan acknowledges that silence around race has meaning for the anti-rape movement, but that those discussions are beyond the scope of her book.

Other examples of scholarship that contributes to a narrative of decline is Kristin Bumiller’s *In an Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement Against Sexual Violence* (2008) and Aya Gruber’s article “Rape, Feminism and the War on Crime” (2009). According to Bumiller, early feminists defined the problem of violence against women as rooted in the state’s failure to protect women and therefore focused on legal reform strategies to increase prosecution and imprisonment of male offenders. Bumiller argues that this focus fueled the explosive growth of the state’s crime control apparatus and social service bureaucracies, which have in fact disempowered women by reinforcing stereotypes of women as victims and dependents. Furthermore, Bumiller argues that criminal justice responses place the blame for violence on individual bad men, justifying a coercive and punitive state reaction to violence and obscuring the neoliberal state’s role in maintaining women’s economic and social subordination that makes women vulnerable to violence. Similarly, Gruber argues that feminists should disengage from rape reforms because these reforms strengthen the “penal state.” She argues, “after decades of using criminal law as *the primary vehicle* to address sexualized violence, the time is ripe for feminists to reassess continued involvement in rape reform” (Gruber, 2009, 581) (italics added). Bumiller and Gruber pay little attention to the scholarly literature that demonstrates how feminists in the early 1970s through the 1990s were well aware of the shortcomings of state-based strategies such as reform of criminal law.

Debates within the U.S. anti-rape movement about strategies to combat sexual assault started soon after the movement’s emergence around 1970. These activists grappled with the

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implications of institutional reform, the failures of the criminal justice system to enact true social change, and the racist biases of law enforcement. Activism by feminists of color, in particular, called these strategies into question, recognizing that cooperation with law enforcement—while seeking justice for victims—would implicate the movement in the scapegoating and criminalization of men of color (Bevacqua, 2000). White feminists also debated these issues from the early days of the anti-rape movement. Feminist Alliance Against Rape, based in Washington, D.C., published robust discussions in their newsletter about the relationship between communities of color and law enforcement. For example, anti-rape activist Jan BenDor of the Michigan Women’s Task Force on Rape explained in a 1975 FAAR newsletter the dilemma facing anti-rape feminists at the time: “how to use a corrupt and racist criminal justice system to enforce the laws against sexual assault, without reinforcing corruption, racism, and classism” (BenDor, 1975). Anti-rape feminists vigorously debated these questions. If the anti-rape movement was going to work with the criminal justice system to improve the institutional response to rape victims, where would that leave women of color, who were and are accustomed to mistreatment by police? Even if a woman of color received humane treatment by police, could men of color accused of rape be dealt with fairly by institutional actors? Could a movement to end rape cooperate with a criminal justice system imbued with racism?

However, addressing the criminal justice system was a necessary component of the anti-rape campaign because of law enforcement’s well-documented mistreatment of victims. Anti-rape activists usually coupled state-based strategies with radical strategies, including street patrols, self-defense training, guerilla actions, and the creation of safe houses in the 1970s (Bevacqua, 2000, 66-80) to strengthen the movement in its press for meaningful change. For example, in 1973, New York Women Against Rape, a radical feminist rape crisis center project,

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coalesced with Women's Anti-Rape Coalition, whose goals were to raise public awareness of sexual assault and to repeal New York's notorious corroboration law (Bevacqua, 2001, 169). Activists in the 1970s campaign against sexual assault were well aware that larger, more sweeping societal transformation was necessary for the eradication of rape; however, they identified near-term steps, such as criminal justice reform, that could be taken to begin addressing this social problem. The classic social movement decision facing these activists—reform or revolution?—would not be resolved lightly. The anti-rape movement was not a single strategy to address sexual violence, but a constellation of activities, tactics, and reforms—large- and small-scale, short-term and revolutionary—to be taken as a whole.

This last point indicates the significant flaw in the narratives of decline—they tend to zero in on a single facet of a complicated whole. While individual components of anti-rape strategy were necessarily limited if taken on their own, their influence has had a profound effect when considered in the context of the entirety of the movement. The evidence points to a movement that was dynamic and intertwined: legal reformers, rape crisis center founders, self-defense strategists, theorists, street performers, and more, saw their work as contributing to the anti-rape movement, not as constituting the movement all by itself. The authors have argued elsewhere (-----) that 1970s anti-rape campaigners capitalized on the law-and-order climate in the Congress and state legislatures to promote tougher rape laws. As elected officials of that time period (and in subsequent decades) jockeyed to position themselves as tough on crime, feminists were handing them a ready-made criminal justice issue to advance. Such activists were not naïve to the implications of their strategy; instead, they saw such legal maneuvering as a necessary step to pursue every avenue available to address sexual assault.

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The evolution of rape crisis centers has also been criticized as emblematic of the anti-rape movement's decline. The activists who conceived and developed rape crisis centers (beginning in 1972) soon noted that their ability to provide any services at all depended on access to reliable, stable funding. They came to understand that an operation run entirely on volunteer power would be unsustainable, particularly as the immensity of the problem of sexual violence became better understood. Pursuing such funding meant cooperating with funders, whether philanthropic organizations, federal, state, and local governments, or a combination. The early rape crisis center activists, however, challenged onerous conditions placed on that funding. For example, they refused to comply with initial mandates that the centers only provide services to victims who report to police, successfully arguing that their interest was in the well being of rape victims, who might or might not choose to report rape to police. Such a mandate would be cruel and would essentially prevent the center staff from reaching those who had any reason to be concerned about going to police, particularly victims of color. Mandated reporting soon died out as a condition of government funds (Bevacqua, 2000).

Funders' preference for professionalization of rape crisis services brought about a gradual change from activist staff and consciousness-raising practices to the rise of credentialed staff and standardized services. Scholars disagree whether such changes have amounted to the erasure of feminist and political priorities of the anti-rape movement (Campbell, Baker, and Mazurek, 1998). For example, scholars such as Wendy Brown (1995) refer to this professionalization and depoliticization as feminism's "therapeutic turn" when the movement shifted away from collective efforts for social change toward individualistic efforts to improve the lives of individual survivors (see also, e.g., Echols, 1990; Rapping, 1996). Such a turn may seem misguided to feminists who aim for fundamental institutional changes rather than individualistic,

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psychoanalytic approaches. The medicalization of child sexual abuse, says Armstrong (1994), places the focus on individuals and families rather than on the power structures and institutions that enable the abuse in the first place. Similar to the critiques of Corrigan and Bumiller, these scholars suggest that focus on the individual at the expense of the collective is key evidence of the feminist anti-violence movement's decline.

However, the feminist anti-rape movement is and was a complex constellation of approaches to address sexual assault, and therapeutic services delivered by compassionate individuals with psychological training quickly became a necessity in this campaign. The deep psychological wounds of sexual assault often required extensive emotional support, and rape crisis centers desperately needed professionals who possessed the training to provide it. While some may focus on the privileging of credentials ("letters after a name"), center staff recognized the need for support groups and other clinical services to assist survivors. The professionalization of rape crisis centers did not reduce sexual assault to individualistic, clinical pursuits; instead, the provision of such services was vital to the victims and survivors who needed them most *and* performed the political work of shaping the identities of survivor activists. As Nancy Whittier argues, social movement reform of therapeutic approaches to sexual assault, which she called "therapeutic activism," is "not simply to affirm victimization, but to cast off its emotional effects and to reposition its subjects within the state and culture" (2009, 11). Scholarship that dismisses the therapeutic strategies of social movement organizations ignores the role these efforts play in building movements and encouraging social change.

Moreover, when one considers a more expansive and inclusive array of anti-rape activisms, a complex picture emerges. In addition to working within the legal and medical systems, the movement has fought for institutional and social change. Diverse activists have led

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these efforts, including women of color, young women and men. To create social change on sexual assault, these activists have engaged a wide range of strategies, including media campaigns, street patrols, direct action, community education, campus initiatives, and more. This activism has built on the foundation laid by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s to continue the progression toward the ultimate goal: a world without rape.

### **Part 2: Beyond Criminal Justice Solutions to Rape: Ongoing Movement Strategies to Create Systemic and Social Change**

By focusing narrowly on interpersonal sexual assault, on rape crisis centers, and on segments of the anti-violence movement that have pursued criminal justice remedies, narratives of decline ignore significant developments in activism against rape and sexual assault over the last two decades. During this time, many activists have been working in a range of contexts and with a wide array of strategies. In fact, a significant strain within the anti-violence movement has directly challenged criminal justice approaches to sexual assault. This part of the paper will document two alternatives to criminal justice approaches to sexual assault—community-based interventions and initiatives to change social norms related to gender and sexuality. As opposed to criminal justice-based approaches to violence, these alternatives offer a positive vision of community based on ideals of caring, respect, safety, and accountability. By employing non-adversarial strategies of social change that promote women’s and girls’ self-empowerment as well as new social norms of gender and sexuality, this positive vision seeks social change through transformation of people’s hearts, minds, and communities. These kinds of interventions may be overlooked as part of the anti-rape movement because they often do not work on “rape”

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or “sexual violence” as distinct problems, but as part of a larger constellation of racialized violence against communities.

Rather than focusing on rape in isolation from the context in which it occurs, the cutting edge of the current anti-violence movement takes a human rights and economic justice approach to social change similar to the reproductive justice movement. The reproductive justice movement focuses not just on the negative right not to have children, but on the positive rights to have and raise children. Whereas the mainstream pro-choice movement focuses on opposing state interference to abortion and contraception access narrowly defined, the reproductive justice movement advocates for reproductive self-determination and targets the systemic factors and social conditions that constrain women’s reproductive decisions. This approach encompasses not only individual civil and political rights, but also economic, social, sexual, and cultural rights of women and the communities in which they live. “Access to resources and services, economic rights, freedom from violence, and safe and healthy communities are all integral to [reproductive justice organizations’] expanded vision” (Silliman, Fried, Ross, & Gutierrez, 2004, 6).

Like the reproductive justice movement, the broader movement opposing sexual assault focuses on the social and economic conditions that make women vulnerable to violence, including sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, and exploitative economic systems. Also like the reproductive justice movement, this movement focuses on a broader array of conduct and contexts—not only rape and sexual assault, but also sexual coercion and harassment; not only on interpersonal assault, but also on institutional and state violence. The leaders of this movement articulate a positive vision of female self-determination and a caring and accountable community, rather than just a punitive approach to violence. While the leaders of rape crisis centers are largely middle-aged white women, the leaders of this

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broader movement are women of color, men, and young people. In the next two sections of this paper, we will provide evidence of some instances of the activism of these groups—focusing on community-based interventions and initiatives to change social norms of gender and sexuality, which will demonstrate how the movement was and is much broader than simply criminal justice and therapeutic strategies.

### **A. Community-Based Interventions**

A major strand of resistance to criminal justice approaches to sexual violence has emerged from women of color activists around the country. This activism has been led by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, an organization that seeks to end violence against women, gender non-conforming, and trans people of color and their communities through “direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing” (<http://www.incite-national.org/>). In 2000, INCITE! organized a conference with over two thousand women of color in Santa Cruz, California to “articulate a more radical conception of what is entailed under the category of ‘violence against women’” (Bierria, 2007). This comprehensive understanding addresses sexual assault within the broader context of violence in and against communities of color. A major focus of this activism has been challenging sexual violence within the criminal justice system itself. In 2005, INCITE! launched a project on law enforcement violence against women of color and transgender people of color. They created a toolkit for organizers working to address police brutality, produced in collaboration with a broad array of groups across the country.<sup>1</sup> INCITE! has embraced a “transformative justice” approach to violence, which “seeks safety and accountability without relying on alienation, punishment, or state or systemic violence, including incarceration or policing” (Kershner et al., 2007, 5).



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INCITE! criticizes the mainstream women's anti-violence movement for relying on the criminal justice system, but they also criticize the anti-prison movement for failing to incorporate gender and sexuality into their analysis and organizing, and for not responding adequately to the needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence (INCITE! & Critical Resistance, 2001). Echoing Kimberle Crenshaw's critique of the exclusion of the experiences of black women from both the civil rights and women's movements (Crenshaw, 1991), INCITE! calls attention to the invisibility of police sexual violence in discussions of police brutality as well as discussions about violence against women. In their pamphlet titled, "Police Brutality Against Women of Color and Trans People of Color," they argue that "Native, Black, Latina, Asian, and Arab women and girls have been and continue to be harassed, profiled, strip searched, body cavity searched, raped, beaten, and murdered by agents of the state on a systemic basis" (INCITE!, n.d.; see also, Figure 1). They cite a 2002 study "Driving While Female" (Walker & Irlbeck) documenting over 400 cases in one year of sexual harassment and abuse of women by police during traffic stops. They emphasize that this violence is perpetrated by "ALL sectors of law enforcement, including local and state police, immigration enforcement (such as ICE, Border Patrol, and Customs), Drug Enforcement Agents, the FBI, private security forces, and military forces" (INCITE!, n.d.). In January 2016, an Oklahoma jury convicted police officer Daniel Holzclaw for sexual assault and other offenses after thirteen African American women, including a 17 year old girl and a 57 year old grandmother, accused him of assaulting them while patrolling their low-income neighborhood (Larimer, 2016).



Figure 1: Poster, designed by Cristy C. Road, produced as part of the INCITE! campaign to end law enforcement violence against women of color and trans people of color. Source:

<http://www.incite-national.org/page/posters>.

Noting how often women of color who call the police for help end up abused by the responding officers, INCITE! calls for “sustainable alternatives” to police intervention and “community-based systems for safety, support, and accountability.” (INCITE!, n.d.). INCITE! emphasizes community organizing by building coalitions, documenting state violence, collectively resisting state violence through base-building and direct action, and organizing to “develop responses to violence in our homes and communities so that we do not have to rely on law enforcement” (INCITE!, n.d.). Activists share their strategies for community accountability through publications (Durazo, Bierria, & Kim, 2011-2012; Chen, Dulani, & Piepzn-Samarasinha, 2011), in an online collective knowledge base and resource center produced by INCITE! (<https://communityaccountability.wordpress.com/>), and at conferences. In March of 2015 in Chicago, Illinois, INCITE! held its fourth Color of Violence conference, “Beyond the State,” which highlighted “emerging strategies, movements, and frameworks that focus on ending violence without relying on policing, mass incarceration, and other systems of violence and control” (<http://www.colorofviolence.org/>).

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Emphasizing state violence rather than interpersonal violence, INCITE! focuses on systemic root causes of violence rather than the more common individual-level analysis of violence. INCITE! connects sexual violence to broader systems of oppression which enable it, including colonialism, racism, capitalism, heterosexism and patriarchy. In their 2001 statement, they call for recognition of “the role of economic oppression, welfare ‘reform’ and attacks on women workers’ rights in increasing women’s vulnerability to all forms of violence” (INCITE! & Critical Resistance, 2001, 3). INCITE! founder Andrea Smith argues that “our strategies to combat violence within communities (sexual/domestic violence) must be informed by approaches that also combat violence directed against communities, including state violence—police brutality, prisons, militarism, racism, colonialism, and economic exploitation” (Smith, 2005, 151). This broad intersectional and systemic approach to violence is similar to the reproductive justice framing of reproductive rights that calls for “the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality and reproduction for ourselves, our families and our communities in all areas of our lives” (Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, 2005, 1).

INCITE! is not alone in challenging the state. Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA) in Seattle, Washington has also challenged the anti-violence movement’s partnership with the criminal justice system and uses “community organizing, critical dialogue, artistic expression, and collective action as tools to build safe, peaceful, and sustainable communities” (<http://cara-seattle.blogspot.com/>). CARA argues that the War on Drugs has led to the incarceration of thousands of survivors of rape and abuse, which continues in prisons that have extremely high rates of sexual violence and exploitation. For immigrants, the War on Terror has led to increasing collaboration between federal immigration law enforcement and local police,

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which decreases the likelihood that immigrant survivors will seek help from police. CARA also argues that prisons waste critical public resources that communities could use to create their own safety and accountability strategies and that they do not change abusive people but often make them more abusive. CARA describes prisons as a “simple solution to complex social problems” that actually “increases violence in our communities” (Communities Against Rape and Abuse, n.d., 3). CARA has developed community-based strategies for safety, support, and accountability (Bierria et al., 2006, 250).

Other grassroots organizations around the country have developed and promoted community-based interventions as an alternative to criminal justice responses to violence.<sup>2</sup> For example, New York City-based LGBT youth of color organization FIERCE coordinates copwatch teams in the West Village that observe and document police interaction with community members using video cameras (<http://www.fierceny.org/campaigns/copwatch-know-your-rights>). Creative Interventions in Oakland, California, has published a toolkit to help people develop “grounded, thoughtful community responses” that “build[] on our connections and caring rather than looking at solutions that rely only on separation and disconnections from our communities” (Creative Interventions, 2012, 1). Creative Interventions developed STOP—StoryTelling and Organizing Project—to promote storytelling to share experiences with community-based accountability models and interventions to violence.

Many young activists are using technology to engaged in direct action strategies to build safer communities. One example is the group RightRides for Women’s Safety, founded in 2004 in New York City. RightRides provides free, safe, late-night rides home for women and LGBTQNC individuals. The next year, the founders of RightRides created Hollaback!, which uses technology to combat street harassment (Kearl, 2010, xii). Activists photograph their

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harassers and post the photographs to Hollaback!’s website along with narrative accounts of their encounters with offenders. Through “documenting, mapping, and sharing incidents of street harassment,” activists expose harassment, refusing to be intimidated by it ([www.ihollaback.org/](http://www.ihollaback.org/)). As of 2015, Hollaback! operated in 80 cities, 20 countries, and in 10 languages (<http://www.ihollaback.org/about/faqs/#globalsl>). Local activists post photographs and narrative accounts of their encounters with offenders. Through sharing stories, staging public events, making documentaries, and creating visual and performance art, Hollaback! is trying to change social norms around street harassment (Kearl, 2010, 165-203). While they support anti-harassment ordinances and calling law enforcement if necessary, their focus is on public awareness and education. Baltimore Hollaback! has a Creating Safer Spaces campaign where they ask businesses to pledge to ensure a safe, non-threatening environment (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Creating Safer Spaces campaign poster designed by Kristen Argenio at Ideal Design Co. Source: <http://www.idealdesignco.com/2013/06/17/recent-project-highlight-poster-design-for-hollaback-baltimore/>

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These businesses pledge to take gender-based harassment and violence seriously, to deal with the harasser, and to offer support resources if needed <http://bmore.ihollaback.org/safer-spaces-campaign/>. In 2009, RightRides and Hollaback created New Yorkers for Safe Transit, with the goal of “eradicating gender-based harassment and violence in mass transit” (Kearl, 2010, xii). Another organization working against sexual harassment is Stop Street Harassment (SSH), which began as a website and blog in 2008 and is now a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. SSH conducts research and public education on street harassment and works to mobilize communities to take action against street harassment (<http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/about/>). These organizations are taking action to prevent sexual violence by challenging the behavior directly, without relying on the police or the criminal justice system.

These community-based efforts are part of a long tradition of women organizing alternative models of self-protection that do not rely on the criminal justice systems. These interventions, notes Vikki Law, “emphasize[] the importance of community—as opposed to individual—actions and responses” (Law, 2011, 92). Contrary to narrative of decline, these organizations are evidence of a vibrant and widespread movement challenging criminal justice approaches and advocating community-based interventions for violence against women.

Despite critiques of the criminal justice system and the focus on community-based interventions, many activists of color still recognize the importance of legal reform. In fact, some grassroots efforts have legal and institutional change as part of their goals. Combined approaches, some aimed at established systems and others operating entirely apart from them, may be at work simultaneously in advocating for similar populations. For example, legal scholar

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Sarah Deer (2015) argues for the importance of the Tribal Law and Order Act (2010) and the Violence Against Women Act reauthorization (2013) for Native American women. TLOA “enhances tribes' authority to prosecute and punish criminals” (<https://www.justice.gov/tribal/tribal-law-and-order-act>), and the VAWA reauthorization gives Native tribes jurisdiction to prosecute intimate partner rapes committed by non-Indians against Native victims (for political reasons, this jurisdiction was not extended to stranger and acquaintance rapes, according to Deer [2015, 104-5]). Both laws were “built on the blood, sweat, and tears of Native women and their allies” (Deer 2015, 106), a fact that affirms the ongoing need for anti-rape activists to engage with legal reforms in the interest of rape victims in disenfranchised communities. Activists have also used the courts to challenge prison correctional officers' sexual abuse of incarcerated women. In *Neal et al. v. Michigan Department of Corrections*, thirty-two women brought a class-action lawsuit to challenge rape and sexual abuse by male correctional officers. After fifteen years of litigation, the lawsuit settled in 2008 with over 800 women receiving compensation for their injuries (Fedock et al., 2016).

Other groups balance working on public policy while also addressing broader cultural issues. The Women of Color Network is a coalition of organizations that work “in and beyond the fields of domestic violence and sexual assault to address a broad range of violence affecting communities of color” (Women of Color Network, 2016) Members include ALIANZA: National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence, Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, Casa de Esperanza, Clan Star, and the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project, National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, and Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault. To achieve the goal of ending violence against women of color and their communities, WOCN focuses on

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the “global context of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, and other forms of oppression that intersect with violence against women of color and their communities” (WOCN, 2016). WOCN supports public policy reform, but also works on broader cultural and institutional reforms.

The success of community-based interventions, however, hinge on the attitudes of community members. In her book *Conquest*, Andrea Smith describes how the sovereign status of Native American communities has allowed them to develop community-based justice programs. While these programs are often successful for addressing child sex abuse, they are often not successful for addressing sexual assault of adult women, who are blamed for sexual assault and who are pressured to “‘forgive and forget’ in tribal mediation programs that focus more on maintaining family and tribal unity than on providing justice and safety for women” (Smith, 2005, 141). Therefore, changing social norms around gender and sexuality is key to the success of community-based interventions. In fact, efforts to change social norms have been a major focus of the anti-violence movement over the last twenty years. To do this, activists have used a variety of strategies, including public demonstrations and displays, the arts and storytelling, educational programs, and film. The next section will describe initiatives to change social norms relating to gender and sexuality through public education and demonstrations, arts and theater, college campus activism, men’s activism against sexual assault, media campaigns, and youth empowerment.

### **B. Initiatives to Change Social Norms Relating to Gender and Sexuality**

From the beginning, the anti-rape movement focused on raising awareness about sexual assault and challenging attitudes that trivialized sexual assault or blamed survivors (Bevacqua,



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2000, 59). Through consciousness-raising and speak outs, take back the night marches, theater and music, magazines and newsletters, women in the 1970s attempted to challenge social norms that excused rape. These efforts supported campaigns for legal reform, which were largely successful (Corrigan, 2013, 34-36). While legal reform was a major component of the anti-rape movement in the 1970s, a significant part of the movement was suspicious about the effectiveness of legal reform, in light of the sexism and racism of the courts and criminal justice system (Bevacqua, 2000). These activists believed that sexual violence was rooted in gendered inequalities that normalized and enabled oppression. Therefore, challenging sexism, racism and other forms of structural oppression in legal and therapeutic interventions as well as in society in general became a critical strategy for ending sexual assault. Early rape crisis centers engaged in innovative strategies to change people's understandings of rape and sexual assault and to prevent rape, such as drafting model policies for prevention and sending them to universities and colleges around the United States (Schmitt and Martin, 1999).

These efforts have continued and proliferated in the last twenty years, especially in light of the ineffectiveness of legal reform. While rape crisis centers do some of this work, other organizations have sprung up whose primary mission is to educate the public about sexual assault and challenge social norms that lead to this behavior. In the 1980s, the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault started a sexual assault awareness week in April, which was expanded in 2001 to a whole month of educational programs and awareness actions (<http://www.nsvrc.org/saam/what-is-saam/history>). Strategies for sexual assault awareness and education have included public demonstrations, art displays and dramatic performances, campus organizing, online activism and media campaigns, and the development of curricula for use in

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secondary schools, colleges and universities. Young people, particularly on college campuses, and men have been leaders of much of this activism.

Public demonstrations against sexual assault began in the 1970s with speak outs and take back the night marches, which continue today on college campuses and in communities across the United States. But new forms of public demonstration have also emerged. Starting in the 1990s, anti-rape activists organized Clothesline Project demonstrations, which are an action where women affected by violence decorate shirts to express their anger and then the shirts are hung on a clothesline to be viewed by others as testimony to the problem of violence against women (<http://www.clotheslineproject.org/>). More recently, in 2011, young women in Toronto organized a demonstration they called Slutwalk to protest victim-blaming by a police officer (Carr, 2013; Mendes, 2015).

In addition to public demonstrations, activists have used theater and art to break the silence about sexual assault and generate conversations about gendered and racial systems of oppression. Interactive theater is a broadly used strategy to open discussion and engage people about sexual assault. The Form Project, Mixed Company Theatre, The Thambo Project, Action Work, Urban Improv, and El Pueblo Integral are a few of the grassroots organizations that use Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) to create interactive theater to educate people about sexual assault. A study on the effectiveness of using theater to change social norms relating to sexual assault concluded that "experiential, interactive, embodied learning seems to be a particularly effective practice for creating attitudes and behaviors that are aimed at preventing sexual assault from occurring" (Christensen, 2012, 120). Performance art is another strategy anti-rape activists used. For example, in the fall of 2014, Columbia college student Emma Sulkowicz staged a "Carry that

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Weight/Mattress Performance” project to raise awareness about sexual assault: she pledged to carry a mattress everywhere she went on campus until the administration expelled the student who assaulted her, an action which has spread to other campuses around the country (Taylor, 2014). Similarly, many organizations are using art to raise awareness about sexual assault. For example, Arte Sante, formed in 2001 in Austin, Texas and serving Latina women, promotes prevention and survivor empowerment through the arts, including mixed media, digital art, painting, drawing, photography, and installation art (<http://www.arte-sana.com/about.htm>). The Long Walk Home, formed in 2003 in Chicago, Illinois is an organization that uses art therapy and the visual and performing arts to end sexual assault (<http://www.alongwalkhome.org/about.php>). These are just a few of the many organizations that use the arts to raise public awareness about sexual violence.

Particularly strong campaigns to change social norms have arisen on college campuses, among K-12 students, and in men’s anti-rape groups. In the 1980s, student anti-rape groups sprung up on college campuses around the country. These groups held speak outs and take back the night marches, organized escort programs, engaged in peer education about sexual assault, and offered self-defense classes. They also pushed for campus policies against rape (Bevacqua, 2000, 163-168). These efforts continue today, but students are also publishing magazines and using the internet and film to raise awareness about sexual assault. For example, in the spring of 2012, students at Amherst College began publishing a print and online magazine called *It Happens Here*, described as a “safe space for survivors of sexual violence and relationship abuse to speak about their experiences, in an effort to break down misconceptions and stereotypes about this form of violence, its victims, and its perpetrators” (<http://ithappenshereamherst.wordpress.com/about/>). The magazine includes testimonies of

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assault, letters to rapists, poetry, analytical essays, and photography. Students are also on Twitter at @ItHappensHereAC. Other colleges have subsequently created “It Happens Here” projects, like Tufts University in 2014 (<http://ihhtufts.wix.com/ihhtufts>). Shortly after the publication of the first issue of *It Happens Here* at Amherst College, the Amherst student newspaper published the open letter of a student, Angie Epifano (2012), describing her experience of rape and the College’s abusive treatment of her. Epifano’s essay received widespread publicity and led to a surge in anti-rape activism. In addition to publications, students have screened the film *The Hunting Ground* (2015) to raise awareness about the epidemic of sexual assault on campus and the failure of university administrations to address rape on campus. As awareness has increased, students have formed new organizations, like Know Your Title IX, founded by survivor Dana Bolger, and End Rape on Campus, founded by survivor Annie Clark. These organizations and others founded by young women are mobilizing a renewed campus movement aimed both at raising awareness, changing social norms and creating more effective administrative responses.

In pursuit of the latter, students have filed civil rights cases against educational institutions under Title IX. For example, Epifano and another student sued Amherst College in 2013 (Mishkin & Rodriguez, 2013). Civil rights litigation provides an institutional-level alternative to criminal prosecution of individual perpetrators. These lawsuits attempt to compel educational institutions to adopt effective policies and training in order to create a safer educational environment. This approach—a civil suit against the college rather than a criminal case against a perpetrator—addresses sexual assault at the institutional level, creating the possibility of changing the culture of an institution. Students around the country are filing Title IX lawsuits against colleges and universities in hopes of institutional and cultural change on campuses. The impact of student activism on college campuses is reflected in the fact that, as of

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March 2016, the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights was investigating over two hundred complaints at over one hundred and sixty schools across the United States (Cohen & St. Claire, 2016). Some of these efforts are addressed at creating campus-based judicial systems that in some ways mirror off-campus rape crisis centers and criminal justice system responses to sexual assault (although differing in significant ways). However, these actions also have wider effects associated with grassroots movements like educating the community about sexual assault and changing attitudes and responses to the issue on campus.

In response to student activism and litigation, colleges and universities have created offices, centers, and policies to address sexual harassment and assault. With funds made available from the Violence Against Women Acts, many sexual assault centers opened on college campuses around the country in the late 1990s and 2000s. While these centers counseled survivors of sexual assault, including advising them through campus disciplinary procedures, they also spent a significant part of their efforts on prevention, including education. This shift toward prevention through education is reflected in the American College Health Association's (AHCA) 2007 position statement advocating a cultural shift on campuses toward a "caring community" that "adopts healthy and caring sexual attitudes and practices" and "reflects civility, honor, respect, and nonviolence," which requires colleges to "infuse messages about healthy sexuality and sexual violence prevention into the curriculum at all levels" (AHCA, 2008, 5). To this end, AHCA has produced a toolkit with strategies to prevent sexual assault on campus, including roundtable discussions, events, trainings, workshops and the involvement of student groups to educate themselves and their peers. They advocate "primary prevention," which means "community and society wide changes" to end sexual assault and "changing social norms" (AHCA, 2008, 7-8). Many colleges and communities now have bystander intervention programs,

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which train individuals to intervene if they observe a sexual assault or a situation that might lead to sexual assault (Martin, June 2016). Even local businesses are getting involved in spotting and preventing assaults, such as the Safe Bar Initiative, which trains bar staff in college towns to intervene in situations that could lead to sexual violence (<https://www.facebook.com/sbiMN/>). Other campuses are using theater to educate students about sexual assault (Christensen, 2013). Prevention and awareness programs on college campuses are now required by the Campus SaVE Act, which was part of the 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (113 P.L. 4; 127 Stat. 54).

In addition to college students, younger women have also led campaigns in their schools and communities to change social norms contributing to sexual assault. Girls for Gender Equity, Inc. (GGE), for example, is a Brooklyn-based “coalition-building and youth development organization” that seeks to “change the culture of sexual harassment in schools” (<http://www.ggenyc.org/>). Their vision is to “undertake organizing campaigns to achieve safety and equality in the social, political, educational, athletic, economic, health, and media worlds of the smaller and larger communities in which girls and women live and work” (<http://www.ggenyc.org/about/mission-vision/>), a vision that echoes the social justice framework of INCITE! and the reproductive justice movement. After hearing girls blame an 8-year-old victim of a brutal rape, GGE’s founder Joanne Smith formed Gender Respect Groups, where girls talked about gender stereotypes and discrimination (Smith, Van Deven & Huppuch, 2011). Out of these groups, sexual harassment emerged as a major issue in the lives of the girls. In response, GGE created the Sisters in Strength program—a paid, yearlong youth organizing internship for teen girls of color to work against sexual harassment and assault. The girls’ first project was to educate the community about street harassment. They created a film, “Hey . . .

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Shorty!” which they screened at a Street Harassment Summit. They invited seven other community organizations to facilitate workshops on how to combat sexual harassment (see Figure 3). The film later won the Best Youth Documentary Award at the tenth annual Roxbury Film Festival in Boston.



Figure 2: Poster for the 2007 sexual harassment summit sponsored by Girls for Gender Equity.

Source: <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/toolkits/event/>.

To better understand what was going on in their schools, the young women conducted participatory action research, where community members imagine, design and conduct the research. The girls collected information about sexual harassment and assault by conducting surveys, focus groups, and a blog. Their major finding was that sexual harassment was pervasive, and normalized in New York City schools. Students rarely complained and administrators ignored it, but it had a significantly negative effect on the community, so students wanted more education about sexual harassment. The girls presented their findings at the annual Gender Equity Festival and used them to mobilize people in the community to organize against sexual

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harassment and assault, forming a Coalition for Gender Equity in Schools with over twenty community organizations to support GGE's work. The girls also testified about their findings before the New York City Department of Education.

Finally, men's anti-rape organizations have focused on changing social norms related to masculinity. Groups like Men Stopping Rape, Men Can Stop Rape, and educators like Jackson Katz have led the men's effort to educate other men and boys about sexual assault. Founded in 1983 in Madison, Wisconsin, Men Stopping Rape has provided educational programs to men at colleges, high schools, group homes, churches and prisons, with a focus on males between the ages of 11 and 22 (<http://www.men-stopping-rape.org/mission/>). In these programs, MSR has worked to challenge myths about sexual assault, and they have analyzed cultural ideas of gender and masculinity that lead to sexual assault. MSR also produced brochures, posters and videos to educate the public. Another group, Men Can Stop Rape, founded in Washington, DC in 1997, educates men and boys in order to prevent sexual violence by changing social norms around masculinity and sexuality that lead to sexual assault (<http://www.mencanstoprape.org/>). They have created a 22-week middle and high school curriculum for boys that is used in nine states and Washington D.C.; they hold conferences like the 2015 Healthy Masculinity Summit in Washington D.C.; and they have an expansive public awareness campaign including posters, flyers and postcards that they distribute in schools and post in subways, bus shelters, and on billboards in all fifty states and twenty foreign countries (see Figure 4).





Figure 3: Posters from Men Can Stop Rape’s “Where Do You Stand?” campaign. Source: <http://www.mencanstoprape.org/Strength-Media-Portfolio/preview-of-new-bystander-intervention-campaign.html>.

These are just a few of the many organizations of men and boys opposing sexual assault that have proliferated in the United States over the last decade

(<http://www.mencanstoprape.org/Resources/us-mens-anti-violence-organizations.html>; Messner, Greenberg, & Peretz, 2015; Katz, 2006, 254).

A leader in men’s activism against sexual assault is Jackson Katz, an activist, educator, author, and filmmaker who has been engaged in gender violence prevention education and training for over two decades. Katz focuses on prevention rather than law enforcement or offender treatment strategies. Targeting male-peer culture, Katz calls for a “far-reaching cultural revolution” to change “the sexist social norms in male culture” (Katz, 2006, 7-8). Katz challenges the U.S. rape culture, which “glorifies and sexualizes male power and dominance, and glorifies and sexualizes female subservience and submission” and therefore “actively promotes—or at the very least tolerates—sexual violence” (149). To achieve this goal, Katz works with young men and boys, particularly athletes but also men in the military, to educate

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them about the normalization of sexual violence, particularly in popular culture. Katz believes strongly in teaching media literacy (251) and to that end he and Sut Jhalley of the Media Education Foundation created several educational documentaries that show how popular media represents cultural norms of masculinity that encourage violence, including *Tough Guise* (1999) and *Tough Guise 2* (2013) and *Wrestling with Manhood* (2003). In 1993, Katz established the Mentors in Violence Prevention Program, which encourages young men and women to take leadership roles in their communities using a “bystander” model that empowers each student to take an active role in promoting a positive school climate (<http://www.jacksonkatz.com/mvp.html>). Rather than focusing on women as victims and men as perpetrators, the bystander approach focuses on the role of peers to intervene in sexual assault at schools, on teams, and in the workplace (Katz, 2006, 116). This approach frames men’s violence toward women as a systemic problem rooted in the institutions and cultural practices of a male-dominated society.

Youth activists on college campuses and in secondary schools as well as men’s anti-rape groups like MSR and MCSR have used a broad range of tactics to challenge rape culture, including demonstrations, art and theater, storytelling and blogs, civil litigation, film, and participatory action research. These sorts of grassroots initiatives involving young people challenge norms about gender and sexuality that normalize sexual assault and harassment. Through community-based interventions and initiatives to change social norms relating to gender and sexuality, the contemporary anti-rape movement is reaching far beyond the criminal justice system and the state to engage individuals and communities in the fight to end sexual assault.

## Conclusion

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Rape crisis centers and criminal law enforcement, valuable as this work is, are not the entirety of the movement to end rape and sexual assault today. Without diminishing the pioneering efforts of law reformers and center founders, the leading edge of the movement lies in organizations promoting community-based interventions and working to change social norms relating to gender and sexuality. In contrast to scholars promoting narratives of decline, we argue that the legacy of the early anti-rape movement is not solely the professionalized leaders of rape-crisis centers, but is the transformative justice work of groups like INCITE! and CARA, the direct action work of groups like RightRides and Hollaback! and the social-norm-transforming work of groups like Men Can Stop Rape and Girls for Gender Equity. Women of color, young women and men, in particular, have led the way in developing creative, grassroots responses to sexual assault and harassment, which indicate not the decline of the anti-rape movement but rather its maturation and expansion toward a positive vision of community based on caring, respect, safety, and accountability. A fair assessment of the anti-rape movement must include this work of women of color, as well as young women and men, or risk failing to see how the anti-rape movement, like the movement against domestic violence (Arnold & Ake, 2013), has grown, adapted, and expanded to be more inclusive and to focus on prevention as well as individual and societal transformation.

Noting the lack of current scholarship by sociologists on rape, Patricia Yancey Martin has suggested that scholars believe that research in this area is no longer needed, that the topic is too distressing, or that rape had become an illegitimate topic. She urges social scientists to reengage in research on rape and sexual assault (Martin, February 2016, 38). Similar factors may be motivating scholars who promote narratives of anti-rape movement decline. We urge these scholars and others to look beyond criminal justice and medical approaches to rape and sexual

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assault to include within their research the broader campaign against violence against women that is working outside of these systems to challenge cultures of violence by using community-based transformational justice strategies.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The groups included Critical Resistance (prison abolition), the Audre Lorde Project (LGBTQ people in the New York City area), Sylvia Rivera Law Project (gender identity and expression), FIERCE (LGBT youth of color), Coalición de Derechos Humanos (immigrant rights on the border), Sex Workers' Project (New York City), Communities United Against Violence (LGBTQ anti-violence organization in Seattle) and the Young Women's Empowerment Project (youth in the sex trade and street economy in Chicago).

<sup>2</sup> Some organizations that have engaged in community-based interventions are Creative Interventions in Oakland, California, Communities United Against Violence in San Francisco, Women & Girls Collective Action Network in Chicago, Illinois (Russo & Spatz, 2007), the Harm Free Zone Organizing Committee in Durham, North Carolina, and the Visions to Peace Project in Washington, DC.

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