



Book Review

Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change

Quinlan, Elizabeth, Quinlan, Andrea, Fogel, Curtis, & Taylor, Gail. (2017). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press. ISBN 9781771122832 (paper) CDN\$44.99; ISBN 9781771122856 (Kindle) (CDN\$13.49). 352 pages

MANDI GRAY

York University, Canada

There has been growing interest in sexual assault on university campuses within the last several years as demonstrated by a number of media investigations, research projects, and legislative changes across Canada. *Sexual Violence at Canadian Universities: Activism, Institutional Responses, and Strategies for Change* edited by Elizabeth Quinlan, Andrea Quinlan, Curtis Fogel and Gail Taylor (2017) is a timely collection examining a number of the key issues from a range of perspectives. The collection includes 15 chapters that are divided into five major themes and written by a combination of scholars, students, activists, student groups, and not-for-profit organizations. The contributors also represent a wide range of geographical locations, lived experiences, and academic disciplines. The collection “takes up the problem of sexual violence as both an individual experience and confluence of structural forces” (p. 4). The objective of the collection is to “link theory and praxis in relation to sexual assault on campuses across subject areas of violent campus spaces in university sports and cyber space, institutional responses to sexual assault, anti-violence activism on and off the campus, and strategies for change” (p. 4). Overall, the collection meets this objective stated in the introductory chapter.

Prior to the publication of this collection, a majority of academic books and reports solely examined sexual violence on American universities and colleges. Therefore, the *Canadian* focus of this collection is a timely and

Correspondence Address: Mandi Gray, Department of Sociology, York University, Toronto, ON, M3J 1P3; Email: graym@yorku.ca

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necessary intervention. There is a lot that Canadians can learn about campus sexual assault from what has happened in the United States, as there is more legal infrastructure available to students (see Chapter 15 by Sheehy & Gilbert). However, there are significant differences between American and Canadian university cultures; most notably, university sports and fraternity culture are not as deeply embedded into Canadian campus culture (see Chapter 7 by Fogel). The cultural and legal differences between American and Canadian post-secondary campuses makes this collection a necessary starting point for those interested in the numerous and complex issues pertaining to preventing, addressing, and responding to sexual assault in the Canadian context. The collection is a necessary read for everyone ranging from undergraduate students, activists, administrators, university faculty and staff, not-for-profit front-line workers, policy advisors, and researchers.

The first theme of the collection is titled “Campus Sexual Violence: Impacts, Voids and Institutional Betrayals.” This section begins with a statistical overview of the consequences of sexual violence on campus, focusing on the educational consequences for Canadian women (Chapter 1 by Stermac, Horowitz, & Bance). The next chapter speaks to the significant lack of literature examining the experiences of sexual violence against Indigenous women on Canadian campuses (Chapter 2 by Bourassa, Bendig, Oleson, Ozog, Billan, Owl, & Ross-Hopley). This is an important and necessary contribution as the authors explore what they call the “policy void,” referencing the ongoing institutional failure to address the unique needs of Indigenous students and the intergenerational impacts of colonization (Chapter 2). The final chapter in this first section, written by Quinlan, explores the contradictions of the corporate university wherein the university takes a public stance against sexual violence while also attempting to significantly cut costs (Chapter 3).

The second thematic section of this book is titled “Violent Spaces on Canadian Campuses.” The chapters in this section make systemic linkages through the examination of a number of high profile cases ranging from the rape of two women in the York University dorm rooms (Chapter 4 by Trusolino), rape chants at St. Mary’s University (Chapter 5 by Haiven) and the University of British Columbia (Chapter 6 by Quinlan), the Dalhousie dentistry students using Facebook to publish misogynist comments about their classmates (Chapter 6 by Quinlan), and suspension of the University of Ottawa following two hockey players being charged with sexual assault (Chapter 7 by Fogel). Quinlan’s chapter on the use of technology as a means to facilitate sexual violence provides an important analysis of the role of social media and other communicative technologies in perpetuating sexual violence on campus. This section is powerful because it provides numerous examples of the extent of rape culture on Canadian campuses and makes a compelling argument that sexual violence on campus is not “about one bad apple” as Trusolino argues (p. 79); rather, the university response to sexual violence often relies upon neoliberal logic focusing solely on individuals and

the university response to sexual violence and results in the increased securitization of campus and the expectation that those most likely to experience sexual violence self-securitize. As a whole, the chapters in this section challenge individual responses to sexual violence by demonstrating the systemic issues within the university that exist nation-wide.

The third thematic section titled “Institutional Prevention and Responses to Sexual Violence” examines three different initiatives to respond to sexual violence on campus: Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) campus safety audit (Chapter 8 by Gunraj); the Bystander Initiative at the University of Windsor (Chapter 9 by Forrest & Senn); and the *Student Safety in Nova Scotia* report (Chapter 10 by Profitt & Ross). The chapters by Gunraj and Forrest & Senn are reflective pieces on their experiences working to end sexualized violence on campus. In contrast, the chapter by Profitt & Ross is a feminist critique of the *Student Safety* report, which is premised on the position that prevention of and responses to sexual violence must acknowledge patriarchal violence and be grounded upon an intersectional social justice framework (p. 214).

This leads into the fourth theme of the book: “Fighting Back: Anti-Violence Activism on Campus.” This section includes two reflective pieces on campus activism at the University of Saskatchewan (Chapter 11 by Quinlan & Laiuk) and York University (Chapter 12 by Mackay, Wolfe, & Rutherford), which together highlight the reality that the ongoing failure of universities to respond to sexual violence is often illuminated following high-profile incidents. Additionally, these chapters are important as they provide readers with a historical overview of sexual assault activism on campus, which has helped to create services like the Sexual Assault Survivors Line (SASSL) at York and the Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CASA) at University of Saskatchewan, and all too often is both forgotten as students graduate and it is written out of official university history.

The final theme of the collection is “Strategies for Change,” which provides readers with tangible “next steps” for proactive responses to sexual violence policy and programming. This section has three chapters from different perspectives. The first is by community educator Julie LaLonde on the importance of university partnerships with community-based organizations (Chapter 13). A major issue identified in previous chapters is that university administrators often do not want to invest in sexual violence prevention and response until there is a high-profile incident on their campus. In this context, LaLonde recommends that universities proactively engage with community partners as opposed to offering reactionary responses to incidents that are reported on in the news. Cahill’s chapter argues the need for university administrators to utilize the expertise of feminist faculty who specialize in sexual violence (Chapter 14). To those readers unfamiliar with sexual violence policy development on campus, this may seem like an obvious suggestion. However, during the policy development at my own university, I witnessed the exclusion of feminist faculty with expertise in

sexual violence, resulting in university administrators and student groups with no expertise in sexualized violence dictating the policy (Gray, Cooper, & Pin, forthcoming). Indeed, as demonstrated in the chapters by LaLonde and Cahill, the refusal of university administrators to engage with community organizations and feminist faculty can have detrimental effects on policy development and service provisioning on campus. The final chapter by Sheehy and Gilbert provides an overview of the unique legal context in Canada and provides a thorough analysis of what can be learned by the policy and legal development in the United States, which is far more developed in comparison (Chapter 15).

Overall, this collection captures a wide range of expertise ranging from senior faculty, student activists, community educators, and graduate students. The Canadian focus of the collection offers an important contribution to the campus sexual violence literature and fills a significant gap within the current academic landscape. A major strength of the collection is that it provides a historical account *vis-à-vis* sexual violence activism on campuses across Canada. In the midst of the current “Me Too” movement and as provincial governments begin passing legislation requiring post-secondary campuses to develop sexual assault policy, within public discourse campus sexual assault often is framed as a newly discovered social problem. However, the chapters in this book demonstrate that both sexual assaults on campuses and campus activism have a long history, thereby providing an important institutional history that will be useful for future activists and scholars alike.

From my experience as a campus activist, the collection requires a deeper analysis of the impact of neoliberalism and the corporatization of the university. While some of the chapters do touch on the growing neoliberalization of the university (Chapter 3 by Quinlan; Chapter 4 by Trusolino), future research needs to further explore linkages between campus sexual assault prevention as a means to enhance the securitization and militarization of the university campus. Furthermore, there needs to be acknowledgement that not all student and activist work around sexual assault is actually beneficial to those who experience sexual violence and some of these groups actively contribute to the securitization and militarization of campus (Gregory, 2012; Gray & Pin, 2017). As Julie Gregory (2012) argues, “future analyses must include explicit criticisms of the ways in which various groups accept, through activities that are overt or covert, militarization-corporatization as necessary for ensuring student, faculty, and staff safety” (p. 80). Indeed, some of the activism highlighted in the reviewed book requires critical reflection, most notably the METRAC safety audits discussed by Gunraj in Chapter 8. The safety audit has been mobilized by Canadian administrators to further their own brand by holding it up as a demonstration of their own institutional benevolence while doing very little to actually prevent and respond to sexual assault on campus (Gregory, 2012). Likewise, at York University (as elsewhere), the safety audit resulted in increasing security patrols, expanding the safe walk program, expanding the mandate of

security officers, increasing the number of CCTV cameras, improving lighting and enhancing security communications (Shoukri, 2013, as cited in Gray & Pin, 2017). Such recommendations further the stranger danger myth of campus sexual assault as opposed to addressing larger structural issues on campus; in other words, such audits have not resulted in any substantive changes to institutional policy or procedure that would actually support those wishing to report sexual violence (Gray & Pin, 2017). Rather, a more critical reading would highlight that, as part of the corporatization of the campus, the growing campus sexual assault industry is associated with the hiring of private security firms, not-for-profit-organizations, and research centres that have “capitalized upon women’s fears by commodifying safety in the forms of gadgets, alarms, and workshops that socialize women to be ever more fearful” (Hall, 2004, p. 4).

These calls for more critical analyses notwithstanding, the reviewed collection offers an important contribution to the growing study of sexual assault on Canadian campuses. The collection references the complexities of issues that coincide with sexual assault, while also highlighting the need for future research on campus sexual assault. That said, the collection seriously lacks substantive engagement or acknowledgement of the campus experiences of the queer and trans community, Black community members on campus, or the unique experiences of sexual violence faced by graduate students, university staff and faculty, whose experiences are fundamentally different from those of undergraduate students. Future research needs to reflect the multiplicity of experiences on campus and the intersecting barriers that various university community members face beyond the sole focus on presumably heterosexual cis-women undergraduate students.

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