

G8.1 Conwy 1 Thursday 6 December 9.00-11.00

A UK/English context: What are the unintended consequences for women of a more open debate upon sexual violence on campus and how can we keep this debate on the agenda in universities to challenge this? (0189)

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Campus sexual violence has been under-researched in the UK. British Crime Survey Statistics demonstrating the prevalence of violence towards women changed this landscape. The British Government published 'End Violence Against Women' in 2010 (HM Government 2010). A UK study by National Union of Students (NUS) surveyed female students about perceptions of safety and experiences of harassment, stalking and sexual assault. 2058 responses were received, headline findings were:

- 68% experienced some form of verbal or non-verbal harassment.
- 12% subject to stalking.
- 16% experienced unwanted kissing, touching or molesting.
- 7% subject to serious sexual assault. (NUS 2010, 3).

Further research followed (Phipps, 2013; Cambridge Study on Sexual Violence 2014). In 2014 a Bystander Toolkit was developed by the University of the West of England (UWE) (Fenton et al 2014), an eight hour intervention to challenge sexual violence on campus. This intervention aimed to enable students to move toward becoming pro-social active bystanders with skills to: notice and interpret problematic behaviour, take responsibility for action, possess necessary skills to act safely, and where appropriate intervene in a variety of ways (Berkowitz, 2009). This drew upon similar US programmes (Jouriles et al 2018).

In 2016 Universities UK (UUK) published 'Changing the Culture' obligating UK universities to develop strategies to manage violence and harassment. In response, The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) announced a range of catalyst funds from 2016. Many universities across the UK developed strategies to counter sexual violence on campus and 2016 to 2018 can be seen as a time of high activity, resource and prominence being given to the issue of sexual violence on campus. HEFCE (now Office for Students (OFS)) funding has now run its course and we are yet to see what will take its place to continue this work. This paper emanates from the research conducted as part of a HEFCE funded project. This research included delivery of the original eight hour bystander intervention to 86 students. Pre and post questionnaires were implemented with this group with a 100% return rate. Three focus groups and poster workshops lasting between two and three hours, with 15 students who had received the intervention, was the final stage of this research. This resulted in development of: a three minute film; posters; a shortened two hour version of the 2014 Bystander toolkit (above); and a responsive 'Report and Support' intranet. Alongside this research has emanated

from this data and themes emerged, particularly: normalisation of and resignation toward unwanted touching; restriction to women's freedoms to go out alone or in female only groups; and protection from men by men.

Opening up discourse upon sexual violence can contribute to a climate of fear, where women are viewed as passive victims in dangerous environments (Lewis et al 2018). This can have an unintended consequence of limiting agency. Paternalistic responses can result, where parents, males and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) seek to protect women from 'hyper masculinity' rather than challenge it. This may essentialise men as sexual predators, and construct women as responsible for preserving sexual restraint (Phipps & Young, 2015). Whilst Phipps et al (2018) remain critical of neo-liberal discourse claiming women have made significant gains within the academy; over protection of women can contribute further still to women's invisibility in the academy allowing men to 'reclaim' a sense of masculine status, space, control and power.

The research carried out here also found evidence of women under-playing sexual assault with repeated examples being given within the focus groups that women were as bad as men in terms of unwanted touching. This might be an attempt by women to reclaim the debate and construct sexual assault as gender neutral normalised behaviour, or to evidence 'hyper femininity' alongside 'hyper masculinity', calling into question the gendered nature of laddish behaviour (Jackson and Tinkler, 2007; Phipps and Young, 2013). It may also be a way for women to play down a tendency to be seen as too militant, rather, constructing themselves as in need of protecting and this aligns with debates around popular misogyny (Keller et al 2018).

These issues represent only some of the confused and confusing messages to emanate from research around sexual violence on campus and it is important that in opening up these debates we seek to emancipate women through changing the culture in ways which increase, rather than limit, their agency. If universities are constructed as places to fear where your narrow and limited options as a woman are to take part, but only in protected spaces or under the protection of men, then momentum to change the culture in a meaningful way is lost. It is early days in terms of what we know about this area and what more there is to learn. UUK and HEFCE (now OFS) gave UK universities the money and the legitimacy to focus in on sexual violence interventions on campus. We know more now than we did and there is an emerging body of statistics regarding prevalence of sexual violence on campus. Theorising around the complexities of this data is still in its infancy and further research is needed. As funds from HEFCE (a major funder in the area of sexual violence on campus) come to an end, this paper further asks: 'How do we keep sexual violence on campus on the HEI agenda?'

References

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