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Shifting the Blame: Systemic Issue, Individual Responsibility

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Violence Prevention Approaches within Ontario University Sexual Violence Policies

by Rachel L Thomson

Submitted to the Faculty of Liberal Arts

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts in Social Justice and Community Engagement

Wilfrid Laurier University

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Abstract

Sexual violence continues to be a pervasive issue on university campuses. The introduction of Ontario's Bill 132, which mandates that all Ontario universities maintain a policy on addressing sexual violence involving students, indicates an awareness of the need to confront this issue. However, the existing literature demonstrates a need to understand how universities are engaging in addressing sexual violence by identifying whether the policies address the systemic factors that legitimate sexual violence societally and how universities incorporate sexual violence prevention strategies into their policies. This paper employed Foucauldian-informed critical discourse analysis using an intersectional feminist and anti-colonial framework to analyze the publicly available sexual violence policies and associated annual reports from a sample of Ontario universities. While this analysis demonstrated a general awareness by the universities of the link between various systems of oppression and sexual violence, the language of the sexual violence policies did not demonstrate meaningful efforts to address these systems of oppression at a structural level. This lack of structural analysis allows for the persistence of several common rape culture narratives, such as a reliance on carceral processes to deter violence and the use of language which perpetuates victim blaming discourses. Moreover, these narratives were found to inform the violence prevention approaches being employed by the universities, resulting in an effective assignment of responsibility to the individual to manage a systemic issue. This paper concludes with a discussion of what it means to "shift the blame" and the need for post-secondary institutions to meaningfully engage in intersectional and anti-colonial approaches in order to eradicate all forms of gender-based and sexual violence.

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Content Warning

This document describes systemic factors that legitimate sexual violence in society including patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism, cisgenderism, ableism, etc. The section titled "The Legitimation of Sexual Violence in Society", which begins on page 5, contains references to colonial violence on pages 6 and 7, and references to slavery, forced procreation, and white supremacist/racial violence on page 7. Throughout the document there are references to sexual violence, sexual assault, rape, and rape culture narratives.

Introduction & Background – Sexual Violence on University Campuses

Sexual violence on university and college campuses is a pervasive issue that affects a significant proportion of students. While several sources have indicated that up to one in four university-aged women experience at least one incident of sexual assault during their time at university, a recent study found that approximately 58% of a sample of Canadian university students had experienced some form of sexual violence including non-consensual kissing, groping and rape (Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario, 2015; Champion et al., 2021; DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993; Senn et al., 2014). In an effort to address this issue on Ontario campuses, as well as in workplaces, the Government of Ontario launched *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment* in 2015 (*It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*, 2015). As defined by the Government of Ontario, sexual violence refers to any physical or psychological act which is sexual in nature or which targets a person's sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression (*It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*, 2015). This includes any non-consensual act which is committed, threatened, or attempted against a person and may involve sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, and sexual exploitation. It is important to note that by specifying sexual violence to include acts which target sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression this definition also includes acts of transphobia and homophobia as constituting sexual violence. While sexual violence impacts individuals of all genders, including cisgender men and boys, the highest prevalence of sexual violence occurs among women, girls, trans-identified and non-binary people, and queer spectrum individuals (Burczycka, 2020; Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario, 2015; Garvey et al., 2017; Lee & Wong, 2019; Marine, 2017). Moreover, nearly three quarters of all students have either experienced or witnessed unwanted sexualized behaviours in a post-secondary setting (Burczycka, 2020).

As part of the *It's Never Okay* action plan, Bill 132 "*Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act (Supporting Survivors and Challenging Sexual Violence and Harassment)*" was enacted in 2016. Bill 132

requires that all Ontario colleges and universities have a stand-alone sexual violence policy in place to address sexual violence involving students, and that all colleges and universities publish a publicly-available yearly report on their activities associated with their sexual violence approach (Bill 132: An Act to Amend Various Statutes with Respect to Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment, Domestic Violence and Related Matters, 2016). The content of the sexual violence policies is governed by Ontario Regulation 131/16, which specifies the inclusion of reporting, response, investigation, and support processes (Ontario Regulation 131/16: Sexual Violence at Colleges and Universities, 2017). Regulation 131/16 also requires that colleges and universities provide training to faculty, staff, and students on sexual violence response procedures included in the policies; however, it is important to note that no specific language exists that requires institutions to engage in sexual violence prevention programs or education.

While the implementation of Ontario's *It's Never Okay* action plan aimed to stop sexual violence and harassment, there are some important questions to be raised about the approach taken in Bill 132 and the policies that were developed in response. For example, the language of Bill 132 represents a reactive approach to sexual violence which focuses on responding to sexual violence *after* the violence has occurred rather than focusing on preventative measures in efforts to reduce the incidence of sexual violence. As Law (2020) states, this reactive approach serves to accept sexual violence as the norm and negates efforts to ameliorate its structural causes. Shifting toward a preventative approach is particularly important because sexual violence has substantial physical and psychological implications which can include injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, sexually transmitted infections and other negative impacts (Lee & Wong, 2019; Senn et al., 2014; Stermac et al., 2017). Recent research has also begun to delve into the specific consequences for post-secondary students, which include reduced academic performance, poor concentration, attendance issues, and dropping out of school (Stermac et al., 2017, 2020). Furthermore, student survivors of sexual violence may modify their behaviour and movements on campus, such as switching

classes, moving their residence, and even transferring campuses to avoid interactions with the perpetrator and/or locations associated with the assault(s) (Stermac et al., 2017). This underscores the importance for colleges and universities to increase their focus on strategies for violence prevention as a means of reducing harm being experienced by students.

Despite the fact that there are no specific requirements for inclusion of prevention initiatives in sexual violence policies, several Ontario university sexual violence policies contain language about sexual violence prevention and/or education, and most universities are engaged in developing programming with the goal of addressing the problem of sexual violence on campus (Francis et al., 2016; Lee & Wong, 2019; Senn et al., 2015; Todorova, 2017). The structure of prevention programming varies between institutions, with common approaches being consent-based education, resistance techniques, and bystander awareness programs (Park, 2017; Senn et al., 2015; Todorova, 2017). These efforts demonstrate a collective awareness among institutional players of the need for violence prevention approaches as an adjunct to the existing sexual violence response policies, but there are important questions to be asked about what these prevention initiatives are focused on and whether they address the persistence of structural inequities that normalize and perpetuate rape culture and sexual violence (Dunne et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2016; Park, 2017). The dynamic of individual versus structural approaches to thinking about sexual violence is discussed further below.

Existing Research on University Sexual Violence Prevention

Several research studies have been undertaken since the introduction of Bill 132 to critically evaluate university sexual violence policies. In general, these studies have demonstrated consistent themes. For example, some studies have identified the need for policies to be more student-centred and to interrogate principles of institutional power and facilitate meaningful support for students (Bellotto et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2016; Root et al., 2020; Salvino et al., 2017; Todorova, 2017). These studies call for increased student engagement with policy development and evaluation to achieve this goal. There were also indicators in the

research of limited student awareness of sexual violence policies and procedures, and an incomplete understanding of issues related to sexual violence among students (Ostridge & O'Connor, 2020; Root et al., 2020; *Student Voices on Sexual Violence:*, 2018). Furthermore, the need for education and training as preventative strategies was frequently identified within the policy studies, as was a critique of the existing education and training measures. Common educational approaches include awareness raising campaigns often deployed during Frosh week, online training modules, and in-person programs such as bystander awareness and sexual assault resistance and risk assessment (Bellotto et al., 2018; Senn et al., 2015).

The body of research into the efficacy of various sexual assault prevention strategies used by universities is growing but is still relatively small. Senn et. al. (2015) conducted a randomized controlled trial for the Enhanced Assess, Acknowledge, Act (EAAA) resistance training program (now known as Flip the Script) which found a relative risk reduction of 46.3% for the outcome of completed rape between the control group (given brochures about sexual violence) and the intervention group (completed the EAAA training). In a later report, Senn et. al. (2021) partially attribute this efficacy to challenging participant's propensity toward victim blaming and beliefs in rape myths, demonstrating the potential for sexual violence prevention approaches which focus on addressing the systemic factors associated with sexual violence. A systematic review conducted by DeGue and colleagues (DeGue et al., 2014) on the efficacy of sexual violence prevention strategies demonstrated a link between violence perpetration and "cognitive factors" such as hypermasculinity and hostility toward women, but found that few sexual violence prevention programs focused on addressing these factors. Educational approaches were more commonly found to focus on increasing knowledge of, or changing attitudes about, sexual violence; however, there was no demonstrable evidence on their efficacy in reducing rates of sexual violence perpetration (DeGue et al., 2014). The conclusions of the DeGue et. al (2014) review demonstrate how individual opinions about sexual violence tend

to reflect systemic discourses, and underscore the difficulty of addressing sexual violence at an individual level within a system that continues to perpetuate rape culture narratives (also see DeGue et al., 2012).

Several researchers and student groups have provided recommendations for a comprehensive approach to preventing sexual violence on campus (Bellotto et al., 2018; Buss et al., 2016; Dunne et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2016; Salvino et al., 2017). In general, these recommendations include increased student involvement in policy and program development, comprehensive education that moves beyond consent (e.g., healthy relationships, masculinities, positive sexuality, etc.), creating a culture of accountability via student engagement, and the involvement of faculty, staff, and student leaders in learning and disseminating sexual violence education throughout the institution including incorporating information in course syllabi. A number of scholars also emphasized that effective violence prevention strategies are predicated upon interrogating and ameliorating the structure of institutional power and the ways in which universities reinforce systemic inequities (Dunne et al., 2020; Harris & Linder, 2017; Hong, 2017; Hunt, 2016; Linder, 2018a; Roskin-Frazee, 2020; Todorova, 2017).

The Legitimation of Sexual Violence in Society

Sexual violence is a major social justice issue which is rooted in systemic inequity and disparate social power (Linder, 2018a; Roberts, 2018; Roskin-Frazee, 2020). Members of dominant social groups (predominantly White[1] cisgender men) have historically employed sexual violence as a tool to establish and maintain social power and control, which continues today in an effort by dominant social groups to retain

[1] The decision to capitalize all racial identity categories including Black, Indigenous, and White was not made lightly. While the capitalization of Black and Indigenous is becoming recognized both as an effort to combat anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and as a sign of respect for the African diaspora and the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island, the capitalization of White has conversely been used by white supremacist groups in an effort to assert a dominance of white identity (Painter, 2020; Thúy Nguyēn & Pendleton, 2020). However, as the Center for the Study of Social Policy (Thúy Nguyēn & Pendleton, 2020), the National Association of Black Journalists (*NABJ Statement on Capitalizing Black and Other Racial Identifiers*, 2020), and other Black scholars (Appiah, 2020; Ewing, 2020; Painter, 2020) have identified, choosing not to capitalize White effectively renders whiteness as the "neutral" or "standard" identity while further absolving White individuals of the responsibility for considering their complicity in racialization and white supremacy. With respect to these considerations, "White" is capitalized when referring to groups of people, while lower-case "w" is used when referencing discourses related to whiteness such as white feminism and white supremacy.

access to the benefits provided by systems of oppression such as white supremacy and patriarchy (Linder, 2018a). Understanding sexual violence as a function of disparate power and a tool of subjugation enables us to identify factors that influence the perpetuation of rape culture and the normalization of sexual violence, such as structural subordination of and disrespect for women, normative binary gender stereotypes, and patriarchal ideals of masculinity which simultaneously encourage men to behave in sexually aggressive ways while also rendering invisible the experiences of sexual violence suffered by boys and men (Hong, 2017; Law, 2020).

When we understand sexual violence as a function of disparate social power, we illuminate the reasons why Indigenous, racialized, dis/abled, queer spectrum, transgender and gender diverse individuals are targeted for sexual violence at significantly higher rates than White cisgender women (Bourassa et al., 2017; Crenshaw, 1991; Garvey et al., 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Hong, 2017; Mailhot Amborski et al., 2021; Marine, 2017; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019). Indeed, rape culture and sexual violence are tools of subjugation that originated with colonization and thus are inevitably intertwined with white supremacist and racist logics (Harris, 2017; Hunt, 2016; Simpson, 2014). The creation and settlement of Canada could not have happened without violence against Indigenous women, as obtaining control over the land required the subjugation of women who were traditionally responsible for issues related to caring for and using the land (Simpson, 2014; *Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies - Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence*, 2017). Furthermore, the imposition of colonial binary gender roles influenced the eradication of gender fluidity and the legitimation of a hierarchy of men over women leading to various forms of gendered violence including violence against Two-Spirit and trans-identified communities (Simpson, 2014; *Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies - Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence*, 2017). The legacy of the colonial gender binary persists as a narrative within rape culture, which legitimates the targeting of individuals who are viewed as disrupting and destabilizing gender by not conforming to normative gender ideals (Linder,

2018a; Marine, 2017). It is important to recognize that it is impossible to separate the issues of sexual violence and rape culture from violent colonial origins and the continued colonization of Indigenous peoples to the present day, and thus also impossible to effectively address sexual violence without actively engaging in decolonization (Hunt, 2016; Simpson, 2014; *Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies - Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence*, 2017).

Sexual violence as a tool of control was similarly used by enslavers to exert control over enslaved people (Carrigan Wooten, 2017; Harris, 2017; Linder, 2018a). Forced procreation via raping enslaved women also increased the enslavers economic power, as children of enslaved people were considered to be the enslavers property (Harris, 2017; Linder, 2018a). Following emancipation, White people continued to use sexual violence to instill a culture of fear and maintain dominance over Black people, committing rape against Black people and making frequent false accusations of rape against Black men to encourage lynching and other violence (Linder, 2018a). Positioning Black men as frequent perpetrators of sexual violence has persisted as the dominant conceptualization of the typical perpetrators of sexual violence as Black cisgender men and the typical victims as White cisgender women (Linder, 2018a; Marine, 2017).

Conceptualizing Rape Culture and Sexual Violence in the University Context

Rape culture refers broadly to the persistent societal discourses that normalize and legitimate sexual violence within society and which position the woman as responsible for or deserving of sexual violence (Bourassa et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2016; Oliver et al., 2020; Park, 2017). For example, violent language used by male-identified students expressing desires to “hate fuck” their woman-identified peers was reduced to “locker room talk” (Bourassa et al., 2017), while woman-identified students reported an awareness of the underlying assumptions about the causes of sexual violence including wearing improper clothing or drinking too much (Oliver et al., 2020). Rape culture discourses serve to perpetuate a number of rape myths, such as the idea that women frequently make false accusations of sexual violence, that sexual violence is more likely

to occur in isolated locations and be perpetrated by strangers, that individuals with more sexual experience are somehow more deserving of rape, and that a woman derives pleasure from being sexually assaulted (Hayes et al., 2013; O'Connor et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2020; Whalley & Hackett, 2017). In an intersectional context, rape culture narratives also position Indigenous and racialized women and girls as inherently disposable, inviolable, and hypersexual, which contributes to both the increased rates at which Indigenous and racialized individuals are targeted for sexual violence and the relative lack of support and response as compared to White individuals following an experience of violence (Harris, 2017; Rajiva, 2021). Further, while it is recognized that the majority of incidents of sexual violence are perpetrated by individuals known to the survivor/victim (Godderis & Root, 2017; Jeffrey et al., 2020; Phillips & Chagnon, 2020), it must be noted that Indigenous women are almost three times as likely to be killed by a stranger than are non-Indigenous women (16.5% compared to 6%), making the "stranger danger" myth a much more cogent reality for Indigenous women and girls (Rajiva, 2021). Rape myth acceptance is observed among individuals of all genders, but is more common among men (especially members of all-male groups such as sports teams and fraternities) and is associated with increased likelihood of hostility toward women, increased sexual aggression, and an increased likelihood of perpetrating sexual violence (O'Connor et al., 2018).

When sexual violence *is* recognized as a problem it is discursively framed by dominant social groups in such a way that prevents a critical interrogation of how power is being constructed and maintained (Macias, 2015). For example, sexual violence is often positioned as having, at least partially, been a result of a lack of clarity on behalf of the survivor/victim about whether they wanted to the sexual act to occur (Li et al., 2017; O'Connor et al., 2018). This victim-blaming rhetoric, which is still prevalent on university campuses, leads to a discursive focus on establishing how the decisions and actions made by the survivor/victim contributed to the experience of violence, such as the clothes they were wearing, how much alcohol they consumed, where they were walking and so forth (O'Connor et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2020). Furthermore, sexual violence discourses

are often framed in reference to the survivor/victim (for example, discourses which describe Indigenous women as having an increased risk of experiencing sexual violence) which renders the actions of the perpetrator invisible, contributes to victim-blaming, and obscures the larger structural oppressions within which this violence occurs (Hunt, 2016; Li et al., 2017; Linder, 2018c; Simpson, 2014). Furthermore, as Miller (2000) highlights, attempts by members of non-dominant social groups to resist and reframe dominant discourses in order to focus more on the relationship of power to sexual violence requires that non-dominant groups function cautiously within the constraints of these dominant discourses to exert “power from the underside” (pp330). This can limit a meaningful change in the dominant narratives, as they are maintained by members of dominant social groups who have greater access to social power and who tend to benefit from the continued subordination of non-dominant social groups (Linder, 2018c; Miller, 2000).

These intertwined narratives reinforce a binary understanding of gender, position the survivor/victim of violence as being responsible for the violence that occurred to them, and perpetuate racism in order to uphold dominant patriarchal and racist power relations (Hong, 2017; Linder, 2018a; O’Connor et al., 2018). Moreover, these narratives ignore the reality of individuals who inhabit intersecting marginalized identity categories and the fact that these individuals are more likely to be targets of sexual violence (Crenshaw, 1991; Harris & Linder, 2017; Marine, 2017). For example, it is estimated that approximately 50% of trans individuals have experienced sexual violence, with transfeminine individuals experiencing sexual violence at a rate of 69% (Marine, 2017; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019). Queer-spectrum individuals, Women of Colour, Indigenous women, and dis/abled individuals are also targeted for sexual violence more frequently than heterosexual women, White women, and those who are able-bodied (Bourassa et al., 2017; Garvey et al., 2017; Hong, 2017; Mailhot Amborski et al., 2021).

Bourassa et. al. (2017) argue that the historical construction of universities as White, colonial spaces has resulted in the perception that university populations remain predominantly White, and as a result have

excluded Indigenous women from consideration in policy development. Sarah Ahmed (2012) describes the concept of "institutional whiteness" whereby the "institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others" (pp35). In other words, as universities in Ontario are institutions that were founded by and for White cisgender men, it follows that university policies will not reflect the needs of individuals who inhabit varying identity categories unless those policies are intentionally inclusive of individuals who inhabit those identities. In sum, the persistence of rape culture on university campuses is perpetuated by a hegemonic culture of inequity that exists both within university institutional norms, which fail to address the systemic causes of violence, and within policies that are developed by university authorities without the inclusion of diverse student voices (Francis et al., 2016; Oliver et al., 2020; Todorova, 2017). Moreover, rape culture, and the resulting normalization of sexual violence especially against those who experience intersecting oppressions, has led to an acceptance of an "inevitability" of sexual violence on university campuses (Francis et al., 2016).

The Illusion of Inclusivity – Constructing the Ideal Survivor

As outlined above, mainstream approaches to prevent and respond to sexual violence and rape culture have failed to incorporate an anti-colonial lens and an intersectional analysis, centering White cisgender women by default while ignoring the fact that trans, queer spectrum, dis/abled, Indigenous and racialized individuals are more frequently targeted for sexual violence. In terms of campus culture, this fact also results in members of marginalized groups often experiencing university sexual violence reporting and support systems differently than White individuals (Bourassa et al., 2017; Garvey et al., 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Hong, 2017; Marine, 2017; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019). The lack of an anti-colonial and intersectional policy lens constructs a supposedly identity-neutral vision of the "ideal survivor" that is deserving of institutional support and for whom violence prevention and response programs have been designed. Alison Phipps (2020b) describes the *political grammar of whiteness*, an effective "narcissism of White identity" (pp62),

whereby the views of White people are seen as objective and their experiences universal. This positioning of the ideal survivor as “identity-neutral” reinforces the political grammar of whiteness and creates an illusion of inclusivity, for example by including “multi-cultural counselling services” in policies, but which is fundamentally predicated upon the centering of White voices and experiences (Phipps, 2020b). An identity-neutral approach further demeans students who do not fit within the vision of the ideal survivor and does not begin to address power dynamics that support the persistence of rape culture and the replication of colonial power structures (Bourassa et al., 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Linder, 2018c; Mack & Na’puti, 2019). As a result, Indigenous, racialized, dis/abled, trans, and queer spectrum students may be less likely to report sexual violence or seek support services on campus, and are less likely to receive adequate support when it is sought (Bourassa et al., 2017; Hong, 2017).

The centering of White women as the default survivor/victim in sexual violence narratives is further demonstrated by White feminists’ appropriation of sexual violence activisms such as the me too movement. The me too movement was created in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke, who saw a need for a program that prioritized the needs of Black women and girls due to their being disproportionately targeted for sexual violence (me too, 2021). However, in 2017, actor Alyssa Milano tweeted “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted, write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet” (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018; Phipps, 2020a). The cascade of responses caused the hashtag #MeToo to go viral and resulted in Milano, a White woman, being largely attributed for starting the movement (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018; Phipps, 2020a). This is only one recent example of how White feminists have co-opted the work of Women of Colour: second-wave feminism largely drew from the anti-rape activism of Black women as part of the US Civil Rights movement, among other instances (Phipps, 2020a). The phrase “white feminism” has thus become synonymous with a movement which both appropriates the work of feminists of colour and centers the voices and experiences of White women in sexual violence discourses by identifying sexual violence solely as a function of patriarchal power and denying the

influence of other systems of oppression including colonialism and racism (Carrigan Wooten, 2017; Phipps, 2020b).

A defining feature of mainstream (white) feminism is its reliance on carceral processes such as legislation, police involvement, and an emphasis on the need for punitive responses to sexual violence (Kim, 2018). The term “carceral feminism” refers both to the collaboration between mainstream feminist anti-violence activism with the criminal justice system and also forms a critique of this emphasis on carceral intervention in sexual violence response (Kim, 2018). This critique acknowledges two major issues with mainstream sexual violence responses: first, the widespread criminalization of Indigenous, racialized, queer, and trans individuals by the carceral system, and second, that legal/carceral intervention has failed to adequately address the issue of sexual violence as demonstrated by the continued high prevalence of sexual violence incidents and the extremely low conviction rate for sexual violence cases brought forward into the legal system (Linder, 2018c; Phillips & Chagnon, 2020; Whalley & Hackett, 2017). The reliance on carceral processes continues to center White women as the “ideal survivors”, while ignoring the ways in which individuals from marginalized identity groups experience sexual violence and sexual violence response differently than White cisgender women. For example, Black women often “become the target for policing” when interacting with the police as a survivor of violence (Kim, 2018), while the thousands of unsolved cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women demonstrate their devaluation by the so-called “justice” system (Hunt, 2016). Recognizing these differing experiences with respect to carceral approaches demonstrates that mainstream anti-violence efforts, which focus attempting to deter crime via threatened or actual carceral processes, are not suitable for all survivor/victims, and that there is an urgent need for a truly intersectional and anti-colonial approach toward eradicating sexual violence which recognizes individuality and adjusts support processes accordingly.

Compliance, Performativity, and the Optics of Care

The enactment of Bill 132 demonstrates an assignment of responsibility by the Ontario government to universities to make meaningful efforts toward addressing sexual violence. However, as discussed previously, mainstream approaches toward addressing sexual violence have not adequately recognized the need to address the systemic factors that perpetuate sexual violence and have instead assigned individual responsibility towards eradicating it. In the words of Xhercis Méndez (2020), "*as long as the university has an individual to blame… then there is no need to address the conditions that result in gender-based violence at the institution"* (pp96). Furthermore, Francis et. al. (2019) identified the issue of *institutional silence* (pp22) whereby university efforts to address sexual violence on campus were seen by student interviewees as inadequate, demonstrated in part by a reliance on voluntary student labour for anti-violence activism and a dearth of culturally diverse student services for survivor/victims.

The concept of "doing diversity" (Ahmed, 2012b, pp51) describes the ways in which institutions prioritize the optics of inclusivity over systemic changes that would create a meaningfully inclusive space: a performative approach that does not necessarily signify a commitment to action. This approach is reflective of a greater social trend toward Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, which, as Ahmed argues, function to *signal* institutional values of diversity, but which are often incorporated only to the extent needed to convey a *perception* of action (Ahmed, 2012b, 2012a). In the same vein, Tuck and Yang (2012) warn against using decolonization as a *metaphor* for social justice and human rights issues. Using the term "decolonization" superficially in an attempt to reflect an apparent consideration of the needs of Indigenous Peoples without full consideration of what decolonization means for Indigenous Peoples re-centers whiteness and perpetuates colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In specific relation to sexual violence policy, Méndez (2020) describes the ways in which universities use policy language to fabricate the *optics of care* (pp84). Specifically, Méndez describes the co-opting of social justice language to create the *perception* of efforts towards addressing equity

issues while having no real impact on those issues. In the case of sexual violence on university campuses, "doing diversity" and the fabrication of the "optics of care" occur as part of efforts by the universities to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of Bill 132 while also satisfying individual and societal trends toward equity, diversity, and inclusion (Ahmed, 2012b; Méndez, 2020).

When we consider the "shaping of institutional spaces" (Ahmed, 2012a, pp35) largely by White, cisgender men who embody the "political grammar of whiteness" (Phipps, 2020b, p62), we reveal the risk that universities will fail to effectively engage in the systemic change needed to effectively address sexual violence because those who shape the institutional spaces are not those who are targeted for sexual violence. Thus, the "optics of care" may be viewed by those who shape the space as sufficient effort towards eradicating sexual violence. In university sexual violence policies, using words such as *prevention* or *education* signals efforts by the university to move beyond a response-based strategy, while the use of words such as *decolonial/anti-colonial, intersectional, anti-oppressive,* etc., provide the optics of addressing the root causes of sexual violence. Furthermore, incorporating strategies such as creating dedicated cultural spaces or providing educational workshops on various systems of oppression can provide positive benefit at an individual level, but they do not function to address the structural factors that created the need for these strategies in the first place, making these efforts an example of "doing diversity" (Ahmed, 2012b). Without specific tactics that are designed to address the systems of oppression that legitimate and perpetuate sexual violence, and that are universally applied (i.e., available to everyone at all institutional levels), policy language such as the examples given herein functions as a performative effort which creates an illusion of institutional action without effective systemic change.

Sexual Violence Prevention – Public Health Model

The public health model for sexual violence prevention uses a categorization system for prevention strategies based on the interventional stage at which the strategy occurs: primary, secondary and tertiary

prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004; Linder, 2018b). A primary prevention strategy is one which takes place prior to any sexual violence occurring, and which prevents initial perpetration/victimization (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004; Linder, 2018b). A secondary prevention strategy is an immediate response to sexual violence, which seeks to ameliorate any short-term consequences of that violence and/or prevent the violence from progressing (Carmody et al., 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004; Linder, 2018b). A tertiary prevention strategy, meanwhile, is a longer-term strategy that is employed after violence has occurred, and attempts to deal with longer-term consequences that arise while preventing further perpetration/victimization (Carmody et al., 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004; Linder, 2018b). Thus, a primary prevention strategy would seek to address the underlying causes of sexual violence, and may include efforts to mitigate patriarchal power relations or dissuade rape myth acceptance which both function at the systemic level and have the potential for a wide-ranging impact (Carmody et al., 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004). Secondary prevention strategies might employ strategies such as bystander intervention or resistance efforts to stop violence from continuing (Carmody et al., 2009). While some institutions have implemented secondary prevention strategies like bystander intervention, the existing literature notes that universities tend to rely on tertiary prevention strategies as the basis of many university sexual violence response procedures (Linder, 2018b). These strategies include activities such as immediate (crisis) and longer-term support for survivor/victims as well as disciplinary action and rehabilitation for perpetrators (Carmody et al., 2009). The goals of tertiary prevention include lessening the impact of victimization and deterring further perpetration. While all prevention categories can play a role in addressing sexual violence, primary prevention strategies provide the greatest benefit at both an individual and societal level (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004).

As has been demonstrated in this literature review, sexual violence on Ontario university campuses is a major issue that impacts a high proportion of students. Moreover, recent data from Ontario university student survey participants points to a continued high rate of sexual violence experienced by students as well as a lack of student knowledge about sexual violence policies and how to access support on campus (*Student Voices on Sexual Violence:*, 2018). While there are indicators of institutional awareness of the need for sexual violence prevention initiatives, Bill 132 does not require inclusion of these initiatives within the university sexual violence policies, nor do these policies appear to include a structural conceptualization of sexual violence as it relates to rape culture, colonization, and other intersecting systems of oppressions. Together, this information indicates a knowledge gap surrounding how Ontario universities attempt to engage in the prevention of campus sexual violence, maintain accountability for the implementation of prevention initiatives, and evaluate the impact of these initiatives. Additionally, the literature suggests a need for critically analyzing university sexual violence policies to interrogate how they ameliorate or replicate systemic inequities and power dynamics that perpetuate rape culture on university campuses.

Research Design

This research will provide an in-depth discursive examination of a sample of Ontario university sexual violence policies. As an issue rooted in systemic oppression and disparate social power, sexual violence must be viewed through an anti-oppressive lens with the aim of identifying how systemic inequities can be ameliorated to achieve justice. Interrogating the structures that uphold rape culture and normalize sexual violence requires examining the potential sources of rape culture narratives within those structures. Within the university context, addressing sexual violence necessitates the development and use of robust sexual violence policies to govern institutional approaches (Bourassa et al., 2017). Thus, examining Ontario university sexual violence policies presents an opportunity to evaluate whether policy language mitigates or upholds structural dynamics that contribute to sexual violence, such as rape culture narratives and patriarchal and

colonial assumptions, and hence, whether those policies can be effective in meaningfully preventing sexual violence on campus. An analysis of the associated annual reports published as a requirement of Bill 132 was also conducted in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of actual sexual violence prevention initiatives being undertaken by universities and how these initiatives support university efforts to meaningfully address sexual violence on campus.

Methodological Framework

To ensure a continued focus on systemic issues, a Foucauldian-informed critical discourse analysis was conducted on a sample of Ontario university sexual violence policies and annual reports. This analysis was enhanced and deepened by applying anti-colonial and intersectional feminist frameworks to further interrogate the policies and reports and interpret the results. Discourse includes both discrete written and spoken language as well as the dominant cultural rhetoric upon which social norms are based (Miller, 2000). Recognizing, as Miller (2000) states, that "language constitutes rather than reflects reality" (pp317) enables us to pursue an understanding of how language has a function in constructing our understanding of the world and, as researchers and activists, we can then identify how altering language can enact a shift in dominant narratives (Graham, 2011). Meaningfully addressing systemic inequities presents a challenge when dominant discourses reflect the needs of those who exist at the higher end of the social power spectrum, i.e., those who possess the power to constitute reality (Miller, 2000). Foucauldian discourse analysis enables a critique of how power manifests both in the conduct of sexual violence and in the development and application of policy (Macias, 2015).

In addition, the application of an intersectional feminist lens (Crenshaw, 1991) in this study allowed the researcher to consider how the manifestation of power in policy occurs within the context of various systems of oppression including sexism, racism, ableism, cisgenderism, heterosexism, etc. This lens is essential given that, as established in the literature review, students who inhabit intersecting identity categories are more

likely to be targets of sexual violence and experience inadequate or harmful institutional responses that arise from intersecting systems of oppression (Harris & Linder, 2017; Park, 2017; Roskin-Frazee, 2020). Finally, the application of an anti-colonial framework informed by Indigenous scholarship including the work of Hunt (2016), Mitchell et. al. (2018), Mack and Na'Puti (2019), Simpson (2014), alongside Ahmed's (2012) theory of institutional whiteness, facilitated an analysis of whether university sexual violence policies perpetuate rape culture via continued colonization and white supremacy, and if so how this perpetuation occurs.

Informed by the theories outlined above, and to address the gaps in the literature indicated in the previous section, this study endeavoured to answer the following research questions:

1. Do Ontario university sexual violence policies address the systemic factors that legitimate sexual violence and promote rape culture?
2. How are sexual violence prevention strategies incorporated into Ontario university sexual violence policies?

Sampling Strategy

The critical discourse analysis undertaken in the study was conducted using a sample of Ontario university sexual violence policies and their associated annual reports. To identify this sample, a purposive sampling strategy was used that considered several criteria to identify a relatively diverse sample of Ontario universities. All 20 Ontario universities were grouped according to their category as assigned by the well-known Maclean's (2020) educational ranking survey–primarily undergraduate, comprehensive, and medical/doctoral–and also assigned by the researcher to one of six geographical regions within Ontario (northwest, north/central, south, east, southwest, southeast) based on location and proximity to other universities. Data from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) on full-time equivalent student enrollment and full-time equivalent international student enrollment were used to identify the

proportion of international students at each university (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2021). A table detailing the information identified for each of the 20 Ontario universities is provided as Appendix A.

With consideration of the lengths of the various policies and annual reports, a sample of eight Ontario universities were selected to create a manageable data set while representing an approximation of the proportionate number of universities from within each Maclean's category, with additional consideration for representation from each geographical region, a diverse range of total number of students attending the university, and a varying proportion of international student population (see Appendix A for further information). Note that as the demographics of students at Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario, are not considered representative of the typical university student population, as well as this university's omission from the CAUT data, this university was not considered for the research sample. The eight universities chosen for data analysis include: Algoma University, Brock University, Nipissing University, Queen's University, Trent University, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, and York.

The data set was comprised of 18 publicly available documents, including sexual violence policies for all eight universities plus stand-alone sexual violence procedures for two universities (Algoma University and University of Waterloo) and the most recent annual reports for all eight universities, for a total of 232 pages that were thematically coded for the purposes of the discursive analysis (see Appendix B for links to all documents).

Methods

With four exceptions, each document was read and coded in its entirety. The four exceptions were the annual reports from Brock University, Nipissing University, Queens University, and Trent University. Each of these universities published their annual sexual violence reports as sections within Human Rights and Equity department reports or within Board of Governors meeting minutes. For these four documents, coding was limited to the section pertaining to sexual violence response departments and initiatives.

Repeated readings of the sample policies and reports were undertaken as part of this analysis. The first reading was used to identify broad thematic categories which were consistent throughout the sample as related to sexual violence prevention, and then a second reading began to employ a coding framework meant to identify words and phrases relevant to identifying whether universities were focusing on efforts to address systemic factors. Words or phrases that were highlighted included: intersectionality, oppression (racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.), anti-oppressive, feminist/feminism, power, the "gendered nature of sexual violence," and rape culture, as well as language indicating efforts towards, or the need for, "systemic change" or similar phrasing. Coding also worked to identify efforts towards an anti-colonial approach including language that demonstrated awareness of the role of colonialism in sexual violence and that demonstrated efforts to support Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, such as evidence of the inclusion of Indigenous representation in policy development.

Quite quickly an initial overarching theme was identified: a lack of structural analysis as applied to sexual violence prevention. Following this discovery, analysis began to focus on thematically coding for the key discourses that were demonstrative of this lack of structural analysis. Based on this process, three key themes were identified: a reliance on deterrence as prevention, constructions of sexual violence which perpetuate rape culture, and a focus on individual efforts to address sexual violence. The overall lack of structural analysis as demonstrated by these themes collectively points to institutional performativity in efforts toward preventing sexual violence. These findings are discussed in-depth in the results section below.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Through the course of my work as a Registered Midwife, I received disclosures of sexual violence from such a high number of my clients that I began to question the accuracy of the available statistical data on prevalence of sexual violence. My personal life has also been impacted by sexual violence, and like so many others, I can write a long list of friends and family who identify as sexual violence survivors. These experiences

have led me to the desire to understand how sexual violence continues to be such a pervasive issue in our society.

As discussed previously, historical narratives surrounding sexual violence have privileged cisgender White women and have rendered the experiences and needs of Indigenous, racialized, dis/abled, queer, trans, and non-binary people invisible. As a cisgender White woman, I must be aware of the risk of replicating structural oppression such as racism, imperialism, cisgenderism, and so forth within my work. A further consideration for settlers when attempting to engage in an anti-colonial framework is to remain cognizant of the risk of replicating colonial power dynamics via attempts at allyship which are based on colonial worldviews (Mitchell et al., 2018). For example, settler allyship must involve supporting Indigenous Peoples in their struggles for self-determination rather than attempting to lead. Thus, settler engagement in *consensual allyship* is required, with efforts being informed and accepted by Indigenous Peoples, and with humility and reflexivity that fosters continued learning and accountability (Hunt, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2018).

Incorporating a high degree of critical reflexivity informed by the written work and academic scholarship of BIPOC, trans, and queer scholars was central to helping me mitigate these risks, while the theoretical frameworks guiding this research informed the analysis by requiring me to continuously interrogate my own understandings of the policy language as a person who inhabits the dominant identity category for whom the policies have been written. Additionally, my goal was to continuously question how my social location, privilege, and power as a researcher impacted my analysis and conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Given the focus of this research is publicly available documents and there are no direct research participants, approval from the Research Ethics Board was not required.

Results

Structural Analysis of Institutional Sexual Violence Narratives

A review of the literature on sexual violence prevention demonstrated the importance of incorporating intersectional and anti-colonial approaches into university sexual violence policies, and to inform sexual violence prevention strategies. Fully incorporating an intersectional and anti-colonial approach requires challenging the dominant societal discourses surrounding sexual violence, including eradicating the intersecting systems of oppression which perpetuate rape culture and normalize sexual violence. As "language constitutes rather than reflects reality" (Miller, 2000, pp317), it is recognized that the power held by the universities when developing policy can enable the universities to drive positive social change. Meaningfully addressing the systemic factors that impact sexual violence can be achieved through the inclusion of language which demonstrates a commitment to this end, and by incorporating sexual violence prevention strategies that address factors that normalize sexual violence and perpetuate rape culture at a structural level.

In practice, campus sexual violence policies provide the framework for the initiatives that are undertaken to address sexual violence at a specific university, including approaches to sexual violence prevention. When considering sexual violence prevention through an anti-oppression lens, this analysis identified an overall awareness by most universities of the systemic factors that legitimate sexual violence. This was demonstrated, for example, by the inclusion of language acknowledging that sexual violence is influenced by systemic factors such as racism and sexism. However, most policies did not demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between sexual violence and systems of oppression, and there was a disparity between different policies in terms of how much emphasis was placed on this relationship. Moreover, there was a general failure to effectively engage in a structural analysis of how these systems are perpetuated within institutional discourse as demonstrated by a lack of clear action taken by the

university to ameliorate them. This was further reflected by a focus on strategies which are reactive, i.e., secondary and tertiary prevention strategies, such as supports provided to students following a disclosure of sexual violence instead of efforts to prevent violence before it occurs (Linder, 2018b).

More specifically, six out of the eight policies (the exceptions being Algoma and Brock) did incorporate some language that suggested awareness of systemic factors impacting sexual violence, such as a description of intersectionality, language which indicates that sexual violence is related to power dynamics, and an acknowledgement of varying identity categories which are more frequently targeted for sexual violence. However, the inclusion of language related to intersectionality or oppression did not demonstrate a clear understanding of what the actual link is between oppressive systems and sexual violence, and in most cases did not speak to the role of the institution in addressing them. For example, the Trent university policy was the only policy to acknowledge the role of power in sexual violence with the inclusion of the statement "sexuality is negotiated in the context of power dynamics" (pp4), but this policy included no mention of other structural factors.

With the exceptions of Algoma and Brock Universities, all remaining policies either identified the need for an intersectional approach toward sexual violence prevention and education or acknowledged systems of oppression as a root cause of sexual violence but, again, did not give specific information within the policy documents about how these systemic factors would be addressed within those education and training initiatives. As an example, the University of Waterloo policy states that "individual experiences of sexual violence are affected by factors including, but not limited to, age, ancestry, racialization, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability, gender identity and gender expression" (section 5.1e), while the Nipissing University policy states that "efforts focused towards eliminating sexual violence need to be grounded in an appreciation that a student's experience is influenced by a multitude of factors, such as: sex, race, ethnicity, ancestry, language, faith, age, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and gender

identity" (pp4, section 4.1). However, the review of the associated annual reports for these universities did not identify actionable strategies that were reflective of efforts to ameliorate these factors.

Chris Linder (2018a) discusses the importance of naming the system of oppression in sexual violence discourses in order to place the focus on the problem – systemic oppression – rather than on the people who experience the problem. While the above examples indirectly mention these systems of oppression by identifying sex, race, ethnicity, etc., as factors associated with sexual violence, a move towards more explicitly stating the system of oppression can facilitate focus on addressing the system itself. An example of this explicit naming of the system, rather than listing intersecting identities is from the York University policy: "some acts of sexual violence are motivated by sexism, racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia, as part of a wider societal context that includes patriarchy, whiteness, and colonization as contributors to acts of sexual violence" (section 4). Only one other policy, from Nipissing University, included an explicit reference to the systems of oppression which motivate sexual violence. This shift in focus supports the development of primary sexual violence prevention strategies (i.e., stopping sexual violence before it occurs) by directing efforts towards effectively eradicating the systems of oppression that legitimate sexual violence (Linder, 2018b, 2018c). Moreover, this enables an intersectional approach to sexual violence prevention and response by recognizing that these systems of oppression impact the experiences of students who inhabit different identity categories (Linder, 2018c).

There was no mention in any policy of using an anti-colonial approach in addressing sexual violence, although Algoma and Nipissing universities both indicated involvement from Indigenous individuals on their respective Sexual Violence Task Force/Sexual Violence Response Committee. At Algoma University, this individual was identified as the Director of the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre and/or a representative from the Anishinaabe Initiatives Division team (pp3). Nipissing University identified an individual from the Office of Indigenous Initiatives or "appropriate designate" (pp23). At first glance, this committee

representation may appear to constitute an effort towards an anti-colonial sexual violence approach, but there was no indication of the scope of the representatives' involvement in policy development or other planning, nor is there a description of how past and ongoing colonialism is addressed within the university. Furthermore, there was no specific mention of Indigenous-informed supports or services for students, making this inclusion in the policy another example of "doing diversity" (Ahmed, 2012b), or in other words "changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations" (Ahmed, 2012a, pp34).

Moving from policy to prevention programming, the analysis of the annual reports demonstrated that there was little to no link between an awareness of the systemic factors influencing sexual violence and the actual sexual violence prevention initiatives being undertaken by the universities. While language acknowledging systemic factors was usually included when describing specific education and prevention initiatives, this language was usually vague and generally did not include a discussion of how these factors impact sexual violence. Moreover, although many reports indicated that sexual violence prevention initiatives being undertaken aimed to provide education on various systemic factors, the initiatives described were not clearly linked to addressing these factors at a structural level (i.e., eliminating these systems within the university and greater community). This was demonstrated by the finding that many prevention initiatives were limited in duration (often single events), were focused on changing individual-level behaviours, and were often directed towards communities who have a higher likelihood of experiencing sexual violence rather than towards those who are more likely to perpetrate or condone sexual violence. As DeGue et. al. (2014) identified, events which are limited in duration have not been shown to have a sustained effect on changing beliefs and behaviours surrounding sexual violence including addressing factors which perpetuate rape culture. Furthermore, many approaches that are currently understood as "best practices" for preventing sexual violence are based on dominant societal discourses of sexual violence and rape culture, and thus they tend to focus on educating people about how to avoid sexual violence rather than teaching individuals not to

commit violence (Linder, 2018b). These approaches contribute to victim-blaming myths related to sexual violence.

In addition to this education programming, four documents (either policies or reports) included language indicative of specific actionable strategies beyond education and training initiatives that reflected an understanding of some of the systemic factors which impact sexual violence. These four strategies included: (1) “culturally responsive” counselling at Brock University, which was identified as Indigenous, queer or trans “specialist” counsellors, and counsellors who can provide support in the students’ first language, (2) Nipissing University identified the need to create more “inclusive spaces” and mentioned collaborating with the equity center and office of Indigenous Initiatives toward this goal, (3) an individual who files a formal report of sexual violence at Trent University can request an investigator of a preferred gender identity, although there was no explicit discussion of gender identity as being inclusive of trans or non-binary individuals, and (4) York University policy mentions identity-conscious supports for students, though no examples are provided. While these strategies are positive and valuable, the above listed efforts are generally reactive in nature and support individual student survivors following victimization. With the potential exception of creating more “inclusive spaces” (an idea that was never fully articulated), the limited scope of these strategies is unlikely to address systems of oppression at a structural level that fundamentally cause sexual violence. Within the language of a public health framework for prevention, these strategies primarily focus on tertiary prevention which occurs after the experience of violence and therefore have no appreciable effect on altering the systemic discourses surrounding sexual violence (Carmody et al., 2009). Moreover, reflecting on the work of Ahmed (2012b) and Méndez (2020) allows the recognition that the inclusion of the “language of diversity” (Ahmed, 2012b, pp52) provides optical value to the institution but does not necessarily reflect actionable strategies that effectively ameliorate oppressive systems, which is what was found in this analysis.

In sum, the inclusion of language in both the policies and the reports without associated efforts to ameliorate the influence of these systems of oppression within the universities demonstrates a performative approach toward eradicating sexual violence. To further support this analysis, three thematic subcategories were identified in the data that demonstrate how the policies and annual reports fail to adequately engage in a structural analysis in campus approaches to sexual violence prevention. These subcategories were identified via an analysis of the *functions* of the policy and report language (Graham, 2011; Macias, 2015). In other words, evaluating how the policy and report language functions to influence the actions of the universities and individuals within the university communities with respect to sexual violence prevention can identify examples of how, regardless of their intent, universities uphold rape culture and permit sexual violence to persist via their use of policy language. These subcategories include: (1) a reliance on carceral processes and deterrence as prevention, (2) constructions of sexual violence in university policy, and (3), how these contribute to a focus on individual responsibility for preventing sexual violence.

Deterrence as Prevention: Approaches from Carceral Feminism

In general, the sample of sexual violence policies demonstrated an understanding that "addressing sexual violence" (per the policy requirements set out in Bill 132) requires an approach which centers reporting (whether informally, formally, or legally) and disciplinary action including university-applied sanctions and/or legal processes. This approach reflects dominant societal discourses surrounding sexual violence which privilege a carceral response to sexual violence and rely on deterrence as prevention (i.e., using the threat of disciplinary action to encourage individuals to not perpetrate sexual violence), subsequently failing to address the systemic factors that normalize sexual violence and perpetuate rape culture (Kim, 2018; Phillips & Chagnon, 2020).

The initial reading of the data set indicated that the concept of sexual violence "prevention" was generally equated with sexual violence "response". Additionally, as initiation of any response by the university

was heavily predicated on the survivor reporting incidents of sexual violence, a discursive focus of the documents was on reporting. In the public health model of sexual violence prevention, response is considered to be a form of tertiary prevention, the goal of which is largely to deter future violence from occurring (Carmody et al., 2009). In considering this focus on reporting and investigation, a clear theme of *deterrence as prevention* was identified in the data. This approach to sexual violence prevention, with roots in carceral feminism, focuses on reporting, investigation, and disciplinary action in an effort to deter future violence, and suggests the possibility of "accountability" via these carceral processes.

It is important to note that the reliance on carceral processes via reporting, investigation, and disciplinary action within the policies is not simply a decision that was made independently by universities but rather is directly influenced by the requirements of Bill 132 (Bill 132: An Act to Amend Various Statutes with Respect to Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment, Domestic Violence and Related Matters, 2016) and Regulation 131/16 (Ontario Regulation 131/16: Sexual Violence at Colleges and Universities, 2017), which mandate that the university sexual violence policies must set out the process for how the university will respond to student reports of sexual violence. However, Bill 132 also makes it clear that universities are not limited to this mandate. The language of the bill includes a more general statement that compels universities to *address* sexual violence more broadly. Thus, the decision by universities to emphasize reporting and response in order for sexual violence to be addressed is reminiscent of carceral logics that persist more broadly at a societal level.

The emphasis on disclosing and reporting sexual violence in the policies, which detailed several methods of disclosing and reporting that can be used by both the survivor/victim and a third party, evokes carceral logics which suggest that successfully preventing violence requires an authority to become aware of the harm in order for the institution to distribute punishments against those who commit violence (Whalley & Hackett, 2017). All policies differentiated between "report" (also referred to as "complaint" or "formal

report") that forms the basis of an investigation and "disclosure" (also referred to as "informal report") which does not initiate an investigation but enables the student to access supports. All eight policies stated that students have the choice between reporting and disclosing, and that students may access supports in either case. Only three universities (Algoma, Brock, Toronto) allow for anonymous disclosures, and only Brock University provided a clear definition of an anonymous disclosure: that an individual can report an incident of sexual violence without providing their name or other identifying information, that they can still receive support after such a disclosure, and that information regarding the disclosure will be maintained by the university (section 4.1-4.3). Five polices mention third-party reporting (Algoma, Brock, Queens, Toronto, Waterloo), where an individual who has received a disclosure of sexual violence, but is not the survivor/victim, can choose to report that disclosure to the university. Two (Brock, Queens) identify the purpose of third-party reporting as being able to identify supports on the survivor/victim's behalf but do not compel the third party to report, while the Algoma University policy states that any member of the university who witnesses sexual misconduct has a *responsibility* to report as a third party, and that this can be done without the consent of the survivor/victim. Two universities (Algoma, Toronto) include a "warning" that a delay in reporting may limit investigative actions that can be taken. All policies mentioned the option of reporting to municipal police, while the Nipissing University policy also included the option to report to Anishinabek Police Services. Only two universities, Nipissing and York, identified the option of withdrawing a report.

Narratives surrounding investigation and accountability in the policies further demonstrate the replication of the carceral system within the university by employing quasi-judicial investigative processes. This is evident in the language surrounding investigation which includes judicial phrases such as "procedural fairness." For example, the University of Toronto's policy states that "The university is committed to the provision of a fair process for all parties and one that respects due process and procedural fairness" (pp4) and University of Waterloo's procedure states that "The principles of natural justice will be followed" (section 7.3).

Four policies, from Algoma, Nipissing, Trent, and York Universities, included the statement “perpetrators will be held accountable” or similar. Thus, the evidence demonstrates that universities have primarily adopted an approach that emphasizes prevention through deterrence. This is in contrast to research which has shown that not only have carceral processes had little effect on preventing crime, but that few perpetrators of sexual violence are actually held accountable through such processes (Linder, 2018b; Phillips & Chagnon, 2020).

Alternative models of justice, such as community accountability or restorative justice processes, are beginning to enter the realm of mainstream sexual violence response including some university policies and procedures (Kim, 2018). These models attempt to acknowledge the impact of harm on the survivor/victim as well as the broader community, help to increase the perpetrator’s understanding of how their actions caused that harm, and enable the perpetrator to make efforts to repair that harm (Kim, 2018). While alternative models of justice still do represent a reactive approach, and therefore would be considered tertiary prevention, community accountability and restorative justice strategies aim to contribute to preventing further sexual violence by addressing the systemic factors that influenced the perpetrator to cause harm (Méndez, 2020). This approach has the potential to create an environment which enables a perpetrator of violence to come forward and take responsibility for their actions in a way that can both repair harm to the affected individual and community while also reducing the associated risks of carceral processes for marginalized individuals (Méndez, 2020; Whalley & Hackett, 2017).

Five universities (Brock, Nipissing and York Universities, Universities of Toronto and Waterloo) did include some reference to restorative or alternative models of justice; however, only one of those universities (Nipissing) set out a clear procedure to engage in such a process. In addition to including an alternative justice procedure, Nipissing University’s annual report also included a recommendation for the development of an Indigenous restorative justice process. Two annual reports (Brock University and University of Waterloo) demonstrated actionable strategies to support alternative justice processes: Brock University has two

counsellors available to support respondents identified in a report of sexual violence and University of Waterloo has engaged in a partnership with Community Justice Initiatives to develop a restorative justice plan including staff education and training. The inclusion of some alternative models of justice in university sexual violence policies presents an indication that a move away from a carceral approach is possible, but for these models to work, it also requires that institutions are willing to address their own complicity in systemic oppressions that are a fundamental cause of sexual violence such as colonialism (Hunt, 2016; Méndez, 2020; Whalley & Hackett, 2017). Thus, it will be important to remain skeptical of the attempt to adopt such approaches within universities until it is clear that these institutions are also fundamentally committed to addressing the structural causes of sexual violence.

Constructions of Sexual Violence in Policy

The ways in which sexual violence is constructed within policy may either support or subvert the dominant societal narratives of sexual violence including rape culture. Rape culture serves to legitimate sexual violence (Bourassa et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2016; Oliver et al., 2020), and an individual's support of rape myths is linked to a higher likelihood of perpetrating sexual violence (O'Connor et al., 2018). Eradicating rape culture and rape myth acceptance, therefore, is a key component of a comprehensive sexual violence prevention approach which plays a direct role in addressing the societal discourses which normalize sexual violence. Directly addressing rape culture narratives, including addressing their reliance on the discourses of systemic oppressions, is a primary prevention strategy as doing so represents an effort to mitigate an underlying cause of sexual violence. In contrast, failing to explicitly address rape culture narratives and related oppressive discourses, or indirectly supporting them in policy language, allows them to persist and can even serve to reinforce them. The analysis of university policies and annual reports brought forth several examples of language which framed the sexual violence survivor/victim, the perpetrator, and sexual violence

itself in such a way that it functioned to reinforce dominant sexual violence narratives and elements of rape culture.

The discourses in both policies and reports generally referred to sexual violence using what I will term *victim-centered framing.* Victim-centered framing serves to construct sexual violence as an abstract event which passively "happens to" an individual (i.e., "being victimized"), rather than one which is actively "committed by" an individual (Linder, 2018a). For example, from the University of Toronto policy: "individuals from historically marginalized communities may be *disproportionately affected by* sexual harassment and sexual violence" (pp3, emphasis added). The use of victim-centered framing minimizes the severity of sexual violence by constructing it as an abstract occurrence which happens to the "other", disempowers the survivor/victim by positioning them as a passive recipient of sexual violence, and removes the role of the perpetrator entirely. Moreover, the focus on the survivor/victim has the effect of assigning them responsibility for experiencing (and therefore preventing) sexual violence. In the case of the example above, it is one's membership in a "historically marginalized community" that has led to the increased vulnerability to violence. This phrasing perpetuates the common rape culture narrative that sexual violence will not happen to those who behave appropriately, i.e., dressing conservatively, avoiding risky behaviour such as substance use, and staying out of dark alleys, etc. (Hayes et al., 2013; O'Connor et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2020), and also maintains the "stranger danger" myth, i.e., the idea that most sexual assault is perpetrated by a socially deviant stranger in a dark alley rather than by a known acquaintance in a familiar place (Godderis & Root, 2017; Jeffrey et al., 2020; Phillips & Chagnon, 2020). Each of these narratives serve to support the victim blaming discourse, which attempts to apply responsibility for sexual violence to the survivor/victim while simultaneously absolving the perpetrator of any blame (Hayes et al., 2013; Jeffrey et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2018; Oliver et al., 2020).

Only one policy (Trent) used *perpetrator-centered framing* to assign responsibility to all university community members to “create and maintain an environment free from sexual violence by *not perpetrating sexual violence”* (pp5, emphasis added). Using perpetrator-centered framing draws attention to the role of the perpetrator as the party responsible for committing sexual violence. Framing sexual violence in this way addresses the common rape culture narrative of victim-blaming by assigning accountability to the perpetrator for causing violence and, when used in the context of various identity categories, enables acknowledgement of the ways in which various systems of oppression intersect with sexual violence. For example, a victim-centered statement might read ‘Indigenous and racialized individuals *disproportionately experience* sexual violence’ while a perpetrator-centered statement might read ‘Indigenous and racialized individuals *are disproportionately targeted for* sexual violence’. Perpetrator-centered framing may also form part of an anti-colonial approach to addressing sexual violence. As Sarah Hunt (2016) describes, positioning Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people as “at risk of sexual violence”, i.e., using victim-centered framing, replicates colonial discourses by presenting Indigenous peoples as in need of intervention and saving and denies their right to self-determination. Reframing narratives that position Indigenous women, girls, and Two-spirit people as “at risk” to instead understand members of these communities as being targeted forces a change in the conversation towards asking the question ‘who is doing the targeting?’ rather than ‘how can potential victims reduce their risk?’

In addition to a focus on who is at risk, the use of identity-neutral phrasing leads to the construction of the “ideal survivor” (i.e., a White, cisgender woman), which ignores the intersections of various systems of oppression and their influence on normalizing violence against individuals who inhabit marginalized identity categories. The construction of the “ideal survivor”, as it arises from the *political grammar of whiteness* (Phipps, 2020b), assumes a centrality of White experience which both disregards the needs of Indigenous and racialized survivor/victims and dismisses the need for an intersectional and anti-colonial sexual violence

prevention approach. This analysis identified the use of identity-neutral phrasing in seven out of eight policies by stating that individuals of all genders can be targets of sexual violence. For example, from Nipissing University's policy: "Nipissing University is aware that sexual violence can be experienced by people of all ages, genders and sexualities" (section 1.2, pp2). While acknowledging that individuals other than women (i.e., men and boys) may experience sexual violence is vitally important, this specific phrasing de-emphasizes the fact that sexual violence is a gendered issue that is predicated upon patriarchal oppression and disparate power relationships between differently gendered people (Hong, 2017; Law, 2020; Linder, 2018c). To emphasize again, not all individuals and communities are equally targeted for sexual violence. This identity-neutral framing serves to depoliticize the issue of sexual violence and prevent conversations that would lead to questions about why, for example, Indigenous women are so significantly targeted.

Only one policy (University of Toronto) included statements which acknowledged both of these perspectives: "The University recognizes that sexual violence can occur between individuals regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or expression, or relationship status" (pp3) and "The university recognizes that sexual violence is overwhelmingly committed against women, and in particular women who experience the intersection of multiple identities such as, but not limited to, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and racialized women. Additionally, the university recognizes that those whose gender identity or gender expression does not conform to historical gender norms are also at increased risk of sexual violence" (pp3). By naming the specific identity categories that are most frequently targeted for sexual violence, including using language that indicated how intersections of identity increase the likelihood of being targeted, this language represents part of an identity-conscious approach (Linder, 2018c) which can serve as the basis for addressing the systems of oppression that normalize and perpetuate violence.

As described above, using victim-centered framing in sexual violence discourse serves both to minimize the severity of sexual violence (i.e., *being affected by* sexual violence) and to shift responsibility for sexual

violence from the perpetrator to the survivor/victim. I argue that the ways that sexual violence is discursively framed in university sexual violence policy perpetuates rape culture myths such as victim blaming, as well as impacting the structure of the sexual violence prevention strategies being employed. For example, many common sexual violence prevention strategies, such as bystander intervention, resistance training, and safe walk programs, are focused on reducing sexual violence victimization rather than being focused on reducing sexual violence perpetration. This discursive focus positions the survivor/victim as responsible (i.e., for failing to resist sexual violence), and removes the need for designing prevention initiatives that attempt to reduce perpetration and ameliorate systemic factors which normalize sexual violence. Furthermore, minimizing the severity of sexual violence by positioning it as an “interpersonal issue” (Li et al., 2017) results in approaches that rely on the individual to manage a systemic issue, such as initiatives that attempt to change individual behaviour including consent-based programming. Further discussion on assigning individual responsibility for a systemic issue will be presented in the following section.

Individual Responsibility for Preventing Sexual Violence

Recognizing sexual violence as a collective issue creates the potential for systemic engagement in violence prevention, which supports the eradication of oppressive systems that perpetuate it. Conversely, positioning sexual violence as an individual issue enables a de-centering of the systemic factors that normalize sexual violence and perpetuate rape culture (Godderis & Root, 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Hunt, 2016; Linder, 2018c). When sexual violence is constructed as an individual issue, it follows that efforts to prevent sexual violence will be applied at the individual level and, consequently, systemic factors impacting sexual violence will not be effectively addressed. While some universities used policy language that suggested an assignment of collective accountability for preventing violence, the sexual violence prevention strategies employed (for example, risk management strategies, consent education, and bystander training) were

generally focused on intervening at the individual level. Strategies which have the potential to ameliorate systemic factors which normalize sexual violence, such as the Enhanced Assess, Acknowledge, Act (EAAA) resistance training program and healthy masculinity education, were not commonly employed by universities in the sample. Furthermore, most universities did not acknowledge institutional responsibility for eradicating systemic oppressions which normalize sexual violence and rape culture.

In terms of empirical examples, three universities (Brock, Trent, and Toronto) included language in their policies that suggested acknowledgement of collective responsibility toward sexual violence. For example, from Brock University's policy: "Brock community members and visitors have the responsibility to… take action to address sexual violence on campus" (pp2), while from the Trent policy: "all members of the Trent community: share the responsibility to create and maintain an environment free from sexual violence by not perpetrating sexual violence, or perpetrating rape culture and, by conducting bystander interventions or getting help if it is not safe to intervene" (pp5). While these statements may assign "collective responsibility" to address sexual violence, they do so by simply stating that every *individual* in the community should not perpetrate violence or should intervene and attempt to stop violence when they see it happening. There is no mention of systemic causes of sexual violence, nor is there any discussion about how universities will demonstrate institutional responsibility towards addressing these systemic causes. In contrast to these two policies, the University of Toronto policy moved beyond this definition of "collective responsibility" (i.e., simply assigning responsibility to all individuals). The University of Toronto policy states: "Addressing the causes and consequences of sexual violence requires the deliberate and collective effort of governments, institutions, and citizens" (pp3). This statement acknowledges collective responsibility for addressing sexual violence at a systemic level (i.e., within the institution and the government) and, as discussed in the preceding section, also acknowledges the impact of systemic oppressions on sexual violence which is an important component of addressing sexual violence at a systemic level. None of the other five university policies used

language related to collective responsibility, and thus default to understanding sexual violence through the lens of being an "interpersonal issue" rather than a systemic problem.

The positioning of sexual violence as an individual issue leads to a focus on strategies which attempt to modify beliefs or behaviours at the individual level. Further, as sexual violence discourses commonly frame sexual violence in the context of the survivor/victim (see preceding section), sexual violence strategies are often focused on reducing sexual violence victimization rather than perpetration, for example, by assigning responsibility to women for management of personal risk. Both Algoma University and Nipissing University described education initiatives aimed at assessing situations for risk of sexual violence (Algoma, pp2) or for increasing awareness of "personal safety" (Nipissing, pp10). No further details were provided on how these education initiatives were undertaken or what information is provided to students. Risk assessment and risk management strategies support victim-blaming rhetoric and perpetuate rape culture narratives by implying that the violence was a result of inadequate risk management (Harris & Linder, 2017). A related approach, which further emphasizes managing risk, is the implementation of environmental or infrastructure-based approaches, such as surveillance and increased lighting. Three universities (Algoma, Brock, and Nipissing) identified environmental/infrastructure-based approaches including evaluating campus lighting, installing surveillance cameras, and introducing a "friend walk" system using a smartphone app which allows the user to share their location with a friend. Approaches like these are based on mainstream anti-violence discourses which suggest that the act of rape is committed by a socially deviant stranger, occurs outside at night (i.e., in a dark alley), requires substantial physical force, and thus results in struggle and injury (Godderis & Root, 2017; Jeffrey et al., 2020; Phillips & Chagnon, 2020). In reality, most incidents of rape are perpetrated by someone known to the survivor/victim, do not involve physical force, and occur privately (Jeffrey et al., 2020; Linder, 2018b). This rhetoric further shifts responsibility away from the collective by problematizing the individual "deviant rapist" and focuses on risk management by the potential victim as a prevention strategy.

All universities included some form of consent education campaign as part of their sexual violence prevention approach. Most of these campaigns were limited in duration, either single events ("understanding consent" videos) or short-term initiatives ("consent week"). Efficacy of consent campaigns for sexual violence prevention has not been demonstrated (DeGue et al., 2014; Law, 2020; Linder, 2018b), and further, these strategies continue to focus on individual responsibility for addressing sexual violence. For example, consent campaigns may assign responsibility to obtain affirmative consent to the person attempting to initiate sexual activity while also assigning responsibility to the person responding to this attempt to either agree or disagree to said activity. The problem with reducing consensual sexual activity to the presence of an affirmative response (or sometimes, the absence of a negative response) is that the power dynamics that can inform negotiations around sexual activity are ignored (Francis et al., 2016; Law, 2020). Moreover, as Tuulia Law describes, consent campaigns may support the narrative that obtaining consent for sexual activity provides the means to avoid disciplinary action for sexual assault rather than emphasizing mutual respect and sexual autonomy (Law, 2020). When eradicating sexual violence is seen as a collective responsibility, the various systems that influence the distribution of social power are recognized and negotiations around sexual activity can become more equitable.

One university (Waterloo) emphasized the need for creating a consent culture on campus, a strategy which has been argued to move beyond typical consent education programs by fostering a systemic awareness of the need for all interactions to be based on mutual consent and autonomy (Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario, 2017; UBC Life Team - Student Services, 2020). Although the University of Waterloo policy did not provide details on how the university intended to cultivate a consent culture, its associated report listed training sessions for student leaders and one workshop provided by an external facilitator.

While the idea of creating a consent culture represents a shift toward a systemic approach for preventing sexual violence, such an approach requires moving beyond thinking about consent in the context

of sexual encounters by applying the principles of consent to every facet of society. In the current context of the ongoing colonization of Turtle Island, for example, one must question how a consent culture can be cultivated within a society built on stolen Indigenous land and within a society that does not support the equity of every individual at a systemic level. When there fails to be a systemic response to addressing systems of oppression which value some lives and bodies over others, and in particular, when governments and institutions fail to address their complicity in the perpetuation of colonization and rape culture, it can be argued that consent-based education will not effectively address sexual violence (Hunt, 2016; Mack & Na'puti, 2019). If instead, the focus is applied to addressing these systems, a culture which equitably values all lives and bodies will follow.

With the exceptions of Algoma University and University of Toronto, most universities offered bystander intervention training with two of those universities (Queens and Trent) identifying bystander intervention as a "core tenet" of their anti-violence programming. Again, on the surface bystander intervention training may appear to represent a collective approach to eradicating sexual violence by encouraging individuals who witness sexual violence to intervene and attempt to stop it from continuing. However, there are a number of critiques of bystander intervention programming that must be considered. With this approach, the onus on stopping violence is still placed on the individual, with greater responsibility for stopping violence being assigned to the bystander than the perpetrator (Linder, 2018b; Rentschler, 2017). Instead of eradicating the factors that normalize and enable violence to occur, this approach accepts sexual violence as inevitable and also has the potential to put the bystander at risk while not demonstrating efficacy in terms of modified behaviour (Linder, 2018c, 2018b; Rentschler, 2017). Moreover, research has indicated that bystander intervention programming continues to be informed by rape myths, which position sexual violence perpetrators as "strangers, men of colour, and 'creepy guys'" (Linder, 2018b, pp96). These narratives have the potential to enable bystanders to dismiss sexual violence being perpetrated by friends and

acquaintances, and further, they do not address the fact that the majority of incidents of sexual violence occur privately where bystanders are not present (Linder, 2018b).

On a deeper level, bystander intervention programming that relies on these dominant narratives does not effectively address the intersections of race, Indigeneity, dis/ability, sexuality, etc., the repercussions of which are demonstrated, for example, by the fact that bystanders are less likely to intervene when a Black student is being assaulted (Harrigan et al., 2020). A study examining the intentions of students to intervene when observing sexual violence demonstrated that higher rape myth acceptance among individuals of all genders is predictive of a reduced intention to intervene and that there is a general desire to adhere to peer norms, i.e., students will tend to do what they believe a peer would do in a similar situation (Harrigan et al., 2020), which both supports the position that bystander intervention programming does not reflect a collective approach, and underscores the need for an approach which addresses rape myth acceptance and rape culture at the systemic level in order to encourage a bystander culture.

One strategy, the Enhanced Assess, Acknowledge, Act (EAAA) resistance training program, has demonstrated some empirical efficacy in addressing sexual violence among university students (Senn et al., 2015). This study demonstrated that the EAAA program was not commonly employed by universities in the sample: only two universities (Brock and Trent) employed EAAA training. In the case of EAAA, responsibility is assigned to the woman to assess situations for risk of sexual violence and to resist any acts of sexual violence that may occur, which constitutes an individual approach toward addressing violence as well as an approach which attempts to reduce victimization rather than perpetration. However, as the program developers explain, this program differs from traditional resistance strategies by providing instruction on resisting acquaintances, who comprise the majority of sexual assault perpetrators, as well as incorporating sex-positive education which holds perpetrators completely accountable for sexual assault and counters harmful attitudes about female sexuality such as woman-blaming (*Frequently Asked Questions: The Flip the Script with EAAA™*

Program, 2021). As described earlier in this section, programming which counters rape myth acceptance among individuals of all genders, including women, and which attempts to ameliorate social power imbalances, may be helpful as part of an effort to create a culture of consent and foster a collective social responsibility (Law, 2020; Linder, 2018b, 2018c); however, these initiatives are not commonly taken up by universities at this time.

One other notable strategy that was employed by two universities in the sample is educational programming targeted toward male students. As part of a public education agreement with the Sexual Assault Centre of Waterloo, the University of Waterloo annual report described providing education on male allyship in various settings including classes and student clubs. Brock University provided a workshop aimed at men which was described as being rooted in intersectionality using a decolonized approach ("Bro2Talk") and indicated plans to develop a peer-to-peer education program for male-identified students to discuss topics of masculinity and the "man-mask" (annual report pp26). The description of the Bro2Talk program includes promoting "the conversation of support, respect and change" (annual report pp27), but there was no description provided of the proposed peer-to-peer education programming topics so the educational focus of Brock's programming remains unclear. As Chris Linder describes, the increasing popularity of programming directed at men as part of a sexual violence prevention strategy reflects both an acknowledgement that most perpetrators of sexual violence are men and an attempt to redirect responsibility for sexual violence away from the victim and toward the perpetrator (Linder, 2018b). Although healthy masculinity education (i.e., education which attempts to counter hypermasculinity, patriarchal norms, hostility toward women, rape culture, etc.) shows promise as a primary prevention strategy for reducing sexual violence perpetration, existing programming for men has predominantly focused on male allyship, which represents a secondary prevention strategy for reducing victimization (Linder, 2018b). Critiques of male allyship programming include the concerns that it risks perpetuating the narrative that women require protection from men, dismisses the

fact that men can be targeted for sexual violence, and does not acknowledge patterns of perpetration of sexual violence among men (Linder, 2018b). The inclusion of programming targeted toward male students in this research sample is suggestive of an institutional understanding that eradicating sexual violence requires the collective efforts of individuals of all genders and has the potential to counter the rape culture narrative of victim blaming by shifting responsibility for avoiding sexual violence away from the victim. However, as the majority of sexual violence perpetrators are men, and as the proclivity to perpetrate sexual violence has been linked to rape myth acceptance, hostility toward women, hypermasculinity and beliefs in traditional gender roles, research suggests that programming targeted toward men must address these systemic issues in addition to focusing on allyship (DeGue et al., 2014; Linder, 2018b).

While all universities in the sample demonstrated efforts toward creating a comprehensive sexual violence prevention approach via the inclusion of multiple sexual violence prevention strategies, the strategies employed still primarily focused on intervening at the individual level and reducing sexual violence victimization rather than reducing perpetration. Three strategies were identified within the sample which may present the potential to counter dominant sexual violence narratives among students. These included efforts to create a consent culture (Waterloo), the EAAA resistance training program (Brock and Trent), and educational programming targeted toward male students (Waterloo and Brock), however, as described previously, creating a consent culture and programming for male-identified students should be more fully developed within the policies to ensure a focus on systemic issues and an acknowledgement of collective accountability rather than simply replicating the dynamic of focusing on individuals. Furthermore, it must be reiterated that the current sexual violence approaches identified in this analysis do not effectively address the broader systemic issues that legitimate sexual violence on university campuses and beyond, such as patriarchy, white supremacy and colonization.

Discussion

Shifting the Blame: Systemic Issue, Individual Responsibility

While most universities demonstrated via policy language some acknowledgement of sexual violence being a systemic issue (i.e., by recognizing, on some level, sexual violence as a form of oppression), this acknowledgement was generally not comprehensive. For example, as described above, only one policy (Trent) acknowledged power dynamics in the context of sexuality, while none of the policies in the sample described a decolonial and/or an anti-colonial approach towards sexual violence prevention. Only two policies (York and Nipissing) explicitly named systems of oppression as root causes of sexual violence. Further, the sexual violence prevention initiatives being undertaken by universities did not clearly demonstrate efforts to eradicate these systems, which was evidenced by approaches which function at the individual, rather than the systemic, level.

The lack of an intersectional and anti-colonial lens in sexual violence work leads to institutional approaches that focus on sexual violence as an individual issue and results in a reliance on the individual to manage the "problem of sexual violence." For example, responsibility for violence prevention is often assigned to women-identified individuals via risk management strategies (e.g., avoiding substance use, not walking alone at night, etc.) and has resulted in investigation and response strategies that endorse victim-blaming (e.g., "what were you wearing?") which, in the university context, impacts a student's willingness to report sexual violence to the institution (Buss et al., 2016; Francis et al., 2016; Godderis & Root, 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Oliver et al., 2020). This lack of a structural analysis in sexual violence policy was further demonstrated in this analysis by the ways in which sexual violence discourses are constructed in policy (i.e., using victim-centered framing, identity-neutral language, and relying on deterrence as prevention), which all contribute to the assignment of responsibility for eradicating sexual violence to the individual and inform how sexual violence "prevention" is undertaken by the university.

What this analysis makes clear is that the discursive function of the policy language enables universities to limit sexual violence prevention initiatives to approaches which tend to focus on reducing sexual violence victimization rather than reducing perpetration (i.e., resistance training, bystander intervention, risk assessment, etc.) and those which focus on individual efforts to end sexual violence (i.e., consent education) rather than efforts to eradicate the systemic oppressions which legitimate sexual violence in the first place. In other words, the policies fail to truly address the systemic factors that perpetuate sexual violence. Further, the reliance on deterrence as prevention reinforces the myths that accountability for sexual violence perpetration can be obtained through carceral processes, and that the threat of disciplinary action is an effective approach to preventing sexual violence perpetration. Collectively, these efforts provide a perception of action towards eradicating sexual violence but in actuality they reflect a performative approach that fails to address the root causes of sexual violence in our society. As Méndez (2020) states: "*as long as the university has an individual to blame… then there is no need to address the conditions that result in gender-based violence at the institution"* (pp96). The discursive focus on the individual in sexual violence policy supports rather than opposes dominant sexual violence discourses and common rape myths, thus absolving the institution of responsibility for making meaningful efforts toward eradicating sexual violence on campus. These institutional approaches in turn facilitate the persistence of rape culture discourses among students and campus culture more generally (Godderis & Root, 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017).

In contrast, framing sexual violence as a collective issue enables us to recognize the causes of sexual violence as intersecting systems of oppression and can facilitate the development of approaches that specifically target these fundamental root causes of violence (Godderis & Root, 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Hunt, 2016; Lalonde, 2017). Appropriately addressing rape culture and effectively eradicating sexual violence within universities requires an intersectional and anti-colonial approach which actively addresses factors such

as patriarchy, power, privilege, and identity (Bourassa et al., 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Hunt, 2016; Linder, 2018c).

Using an intersectional approach highlights how interconnected systems of oppression, including sexism, racism, ableism and so forth, result in a perpetuation of rape culture which enables and encourages the disproportionate targeting of people who have been forced to the margins through the devaluing anyone who isn’t White, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, etc. (Garvey et al., 2017; Hunt, 2016; Linder, 2018a; Marine, 2017; Simpson, 2014). This approach requires identifying how intersections of identity are both represented in, and excluded from, university sexual violence policies and rape culture narratives as part of a critically reflexive analysis of structural factors that form the basis of rape culture and normalize sexual violence. Further, an anti-colonial approach prioritizes Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination which challenges the dominant Eurocentric discourses surrounding sexual violence, and addresses power structures that impact the perpetuation of rape culture and normalize sexual violence, particularly against members of marginalized groups (Hunt, 2016; Linder, 2018c; Mack & Na’puti, 2019; Méndez, 2020).

Sarah Hunt (2016) describes how universities can prioritize Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in their institutional approaches toward addressing sexual violence and rape culture on campus. In particular, Hunt emphasizes the need for Indigenous leadership in sexual violence response and policy development, an integration of Indigenous cultural practices in discussions about sex, sexual violence, and consent, and recognition of the importance of land sovereignty for Indigenous nations (Hunt, 2016). While a truly anti-colonial approach cannot occur in the context of continued colonization of Turtle Island and the existence of university campuses on Indigenous lands, universities must make meaningful efforts towards addressing their complicity in continued colonization of Indigenous communities. This requires universities to move beyond performative actions such as the use of land acknowledgements, which, in the words of Tuck and Yang (2012), represent a “settler move to innocence” which is an effort that attempts to assuage settler

guilt by *signalling* the values of diversity without engaging in meaningful action towards inclusivity and specifically towards rematriating land to Indigenous communities. This must also include efforts by universities to prioritize and promote diversity at all institutional levels rather than relying on equity, diversity, and inclusion programming that signals a commitment to equity but does not follow through in terms of actions (Ahmed, 2012b). One recent example of an effort towards taking an anti-colonial stance includes the decision by the board of directors at X University (formerly Ryerson University) to proceed with changing the university name following student and faculty action (CBC News, 2021). This decision acknowledges the involvement of university namesake Egerton Ryerson as one of the architects of the residential school system in Canada and represents a beginning effort towards ending the continuing harm being enacted against Indigenous communities. Efforts toward active decolonization of institutional spaces including universities must continue and must involve reparations for the harms of colonization including land theft.

Collectively, these factors begin to foster a survivor-centered anti-violence approach which shifts the focus away from performative institutional compliance and enables a move towards effective sexual violence prevention strategies at the level of addressing systemic oppression. To this end, a starting point for universities is to undertake a structural analysis of sexual violence narratives in sexual violence policy and in current violence prevention programming initiatives to identify how these narratives risk perpetuating systemic oppression and rape culture. I argue that policies should incorporate language which explicitly acknowledges systems of oppression as a root cause of rape culture and sexual violence, interrogates the impacts of those systems at both an individual and societal level, and accepts institutional responsibility toward ameliorating those systems via a clear action plan. Further, existing policies and anti-violence programming initiatives should be evaluated for messages that perpetuate rape culture narratives such as victim blaming, which arises, for example, from strategies which directly and indirectly assign responsibility to women and marginalized groups to reduce victimization, such as resistance training and campus safe walk

programs (see section titled Constructions of Sexual Violence in Policy). This includes incorporating *perpetrator-centered framing* and changing policy language which positions certain groups as being "at risk" of sexual violence to being "targeted for" sexual violence. The result is a shift in the discursive focus on ending sexual violence from approaches that aim to reduce victimization to those that aim to reduce perpetration, which comprise efforts towards primary sexual violence prevention (Carmody et al., 2009). Moreover, changing policy language to identify systemic oppressions as the root causes of sexual violence and shifting the focus to the perpetrator enables an increased recognition of sexual violence as a systemic issue rather than an individual one, which encourages a focus on ameliorating these systemic issues thereby addressing the root causes of sexual violence. While these recommendations provide one possible way forward in terms of university sexual violence policies and prevention programming, ultimately it must be recognized that eradicating systemic oppressions such as colonialism, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and cisgenderism, that legitimate the targeting of marginalized groups for sexual violence will have the greatest impact on violence reduction in our society. If post-secondary institutions are going to contribute meaningfully to the eradication of sexual violence, they must be committed to engaging in an intersectional and anti-colonial approach toward eliminating oppression within the institution and beyond, including acknowledging responsibility for the role of the institution in perpetuating systemic oppressions and rape culture narratives.

Conclusion

Sexual violence is a significant issue on university campuses. Several studies have suggested a prevalence of up to 1 in 4 students reporting at least one incident of sexual violence during their university career, with one study indicating that up to 58% of a sample of Canadian university students have experienced sexual violence (Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario, 2015; Champion et al., 2021; DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993; Senn et al., 2014). Sexual violence is predicated upon the perpetuation of systems of oppression including sexism, racism, ableism, cisgenderism, heterosexism, etc., which legitimates the targeting of women,

girls, transgender, and gender diverse individuals for sexual violence. Further, Indigenous, racialized, dis/abled, transgender, gender diverse, and queer spectrum individuals are targeted for sexual violence at significantly higher rates than White cisgender women (Bourassa et al., 2017; Crenshaw, 1991; Garvey et al., 2017; Harris & Linder, 2017; Hong, 2017; Mailhot Amborski et al., 2021; Marine, 2017; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019).

In Ontario, universities are required under Bill 132 to maintain a policy that addresses sexual violence involving students (Bill 132: An Act to Amend Various Statutes with Respect to Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment, Domestic Violence and Related Matters, 2016). This study aimed to understand whether existing sexual violence policies address the systemic factors that legitimate sexual violence and perpetuate rape culture and how these policies incorporate sexual violence prevention strategies as part of their mandate to address sexual violence on campus. To this end, a Foucauldian-informed critical discourse analysis was conducted on a sample of publicly available Ontario university sexual violence policies and their associated annual reports using an intersectional feminist and anti-colonial framework. Using a purposive sampling strategy, a sample of eight Ontario universities were selected to represent variation in terms of the well-known Maclean’s educational ranking survey (primarily undergraduate, comprehensive, and medical/doctoral) (Maclean’s, 2020), geographic region within Ontario, full-time equivalent student enrollment, and full-time equivalent international student enrollment (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2021). The eight universities chosen for data analysis include: Algoma University, Brock University, Nipissing University, Queen’s University, Trent University, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, and York University (Appendix A).

Existing literature points to the need to address sexual violence using an intersectional and anti-colonial approach (Hunt, 2016; Mack & Na’puti, 2019), with the most effective prevention strategies being those which target the systems of oppression that legitimate sexual violence and rape culture rather than

strategies which focus on changing beliefs and behaviours at the individual level (DeGue et al., 2014; Linder, 2018c). While this study demonstrated that most universities incorporated policy language to signal an awareness of systemic factors which perpetuate sexual violence, there was an overall lack of a structural analysis of sexual violence prevention which then led to violence prevention strategies that failed to address these systemic factors. This analysis found that sexual violence prevention strategies employed on university campuses are often reactive (i.e., occurring after incidents of sexual violence) and are targeted towards the individual, which have not only been found to have limited long-term efficacy, but also perpetuate rape culture on university campuses by supporting narratives such as victim-blaming (DeGue et al., 2014; Linder, 2018b). Moreover, the lack of an intersectional and anti-colonial lens in university sexual violence policies, including the use of identity-neutral language, results in an approach which depoliticizes the issue of sexual violence, ignores the needs of individuals who inhabit intersecting marginalized identity categories (i.e., Indigenous, racialized, queer spectrum, trans, non-binary, and dis/abled, etc.), and prevents meaningful efforts to eradicate the oppressive systems which legitimate it.

I further argue that, while universities are generally exhibiting an awareness of the connection between systems of oppression and sexual violence, the structure of university sexual violence policies does not adequately address these systemic factors which allows for several common rape culture narratives to persist. For example, the emphasis on carceral processes including reporting, investigation, and disciplinary action by all universities in the research sample suggest a reliance on deterring sexual violence (i.e., using the threat of disciplinary action to encourage individuals to not perpetrate sexual violence) as a prevention strategy. In practice, carceral processes have been shown to have little effect on reducing sexual violence and have the potential to cause further harm to individuals (both survivor/victims and perpetrators) who engage with these processes, especially Indigenous, racialized, and queer-spectrum individuals who have historically been and continue to be criminalized in our society (Hunt, 2016; Kim, 2018; Linder, 2018c; Phillips & Chagnon,

2020; Whalley & Hackett, 2017). Moreover, the use of victim-centered framing in policy and the assignment of responsibility for preventing sexual violence to the individual enables narratives to persist which position sexual violence as an interpersonal issue rather than a systemic one (Godderis & Root, 2017; Linder, 2018a). This shifts responsibility for preventing violence away from the institution and fails to adequately encourage a change in the systemic factors which continue to support dominant sexual violence discourses and allows rape culture to persist.

Policy provides a framework for action, which, in the case of university sexual violence policies, can be used as a basis for effective sexual violence prevention strategies. As "language constitutes rather than reflects reality" (Miller, 2000, pp317), I argue that an effective sexual violence prevention approach begins with incorporating policy language which explicitly identifies sexual violence as a function of oppression, privileges an intersectional and anti-colonial approach towards its eradication using identity-conscious language, and counters victim-blaming using perpetrator-centred framing. Violence prevention strategies undertaken by universities should aim to reduce perpetration of violence rather than focusing on reducing victimization, and as part of an intersectional and anti-colonial approach, universities should continue to develop alternative models of justice which foster an environment of accountability by enabling those who have caused harm to receive support and education towards repairing that harm. Further, as systemic oppressions legitimate sexual violence in our society, universities must interrogate their commitment to equity and anti-oppression initiatives at all institutional levels by identifying and mitigating performative actions toward equity and decolonization and committing to ending systemic oppression within the university community and society more broadly.

Appendix A – Ontario University Categorization

The following summarizes the data for Ontario universities that was used to identify the research sample. The universities chosen for the sample are shown highlighted in grey.

University	Primary Campus Location	Assigned Geographical Region	University FTE enrolment [1]	International Student Enrolment [1]	% International students	Category [2]
Algoma University	Sault Ste. Marie	Northwest	1083	279	26	Undergraduate
Brock University	St. Catharines	Southeast	16924	1691	10	Comprehensive
Carleton University	Ottawa	East	26047	3518	14	Comprehensive
Lakehead University	Thunder Bay	Northwest	7342	746	10	Undergraduate
Laurentian University	Sudbury	North/Central	7877	552	7	Undergraduate
McMaster University	Hamilton	Southeast	30409	3038	10	Medical/Doctoral
Nipissing University	North Bay	North/Central	4002	54	1	Undergraduate
OCADU	Toronto	South	3679	477	13	not applicable
Ontario Tech University	Oshawa	South	9458	655	7	Undergraduate
Queen's University	Kingston	East	25470	2629	10	Medical/Doctoral
Royal Military College	Kingston	East	not available	not available	not available	not applicable
Ryerson University	Toronto	South	34395	1570	5	Comprehensive
Trent University	Peterborough	East	8012	585	7	Undergraduate
University of Guelph	Guelph	Southwest	27544	1211	4	Comprehensive
University of Ottawa	Ottawa	East	38337	5243	14	Medical/Doctoral
University of Toronto	Toronto	South	83313	16760	20	Medical/Doctoral
University of Waterloo	Waterloo	Southwest	35917	7035	20	Comprehensive
University of Windsor	Windsor	Southwest	14173	2687	19	Comprehensive
Western University	London	Southwest	36107	4350	12	Medical/Doctoral
Wilfrid Laurier University	Waterloo	Southwest	16745	1038	6	Comprehensive
York University	Toronto	South	46359	6186	13	Comprehensive

[1] Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2021
[2] Maclean's, 2020

Appendix B – Summary of Documents used as Primary Data

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