Addressing Sexual Violence at Ontario Universities in the Context of Rising Anti-Feminist Backlash

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that anti-feminist backlash at Canadian universities is fuelled by, and has a significant impact on, anti-violence efforts on campus and, in particular, whether and how they engage with male students and normative constructions of masculinity.

Keywords: anti-feminist backlash, Canadian universities, men's rights, sexual violence

Introduction

Over the past decade, sexual violence has become the subject of heightened public attention and calls for action in Canada and beyond, as evidenced by the popularity of #MeToo (Bogen et al. 2019) and the response to high profile cases such as Jian Ghomeshi (D. Phillips 2017). This momentum has been particularly visible at Canadian universities and, in the context of ongoing student activism, five provinces have recently passed legislation mandating the creation of sexual violence policies and expanded institutional response mechanisms. During the same time period, there has been a rise in anti-feminist and so-called "alt-right" backlash that also has a growing presence on Canadian campuses. Anti-feminist backlash exists on a spectrum and ranges from threats of violence against feminists (Hopper 2015) and highly visible examples, such as university professor Jordan Peterson's characterization of Women's Studies as an "indoctrination cult" (CBC Radio 2017, para. 8), to more subtle resistance in everyday academic settings that serves to maintain existing institutional inequities. In this paper, I argue that anti-feminist backlash is not simply part of the context in which contemporary anti-violence activism is unfolding in Canada but rather that it is fuelled by, and has a significant impact on, anti-violence efforts on campus, and, in particular, whether and how they engage with male students and normative constructions of masculinity. In other words, the threat of backlash shapes what can be said and done about the gendered nature of sexual violence perpetration at Canadian universities.

Conceptualizing Backlash

Anti-feminist backlash is not a new phenomenon. While misogyny and resistance to feminism are ongoing and persistent, the concept of backlash refers to periods of acute resistance that generally correspond

to the perception that specific feminist efforts are threatening the status quo (Faludi 2006). In this paper, I argue that contemporary anti-feminist backlash conforms to this definition to the extent that it responds, at least in part, to the perceived success of feminist activism in raising public awareness and passing provincial legislation on the issue of campus sexual violence. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) claims that while anti-feminist backlash is a reactive response to feminism, it is not linear or unidirectional. Instead, she conceptualizes this backlash as a form of popular misogyny, which she defines as a normative social and political structure that is networked across multiple sites and is in a constant dynamic relationship with feminism. According to Banet-Weiser (2018), both feminism and misogyny are continually reconfigured through this relationship. This paper explores this relationship with respect to efforts to address sexual violence on campus.

While there are ideological differences among anti-feminist groups, they are generally united by a sense of aggrieved entitlement rooted in the perception that feminist gains have eroded white male privilege (Ging 2019). These groups include Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), who have taken up a variety of issues, including divorce law, child custody, men's mental health, and domestic violence, and posit the suppression of feminism and revalorization of normative constructions of masculinity as the solution to what they perceive to be a "crisis of masculinity" (Blais and Dupuis-Déri 2012). By contrast, involuntary celibates, commonly known as "incels," are more concerned with violent retribution than with the recuperation of traditional masculine norms. Although incels often identify with subordinated "beta" masculinities and strategically distance themselves from dominant "alpha" masculinity, which they associate with sexual success, they simultaneously maintain hierarchies of power through their violence (Ging 2019).

Rather than framing MRAs and incels as anomalous "fringe" movements, they must be understood as existing on a spectrum with more subtle mainstream expressions of popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser 2018; Dragiewicz and Mann 2016). Michael Messner (2016, 16) points to the emergence of a more insidious version of anti-feminism that is grounded in neoliberalism and maintains male privilege by "skirt[ing] analysis of structural inequalities in favor of a common-sense celebration of individual choice for women and men." Neoliberal anti-feminism tends to be masked in depoliticized equality rhetoric and is the version that is most likely to resonate with educated, middle-class, white men and influence policy (Messner 2016). As Banet-Weiser (2018, 33) points out, because "the legacy of patriarchy legitimates misogynistic arguments as common sense," they can be converted into policy and legal discourse "with terrible efficiency." Examples of this version of anti-feminism abound, ranging from opinion columns in mainstream Canadian media (i.e. Kay 2014; Wente 2019a) to public policy, as illustrated by the Harper government's restructuring of Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative (Mann 2016). As I will demonstrate in this paper, neoliberal anti-feminism influences Canadian universities' responses to sexual violence in ways that serve to maintain existing institutional power arrangements.

Anti-feminist backlash intersects with white supremacy, heteronormativity, and other systems of oppression to the extent that it has been called a "gateway drug to the alt-right" (Futrelle 2017, para.7). The term "alt-right" refers to those who ascribe to a variety of nationalist, conservative, and far-right ideologies and became popularized as a descriptor for a faction of Trump supporters (Perry, Mirrlees, and Scrivens 2018). While there are notable exceptions, the majority of MRAs and incels are generally understood to be white, heterosexual, cisgender men and, as such, their entitlement to power and sex is framed as emerging from normative constructions of white masculinity (Marwick and Caplan 2018). Racism is rampant in these communities; for example, in the manifesto released prior to his shooting rampage in Isla Vista, California, Elliot Rodger complains about Black, Mexican, and Asian men who date white women and argues that he "deserves it more" as someone who is "half white" and "descended from British aristocracy" (as quoted in Paradkar 2018, para. 10). These intersections also shape the impact of this backlash; as the Twitter attack on comedian Leslie Jones (Madden

et al. 2018) illustrates, women of colour often experience specific racist and misogynist backlash. Further, when backlash informs policy, marginalized women and trans folks generally bear the brunt of the impact (Faludi et al. 2020). As such, it is important to analyze anti-feminist backlash from an intersectional perspective.

Canadian universities are not immune to anti-feminist and alt-right backlash. In the remainder of this paper, I examine the specific ways in which backlash is circulating on campus, as well as how it has been fuelled by recent efforts to address sexual violence. I also delineate its impact on anti-violence efforts, ranging from threats and violence against individual activists to how it affects policy and prevention efforts. I conclude that this backlash shapes what can be said and done about sexual violence on university campuses, and in particular, about its gendered nature, in ways that may ultimately impact the potential effectiveness of anti-violence efforts.

Methods

This paper draws on the findings of a qualitative study that I conducted between 2018 and 2019, which analyzed how Ontario universities have responded to sexual violence through the theoretical and methodological framework of intersectionality (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016; Thornton Dill and Kohlman 2012). Under the leadership of the previous Liberal government, Ontario became the first Canadian province to pass legislation on campus sexual violence in 2016. This legislation requires post-secondary institutions to develop sexual violence policies and, as such, I conducted a discourse analysis of these policies at all of the public universities in Ontario. This analysis approached the policies as sites where "truths" about sexual violence—how it is defined, whose experiences are valued and in what ways—are (re)produced (Strega 2005).

To better understand how these policies translate into practice, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 31 stakeholders from three Ontario universities that I selected as case studies. The selected institutions are all located in urban areas in different geographic regions of Ontario. Two of the institutions are large, while the other is medium-sized. The stakeholders that I interviewed included student activists, faculty and staff involved in anti-violence efforts on campus, and members of community organizations whose anti-violence work impacts the selected universities.

My recruitment strategy was informed by the desire to centre the voices of those who are typically marginalized in mainstream research and public debates about campus sexual violence. While I did not collect demographic data, many of my participants addressed aspects of their identities during our interviews. Of the 31 participants, 7 identified as male; at least 3 identified as Indigenous or Métis; at least 6 identified as Black; at least 10 identified as survivors of sexual violence; and at least 8 identified as lesbian, gay, or queer. As the following discussion of my research findings demonstrates, their experiences with anti-violence efforts and anti-feminist backlash underscore the importance of analyzing these topics through an intersectional perspective.

Findings and Discussion

How Backlash Responds to Anti-Violence Efforts

In the context of ongoing student activism, heightened public attention, and the recent provincial legislation directing Canadian universities to develop specific sexual violence policies, anti-feminist backlash appears in a few different but interrelated forms, including the characterization of this heightened attention as a "moral panic." For example, Margaret Wente (2019b, para. 12) mobilizes a sense of moral panic to argue that the problem of sexual violence is being overstated "by lumping together genuine assault with trivial misbehavior." Wente's argument is certainly not new and echoes so-called "postfeminist" Katie Roiphe's (1994) earlier assertions that feminist research exaggerates the prevalence of sexual violence by defining rape and sexual harassment too broadly. Similarly, Laura Kipnis (2017) characterizes campus anti-violence efforts as a moral panic that threatens to regulate sexuality and reproduce patriarchal notions of femininity as vulnerability. However, these arguments problematically assume that there is a consensus on the

nature and scope of sexual violence, and that current remedies are not only adequate but excessive (N. Phillips 2017). Sara Ahmed (2015, para. 49) cautions against framing student allegations of sexual violence against staff and faculty as a moral panic, as it "allow[s] a critique of power to be reframed (and dismissed) as an imposition of moral norms" and therefore risks reproducing dominant structures of power and the normalization of sexual harassment within academia.

Related to the notion that the prevalence of sexual violence is overstated is the argument that feminists have created an environment that encourages false reporting (Lonergan 2018). Lise Gotell and Emily Dutton (2016) argue that anti-feminist groups have strategically mobilized this argument to attract new members by capitalizing on young men's fear of being falsely accused. For example, in 2013, Men's Rights Edmonton launched the *Don't Be That Girl* campaign in response to the *Don't Be That Guy* anti-rape campaign, which was popular on campuses across Canada. The counter-campaign featured posters undermining the credibility of sexual assault allegations with statements such as "just because you regret a one-night stand, doesn't mean it wasn't consensual" (as quoted in Gotell and Dutton 2016, 67). This discourse is also visible in anti-feminist threats posted online in September 2015, which included: "next week when a feminist at the University of Toronto tries to ruin your life with false sex rape allegations, rent a gun from a gang and start firing bullets into these feminists at your nearest Women's Studies classroom" (as quoted in Hopper 2015, para. 8). Although the false reporting discourse may succeed in mobilizing MRAs, it ignores the overwhelming evidence that sexual assault is grossly underreported (Conroy and Cotter 2017) and is more likely to be deemed "unfounded" by police than other crimes (Doolittle 2017).

Anti-feminist backlash also manifests in the argument that free speech is under threat on Canadian campuses. This argument is premised on the notion that in the era of "political correctness," controversial perspectives, particularly far-right perspectives, are being censored by feminists and so-called "social justice warriors" (Pang 2017). In the Canadian context, University of Toronto professor Jordan Peterson is one of the most vocal proponents of the view that free speech is under threat. Peterson became (in)famous for arguing that being asked to use gender-neutral pronouns and protections against discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression constitute threats to his free speech (Pang 2017). In a *New York Times* interview, Peterson reportedly questioned the existence of patriarchy and suggested that existing hierarchies are the natural result of differing levels of competence (Bowles 2018, para. 5). He has referred to Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, English Literature, and Education as "indoctrination cults" (CBC Radio 2017, para. 8) that are invested in producing "the next generation of pathetic whining radicals" (Pang 2017, para. 22). He also discussed plans to create a website cataloguing all "postmodern neo-Marxist cult classes" (CBC Radio 2017, para. 8) to discourage enrollment, which is fairly hypocritical for someone so concerned with free speech. The characterization of feminists and student anti-violence activists as overly sensitive and censorious is a means by which their claims are dismissed, and existing institutional inequities are maintained (Ahmed 2015).

Anti-feminist and alt-right groups have deployed free speech arguments to legitimize their presence on campus. For example, in 2016, the Men's Issues Awareness Society (MIAS) at Ryerson University filed a joint lawsuit with two anti-abortion groups against the student union for allegedly discriminating against their right to free speech after they were denied official student group status (Kivanc 2016). The Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE), a well-known men's rights group, supported MIAS members in launching their lawsuit (Kivanc 2016). While the lawsuit was dismissed in early 2018, the MIAS founder warned that the verdict would not succeed in "silenc[ing] men" and that "it's going to create even more people who are willing to fight for these causes and they're going to be angrier than I am, so be prepared" (as quoted in Binning 2018, para. 7).

Student-led free speech clubs have also emerged at Canadian universities. While they tend to frame their

mission in politically neutral terms, this framing is quickly betrayed by their choice of invited speakers. For example, the Students in Support of Free Speech (SSFS) group at the University of Toronto has hosted right-wing speakers including Peterson, Lauren Southern, Ezra Levant, and Ben Shapiro (Pang 2017). They also held a rally in support of members of the white nationalist Proud Boys, which was attended by Paul Fromm, the director of the Council of Conservative Citizens, a white supremacist group with ties to the Ku Klux Klan (Pang 2017). These incidents must be contextualized within broader white nationalism at Canadian universities. In the wake of Trump's election, posters appeared on campuses nationwide bearing statements such as "it's only racist when white people do it" and "tired of anti-white propaganda? It's time to MAKE CANADA GREAT AGAIN!" (as quoted in Perry, Mirrlees, and Scrivens 2018, 59). As these examples demonstrate, the argument that free speech is under attack on campus is inherently linked to the same sense of aggrieved white masculine entitlement that animates anti-feminist backlash.

By contrast, there *are* serious limits imposed on what can be said about sexual violence at Canadian universities. For example, Clea Schmidt, an Education professor at the University of Manitoba, reported facing increasing pressure to resign after she critiqued the University administration's handling of sexual violence cases, including her own substantiated complaint of sexual harassment against a colleague (Botelho-Urbanski 2019). By drawing attention to the issue of campus sexual violence, Schmidt might thus be described as an "institutional killjoy," who "poses a problem because she keeps exposing a problem" (Ahmed 2017, 99). Meanwhile, high-profile faculty members may be protected from sexual assault allegations based their perceived value to the institution as "the patriarchal impulse to shield privileged men is intensified by the fact that the reputation of the perpetrator operates as a proxy for that of the university" (Phipps 2020, 234). For example, some Canadian universities have signed non-disclosure agreements as part of their settlements with faculty who perpetrate sexual violence to avoid long arbitration processes. These agreements often prevent survivors from knowing the results of the investigation and allow the offending professor to seek employment at other institutions without disclosing this history (Ward and Gollom 2018). Workplace health and safety regulations may also limit institutions' ability to reveal information about complaints against faculty and staff, including the fact that they have been named in a formal complaint (Jones 2018).

Some institutions' sexual violence policies place restrictions on survivors' ability to discuss their complaints, which have been described as "gag orders" (Jones 2018, para. 14). While the policies also typically include provisions that prohibit retaliation, one of my research participants described experiencing "major bullying" after her complaint against a classmate was dismissed: "I have heard things behind my back: 'oh, we don't want to be in a group with her because […] this happened.' I get looks. I'm the girl who cried wolf" (020). As a result, she said that she felt like she had no choice but to switch to a different major. Further, there is a risk that those who file complaints will be sued for defamation (Kingkade 2017). For example, after he was fired by the University of British Columbia, Steven Galloway filed defamation lawsuits against a former student who accused him of sexual assault and over 20 others who are alleged to have repeated the accusations (Lederman 2020). Unsurprisingly, these issues have not been taken up by the supposedly politically neutral campus free speech advocates.

How Responses to Campus Sexual Violence are Shaped by Backlash

While it may be tempting to dismiss expressions of anti-feminism on campus as fringe concerns, it is important to recognize their ability to influence how universities are responding to sexual violence. At the level of policymaking, debates about due process and the rights of accused students, which are legitimate concerns, can become a vehicle to advance anti-feminist interests. In the United States, Education Secretary Betsy Devos invited MRA groups, including the National Coalition for Men, who have been accused of publishing the names and photos of sexual assault survivors and of promoting misogynistic violence (Kreighbaum 2017; Scheinman 2017), to participate

in a summit on campus sexual violence in 2017. Following the summit, the Trump administration introduced new Title IX regulations that, among other things, encouraged post-secondary institutions to adopt the higher "clear and convincing" standard of evidence and guaranteed the right of accused students to cross-examine their accusers (Green 2020). These American debates have the potential to influence how Canadian institutions respond to sexual violence. I noted, for example, that some Ontario universities' policies avoid using the terms "victim" or "survivor," which is consistent with the critique that the use of these terms pre-supposes the guilt of the respondent (Kipnis 2017). Three Ontario universities included clauses stipulating that "vexatious" complaints or complaints made in "bad faith" can result in sanctions against the complainant. While such clauses are not unique to sexual violence policies, their inclusion has the effect of reproducing the fear of false reporting. Further, Ontario's Conservative Premier, Doug Ford, passed legislation shortly after taking office that requires all post-secondary institutions to implement free speech policies and threatened to cut the funding of noncompliant institutions, which was widely interpreted as a gesture to appease his far-right constituents (Jeffords 2018). These examples clearly illustrate the potential for anti-feminist backlash to inform policy.

The neoliberal university is deeply invested in preserving their public reputation as a means of securing scarce tuition dollars and research funding (Gray and Pin 2017). Allegations of sexual violence are therefore perceived as threats to the institution's reputation that must be carefully managed or silenced (Phipps 2020). Yet as institutions' sexual violence policies and responses are publicly ranked and evaluated in the media and by student activist organizations such as Our Turn (2017), they have become a significant measure of post-secondary institutions' performance. As such, "university branding becomes entangled with sexual assault prevention […] to further the public reputation of the university as proactive in enhancing student safety […] as a component of institutional efforts to attract prospective students" (Gray and Pin 2017, 93-4). Post-secondary institutions must project the public image that they are committed to addressing sexual violence while simultaneously avoiding backlash and accusations of bias and infringement on free speech, particularly in Ontario.

My research suggests that some of the more subtle forms of backlash are present in institutional policymaking processes, particularly with respect to whose voices and perspectives are represented. At two of the three institutions that I studied, participants described these process as being driven by administrative interests, which caused tension among committee members who questioned their priorities: "are you working to support survivors or are you here to support the university and worry about liability and tuition dollars?" (018). One participant, who teaches in Gender Studies, felt that feminist faculty were excluded because "the university sees feminists on campus not necessarily as allies [but] more as people that they have to keep away" (029). Similarly, after being asked to join the policymaking committee at the third institution, a faculty member who researches campus sexual violence said that she felt "relieved because I know that at many universities, the people who actually had most expertise were not put on the committees" (025). Participants also raised concerns regarding the shallowness of consultations with students and community anti-violence organizations. Further, participants at one institution said that their policymaking committee was chaired by a "white male" administrator who exercised his privilege to silence other committee members: "it was a committee of strong women, strong voices, [and] sometimes those voices were not being heard, specifically racialized voices" (017). These examples illustrate the ways that subtle forms of backlash serve to maintain existing inequities and silence those who are perceived to be institutional killjoys (Ahmed 2017).

Given these dynamics, it is unsurprising that my analysis of universities' sexual violence policies revealed a tendency to frame sexual violence as a depoliticized interpersonal issue. Of the 22 public universities in Ontario, 10 have policies that are completely identity-neutral. This depoliticized framing may represent an attempt to expand the definition of sexual violence to include the experiences of those who do not conform to the "ideal" survivor, who is typically understood to be a white, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender wo-

man (Richie 2000). Nevertheless, this framing fails to address the gendered nature of sexual violence, as well as how vulnerability to violence and access to support are shaped by its intersections with systems of oppression (Harris and Linder 2017). By contrast, the other universities' policies include references to intersectionality and name those who experience heightened vulnerability, which is significant. However, my findings suggest that these references to intersectionality rarely translate into practice in a way that meaningfully addresses the experiences of marginalized survivors. As such, I conclude that these references must be understood as a reflection of the institutional incorporation of intersectionality rather than a genuine commitment to addressing the underlying power relations that give rise to sexual violence. Importantly, none of the policies explicitly address the fact that cisgender men perpetrate the overwhelming majority of sexual violence (Conroy and Cotter 2017) or how normative masculinities contribute to violence.

My research participants suggested that this depoliticized framing may be motivated, at least in part, by a desire to avoid backlash. As one participant explained, if university responses to sexual violence

> speak to these more political aspects, […] the administration feel[s] like they are going to get a lot of complaints. They are going to be in the media. There's going to be a whole uproar about it because there are people who are very committed to upholding a cis, heterosexual, patriarchal structure. (031)

Similarly, another participant said that the recent free speech legislation "shifted the culture on our campus away from intersectionality in the sense that […] it became this space that was so heavily focused on freedom of speech and not saying things that could kind of spark this contentious debate" (028), such as the confrontations that occurred at the University of Toronto in response to Peterson (Pang 2017). Adopting depoliticized anti-violence efforts may allow universities to avoid these heated debates and preserve their public reputation and image.

Beyond the content of these policies, my research suggests that the desire to avoid backlash also informs approaches to sexual violence prevention. As one participant explained, when prevention efforts are explicitly linked to feminism, they risk being perceived as inherently "man-bashing" (019). Similarly, another participant argued that "because these issues are so visible and so contentious and so divisive, there's a lot of hostility at times to the idea that 'oh great, here comes a feminist' and […] the notion of [the] 'social justice warrior'" (023). Again, this contributes to the implementation of depoliticized approaches.

Consent campaigns illustrate this depoliticized framing by (mis)representing sexual violence as an interpersonal issue resulting from miscommunication and a lack of knowledge about consent (Beres 2018), which fails to acknowledge the power relations inherent in sexual violence and, in so doing, resembles the insidious neoliberal version of anti-feminism that Messner (2016) describes. Representing consent as a negotiation between equal individuals who have the capacity to "just say no" (or yes) and have their "no" respected (Burkett and Hamilton 2012) leaves white masculine sexual entitlement unaddressed. It also fails to account for how certain populations are constructed as sexually available and always already consenting (Crenshaw 1991) while others are constructed as inherently threatening (Davis 1981) based on the intersections of privilege and oppression. As one participant explained, "it's not so much that this person didn't say no or that you thought that they had said yes or whatever, it's that in many cases people feel entitled to sex" (031). As this example illustrates, while depoliticized approaches may be less likely to attract backlash, their potential impact may be limited if they fail to address the underlying social and structural causes of sexual violence.

Despite the gendered nature of sexual violence perpetration, few Canadian universities have implemented prevention efforts focused specifically on masculinities. When male students are included in prevention efforts, there is a tendency to make them palatable by framing male participants as "real" men, "good" men, or as protectors while those who perpetrate sexual violence are othered (Masters 2010; Scheel et al. 2001). For example, as one participant explained, "some versions of the bystander […] [are] about encouraging men to stand in their hero space with their capes and

these poor women who can't do anything for themselves and who need them" (025).While this framing is often deployed as a strategy to encourage male participation, it falls short of addressing the ways in which normative constructions of masculinity contribute to sexual violence (Katz 2018). As such, one of my participants said:

> I want to see more initiatives targeting men […] [that] talk about how they are a part of problem, whether they are perpetrators or not and how they have this opportunity, possibly the most opportunity, in different situations to prevent it from happening […] There is a lot value in them being uncomfortable and acknowledging their complicity. (015)

This argument is supported by research that suggests that prevention efforts that target men and boys are most effective when they challenge normative constructions of masculinity (Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2015).

The Impact of Anti-Feminist Backlash

While the examples discussed above illustrate how anti-feminist backlash shapes responses to campus sexual violence in policy and in practice, it is equally important to recognize its impact on individual anti-violence activists and practitioners. As one of my research participants explained,

> I've never had death threats, but I would be lying to say that I'm not sometimes fearful of extreme right-wing men's groups. […] There sometimes is a real fear of being branded or being the target of hate because it's real and the more I do this work, the more I see how vulnerable we are to that. […] I probably don't dwell in that space for too long because it would be paralyzing. (023)

The fear of harassment compounds the emotional labour inherent in campus anti-violence work, which tends to be performed by those who are already marginalized within academic institutions (Ahmed 2017).

Moreover, a fear of harassment is well-founded (Wunker 2017). After Gotell publicly responded to Men's Rights Edmonton's *Don't Be That Girl* campaign, they circulated a poster featuring an illustration of her face that read: "just because you're paid to demonize men doesn't mean rape is gendered. Don't be that bigot!" (Gotell and Dutton 2016, 68). In fall 2019, an instructor at the University of British Columbia, Marina Adshade, reported receiving threats of sexual violence after she tweeted allegations that several female students were drugged at a fraternity party and questioned whether fraternities should be permitted on campus (Pathak 2019). In 2014, a student who was involved in opposing an event held by the Men's Issues Awareness Society at Queen's University was threatened and violently attacked outside her home (Canadian Press 2014). After protesting against Peterson during a rally held by SSFS at the University of Toronto, trans students reported that their personal information was published online and that they were subsequently subjected to harassment (Pang 2017). At the University of Ottawa, a student journalist faced threats of violence after exposing the Science Students Association's pub crawl, which allegedly awarded participants points for performing oral sex and eating doughnuts off of a judge's penis (Schnurr 2016). In response, racist, sexist, and Islamophobic threats were posted to her social media accounts, including: "I will be laughing when your father murders you in an honor killing. You terrorist breeder" and "don't spoil it for everyone else, you filthy f***ing sand******. I hope your imam rapes you" (Schnurr 2016, para. 7). These examples demonstrate not only the real and present threat faced by those working to address violence on campus, but also the importance of analyzing these threats from an intersectional perspective.

While these examples of harassment were targeted toward specific individuals, the impact of such backlash must be understood as an attempt to silence activists and discourage others from becoming involved in anti-violence efforts. This silencing directly contradicts anti-feminist groups' claims of being invested in free speech. By exacerbating the emotional labour required to address sexual violence within the neoliberal institution, this backlash may also contribute to the high levels of burnout and job turnover that I have observed among those working to facilitate prevention and support survivors. Ultimately, this turnover may impact the consistency of these efforts to prevent and

respond to violence. However, as one of my research participants pointed out, the existence of this backlash can also be reframed as a sign of progress. As she explained,

> I would say that what we're doing is radical because most people would prefer that we just shut up and go away. In fact, the more traction we make in challenging social norms and getting institutional responses and getting people fired and showing them that this behaviour is unacceptable and won't be tolerated, the more backlash there is. (023)

Although it is unlikely to be of any consolation to those who are experiencing threats and harassment, the idea that backlash is an indicator of progress may serve as motivation to continue pushing to make these changes.

Conclusion

While this is by no means an exhaustive account of anti-feminist backlash at Canadian universities, this paper begins to unpack the dynamic relationship between backlash and efforts to address sexual violence on campus. I have argued that heightened public awareness of campus sexual violence and the resulting legislation has fuelled anti-feminist backlash, which is often disguised in the depoliticized rhetoric of due process and free speech. My research findings demonstrate that this backlash is impacting what can be said and done about campus sexual violence and, in particular, about the gendered nature of perpetration and how normative constructions of masculinity contribute to violence.

My research focused specifically on how Ontario universities are responding to sexual violence and, as such, my findings are not necessarily representative of universities in other provinces. Similarly, my research focused on universities and did not examine responses to violence or the presence of anti-feminist backlash at Canadian colleges. I am currently working to expand on these findings by researching anti-violence efforts explicitly targeted toward male students at Canadian universities, which, as I mentioned above, are relatively uncommon. By interviewing the facilitators of these programs, as well as male students who have participated in them, I am hoping to better understand how they engage with constructions of masculinity and how this work is impacted by anti-feminist backlash. Because this backlash is diffuse (Banet-Weiser 2018) and often masked using depoliticized rhetoric (Messner 2016), it can be difficult to identify. As such, I am also planning to undertake research to map the scale and scope of this backlash at Canadian post-secondary institutions.

Ultimately, while the present moment must be characterized as one of significant momentum toward addressing campus sexual violence, it must also be characterized as one of substantial anti-feminist and alt-right backlash at Canadian universities. The overarching impact of this backlash can make any gains toward preventing or addressing violence on campus feel like a fragile victory. However, at a time when university community members who are racialized, Muslim, feminist, queer, and/or trans are being subjected to harassment and violence, this backlash only increases the urgency of ensuring that responses to sexual violence are intersectional and address the underlying social and structural roots of violence.

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