



NEEDS ASSESSMENT

PROJECT: QC16313

PREVENTING AND ELIMINATING RAPE CULTURE  
ATWATER LIBRARY AND COMPUTER CENTRE

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## **Addressing Sexual Violence on Campuses in Montreal**

**A project of the Atwater Library & Computer Centre  
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### **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Methodology

Framing the Conversation

Defining Sexual Violence

Defining Consent

Rape Statistics

Defining Rape Culture

Backlash Against Rape Culture

Responses at the Institutional Level

Gender-based Cyberviolence and Rape Culture

Concrete Responses to Rape Culture

Ways Forward

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equality while simultaneously coming together to work for gender equality at the national level. Both the Atwater Library and Computer Centre and the women leaders working on the project are grateful for the support of Status of Women Canada, without which this innovative project would not be possible. The Atwater Library and Computer Centre would like to acknowledge the commitment and contributions of the women leader participants, Shanly Dixon, PhD, Eileen Kerwin Jones, PhD and Brenda Lamb BSc, who are working to prevent gender-based sexual violence at the local level and to further gender equality as part of the national network.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this Needs Assessment was to connect with key experts, advocates and change agents from local community and organizations who are committed to addressing rape culture and sexual violence on college campuses. These diverse individuals are educational administrators, college and university faculty, scholars and researchers, front-line sexual violence and counseling personnel, technologists, activists, students and survivors. Through conducting the research for this Needs Assessment, we had the opportunity to connect with a variety of people who are committed to participating in building awareness, developing policy and responses and creating a cultural shift around rape culture and sexual violence on college campuses. Our goal over the course of this project is to bring these key stakeholders together to leverage our combined capacities to concretely effect change on college campuses. Additionally, during the research for this Needs Assessment, we identified institutional barriers, gaps in knowledge, understandings and perspectives around the issue of rape culture and gender-based sexual violence that will make it challenging to address rape culture on campus. We were also able to pinpoint some promising strategies to address these challenges, in collaboration with stakeholders, which will be outlined in the following pages.

## **Methodology**

The methodology for this Needs Assessment comprises a discussion of current research and literature. Additionally, we conducted 15 open-ended, extensive, in-depth interviews with carefully

selected key participants with whom we plan to collaborate over the next three-years. While our interviews were semi-structured and very much driven by what the participants wanted to discuss, following are some of the types of questions we used to guide our conversations.

We asked the interview participants questions about whether they believed that rape culture existed on their campuses. How rape culture and gender-based sexual violence were being addressed on their campuses and whether they perceived student engagement with online gender-based cyberviolence and misogyny as impacting offline behavior on campus? Do they have a stand-alone sexual assault policy? How far along in the process are they? What are some of the barriers they might be facing and how can we be of assistance? Do they have clear procedures and responses in place to address sexual assault on campus? Are the policies and responses widely shared? Do people, such as administration and faculty, know how to appropriately respond? What does rape culture look like on college campuses? What causes rape culture on college campuses? What needs to be done to prevent and eliminate rape culture on college campuses? What strategies would they propose?

The interviews provided us with an opportunity to connect with and gain buy-in from some of the key stakeholders we will be collaborating with and it also provided us with insights regarding where the various stakeholders and institutions were in terms of their understandings and strategies around the issue of gender-based sexual violence. This afforded valuable information that will enable us to meet the individual stakeholders “where they are” and develop specific initiatives to support them in moving forward.

This report employs gender neutral pronouns where appropriate and/or requested. It respects the anonymity, as requested by some participants, by primarily focusing on what the assessment uncovered, rather than on the identity of the contributors. Researching, writing about, and discussing gender-based violence is a challenging undertaking; the topic is sensitive and complex, and requires a thoughtful and nuanced approach. Therefore, throughout the course of researching for and writing this Needs Assessment, we sought to remain mindful of the various perspectives that abound in the literature and emerged through the research for this report, and ensure that we

attempted to fairly represent the wide-ranging viewpoints that we encountered, so that we may gain a better understanding of the landscape in which this work of addressing gender-based sexual violence, takes place.

## **Framing the Conversation**

As we embark upon this project, we struggle with finding and using inclusive language that approaches gender-based sexual violence in a sensitive and empathetic tone. There are challenges regarding how to frame the issue of sexual violence on campus. For instance, according to the literature and our discussions with stakeholders, rape culture has become a fraught and often-times contentious term. While many of our stakeholders maintain that it is important to employ the correct nomenclature that has been used by feminists since the 1970s, in referencing a society in which sexual violence is pervasive and normalized, other stakeholders have suggested that the term rape culture can be alienating to people who don't have a clear understanding of what the term means and are resistant to feminist terminology and language.

As Canadian universities endeavored to develop sexual assault policy, there were debates about whether or not to incorporate the term rape culture into their existing language. For example, many survivors and front-line workers maintained that the use of the term rape culture acknowledged that it exists on campus which they viewed as a positive and important step to addressing sexual violence. While others opposed the term, suggesting it has negative connotations, and could be construed as offensive to certain individuals. People can be reluctant to acknowledging the existence of rape culture on campus for a variety of reasons, from concerns about institutional reputation to the belief that the term exaggerates the extent of gender-based sexual violence. Still others oppose the term rape culture because they find the term 'rape' distasteful, while they acknowledge that the behaviors the term describes are prevalent on their campus. As can be imagined, it becomes very difficult to bring to light an often-hidden phenomenon, due to the varied reactions to the descriptors employed. The resistance to naming and discussing the issues surrounding rape culture on campus is indicative of the challenges faced in actually changing the culture.

To help guide the discussion forward, some of our stakeholders have suggested re-framing the conversation in a more positive mode, such as using phraseology such as: “let’s work together to create a culture of consent and respect.” In this way, the conversation becomes more about what we are trying to achieve, rather than focusing the agenda on what we would like to eliminate. However, based on our direct engagement with young women through our three-year gender-based cyberviolence project, we realized that we are still in the ‘serious zone’. When we replace the term “rape culture” with “enthusiastic consent”, it may diminish, water down or deflect the true extent of a serious and complex issue. For many, the two terms are not interchangeable and reflect very different issues.

In an attempt to make painful and complex conversations about sexual violence accessible and non-alienating an industry to address sexual assault on campus has emerged in the form of packaging and marketing of sexual violence content, such as in “consent is sexy” campaigns (<http://www.consentissexy.net/why-colleges-choose>). These sexual violence prevention packages have become big business as discussed in the Market Place Article *The business of preventing sexual assault on campus* by Annie Baxter (August 29, 2014) or *Curbing Sexual Assault Becomes Big Business On Campus* as heard on All Things Considered (August 12). While constructive aspects of these campaigns are that they are often sex positive and inclusive, it could be argued that they can potentially gloss over some of the more complex, contextual and nuanced aspects that require more comprehensive strategies and campaigns. Additionally, in an attempt to be inclusive or to avoid alienating consumers, these campaigns sometimes neglect to acknowledge the reality that sexual violence is in fact a gendered issue. The avoidance of the more controversial or complicated aspects of sexual violence can resonate positively with some individuals who are resistant to acknowledging the degree to which sexism and gender normativity is internalized and the ways in which sexual violence is a gendered issue with girls, women, LGBTQQI2S, and gender non-conforming people experiencing sexual violence both differently and disproportionately. Several of our stakeholders argue that sexual violence cannot be comprehensively addressed solely through marketing campaigns focusing on consent. While these campaigns may serve as part of a strategy there is a danger that

institutions can implement a campaign, and believe that they have adequately addressed the issue. This neglects the reality that while every educational institution should implement prevention strategies, policy with responses and procedures that are clear, transparent, and accessible to everyone, along with comprehensive education, knowledge mobilization and survivor supports are also key. It's also important to acknowledge that contexts and individual situations are unique and require an authentically knowledgeable and engaged community.

While conversations about consent and mutual respect are crucial aspects of opening up the lines of communication between researchers, educators and participants, some respondents who work closely with survivors suggest that it is critical that we first help administrators, faculty and students identify, acknowledge and critique the cultural and media landscape that supports a climate in which gender-based sexual violence exists and flourishes. Unfortunately, we are still seeing young women, who have survived sexual assault, whether on one or multiple occasions, feel uncertain as to whether or not their experiences count as bonafide cases of sexual assault, particularly evident as some young women asked front-line sexual assault counselors such questions as, "How many times do you have to say no and how hard do you have to resist before you can call the experience sexual assault?". Further to the point, when students report that "My injuries aren't serious enough for it to be considered sexual assault.", we know we are not yet in a space or time frame where the aspect of "key terms" can be quickly glanced over in reports on incidents of sexual violence in and around college campuses. The data from our front-line workers suggest that many young women are still struggling to understand what constitutes sexual assault, which reveals that we are a long way away from seeing the subject as a continuum from "rape culture" towards discussing the issues of sexual violence by focusing on "enthusiastic consent". Research conducted through a study of a thematic analysis of 462 accounts from adolescent girls ages 12-18 (Thomas, 2017) reveals that young women often shared intimate images when they did not want to. The adolescents reported sending photographs as the result of coercion by male counterparts through repeated requests, insistence, anger, and threats. Although the young women did not want to share the images and attempted to manage the exchanges they often eventually reluctantly complied. They went along with the demands because they felt pressured to do so. This suggests that young women do not currently

possess the knowledge, resources, awareness or tools to navigate the pressures inherent in many sexual requests and encounters.

We also see this current state as requiring structural change to address how schools view sexual violence occurring on campuses, and it is clear that we have much foundational work to complete before we can secure a structural base that enables us to move to the next stage in the culture shift around sexual violence. In the meantime, we are working on establishing the building blocks of consent in institutions, which includes developing comprehensive definitions about what gender-based sexual violence and sexual consent mean. In addition, we are highlighting the importance of education and awareness as pivotal to moving to the next stage of the culture shift.

This leaves us with a methodological conundrum concerning how we can be ethical, compassionate, authentic, and inclusive advocates on the issue of sexual violence, without being moralistic or alienating. In doing so, we ask the question, ‘How can we address the issue of rape culture on campus in a way that is respectful of the gravity of the issue, makes sense to both the girls and women who are both affected by, and working in fields related to combatting the issue of sexual violence, which adopts an intersectional approach acknowledging that LGBTQQI2S and marginalized students may experience sexual violence uniquely and therefore require tailored responses, which is inclusive of the general student population, and is effective and sufficiently functional for administration to implement?’ The challenge of framing the conversation in these ways will be a key issue at the outset of this project, and will be an important element of our best practices document. Along this process, we will be noting the ways in which the various research projects address the issue, the positions they take, and the language they use; we will then proceed by checking in with all of our stakeholders for their feedback on this important first step in the building process.

### **Framing the Public Discourse**

With regards to rape culture, much of the current mass media, popular culture, and social media discourse around gender-based sexual violence on campuses across Canada tolerates and even fosters casual acceptance of misogynistic attitudes, the objectification of women, the portrayal of sexual violence as entertainment, victim blaming, and the harassment of LGBTQQI2S<sup>1</sup> and gender non-conforming people. These discourses often support the suggestion that the responsibility for avoiding sexual violence on campus is primarily the responsibility of female students. For example, these students are asked to manage risk factors by drinking moderately, guarding their own beverages in public spaces, limiting mobility, such as refraining from taking night classes in remote areas of campus, not working alone in labs at night, not taking taxis at night when inebriated, dressing conservatively, and carefully weighing all potential risks in appropriate contexts when choosing to attend or abstain from social engagements or collaborative activities. The burden of protection from sexual violence on campuses seems to rest solely on the shoulders of girls and women who attend them.

In comparison, there are also concerns often expressed by male students, who might be alienated or offended by the use of the term ‘rape culture’, when discussing campus sexual violence in class, during presentations, or at violence prevention workshops. Campus behavior that supports an environment enabling rape culture, that continues to thrive, has become too normalized, particularly through beginning-of-year activities at hazing rituals and at frosh activities, when making jokes about sexually assaulting female classmates is the norm, through filming and sharing sexual assaults, and through the creation of revenge porn and rape chants. When incidents of sexual violence do become public, concerns for the accused are sometimes expressed relating to ruining perpetrators reputations or future careers over ‘alleged’ charges of sexual assault, rather than the health and well-being of the victim.

As we struggle to create work and school environments that are more conscious about existing systems of gendered oppression, including patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, rape culture, heterosexism, homophobia, cissexism, and transphobia, and where intolerance is unacceptable behavior, it’s

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Two-Spirit

important to challenge the current mass media, popular culture, and social media discourses around gender-based sexual violence on campuses in order to eliminate a culture that continues to perpetuate unsafe campuses. A crucial aspect of our project will therefore be to help develop strategies that institutions can use to interrogate, as well as challenge these activities, and create supportive environments that question the occurrence of gender-based sexual violence in these spaces.

## **Defining Sexual Violence**

As we have stated at the outset, clearly defining sexual violence in its many variations is a key aspect of any strategy that addresses sexual violence on campuses. However, this preliminary and requisite work also has important implications at the secondary school level. For instance, during our previous work in high schools, colleges and universities, debates raged about what activities actually constituted sexual violence. For example, throughout our three years of working on gender-based cyberviolence, we became aware that knowledge of what exactly and specifically constitutes both online and offline forms of gender-based sexual violence has often been lacking within academic institutions at the administrative, faculty, and student levels. Therefore, in light of our prior work with youth, we know that a key first step in addressing gender-based sexual violence on college and university campuses will be to comprehensively and clearly define gender-based sexual violence, and the roles that gender and intersectionality play in the manifestation of gender-based sexual violence.

As such, a key first element in the strategy of defining what constitutes sexual violence and knowledge mobilization on college campuses is to clearly articulate that sexual violence can occur with or without physical force. In Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan, *Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives*, sexual violence is defined as "any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. This includes sexual abuse, sexual assault, rape, incest, childhood sexual abuse and rape during armed conflict. It also includes sexual harassment, stalking, indecent or sexualized exposure, degrading sexual imagery, voyeurism, cyber harassment, trafficking, and sexual exploitation." (Directorate, O. W. S., 2013). Sexual assault is also a crime that is

recognized in the *Criminal Code* of Canada. Within the code, three levels of sexual assault are outlined: Level 1 is any form of sexual activity (e.g., kissing, fondling, oral sex, vaginal or anal intercourse) forced on someone else resulting in minor physical injuries or no injuries to the victim. Level 2 is sexual assault with a weapon, threats, or causing bodily harm. Level 3 is sexual assault that results in wounding, maiming, disfiguring or endangering the life of the victim (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008).

One of the findings from the research for this Needs Assessment was that, oftentimes, survivors of sexual assault don't define their experience as sexual assault, because they believe that they do not have severe enough injuries to support a claim. The framing of sexual violence as a criminal offence needs to be understood and recognized at all levels of educational institutions. For example, the use of threats, manipulation, harassment, and psychological pressure to obtain sex or to exploit someone who is incapacitated and unable to provide consent, are all forms that sexual violence can take. Therefore, a very important aspect of our work during this project will be to help build awareness that will enable survivors to identify incidents of sexual violence for what they are, and additionally, to educate the larger campus community, so that when survivors do come forward with their experiences, they can do so in a safe and supportive environment.

## **Defining Consent**

In the past, stakeholders have suggested that students did not have a clear understanding of what constitutes consent, however, there were contradictory perspectives about how to proceed in addressing this gap. It has also been suggested by some stakeholders that the messaging and marketing of the consent discourse has become so packaged and stylized, that it has oversimplified a complex and serious issue (Goldberg, 2016). To be clear: No one consents to being sexually assaulted, and therefore, a sexual violence policy should communicate in concrete terms the role and meaning of consent, and how to know when it has been given or refused.

In as much as defining when sexual assault can occur, the issue of consent is imminently central to its workable definition. Therefore, as we have done above, we defer to the rules and laws of Canada

and state here that “The Criminal Code of Canada defines consent as it relates to sexual assault as the voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity. An individual must actively and willingly give consent to sexual activity. Simply stated, sexual activity without consent is sexual assault.”

(Directorate, O. W. S., 2013). More specifically, section 273.1 (2) provides clarity for examples of when consent is *not* obtained; these include:

- where the agreement is expressed by the words or conduct of a person other than the complainant;
- where the complainant is incapable of consenting to the activity;
- where the accused induces the complainant to engage in the activity by abusing a position of trust, power or authority;
- where the complainant expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to engage in the activity, or
- where the complainant, having consented to engage in sexual activity, expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement to continue to engage in the activity.

Education about consent is an increasingly significant aspect of addressing sexual violence on college and university campuses. Consent is never assumed or implied, is not silence or the absence of “no”, cannot be given if the victim is impaired by alcohol or drugs, or is unconscious, can never be obtained through threats or coercion, can be revoked at any time, cannot be obtained if the perpetrator abuses a position of trust, power or authority. Furthermore, consenting to one kind or instance of sexual activity does not mean that consent is given to any other sexual activity.

## **Rape Statistics**

Sexual assault is a gender-based crime. For this reason, much of the research about rape culture begins with statistics on the prevalence of the issue: Approximately one in five women experiences sexual assault while in college (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017). Although sexual assault affects both men and women, over 93 per cent of reported adult victims in Canada are female, and 97 per cent of those

accused are men (Sinha, M. (2013). In a September 2015 study conducted by the American Association of Universities, more than 150,000 students at 27 universities participated in the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct, which was one of the largest surveys on sexual assault and sexual misconduct to provide insight into students' perceptions of campus climate in terms of both number of schools and number of students. The study found that 26 % of women reported forced sexual contact on college campuses while 7 % reported full penetrative rape. 7 % of men reported forced sexual contact on college campuses while 2 % reported full penetrative rape. Another worrying statistic such as these is that less than 5% of college sexual assaults are reported to law enforcement officials (Perreault, 2015).

Women living with disabilities disproportionately experience sexual violence, they are two times more likely than non-disabled women to experience sexual violence. Furthermore, girls and women who are young (between 15 and 24 years of age), Aboriginal, and who identify as being gay or bisexual, are most often targets of sexual violence (Perreault, 2015), making it especially difficult for young women, who are 12 times more likely than men to experience sexual violence while walking at night, be safe when walking to work, class, or social gathering in the evening (Conroy & Cotter, 2017).

### **The Controversy Around Rape Statistics**

Sometimes rape statistics are called into question by rape deniers. In particular, acquaintance rape deniers use two strategies to discredit the concept of acquaintance rape. In Jody Raphael's book *Rape Is Rape: How Denial, Distortion, and Victim Blaming Are Fueling a Hidden Acquaintance Rape Crisis* (Raphael, 2013), the first strategy described is to dispute rape prevalence statistics, suggesting that they are based upon too broad a definition of rape. The second strategy is to claim that a significant percentage of rape claims are false or just 'bad sex' that the women regret the morning after the sexual encounter.

Many feminist theorists suggest that the backlash against rape prevalence statistics first began with research conducted by Mary Koss. In 1987 Koss found a 27.5 % prevalence for rape and attempted rape for 3,862 women surveyed on college campuses. This research contributed to awareness about acquaintance rape, because 84 % of the rapes involved a man the victim knew and 57 % occurred on dates. However, her research was critiqued on a single question about the consumption of alcohol or drugs, where the research has shown that alcohol use and sexual violence were associated. Indeed, a systematic review by Tharp and colleagues (2013) found that alcohol use *was* significantly associated with sexual violence perpetration in high school students, college populations, and among adults. However, in some studies included in the review, the relationship between alcohol use and sexual violence changed when the researchers also considered other factors, such as individual attitudes and peer group beliefs. That said, alcohol policy has the potential to prevent or reduce sexual violence perpetration, but only as one component of a comprehensive prevention strategy. When Koss removed the question, the rate fell to 20 percent or 1 in 5 women. However, the critique that feminists have expanded the definition of rape too broadly remains prevalent in current discussions around rape culture and consent, *despite* the fact that the research and the statistic has since been replicated and verified by other studies.

For instance, research for the resource guide for Ontario's colleges and universities, *Developing a Response to Sexual Violence Toronto: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities*, confirms that acquaintance rape, defined as "sexual contact that is forced, manipulated, or coerced by a partner, friend, or acquaintance", remains a significant component of sexual assault. Eighty-two percent of sexual assaults are perpetrated by a known person to the victim, and can include a date, close acquaintance, teacher or lecturer, team coach, and even family member (Directorate, O. W. S., 2013). However, despite research revealing consistent statistics about rape prevalence, there still remains a 'rape myth' that supports the idea that these numbers are exaggerated, when, all too often, they are under-reported.

## **Defining Rape Culture**

The term rape culture is attributed to Susan Brownmiller's work *Against our Will* (1975) "rape-supportive culture," the 1975 documentary "Rape Culture," and later in the 1993 anthology *Transforming a Rape Culture*. The term describes the cultural practices that reproduce and justify the perpetration of sexual violence.

"Rape culture refers to the complex set of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm (Buchwald et al. 1993: vii)."

According to the academics working with McGill University's *Impacts: Collaborations to Address Sexual Violence on Campus* project, "Feminist theories recognize rape culture as a way in which sexist societal attitudes and language tacitly condone, minimize and or normalize sexual violence, mostly against women, but also against other genders through institutions, communities and individuals." (Project Description). Furthermore, rape culture is embedded in discrimination and exists along a continuum of gender-based sexual violence. Some of the behaviors that contribute to rape culture are broad and include the sexual objectification of women, the sexualization of violence against women, the pervasiveness and normalization of popular culture depictions of sexual violence against women as entertainment and rape jokes. Other behaviors contributing to rape culture are individually experienced such as, sexual harassment, non-consensual distribution of intimate images or of images of sexual violence, shaming of an individual for their gender identification or sexual orientation and victim blaming. Moreover, the list continuously expands as gender-based sexual violence flourishes both online and off.

## **Backlash Against Rape Culture**

Some scholars suggest that the prevalence of rape culture might be viewed as a backlash against periods of feminist success (Gavey 2005, p. 64; Gotell & Dutton, 2016). For example, Gotell and Dutton explain that historically ‘anti-feminist’ groups advance and gain traction during periods where women make gains in political or cultural arenas, particularly when they are perceived as potentially encroaching upon or challenging male privilege. This could explain the increasing prevalence of rape culture on college campuses specifically, as more women are leading successful academic careers and are entering traditionally male-dominated fields. Gotell and Dutton further suggest that an important aspect of the backlash against anti-rape feminism is the construction of the movement as promoting a neoliberal law and order state, promoting retributive and punitive justice, which further disenfranchises economically marginalized and racialized populations, noting that:

“A backlash to anti-rape feminism has been similarly reflected in popular culture. In newspapers and on popular news websites, the concept ‘rape culture’ has been identified as a feminist-produced moral panic (for example Kitchens 2014). Statistical evidence of rape’s pervasiveness has come under fire (for example MacDonald 2014). Efforts to respond to sexual violence on university campuses have been condemned as abuses of due process that stigmatize innocent young men (MacDonald 2014). Media critiques blame ‘ideological’ feminism for constructing men as rapists and for absolving women from taking reasonable steps (avoiding binge drinking, for example) to prevent rape.” (Gotell & Dutton, 2016).

As terms like ‘rape culture’ become increasingly employed in mainstream popular media, and resulting concerns emerge about the prevalence of sexual assault and the lack of effective institutional responses, a backlash against anti-rape culture activists has emerged. This current backlash “echoes an earlier antifeminist backlash that emerged in the 1990s in response to feminist social science research demonstrating the pervasiveness of sexual violence” (Gotell & Dutton, 2016, p. 66). It is increasingly suggested by Men’s Rights Activists (MRA’s), for example, that concerns about rape culture on college campuses are feminist generated moral panics (Gotell & Dutton, 2016;

Raphael, 2013). The denial of rape culture as expressed above will be a major challenge in our project, particularly as we work to change the cultural landscape around sexual assault. Even as the implementation of sexual assault policy is currently being mandated by the Quebec provincial government, we face strong resistance to the idea that rape culture exists.

Our initial research for this project reveals that as sexual assault is becoming increasingly normalized, both male and female students are encountering situations where they are unable to accurately identify sexual assault. We believe that it remains essential to educate students about sexual violence in a manner that clearly, transparently, and accurately addresses the issues. While mutual respect and enthusiastic consent are certainly part of the conversation, our project will also address educating students about that broader social and cultural landscape that perpetuates rape culture and the specifics of what constitutes and leads to sexual violence.

Resistance to acknowledging the problem and addressing it in language that clearly and accurately defines the key issues points to some of the challenges we will be facing. Implementing a mandated policy addressing sexual assault will be less effective if the faculty and administration at the institution don't have an understanding of the issue and deny the prevalence. For example, while Men's Rights Activists deny the existence of rape culture, some feminists also oppose the use of the terminology. These feminists perceive the conversations and increasing awareness of rape culture as a threat to women's sexual freedom.

In her 2006 book, *The Female Thing*, Laura Kipnis discusses the unfortunate paradox that as women have finally achieved a degree of sexual freedom, awareness about rape culture has resulted in women limiting their own personal freedoms due to fears concerning their safety and vulnerability. This is certainly a major concern that we explore in our project. At the same time, we do not want to generate moral panics around sexual violence. However, as policy is being mandated and implemented in Quebec, it does seem to present an opportunity to begin productive conversations, to educate, and to mobilize knowledge and awareness efforts around gender-based sexual violence on campuses.

The pervasiveness of sexual violence and ‘rape culture’ are intertwined, but we must be aware not to confuse the cause with the effect. The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), RAINN urged a U.S. task force to remain focused on the true cause of the problem. “In the last few years, there has been an unfortunate trend towards blaming “rape culture” for the extensive problem of sexual violence on campuses. While it is helpful to point out the systemic barriers to addressing the problem, it is important to not lose sight of a simple fact: Rape is caused not by cultural factors but by the conscious decisions, of a small percentage of the community, to commit a violent crime,” said the letter to the task force from RAINN’s president, Scott Berkowitz, and vice president for public policy, Rebecca O’Connor. (RAINN, March 6, 2014). This quote has been used by rape deniers to suggest that rape culture either does not exist or is not a factor in sexual violence. While we acknowledge that individuals commit acts of sexual violence we cannot overstate the reality that a cultural landscape that enables and tolerates misogyny and gender-based sexual violence greatly contributes to perpetuating and supporting individual acts of sexual violence.

Rape culture is also supported by rape myths. While rape myths can vary culturally, there is a general pattern that can be recognized. For example, rape myths perpetuate stereotypes and promote incorrect information, which serves to create a landscape where sexual violence can flourish. Rape myths can also call into question the prevalence of sexual violence denying the validity of statistical evidence and research, minimizing the impacts of sexual violence, and disbelieving survivors when they come forward and discrediting them (Burt 1980; Edwards et al. 2011; Mark, 2016).

Additionally, rape myths confuse the understanding of what consent entails, further creating a climate in which sexual violence can grow, and in which survivors of sexual assault feel confusion and guilt, which makes them reluctant to report. Such internalization of rape myths by survivors is a significant barrier to reporting, and as a result, to creating a safe campus environment. Furthermore, “Rape myths are reinforced through the media and are embedded in advertisements, television shows, movies, video games and the internet.” (Directorate, O. W. S., 2013). Bleecker and Murnen (2005) “found that the presence of objectifying images was statistically associated with men's

endorsement of rape myths.” (Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017, p. 95). Implementing educational initiatives designed to help young people to deconstruct rape myths is key. Additionally, knowledge mobilization activities on campus that address rape myths serve to create a culture change in which policy is more likely to be effective. Actively addressing rape myths at all levels of educational institutions, including administration, faculty, employees and students, will be a key focus of our project. Some of the challenges we expect to face are that students are often resistant to acknowledging rape culture on campus and are susceptible to adopting rape myths.

One such myth concerns the campus party scene. Specifically, some students may have an incentive in not participating in activities that create culture change on campus. As Armstrong et al. (2006) noted, “Finding fault with the party scene potentially threatens meaningful identities and lifestyles” (p. 492). If we turn to the campus party scene as a potential factor influencing rape culture on campus we risk disrupting the party-scene culture. Therefore, by blaming the victim and attributing negative outcomes to women’s individual bad judgement “students avoid criticizing the party scene or men's behavior within it” (p. 493). This victim blaming often results in women internalizing the responsibility for their sexual assault, attributing the assault to their own bad judgement or incompetence and therefore they don’t report in order to avoid further condemnation” (Jozkowski, K. N., & Wiersma-Mosley, J. D., 2017). Lisak, D. (2008). Understanding the predatory nature of sexual violence. Retrieved from *Harvard Kennedy School Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation website*: <http://www.innovations.harvard.edu/showdoc.html>.

Other myths abound around the causality of sexual violence at fraternities and sororities. For example, during focus group research with women in sororities, DeSantis (2007) found that many of the respondents had disclosed experiences of sexual assault, rape, attempted rape, and/or situations in which “men will not take no for an answer” (p. 99). Yet respondents also revealed that they had not confronted the perpetrator and often acted as if nothing had happened. DeSantos attributed these reactions to the unacceptability of women expressing anger or rage in our society, and consequently these emotions often turned to guilt or sadness. Additionally, if a woman does report, she risks experiencing social sanctions. According to DeSantis research survivors are expected to

understand that, ‘boys will be boys’ and ‘roll with it’ (Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017). The myth that being a part of a particular group necessarily alleviates you from being a responsible adult is a myth that does not do justice to the many positive philanthropic activities that these clubs participate in.

Some myths are perpetrated by individuals who are close to the survivor. According to our interviews for this Needs Assessment, additional reasons that women might not report incidences of sexual violence is when they were told by their friends and peers that “it happens to everyone.” Sexual violence has become so normalized, that it has also been thought of as “part of the college experience.” This stems from rape myths that trivialize and normalize sexual violence. It was also suggested that survivors of sexual assault sometimes want to keep the assault a secret, because they are concerned that they will be judged or shamed. They worry that they will be seen differently, for instance, as being less competent for allowing this to happen to them, having exercised poor judgement, and for being psychologically damaged or fragile as a result. Such myths are especially dangerous, particularly when they originate from a trusted source.

There are other reasons why students choose not to report cases to authorities or the school. For example, the resource guide, Directorate, O. W. S. (2013) *Developing a response to sexual violence: A resource guide for Ontario’s colleges and universities*. Toronto: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, outlines a series of such reasons. These range from having concerns about being believed, concerns about being blamed for the assault, feelings of shame or guilt, fear of institutional sanctions or a police investigation where underage drinking or the use of illegal drugs were involved and fear of reprisal by the perpetrator or his friends. This can also include fear of cyberviolence from peers and even strangers. Such myths can dampen the ability of law enforcement to punish perpetrators, and for legal systems to institutionalize the notion that sexual violence is not tolerated at all levels of society.

There can also be tremendous peer pressure to not report, especially if the perpetrator has significant status on campus. Survivors may be concerned about confidentiality of the reporting

process, not wanting to open their lives to outside scrutiny and judgement. Moreover, concerns about maintaining control over the process, being forced to participate in legal proceedings or restorative justice in ways they are not comfortable with, or physical examinations or questions that may be potentially invasive. Oftentimes, there are also emotional and psychological impacts of reporting that survivors may not yet be ready to experience. Cultural beliefs and values can also influence an individual's decision to tell someone or formally report the incident. Survivors may fear that contacting services will result in other community members learning about the assault; they may believe that a disclosure could result in being ostracized by family or friends.

Survivors may also fear that their lives and school experiences will change completely if they decide to report, particularly younger students, who may anticipate parental intervention in the form of changing their living arrangements (being pulled out of dorm), having their personal autonomy limited, or not being able to travel and experience college life independently. Some survivors we spoke to had chosen not to report because they believed that there is still significant stigma attached to having been a victim of sexual violence. They were concerned about being viewed as vulnerable, fragile or somehow damaged by the event. They believed that these perceptions might impact future opportunities.

Previous experiences of racism, ableism, homophobia or transphobia may also influence survivor's decisions to withhold their report. The potential for experiencing discrimination, combined with the desire for privacy regarding sexual orientation, may be deterrents to reporting and seeking help. There may also be a lack of services for students available to effectively accommodate the unique experiences and needs of some campus students and communities, moreover, even if the services do exist, survivors may not come forward because they are unaware of them. Survivors may choose not to report because they believe that they will experience many of the above-mentioned consequences, but inevitably, there will be no consequences for the perpetrator. Respondents for this Needs Assessment and the women leaders we spoke to at the inaugural meeting of the Gender Equality Network Canada overwhelmingly reported that they had not personally witnessed a positive outcome of a survivor reporting. We discussed what the potential benefits to the survivor might be in

reporting and whether the process results in positive experiences and healing for the survivor. It was suggested that the processes and consequences of reporting often add to the survivor's trauma.

Among students who do choose to disclose incidences, they often select a close friend or family member to discuss the incident (Directorate, O. W. S. (2013), but they may also speak with other students, staff, or teachers and coaches. This raises the question of how do we create a college and university culture where survivors feel able to express their emotions and share their experiences with administration. For example, institutional policies and protocols can also play a valuable role in creating campus environments where survivors feel safe about coming forward and getting the help they need. Policies and protocols are particularly beneficial when combined with public education and prevention initiatives, as well as ongoing improvements to the physical safety of the campus student body (Directorate, O. W. S. (2013). While implementing provincially mandated sexual violence policy is a crucial aspect of the solution and will contribute to sending a clear message that sexual violence will not be tolerated, the under-reporting of sexual assault on campus is a fundamental aspect of the problem. Therefore, a vital component of our strategy will be to provide education and knowledge mobilization regarding what sexual violence entails, and to create a campus culture that supports survivors, and provides a safe environment in which students can come forward.

### **Responses at the Institutional Level**

While there is a growing shift in the number of female to male students who obtain university degrees, it remains that most administration positions are male-dominated. (Cook, 2012; Huang, 2015; White, McDade, Yamagata, & Morahan, 2012). This difference is not necessarily the reason or the cause of sexual violence in universities, but the spaces in which patriarchal dominance is established are likely breeding grounds for sexual violence and gender-based inequality in and around university campuses (Jozkowski, & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017). At the same time, it is unclear regarding the extent that board members at the upper echelon are trained to deal with cases of sexual violence, particularly since only 30% of universities in the United states had trained members (DeMatteo, Galloway, Arnold, & Patel, 2015). Moreover, DeMatteo and colleagues (2015) stress that training would reduce bias among executive members. (Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017). It is clear that a crucial aspect of addressing rape culture on college campuses would be to educate

board members and administrators so that they were in a position to support faculty, students and survivors.

## **Gender-based Cyberviolence and Rape Culture**

“So, too, cyber hate can skew how society perceives and treats women, entrenching hateful attitudes and discrimination. The search-ability and persistence of digital content ensures the continuation of these harms” (Citron, 2011). The impetus for drafting the *Preventing and Eliminating Rape Culture on College Campuses* grant proposal emerged as a result of a three-year Status of Women Canada funded Project, *Helping Communities Respond: Preventing and Eliminating Cyberviolence directed at Girls and Young Women* conducted by the Atwater Library and Computer Centre. During the course of the Project, we engaged with over 1000 individuals in our community to share knowledge about gender-based cyberviolence and how it impacts girls, women, LGBTQI2S<sup>2</sup>, and gender non-conforming people. Through working with the extensive networks that we had established with academics and research groups, educators and schools, front-line sexual assault workers and counselors, law enforcement, digital thought leaders, technologists, and activists and the video game industry/community, it became evident that the gender-based cyberviolence occurring online was having powerfully negative consequences offline, as was evident during the course of the *Preventing Cyberviolence* Project.

We do not believe this inter-relationship between sexual violence occurring in on and offline spaces is unique to our project. A 2013 report from the World Health Organization referred to violence against women as “a global health problem of epidemic proportion.” This epidemic is being manifested online as revenge porn, sex trafficking, depiction of sexual violence for entertainment, hyper-sexualization of girls and women in media and popular culture along with the ‘pornification’ of popular youth culture. All of these different forms of violence against women put extreme pressure on girls to live up to impossible physical standards, to create online identities that reflect ‘porn-star’ constructions of beauty and sexuality. The pressure offline to conform to these

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<sup>2</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Two-Spirit

constructed realities is often intensely felt by girls and young women as they face social pressures in their everyday lives.

As digital technologies evolve, gender-based cyberviolence intensifies an offline landscape in which gender inequality already exists. As we struggle to create work and school environments that are more conscious about existing systems of gendered oppression, including patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, rape culture, heterosexism, homophobia, cissexism, and transphobia, and where intolerance is unacceptable, the online world provides a landscape where gendered sexual violence seems to flourish. This creates further challenges, as young people's understandings of gender roles, sexuality, and sexual identity are greatly shaped by the content they are exposed to online. As both online and offline environments become increasingly intertwined, gender-based cyberviolence has profound impacts on fostering gender inequality in our everyday lives.

Never before have young people had such unfettered access to information, combined with the ability to explore and construct individual identity online. While this has led to numerous positive social and culture shifts, including greater awareness of social, political, and environmental issues, the ability to align oneself with communities of interest, to engage as an activist, to access opportunities for both global and cross-generational interactions and collaborations, to deepen understanding of diverse communities, and to promote greater gender awareness, etc., it becomes even more important to remain cognizant of the reality that the freedom to develop and enact identity online happens *within* a commercial context. As young people engage online, they create online identities; at this same time, significant effort is often devoted to creating and growing the virtual self in a way that represents the individual as seen from both on and offline worlds.

While online spaces have created positive opportunities for young people to explore and interact around gender and sexuality, there are also tremendous commercial pressures to create a specific type of sexual identity that can then be commodified and shared. For young people, much of their identity development and performance occurs on social media sites and online dating sites; this is where youth interact and communicate, and the investment in their online identity intensifies.

However, it's crucial to be mindful of the fact that online spaces in which this identity construction and performance occurs often exists solely to make a profit. The identities young people create and engage with online become commodities from which many of these sites profit.

### **Cyberspace provides both opportunity and risk**

Through our work, over the past three years, with the Preventing Cyberviolence Project, it became exceedingly clear that there is a continuum of online violence, from very broad social impacts to the more personal, individual impacts. At one end of the continuum there might be the hyper-sexualization and objectification of girls and women in online spaces and through popular culture, video games, pornography, portrayal of rape as entertainment or as humor in media and popular culture, television, film and music and then more individually focused acts of violence such as threats and harassment, victim blaming, revenge porn, stalking, the luring and grooming of girls online, commodifying and eventually human trafficking through online sites. Our research with over 1000 stakeholders combined with our ongoing engagement around policy implementation and knowledge mobilization revealed overwhelmingly that the normalization of sexual violence against women online normalized that violence offline. The online world is inextricably intertwined with the offline, particularly on college campuses. Young people describe a “‘matrix of sexism’ in which elements of rape culture formed a taken-for-granted backdrop to their everyday lives” (Rentschler, 2014).

Issues surrounding the perpetuation of rape culture have been an integral aspect of our Preventing Cyberviolence Project, as our work with community organizations and on high school and college campuses revealed that, there is often a belief that sexual violence against girls and women is a ubiquitous and inevitable aspect of social life and our culture and therefore cannot be eradicated. Although sexual violence is of course perceived as heinous and unacceptable the belief that it's an inherent aspect of society normalizes gender-based sexual violence. This perspective constitutes both a social and institutional barrier as it influences policy, protocol and procedures on college campuses. If there is an attitude that gender-based sexual violence is an everyday aspect of our lives there is less incentive to develop and implement strategies to permanently eradicate it. We need to

change this belief by ‘de-normalizing’ gender-based sexual violence and rape culture through policy that clearly articulates the procedures that will be followed, consequences for perpetrator, and support to the survivor. Additionally, knowledge mobilization activities that are comprehensive and ongoing and that are integrated into every level of the institution will be a crucial aspect of any strategy.

Increasingly, women are experiencing online sexual violence that directly impacts their offline lives. For instance, in the distribution of “revenge porn,” where sexually explicit images or videos are distributed without consent, Citron (2014) found that in the 1,606 cases she examined, 90% of the targets were women. Targets of cyberviolence (and those that perceive themselves as potential targets) can feel unsafe to establish a positive online presence. This can mean that girls, women, LGBTQQI2S, and gender non-conforming people would be unable to promote their work equally, and to create a professional website or social media account or engage in civic and political discussions. Feeling unsafe online often results in unequal opportunity for advancement, which becomes especially important when engaging online becomes increasingly crucial for success in academic, political, and professional spheres.

Cyberspace also plays a key role in both mobilizing rape culture and in resisting it. For instance, cyberspace provides potential sites of “third-wave feminism emphasizing grassroots direct action and cultural struggles, while turning away from engagement with the state and law” (Snyder 2008) (Cited in Gotell & Dutton, p. 71). As Gotell and Dutton, note in their article *Sexual Violence in the Manosphere: Antifeminist Men’s Rights Discourses on Rape*, “Extremists and hate groups are increasingly embracing new media forums (such as websites, blogs and *YouTube* channels) as avenues to deliver their messages (Dunbar, Connelly, Jensen et al. 2014). In these spaces, MRAs are building virtual communities founded on malice against feminists and mobilizing men on the basis of a claimed identity as victims.” (p. 72). Cyberspace provides a powerful arena for like-minded individuals to come together and have their perspectives reinforced and amplified, whether for positive or negative purposes.

## **The Quebec Context**

While cyber and sexual violence against girls and women continues to be prevalent online, offline much of the aggression towards girls and women plays out on-site at the university and college level. To tackle this problem, researchers from six Quebec universities (UQAM, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Université de Sherbrooke, Université Laval and Université de Montréal) looked into the incidence of sexual violence and harassment on the province's university campuses. The investigation, ESSIMU (*Enquête Sexualité Sécurité et Interactions en Milieu Universitaire*), headed by Manon Bergeron, professor of sexology at UQAM, surveyed a total of 9,284 students and staff members from these six universities. Among them, 37% (of whom 41% identified as female, 26% as male, 49 as sexual minorities, and 56% a gender minority) indicated they had experienced some form of sexual violence, ranging from harassment to assault, committed by someone associated with the university, from the time they first started attending the institution. (Bergeron, Hébert, Ricci, Goyer, Duhamel, Kurtzman, & Demers, 2016).

### **Student Groups/Association for the Voice of Education in Quebec (AVEQ)**

Despite the primary mandate of our grant being to address rape culture on campus through a policy lens at the institutional level, which involves working closely with administration, we are very cognizant of the importance of including students in the conversations. This inclusion is particularly salient in light of the Release of a joint statement “Denouncing Lack of Survivor Inclusion in Government Sexual Assault Consultations” from the Association for the Voice of Education in Quebec (AVEQ) and ASSÉ on January 12, 2017. Further to this point of including students in the conversation, on August 21<sup>st</sup> 2017, minister Hélène David announced public consultations regarding sexual violence on university and CEGEP campuses across the province. Minister David invited university and college administrators, who are responsible for creating policies or frameworks for disciplinary processes in cases of sexual violence to consult. It is crucial to include the perspectives of survivors, as well as groups that support survivors, and groups that represent indigenous, racialized and transgender women who are the most affected by sexual violence on an ongoing basis in order to achieve outcomes that are both survivor centered and effective. Further to that point we

intend to ensure that throughout our project we are in continuous consultation with students, student groups and survivors.

## Concrete Responses to Rape Culture

When cases of college sexual assaults are reported to campus law enforcement and administration, they frequently require a coordinated response, as victims commonly have complex needs that span multiple departments on campus (Smith, Wilkes, & Bouffard, 2014). This highlights the necessary strategy of bringing multiple diverse stakeholders throughout the educational institution together to work collaboratively to develop and implement unified holistic strategies and responses. According to a report, *Preventing Sexual Violence on College Campuses: Lessons from Research and Practice* which was prepared for the *White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault April 2014*, prevention strategies that are consistent with best practices, such as being theory-based and including multiple skill-based sessions, have the greatest potential in reducing rates of sexual violence. Other strategies that have demonstrated some evidence for changing behavior or modifying risk factors include building relationship skills, organizational policies, or practices to improve safety or climate, addressing social norms and behavior with messages from trusted and influential voices and training student bystanders to intervene. However, it's important that these final judgments are evidence based, and follow empirically-sound conclusions; for example, as DeGue (2014) informs us,

“Brief, one-session educational programs focused on increasing awareness or changing beliefs and attitudes are not effective at changing behavior in the long-term. These approaches may be useful as one component of a comprehensive strategy. However, they are not likely to have any impact on rates of violence if implemented as a stand-alone strategy or as a primary component of a prevention plan. Although these brief programs may increase awareness of the issue, it is unlikely that such programs are sufficient to change behavioral patterns that are developed and continually influenced and reinforced across the lifespan. Programs that fit within one class period or that can be delivered at low cost via video or in large group settings are appealing in educational and other settings. However, continuing to invest scarce resources in low or no-impact strategies detracts from potential investments in more effective approaches and may be counter-productive. For these reasons, preventing sexual violence may require a shift away from low-dose educational programming

to development and investment in more comprehensive strategies that address risk factors at multiple levels of influence, including those at the community level”. (DeGue, 2014)

Other suggested steps that college campuses can take to address sexual violence include: employing research to gain an understanding of students needs in relation to sexual violence, developing comprehensive prevention plans that consider systemic and structural factors, cultural and social norms and include campus-wide policy, evaluating any strategies that are implemented and sharing best practices and lessons learned.

## **Summary of Findings:**

### **Knowledge mobilization begins at the top of the ivory tower**

Both research and our Needs Assessment interviews support the belief that a trusted faculty member is often the person a sexual violence survivor will disclose to.

Within the institutions that we engaged with for this Needs Assessment, there were important gaps in both general knowledge and awareness about gender-based sexual violence, and in the perspectives and approaches amongst administration, faculty, and support staff. These gaps show a need to harmonize policies, knowledge, and approaches within institutions. We observed that oftentimes, there were invaluable resources within institutions in the form of feminist academics who were experts in the area of gender-based sexual violence, who had often been researching and working on the subject for years. Additionally, there were student activists and survivors who also held specialized knowledge and were invested in the issue. These significant resources are being under-utilized. Going forward, a potential strategy would be to engage in activities within and between institutions for the purposes of ‘leveling-up’ knowledge about sexual violence by bringing together and collaborating with existing ‘experts’ within our stakeholder and partner institutions.

### **Need for inclusion of student voices**

As we engage in conversations, research and write documents, develop and enact policy with our stakeholders, it is crucial to authentically include student activists and survivor’s perspectives in ways that can support students as leaders of the process whenever possible. “Students act as agents of

change, advocating against campus sexual assault and transforming campus norms about consent, prevention, support for survivors, and institutional response (Dick & Ziering, 2015; Jackson, 2014).” (Found in Krause, Miedema, Woofter and Yount, 2017). In their article *Feminist Research with Student Activists: Enhancing Campus Sexual Assault Research* the authors suggest that VAW researchers often overlook the contributions of student activists and they call upon those doing VAW work on campuses to include the voices of students as collaborators with the goal of creating better, more relevant institutional strategies for prevention and response. To this end, we will be vigilant about developing opportunities for students to not only contribute to but to guide and lead research and strategies about gender-based sexual violence on campuses. According to student activists and survivors we spoke to for our Needs Assessment, survivors must be part of every conversation with administrators because their contributions completely change the tone of the conversation. According to a leader of one student organization and survivor “If survivors are not present in policy development discussions you potentially end up with policies and responses that would be alienating for the people you are trying to support.” Administrators are often concerned with issues of liability and unions and may have to balance that with the perspectives of survivors. The student activist suggested that it was crucial that administration not rush to get policy done, ticking of a box in a work-plan but rather take time and think and consult before acting. Additionally, it is key to have academic accommodation included in responses.

**Need to take time the time to develop policy that is effective, workable and that makes sense to administration, faculty and students.** While provincial legislation requiring sexual violence policy in educational institutions is a commendable, essential and fundamental initiative, some of our front-line stakeholders who have been advocating on this front for many years, are cautioning against rushing policy, suggesting that we need to do this correctly and comprehensively in order to not miss the opportunity to create living, effective policies.

**Need to develop strategies to create ways to ensure sustainability for the knowledge and resources acquired and developed by students and student groups and to integrate this valuable resource into the institutional knowledge of the larger educational organization**

**and community.** It's crucial to include student voices in the discussion about policy and to find ways to include collective student knowledge and experience sustainably within the institutions we are collaborating with. This is a challenge because students, by virtue of their position within the institution, are transitory and as a result student organizations sometimes lack institutional memory. Often-times the knowledge and experience acquired by students is lost to the organizations they belong to as they graduate.

### **Need for an intersectional approach**

The many different communities on campus experience sexual violence uniquely and therefore may potentially have very different needs in terms of policy and responses. Taking an intersectional approach begins with challenging binary understandings of “masculinity” and “femininity” and understanding and creating capacity for the diversity that exists within the student body. An important aspect of developing effective policy and responses is to deliberately seek out the perspectives of students from varied socio-economic, age, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, while also acknowledging that women with disabilities are more likely to experience sexual assault on campus. Including transgender, genderqueer, non-conforming and questioning people's (henceforth TGNQ) experiences of sexual, gendered, and intimate partner violence will be crucial in creating strategies that are inclusive and effective.

### **Need to be flexible and adaptable**

Due to the quickly changing and evolving landscape in the area of gender-based sexual violence we will need to be continuously aware of emerging legislation and provincial mandates in addition to regularly connecting with all of the ongoing research and front-line projects to ensure that we are sharing knowledge and resources. This project will make an important contribution by being a conduit through which projects, resources and information can be shared between the various local organizations working on preventing and eliminating rape culture on college campuses.

**Need to address online gender-based sexual violence as an influencing factor in rape culture on campus.** As both online and offline environments become increasingly intertwined, gender-based cyberviolence has profound impacts on gender inequality and gender-based sexual

violence in our everyday lives. The normalization of sexual violence against women online further normalizes gender-based sexual violence offline. The online world is inextricably intertwined with the offline, particularly on college campuses. Young people describe a “‘matrix of sexism’ in which elements of rape culture formed a taken-for-granted backdrop to their everyday lives” (Rentschler, 2014). Strategies that focus on culture shifts need to acknowledge and address this reality. As we endeavor to create work and school environments that are more conscious about existing systems of gendered oppression, including patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, rape culture, heterosexism, homophobia, cissexism, and transphobia, and where intolerance is unacceptable behavior, it is also important to challenge the current mass media, popular culture, and social media discourses around gender-based sexual violence on campuses in order to eliminate a culture that continues to perpetuate unsafe campuses.

**Need to combat rape myths.** There is often a belief that sexual violence against girls and women is a ubiquitous and inevitable aspect of social life and our culture and therefore cannot be eradicated. Although sexual violence is of course perceived as heinous and unacceptable the belief that it’s an inherent aspect of society normalizes sexual violence. This perspective constitutes both a social and institutional barrier as it influences policy, protocol and procedures on college campuses. The denial of rape culture will be a major challenge in our project, particularly as we work to change the cultural landscape around sexual assault. Additionally, acceptance of rape myths by general society along with the internalization of rape myths by survivors is a significant barrier to reporting, and as a result, to creating a safe campus environment.

**Need to find language to promote inclusive discussions.** There are challenges regarding how to frame the issue of sexual violence on campus. For instance, according to the literature and our discussions with stakeholders, ‘rape culture’ has become a fraught and often-times contentious term.

### **Ways forward:**

This project aims to mobilize key partners, including academic institutions, to develop comprehensive strategies in implementing clearly articulated, concrete, widespread, inclusive policies and best practices to prevent, eliminate and respond to rape culture on campuses across Canada.

The strategies developed in three pilot sites will constitute three CEGEP campuses in the Greater Montreal region. The approaches that are developed will actively involve academic institutions at the administration level, academic researchers and policy makers and will harmonize and inform rape culture prevention policy on both high school and university campuses. The research and best practices will be widely shared with academic institutions at the administration level, academic researchers, policy makers and the general public.

A key goal is to develop effective means of engaging academic partners in integrating knowledge mobilization about rape culture into academic institutions across-the-board at all levels. This will be done by engaging partners through a multi-pronged approach: widely communicating a clear understanding of what rape culture is; building awareness about the behaviors (both on and offline) that contribute to rape culture; developing policy that addresses sexual harassment and violence against girls and women (both on and offline) with clearly drafted, transparent and accessible procedures to follow when incidents occur; engaging in knowledge mobilization about rape culture into academic institutions at all levels.

- We will support activities on campuses that challenge the current mass media, popular culture, and social media discourses around gender-based sexual violence
- We will address gender-based sexual violence on college and university campuses by providing a comprehensive and clear definition of sexual violence, and the roles that gender and intersectionality plays in the manifestation of gender-based sexual violence.
- We will encourage and participate in knowledge mobilization activities on campus that address rape myths and thereby serve to create a culture change in which policy is more likely to be effective. We will actively address rape myths at all levels of educational institutions.
- While implementing provincially mandated sexual violence policy is a crucial aspect of the solution and will contribute to send a clear message that sexual violence will not be tolerated, the under-reporting of sexual assault on campus is a fundamental aspect of the problem. Therefore, a vital component of our strategy will be to provide education and knowledge

mobilization regarding what sexual violence entails, and to create a campus culture that supports survivors, and provides a safe environment in which students can come forward.

- We recognize that there is an urgent need for more extensive, comprehensive and nuanced qualitative research. Researchers have produced some quantitative research that reveals that rape culture and gender-based sexual violence are pervasive and it is a foundation to work from. However, there is a pressing need to conduct qualitative research that uncovers the ways in which rape culture may contribute to sexual violence and how this manifests in everyday lives.
- We acknowledge that perspectives around this issue are very divergent. Therefore it becomes imperative to make sure that we bring stakeholders with conflicting and varied viewpoints and experiences together to develop policy and responses that make sense to administrators, faculty and students. Policy needs to be viewed as both fair and effective by the community in order to be consistently employed and implemented. Survivors need to believe that coming forward will result in positive outcomes and implementing policy is more likely to happen if it is viewed as beneficial to the entire community.
- Because the language around rape culture and sexual violence can be contentious and divisive we will be aware of and noting the ways in which the various research projects address the issue, the positions they take, and the language they use; we will then proceed by checking in with all of our stakeholders for their feedback on this important first step in the building process.
- We need to change the belief that sexual violence against girls and women is a ubiquitous and inevitable aspect of social life and our culture and therefore cannot be eradicated by ‘de-normalizing’ gender-based sexual violence and rape culture through policy that clearly articulates the procedures that will be followed, consequences to the perpetrator, and support to survivor. Additionally, knowledge mobilization activities that are comprehensive and ongoing and that are integrated into every level of the institution will be a crucial aspect of any strategy.
- We will include the perspectives of survivors, as well as groups that support survivors, and groups that represent indigenous, racialized and transgender women who are the most

affected by sexual violence on an ongoing basis in order to achieve outcomes that are both survivor centered and effective. We intend to ensure that throughout our project we are in continuous consultation with students, student groups and survivors.

- We will employ innovative and arts-based methodologies to share viewpoints and experiences. This is an important and effective way to bring stakeholders with diverse and oft times conflicting viewpoints together to gain a greater understanding about gender-based sexual violence, the pervasiveness of the problem and the potentially profound impact it has on survivors. This is especially valuable in including those whose perspectives might typically be excluded from the more institutional discourse.
- We will aim to bring multiple diverse stakeholders throughout the educational institution together to work collaboratively to develop and implement unified holistic strategies and responses. We appreciate the fact that incidents of sexual violence require immediate, coordinated response, as survivors, perpetrators and the broader community commonly have needs that span multiple departments on campus. This highlights the necessary strategy of bringing multiple diverse stakeholders throughout the educational institution together to work collaboratively to develop and implement unified holistic strategies and responses.

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