

“SlutWalk is ‘kind of like feminism’”:

A critical reading of Canadian mainstream news coverage of SlutWalk

By

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Abstract

Since its inception in April 2011, “SlutWalk” has grown from a Toronto-based rally and march against victim-blaming and sexual violence into a globalized movement spanning six continents. Given that its mainstream visibility is unprecedented for any contemporary feminist movement, SlutWalk represents a unique opportunity to examine representations of feminist politics in the Canadian mainstream news media. Drawing on the theoretical and methodological tools of feminism and cultural studies, I offer a contextualized reading and discourse analysis of the representations of SlutWalk across print, radio, and televisual media during its first nine months of press. On the surface, the media portrays SlutWalk in a fair and positive light, taking seriously its messages about police accountability, victim solidarity, and women’s liberation as key tenets for ending victim-blaming. Nonetheless, these “fair” messages are constituted by and constitutive of neoliberal, white supremacist, and postfeminist discourses of the “reality” of sexual violence, which undermine intersectional feminist efforts to eradicate sexual violence. I argue that mainstream media representations of SlutWalk reproduce a watered-down version of feminism and a decontextualized understanding of sexual violence that resonates most with white, heteronormative, educated women. Overall, I suggest that the mainstream visibility of SlutWalk is possible only insofar as its representations steer clear of any substantive critique of patriarchal violence as it articulates with racism, heterosexism, and institutional violence. Average media consumers of stories about SlutWalk are most likely afforded a sense that “managing” sexual violence and “liberating” women might be achieved within the existing status quo and through a sole focus on (white) women. In conclusion, I reiterate the need for intervention and engagement with the mainstream reproduction of discourses about feminism, and offer suggestions for how this might be achieved.

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Preface: The Origin of SlutWalk

Instead of ceding the power to define intervention to administrators caught up in the culture of risk management, feminists might practice publicly perverting and mocking the language in a manner that highlights how nonsensical it is to socialize women to stop rape. (Rachel Hall, 2004, p. 12)

During a 24 January 2011 campus safety briefing at York University's Osgoode Law School, a Toronto Police Constable named Michael Sanguinetti recommended that "women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized" (Kwan, 2011). In the wake of the York incident, a feminist social intervention unfolded that cultural studies scholar Rachel Hall gestured towards seven years prior. Sanguinetti's now infamous words are known for sparking the protest movement known as "SlutWalk" that attempts to subvert the victim-blaming language that pervades public dialogue about sexual violence.

In this preface, I will describe how victim-blaming attitudes are part of what feminists call "rape culture." I will examine Sanguinetti's remarks to show how they place blame on rape victims instead of rapists and explain how his words ultimately led to the Slutwalk movement. Then I will discuss the growth of the global SlutWalk phenomenon to provide my readers with enough background to understand why media coverage about SlutWalk is a significant cultural text.

Constable Sanguinetti and Rape Culture

Sanguinetti offered his "advice" in the context of a campus safety seminar, which is among the most common types of sexual assault intervention strategies (Morrison, Hardison, Mathew, & O'Neil, 2004). The majority of sexual assault programs are victim-focused and emphasize risk reduction and education (Hall, 2004; Lonsway et al., 2009; McMahon, 2000; Morrison et al., 2004). These primary prevention programs are premised on the inevitability of male violence and the vulnerability of women, and conceive of opportunities for intervention only with the latter. Rachel Hall describes how women are paradoxically "assigned an *a priori* victim-status and expected to avoid the inevitable all on their own" (2004, p. 6), and thus are rendered more culpable for sexual

violence than the perpetrators themselves. By conceiving of sexual violence as something that women should avoid, Sanguinetti reinforced the notion that the problem of sexual violence is best “address[ed] through the bodies of women, always already victims, instead of potential victimizers” (Hall, 2004, p. 8). He advised women to regulate and suppress their overt sexuality to avoid stirring the sexual appetites of potential rapists. This type of “safety tip” perpetuates “slut-shaming” because it implies that provocatively dressed women are especially violable and less deserving of sympathy in the event of an attack.

Sanguinetti’s victim-blaming and slut-shaming remarks at the York campus safety seminar are instructive for how mainstream Canadian society understands the politics of sexuality, gender, and sexual violence. Similarly, feminist writer Jill Filipovic argues that “at the heart of the sexual assault issue is how mainstream [North] American culture constructs sex and sexualities along gendered lines” (p. 18). The logic underpinning Sanguinetti’s remark is congruent with several persistent “traditional explanations and shared meanings” about rape, which Coppock, Haydon, and Richter (1995) describe as including:

women enjoy rape (say no when they mean yes); women provoke rape (by the way they dress, by going out alone, by accepting lifts); only certain – unrespectable – women are raped; women make false accusations of rape (for revenge or to protect their reputation); rape is committed by maniacs (ill, sick, stressed, out of control); rapists are in the grip of impulsive, uncontrollable sexual urges; most rapists are strangers. (p. 31)

These types of traditional explanations are not empirically or theoretically supported, so feminists and anti-violence scholars refer to them as rape *myths*. Unfortunately, rape myths are pervasive in public discourse surrounding sexual violence, and are reproduced and reified in legal, safety, and journalistic practices for sexual violence cases. Feminists contend that rape myths are pervasive precisely because they fit within the logic of widely held and conservative understandings of gender and sex (e.g., Filipovic, 2008). Conservative gender norms naturalize heterosexual attraction and sexual relations along gender essentialist lines, meaning that biological males are expected be masculine and sexually attracted to their biologically female and feminine counterparts. Moreover,

female sexuality is configured as passive and in the service of male desire and pleasure. Gender essentialism is a key component of patriarchy, for it assumes male dominance within the social hierarchy. The overlapping logics of gender essentialism, patriarchy, and rape myths take for granted male power over women as “normal,” and rationalize sexual violence as extreme manifestations of otherwise normal heterosexual relations. Hall (2004) argues that we must question the normalcy of rape within the broader cultural landscape:

We must stop allowing the spectacle of women’s suffering to eclipse the cultural factors at work that make rape thinkable and doable by some men. If we are to struggle against rape as a product of gender socialization more effectively, we have to acknowledge how much sense rape makes in a (hetero)sexist culture such as our own. (p. 13)

The idea that “rape makes sense” in a given scenario (e.g., when women dress slutty) is borne out of a broader socio-cultural context that feminists have termed “rape culture.” This term refers to the social and cultural landscape that celebrates aggressive masculinity, misogyny, and sexism, and that subtly and explicitly condones male violence against women, including derogatory language, street harassment, domestic violence, rape, and institutional violence. One conceptual advantage of “rape culture” is the critical interrogation of the individual acts of violence through their articulations with everyday social and cultural practices.

Applying the concept of rape culture to the context of the York campus safety seminar requires that we view Sanguinetti not as a “bad apple” but rather as a product and proponent of wider societal norms and cultural influences, both historical and present-day. For instance, his comments must be situated alongside the historical negligence of the Toronto Police Service regarding sexual assault (most obviously in the 1986 Jane Doe case).¹ In the following section, I describe how critiques of Sanguinetti’s comments evolved into a demonstration known as “SlutWalk”.

¹ See “Jane Doe v. Metropolitan (Municipality) Commissioners of Police” <http://www.sgmlaw.com/en/about/JaneDoev.MetropolitanTorontoMunicipalityCommissionersofPolice.cfm>

SlutWalk

The York student newspaper *Excalibur* broke the story about Sanguinetti's comments on 8 February (Kwan, 2011). It reached national and international audiences on 17 February when it was cited by several media outlets, including *Torontoist.com* (Toronto-based blog), *the Toronto Star* (Canada's largest circulation newspaper) *CBC News* online, *rabble.ca* (not-for-profit left-wing Canadian online magazine), and *Jezebel.com* (women's blog under parent company *Gawker.com* media) (Lawrence, 2011). Sanguinetti's comments also circulated through the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. On 18 February, a call for public protest in Toronto was posted on the community blog section of *feministing.com* (a feminist blog) and the first tweet from @SlutWalkTO appeared.² SlutWalk co-founders Sonya Barnett, an artist, and Heather Jarvis, a Guelph University undergraduate student, heard about Sanguinetti's comments in February, and came up with the idea for a "SlutWalk" in the weeks following.

So what exactly is a SlutWalk? To answer this, some people may refer to the website of the original SlutWalk, which outlines the principles of the movement and suggests criteria for "satellite" SlutWalks. I hesitate to define all SlutWalks based on the mandates of the original walk because I believe the discursive potential of SlutWalk lies more in the impact it has in mainstream dialogue rather than the express intentions of its co-founders. The first SlutWalk involved a public rally, speeches, and a march of more than 3,000 demonstrators that traveled past Queen's Park and towards police headquarters in downtown Toronto on 3 April 2011. Given its grassroots organization, the shape and tone of each SlutWalk varies by location. A SlutWalk is any number of the following things: a public demonstration against sexual violence and rape culture, an attempt to reappropriate the "slut" stereotype, a public effort to shift the focus of dialogue about sexual violence from the

² "Angered by TO Police Services comment on dressing to get raped, we're mobilizing. Please LIKE our Facebook Page: <http://on.fb.me/f0apZD>"

behaviours, identities, and attire of its victims to its perpetrators and the actual violence they commit, and/or a show of solidarity with victims and so-called “sluts.”

My online observations indicate that, generally, SlutWalks loosely follow the pattern of the original. A SlutWalk involves a public rally featuring local activists, frontline workers from sexual assault centers, and survivors of sexual assault, followed by a march with signs, banners, and chants in busy city streets (usually, and perhaps ironically, with some form of safety and traffic control from local police authorities). The demographic of participants is a point of contention in the feminist blogosphere.³ Direct accounts of some SlutWalks described the crowd as diverse across intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, age, and ability (e.g., Walia, 2011); others described the majority of participants as being young, middle-class, educated, white, and cisgendered⁴ women (Blogando, 2011; selftravels2010, 2011).

The counter-narratives and aesthetics of SlutWalk attempt to subvert victim-blaming rhetoric and/or “reclaim” the word “slut.” Many signs include sayings that correct the myth that rape is an act of sexual desire (e.g., “Rape is about power not sex”). Other signs redirect attention away from victims and towards rape culture (e.g., “We live in a society that teaches don’t get raped instead of don’t rape”) and rape perpetrators (e.g., “Sexual assault prevention tips guaranteed to work. #8 Use the buddy system! If it’s inconvenient for you to stop yourself from raping a woman, ask a trusted friend to accompany you when you step out in public”). Some participants show solidarity with “sluts” through satirical attire (e.g., wearing stereotypically “slutty” short skirts, bras, fishnet stockings, high heels) and messages about female sexual autonomy and positive consent (e.g., “A dress is not a yes!” and “Ask me how I like it!”). Participants who are sexual assault survivors directly challenge the rape myth that informed Sanguinetti’s comments by wearing “everyday”

³ The “feminist blogosphere” refers to an informal collection of online weblogs and fora that have feminist content and commentary on a range of topics, including current events and pop culture. For many young feminists, the feminist blogosphere is a primary hub for education, networking, and activism.

⁴ Cisgender is a term used to describe when an individual’s self-perception matches the traditional gender roles associated with one’s sex.

clothes and holding signs that have some background information about their rape (e.g., “I was wearing pants and a sweater, was it my fault too?”). Key messages seem to challenge the slut stereotype while emphasizing that nobody deserves to be raped and that no identity or form of attire is ever an invitation for assault or a reason to discredit a victim of sexual assault.

Arriving at a Thesis Project

Initially, my engagement with SlutWalk was as an activist. I personally learned about the York incident on *Jezebel.com*. I casually followed the early development of SlutWalk, mainly through Toronto-based friends’ Facebook postings. The burgeoning SlutWalk movement resonated with my political interest in mainstream media representations of feminism and rape culture. After a few weeks passed, the media frenzy continued and I realized that I could turn my interest in SlutWalk into a formal thesis project.

News of the protest moved from social media to the mainstream press in the weeks following February 18, with an obvious swell in coverage during the first week of April. From then on, it became nearly impossible to follow all of the media coverage of the initial SlutWalk and the numerous “satellite” protests around North America and the world. On 13 May 2011, I set up a Google alert for “SlutWalk” and tried to keep up with the deluge of alternative news, mainstream news, and social networking buzz online. Since then, I have amassed over 400 alerts (each containing several news results about SlutWalk), and SlutWalk has entered its second year in many cities around the world. The project that follows is a critical reading of just a fraction of that text.

Chapter One: Introduction

Since its inception in April 2011, “SlutWalk” has exploded from a Toronto-based protest against victim-blaming into a global grassroots movement. With hundreds of demonstrations taking place on six continents, SlutWalk has garnered globalized mainstream attention through virtual activism and traditional media coverage. Given that its mainstream visibility is unprecedented for any contemporary feminist movement, SlutWalk represents a unique opportunity to examine representations of feminist politics and protest in the Canadian mainstream news media. The primary goal of my Master’s thesis project is, therefore, to explore how messages about feminism and sexual violence advocacy and prevention are represented into the mainstream media discussions about SlutWalk. Drawing on the theoretical and methodological tools of feminism and cultural studies, I will offer a contextualized reading and discourse analysis of the representations of SlutWalk across Canadian print, radio, and televisual media during its first nine months. I will look at coverage of events in cities across Canada, including Toronto, Ottawa, Edmonton, Vancouver, Montreal, and Hamilton. To ground my project, I will build a conversation that brings together key insights from anti-racist feminist scholarship and from cultural studies literatures that address social movements against sexual violence and media representations of feminism.

Defining Feminism

Since I rely on the term “feminism” throughout my thesis, it is pertinent that I define it here. My most consistent and in-depth engagement with feminist thought has been through the work of black feminist cultural critic and scholar bell hooks (1990, 1994, 2000a, 2000b). I follow hooks’ (2000b) definition of feminism:

[It] is a struggle to end sexist oppression... it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. ... A commitment to feminism so defined would demand that each individual participant acquire a critical political consciousness based on ideas and beliefs. (p. 26)

I subscribe to this definition of feminism because it emphasizes the cultural basis of domination and the “interrelatedness of sex, race, and class oppression” (p. 33) and thus lends itself to nuanced, politicized, and culturally contextualized analyses of feminist issues such as sexual violence. To quote Flavia Dzodan, a contributor to one of my favourite feminist political blogs, Tiger Beatdown, “my feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit!” (Dzodan, 2011). Throughout this work, I refer to “feminism” and “the feminist movement” for grammatical consistency and simplicity, rather than to make a point about conceptual singularity or political homogeneity. These terms should not be read as conceptually singular or monolithic, for the phenomena they signify are complex, fluctuating, and plural. Indeed, the plural forms (i.e., “feminisms” and “feminist movements”) could be substituted in most instances. To introduce the central problem of my project, I describe my own experience with SlutWalk in Kingston, Ontario.

SlutWalk Kingston

HOW CAN YOU END SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

- 1) Don't rape. Duh.*
- 2) Always get consent.*
- 3) Speak out against sexism.*
- 4) Celebrate non-violent masculinity*
- 5) Condemn rape jokes.*
- 6) Teach your sons 1-5*

*We need to stop teaching
our daughters to be afraid,
and start teaching our sons
to respect women
and feminist values.*

*FEMINISTS don't
think all men are rapists.
RAPISTS DO...*

*SLUT-SHAMING & RAPE JOKES
VALIDATE RAPISTS!*

After an hour of preparation, backed by my months of ongoing research, my feminist friend and I were satisfied that our signage for Kingston's first SlutWalk depicted actionable items for rape prevention. Our signs and words were so big that they would obscure our fully-clothed bodies unless hoisted momentarily above our heads. We had expressly avoided the "Proud Slut" messages that seemed omnipresent in alternative and mainstream media coverage of SlutWalks in other cities, and around which a swirl of critique and controversy had emerged. We worried that the proud slut signs were potentially off-putting and easily dismissed by average news producers and consumers. Moreover, proud slut messages are not readily connected to sexual violence prevention. A declaration of "I'm a proud slut" might be more easily understood as some newfangled version of depoliticized "girl power." For us, the protest was more about connecting to a broader political cause than it was about using public space to display an individual reclamation of autonomous sexuality.

I was familiar with the way messages about female sexuality could be taken up. When I tried to explain my Master's research to cab drivers or distant relatives, I heard a common response: "It's about women wanting to dress slutty, right?" Each time, I struggled to explain that the act of declaring oneself a slut was not necessarily about objectifying or degrading oneself, but that it might be about taking ownership of the term and diffusing its power to harm. I tried to reiterate that the most pressing issue was that nobody should ever be blamed for their own assault. To my dismay, conversations often took a turn for the worse, in the sense that my counterparts sometimes responded with something resembling a rape myth or an anti-feminist remark. This notion of subversion and reclamation was a hard sell, and I began to seriously question the purpose of my project. If I couldn't find a way to converse with people with experiences, opinions, and social positions different from my own, then how could I envision any sort of widespread social change in favour of feminism?

These moments of tension told me something about the difficulties of inserting feminist politics into everyday conversation. Worse yet, these conversations told me that the SlutWalk vision of empowered female sexuality might translate a little too easily into the patriarchal status quo. I

thought about feminist cultural critic Angela McRobbie's recent work on the "the taboo-breaking phallic girl" (2009, p. 84). She writes:

Consumer culture, the tabloid press, the girl's and women's magazine sector, the lads' magazines and also downmarket, trashy television all encourage young women, as though in the name of sexual equality, to overturn the old double standard and emulate the assertive and hedonistic styles of sexuality associated with young men ... This [female] phallicism also provides new dimensions of moral panic, titillation, and voyeuristic excitement as news spectacle and entertainment. (p. 84)

If the images of SlutWalk protesters were easy fodder for a mainstream media spectacle of female phallicism – which, by the way, offers the "pretence of equality" (p. 85) – then could I really blame my cab driver for "missing the point"? For that matter, could I blame him for assessing the situation in *exactly the way* dominant discursive forces prime him to do?

Getting back to my experience at Kingston SlutWalk, I felt satisfied that our signs worked more obviously towards challenging rather than reifying the patriarchal fantasy of a palatable feminist revolution. Setting out to join the crowd at Kingston's first SlutWalk, I said to my friend, "I'm determined that we get our awesome signs in the newspaper!" Not missing a beat, she replied, "Yeah, I don't think we're dressed slutty enough for that." My friend's matter-of-fact statement had unintentionally provided further rationale for my case study of SlutWalk media coverage. "Exactly," I said.⁵ She was confident that our impassioned and critically engaged feminist voices mattered less than our clothes in determining whether we'd secure media attention, and thus indirect access to a mass audience for our painstakingly developed messages. At the risk of employing totalizing language, I "knew" she was "right" – or at least, I knew where she was coming from with such a comment.

The Problem

As a scholar and activist in feminist media critique, I am keenly aware of the tenuous presence of feminism in mainstream spaces. Countless historical and contemporary feminist media

⁵ For the record, that conversation ended with: "Mind if I quote you in the intro to my thesis?" "Really? Sure!"

critiques (e.g., Bean, 2007; Dean, 2010; hooks, 1994; McRobbie, 2009; Mendes, 2011; Moore, 2011) have demonstrated the persistent co-optation and erasure of feminist political messages and the ongoing sexual objectification of women in North American and British popular culture and mainstream media, noting little significant progress towards more serious and nuanced representations (see, for example, Worthington 2008). My thesis contributes to this work by asking how SlutWalk has gained traction in the same sphere (mainstream news media) that is implicated in the discursive undoing of feminism and the (re)production of the phenomenon that SlutWalk is protesting (rape culture and victim-blaming)? In asking such a question, I need to acknowledge the historical context of the relationship between feminist politics and the popular press, and, therefore, to approach an analysis of that relationship with a healthy skepticism about, rather than an outright denial of, the progressive feminist potential of media coverage on SlutWalk.

When I was preparing my own signs for the Kingston SlutWalk, I did so with an awareness of the way feminists are often positioned in the press. Did I – or if not me then others around me – have to be scantily dressed to get my sign in the news, where it might be able to stimulate discussion about sexual violence? Would this means of securing a widespread audience detract from the seriousness and substance of my message? Was it a “damned if I do, damned if I don’t” scenario? My conundrum speaks to what feminist media scholar Kellie Bean calls the “double bind of any liberal political movement” (Bean, 2007, p. 10). This double bind stems from the fact that “[t]he mainstream media, as an emphatically patriarchal, seriously conservative, willfully biased capital institution can be nothing but pernicious to liberal political thinking, [yet it] ... also represents the best access to the largest audience” (p. 10). The presence of SlutWalk in mainstream media might paradoxically restrict its political impact – since the conditions of intelligibility in the mainstream media are heavily influenced by the priorities of patriarchy, conservatism, and capitalism – and yet enable it to reach wider audiences.

Bean's contention that the mainstream media provides the "best access to the largest audience" seems outdated amidst the rise of "new" media. Through its interactive, real-time, user-demanded and -generated content, "new" media have enabled the inception, development, and globalization of grassroots progressive social movements, such as the Arab Spring, SlutWalk, and Occupy Wall Street. Even while "new" media have added complicated layers to the circuit of cultural production (see Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram, & Tincknell, 2004), there is evidence that "old" media remains relevant for shaping understanding of social issues. Research from Ogilvie Public Relations Worldwide (2011) recently assessed the impact of the digital revolution on cause engagement in the United States amongst a nationally representative sample of Americans. The majority of Americans acknowledged the value of social networking for enhancing the visibility of social causes, though they still reported turning to television, print media, and personal relationships as primary sources of information about those causes (p. 5). These findings reiterate the continuing importance of the so-called "old" media (e.g., print publications, radio) in shaping general knowledge and understanding of social issues. SlutWalk proponents may use new media in the hopes of influencing a mass audience, but there are still many people who will learn about SlutWalk through more traditional channels such as newspapers, tv, and radio. In other words, I believe that Bean's contention about the double-bind of feminism in the mainstream media still applies in the case of contemporary movements like SlutWalk.

The paradox of SlutWalk achieving a kind of mainstream notoriety that might work against it intrigues and concerns me for a couple reasons. First, I am concerned that the reproduction of images of "sluts" at the protest will constitute the kind of objectification of women that the SlutWalk is trying to subvert. Second, I worry that the media attention may undermine intersectional feminist politics in public discourse. Briefly, Kimberly Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality posits that sexism, heterosexism, racism, ableism, and classism are interlocking systems of domination that shape lived experience. These interlocking systems of domination bestow certain privileges upon

dominant groups (e.g., white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender, male) and position their members to be heard and taken seriously within mainstream spaces above others. The experience and exercise of privilege occurs in ways that are often unmarked and unexamined. For instance, I can speak out against sexual harassment as mainly a gendered discrimination because my white privilege affords me the freedom of *not* having to grapple daily with racial discrimination along gendered lines. It is both a reflection and reproduction of racial and class privilege when class and race issues are obscured, collapsed, or stereotyped in discourses about gender. Intersectional politics are likely to be overshadowed in the context of the “emphatically patriarchal, seriously conservative, willfully biased capital institution” of mainstream media (Bean, 2007, p. 10).

Writing 26 years ago, Martin and Mohanty (1986) called for a redefinition of feminist community that neither collapses differences based on gender, sexuality, race, and class into a false unity, nor essentializes those differences. In an often cited passage, they noted an irreconcilable tension, or a double bind, between the desire to speak and the price paid to speak:

There is an irreconcilable tension between the search for a secure place from which to speak, within which to act, and the awareness of the price at which secure places are bought, the awareness of the exclusions, the denials, the blindnesses on which they are predicated. (p. 206)

Martin and Mohanty ask us to grapple with how broader power relations and structures make it easier for some people to speak, in ways that are predicated on others not speaking, and yet garner widespread media attention. These inevitable moments of inclusion and exclusion in the mediated SlutWalk phenomenon have political and discursive consequences that I wish to explore. This brings me to my research question.

Research Question

How are feminist messages in SlutWalk – including, but not limited to, issues of victim-blaming and prevention of sexual violence – rendered intelligible in the mainstream news media?

Rationale

By failing to create a mass-based educational movement to teach everyone about feminism we allow mainstream patriarchal mass media to remain the primary place where folks learn about feminism, and most of what they learn is negative. (hooks, 2000, p. 23)

Even as written twelve years ago, bell hooks' ideas still resonate in the contemporary context, a context in which discussion about the United States' Secretary of State's makeup routine is deemed a legitimate news item. I say this with a mix of despair – are we still here? – and gratitude for hooks' reminder that, at some point, I must grapple with mainstream patriarchal mass media in order to promote feminist principles.

In the contemporary era in North America, it is difficult to identify a feminist demonstration or event that has been as widely replicated, publicized, and critiqued as SlutWalk. Coverage of SlutWalk has enabled me to discuss my feminist politics with the people in my life who don't identify as feminist. Melissa Weiner (2011) describes the utility of the media in documenting social protest, explaining how coverage about “the protest events, their causes, and logistical details ... can contribute to oppositional consciousness development, provide potential activists with information to facilitate movement participation, and generate sympathetic support from bystanders” (p. 300). However, not all the producers and consumers of mainstream media have the desire or know-how to critically engage with the discourses surrounding social protests. For this reason, media coverage is likely a useful but insufficient component of any social protests' strategy for achieving widespread acceptance and support.

The media comprise “public arenas where images of domestic violence are constructed, debated, and reproduced” (Berns, 2001, p. 263), and where meanings are constructed about the factors and actors that are accountable for the cause, prevention, and treatment of sexual violence. The media are thus a powerful vehicle for shaping public consciousness about sexual violence as a problem and about feminism as a political movement. As a highly visible media event, SlutWalk is part of the everyday cultural terrain; it is open for consumption and discussion by people regardless

of their prior engagement with feminist politics or with movements against sexual violence. For most people with access to daily news media, SlutWalk is a Sunday headline to skim over rather than a Saturday event to participate in firsthand; it is a fleeting lunchtime discussion rather than an ongoing debate in the feminist blogosphere. More importantly, an article or news brief about SlutWalk may provide some people's first exposure to contemporary feminist movements or to discussions about the problem of victim-blaming. For this reason, SlutWalk's media presence has implications beyond the event itself, in terms of how feminist politics are taken up, challenged, and embraced by the general public. Therefore, mainstream coverage of SlutWalk is a compelling object of study for my thesis.

My Thesis is Not...

My thesis will not be a project about the accuracy of media portrayals of SlutWalk. SlutWalk is not a factual reality that can be separated from the mediated representations that circulate in the public sphere. Instead of acting as "a distorting mirror held up to a reality, which existed outside of itself" (Hall, 2006, p. 6), the media play a key role in constituting the very things they claim to reflect objectively. Thus, I will not dwell on whether or not the media accurately capture the purposes of the protest, the content of rally speeches, the demographic of the protesters. After all, it is my contention that the discursive features of SlutWalk – rather than the protest's intended purpose – are more significant theoretically and culturally to a study of feminism in the mainstream.

This project will not be an evaluation of the merits or faults of SlutWalk as a social movement (feminist or otherwise). Feminist debates about the mandates, organization, and identity and race politics of SlutWalk are worthy of critical reflection, but they rarely appear in mainstream coverage (for many reasons). For instance, an ethnographic project focusing on the experience of organizing and marching in a SlutWalk would surely provide necessary insights into the politics of contemporary feminist organizing. This sub-cultural ethnography would capture the cultural significance of SlutWalk among variously identified feminists and activists, but it would miss the

cultural impact of SlutWalk for the millions of people who experience it in a secondhand, “media-mediated” way (Hall, 2006, p. 6). Although I am personally and politically invested in the former group, I am compelled to find ways of speaking with the latter group about feminist understandings of sexual violence.

I see parallels in my goal with that of Alison Young (1995), who wrote about the national press discourse surrounding the Greenham Common protest using media analysis and interviews. In a self-reflexive article about the conceptual decisions she made while writing her PhD dissertation and book, Young explains:

I was conscious that I did not want to write *on* the Greenham women; I wanted to write *on* the press reports’ *representations* of the Greenham women and thus open up the space of representation to analysis. This seemed like a crucial distinction ... I did not wish to *judge* the protest, to offer an opinion as to whether their political choices were appropriate or even feminist. That seemed to be part of some other project. My aim was to show the powerful persuasiveness of the press and at the same time afford the Greenham women an opportunity to tell a different story. (p. 124-5, original emphasis)

I am inspired by Young to stick to my project as defined, and to believe in its purpose. Writing almost twenty years after Young did, I share a similar belief in the “powerful persuasiveness of the press,” and, like her, I want to direct my critical engagement towards media representation. Unless feminist theories and practices related to sexual violence prevention are translated into compelling, popular, and accessible counter-narratives, they will continue to be undermined in the media and legal system, and women’s autonomy and freedom will continue to be jeopardized.

Chapter Outline

In my literature review (Chapter Two), I summarize scholarship on feminist approaches to sexual violence social movements, debates about third-wave and postfeminism, mainstream news media representations of feminism and sexual violence, and the role of virtual activism in contemporary social movements.

In Chapter Three, I outline my theoretical and methodological approaches, which are grounded in feminist theory and cultural studies media critiques, and which draw on Foucault’s

(1980) concepts of discourse and power/knowledge. I argue that it is best practice in cultural studies and feminist media studies to “read” representations of SlutWalk within the contemporary context of political, social, cultural, and economic linkages. Such a contextualized reading affords a necessary distance to see the circulation of power in the production of meaning within and around the text, which is basically the goal of discourse analysis. I conclude the chapter by describing the process of collecting, selecting, and organizing my primary media sources. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on my writing process.

I argue that mainstream media representations of SlutWalk reproduce a watered-down version of feminism and a decontextualized understanding of sexual violence that resonates most with and focuses activism on white, heteronormative, middle-class women. I develop my argument across three interrelated analysis chapters. In Chapter Four, I explore how media discourses about police accountability and victim-blaming support the managing rape paradigm (Matthews, 1994), which problematically assumes a stable relationship between women and the state. In Chapter Five, I demonstrate how media representations of slut-shaming and solidarity reproduce essentialized gender differences under an unmarked whiteness. In Chapter Six, I examine how media discourses of women’s empowerment and victimization reify a First World-Third World dichotomy that effectively erase the need for feminist critiques of patriarchal violence as rooted in mainstream culture.

In my conclusion (Chapter Seven), I review the rationale and method of my thesis project. I bring into conversation the dominant discourses described in the analysis chapters. I suggest that the mainstream visibility of SlutWalk is possible only insofar as its representations steer clear of any substantive critique of patriarchy as it articulates with racism, heterosexism, and institutional violence. I reflect on the implications of such mainstream media representations for mass-based feminist resistance of sexual prevention. Specifically, I argue that average media consumers of news coverage about SlutWalk are most likely afforded a sense that “managing” sexual violence and

“liberating” women might be achieved within the existing status quo and through a sole focus on (white) women. Therefore, I reiterate the need for intervention and engagement with the mainstream reproduction of discourses about feminism, and offer suggestions for how this might be achieved.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

My thesis is informed by and grounded in the intersections of scholarship about anti-racist feminist theories of sexual violence and feminist media critiques in the Canadian sociocultural context. I consult this literature not only to review *what* has been “said” and “done” on topics similar to mine, but also to see *how* it was said and done – through what theoretical lens, following what methodology, and using what methods. Thus, my literature review will overlap with and inform my theoretical framework and methodological approach (see Chapter Three).

My literature review involves four key parts, with a few guiding priorities. Overall, I prioritize scholarship that espouses the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and that is historically contextualized. Where possible, I draw upon scholarship based in the Canadian political, cultural, and economic context. First, I summarize historical and contemporary feminist scholarship about sexual violence, with a focus on anti-racist theories in the North American context. Second, I reflect on current debates about third-wave feminism and postfeminism as they relate to my project. Third, I review previous research about mainstream news media representations of feminism, especially those that address the depiction of sexual violence.

Feminist Approaches to Sexual Violence

In this section I highlight the key tenets of feminist studies of sexual violence and discuss the institutionalization of the feminist anti-rape movement. One of the fundamental feminist contentions about rape is that it is a violent act of power and control that occurs along gendered lines. A wide array of statistical evidence about perpetration, victimization, police reporting, and conviction rates demonstrates this gendered pattern. For instance, the most recent report from Statistics Canada shows that between 2004 and 2007, reported sexual assaults were overwhelmingly perpetrated by men towards women, the attacker was known to the victim in over half of the cases, and the attack was most likely to take place in a private residence. Fewer than one in ten victims of sexual assault reported to police, compared to close to half for robberies and 40% for physical assault. Police were

less likely to lay charges for sexual offences, which in turn were less likely to lead to a conviction when compared to other violent crimes (Statistics Canada, 2007). The overwhelming pattern is that men perpetrate sexual assault against female victims. As I described in the Preface, rape myths are popularly-held beliefs about rape that fail to take into account this statistical evidence and that ultimately support sexist discrimination, oppression, and exploitation. Therefore, feminists argue that sexual violence and rape myths are crucial for reifying patriarchal dominance and maintaining female subordination.

In a chapter about gendered violence, Ann Duffy contends that “one of the great accomplishments of modern feminism has been the ‘naming’ and exposure of the violence women endure” (1995, p. 165). Early feminist anti-rape activists in North America sought to develop public consciousness about the seriousness and pervasiveness of gendered violence in society, ranging from sexual harassment to rape (Richie, 2000). In attempting to put violence against women on the public agenda in North America, feminists had to challenge widely held individualistic and sexual explanations of it (Duffy, 1995). Countering notions that rape or wife abuse, for example, are personal troubles or manifestations of uncontrollable male sexual desire, feminists of various academic traditions framed them as acts of violence stemming from societal norms of aggressive masculinity and submissive femininity (hooks, 2000b; Lonsway et al., 2009; Marcus, 1992; Mardorossian, 2002; Matthews, 1994; Richie, 2000). In short, rape is about power, not sexual urges. Within and beyond this place of agreement, feminists have developed divergent theories and interventions for sexual violence.

The most obvious divergence in feminists theories of sexual violence occurred with the pornography debates of the late 1970s and early 1980s (hooks, 2000a). Some feminists argued that pornography was degrading towards women and created a culture of acceptance for violence against women (Roach Pierson, 1993). These “anti-porn” feminists called for the censorship and in, some cases, the outright ban of pornography. Meanwhile, other feminists advocated for sex positivism,

which proffers a vision of sexual pleasure that includes sadomasochism and pornography with consenting adults (hooks, 2000b). hooks recalls that differences of opinion about practices of sexual sadomasochism and patriarchal pornography were “powerful enough to divide and disrupt the feminist movement,” such that “by the late ‘80s most radical feminist dialogues about sexuality were no longer public ... [but instead] took place privately” (p. 89).

Contemporary debates about rape include, but are not limited to, discussions of rape in the postmodern condition (e.g., Marcus, 1992; Mardorossian, 2002) and in the context of racially- and economically-motivated violence perpetrated by the police, the state, the military, and corporations (Smith, 2005). In her dissertation, Nadya Burton (1999) argues that the central constructs within much early anti-rape writing are fear and victimhood, and their constant invocation led to the underdevelopment of resistance and prevention. Similarly, bell hooks (2000b) claims that the typical focus on women’s sexual victimhood within writing on violence against women can be psychologically demoralizing, especially for women whose exploitation and oppression is daily and manifold in cultural and systemic conditions of poverty and racism (p. 46). Like Burton, hooks believes in the political and therapeutic effectiveness of women bonding on the basis of shared strengths, community resources, and a political commitment to end sexist oppression, rather than on the basis of victimhood.

I struggled to find contemporary feminist writing devoted to theories of rape prevention, so I must agree with Burton on the paucity of discourses of resistance within feminist anti-rape theories. Carine Mardorossian (2002) contends that “rape has become academia’s undertheorized and apparently untheorizable issue” (p. 743). Notable exceptions seem to be Sharon Marcus’ (1992) theory about disrupting rape scripts, Nancy Naples’ theory about the limits of survivor discourse (2003), and Mardorossian’s (2002) call for a “new feminist theory for rape.” Mardorossian contends that “postmodern feminists ... seem unable to [tackle rape and anti-rape politics] ... in any other way than in the psychologizing and victim-blaming terms that have dominated hegemonic approaches to

gendered violence in contemporary culture” (p. 747). There are two parts to Mardorossian’s claim. First, she argues that many postmodern feminists have, paradoxically, more in common with backlashers – antifeminists – than with activist feminists. Second, and further to the first point, she argues that both camps have similarly overemphasized psychological interiority in ways that “[make] women’s psyche the site of the analysis of rape or of rape prevention” (p. 756). Similar to Michelle Fine’s (1989) work, written almost twenty years earlier, Mardorossian describes how popular and scholarly discourse about anti-rape is too individualistic. That is, the social problem of male violence is mostly studied through almost exclusive attention to women’s health, beliefs, and self-esteem.

There is some literature to suggest that the theoretical stagnancy around rape and the seeming acceptance of rape as a “fact of women’s lives” may correspond with the way the feminist anti-rape movement became institutionalized and professionalized – that is, according to neoliberal ideals that are problematically couched in race and class neutrality. Beth Richie (2000) describes how “the notion that every woman is at risk [is] one of the hallmarks of [the feminist-based antiviolence movement’s] rhetorical paradigm” (p. 1134); it was a strategic and successful attempt by early activists to establish gendered violence as a social problem and to avoid stereotyping its victims. The institutionalization of the women’s shelter system, establishment of legal reforms to protect survivors (e.g., rape shield law), legal redefinition of sexual assault severity in terms of violence, and criminalization of perpetrators were pivotal accomplishments for the women’s movement (for review of Canadian legal responses to violence against women see Sheehy, 1999). Richie argues, however, that these successes constitute “a national advocacy response based on a false sense of unity around the experience of gender oppression” (p. 1135). In her work, Richie opposes this epistemological foundation, for it created an “everywoman” who was by default, a white, middle-class woman, and, in turn, a wider movement catered to her needs (p. 1135).

In a similar vein, Nancy Matthews (1994) offers a critical history of the relationship between the feminist anti-rape movement and the State in the United States. Matthews argues that rape crisis

work was a reflection of both new feminist politics and a therapeutic society premised on the psychological treatment of personal trauma. Crucial to her argument is the contention that anti-rape efforts shifted from preventing rape (through early politicized efforts to transform social relations in the 1970s) to managing the aftermath of rape (through depoliticized, institutionalized, and individualized therapeutic strategies). That is, “as the state became more involved in the anti-rape movement, it recast the feminist definition of rape as a political issue into a problem of an individual victim,” a translation in the anti-rape agenda that Matthews refers to as “managing rape” (p. 8).

The shift from prevention to management had consequences for the role of victims in the anti-rape feminist movement. Second wave anti-rape activism was founded on the strength of victims of male violence, who focused their organizing on social change and justice. Echoing Matthews (1994), Duffy (1995), Marcus (1992), and Mardorossian (2002) posit that the reactionary approaches to rape in some quarters of the shelter, public health, and legal systems have overshadowed grassroots feminist efforts to eradicate rape through social and political transformation. Mardorossian (2002) notes that such political activities are less prevalent and “have been irremediably dissociated from victims insofar as the latter are now the objects rather than the subjects of these movements” (p. 768). In an era when feminists had mostly focused on reforming police and legal procedures, Marcus (1992) describes “a sense of futility: rape itself seem[ed] to be taken for granted as an occurrence and only post-rape events offer[ed] possible occasions for intervention” (p. 386). Similarly, Duffy explains that, in the Canadian context, “the battles against the violence appear endless, and front-line workers despair at having to provide band-aid support to an endless stream of victims while fighting endless skirmishes with the victim-blaming and stereotyping forces” (1995, p. 175).

The management-style approach to rape prevention has become especially limited under neoliberalism, a key tenet of which is to delimit government intervention in favour of private sector and market-based solutions for public issues. Morrow, Hankivsky, and Varcoe (2004) studied how the conservative government’s dismantling of the welfare state affected the feminist anti-violence

movement in Canada. Morrow and colleagues conclude that the right to live free of violence, among other social entitlements, is being “undermined by neoliberal state values, expressed in federal and provincial policy shifts that favour self-sufficiency and economic competitiveness over a strong welfare state” (p. 374). Cuts to government funding for women’s programming have threatened the sustainability of the women’s shelter system and constrained the development of a coordinated, inter-sectoral response to gendered violence in Canada. As in the aforementioned US literature, Morrow et al. explain how neoliberal policies and cutbacks require frontline workers and activists to narrow their focus on women’s immediate and individual needs. Therefore, relatively less time and political energy can be devoted to addressing structural problems, innovating newer strategies, and protesting in the traditional sense.

In both Canada and the United States, the ability of feminists scholars and activists to develop theories and innovate programs for rape *prevention* continues to be significantly threatened by the rise of neoliberal policy and economic globalization and subsequent cuts to social welfare and women’s programming. As Rachel Hall so eloquently warns, “resistance to change is not merely due to the recalcitrance of particular forms of sexism in our culture” (2004, p. 12). The challenge lies both with the sexual violence itself and the way that we conceptualize and respond it, whether through governmental and nongovernmental sectoral responses or through media narratives. As it stands, the dominant approaches to men’s violence against women are reformist strategies that intervene in the post-rape aftermath, including “the establishment of shelters, the increased reliance on the criminal justice system and the creation of risk measures to identify potentially abusive individuals or situations” (Morrow et al., 2004, p. 369).

In her critical analysis of rape prevention since the 1980s, Rebecca Hall (2004) focuses her critique specifically on this latter strategy – the management of risk. She argues that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a new neoliberal rationality of government led to a “risk management mindset in social administration” (p. 1). Rather than dealing with various social and health ills through classic

disciplinary or therapeutic interventions, neoliberal risk management calls for what Castel (1991) termed “systematic pre-detection” (as cited in Hall, 2004, p. 2). Citizens must adopt personal responsibility to anticipate and avoid undesirable events, such as rape, with attention to a combination of abstract risk factors, rather than a localized danger, such as a rapist. In the case of rape prevention, the chief risk factor is simply being a woman. As potential victims, women’s bodies were reducible to the embodiment of risk of rape, and thus the focal point of prevention efforts (Hall, 2004). At the end of the twentieth century, the general public, academic community, and private sector began to take more seriously the “risk of rape” in women’s lives, all while emphasizing women’s personal responsibility for avoiding their own statistically probable rape. However, these rape prevention discourses failed to account for race and class differences among women. The concerns of white and middle class women were privileged above those of working class and women of colour (Hall, 2004).

The entrenchment of strategies under the “neoliberal cloak of risk management” (Hall, 2004, p. 1) has therefore led to the subordination of lower income women and/or women of colour within the feminist anti-rape movement and has obscured violence against women of colour (VAWC) as a societal problem. Richie (2000) argues that the erasure of lower income and women of color from the dominant view “seriously compromised the transgressive and transformative potential of the antiviolence movement’s potentially radical critique of various forms of social domination” (p. 1135). That is, the continued lack of attention towards VAWC enables the continued denial of its intersection with other forms of violence, including child sexual abuse, state-perpetrated violence (e.g., colonization, police brutality, prisons), and structural violence (e.g., racism, poverty) (hooks, 2000b; Smith, 2005). Indigenous scholar and prison abolitionist, Andrea Smith, argues that by centering women of colour in the analysis of sexual violence, we can develop approaches that address the cultural and systemic roots of all forms of violence, thus “build[ing] a movement that more effectively ends violence not just for women of color but for all people” (p. 160). Smith and

other feminist prison abolitionists point to the “contradiction ... in relying upon the state to solve problems it is responsible for creating” (p. 139) and work to develop community-based forms of prevention and justice. The increased acknowledgement of anti-racist feminist thought since the 1990s has stirred debates and critiques about the racist state practices of the police and criminal justice system in the Canadian anti-violence movement (Morrow et al., 2004). The extent to which these critiques have reached the general public remains to be seen.

Bringing the works of Richie (2000), Hall (2004), hooks (2000b), Smith (2005), Mardorossian (2002), Matthews (1994), and Morrow et al. (2004) into conversation has given me a fuller sense of the problem with current approaches to sexual violence, thus offering important context for the emergence of SlutWalk and for representations of it in the mainstream. Neoliberal and reformist approaches to sexual violence have led to Matthews’ “managing rape” paradigm, in which women, as “rape space(s),” are approached through a risk management mindset (Hall, 2004, p. 2). This paradigm has several characteristics – reproduction of whiteness, rhetoric of individual risk and responsibility, and erasure of structural forms of violence – which have stifled the innovation of culturally- and structurally-based solutions for preventing sexual violence. With women’s shelters and rape crisis centers facing budget cutbacks (Morrow et al. 2004), there seems to be little remaining political willpower and financial backing for rape prevention geared towards boys and men, including educational programs and public campaigns promoting non-violent masculinity (Lonsway et al., 2009).

Inclusive approaches to sexual violence that emphasize prevention, political resistance, and solidarity needs to begin with an expanded definition of rape as a material and symbolic act of violence and a tool for “racism, economic oppression, and colonialism, as well as patriarchy” (Smith, 2005, p. 151). I argue, as others have, that the rhetoric of victim-blaming must be understood as an attack on the autonomy and integrity of vulnerable people that also increases the likelihood of material instances of violence. We must theorize and analyze victim-blaming as a complex

confluence of racist, classist, sexist, and misogynous attacks and as supposedly benign safety recommendations for “good neoliberal subjects” (Adams, 2011). Furthermore, victim-blaming must be interrogated for its role in bolstering white neoliberal approaches to sexual violence prevention and in jeopardizing alternative approaches to sexual violence that take into account its enmeshment with broader relations of power and control.

Third-wave Feminism and Postfeminism

An important feature of recent feminist scholarship centers around ontological and epistemological debates about the distinction between “second-wave feminism,” “third-wave feminism,” and “postfeminism.” The distinction between the second- and third-wave has been oversimplified as a generational conflict, such that the third-wave has been mischaracterized as a “rebellion against second-wave mothers” (Snyder, 2008, p. 175). A more fair description may be that third-wave feminists are grateful beneficiaries of the success of second-wave feminists. Still, the third-wave sets itself apart from the second through its approach to the theoretical impasses of feminist theory in the 1980s. As described by Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997), third-wave feminism aims to develop “modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity, and the creation of a coalition politics based on these understandings” (p. 3). Although its definition is contentious, third-wave feminism has been described as embracing intersectionality, contradiction, fluidity, and inclusivity; it destabilizes monolithic notions of identity, empowerment, oppression, solidarity, and organizing (Bean, 2007; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Snyder, 2008).

A common thread in contemporary feminist scholarship is a critical engagement with mainstream pop cultural uses of the term “feminism” (e.g., Bean, 2007; Coppock et al., 1995; McRobbie, 2009). One of the unique features of contemporary feminisms as depicted in mainstream media (primarily but not exclusively), is the popular assertion that “feminism is dead” or that we live in a “postfeminist” society where we’ve supposedly achieved gender equality. It follows that much of

the current feminist literature addresses this notion of postfeminism. In the introduction to their canonical third-wave text, Heywood and Drake (1997) immediately separate “third-wavers” from “postfeminists,” defining the latter as “a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave” (p. 1). Heywood and Drake argue that postfeminism is “in every way more visible than is the diverse activist work that terms itself the ‘third wave’” (p. 1), and they are upset about it. This diverse third-wave activist work includes girls’ and young women’s zine production as a form of resistance to narrowly-defined mainstream norms of femininity (Ferris, 2001), the incorporation of riot grrrl politics into mainstream media in the 1990s (Jacques, 2001), and challenges to feminist academic elitism (Ossandon, 2011). According to Heywood and Drake, third-wave and postfeminism are in “a perpetual battle of representation and definitional clout,” wherein slippage is fundamentally and politically problematic (p. 1).

Canadian feminist scholar Ann Braithwaite (2002) protests the simplistic distinction between third wave and postfeminism, arguing that it ignores overlapping features and serves to deflect criticism away from self-identified third-wavers. Paraphrasing Heywood and Drake’s strategy for refusing criticism, Braithwaite says, “it is ‘postfeminism’ that is self-indulgent, focused on experiential and individualized accounts, and that, when it does use the word feminist at all, more often than not dismisses it or particular versions of it” (p. 336). Braithwaite contends that we – meaning “people invested in feminisms” (p. 342) – should not dismiss postfeminism as little more than anti-feminism, least of all because such prefixes imply that “feminism” once had a stable meaning (which it did not). Braithwaite sympathizes more with British and Australian scholarly uses of postfeminism, where the prefix “post” signifies a continuity with rather than a break from feminism. Postfeminism “becomes a way to talk about the changes in feminist thinking over the last forty years rather than a rupture with it” (p. 341). Therefore, postfeminism is useful because “it is not *against* feminism, but *about* feminism today” (p. 341).

One of the most updated and advanced theories of postfeminism, wherein post implies continuity, is offered by British feminist cultural studies scholar Angela McRobbie (2009). McRobbie describes the current social and cultural landscape as being postfeminist, meaning “a situation which is marked by a new kind of anti-feminist sentiment which is different from simply being a question of backlash against the seeming gains [of second-wave feminism]” (p. 1)⁶. She argues that feminist discourses of empowerment and choice are individualized and watered down in political and institutional spheres and, simultaneously, deployed in media and pop culture “as a kind of substitute for feminism” (p. 1). In her book, The Aftermath of Feminism (2009), McRobbie develops the theory of disarticulation to describe how feminism is invoked, accounted for, and maligned in the public sphere. By disarticulation, McRobbie means “a force which devalues, or negates and makes unthinkable the very basis of coming-together ... on the assumption widely promoted that there is no longer any need for such actions” (p. 26). Although McRobbie tends to focus on figures and events in popular culture, rather than news media, her theory of disarticulation is still relevant for understanding how the current social, cultural, political, and economic landscape affects the success of feminist social movements. Therefore, I use the theory of disarticulation to make sense of the mainstream configurations of feminism in SlutWalk press coverage.

The recent work of Kellie Bean, Post-Backlash Feminism (2007), also informs my analysis, because it problematizes the popular production of feminism in the U.S. mainstream media, with one chapter focused specifically on popular debates about date rape. Like McRobbie, Bean focuses her analysis of feminism in the public sphere in what has been called the “post-backlash era” and is concerned about the (mis)representation of feminism to the general public. In her introductory chapter, Bean argues that the increasingly nuanced academic approaches to feminist politics starkly contrast with the shallow popular arguments that are available to the “reading and TV-viewing

⁶ American feminist and journalist Susan Faludi is widely cited in discussions about anti-feminist backlash. She observed a resistance to feminism in the 1980s that she later theorized as “backlash” in her 1991 book of the same name.

public” through mainstream news (p. 4). According to Bean, these shallow mainstream discourses have weakened and narrowed the political basis and effectiveness of the feminist movement.

The 2001 winter/spring issue of *Canadian Woman Studies* is an exemplar of the diverse scholarship about contemporary feminisms. It sets out to “quell the notion that young women have become disillusioned with and detached from feminism, feminist activism, and the women’s movement” (Bourgeois et al., 2001, p. 3). This issue features the work of new, young women feminists (e.g., active radical feminists, Aboriginal feminists, undergraduate students), including essays, poetry, and artwork. The issue celebrates the multi-faceted nature of feminism, rather than offering a falsely cohesive narrative of the women’s movement at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Its collection of young writers reminds me that a significant part of achieving widespread social changes entails negotiating the tensions *and* possibilities of mainstream incarnations of feminism.

Mainstream News Media Representations of Feminism and Gendered Violence

Feminists remain concerned with how mainstream media⁷ attention towards feminist issues helps or hinders activist efforts to eradicate those issues. Several feminist media critiques in the UK, US, Canada, and Australia show that the mainstream news media have frequently misrepresented, undermined, and repudiated the second-wave feminist movement (Mendes, 2011), national women’s organizations (Goddu, 1999), and contemporary feminist figures (Shugart, Egley Waggoner, & O’Brien Hallstein, 2001), with negative effects. Many researchers have also demonstrated that media coverage of sexual violence has been problematic, for it has tended to promote individualized, pathologized, and dichotomous understandings of victims and survivors (Noh, Lee, & Feltey, 2010) and to offer depoliticized explanations of the root causes of rape (Moore, 2011; Worthington, 2008). Worse yet, mainstream journalism has been repeatedly implicated in the (re)production and

⁷ I limit this part of the literature review to contemporary scholarship focusing on the portrayal of specific instances of sexual violence in the news media. As such, I do not engage with analyses of fictional depictions in advertising, art, film, and music.

circulation of victim-blaming narratives in stories about domestic and sexual assault trials (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

In Canada, mainstream news media demonstrate a selective silence around the rape, kidnapping, and disappearance of non-white women and lower-income women (Gilchrist, 2010; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Stillman, 2007). The news media have been particularly silent about the persistent overrepresentation of Aboriginal women among victims of sexual and physical violence, kidnapping, and homicide in Canada (Gilchrist, 2010). Stillman (2007) has described this as the “missing white girl syndrome,” which entails the mainstream media positioning of (and subsequently profiting from) “young, white, well-off women as worthy of societal empathy while casting others as disposable lives” in cases of rape, femicide, and kidnapping (p. 500). Similarly, Razack (2000) has critiqued the racialized forms of victim-blaming in the media that naturalize the violability of women of colour and diminish the culpability of their rapists. These Canadian feminist media critiques are exemplary for their intersectional approaches and their attention to the unmarked privileges and absent presences in media coverage of sexual violence. While offering important insights for how to proceed with my own analysis of news coverage, they also point to the types of conclusions I can make about the cultural impact of such coverage on the feminist anti-rape movement in Canada.

Conclusion

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I situate my thesis at the intersections of scholarship about anti-racist feminist theories of sexual violence and feminist media critiques in the Canadian sociocultural context. I read extensively about the history of anti-racist and feminist anti-rape activism, debates about third-wave and postfeminism, and critiques of media portrayals of feminism and sexual violence. I may not have carefully defined the contours of this literature review at the outset of my thesis, nonetheless I believe that my project is best situated alongside and grounded in the aforementioned scholarship. There are several key concepts that directly serve my analysis of media representations of SlutWalk, and enable me to reflect on the popularization of

feminist thought through mainstream news media (e.g., intersectionality, managing rape paradigm, neoliberal risk management, postfeminism, disarticulation, unmarked white privilege). Overall, this past literature motivates me to move beyond the intentionality of media texts, and towards explaining the discursive representation of sexual violence and feminist uprisings in the media. In the next chapter, I summarize the theoretical and methodological approaches that actually prepare and equip me for the task of critically interrogating media representations.

Chapter Three: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Theoretical Framework

The inspiration and passion for my project derives from my ongoing political engagement with feminist media production and critique, rather than a scholarly immersion in feminist cultural theory. Feminism has become meaningful to me through ongoing cultural engagement with feminist blogs, editorials, music, and art, and less so from a scholarly critique of feminist anthologies, journal articles, or books. I strive to make my academic work move past critique and towards social change, to have it accomplish some sort of cultural and political work instead of intellectual banter and ego-stroking. When critiques of mainstream media are confined to the privileged spaces of university seminars and theses, there is little substantive social and structural change to be expected beyond the immediate (and by no means guaranteed) epiphanies of a few students. Therein lies one of many contradictions, for I have benefited directly and significantly from many classroom epiphanies. I do not wish to suggest that politics and social change are entirely separate from intellectual and theoretical pursuits, nor do I wish to fabricate a divide between “scholars” and “activists”. Quite the contrary, my critical perspective relies on and celebrates the fluidity, contradiction, and politics of knowledge production within and beyond academia.

Epistemology

My epistemological foundation is anti-objectivist and poststructuralist. Chris Weedon (2000) describes feminist poststructuralism as “a theory which decentres the rational, self-present subject of humanism, seeing subjectivity and consciousness as socially produced in language, as sites of struggle and potential change” and its projects as providing “detailed, historically specific analys[es], to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the opportunities for resistance to it” (p. 40). Also writing within and about the feminist poststructuralist canon, Nicola Gavey (1989) argues that researchers should be concerned with interrogating and displacing dominant knowledges, rather than with “‘discovering’ reality, ‘revealing’ truth, or ‘uncovering’ the

facts” (p. 463). There is no truth to uncover, because meaning and knowledge are not fixed, but rather are “discursively constituted through language and other signifying practices” (Gavey, 1989, p. 463).

The intellectual work of feminist poststructuralist research involves interpretative, critical readings of cultural forms within the context of a complex “network of economic, political, and social linkages” (King, 2005, p. 21). Johnson and colleagues (2004) explain that, “as texts, cultural forms appear relatively fixed and stable so that their complexities can be analysed and represented” (p. 75). The temporary fixity of cultural forms is a problematic abstraction from the cultural conditions that shaped their production, social use, and relationship to surrounding texts. As such, working with text necessitates working with context. It is only in context that I can begin to understand how meanings are produced, transformed, and challenged, and how truth claims are taken up and perhaps taken for granted. Texts are polysemic and can be “read” in any number of ways, depending on how one builds the context.

Overall, the critical perspective for my thesis emanates from intersections of feminism and cultural studies. Within these often overlapping bodies of literature, I most identify with writing that: i) employs poststructuralist, interpretive methodologies with intellectual rigor; ii) remains fundamentally concerned with the cultural and political impact of research; and iii) strives to be accessible and practically significant outside academia. In the following sections, I will explain how feminist and cultural studies scholarship provide a theoretical orientation and methodological direction for my case study of SlutWalk.

Feminist scholarship

Feminism itself can be considered a theory and a politics (Gavey, 1989). bell hooks’ definition of feminism as an intersectional struggle to end sexist oppression that I mentioned in Chapter One, speaks to a revolutionary version of feminism that views social justice struggles for equality as tied to widespread social and cultural transformation and the dismantling of interlocking systems of

domination (i.e., white supremacy, capitalism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism). Her definition should be contrasted with “reform feminism” or “reformist feminism” which aims to achieve social equality between men and women within the existing social order (hooks, 2000b). The political action and accomplishments of reform feminism are focused on addressing gender-based inequality in family, work, educational, legal, and social spheres. hooks argues that the reformist feminist “emphasis on ‘common oppression’ ... masked the extent to which [conservative and liberal women] shaped the movement so that it addressed and promoted their class interests” (p. 6). As Ruth Roach Pierson explained, “For those of us whose race, class, sexuality, age and able-bodiedness positioned us close to the dominant norm, only “gender” was immediately experienced as problematic” (1993, p. 188).

The successes of the mainstream feminist movement in the first- and second-wave were most readily and fully experienced by more privileged women (white, middle and upper-class, educated, able-bodied, heterosexual). Moreover, gender-based advances often relied on race- and class-based exploitation and discrimination. For example, reform feminism did not transform the gendered division of labour, rather it enabled middle-class white women increased access to the workplaces of their middle-class, white male counterparts (hooks, 2000a). In the realm of heteronormative domestic coupledom – which went unchallenged as the status quo under reform feminism – there was no cultural push for husbands to take on the work traditionally expected of women such as cleaning, cooking, and child-rearing. The newly “empowered” career-minded married women often had to rely on the labour of other women to maintain their households and raise their children. The advancement of relatively privileged women came at the expense of the continued subordination of women and men occupying less dominant positions, and did little to fundamentally challenge white, male, economic privilege (hooks, 2000a).

I do not deny that feminist political action has been successful in securing more equal workplace, political, and reproductive rights for women in Canada. But can we call it a victory if only some women ever benefit in a direct way from those rights (or programs or campaigns), while

other women never do? It is seriously shortsighted for feminists to theorize and mobilize around only the gendered dimensions of oppression, for such thinking inevitably leads to the symbolic and material oppression of marginalized people. I reprise my earlier contention: my feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit. In this framework, one person or group's freedom must not be tied to the oppression of another.

When we conceive of and act upon women's oppression and liberation solely in terms of gender-based victimization, we obscure the racial, ethnic, sexual, and class differences and inequalities that exist among women and the unique ways that women can resist oppression. Debi Brock argued that there is little we can learn from feminist analyses that rely on "a totalizing discourse that blurs women's experiences while it seeks to uncover them" (1993, p. 113), and treat women and sexual violence as monolithic categories. We will never eradicate sexual violence if our approaches are based on the dual premises that it is *only* ever motivated by gendered power differences and that it is experienced the *same* by all women (Brock, 1993).

Grand narratives about women's common oppression tend to slip towards problematic essentialist understandings of gender difference. That is, oppression is treated as an inherent and integral part of the experience of all women. Moreover, the totalizing discourse of women's common oppression tends to make victimization the sole basis for bonding and mobilizing in the feminist movement. The "victimization mentality" makes it hard for privileged women to acknowledge that they can experience gender discrimination *and* participate in and benefit from the oppression of other women (Roach Pierson, 1993, p. 188). Clinging to some "sentimental evocations of sisterhood" (hooks, 1994, p. 101) has the effect of enabling privileged women to "abdicate responsibility for their role in the maintenance and perpetuation of sexism, racism, and classism ... by insisting that only men [are] the enemy" (hooks, 2000b, p. 46).

This brings me to the importance of analyzing race and class differences within feminist scholarship and activism. Several anti-racist, anti-capitalist feminist scholars in the United States

(Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000b; Richie, 2000; Smith, 2005), and Canada (Bannerji, 1999; Dua, 1999; Razack, 2000) have variously argued that racism, colonialism, sexism, and economic oppression are immutably connected and yet relatively unacknowledged as such in theory and practice. While these scholars might offer vastly different ways to theorize such interconnections, they have tended to be similarly critical of the ways that feminist and anti-racist scholarship and activism have marginalized the particular experiences and work of women of colour. In her canonical text on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) argues that:

[the feminist struggle] to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains... [These] practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, [thereby] relegat[ing] the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (p. 1242)

Women of colour have often been rendered invisible both as actors and scholars within the feminist and anti-racist social movements, and as victims bearing the brunt of sexism and racism. Across her various works (1990, 1994, 2000a, 2000), hooks has described the significant contribution of women of colour in shifting the rhetoric, theory, and definitions of feminism towards more complex theories of solidarity, a recognition of interlocking structures of domination, and a commitment to a more inclusive movement. Of course, a sole focus on the intersection of race and gender cannot reveal the full extent to which some groups are rendered (in)visible in the mainstream – an argument which the above scholars support. We must politicize and theorize the ways that material wealth, ablebodiedness, and heterosexuality are reproduced as dominant and normalized within and beyond feminist theory and practice, or we risk making the many intersections of lesbian / transgender / lower income / women of colour / living with disability / sex worker as locations that resist telling. In her work on the politics of difference in the women's movement in Canada, Ruth Roach Pierson (1993) reminds us that:

the racism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism of the mainstream women's movement are rooted in those institutions, economic practices and cultural expressions that structure the dominance in *society at large* of whites, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, and the middle to

upper classes. And these structures are as socially pervasive as those of gender. (p. 190, my emphasis)

As I described in my earlier literature review section, these politics of difference and representation feature heavily in feminist media critiques of sexual violence coverage.

Overall, feminist scholarship provides me with the theoretical underpinnings and historical context for my case study of SlutWalk. It also affords me a sense of the current theoretical and political challenges facing feminists, which come to bear on their efforts to eradicate sexual violence and oppression.

Cultural studies scholarship

I situate my project within what Johnson and colleagues (2004) called “the generative relationship” (p. 14) between cultural studies, social movements, and media. They describe how social movements have historically (and quite generally) emerged out of the “contradictions of modernity” (p. 14). Some of these contradictions involve wrestling with narratives of progress and success in the midst of deepening inequalities based on gender, race, and class. Many of these movements came to understand the political significance of the new media in shaping dominant representations of social justice issues. Part of the struggle for activists and scholars is “to understand what holds the conventional or mainstream forms of life and belief in place or directs the main tendencies of change” (p. 15). Here I understand Johnson et al. to be highlighting the political and cultural importance of studying conventional media representations of social movements, such as SlutWalk, so that we might better understand the conditions for social transformation, in this case as related to sexual violence prevention.

My project fits within cultural studies for many reasons. First, culture is at the center of my study. By exploring the mainstream reception of a highly visible feminist social movement, I hope to learn something about the cultural terrain of contemporary feminist politics in Canadian society. What is meant by culture and cultural terrain? The definition of culture is fiercely debated, as would

be expected in a field that is variously described as inter-, trans-, and anti-disciplinary. Foremost cultural studies and critical race scholar, Stuart Hall, describes culture as “the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society [as well as] the contradictory forms of ‘common sense’ which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life” (1986, p. 26, as cited in Nelson, Trenchler, & Grossberg, 1992, p. 5). In my project, I am most interested in the cultural terrain that shapes representations and common-sense notions of feminism and sexual violence. My access to such terrain is through the Canadian mainstream news media coverage of SlutWalk.

Second, I appreciate that cultural studies calls on its scholars to be intellectual, theoretical, and political for the sake of making social difference. Based on the description provided by Nelson and colleagues (1992) – where culture is “the ground on which analysis proceeds, the object of study, and the site of political critique and intervention” (p. 5) – it is clear that a cultural studies project is not merely an academic pursuit. An ongoing preoccupation among cultural studies scholars is to provide critical, intellectual studies of radical social and cultural transformation and to intervene and participate as political actors in such transformation. Cultural studies responds to and nurtures my anxiety about heavy theory, because, according to Nelson et al., cultural studies offers “a bridge between theory and material culture” (p. 6). Theory has a necessary place within cultural studies, in that it supports the intellectual work of analysing power, politics, representation, discourse, and context. But this “intellectual work is, by itself, incomplete, unless it enters back into the world of cultural and political power and struggle, unless it responds to the challenges of history” (p. 6).

Third, my project is largely inspired by the work of cultural studies scholars, especially those engaged in feminist- and critical race-inspired media critique such as bell hooks, Angela McRobbie, and Stuart Hall. These writers are critically aligned with(in) the academy and are concerned with the “everyday” as a site of ideological and discursive production – that is, a place where meaning is forged and challenged according to power relations within a complex network of economic, political,

and social connections. My project is concerned with exploring the “mundane and the marginal” of the everyday and “the variously oppressive and liberatory potential of cultural relations” (King, 2005, p. 22). The mainstream news media is an integral part of the everyday terrain of people’s lives, a taken-for-granted site of cultural production, and a tool for “ideological labour” (Hall, 2006, p. 82), and thus the focus of much scholarly work within cultural studies. The media construct frameworks that classify the world, its people, its problems, and its solutions in knowable terms. My access to the everyday is thus through the mainstream media.

Foucauldian theory of power/knowledge

My project will be influenced by Foucault’s discursive approach to language and representation, an understanding of which I’ve gleaned mostly through secondary readings provided by Hall (2001) and Adams (1997), among others. According to Hall, Foucault was concerned with “the production of knowledge and meaning, not through language but through discourse” (2001, p. 73); Foucault expanded on the original linguistic conceptions of discourse that confined it to passages of writing or speech. Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, is a system of representation or “organized systems of knowledge that make possible what can be spoken about and how one may speak about it” (Adams, 1997, p. 6). Discourse also “influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall, 2001, p. 72). Therefore, discourse involves defining and regulating the boundaries of acceptable/unacceptable and intelligible/unintelligible ways of talking, writing, and conducting oneself. Dominant discourse is thus the set of normative ideas and expectations that govern our identities, behaviours, and interactions, albeit in insidious ways. Our sense of what is “normal” and “true” is constituted through the discursive operation of power and production of knowledge, a process which is always ongoing and yet mostly invisible by its own invention.

In his later works, Foucault posited a dialectical relationship of power and knowledge (1980), stating that “there can be no exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth

through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (p. 93). Power and knowledge are fundamentally connected in discourse, such that “discourses become a vocabulary, language, text and expression of relations of power” (Coppock et al., 1995). In the following excerpt from his “Lecture Two: 14 January 1976,” Foucault (1980) described the inseparability of power, social existence, and discourse:

in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. (p. 93)

This means that social existence becomes meaningful through discursive power relations. In the same lecture, Foucault offered several methodological precautions, including a reminder that power is not possessed by a dominant agent or ruling group. Foucault stated, “power must be analysed as something which circulates” while individuals operate as “elements of its articulation” within complex web-like social networks (p. 98). Though ubiquitous in its circulation, power is not always repressive and discourse is not totalizing. That is, we cannot conceptualize dominance without also understanding resistance. Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge allows for the positive production of resistance and an emancipation of subjugated knowledges—those pieces of history that were dismissed as inadequate or neglected as naïve (p. 82). Mainstream attention towards any social resistance necessarily involves a tension between a dominant mode of thinking (e.g., victim-blaming) and a subjugated knowledge (e.g., feminist politics). Thus, my case study takes seriously the potential for SlutWalk to be implicated in both emancipatory and dominant discourses surrounding sexual violence prevention.

Methodology

In this section, I summarize the methods of discourse analysis and contextualized reading with reference to insights from past research. I then describe my data collection and selection process, followed by a self-reflexive account of my writing process.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is way of interpreting the social world that is consistent with a feminist poststructuralist paradigm (Gavey, 1989). Carol Bacchi (2005) argues that the ubiquitous use of the terms “discourse” and “discursive” by feminists often renders the concept ambiguous. Bacchi distinguishes between “discourse analysis”, in which discourse is closer to language in a semiotic usage, and “analysis of discourses”, which involves a more political-theoretical focus on contextual meaning. I ascribe to the latter tradition’s goal – which “is to identify, within a text, institutionally supported and culturally influenced interpretive and conceptual schemas (discourses) that produce particular understandings of issues and events” – but refer to “discourse analysis” to maintain consistency with other scholarship (Bacchi, 2005, p. 199).

According to feminist scholar Nicola Gavey (1989), the primary goal of discourse analysis is to discern patterns of meaning through careful reading of texts. Such an exercise assumes that “these processes are not static, fixed, and orderly but rather fragmented, inconsistent, and contradictory” (Gavey, p. 467). Detecting discursive patterns of meaning involves questioning elements of social existence that are typically taken-for-granted as true, natural, and inevitable. Adams (1997) described the task of discourse analysis as determining:

which discourses are operating when and how and in what configurations. ... In analyzing discourses one investigates the various processes – language and social practices – which make possible the statement of ‘truths’ that order our social world. (p. 6)

Therefore, discourse analysis is not about describing what is true in reality, it is about understanding the conditions of possibility that allow certain things to count as truth. From a Foucauldian perspective, media representations of SlutWalk are not “seen as reflections of reality but as reflections of particular discursive formations that determine “regimes of truth” (what counts as the truth)” (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 766). Sean Phelan and Lincoln Dahlberg (2011) explain that a discourse theoretical approach is “against simply describing the representation of a particular issue” and is instead focused on “how that representation – and the objects of discourse assumed by it – is

made possible in the first place” (p. 13). My study of mainstream news media representations of SlutWalk is not about scrutinizing SlutWalk as a social movement, but about assessing the climate – the conditions of power/knowledge – that enables particular portrayals of feminist political action to achieve such mainstream notoriety.

Contextualized reading

Johnson and colleagues (2004) describe at length how cultural studies refuses to endorse a singular method, opting instead for ever-evolving bricolage methods or mixed methods that tend to transcend disciplinary boundaries. This combination of methods can be summed up as “reading.” King (2005) posits that the usefulness of the cultural studies field arises from its “interdisciplinarity, anti-formalism, and flexibility – particularly its sensitivity to changing economic, political, and social conditions” (p. 21). Cultural studies might thus be distinguished from other research traditions by its attentiveness to the relationality of culture. This orientation is most often described as “contextual analysis” or “articulation” (p. 24). Though it has been called a theoretical sensibility, articulation is not a pre-existing theory itself. Rather, articulation makes researchers confront and engage with the current epistemological and political conditions surrounding their objects of study (King, 2005). Engagement with context is both the grounds for developing radically contextualized theory and “the methodological ethos ... for undertaking a cultural study of ... one’s object of analysis” (p. 24).

Following this orientation, this thesis offers a contextualized reading of media representations of SlutWalk that involves analyzing media sources “within the context of economic, political, and social linkages that produce and give meaning to them” (King, 2005, p. 21). In a contextual analysis, one strives to understand how a discursive network produces the cultural phenomenon under study, and in turn, how that cultural phenomenon may shift and transform the network. Johnson et al. (2004) explain that the process of reconstructing this context is a means of achieving distance from a text, a process which, they argue, enables a more critical reading of the phenomenon. It seems to me that contextualized reading involves a great deal of the researcher confronting themselves and the

text in context. In a section on contextualization in the research process, Johnson et al. explain that research “involves grasping the nature of the differences and forms of power that circulate around the self and the other in a dialogue and are actively produced within and around key texts” (p. 77). To develop an interpretation of context is to understand the circulation of power in the production of meaning within and around the text.

Sources

In the interest of acknowledging the unique circumstances of its origin and of defining a feasible Master’s project, I focus on the “local” Canadian piece of the global SlutWalk phenomenon. SlutWalk emerged from a Canadian context, and my primary concern remains with its possible impact on discourses of feminism amongst Canadians. While I acknowledge the influence of American ideology and press on Canadian news media consumers, and the increasingly global reach of SlutWalk, I have set Canadian parameters on my news media to maintain consistency and keep the project manageable.

I limited my primary sources to Canadian coverage of North American SlutWalks across a range of media including newspapers, nightly news clips, radio clips, and photos. On 18 January 2012, I searched the online database *Factiva* for the key words “SlutWalk” or “Slut Walk” across the print and online (where applicable) collections of seventeen Canadian news media sources (Globe and Mail, National Post, Toronto Star, Toronto Sun, Ottawa Citizen, Ottawa Sun, Edmonton Examiner, Edmonton Journal, Edmonton Sun, Hamilton Spectator, Calgary Herald, Montreal Gazette, Vancouver Sun, Vancouver Post, Vancouver Province, CBC News, and CTV News), with a date limitation of 17 February 2011 (when the story about Sanguinetti’s comments broke) and 18 January 2012. My *Factiva* search amassed 77 hits (written text only). I did a manual supplemental search of “SlutWalk” and “Slut Walk” on the websites affiliated with each publication and news media conglomerate in order to collect additional media such as photos, streaming news content, tv

debates, and radio programs. This supplemental search also retrieved several online articles and op-eds that were somehow missed by *Factiva's* search algorithm.

My overall initial sample included 161 written texts: 138 newspaper articles, 18 videos, and 5 radio clips. Many of the audio and video clips were available only as online streaming content, and thus could not be downloaded and saved to a personal computer for controlled offline viewing. To allow for an offline analysis of the language and tone, I transcribed the audio and video texts. Additionally, I saved several screen shots of the videos to allow for offline analysis of the visual components, in conjunction with the transcripts. For organizational purposes, I compiled the key descriptive details of the written sources (i.e., published articles, transcribed audio, and video) into a spreadsheet. For each text, I developed a source code (e.g., CBC1) and recorded the headline, length, type of media, regional reach, and date of publication. Some newspaper articles had accompanying videos, which appeared as the same entry in the table. I read through each article once, making note of “emerging themes, quotations, [and] angles or positions that seemed salient or ideologically rich” and paying attention to word choices, other rhetorical devices, and “the presence or absence of particular voices” (Mendes, 2011, p. 486). After this initial reading, I applied basic exclusion criteria to eliminate 76 texts (including repetitious articles, letters to the editor, texts covering SlutWalks outside North America, news briefs, and texts that did not primarily feature SlutWalk).

I saved 378 visual texts (94 photos, 284 screen shots) in iPhoto© to allow for easier scanning and zooming. My first “reading” of the photos and videos happened sort of haphazardly during the mundane but necessary process of saving each photo and screen shot to my computer, and sorting them in an iPhoto© album. During this lengthy process, I couldn't help but begin to notice trends and divergences in the visual components across the set of images. I recorded emerging patterns and categories in a notebook, then used these to develop a descriptive spreadsheet of the images, noting the racial, gender, and age diversity of the SlutWalk participants and interviewees in media stories; the intelligibility of placards and chants; participants' attire (scantly clad, costume, regular); the

media and police presence; and the main focus of the photograph or footage composition (archival or SlutWalk footage; individual, group, crowd; posed, marching, speeches; disembodied people). In the case of video footage, I focused on those discursive elements that were not captured in the video transcripts, namely the camera angles and techniques, the gender, racial, and age composition of crowds and interviewees; and the presence of police and media.

Through a somewhat crude tallying process, I recorded trends in representation across the visual sources of SlutWalk (e.g., absence of women of colour in foreground of photos and on-camera interviews). This spreadsheet was never intended as raw data for a formal descriptive statistical analysis, nor as an appendix. I describe these trends later in my analyses chapters, but those references are not to be read as an effort at establishing “objectivity” in my methods or analysis. They serve as descriptive components in an interpretive and contextual argument.

The publication dates of the texts ranged from 21 March to 30 December 2011. The majority (71) of written texts were published in April, May, and June 2011, a date range coinciding with SlutWalks in Toronto (3 April), Ottawa (10 April), Boston, (7 May), Vancouver (15 May), Saskatoon (28 May), Montreal (29 May), Edmonton (4 June), Hamilton (5 June), and Calgary (11 June).

My process

I offer this introspective section to afford my readers some transparency about my process and to take accountability for my power in knowledge production. What follows is a self-reflexive account of my writing process that I have purposely reconstructed as a chronology. This is not meant to imply that there was coherence and linearity to my revelations, rather it is a strategic decision to ease readers’ burden.

I’ll begin with a confession: I am recovering scientist. In moments of vulnerability, I find myself on a slippery slope from free-flowing interpretive work to rigid scientific protocol. Step-by-step collection, selection, and rule-bound exclusion. Rigid note-taking. Counting. Most of my in-depth training in research methods was positivist and quantitative (biology, psychology, health

promotion). After numerous courses and lab reports, I learned that research methods involve prescriptive exercises. In my former life as a positivist researcher, the methods chapter was the easiest to write, because you could avoid thinking and yet still feel accomplished about working. It was sort of like productive procrastination. Looking back, even the actual execution of the methods was tedious. It mattered little that it was *me* lighting the Bunsen burner or *me* administering the survey. In the final report, I would eliminate all traces of *me* through passive voice.

The scientific tale, as Andrew Sparkes (2002) calls it, is governed by conventions that rest on the erasure of the power and privilege of the researcher. Geertz (1988) would call my earlier science writing “author-evacuated texts” (as cited in Sparkes, 2002, p. 36); Haraway (1988) would call it the objectivist scientist’s “god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (p. 581). The point is that “writing it up” and “reporting the findings” is often mistakenly assumed to be an author-evacuated process, apolitical, and unrelated to knowledge production.

Now, as a student of cultural studies, I see writing about methods as an intimate and necessary entry into the process of knowledge production for both the reader and the writer. It is far from mindless, definitely political, and rarely self-evident. In his critique of the classic period of ethnography (1921-1971), Geertz (1973) describes the “classic ethnographer” as similar to the objectivist scientist; both would have us believe they occupied an unmarked, neutral, and objective position from which to observe “truth,” whether about science or culture. Throughout his work, Geertz argues that we must critically examine the intellectual effort of practitioners in order to understand knowledge production about culture.

As I mentioned earlier, Johnson et al. understand reading and writing in cultural research as forms of intertextuality, where “intertexts are realizations of the dialogue between the texts we study and the texts we make” (p. 76). To encounter a text is to enter into a dialogic relation with many layers of representation. The layered dialogue begins with the first reading of our texts. In my case, I read through and sorted my initial set of 171 written texts and skimmed through nearly 400 visual

texts. I scribbled in the marginalia of more than one hundred pages of my printed sources and filled a notebook and several word documents and spreadsheets with additional observations. As Johnson et al. explain, “these notes are the beginnings of our answers to the questions posed to us by the texts we read ... or rephrasings of our own questions in the light of answers given – or withheld – by the texts” (p. 76). Johnson et al. explain that a further layer of note-taking involves a more formal and extensive exercise of reading across the different texts, juxtaposing elements, pulling out key quotes, paraphrasing ideas, and overall reflection.

Somewhere in this first reading, I lost self-consciousness of the double process involved in dialogue between my news texts and my thesis text. After several weeks of working with the texts, I realized I hadn’t allowed for an interpretive encounter of the texts, nor had I begun to write my own telling of it in any substantive way. I was caught up in processing the detail of the source texts, and wanted to meticulously trace each of my thoughts back to a text or a proven pattern in the texts. The problem manifested most obviously in my development of three spreadsheets (see Sources). I had justified these as necessary for organizational purposes, but soon realized they were precursors for what could have become a very descriptive quantitative content analysis. What began as a logistical exercise eventually constituted an epistemological relapse towards objectivity. I was looking to make some sort of discovery embedded within the text, through a close and meticulous reading of every source. Even though Johnson et al. (and Mary Louise) warned me, I think I failed to guard against “a particular kind of objectivism and cultural determinism in research that is associated with structuralist and other language-led approaches” (p. 76).

In my first reading of my sources, I experienced the weight of the rhetoric, suspended my skepticism, and was temporarily persuaded by what the texts explicitly stated (Johnson et al., p. 77). I was a mere conduit for the supposedly straightforward message of the media, the scribe for the quantifiable trends and patterns of the media coverage of SlutWalk. Against all suggestions, teachings, and declarations to the contrary, I had vacated my self during my analysis! It mattered not

that it was *me* taking those notes or describing those trends, and for that reason it slipped dangerously close to an objective exercise instead of *my* thesis. I felt like a full-fledged fraud – a relapsed scientist who had been mistakenly entrusted to write a Master’s thesis in cultural studies. Needless to say, I was devastated. All the while, I was falling further down the rabbit hole by continuing to read ever more theory, methods, and feminist media critiques. I had fallen for the researcher’s mythic quest for the special book or article that would offer what I needed to know, refusing to accept that maybe I was pushing myself further away from producing that item myself (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 70).

Unfortunately – or, in retrospect, fortunately – many interpretive works in cultural studies tend to be vague on the methods front, or offer a falsely coherent account of the writing process. Then I remembered the Johnson et al. book, and re-read several chapters geared towards young researchers. The first step on the road to recovery was to acknowledge that I had done a lot of work by that point, but that my relapsed objectivist brain wouldn’t translate it as meaningful. I had to accept that most forms of writing are meant just for ourselves, including “research diary entries, notes on reading, bits of analysis or argument, annotations to transcripts, plans, headings and computer files for future chapters” (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 79).

Once I embraced my unique positionality, my dialogic relation with my sources was enriched and revitalized. In order to shift from superficial descriptive reading (as in the spreadsheets) to an interpretive discourse analysis, I had to create distance with my sources and return them to context. Without an express intention of doing so, I ended up turning my initial descriptive reading into an object of analysis, a process which relied upon continued self-reflexivity and an interrogation of my positionality and my responses to the texts. At this time, I embarked on a very subjective process of narrowing my sources. I ended up exploring my responses to the twenty or so texts that spoke to me the most in the analysis chapters. Fearing another slip towards epistemological objectivity, I avoided any rigid recording of this part of the process. I honestly didn’t keep track of how many sources ended up in my final sample, nor did I keep a compiled list of them as it evolved. My main concern

was to be able to track the author, quote, photo, or video back to the source for citation purposes in building my analysis. The purpose was not to achieve objectivity but simply to achieve accuracy of the quotes during my interpretation of the discourse.

To facilitate my transition from writing for research to writing for presentation, as Johnson et al. (2004) describe it, I organized key quotes under thematic sub-headings. In some cases, the headings came first, and I compiled exemplary quotes or photos under them. In other cases, I encountered a quote that resonated with me and abstracted from it to get a heading. Once I felt my headings had captured the interesting parts of the media coverage, I sketched a very rough outline of my discourse analysis using a sophisticated system of sticky notes and a bulletin board. Then I began free writing sub-sections of the discourse analysis from memory of the texts. I built context from my existing knowledge, and supported it with references to past literature where necessary (most often from re-reading, less so from adding previously unread literature to my repertoire). In the iterative revision process, I revisited the original media texts to confirm accuracy and to see if my interpretations would hold up. In other words, I confirmed that my abstraction and interpretation didn't betray or misrepresent the source material. In some cases, this required rewording certain analysis sections to avoid inferences about a particular journalist or interviewee's intentions.

Conclusion

Given that its mainstream visibility is unprecedented for any contemporary feminist movement, SlutWalk represents a unique opportunity to examine representations of feminist politics in the Canadian mainstream news media. Drawing on the theoretical and methodological tools of feminism and cultural studies, I will offer a contextualized reading and discourse analysis of the representations of SlutWalk across print, radio, and televisual media during its first nine months of press. This project will allow me to reflect on how feminist politics might become popularized for mainstream audiences through news coverage. In my first analysis chapter, I show how media

discourses about police accountability and victim-blaming tend to reify the dominant approach of “managing” rather than preventing rape.

Chapter Four: SlutWalk and the Aftermath of Rape

Nancy Matthews (1994) describes how the professionalization of the anti-rape movement involved the convergence of “feminist demands and state responses ... at the point of what happens *after the fact of violence*,” including “having rape taken more seriously [and] laws that do not blame the victim” (p. 149, my emphasis). She used the term “managing rape paradigm” to describe how public thinking about sexual violence revolved around mending the relationship between victims and the state and “society.”

Nearly twenty years later, my analysis of SlutWalk media coverage demonstrates that the dominant approach to sexual violence remains primarily concerned with the aftermath of sexual violence and the victim-state relationship. In this chapter, I provide examples from the media coverage of SlutWalk that demonstrate a discursive convergence around victims after the fact of violence. Across two major sections, I demonstrate how media consumers are confronted with notions about what the police should do better for victims, what feminists can’t seem to do for victims, and what individual women must do to avoid becoming victims. In the first section, I provide examples of the mainstream media emphasis on restoring police accountability. I argue that the centrality of the police in media narratives about rape is made possible in a political and cultural context that favours sexual violence management over prevention, and that primarily envisions and responds to a white, middle-class female victim. In the second section, I focus on how the media handle the problem of victim-blaming variously by avoiding slut-shaming, blaming feminists, and sometimes inadvertently reinforcing victim-blaming. I argue that the media fail to convey how victim-blaming emerges from rape culture, and in so doing, normalize victim-blaming further as an appropriate response to sexual violence.

Police Accountability

In this section, I argue that the police are paradoxically positioned as the key actors in the problem of and the solution to victim-blaming, which reifies their crucial role in maintaining rape

culture and in managing the aftermath of rape. I show how media texts portray police and SlutWalk in a range of neutral, positive, and negative frames and share an underlying assumption about the centrality of the police in securing the safety of victims of sexual violence and channeling them on a path of legal justice. This emphasis on recuperating the protective function of the police reflects a mainstream bias towards white and middle-class understandings of the social contexts that shape sexual violence and the experiences of violence therein.

Across the sources I examined, the media discursively and materially connected SlutWalk to the police. The typical media narrative of a SlutWalk event describes the Sanguinetti victim-blaming incident (or another example of law enforcement personnel engaging in victim-blaming), includes statements from representatives of SlutWalk and the local police force, and explains the march route as beginning and/or ending at police headquarters. In these media texts, which focus on descriptive event coverage, law enforcement agencies are consistently implicated in the problem of victim-blaming. SlutWalk organizers are represented as expressly opposed to victim-blaming attitudes, especially amongst police officers, while still being cooperative with police and in favour of their continued involvement in dealing with sexual violence. The common thread in almost all the articles is the restatement of Sanguinetti's slut comment during the York University campus safety session. Less often, journalists mention (sometimes via a quoted organizer) examples of other victim-blaming incidents involving police and court officials. For instance, many articles mention the February 2011 incident involving Manitoba Judge Robert Dewar's lenient sentencing of a convicted rapist based on the victim's attire and behaviour⁸ (Hamilton Spectator, Apr 4; Vancouver Sun, May 12). The trend

⁸ In February 2011, Justice Robert Dewar ordered house arrest instead of a prison sentence for convicted rapist, Kenneth Rhodes. In assessing the "moral blameworthiness" of the 26-year-old woman, Dewar suggested that her tube top, high heels, and makeup, and flirtatious behaviour leading up to the rape sent the signal that "sex was in the air." Citing the inviting circumstances, Dewar characterized Rhodes as a "clumsy Don Juan." McIntyre, M. (Feb 24 2011). "Rape victim 'inviting,' so no jail: Judge rules woman's clothes, conduct ease blame on attacker". *Winnipeg Free Press*. <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/rape-victim-inviting-so-no-jail--rape-victim-inviting-so-no-jail-116801578.html>.

across media articles of making connections to other examples of victim-blaming in the legal system suggests competency and willingness amongst media producers in identifying the problem across regional and institutional settings.

Media outlets typically afford SlutWalk allies and organizers ample space to describe the rationale for the protest and, in turn, refute the notion that Sanguinetti was merely a “bad apple” in an otherwise accountable police force. Many media articles and news segments include some indication that SlutWalk is based on the notion that Sanguinetti’s comment “points to persistent problems in Canada’s justice system when it comes to dealing with sexual assault” (Hamilton Spectator, Apr 4). As explained by Anna Willats of the Toronto Police Accountability Coalition during an on-camera interview by CBC at the Toronto SlutWalk, “[Sanguinetti] felt that he had the right and was not confronted by his partner when he said that. So I think we have to presume that that does represent a significant attitude on the part of members of the Toronto Police service” (CBC, Apr 3). Willats directs viewers’ attention to the fact that Sanguinetti was not immediately reprimanded by his colleague, which might be read as evidence of tacit acceptance of the slut-shaming remark amongst the force. Toronto organizer Jeanette Janzen explains in a Toronto Sun News video segment, “[Sanguinetti’s comment] points to a larger problem within police culture and all we’re asking for is for them to be accountable and transparency [sic] in exactly what is – how do they train and educate their police officers?” (Toronto Sun, Apr 3).

Several articles refer to the 1998 Jane Doe trial, in which a sexual assault survivor successfully sued the Toronto Police for negligence and gender discrimination for failing to adequately warn female residents of the “balcony rapist” in 1986. The Judge ruled in favour of Jane Doe, who posited that rape myths and sexist stereotypes about women had impeded the proper investigation of rape cases by the police. The recurring presence of Jane Doe in the narratives about

SlutWalk situates SlutWalk along a historical trajectory, one in which sexual assault victims and survivors have demanded police accountability. Media narratives demonstrate that questions of police accountability reverberated beyond Toronto, to the extent that police departments across Canada, “[took] notice [and] denounced Const. Sanguinetti’s comments” (National Post, Jun 6). In addition to denouncing Sanguinetti’s remarks, members of the Saskatoon Police Force attended the Saskatoon SlutWalk to “show that the Saskatoon Police Service is a very progressive service” that takes seriously the issues presented by SlutWalk participants (CBC, May 28). The threshold for what constitutes “progressive” is not defined. Saskatoon Police Chief Clive Weighill laments the underreporting of sexual assault and “encouraged any sexual assault victims to come forward” explaining, “We’re here to help” (CBC, May 28). Saskatoon SlutWalk organizer Leah Horlick commends the police presence and said the SlutWalk is a “good opportunity for police forces to emphasize that they stand in solidarity with survivors of sexual assault and are no longer going to perpetuate victim blaming” (CBC, May 28).

“Police accountability” is also discursively present in statements made by SlutWalk allies, panelists, and reporting journalists and columnists, almost all of whom were identified as or were identifiable as white, university-educated women. Some allies focus on the hypocrisy of victim-blaming among law enforcement officials, with participant Melissa Dolson stating “[the police] are supposed to be protecting everyone as a whole” (Globe and Mail, Apr 4). York Professor Kate McPherson, speaking as a panelist on TVO’s *The Agenda*, explains that although victim-blaming attitudes are evident beyond the police force, “The fact of the matter is we count on institutions like the police to do better than the average” (TVO, May 9). Although the media describe victim-blaming as a widespread problem rooted in “societal attitudes,” it positions the police as the chief hypocrites and wrongdoers. More importantly, the media construct police forces as key agents of change who must restore trust and “do better than average” in their interactions with sexual assault victims. As

much as the SlutWalk-aligned comments are critical in tone, they nonetheless reproduce the supposedly protective role of the police, specifically in dealing with instances of sexual violence.

Overall, the coverage of the Toronto Police Forces' statements reflect a public relations exercise in damage control. Demonstrating the requisite shock and dismay over Sanguinetti's comments, Toronto Police Force officials distanced themselves from Sanguinetti and held him up as an anomaly. Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair characterizes the incident as a "training issue" and indicates that Sanguinetti's remarks are not reflective of the service. Blair explains that Sanguinetti's remarks highlighted the need for further training among his officers on the "reality of victimization" (CBC, Apr 3). Blair's characterization of Sanguinetti's comments locate the issue of victim-blaming as an anomaly within the bureaucracy of the police force, rather than a culturally rooted problem. That the solution could be found within an existing bureaucratic structure through staff sensitivity training reflects the professionalization of rape prevention services since the 1980s (Matthews, 1994).

Throughout the media coverage of Toronto SlutWalk, journalists allot significant space to the Toronto Police Force's attempts to characterize Sanguinetti's victim-blaming as an isolated incident. For instance, *Globe and Mail* reporter Greg McArthur includes the following statement from the Toronto Police Force: "Our actions and behaviour must never cause doubt or bring discredit to the reputation of the service" (Globe and Mail, Apr 4). Soliciting remarks from opposing sides of a controversy may be standard journalistic practice, but it must not be read superficially as indicative of politically neutral, objective reporting. Both "sides" in this case do not enter the public dialogue equally. These comments must be read in the context of the power imbalance between feminists and any state body, wherein the police carry enormous authority as an apparatus of power for the state (or, for corporations as is increasingly the case) while feminists and feminist issues are consistently misrepresented and undermined in mainstream spaces (Mendes, 2011).

Both SlutWalk and police forces are represented as being in agreement that the problem of victim-blaming in the various police forces could/should be addressed through further police training and education. Most media texts favour a condensed version of local SlutWalk demands. CBC reports that “[Slutwalk is] calling on law enforcement agencies not to blame victims after sexual assault” (May 6), thus lending a circular understanding of problem and solution for media consumers (e.g., “end victim-blaming by not blaming victims”). Victims’ needs are represented as being better served by improved collaboration between existing government institutions (e.g., medical and judicial). For example, the *Hamilton Spectator* reports that local Hamilton organizers asked “protective services to take more direction from community agencies and to be more transparent about their protocols, for elected officials to make sexual assault victims’ dignity a priority, as well as the creation of a federal commission on sexualized assault” (May 24). Overall, SlutWalk is portrayed as critical of law enforcement practices and policies, but ultimately as supportive of these agencies’ crucial role in protecting and supporting victims and survivors.

The media’s repetition of Constable Sanguinetti’s victim-blaming remark, or that of another public official such as Justice Robert Dewar, jeopardizes the public image of the legal and judicial systems. These remarks serve as high profile examples of the culture of victim-blaming around which protesters mobilized. But, for all the talk about systemic problems in the police and criminal justice system, there seemed to be no question that the police have a crucial, protective role to play in relation to sexual assault victims. Referred to as “protective services” (*Hamilton Spectator*, May 24) or as one of several “protective professions” (*National Post*, Jun 21), the police are linguistically and culturally cemented as protectors. The SlutWalk allies’ emphasis on the hypocrisy of Sanguinetti, the defensiveness of the police, and the memories of the Jane Doe case similarly take for granted the role of the police as protective, and thereby reified their function as a necessary apparatus of state power.

The problem is constructed as primarily a matter of recuperating police accountability and trustworthiness, rather than interrogating their integral role in institutional surveillance, control, and

domination. As Andrea Smith (2005) has argued, representations of the police as protective are highly problematic in the context of anti-violence work, for they obscure from popular view historical and contemporary instances of police brutality towards disenfranchised communities (e.g., Aboriginal communities in Canada). For instance, the 2004 “Stolen Sisters” report by Amnesty International (Canada) “concluded that Canadian authorities and most police forces do not protect Aboriginal women from violent attacks (including murder) but, instead, tend to disregard these violations when they occur and are reported” (Harper, 2006, p. 35).

In the following sections, I describe my two major concerns about the discourses of police accountability surrounding SlutWalk. First, the media address the issue of police accountability uncritically and utterly fail to capture its articulation with issues of colonization, poverty, and racism. Second, the emphasis on police accountability is futile for a politics of rape *prevention* because much of the accountability is towards women who have already been victimized (Marcus, 1992). I argue that the mainstream media emphasis on restoring police accountability is made possible in a political and cultural context that favours sexual violence management over prevention, and that primarily envisions and responds to a white, middle-class female victim. Therefore, the media depiction of police accountability promotes the management of sexual violence and runs counter to the goal of ending sexual violence.

Discourses of police accountability rest on the assumption that the police, as chief protectors of victims, must do better as managers of the rape aftermath. SlutWalk is portrayed as a movement that seeks to recuperate police accountability and reform police practices in favour of victim support and solidarity, and as such it resonates more with people who already believe in “police accountability.” What remains absent from media narratives is the fact that many people would not call the police for help in the first place. Recalling her research in the Los Angeles anti-rape movement, Matthews notes how activists’ approaches to police varied depending on their gender, race, and class:

Liberal middle-class white women pressed for the police to do their jobs more effectively, assuming and expecting police responsiveness. In contrast to middle-class white women's reflex to call the police when in trouble, Black and Latina women had experiences of police racism, including harassment, trivializing their complaints, threats of deportation, and assault, so they were more likely to view the police as another potential threat rather than to assume protection. (1994, p. 151)

Matthews' statement sheds light on the qualitatively different relationships that women have with the police depending on their race and class privileges.

Many anti-racist feminist scholars and prison abolitionists problematize the reliance on law enforcement in the anti-rape movement, and the anti-violence movement generally (e.g., hooks, 2000a; Razack, 2000; Richie, 2000; Smith, 2005). Offering some perspective on the consequences of an over reliance on state control of violence, Richie says that "while the antiviolence movement is working to improve arrest policies, everyday safety in communities of color is being threatened by more aggressive policing, which has resulted in increased use of force, mass incarceration, and brutality" (2000, p. 1136). Similarly, Smith points out, "most of the strategies developed by the mainstream antiviolence movement depend on the state as the *solution* for ending violence," which entails an explicit reliance on "a racist and colonial criminal legal system ... with insufficient attention to how this system oppresses communities of color" (2005, p. 5). Writing in the Canadian context, Razack reminds us that urban Aboriginal peoples are "over-policed and incarcerated at one of the highest rates in the world" (2000, p. 95). She goes on to describe how the encounter in policing between white settlers and Aboriginal people maintains the features of "the 19th century colonial encounter," and how, consequently, "Native women can seldom count on the police when assaulted" (p. 104). In these specific contexts, the ultimate injustice is not that the right to safety and protection has been violated with a victim-blaming statement like Sanguinetti's, but that the right to safety and protection was not afforded in the first place.

When media "buy[s] into a law and order framing" of domestic violence, there are "possible serious consequences for how the issues are dealt with," and, I would add, how the general public

comes to understand them (Bacchi, 2005, p. 204). Activists and scholars like hooks, Razack, Richie, and Smith warn that such consequences are more dire for those individuals and groups marginalized from the mainstream. Echoing Richie (2000) and Razack (2000), Bacchi argues that “a law and order problematization often leads to the targeting of members of specific groups, such as blacks or working-class people” (p. 204). I am not suggesting that there is no place in the feminist movement for police accountability and legal reforms. For instance, feminist-oriented research that seeks to improve the sexual assault reporting process is necessary for preventing re-victimization among the women who are likely to seek out police assistance (e.g., Vopni, 2006). The problem arises when the discourse of police accountability overpowers all other approaches to dealing with sexual violence. So, I am suggesting that the law and order approach will, at best, help a minority of relatively privileged women in a limited way, and will, at worst, fail to serve a majority of women who are already vastly underserved by the state.

When the media reproduce the law and order approach, they perpetuate for media consumers the notion that the law and order approach is *the* approach for dealing with sexual violence, and obscure from view alternative approaches to preventing and controlling rape and seeking justice outside of the criminal justice system (e.g., community accountability discussions). Moreover, by reproducing the managing rape paradigm, the media contribute to the faulty notion that all women might have their trust reinstated by the police through SlutWalk’s feminist political action. The media I examined do not allow space for acknowledging that calling the police is not always an option for victims of gender-based violence who fall outside spaces of class, race, and gender privilege. That some women are more at risk in the *presence* of police is obscured by the demands for better training and by the media emphasis on the virtuosity and expertise of police in protecting victims of sex crimes.

An emphasis on police accountability – even one that achieves a mainstream media presence – is futile for rape prevention because, “quite literally, the rape has already occurred by the time a case comes to [the police or to] court” (Marcus, 1992, p. 169). Of course, the argument can be made that if the police take sexual violence more seriously, they might catch more rapists. To the extent that they catch rapists who are repeat offenders, then calls for police accountability *might* be a form of “treatment as prevention.” But a lot of changes would have to be made to the entire criminal justice system for that prevention plan to pan out, not to mention it literally relies on women being victimized and coming to the police.

Discourses About Victim-Blaming

In this section, I focus on how the media handled the problem of victim-blaming by avoiding the shaming of sluts, blaming feminists, and sometimes inadvertently reinforcing victim-blaming. I argue that the media fail to convey to consumers how victim-blaming is a problem emerging from rape culture, and in so doing, normalize it further as an appropriate response to sexual violence.

Resisting victim-blaming, avoiding slut-shaming

Most of the media coverage affords some credibility to SlutWalk as an anti-victim-blaming demonstration and movement, whilst avoiding engagement with its resistance to slut-shaming (outside of the occasional quote from organizers and participants). The media are quite adept at validating the problem of victim-blaming and undermining its logic, so long as it remains somewhat separate from the messier conversation about slut-shaming and the slut stereotype (i.e., the notion that promiscuous women invite sexual violence). Therefore, the media characterize victim-blaming as a problem emerging from individual ignorance about instances of sexual violence rather than from a rape culture that normalizes misogyny and men’s violence against women.

Many media texts debunk the victim-blaming myth by simply denying it. For instance, the *Hamilton Spectator*’s May 24 headline – “SlutWalk: The victim is not to blame” – clearly and simply counters the notion that victims are to blame. Given that Sanguinetti’s original comment was about

women's attire (or what I'll refer to as "the fashion rape myth"), many rebuttals involve specific examples about promiscuous attire. For instance, *Toronto Sun* reporter Ian Robertson reiterates the message of Toronto SlutWalk organizers, explaining "that no matter how a woman dresses and behaves in public, it should not invite sexual assault and women should not be blamed for them" (Toronto Sun, Apr 3).

Another recurring method for debunking the fashion rape myth is to reveal its fallacy through examples. Most often, this involves highlighting specific victims or groups of victims of sexual assault who were not dressed provocatively at the time they were attacked. Several media outlets (Ottawa Citizen, Apr 9; Toronto Sun, Apr 3; Toronto Star, Apr 3) interview a woman identified as Polly Esther, who declares that she is "living proof" (Toronto Star, Apr 3) that provocative clothes do not provoke sexual assault. In interviews and on her sign, Esther recounts how she was wearing winter layers when she was sexually assaulted at age 14. In fact, many texts refer to child and elder abuse (Toronto Star, Mar 30; Montreal Gazette, Apr 2; Globe and Mail, Apr 16, May 12), arguing that "Sanguinetti's slutty-dress argument" (Montreal Gazette, Apr 2) clearly holds no water because it cannot explain why infants, toddlers, and seniors are sexually assaulted.

The media seem unable or unwilling to critically address the fashion rape myth by wrestling with slut-shaming, that is, widely held misogynist beliefs about the violability of provocatively dressed women. To circumvent this messy conversation, the media focus on establishing the "reality" of sexual violence and victimization patterns. This entails a hyperbolic emphasis on the unjust victimization and blaming of the chaste, savvy, conservative, attention-avoidant counterparts of "slutty" women. In her June 23 editorial in the *National Post*, Sheril Kirshenbaum offers a resistance to victim-blaming that circumvents a direct conversation about why some people believe that "slutty women" are more open to violence or responsible for their own attack than "modest women." This type of representation of resistance to victim-blaming – that is, one that avoids dealing with the related issue of slut-shaming – is common across media articles. Kirshenbaum offers a counterpoint

to columnist Barbara Kay's false assertion that "women who dress modestly usually won't be harassed by men" (National Post, Jun 24). Kirshenbaum begins by describing her experience being attacked on the street in 2006, explaining that she "always dressed conservatively in a business suit with hair tightly wound in a low bun." Although she managed to evade her attacker, Kirshenbaum recalls how the experience nonetheless:

forever shattered the false sense of security I had developed growing up in New York. I mistakenly believed that because I was street savvy, I would be safe. But I could never have been prepared for monsters like my attacker and was certainly not asking for attention.

Kirshenbaum's lesson is that "it's important to be realistic about sexual violence. Dressing modestly is no defence." By drawing on her own experience, wherein she was attacked while dressed super conservatively and "not asking for attention," Kirshenbaum effectively demonstrates that street savvy and efforts to evade attention through conservative dress will not prevent sexual assault. Though perhaps not an express intention, her method for disputing the Kay's point about the supposedly protective function of modest clothing is to reify the "reality": rape is a fact of women's lives that they may not be able to escape, and for that reason, no woman should be blamed.

In another example, *Globe and Mail* Style reporter Katrina Onstad exclaims, "It seems obvious that clothes don't have anything to do with sexual violence – was the 70-year-old woman recently attacked in her Toronto nursing home asking for it?" (Globe and Mail, Apr 16). It is positive that Onstad, among others, is taking a public stand in defense of victims of sexual violence. Still, this method of debunking rape myths constitutes a type of syllogism, wherein the false logic of one statement (i.e., "Dressing slutty invites attackers") is established exclusively with reference to the false premise of its inverse ("Dressing modestly wards off attackers" or, as Sanguinetti put it "Women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized."). In a sense, the media put forth only one of the two important arguments that can and should be made about the fallacy and harm of victim-blaming. It is worth noting that within this syllogism, victims are constructed in ways that collapse age, hegemonic beauty ideals, and style of dress.

I argue that the media took the path of least resistance by defending chaste and innocent victims as a means of eroding the logic of victim-blaming. In a May 12 *Globe and Mail* editorial, the author rhetorically challenges slut-shamers:

And if dressing like a ‘slut’ invites sexual assault, why is it that, in Britain, a serial rapist is targeting elderly women? Why, in parts of the world, are babies raped? Why have so many boys been sexually assaulted in institutional care, or men in jails?

Globe and Mail columnist Judith Timson argues that “the real reason underlying SlutWalk couldn’t be more serious” (May 13). In order to support her point that rape is a “crime of power,” Timson states that, “Disabled women are raped at an alarming rate, and not many of them were dressed in tight skirts when it happened” (May 13). Timson’s defense of women living with disabilities is contingent on a narrow vision for their sexuality and clothing style. *Toronto Star* columnist Heather Mallick presents a hypothetical scenario where she consults a notorious “night stalker” Delroy Grant of London, England to help establish an “index of clothes that shout ‘I’m asking for it,’” explaining that the “police have linked [Delroy] to 203 rapes, mostly on elderly women but including 10 men, in almost 20 years of frenzied attacks” (Mar 30). Mallick surmises, “I don’t know what his victims were wearing. Cardigans, I imagine, and bed socks.”

Kirshenbaum cites herself as the conservative woman example, while Onstad, Timson, Mallick, and the unnamed *Globe and Mail* editorial writer call forth victims from segments of the population – infants, boys, elderly, women, people living with disabilities, male prisoners – that are considered, under conventional readings, not inherently (let alone exceedingly) sexual or provocative. That is, the writers mostly steer clear of incidents of sexual assault involving young so-called “slutty” women. The examples presented in the media do not discursively or politically challenge the logic of the misogynistic virgin-whore dichotomy through which slut becomes meaningful. Indeed, the persuasiveness of the media’s resistance to victim-blaming seems contingent on the facile separation of “obvious victims” from “slutty women” within popular consciousness. Media representations contribute to and rely on popularly held beliefs that some people – decidedly

non-sexual and not provocative ones – are more readily understood as victims and more deserving of empathy than others.

Mainstream opposition to victim-blaming logic appeals to the commonsense view that legitimate sexual assault victims are chaste, modest, defenseless, and unambiguously not “asking for it.” With their attention on the “obvious victims,” the columnists I cite here avoid wrestling with the key cultural problem that SlutWalk sought to address – that sluttish attire and promiscuity provoke and justify rape. The problem is that an anti-victim-blaming movement like SlutWalk is not borne out of a culture that primarily blames and shames 4-year-olds and grandmothers for being raped. It is borne out of a culture that has maintained and wielded the myths that oppose the passive woman to the tempting woman to “justify the social control of half the population for centuries” (Filipovic, 2008, p. 18). The path of most resistance, and the one with the most pay-off from a feminist standpoint, would have entailed challenging how the shaming of slutty women is part of victim-blaming and rape culture. This would mean working towards dismantling the virgin-whore dichotomy, framing sexual assault as explicitly about power dynamics, and interrogating the pervasiveness of sexual violence in relation to dominant norms of femininity and masculinity. While this path of most resistance is a tall order in any social space, it is especially difficult in the mainstream spaces in which rape culture takes hold. Still, SlutWalk is arguably the most obvious event around which to show the way notions of slutty women and victims contribute to the broader problem of rape culture.

Feminists (mis)managing rape

The relationship between SlutWalk, the police, and sexual violence intervention also takes up space in editorial and columnist texts. In a few widely circulated opinion editorials and columns, the discourse of police accountability persists in ways that are more overtly critical of SlutWalk and defensive of police authority. Most media reports tend to validate the movement’s police-focused efforts through a narrative thread about recuperating police accountability in light of Sanguinetti’s

hypocrisy. Conversely, some columnists deny the hypocrisy altogether and vehemently defend Sanguinetti, including *Ottawa Sun*'s Anthony Furey, *Globe and Mail*'s Margaret Wenté, and *National Post*'s Barbara Kay. In their opening remarks, all three columnists are sympathetic to Sanguinetti, framing SlutWalk as an unjustified movement set on vilifying one man and over-generalizing the problem. They all extoll the virtuosity of Sanguinetti and police everywhere in helping real victims.

Wenté refers to Justice Robert Dewar's comments as evidence that victim-blaming *is not* a pervasive problem, evidently because there was a public outcry chastising him. Citing legal reforms, Wenté offers that the police have significantly improved their handling of victims and arrest of known perpetrators. She confidently declares that women at high risk of sexual violence "will not be helped by slogans and SlutWalks. What they really need is the dedicated efforts of people like Jenniferjit Sidhu, a young Toronto police officer who goes on domestic violence calls in South Asian neighbourhoods" (*Globe and Mail*, May 12).

In a particularly condescending iteration of this "defending the police"/"blaming the feminists" stance, Furey undermines the expertise of feminists organizers and bolsters that of police officers:

I would imagine some members of the police force – high-ranking female officers, long-term members of the sex assault section – could teach the protesters more about the subject than they could teach them. Some have been working to bring assault perpetrators to justice longer than these protesters have been alive. ... Those of us who know victims of sexual assault understand the last people you want to alienate are the ones tasked with protecting you. ... The best way for a community to work together is to stop erecting walls and start building bridges. (OS2, Apr 10)

Furey characterizes SlutWalk protesters as barriers to justice, and police as protectors whose work is unequivocally good for the community and victims of sexual assault.

According to Wenté and Furey, the system for dealing with sexual violence is mostly working, and no thanks to the legions of young, naïve, and whiny feminists. Nancy Berns (2001) observes a similar rhetorical strategy of chastising battered women's advocates in men's magazines.

Throughout their critique of SlutWalk, Wente and Furey rely on notable omissions regarding patterns and prevalences related to sexual violence. They fail to reference evidence of the vast underreporting of sexual crimes, the likelihood of re-victimization during police reporting and court cases, the dismal arrest and conviction rates of perpetrators, and the police-perpetrated violence against women, especially in vulnerable populations. Both Kellie Bean (2007) and Angela McRobbie (2009) would characterize these omissions as crucial and common in the postfeminist depiction of sexual violence. Although McRobbie developed her theory of postfeminism in the landscape of contemporary political and popular culture in the UK, it is relevant for my critical reading of SlutWalk media coverage. She argues that

post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasised that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force (p. 12)

The notion that feminism can be both taken into account and repudiated under postfeminism is a sort of double movement or a double entanglement, involving disarticulation, displacement, replacement, and substitution. By disarticulation, McRobbie means “a force which devalues, or negates and makes unthinkable the very basis of coming-together, ... on the assumption widely promoted that there is no longer any need for such actions” (p. 26).

Wente’s and Furey’s critiques of SlutWalk can be thought of as a discursive disarticulation of feminism within mainstream Canadian society. They take into account positive advances (e.g., public critique of rape myths, legal reforms, and presence of a sexual assault section and high-ranking female officers) without giving any credit to the feminist agitation that led to these advances. But, then, Wente and Furey repudiate feminist efforts by pointing out how unnecessary they are (e.g., rape myths are not really a problem, SlutWalks and slogans are not helpful, protesters are alienating). By discrediting the need for feminist political action, and reaffirming the capability of the police in handling sexual violence, media commentators Wente and Furey depoliticize sexual violence and reinforce the notion that it is something to be managed through state apparatuses like the police.

In some critiques, the SlutWalk message – that nobody deserves to be assaulted or blamed for their assault, regardless of how they dress or where they walk – is refashioned as advice about engaging in individual self-expression without fear of retribution. That is, wearing a bra and boots in public is read as an act of personal expression rather than one also entailing elements of political subversion and resistance. For instance, columnist Anthony Furey explains that SlutWalk is about people dressing however they want and “inhabit[ing] whatever sexual persona they choose” (Ottawa Citizen, Apr 10), but doesn’t tie the message to sexual violence victimization. SlutWalk supporters are initially characterized as “admirable but misguided” (Edmonton Sun, Apr 29) and possessing “noble intention(s)” (CBC, May 13), but their “naïve” messages are subsequently critiqued for supposedly encouraging young girls and women to ignore police warnings and enter dangerous scenarios.

During *CBC’s On the Coast*, a morning radio show in British Columbia, the host asks Vancouver SlutWalk organizer, Kate Raso, to explain “how is the word slut empowering?” (May 13). Raso explains that the appropriation of slut – which she qualifies as being the message of only a contingent within the SlutWalk movement – helps elicit a broader discussion about the lack of positive nouns for “a woman who is in control of her sexuality, who derives empowerment, great pleasure from her sexuality, who has a sex life that is respectful and healthy for all parties involved, who understands consent.” Raso concludes by characterizing the reappropriation of slut as an end goal, saying “[it’s] where we need to get, however there’s a lot of steps that we need to take before we get there.” The host responds:

There really are [a lot of steps]. And I see the intention, it’s such a noble intention. But uh you know we’re at a time when young girls are sexualized really young. ... And, what message does it send to young girls, to these tweens, who dress older maybe provocatively. Do you want them to claim the word, slut? What message do you want them to receive, the ones who are early [sic]?

I believe that it is through a subtle and likely unintended display of condescension towards Raso (and SlutWalk-ers by extension) that the host suggests that SlutWalk’s celebration of autonomous female

sexual empowerment might inadvertently collude with the sexualization of girls. It is crucial to not overlook the discursive effect of this conversational turn. One minute, Raso is given a platform to describe the feminist principles of a burgeoning grassroots political movement. The next minute, she is asked to play guidance counselor, doling out advice to tween girls facing the pressures of sexualization, including those apparently emanating from SlutWalk.

The *On the Coast* interview seems to echo the general media treatment of young female public figures (e.g., pop stars, actors, politicians), who are made to feel a heightened individual responsibility for social problems – problems which, notably, go relatively unnoticed unless in the context of critiquing feminism or women’s rights. *National Post*’s Barbara Kay and *Globe and Mail*’s Judith Timson and Margaret Wentz also created a “think of the children” narrative, where they variously argue that SlutWalk either doesn’t do enough to address, or actually contributes to, what Wentz calls the “slut-ification of preadolescent girls” (*Globe and Mail*, May 12). The discursive shift from women to young girls being sexualized is important, because it enables these commentators to downplay the potential long term political impact of feminist movements like SlutWalk for women, while simultaneously heightening their supposed short term negative impact for girls. Such discursive strategies rely on the mainstream rhetoric about the virtuousness of young girls and elicit knee-jerk reactions that chastise feminist politics for causing or not doing enough to address widespread “gendered” problems, which the media conflate with “women’s issues.”

The trend towards highlighting the inadequacy of SlutWalk continues in the Apr 29 *Edmonton Sun* editorial. The writer qualifies what he or she understands to be SlutWalk’s message in a way that negates its political substance:

[There is] a certain naivety in the way the message is being delivered by organizers because it IS dangerous to dress in certain ways and it IS dangerous to walk in the wrong areas of the city, at night, alone. ... Express yourself. But don’t forget that there are bad people out there.

Overall, these critiques of SlutWalk involve patronizing tones and teachable moments geared towards young SlutWalk organizers and supporters, or “young feminists” more broadly. According

to these critiques, SlutWalk is ultimately bad for women and, especially, for young girls because it encourages the exhibition of too much mobility and freedom in a world that values female submissiveness.

The notion that feminism is “bad” for women and girls is unfortunately common in media representations of feminism more generally. In their critiques of high profile postfeminist writers such as Katie Roiphe, Camilla Paglia, and Christina Hoff Summers, feminists like bell hooks (1994), Nancy Berns (2001), Kellie Bean (2007), Carine Mardorossian (2002), and Angela McRobbie (2009) all note that the postfeminist writers’ misunderstanding of sexual violence involves blaming feminists for heightening the risk in women’s lives. Overall, Kay’s column and the *Sun* media editorials suggest that we (media consumers) don’t need feminism anymore, we don’t need to get bogged down by word choices, and we definitely don’t need to follow the SlutWalk advice about dressing and going about however we please (e.g., “It’s my hot body, I do what I want” on sign, CBC, Jun 19). What we really need – and what Constable Sanguinetti was trying to helpfully point out before he got unfairly jumped on by the politically correct and naïve feminazis – is to take responsibility for our own risky scenarios.

Rape: the fact of women’s lives

In other words, covering the SlutWalk event gave some writers a chance to explain what Sanguinetti (or Dewar, or any victim-blamer) meant to say. Columnists such as Barbara Kay of the *National Post* and editorial staff from the *Toronto Sun* and *Edmonton Sun* vacate Sanguinetti’s comment of its gender-based offensiveness, and argue that, at its core, it was a well-intentioned, logical, and necessary reminder of women’s responsibility to avoid risk. For instance, Kay posits that “the impulse behind his remarks was not altogether wrong” (*National Post*, Jun 24). Both the *Sun* editorials begin with the assertion that, of course, nobody deserves to be raped, and, of course, Sanguinetti’s word choice was poor, but, really, he spoke the truth. Both refer to the “real world,” in which “any responsible adult knows exactly what the officer meant” and wherein there is “no

substitute for good judgment and common sense in how one behaves in public and to pretend this has no relevance to personal safety is dangerous and disingenuous” (Toronto Sun, Apr 6). This focus on personal judgment, responsibility, and common sense operates to individualize the causes and responses to violence, and renders the ensuing advice as applicable to everyone, regardless of context. The *Toronto Sun* editorial claims that “it’s obviously unwise for *anyone* to dress or act inappropriately, or to drink to excess, particularly in unfamiliar surroundings,” and “an inebriated young *woman, or man*” who acts in those ways is being stupid (my emphasis). As the *Edmonton Sun* author states, it’s “common sense safety, not sexism ... ANYONE walking alone at night in a bad part of town is advertising their potential victim status” (Edmonton Sun, Apr 29). The message to media consumers is that the problem is not misogyny or normalized violence, it’s stupidity, “and that’s not a problem any so-called “SlutWalk” is going to fix” (Toronto Sun, Apr 6).

Basically, these media narratives are a rehash of the victim-blaming logic that motivated SlutWalk in the first place. These types of statements are informed by and exemplary of the risk management and reduction strategies that pervade much primary rape prevention and education. These strategies are mostly focused at changing the individual behaviour of potential female victims rather than male perpetrators (Lonsway et al. 2009; McMahon, 2000). Premised on the inevitability of male violence, such recommendations position women as victims-in-waiting who are more culpable for sexual violence than the perpetrators themselves. However, in the aforementioned examples, the “paternalistic myth of women’s vulnerability donned the neoliberal cloak of risk management” (Hall, 2004, p. 1). With respect to rape prevention, neoliberal discourse involves an implicit repudiation of feminist efforts to “make it about gender,” a taking into account of (reformist) feminist successes in equalizing the sexes, and an added dose of the central tenet of neoliberal citizenship: self-sufficiency. So, in this scenario, the problem is not about gender relations (let alone about race, class, or sexual privilege), it’s about individual citizens managing their own safety and security and accepting the reality of all types of violence.

These aforementioned columnists aside, most of the media coverage of SlutWalk did afford unprecedented space for critiquing the victim-blaming or “don’t get raped” tone of typical sexual violence prevention tips. For instance, several texts reveal the extent to which victim-blaming is entrenched in common responses to victims, often through a heavy reliance on excerpts from interviews with SlutWalk organizers and local shelter directors. Paraphrasing Calgary SlutWalk organizer Allison Robins, CBC News says, “The [SlutWalk] message goes beyond fashion choices ... Victims of rape are also sometimes blamed for their actions, words or associations” (CBC, Aug 21). Offering examples of typical victim-blaming responses that rationalize the violence, Robins said, “They’ll say, ‘She was walking in the beltline,’ or ‘It was late at night and she was alone’ or ‘She had slept with this person before so it couldn’t possibly be rape’.” Speaking about the Hamilton context, Lenore Lukasik-Foss, director of the Sexual Assault Centre Hamilton and Area (SACHA), explains that victims face a tremendous amount of blame in the wake of their sexual assault in the form of a barrage of questions about their behaviour and whereabouts (e.g., “Why were you there? Who were you with? What were you wearing? What were you drinking?”), with the problematic implication being “That somehow our actions cause someone to commit rape” (Hamilton Spectator, May 24).

Montreal Gazette reporter Janet Bagnall says that Sanguinetti’s statement “reconfirmed all the clichés: Women are at fault if they’re attacked because of what they wear. Or don’t wear. Or where they are. Or whom they’re with. Or not with” (Montreal Gazette, Apr 2). Bagnall understands that identifying victim-blaming is one of many steps towards ending it, as is acknowledging how nonsensically it is applied. Nevertheless, there are discursive limits to how her listing of clichés might subvert those clichés in the minds of media consumers. Media consumers might recognize their own reactions in the examples, and come to a place of critical self-reflection wherein they confront their own collusion with victim-blaming. However, media consumers’ recognition might just as easily be accompanied by a sense of feeling justified in their popularly held attitudes about sexual violence. In the end, consumers get a laundry list of items that, for one camp, perpetuate

victim-blaming and do *not* effectively prevent sexual assault, and, for another camp, constitute valid common sense safety tips. We can call it victory that Bagnall's column might attract more people to the former camp, and thus increase the percentage of the populace equipped with methods to debunk victim-blaming. Still, I think that more can be accomplished by not only debunking myths, but by calling into question the broader context of rape culture from which they take hold. Perhaps more feminist academics need to crossover into journalism to take on this tricky task.

In a few instances, the media did debunk rape myths *and* redirect blame onto rapists. For example, Bagnall explains that SlutWalks are really about "women's fury at the continuing failure of the justice system to grasp the obvious – nobody's "asking for it" – and its failure to assign blame to the only person who deserves it, the assailant" (Montreal Gazette, Apr 2). Toronto SlutWalk participant Sierra Chevy Harris is quoted in *Hamilton Spectator*: "We need to criticize the people who are actually committing the crimes" (Hamilton Spectator, Apr 4). The redirection of blame is commonly captured with written or visual reference to the message "Don't tell us how to dress, tell men not to rape" (National Post, Jun 6), although this slogan was not the most prominent in written descriptions or photographs of signs at the walks. In her interview on *CBC's Connect with Mark Kelley*, feminist critic Shira Tarrant explain that the role of SlutWalk is to promote the message that, "it doesn't matter what she's wearing, it doesn't matter who she sleeps with, it doesn't matter what she does for a living. The question is never 'What was she wearing?' but rather 'Why was he raping?'" (CBC, Jun 9).

In the most generous reading of the overall media coverage of SlutWalk, we might say that it provides an unprecedented amount of space for the feminist message about changing from a "don't get raped" to a "don't rape" society. The notion that people outside of feminist circles are being exposed to the idea that "We live in a society that teaches don't get raped instead of don't rape" is monumental. At present, my task is to identify spaces for further improvement in media coverage of SlutWalk. To refocus the public conversation and policy towards "don't rape" is certainly necessary,

but it doesn't contribute to dismantling rape culture. The media do not foster critiques of the cultural and structural influences or implications of either message. The media mostly fail to interrogate victim-blaming as stemming from widely held misogynistic beliefs. There is no space devoted to unpacking the normalization of sexual violence as part of heteronormative gender relations, let alone its articulation with other forms of violence.

In the current cultural landscape of Canada, men and boys are socialized into positions of dominance and aggression in ways that seem almost contingent on denying their affiliation with or potential to become rapists. Therefore, to "blame rapists" does not necessarily entail blaming husbands, uncles, boyfriends, brothers, sons, public officials, and police officers. The "don't rape" message likely wouldn't stick, least of all with rapists, who employ a host of "techniques of neutralization" to justify their derogatory sexism and violent behaviour, which they rarely openly identify as constituting rape (Horvath, Hegarty, Tyler, & Mansfield, 2011). Consequently, it is standard practice in empirical studies of rape perpetration and victimization, to avoid the word rape and instead provide behaviourally-specific descriptions of unwanted sexual experiences. A wide body of evidence demonstrates that such criteria enables the detection of higher and presumably more accurate rape perpetration and victimization prevalence rates (Koss et al., 2007). A different version of the message, "blame men for rape" would implicate any and every man in rape, and reify the heterosexist notion that rape can only be perpetrated by a man, which is likely to elicit knee-jerk defensiveness rather than moves to accountability.

Conclusion

At best, the media coverage surrounding SlutWalk gives some currency to refuting victim-blaming and promoting a "don't rape" message. At worst, news coverage of SlutWalk is littered with teachable moments about the perils of feminism and the importance of individuals taking responsibility for avoiding risk and danger. Overall, media coverage of SlutWalk denotes a marked improvement from past media treatment of sexual violence (e.g., Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), and this

cannot be understated. Still, I would have preferred the media to highlight feminist issues in ways that do *not* cement sexual violence as an ever present threat in women's lives and that do *not* glorify the police as the protectors and managers of this ever present threat. I believe this might have been accomplished had more journalists tackled victim-blaming and slut-shaming in conjunction. As it stands, the media representations of feminist resistance to victim-blaming are unrelated to a critique of patriarchy as it intersects with heterosexism, racism, and institutional class oppression. It troubles me that the general public, having read, watched, or listened to news coverage of SlutWalk, would not necessarily be empowered to negotiate a key underlying problem, namely that "rape can be an extension of normal heterosexual relations" (Moore, 2011, p. 462). If we can't identify and confront the problem as it enmeshes with everyday life, then how can we expect to collectively agitate for widespread cultural changes?

Chapter Five: Simplifying the “Slut” and “Walk” in SlutWalk: Essentializing Gender Differences and Reproducing Whiteness

In many respects, media coverage of SlutWalk tends to amplify some basic feminist tenets, such as showing solidarity with victims of sexual violence, while ignoring others. In this chapter, I interrogate the discursive conditions that shape the media’s positive amplification of feminist ideas, particularly regarding slut-shaming and solidarity. Across two sections, I demonstrate how the mainstream news relies on an overly simple gender analysis that is premised on whiteness.

In the first major section, I argue that the media portray slut-shaming too simply as a male-perpetrated oppression that affects women everywhere. In its oversimplification of the problem, the media rely on decontextualized and individualized framings of the “slut” stereotype. Overall, the media fall short in exploring slut-shaming as a culturally-rooted problem that women (and SlutWalk supporters) can reinforce. I also show how the media oversimplify SlutWalk as an inclusive and diverse movement that welcomes “all walks of life,” while nonetheless highlighting young white female participants in interviews and photos. I argue that any claims to diversity and inclusion must be juxtaposed with the media’s visual whitewashing of solidarity, victimhood, and resistance.

In the second section, I build on the arguments of the first by expanding my subject matter to include the overall media spectacle of SlutWalk. I analyse media narratives that encourage dialogue and debate about SlutWalk’s controversial marketing strategies. I show how the media and activists create a spectacle of SlutWalk that elevates the “slut” controversy to public consciousness and makes ensuing feminist discussions more widely available for the general public. Ultimately, I argue that the spectacle overshadows and undermines the movement’s political messages about victim solidarity and violence prevention.

Oversimplifying the Problem and the Protest: The Facts

The mainstream news media I examined provide readers with an accessible understanding of the problem of slut-shaming and the nature of feminist resistance in SlutWalk by establishing three

“facts.” The first is to position Constable Sanguinetti as the poster-boy for slut-shaming. The second is to portray women as victims of slut-shaming worthy of sympathy. The third is to depict SlutWalk as an inclusive movement that invites diverse peoples to unite in resistance against slut-shaming. At first glance, the media portray feminist resistance positively and make feminist ideas accessible to wider audiences. Upon closer inspection, the media’s oversimplification relies on problematic norms of whiteness and postfeminism. Namely, the mainstream media depoliticize the problem of slut-shaming by discursively positioning men as perpetrators of isolated attacks. In turn, the media (inadvertently) absolves women of any responsibility for perpetuating the “slut” stereotype. Simultaneously, the media exclusively features young white women, thus reproducing white privilege in popular portrayals of feminism.

Sanguinetti: Poster-boy for slut-shaming

Most journalists introduce the notion of slut-shaming to readers and explain the origin of SlutWalk by referring to Constable Sanguinetti. That is, they use Sanguinetti as the “hook” for their stories. In her May 12 *Globe and Mail* column, Judith Timson offers an example of this journalistic efficiency:

SlutWalk started, of course, with poor Michael Sanguinetti, the Toronto cop who now goes down in the annals of feminist history (“Daddy, tell me again how you ended up in the Ms. Magazine Hall of Shame?”) because he suggested that women could avoid being raped if they stopped “dressing like sluts.”

The only work for readers seems to be calling forth existing knowledge of the word “slut.” Within my sample of media texts, little space is devoted to unpacking what made Sanguinetti’s use of the word “slut” so controversial and enraging, presumably because “slut” is taken-for-granted as a widespread gender-based slur. In most texts, journalists provide the facts in a way that requires readers to assume the political incorrectness of Sanguinetti’s remark. For example, CBC began an Apr 3 article as follows:

A group of Toronto marchers took to the streets Sunday afternoon in what they’re calling a “slut walk” in response to controversial comments made by a police constable earlier this

year. In January, Toronto Police Const. Michael Sanguinetti told a personal security class at York University that “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized.” Sanguinetti apologized for his comments, but his apology failed to satisfy walk organizer Sonya Barnett.

Some reporters flourish their descriptions of Sanguinetti to make his error more explicit to readers. For example, *Globe and Mail* reporter Greg McArthur characterizes Sanguinetti’s advice as “ill-advised,” and an example of when “public officials ... say things that offend” (Apr 4), an *Associated Press* reporter calls it a “flippant comment” (CBC, May 6), and *Ottawa Citizen* columnist Joanne Laucius names it a “grave mistake” (Apr 9). The tendency to “skip over” an explanation of the “slut” stereotype is a tactic used both by reporters who are relatively supportive (e.g., Timson) and who are openly critical (e.g., Furey) of SlutWalk. In the second paragraph of a column in the *Ottawa Citizen*, Anthony Furey calls the Sanguinetti comment “a classic case of blaming the victim,” explains that apologies were issued, and moves immediately into his critique of SlutWalk (Apr 10). If there is further elaboration about the problem, it is often about victim-blaming in sexual assault cases. Some texts don’t even include the term “slut-shaming” and refer only to blaming the victim (e.g., *Ottawa Citizen*, Apr 11); one collapses slut-shaming with victim-blaming, with the use of the term “victim-shaming” (CBC, Apr 3). For the most part, journalists do not spend time explaining why or how slut is a derogatory term beyond the realm of “safety advice” in which Sanguinetti used it.

Under similar time and space restrictions, I might have expedited my explanation of slut-shaming much the same way that Laucius and Furey do. Still, I worry about the cultural implications of journalism that requires readers to “read between the lines” to identify misogyny and sexism. On a superficial level, the press might be said to have demonstrated gender studies savvy; slut-shaming was so facile that it hardly required explanation: Sanguinetti’s slut comment was an offensive, politically incorrect, gender-based slur. I counter that such a reading is too generous and shortsighted, given the abundance of evidence of the mainstream news media’s complacency and active

contribution to slut-shaming and victim-blaming, treatment of “gender” or “women’s issues” as soft news (Mendes, 2011), avoidance of structural causes of male violence against women (Worthington, 2008), and continued failure on gender parity in hiring.

Paradoxically, news media rely on readers’ tacit understanding of “slut,” only to then write about slut-shaming in ways that deter readers from acknowledging their potential participation in the problem. In a sense, Sanguinetti is the poster-boy and scapegoat, for his very publicized wrongdoing enables SlutWalkers, journalists, readers, and even the police themselves (see Chapter 4) to feel better about having pinpointed the problem. Sanguinetti is central to mainstream media explanations of slut-shaming, and thus serves as the focal point of the outrage culminating in SlutWalk. According to *Vancouver Province* reporter Ian Austin, “Sanguinetti’s words galvanized women who saw the officer’s speech as typical of male bias, often blaming the victims of sexual assaults” (May 16). I believe that this oversimplification inadvertently encourages an interpretation of slut-shaming as a male-perpetrated oppression, and ultimately, deters an exploration of slut-shaming as part of the general cultural phenomenon known as rape culture. The news media rarely cite examples of woman-to-woman slut-shaming, and mostly fail to acknowledge the ubiquitous presence of the term “slut” in mainstream pop culture, music, and political debates. The omnipresence of Sanguinetti as the lone exemplar might partly explain (or enable) the lack of commentary about women’s participation in sexism, which I detected throughout the media coverage of SlutWalk. In this context, women are most easily understood as victims. I explore the construction of women-as-victims in the following section.

Women: the shamed, not the shamers

The second part of the oversimplified media portrayal of slut-shaming is a focus on women as the victims of slut-shaming. Journalists cement slut as a gender-based slur used to injure women, particularly by relying on the explanations of SlutWalk participants and organizers. For example,

Hamilton Spectator reporter Danielle Wong offers her readers a direct description of slut as a pejorative term for women by quoting Hamilton SlutWalk co-organizer Nikki Wilson:

“The word slut is used to make women feel uncomfortable about how they’re presented to the world and to shame (them), and make them feel they need to police their bodies and police their sexualities in the way they express themselves,” said Wilson, 22. (May 24)

The *Globe and Mail* similarly encourages readers to understand slut-shaming as a gendered phenomenon in which women are oppressed by quoting a speaker at Boston SlutWalk:

A slut is someone, usually a woman, who’s stepped outside of the very narrow lane that good girls are supposed to stay within. Sluts are loud. We’re messy. We don’t behave. In fact, the original definition of ‘slut’ meant ‘untidy woman.’ But since we live in a world that relies on women to be tidy in all ways, to be quiet and obedient and agreeable and available (but never aggressive), those of us who colour outside the lines get called sluts. And that word is meant to keep us in line. (May 12)

Many media texts I examined establish slut-shaming as a relatable experience for women that serves as a basis for solidarity. In on-camera interviews with CBC and CTV, Vancouver SlutWalk co-organizer Katie Raso explains the galvanizing function of slut-shaming, particularly for women, declaring, “I don’t know a woman who hasn’t been called slut. And you know, it’s something that affects all of us” (CBC, May 13) and “Everyone I know has been called a slut and yet we’re all very different women and we all dress very differently” (CTV, May 14). Similarly, *Ottawa Citizen* reporter Zev Singer paraphrases Ottawa SlutWalk participant Katryna Schafer’s feelings about SlutWalk as a form of solidarity, saying “If a police officer, or anyone else, wants to call a woman a slut in a way that blames a victim, then they’ll have to call all of the marchers sluts, too” (Apr 11).

On the one hand, these candid descriptions of the effects of slut-shaming render feminist ideas more accessible to readers, and are thus positive features of the SlutWalk media coverage. Readers are afforded a sense of how “slut” is used to monitor the rigid boundaries of feminine norms. The second passage from the Boston speaker is particularly nuanced, for it historicizes the term and pushes past common-sense understandings revolving around promiscuity. Unfortunately, such detailed accounts of slut-shaming are relatively uncommon and thus not characteristic of the sample.

Nonetheless, the media acknowledges slut-shaming as a widespread issue by offering space for SlutWalk supporters to explain a common oppression based on female gender and sexualities, which include multiple mentions of “us” and “we” in reference to women. The media reproduces SlutWalk as a movement for uniting people in outrage and solidarity. As a result, the media represent slut-shaming as happening everywhere and affecting all women. The extent to which “all women” could be said to participate in the culture of slut-shaming is unacknowledged. That is, slut-shaming is described as not something women do, but as something that is done to them.

So, SlutWalk participants and supporters are rendered invisible as potential or actual “slut-shamers” in the mediascape. Woman-to-woman slut-shaming, a prime example of female sexist thinking, is mostly obscured from view in discourses about SlutWalk. In the context of SlutWalk, many supporters frame their descriptions of slut-shaming in passive voice (e.g., “slut is used to make women feel”). Dominant discourses of sexism and violence against women frequently adopt this passive framing of the problem, wherein men are the implicit operators of violence and women are the objects of violence (Marcus, 1992). For the most part, the only identifiable subject of slut-shaming as a verb is Sanguinetti. More importantly, women and SlutWalk supporters are seemingly absolved of any personal or collective responsibility for having sustained the popular currency of the “slut” stereotype.

The mainstream depiction of slut-shaming hinges on what hooks (2000a) describes as the “shared sympathy for [women’s] common suffering” (p. 15). In this popular incarnation of feminist resistance in SlutWalk, there are limited representations of struggle against patriarchal injustice in all of its forms, including when women “judge each other without compassion and punish one another harshly” (hooks, 2000a, p. 14). Therefore, to the typical mainstream media consumer, slut-shaming would be most readily understood as a male-perpetrated phenomenon that affects and outrages women everywhere, and, presumably, equally. In my experience, feminist politics are a lot messier

than what might be captured by an “us” versus “them”/”him” dichotomy, especially one that assumes an inherent opposition between men and women. To put it simply, this is not good for feminism.

A dichotomous and oppositional understanding of slut-shaming is problematic because it fails to accurately reflect how sexism takes hold in dominant culture, including through woman-to-woman slut-shaming. hooks (2000a) reminds us that a critique of women’s internalized sexism was the foundation of political solidarity in the feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s, and remains crucial in contemporary versions. In the last decade, I have referred to other women as sluts behind their backs and laughed at jokes about “sluts,” and reaped the social rewards of my collusion with the “slut” stereotype amongst friends. As an unabashed feminist, I don’t have the greatest track record, and I wonder, what are the odds that anyone does? It is all the more curious to me, then, that the majority of media messages about SlutWalk – from quoted participants and photographed signs – give the impression that most people do have a good track record.

Joanne Laucius’s *Ottawa Citizen* column from 9 April is a notable exception, in that it breaks from the media pattern of treating slut-shaming as an attack on women, for which few people (mostly men) are accountable. Laucius calls young women’s usage of slut as “a double-edge word,” as it could be complimentary of a friend’s “chutzpah” or intended to undermine an enemy. Laucius even cites a pop culture example of female sexism, thus reminding readers of the wide-reaching nature of slut-shaming:

“In girl world, Halloween is the one night a year when girls can dress like a total slut and no other girls can say anything about it,” notes Lindsay Lohan in *Mean Girls*, which takes an anthropological – and humorous – look at the backstabbing world of high school girls.

Laucius does here what few other journalists did – she acknowledges that slut has a history and a social location for herself and for her readers, and in turn, recognizes the lived messiness of the problem. It’s a simple and significant moment, for it demonstrates that the mainstream media can address social issues through a feminist lens and garner readership. On a wider scale, the mainstream

media might acknowledge that women and girls can also shame each other through the use of the label “slut,” and thus demonstrate that patriarchal consciousness spreads far beyond the Sanguinettis of the world. In turn, this might encourage some critical introspection (a crucial part of feminist consciousness-raising) amongst readers. As it stands, the media emphasis on calling out only Sanguinetti for slut-shaming precludes an exploration of slut-shaming as a general cultural phenomenon – one that extends beyond discussions of sexual violence – which SlutWalk participants and media consumers themselves might have been sustaining at one point or another.

“All walks of life”: a whitewashed banner of diversity and inclusion

In this section, I argue that the media discourses about diversity and inclusiveness point to a sense of universal solidarity within SlutWalk, and potentially encourage media consumers to envision participating in a similar feminist demonstration. Unfortunately, the written accounts of diversity stand in contradiction to its visual representations of Slutwalk agitators as overwhelmingly young, white, and female students. In media coverage of SlutWalk, the contradiction between the diversity-inclusiveness discourse and the white visual economy reinforces the broader reproduction of white privilege in the media representations of feminism, social movements, and “gender issues.”

Many news reports I examined describe SlutWalk as an inclusive movement representing a diverse cross-section of people. Participants are repeatedly described as coming from “all walks of life,” (CTV, May 14; Edmonton Journal, Apr 3; Globe and Mail, Apr 4), and from “all age groups and genders” (CTV, May 14), making the crowd constitutive of “almost every representation of people ... People of different races, people of different abilities, people of different orientations” (TVO, May 9) and “represent[ing] a cross-section of the city” (Globe and Mail, Apr 16). In addition to emphasizing diversity in relation to race, ability, age, sexual orientation, and gender, some news reports also refer to the differing political slants and lifestyles of participants. For instance, the Toronto SlutWalk featured “all walks of life, including activists, Goths, native protesters, artists, and a good smattering of men” according to *Globe and Mail* reporter Greg McArthur (Apr 4). The sense

of diversity and inclusiveness is also established, though to a lesser extent, through the acknowledgement of the attendance of families and parents (CBC, May 6; CBC, Aug 21) and multiple generations of women (Edmonton Journal, Aug 21; CTV, May 14), and the range of attire worn by the crowd (Hamilton Spectator, Jun 6; Toronto Star, Apr 4; Toronto Star, Mar 30).

Some media outlets point to the inclusiveness and diversity as evidence of the potential of SlutWalk to help victims of slut-shaming. In her Mar 30 column, *Toronto Star* columnist Heather Mallick writes the following about the then upcoming Toronto SlutWalk:

... will feature people in all sorts of garments and gear, dressed for the office, clubbing, yoga, walking the dog, whatever it is that people wear as they go about their lives not asking to be raped. It is a message of love and strength to all women (and men), especially those who have been assaulted at the core of their being.

Ottawa Citizen columnist Joanne Laucius explicitly affiliates SlutWalk with third-wave feminism and sings its praises in connection to its inclusive approach, saying that:

Perhaps the best thing about Third Wave feminism is that these young women recognize that feminism in the new millennium is not about exclusion. There might be a trace of anger behind SlutWalk, but also a sense of camaraderie in fishnets and stilettos. Everyone is welcome at SlutWalk. (Apr 9)

The media also recognize diverging opinions about the appropriation of slut, though these were typically positioned as secondary to the goal of marching in solidarity with victims. For instance, *Ottawa Citizen* reporter Zev Singer highlights the tension between the two goals of SlutWalk with reference to the thoughts of Ottawa SlutWalk participant, Katryna Schafer. Singer describes Schafer as not being in favour of “the idea of identifying as a slut on a personal level” but in favour of “calling the event the Slut-Walk, as a form of solidarity” (Apr 11). *Vancouver Province* reporter Ian Austin captures a similar sentiment from protester Rory Marck, who says “There’s such a variety of opinions – some people like the idea, but don’t like the term, ‘SlutWalk.’ It’s kind of like feminism” (May 16). *Vancouver Sun* reporter Daphne Bramham explains that her discomfort with the word slut matters less than showing solidarity of the movement. Bramham states, “what’s more important is that the SlutWalk symbolizes how a new generation of women has been energized to

take on an old fight” (May 12). In other words, the diversity of opinions about the provocative title do not dismantle the notion of unity and inclusiveness. SlutWalk participants are portrayed as sharing “a common message” (CTV, May 14) and being “united by a surge of well-placed fury” (Globe and Mail, Apr 16).

These overlapping narratives of diversity and inclusiveness are contradicted by the visual and audio-visual representations of SlutWalk events, which feature young white women (many of whom had performed the word slut based on their signage and attire). With a handful of exceptions, photos and interviews do not feature a diverse cross-section of people; they do not include, for instance, men, women of colour, people with disabilities, or older individuals. The most high profile photographs and news footage of the SlutWalk events feature posed photos of young, white, scantily-clad women with signs, many of whom are identified as university students. Across 18 video clips, there is only one black woman interviewed on camera, albeit briefly as she marched during the relatively less publicized Winnipeg SlutWalk (CTV, Oct 15). While there is an abundance of images showing individuals and groups of young white women at SlutWalk, there are only a handful of such images of women of colour (and they are inconspicuous amongst dozens of photos in a slideshow from Edmonton SlutWalk).

Not only are white women the most conspicuous participants and organizers of SlutWalk in the press, they are also overrepresented as invited experts and critical commentators on shows like *TVO's The Agenda* with Steve Paikin, *CBC's Q* with Jian Ghomeshi, and *CBC's Connect* with Mark Kelley. The banner of diversity and inclusiveness is held up by white women, the voices of outrage and solidarity are that of a young white female university students, and the chief supporters and dissidents of the latest feminist demonstration are white female professors and journalists. The people participating in, benefiting from, and discussing SlutWalk in the mainstream news media occupy positions of racial, cultural, and economic privilege. By frequently quoting or soliciting feedback from white female organizers and academics, the press establishes a gendered framing of

the problem and the protest, while also reproducing the whiteness and elitism of the media coverage of SlutWalk.

The media juxtapose discourses of inclusive diversity with representations of whiteness. This juxtaposition shapes whether or not media consumers identify with the movement and, in turn, informs their expectations about whether they will be welcomed in the movement. That is, drawing from media representations, will media consumers “see” themselves as recognized participants of the movement? Activist and *rabble.ca* contributor, Harsha Walia, speaks to the relationship between media representation and expectations. Recalling the Vancouver SlutWalk, she explains, “I expected to see only a handful of women of colour, mothers and children, older women. I was surprised at the actual diversity on the streets, not captured by photographers seeking sensationalist images of bras and fish nets” (May 18). Walia points to several issues in that quote, and throughout her analysis of SlutWalk in *rabble.ca*. The first is that the extent to which SlutWalk can be read by media consumers as inclusive and diverse stands in tension with its overwhelmingly unmarked white vision of female sexual empowerment. In turn, this tension is damaging for the development of a mass-based feminist movement and for sexual violence prevention, because it tends to subsume difference in an apolitical and whitewashed “we” that relatively few people can identify with. Overall, the news media proffer a narrative of SlutWalk as welcoming of and working for everyone while also reproducing white supremacy in the movement and marginalizing non-white voices and opinions.

Debating “SlutWalk”: (White) Feminists at the Table

Throughout the first half of this chapter, I developed an argument about supposedly factual and straightforward media coverage. In the second half, I carry forward the threads of that argument about media reproduction of whiteness, but I do so with a broader scope of evidence and interpretations. Namely, I shift the focus of my analysis to moments of debate and contention in the media coverage of SlutWalk, drawing on media excerpts that reflect a more dynamic, dialogic, and

layered style of journalism. I focus on moments where reporters and tv hosts took a stance themselves and/or captured the divergent opinions of invited commentators.

In the following sub-section, I demonstrate how the media is preoccupied with debating the merits of the branding and marketing tactics of organizers, rather than the political substance of the movement. I show how a mutually beneficial interplay between savvy SlutWalk-ers and journalists seeking catchy copy propels the SlutWalk from a local event to a worldwide mediated spectacle. The problem is that SlutWalk's spectacular mainstream existence is circumscribed by postfeminist ideals and premised on whiteness, which distract from conversations about sexual violence prevention and undermine the intersectional feminist politics that prevention requires.

The spectacle of SlutWalk: Rising above the noise, silencing others

But whatever you may think of SlutWalk (and part of the genius of its organizers has been figuring out that “slut” is a search-engine optimizer), one strongly positive thing has emerged from it: a new, energetic cohort of feisty feminists are on the move. They've used social media to mobilize in a hell of a hurry (the longest part was probably wondering what to wear). And they've figured out a way to be front and centre in the public conversation. (Timson, *Globe and Mail* Columnist, 13 May 2011)

Ultimately, protesters face a difficult challenge. News coverage is important to achieving protest goals, yet such coverage may not be forthcoming unless protesters engage in dramatic and even violent action. However, those very actions that attract media attention are often central features of stories that delegitimize the protesters. (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong, 2012)

Since the story broke, media outlets explained the widespread attention to SlutWalk as being obviously connected to its controversial name. For instance, the day before the Toronto demonstration, the *Globe and Mail* explains that SlutWalk was “picking up public steam, thanks to its provocative calling card” (Apr 2). Several media outlets characterize the protest name as provocative, scandalous, or controversial in their headlines, bylines, body, and captions. It was only on rare occasions that the descriptor for the movement was “feminist” or “quasi-feminist.” According to the press, the most marketable aspect of SlutWalk is its brand, not necessarily its message. If we

delve deeper into these media texts, we learn more about the relationship between feminist activists and mainstream news media.

In her May 10 article, *Globe and Mail* journalist Elizabeth Church explores the worldwide spread of the SlutWalk movement in the context of feminist debates about its provocative title. Church calls SlutWalk “an in-your-face response to violence against women” and frames SlutWalk positively as the latest example of social media activism (*Globe and Mail*, May 10). Church provides space for organizers and supporters to explain their strategies and goals. In an interview, co-founder Sonya Barnett explains that the slut brand is a way of “grabbing attention” and “[rising] above the noise” while also intending to “teach people about the harmful use of language.” Barnett is “skeptical that a protest by any other name would [make] headlines in the British press and on Fox News or [elicit] messages from would-be march organizers halfway around the world.” Karen Pickering, an organizer of the Melbourne SlutWalk, echoes Barnett, explaining that her efforts as a long-time organizer of women’s events failed to get mainstream attention until SlutWalk. In the same article, Church paraphrases York professor Kate McPherson as describing the slut brand as a clever and effective strategy “that has allowed organizers to put the issue of women’s sexuality on the table and then focus on a more pressing topic – why society has failed to address sexual violence.” My concern is that the media fixation on the former prevented an exploration of the latter.

In open forums (such as radio programs and TV shows), more in-depth debates emerge about whether SlutWalk’s mainstream incarnation as a highly visual media spectacle might undermine the legitimacy of SlutWalk as a feminist movement and signal its cooptation by corporate media. *Globe and Mail* columnist Margaret Wente is most succinct in this regard:

The walks are drawing major media coverage, because news directors think their audiences will be stirred by images of valiant feminists reclaiming their power and their agency. Either that, or by images of nubile young women in thigh-high cutoffs and tube tops. You really have to wonder who’s using whom. (May 12)

Sarcastic tone aside, Wenthe rightly points to the irreconcilable tension that all activists experience in securing a place in mainstream dialogue and subsequently paying the price of being represented in ways that coalesce with market-driven news values and the white visual economy. That is, just as activists capitalized on their controversial name to secure a platform for their political message, the media capitalized on the controversial name and sexy costumes of protesters to sell newspapers.

During *TVO's the Agenda*, Heather Jarvis shows frustration about SlutWalk's mainstream representation, stating that,

[S]ome people have become so focused on this word that they are losing sight of the rest of the work that we are doing. We are calling into question male sexuality, we are trying different forms of education and pushing different angles to bring this piece together ... SlutWalk is doing a lot more than just talking about reclaiming slut, and why aren't we talking about those things? (May 9).

Jarvis' frustration speaks to Kellie Bean's (2007) "double bind" of tapping into mainstream audiences through the media without compromising feminist politics. To gain access to the mainstream club of news producers, the activists paid the cover fee with "slut," only to realize that subsequent conversations were fixated on their provocative nametag rather than their march. Both SlutWalk's successful marketing and its struggle to be taken seriously derive from the same thing: its controversial name. I will explore the paradox of "slut" through a close reading of two interactions between media figures and SlutWalk activists on the debate segment of *CBC's Q with Jian Ghomeshi* – a left-leaning radio program – and *Connect with Mark Kelley* – a news talk show. I will provide pertinent quotes from each show separately, but will interpret them together.

Ghomeshi centers the May 10 *Q* debate around the question, "Is [the word slut] empowering to women or an affront to the feminist progress?" and monitors the subsequent discussion between Gail Dines, notable as both an anti-porn scholar and outspoken critic of SlutWalk, and Heather Jarvis, SlutWalk co-founder. Ghomeshi asks Jarvis,

Do you feel conflicted at all, as you see slut emblazoned across headlines in papers all over the world? ... Do you think the media coverage is getting your re-definition, or at times, taking advantage of it for a catchy copy? (May 10).

Jarvis agrees, saying “I definitely think people are taking advantage of it, as they always have of feminism, and women, sometimes. It’s never going to not happen. We’ve seen that, it’s the reality.”

On his Jun 9 broadcast, Mark Kelley speaks on-camera with his invited guest, Shira Tarrant (social critic and author, featured speaker at Los Angeles SlutWalk), primarily about the controversial name and reclamation of slut. The conversation takes place against the studio backdrop of photos of scantily clad white female protesters from various SlutWalks. Kelley opens by asking, “Why try to reclaim the word itself?” (CBC, Jun 9). Tarrant explains,

SlutWalks are about saying it doesn’t matter what she’s wearing, it doesn’t matter who she sleeps with, it doesn’t matter what she does for a living. The question is never ‘What was she wearing?’ but rather ‘Why was he raping?’

Kelley responds:

I understand the point behind [SlutWalk] but I guess it’s what’s out front of it. It’s like the advertising on a packaging on something. And that makes people uncomfortable, and so I wonder if that only serves to distance the good message that you’re trying to get across?

Tarrant responds in disagreement, “Well I don’t think so. I think it’s actually bringing so much attention. I mean the fact is that I’m on your show tonight because it’s called SlutWalk”.

Both the *Q* debate and the *Connect* segment involve “meta” discussion about mainstream depictions of SlutWalk, that is, the media talking about the media talking about SlutWalk. Ghomeshi and Kelley acknowledge feminist efforts to navigate the muddy waters of the mainstream news circuit, while also distancing themselves from their power in ideological production and issue-framing. Although Ghomeshi suggests that the media catered the SlutWalk message for profit, he does not take accountability for his own complacency in the same distortion. Ghomeshi frames and monitors his *Q* debate segment around “the politics of the word ‘slut’”, rather than, say, the politics of sexual violence prevention. The *Q* debate reinforces the notion that the most discussion-worthy element of SlutWalk is its spectacular name, a move which more readily reflects and reinforces market driven news values (i.e., newspaper sales) than feminist politics to end violence.

Kelley also focuses his conversation around the controversy of reclaiming slut, positioning himself as sympathetic to the underlying message of SlutWalk, though never really engaging with it. Kelley's line of questioning signals a preoccupation with unpacking the controversy and widespread attention of the movement, rather than the issue of sexual violence. Perhaps inadvertently, Kelley's emphasis on the controversial branding of the movement serves as a barrier to a conversation about "the good message that [SlutWalk was] trying to get across." Like Ghomeshi, Kelley amplifies the "slut" in SlutWalk, and then calls on Tarrant, as a SlutWalk affiliate, to explain the media fixation on the branding and its impact on the cause.

SlutWalk supporters Jarvis and Tarrant demonstrate a similar awareness of how the controversial name secured their spots on the panel while also imposing rigid boundaries on the content of their dialogue. Jarvis's comment sheds light on the historically complex relationship between feminism and the media, but it also suggests that the media distortion of feminism is the inevitable product of an unchanging reality past, present, and future. In other words, Jarvis suggests that feminist politics simply do not and will not ever fit in the media landscape, without the media engaging in at least some profitable distortion of feminism. Similarly, Tarrant seems confident about the "fact" that her invitation to provide feedback on *Connect* was contingent on the SlutWalk brand stirring controversy; she thus echoes the aforementioned sentiments of Toronto SlutWalk co-founder Barnett, Melbourne SlutWalk organizer Pickering, and feminist scholar MacPherson in Church's *Globe and Mail* article (May 10).

In the context of extended debate and dialogue, it is unfortunate that both the media producers and SlutWalk supporters⁹ employ totalizing language and stances to describe the fraught relationship between feminist activism and the mainstream news media. In particular, Jarvis'

⁹ I have represented media producers and Slutwalk supporters as separate and distinct for argument's sake. These are, at times, fluid and overlapping categories. For instance, Jarvis and SlutWalkers are also media producers in the burgeoning spheres of new media in the internet age (social networking), but, unlike Ghomeshi and others, are not necessarily paid for it.

statement denotes a slippage from publicly acknowledging structural power differences between feminist agitators and media producers (post-structuralist) and characterizing those differences as inevitable and unchanging (essentialist). These widely available debates, panel discussions, and interviews between prominent media figures and lesser known feminist activists and scholars provide an important opportunity for the general public to “listen in” and even participate in discussions pertaining to feminist activism and violence prevention. Unfortunately, upon listening to the discussion between Ghomeshi and Jarvis, for instance, media consumers might come to oversimplify the relationship between feminism and the mainstream media, and by extension, mainstream culture, as inevitably at odds. This might serve to further disenchant the public from engaging with feminist politics, including those concerned with violence prevention. I do not have space within this thesis to critically explore the responsibility of feminists and activists to carefully navigate mainstream spaces, nor the research on the congruency (or lack thereof) of feminist values and journalistic standards in mainstream news production. Briefly, I should acknowledge that such projects are necessary and ongoing in the work of organizations such as Women, Action, and the Media! (WAM!) and in mass communication and framing studies (e.g., Worthington, 2008).

More central to my project is an exploration of the conditions of possibility that enabled a discursive preoccupation with the *SlutWalk* rather than the *SlutWalk* within media coverage. The media made *SlutWalk* visible in the mainstream partly by camouflaging its feminist rhetoric in a provocative, attention-getting package. Against the best efforts of *SlutWalk* organizers and supporters, debates about the *SlutWalk* branding tactics dominate the mediascape, thus overshadowing dialogue about ending sexual violence and victim-blaming. Although some journalists, such as the *Globe and Mail*'s Elizabeth Church, do manage to redirect attention to those feminist issues (and speak to the difficulty of such a task), the subsequent discussions privilege the viewpoints of white educated women at the exclusion of others. In both the major mediated forums for discussion (CBC's *Q* and *Connect*, and TVO's *The Agenda*) and the brief televised interviews

(e.g., CTV News Montreal, May 9) invited panelists and commentators are exclusively white women in various positions of privilege and authority, including university students, professors, and journalists. Organizers and supporters may have jockeyed for a position at the table with their shock marketing, but such maneuvering seemed contingent on only some white educated women participating in a narrow line of questioning.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I aimed to help my readers understand how newspaper columnists and news programs filter and reproduce specific messages about slut-shaming for wider audiences in ways that promote some feminist values at the expense of others. In the first section, I argued that the media, despite its gestures of good faith towards victims and feminists, rely on and reproduce depoliticized understandings of solidarity and resistance that ignore the complexities of sexual violence and undermine intersectional feminisms. In the final section, I argued that the media circumvent crucial discussions about violence prevention in favour of sensationalized stories about the controversial “slut” branding tactics. In so doing, the media promote the views of relatively privileged white feminist activists and scholars. Overall, I argued that media representations of the problem, protesters, and strategies of SlutWalk can be described as “generous” only through superficial readings. Upon further inspection, we see how the media reproduce oversimplified understandings of slut-shaming as a male-perpetrated attack on women, without sufficient attention to its wider cultural roots. Moreover, the media represent the issue of slut-shaming and participation in SlutWalk from an unmarked white positionality, which render invisible the experiences of people of colour in relation to SlutWalk. In the next chapter, I examine media discourses of women’s victimization and empowerment through the lens of unmarked white privilege and racialized stereotypes.

Chapter Six: Postfeminist Poster-girls and the Third World Woman

I believe that the media could play a crucial role in popularizing feminism for wider audiences by making it more visible through everyday examples. In this chapter, I focus on how journalists make feminist ideas more accessible to media consumers by developing examples of women's empowerment and gendered oppression (sections one and two) and by appealing to media consumers' grasp of liberal democratic values (section three). Across three sections, I argue that these journalistic methods, though well-intentioned, reproduce dominant cultural tropes about women's liberation, victimhood, and gender equality, which reify racial stereotypes and contribute to the popular notion that sexual violence can be managed with a sole focus on women.

In the first section, I provide examples of how the media promote women's liberation in ways that are biased towards the experiences of young, white, middle-class, educated women. I show how popularized visions of women's liberation correspond closely with postfeminist ideals of freedom and choice. I argue that the media, by relying on and reproducing an individualized and depoliticized version of feminism, dangerously overextend the effectiveness of "women's empowerment" as a violence prevention method.

In the second section, I juxtapose the media's whitewashed portrayal of empowerment with its perhaps inadvertently racist depiction of "victimhood". I apply Chandra Mohanty's theory of the "Third World Woman" (1988) to my reading of media examples of extreme gendered violence within racialized communities. I focus on how the media, in the process of demonstrating solidarity with victims, convey to readers that gendered oppression is inherently more severe within racialized communities and developing nations. I argue that the media's discursive construction of the Third World Woman as the ultimate and inevitable victim of sexual violence, homogenizes violence against women of colour and erases sexual violence from mainstream Canadian society.

In the final section, I offer examples of how the media construct victim-blaming as incongruent with Canadian democratic society. I show how the media's assessment that victim-

blaming is ‘archaic’ colludes with postfeminism, for it rests on the false assumption that gender equality has already been achieved in Canada. I argue that the media, through its postfeminist reading of victim-blaming, dissuades people from understanding and critiquing victim-blaming as an utterly (and unfortunately) normal response to sexual violence.

(White) Women’s Liberation: Choice and Empowerment for Whom?

In this section, I argue that the media create a popular vision of women’s liberation that corresponds with postfeminist and neoliberal ideals of freedom and choice that are taken out of the context of wider political struggle. I show how most media examples of female empowerment feature individual stories of women who are unabashedly taking on their own self-liberation, often by redefining “slut”. I point out the paradoxical way that the media tend to objectify women in the process of capturing their apparent liberation for news coverage. I also direct readers’ attention to the fact that the exemplars of empowerment – both in SlutWalk coverage and more broadly in mainstream culture – are young, white, middle-class, and educated women. I argue that the media rely exclusively on these relatively privileged individuals to demonstrate the positive impact of SlutWalk, and yet fail to contend with how the benefits of SlutWalk might only be achievable by women with racial, economic, and class privileges. Overall, I argue that the media offer mass audiences a palatable version of feminism as a vehicle for “self-help,” which fits neatly within the existing social order, rather than as a collective political movement, which seeks to revolutionize the social order.

Throughout the news media coverage of SlutWalk, I noticed the discursive reproduction of a hetero-sexy white femininity that corresponds to the wider objectification of women. To show how this discursive reproduction of white, feminine “hetero-sexiness” is accomplished, I will summarize the visual elements of media coverage, providing some specific examples from the accompanying photo galleries and/or video footage. I will then interpret these and offer my argument with reference to literature from bell hooks (1994), Kellie Bean (2007), and Angela McRobbie (2009).

Across various media outlets, the majority of stories I examined prominently feature participants who are scantily clad, younger, white, and female (e.g., CBC, Aug 21; CTV, May 14 and 29; Ottawa Citizen, Apr 11; Toronto Sun, Apr 3). For example, CTV reporter Penny Daflos does an on-camera interview with two young white women at Vancouver SlutWalk, whom she describes as “showing off the goods” in their dresses and sheer tops (May 14). Similarly, in television coverage, the background images behind news anchors tend to show white women in undergarments, holding signs about the reclamation of slut and respecting women’s sexuality (e.g., CBC, Jun 9; CTV, May 14). For instance, one of the images behind *Connect* host Mark Kelley depicts a white woman in a bra holding a sign saying “Slut” with a heart drawn below it. Larger galleries and video clips of crowds depict more diversity in the crowds (i.e., various genders, races, age groups, range of attire). However, the media do not make images of diversity as readily accessible or memorable, because they require consumers to navigate further into news websites.

Several news clips involve panning or zooming camera shots of women’s bodies, especially their breasts, bare legs, short skirts, and stiletto heels (e.g., CBC, Apr 3; CTV, May 14; Toronto Sun, Apr 3). These shots of disembodied women exclude their faces, signs, or evidence of their voices and cheering – that is, the women are not recognizable as protesters within the frame of the shot. The media tendency to disembody and objectify women is exemplified in the opening sequence of the April 3 broadcast of CBC’s *the National*, which features successive shots of women’s cleavage. The media emphasis on women’s appearance in various states of undress is further solidified in the bold captions of news clips, such as “Dressing Provocatively” (CTV, May 29) and “Scandalous Protest” (CBC, Apr 3). Many journalists describe SlutWalk as attracting “people from all walks of life” (see Chapter 5), and relatively few characterize it as “gatherings of scantily dressed women” (National Post, Jun 6). Varying written descriptions aside, almost every media outlet offers consumers a common “young, white, slutty, female” visual representation of SlutWalk.

Ian Robertson and Jonathan Brodie of the *Toronto Sun* describe: “Leading the [Toronto SlutWalk] march, Sierra “Chevy” Harris danced in knee-high black boots, with Magdalena “Maggie” Ivasecko sporting see-through, waist-high net stockings over white panties” (Apr 3). Although Sierra “Chevy” Harris and Magdalena “Maggie” Ivasecko were two young white women out of 2000 participants at the Toronto SlutWalk, they are the most recurrent and prominent subjects of photos and news footage across the Canadian coverage of all SlutWalk events. They appear in the foreground and background of many photos and videos, and are frequently interviewed in text and on camera. CBC’s *the National*, CTV News Montreal and Vancouver, *the Globe and Mail*, *the Hamilton Spectator*, *Montreal Gazette*, *the Ottawa Citizen*, *the Ottawa Sun*, *The Toronto Sun*, and *The Toronto Star* all show Harris and Ivasecko carrying signs (e.g., “Proud Slut” and “Sluts Say Yes”) and/or feature their commentary about women’s rights and liberating women.

Harris and Ivasecko are meant to signify empowered women who had appropriated slut and refused to be shamed for expressing their sexuality. To support this point, I will provide a close reading of part of the aforementioned April 3 broadcast of CBC’s *The National*. After a brief studio introduction by anchor Wendy Mesley, we see several brief shots of women’s cleavage, with the voiceover, “Showing a little skin, some say sexy, others say it’s asking for trouble.” The camera cuts to Harris and Ivasecko, who are jumping up and down, dancing, singing, and smiling as they pose for photos, with a voiceover exclaiming, “Sierra Harris and Maggie Ivasecko are proud to call their look slutty.” Then we see Harris standing still as an off-camera reporter holds a mic. She says, “I strongly believe in women’s sexuality—.” Her statement is cut short, and the camera cuts to Ivasecko from the waist-up. She holds a sign above her head, though its text is out of view, and says, “I think that I can dress in a thong and tights or maybe not wear any underwear when I’m wearing a skirt and that [sic] not be a consent for me to get raped.” As she speaks, the camera pans to her thong, which is visible through her black tights, and eventually back up to her torso and face. The camera cuts to footage of the marching crowd, with sounds of drums and a male-voiced chant: ‘We love sluts! We

love sluts!’ Then, the voiceover, “Turns out, Harris and Ivasecko aren’t alone.” Later, as co-founder Heather Jarvis speaks during an interview, Harris is visible in the background, in the vicinity of several jovial older male photographers.

Even though Harris and Ivasecko signify a very particular type of SlutWalk participant (young, white, able-bodied, English-speaking, female, and performing the “slut” stereotype), this news story, alongside many others, represents Harris and Ivasecko as the poster girls for SlutWalk. It is not incidental that almost every news outlet interviewed and photographed these two particular women, nor that photographers seemed to enjoy the process. I argue that Harris and Ivasecko exemplify a hetero-sexy white femininity and what McRobbie calls the “taboo-breaking phallic girl” (2009, p. 85), which is central to the spectacle of SlutWalk in the mainstream news media. Their provocative clothing and hegemonic feminine beauty accommodate the male gaze of the news and entertainment industry, and thus enable media outlets to sell newspapers, increase webpage views, and attract television viewers. But do they generate a parallel interest in feminism and sexual violence prevention among media consumers?

To try to answer this question, I draw from three of my favourite texts in the feminist cultural studies canon, bell hooks’ Outlaw Culture (1994), Kellie Bean’s Post-Backlash Feminism (2007), and Angela McRobbie’s The Aftermath of Feminism (2009). Although they write with slightly different theoretical lenses, all three authors speak to the problems of popular incarnations of feminism. hooks recounts a negative interview experience with a “white male-dominated [*Esquire*] magazine” (p. 76) for an article that was supposed to be about “different attitudes among feminists towards sexuality” (p. 75). hooks spends much of the chapter explaining how the author, Tad Friend, and by extension, many patriarchal publications, distort anti-racist feminists’ views for profit. When it comes to understanding the negative implications of a media spectacle fixated on the “(white) phallic girls” of SlutWalk, the following passage is crucial:

Most of the women quoted in *Esquire* display a lack of sexual imagination, since they primarily conceive of sexual agency only by inverting the patriarchal standpoint and claiming it as their own. Their comments were so pathetically male-identified that it was scary to think that readers might actually be convinced they were an expression of feminist, female, sexual agency. However, they were intended to excite the male imagination, and no doubt many men get off fantasizing that the feminist sexual revolution would not really change anything, just make it easier for everybody to occupy the space of the patriarchal phallic imaginary. (p. 80)

What hooks suggests is that one of the most dangerous ways that feminism can be incorporated into mainstream discourse is to *appear* not to disrupt the patriarchal status quo at all. Indeed, if feminism's political substance and emphasis on widespread social change is lost in translation, so to speak, it ceases to be feminism. The purpose of interrogating depoliticized and "pathetically male-identified" expressions of "feminist" sexual agency in mainstream media is *not* to enforce a moral dress and lifestyle code that prohibits women from "looking sexy for male partners." As Kellie Bean (2007) says, the point is to call out when the media's discursive practices substitute "highly individuated political tastes and personal choices for the collective of social politics," thus draining the politics from feminism (p. 177). One of the key problems with trying to package the politics of SlutWalk into a news story is that, without a deep understanding of the emerging "collective of social politics," the media and consumers rely more heavily on sound-bites from individuals.

The sources I examined create a dominant narrative about women reclaiming slut with using sound-bites alongside descriptions of participants, such as the following excerpt from the *Hamilton Spectator*: "Cheryl Howe, 21, carried a sign that offered 'free hugs for sluts.' The Mohawk college student said she hoped the walk would empower people to be confident in their sexuality" (Jun 6). During the May 9 panel discussion of TVO's *The Agenda*, anti-porn writer Gail Dines, in keeping with the topic of the debate, challenges SlutWalk co-founder Heather Jarvis to explain how reclaiming slut can be deemed empowering. Jarvis responds with a personal anecdote, saying:

There have been a few times, where I have been called a slut, and I have felt safe enough and confident enough in that moment to turn around and say to some idiotic individual, 'Yeah, I'm in control of this, I'm okay with my sexuality and what I do with it. I'm a slut, okay.' They have gone silent, and for me, that is really reclaiming my agency and power.

As I demonstrated earlier, the media clearly centralize the visual image of SlutWalk of the “reclaimed slut.” Nonetheless, there are still occasions where both SlutWalk supporters and media commentators acknowledge that, “the ‘slut’ element – and the question of whether the term should be ‘reclaimed’ – did not have the same consensus” as the solidarity with victims captured by “the ‘walk’ element” (Ottawa Citizen, Apr 11). During an interview with Mark Kelley, feminist critic Shira Tarrant says, “You know, if people want to reclaim the word slut, that’s a very personal decision” (CBC, Jun 9). *Ottawa Citizen* reporter Zev Singer makes clear the individual nature of the decision by devoting ample space to “I” statements from interviewees, such as the following comment from 22-year-old protester, Natalie Davis:

“I want to embrace the word ‘slut’ as somebody who is sexually responsible and aware, whether I have one or a hundred partners,” Davis said. “To me a slut is someone who can say yes or no – and just because I identify as a slut that doesn’t mean I say yes to everybody. To me a slut is just somebody who is in charge of their own body and in charge of their own sexuality.” (Apr 11)

The media struggle to acknowledge how the privilege of certain subject positions enables the reclaiming of slut to be a matter of choice and personal preference. The issue (from a discursive and political standpoint, rather than a journalistic one) is that media sound-bites and images communicating the benefits of reclaiming slut only feature young, white, educated, heteronormative women. The media reliance on the viewpoints from one subject position is likely unintentional, which is evidence of the invisible norms at play. White privilege, class privilege, and heteronormative privilege do not announce themselves as such.

I argue that the media represent the reclamation of slut in ways that reproduce white, heterosexual privilege and heteronormativity and promote a postfeminist rhetoric of choice. I reach this argument by contextualizing and politicizing women’s agency and choice – that is, by working to understand how the decision to reclaim slut, for instance, is shaped by the discursive operation of

power and privilege. McRobbie (2009) argues that, in the postfeminist landscape, female phallicism endorses transgressions for an assumed young white female subject:

It is one thing for young white women to playfully disrupt the divisions which underpinned the old double standard between the good girl and the whore, but adopting the appearance and street-style of whore, brings starkly into visibility, the divisions which exist between white privileged femininity and its black and still disadvantaged counterpart. (p. 87)

Although McRobbie's work does encourage us to interrogate the merits of SlutWalk's political reappropriation of slut in itself, my focus here and throughout my thesis is on the implications of media representations of SlutWalk. How does the privileging of a young white female subject in representations of feminist empowerment affect popular understandings of feminism? Kellie Bean (2007) puts into perspective how popular representations of feminist messages of empowerment impact the lives of people differently, depending on whether they account for varying social positions. Referring to the popularization of quasi-feminist slogans such as "Girls Rule!" on t-shirts and jewelry, Bean says "such language only serves the already empowered, the very rich, the very, very safe. No woman isolated from ideas and opportunity through illiteracy, poverty, or violence will ever benefit from cheerleading like this" (p. 111).

It's worth noting that, in the process of critically unpacking dominant representations in the media coverage of SlutWalk, we have moved quite far away from notions of sexual violence prevention. This is my point exactly. In media discourses about SlutWalk, female sexual empowerment is only loosely tied to notions of ending sexist oppression. A London¹⁰ protester's sign speaks to this, "Don't get so distracted by the underwear that you forget THIS MARCH IS ABOUT RAPE!" The media construct Harris and Ivasecko as the cheerleaders of SlutWalk and simultaneously deploy a narrative about respecting women's choices that, in addition to reproducing white heteronormative feminine privilege, is mostly separate from narratives about sexual violence

¹⁰ I found an image of this sign in a Google image search for "SlutWalk signs". It was not affiliated with any traditional Canadian media outlets (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dizzydizzydinosaurs/5822645256/>)

prevention. For media consumers, it becomes difficult to process how all of this applies to sexual violence. Drawing from bell hooks, I argue that, in the discursive reproduction of the “empowered slut,” the media reject feminism

as a political movement that seeks to eradicate sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression [and replace it] with the notion that feminism is simply ‘a theory of self-worth’ ... Thus depoliticized, this movement can embrace everyone, since it has no overt political tenets. This ‘feminism’ turns the movement away from politics back to a vision of individual self-help. (1994, p. 98)

The “empowered slut,” a type of phallic girl, is central to the reproduction of a depoliticized “self help” feminism. The average¹¹ media consumer might view a news segment featuring Harris and Ivasecko, and come to internalize the notion that a conversation about sexual violence is inevitably focused on changing women. And additional part of this argument, and the focus of my next section, is to unpack what type of women are depicted as most desperately in need of change.

Third World Woman: the ‘Real’ Victim

The phallic girl is a summation of the sexual freedoms which have been granted to young Western women [and] figurations of the phallic girl mark out by subtle means processes of exclusion and re-colonisation. (McRobbie, 2009, p. 87)

In this section, I extend my argument by locating the underlying white privilege of media representations of the “empowered slut” alongside media representations of the racialized “real victim.” With reference to Chandra Mohanty’s work, I trouble the oversimplified dichotomy between white Western women’s freedom and the Third World Woman’s inherent oppression, which emerges across several media texts. I reflect on the implications for intersectional and coalitional feminist efforts to address sexual violence, of which SlutWalk might be a part.

Reading through my primary media texts, I noticed a paucity of references to racial and ethnic differences among women. Tiring of the “whitewashing” of feminism and gender issues in the press, I was relieved when I encountered a few brief statements acknowledging that not all women

¹¹ By average, I very crudely mean someone who has not yet engaged in feminist consciousness-raising or activism. The goal, of course, is for “average” to one day include “feminist.”

are the same (e.g., *Globe and Mail*, May 12; *Ottawa Sun*, Apr 10; *National Post*, Jun 6, Jun 24; *Toronto Star*, Mar 30; *Vancouver Sun*, May 12). I was tempted to celebrate these particular journalists for drawing consumers' attention to victimization in marginalized groups and issues of white privilege in SlutWalk. Upon further reflection, I saw these brief moments as part of a disturbing trend in mainstream discourses about sexual violence and gender-based oppression, wherein journalists made tokenistic and essentialized references to 'real' violence as occurring outside mainstream society. To make sense of this narrative trend, I turn to Chandra Mohanty's (1988) canonical text about the discursive reproduction of the Third World woman in western academic feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, and Kellie Bean's (2007) recent analysis of the postfeminist backlash towards date rape since the 1990s.

Mohanty wrote on the "process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world," calling it the "Third World Woman" (1988, p. 63). At the time, she set out to interrogate this process as it unfolded in western academic feminism, arguing that it constituted an exercise of power that "need[ed] to be defined and named" (p. 63). My intention in citing Mohanty is not to conflate present-day Canadian mainstream news media with western feminist scholarship from the 1980s, nor to apply her original argument out of context. Nonetheless, media practices are like feminist scholarly practices, in that both "exist within relations of power – relations which they counter, redefine, or even implicitly support" (p. 62). Another parallel with Mohanty is that we share a sense of the "urgent political necessity of forming strategic coalitions across class, race and national boundaries" (p. 61) within contemporary feminist theory and practice. We both agree that interpenetrating axes of power shape inequality along class, race, gender, and national boundaries, and thus solutions must be coordinated across difference. Lastly, our projects are similarly committed to a careful interrogation of the discursive process through which issues are rendered intelligible or invisible in dominant spaces. I thus proceed carefully in taking cues from Mohanty's 1988 work in my critique of present-day media narratives.

I argue that media references to racial and ethnic differences among women do little to meaningfully highlight and contextualize the intersection of race, ethnic, and gender-based oppressions. Instead, the occasional infusion of race or ethnicity into discussions of SlutWalk and sexual violence contributes to the discursive reproduction of the oppressed “Third World Woman” (Mohanty, 1988). To illuminate my argument, I will offer some excerpts.

Journalists from several media outlets provide examples of sexual violence and gender inequality involving racialized immigrant populations (*Globe and Mail*, May 12), women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (*Globe and Mail*, May 13), Islamic populations (*Ottawa Sun*, Apr 10; *National Post*, Jun 21), Afghanistan and Egypt (*Globe and Mail*, May 12), developing nations (*National Post*, Jun 24), and “an Iranian woman” (*Toronto Star*, Mar 30). These examples support journalists’ arguments about proof of why we need SlutWalk and/or as proof of why SlutWalk won’t work, both of which are premised on exhibiting the reality of sexual violence. In the case of *Globe and Mail* columnist Judith Timson, a reference to rape statistics in Congo serves to paradoxically demonstrate the need for and the inadequacy of SlutWalk. Timson explains some of the feminist criticisms of SlutWalk as follows:

It’s tempting for older feminists to either be patronizing (been there, done that) or dismissive, saying loftily the world is a different place now, we have so much more equality and power, so girls, put your minds to something more serious. For instance, the latest statistics show that in Congo, four women are raped every five minutes. Something called SlutWalk is nothing but a cruel irony for those women. And yet the real reason underlying Slut Walk couldn’t be more serious. Rape, as we are all supposed to know by now, but somehow still forget, is a crime of opportunity; it’s a crime of power. (May 12)

Throughout her article, Timson is critical in her support of SlutWalk. For the most part, I appreciate that Timson assumes contradictory stances because it offers readers a nuanced example of what it’s like to negotiate feminist politics. But, in this instance, I must call attention to the how she implies that SlutWalk might be an important precursor for harder fights with higher stakes. She implies that for SlutWalkers to “put [their] minds to something more serious” involves helping women in African countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo. My point is not that we shouldn’t care about global

instances of sexual violence, but rather to draw attention to the implications of hierarchizing sexual violence across transnational and racial boundaries.

National Post commentator Sheril Kirshenbaum speaks about the need to break the silence and stigma of victimization. She explains that her awareness-raising online campaign called “Silence Is The Enemy” (SITE) “raised thousands of dollars for Doctors Without Borders to support the victims of sexual violence in developing nations who have had no platform to speak out for themselves” (*National Post*, Jun 24). Good intentions aside, Kirshenbaum’s statement implies a sweeping overgeneralization – that victims of sexual violence in developing nations can’t advocate for themselves. Albeit unintentionally, Kirshenbaum gives her readers the impression that feminist activists and victim advocacy groups don’t exist within developing nations. She might have still spoken about her campaign, and introduced readers to its purpose, without homogenizing “victims of sexual violence in developing nations.”

The case might be made that such journalistic exemplars are purposely global in content so as to shed light on the pervasiveness of sexual violence, whilst lending support to victims and ending stigma and silences in mainstream spaces. But there are ways to acknowledge racial and ethnic differences in sexual violence victimization without relying on decontextualized monolithic evocations of non-white and non-Christian women as inherent victims. Instead of calling forth racial and ethnic groups only as victims of sexual violence, they must also be represented as agents of change within activist circles and society more broadly. As I have argued throughout this thesis, white women are problematically overrepresented as both activists, benefactors of, and commentators on SlutWalk, and thus appear to be the saviours and experts for all women. Several of the examples of victimization in racial and ethnic groups are only briefly mentioned, out of context. There must be efforts to contextualize all forms of violence in specific geopolitical settings, because this will foster careful consideration of the complexity of the issue at hand. When “violence in Congo,” for instance, is mentioned only in passing, people come to rely too easily on existing

cultural tropes and stereotypes to process the vague reference. Overall, The otherness of “real victims” and the whiteness of “empowered sluts” and “experts” work off one another. In addition to racist stereotyping, the emphasis on the Third World Woman as the ultimate and inevitable victim of sexual violence serves to downplay and sometimes erase sexual violence from mainstream Canadian society, and thus delegitimize SlutWalk.

A *Globe and Mail* editorial entitled “The overcoming of stigma” also champions SlutWalk as a part of “a broader, and healthy, phenomenon” to end shame and silence around sexual violence victimization (*Globe and Mail*, May 12). The editorial calls forth examples of violence and victimization in Afghanistan, Egypt, Quebec, Britain, institutions, and men’s prisons, all in the name of supporting anti-rape activism:

This refusal to accept silence and its inevitable partner, shame, has been seen of late in the interviews given by Melissa Fung, a CBC reporter held captive in Afghanistan in 2008 for 28 days and by CBS’s chief foreign correspondent Lara Logan, who was lucky to survive a mob assault in Egypt in February. Jeannie and Anne Marie Hilton of Quebec, victims of incest by their father, the former boxing champion Dave Hilton Jr., wrote a book in 2004 to fight back against the shame they felt that silence imposes on sex-assault and incest victims.

Similar to Timson and Kirshenbaum, this editorial “globalizes” the issue of sexual violence. I prefer this method though, because it cites purposefully diverse and specific examples. When space restrictions do not allow for lengthy descriptions, journalists are wise to follow this editorial’s lead, by citing specific examples that have received coverage outside of the article. The benefit of naming specific instances is that readers can follow up outside the article, should they wish for more context.

This specific and diverse list of sexual violence stands in contrast to *Ottawa Sun* columnist Anthony Furey’s vague reference to “actual injustices” in Saudi Arabia. He suggests protesters had overblown the severity and impact of victim-blaming, saying:

SlutWalk hasn’t come off as a serious protest, but rather something of a lark. If they made substantive claims against actual, rather than perceived, injustices they would achieve something tangible. Do a SlutWalk in Saudi Arabia and then you’ll earn your stripes. (Apr 10)

Building on the discourse of third world difference, Furey offers a comparison between Canada and other “countries”:

Our most challenging social arguments these days are whether taxpayers should finance gender reassignment surgeries. Contrast this with countries that currently debate whether people should be killed for openly displaying homosexual affections. The latter is the one in need of agitators, not the former.

Furey heralds Canada as a progressive country merely because public debates exist about gender reassignment surgeries for transgender people, and he positions other countries, where homosexuality is punishable by death,¹² as comparatively regressive. Obviously, there are qualitative differences between public funding of gender reassignment surgery and outlawing homosexuality, especially in such different historical and cultural contexts. I accept Furey’s premise that the stakes are precipitously higher for social issues where death is concerned, but I do not accept his conclusion. He implies that we’re doing fine in the great liberal democracy of Canada, and that the real violence is being committed elsewhere, providing readers only with a clue that it might be in the Middle East or Africa. This editorial style relies on representations that homogenize and essentialize issues, people, and places. Never mind the fact that public debates about funding gender reassignment surgery emerged only after years of resistance from the LGBTQ communities against discriminatory government policies and societal norms.

Without providing any historically or culturally specific examinations of sexual violence in those groups, journalists (and scholars and politicians) come to rely on readers’ acceptance of racist generalizations (guised as genuine concern) to make their points about SlutWalk. I contend that a meaningful effort must be made to engage with either the historical and present-day complexities of dealing with sexual violence as it intersects with issues of immigration, conflict, and religion. If we can’t do that, we risk naturalizing violence as “a natural by-product” of certain racialized and

¹² Readers might interpret this statement as related to the Ugandan context, given the worldwide coverage of the murder of gay rights’ activist David Kato and the ensuing attention to illegality of homosexuality in countries such as Uganda.

marginalized spaces (Razack, 2000, p. 117), and thus should reconsider our references to “Congo” or “Saudi Arabia” or “developing nations”.

When the persuasive weight of our argument for sexual violence advocacy comes from only vague references to foreign places, we also risk rendering invisible the oppression and violence within Canadian society. The implication is that Real sexual violence – the kind worth protesting – happens to Other people (veiled women, homosexuals, Congolese women, Aboriginal women, South Asian women immigrants) at the material and discursive margins of the white liberal mainstream society (immigrant communities, Northern Canada) and in other countries altogether (Saudi Arabia, Democratic Republic of Congo, other countries). Like the gender reassignment surgery funding debate, the “issues” of slut-shaming, victim-blaming, and acquaintance rape on campuses are not “real” or dire enough to warrant public discussion let alone worldwide protest.

Persuasive editorials and journalism must not rely on and reproduce an implicit hierarchy of violence according to supposedly coherent and homogenous racial, ethnic, religious, and national categories. This is not an easy task. For instance, Daphne Bramham writes a supportive article of SlutWalk in the *Vancouver Sun* and illustrates how all types of women are socialized into regulating their behaviour to prevent violence. She says, “[Women] are told we must hide behind burqas, veils, buttonedup blouses, long skirts and loose clothing. If we don’t, we risk inflaming the passions of men” (Vancouver Sun, May 12). I am on board with this type of statement being included in an editorial about SlutWalk, because I think it makes people think about both the pervasive and mundane ways that gendered oppression occurs. Still, Bramham’s statement assumes that wearing a burqa or veil is an inherently oppressive practice devoid of female agency, an assumption which reproduces popular misunderstandings of Islam. It is subtle but significant. I devote the remaining space of this section to grounding my argument further in literature from Bullock and Jafri (2000), Razack (2004), Mohanty (1986), and Bean (2007).

In their study of the construction of “women” and nationhood in Canadian mainstream media, Bullock and Jafri (2000) argue that the media perpetuate pervasive Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim Canadian women (e.g., exotic beauty, veiled victim, militant fundamentalist), which constantly link Muslim women to the *hijab* and the *hijab* to oppression and violence. Media representations of “the veil as a symbol of oppression/violence ignore the sociological complexity behind the decision to cover, and the multiple meanings ‘covering’ has for Canadian Muslim women,” such as spiritual fulfillment and empowerment against Western culture (p. 37). The only media producer to resist those particular misunderstandings was *Ottawa Citizen* columnist Joanne Laucius, who lists burqa alongside “plunging neckline and knee-high platform boots” and “a grey cardigan and sensible shoes” as attire that SlutWalk participants could *choose* to wear (Apr 9). One-dimensional depictions of Muslim women in the media can breed hostility and suspicion among fellow Canadians (Bullock & Jafri, 2000), manifesting in hate crimes such as recent *hijab* pulling incidents in Kingston and Toronto (CBC News, 2011). In the post-9/11 context, the presumption of Muslim men’s violence against women has fueled the “policing of Muslim communities in the name of gender equality” (Razack, 2004, p. 129) in ways that mask the aforementioned hate crimes, legitimate the ‘War on Terror,’ and make nearly impossible a nuanced and effective approach to patriarchal violence in Muslim communities.

Mohanty’s critique of western feminists’ overgeneralized and decontextualized interpretations of sex segregation and veiling in Islamic cultures is pertinent to a critical reading of racially and ethnically coded comments within SlutWalk media coverage. Mohanty argues that many early feminist analyses of Muslim women from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, India, and Egypt collapse distinct fragmented examples into the universal fact of men’s sexual control of women, and deny the cultural and historical specificity and contradiction within institutions such as *purdah* and veiling. The denial of specificity – as in Furey’s reference to “other countries,” Wente’s mention of “women across the North,” and Kirshenbaum’s reference to “victims ... in developing nations” – not

only rules out the “potentially subversive aspects” (p. 75) of various cultural practices and communities, but it does little to support the agency, choice, and oppositional political strategizing amongst the supposedly oppressed people of those countries and regions.

Throughout her work, Mohanty argues that the specification of feminist issues in their “local cultural and historical contexts” (p. 75) would lead to nuanced understandings and the generation of effective political strategies. So, when critics or dissidents of SlutWalk briefly lament the plight of Congolese women or veiled women to demonstrate concern for victims, it is not immediately congruent with globalized anti-rape or human rights activism. Not only do such one-dimensional and decontextualized renderings of victims and advocates distract and detract from the efforts of locally embedded anti-rape activists around the world, but they tend to be wielded in ways that more readily serve the agenda of the speaker. This agenda-serving is perhaps no more evident than amongst conservative “feminists” writing about female empowerment in the popular press (Bean, 2007; hooks, 1994; McRobbie, 2009). But these writers tend to be persuasive, making it is easy to err on the side of congratulating them for their nobility.

In my media sample, there is one obvious example of a conservative “feminist” writer who gives the impression of caring for victims, while simultaneously eroding the principles upon which anti-rape and feminist activism are based. In case I haven’t made it clear throughout this thesis, the *Globe and Mail’s* Margaret Wenté is not a fan of SlutWalk. Initially, I was inclined to give Wenté some credit for not shying away from the issues of privilege in SlutWalk, and pointing her readers’ attention to victimization in marginalized groups. For your background, Wenté thinks the protesters are getting caught up in a “fevered rhetoric” that has no material basis. Specifically, Wenté denies that rape is a problem on campus, saying that frequently cited statistic that 62% of female students have been sexually harassed is a “scare statistic cooked up by the American Association of University Women.” But, Wenté is careful not to alienate her reader. She cares, but not about the “highly educated young women who join SlutWalks.” She says,

So, is violence against women a non-problem? Absolutely not. It is a very large problem in a number of Canada's South Asian communities, including some not far from York University. Some of York's first generation immigrant students are no doubt safer on campus than they are in their own homes. And the pervasiveness of violence against women across the North, and in certain aboriginal communities, shocks the conscience. (May 12)

Around the same time that I was trying to process my reaction to Wente, I was reading Kellie Bean's critique of anti-feminist conservative "feminist" Christina Hoff Sommers. Citing from within Bean's text, Hoff Sommers claims that "[n]o matter how you look at it women on campus do not face anywhere near the same risk of rape as women elsewhere" (1994, p. 221, as cited in Bean, 2007, p. 174). Bean offers the following rebuttal:

Indeed, where [Hoff Sommers] lives, apparently rape is not a problem. Hoff Sommers locates "elsewhere" on the map of women's history in "poor urban communities." She is quite concerned for poor *urban* women – that cynical and ever recognizable code for *non-white* women – so much so that every time a privileged women [sic] who can afford to go on to college dares to complain about rates of sexual assault, well, Hoff Sommers is compelled to speak up. But her rhetorical strategy indulges the ugliest hypocrisy: exploiting a reference to an oppressed group for which her work otherwise shows no genuine concern, Hoff Sommers seeks to pain those who oppose her views on rape as racist. She avoids the term racism, of course, and simply implies the offense as she tacitly piles on evidence of feminism's unconscionable concern for the notoriously "self-preoccupied" and misguided "campus feminists." (p. 221)

It's almost as though Bean crafted a response to Furey's piece on Slutwalk's "perceived injustices" or Wente's column about "the narcissistic self-indulgence of the SlutWalkers." Bean brings into sharp focus the fact that talk about oppression and privilege does not constitute a discursive challenge to the roots of said oppression – sometimes it accomplishes the opposite while scoring the supposedly speaker superficial credibility.

Victim-blaming as Archaic and Incongruent with Liberal Democracy

Across many media texts, victim-blaming is depicted as archaic and fundamentally incongruent with liberal democracy. I will show how this conceptualization seems to coalesce with SlutWalk's goals, by pointing to instances where openly supportive figures of SlutWalk promoted a "victim-blaming-as-archaic" narrative. I juxtapose these instances with examples of the "victim-blaming-as-archaic" narrative in texts that were overtly critical and dismissive of SlutWalk. I argue

that the media representation of victim-blaming as “out of place” in Canadian society distracts media consumers from a key element of feminist activism: grappling with how victim-blaming is a form of misogyny and heterosexism that is utterly normal in contemporary culture.

Many media figures, irrespective of their approval of SlutWalk, rely on the shared assumption that Sanguinetti’s comments are an exception rather than the rule – an aberration of what we would expect in 2011 in Canada. Assistant Dean of York University’s Osgoode Law School, Ronda Bessner recalls her reaction to Sanguinetti’s statement, saying “I was shocked. I did not think that in 2011 police officers would be saying things like this” (Globe and Mail, May 10). Bessner’s sentiments are echoed in the headline for Janet Bagnall’s supportive article, “Positive steps change archaic views” (Montreal Gazette, May 20). Several media texts cite Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair, who characterizes Sanguinetti’s comments as archaic thinking, explaining that such attitudes should have been effectively eradicated through sensitivity training (e.g., Toronto Star, Apr 4). Katrina Onstad refers to Sanguinetti’s comment as evidence of “his stunning idiocy” and cheekily reminds readers that “P.S., in Canada, we get to dress however the hell we please” (Globe and Mail, Apr 16). The classification of Sanguinetti’s statements as archaic might seem at first to lend credibility to the SlutWalk message and movement. That is, victim-blaming is archaic, and it must be eradicated through efforts like SlutWalk.

But this same line of thinking is employed by media figures who are openly dismissive of both SlutWalk and feminism – namely *National Post*’s Barbara Kay (Jun 21), *Ottawa Sun*’s Anthony Furey (Apr 10), and *Globe and Mail*’s Margaret Wentz (Apr 16) – so we cannot deduce that it works immediately in favour of legitimizing and popularizing feminism. I argue that Furey, Wentz, and Kay reproduce what McRobbie (2009) calls the “postfeminist double entanglement” by accounting for and repudiating feminism. In their narrative about victim-blaming being anomalous in the contemporary Canadian landscape, they implicitly account for past feminist efforts (i.e., equality has been achieved) and repudiate contemporary feminist efforts like SlutWalk (i.e., feminism is no

longer necessary). To support my argument, I offer excerpts from each of the aforementioned columns.

In his description of SlutWalk, Anthony Furey says:

Women and their male supporters promoted the fact they have a right to dress they want and inhabit whatever sexual persona they choose. Sounds about right to me. In a liberal democracy you should be free to do whatever you want so long as you do not infringe upon anyone else's liberty. How you dress, who you marry, what sort of sexual lifestyle you lead, etc. (Apr 10)

Furey accuses the protesters of "taking one man's actions and extrapolating it into a systemic problem" thus making the protesters "guilty of exactly the same fallacy the Toronto [police] officer conducted." According to Furey, SlutWalk "is what happens when we live in a very liberal society that has few advances left to undertake. Listless people try create foes out of friends in search of something to agitate against."

Similarly, Wente argues that, "SlutWalks are what you get when graduate students in feminist studies run out of things to do" and states that "[t]he highly educated young women who join SlutWalks are among the safest and most secure in the world" (Globe and Mail, Apr 16). Wente also argues that SlutWalk's treatment of victim-blaming is overblown, declaring that: "The attitude that rape victims bring it on themselves has largely (though not entirely) disappeared from mainstream society." Barbara Kay constructs women's liberation as a fact of Canadian society, saying: "Western women's control of their own bodies is now effectively absolute" (Jun 21). She reiterates the point that there is nothing really at stake, saying SlutWalk is merely about "a woman's right to dress and act like women whose business it is to arouse lust and get paid for satisfying it" (Jun 23). She defends Toronto Mayor Rob Ford's decision not to attend Toronto SlutWalk, saying it's a cause that would hardly be worth sacrificing a vacation in Muskoka, or "a single precious moment" (Jun 23).

In the postfeminist, gender-equal world occupied by figures like Furey, Wente, and Kay, victim-blaming is supported by an ignorant minority, starkly out of place in an otherwise liberal and

equal mainstream society, and thus hardly something to develop a protest around. Furey and Wente evoke the tenets of liberal democracy (e.g., freedom, liberty, safety) without giving any credit to the feminist movement in proffering such beliefs. That is, Furey and Wente not only implicitly overstate the success of past feminists efforts, they do not identify them as feminist. They make SlutWalk's goal seem so congruent with apparently widely accepted liberal beliefs as to be unnecessary. Kay is outright dismissive. Across all of their statements, there is an underlying assumption that we live in a liberal democratic society in which statements like Sanguinetti's are infrequent, highly ridiculed, and reflective of archaic thought.

The "victim-blaming-as-archaic" angle works discursively at cross-purposes with intersectional feminist anti-rape activism. First, it precludes the conceptualization of victim-blaming as embedded in the very fabric of dominant culture and denies its articulation with dominant discourses of heteronormativity and individualism. To define an attitude as archaic is to distinguish it from contemporary thought and social interaction. To frame victim-blaming as dissonant with dominant culture is to deny the extent to which it is normalized, alongside misogyny and violence against women, in contemporary society. The problem with victim-blaming is how utterly "normal" it is in responses to sexual violence (and other social issues such as homelessness). Indeed, many feminists have argued that we must confront the widespread cultural currency of victim-blaming within mainstream culture in order to eradicate sexual violence. Second, the "victim-blaming-as-archaic" angle relies on and reproduces a grand narrative of democracy in Canada, exaggerated by neoliberalism, that overstates equality and freedom and understates or isolates inequalities. In this imaginary Canada, women enjoy their freedom and autonomy except for the occasional slip up by stunning idiots like Sanguinetti. The assumption is that things are mostly fine, equality-wise, and that comments like Sanguinetti's signal the need for recuperative and reformist action, rather than revolutionary action.

Conclusion

Grounding rape prevention in the reinvention of the female self implies that the fight against sexual violence depends on and has to be preceded by the individualized questioning of normalized female subjectivity. (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 758)

In this chapter, I argued that the media reproduce popular understandings about sexual violence prevention being contingent on women by reinforcing existing tropes in the popular imaginary – the (white) phallic girl, the Third World Woman, and the gender-equal democracy. The media discursively reify exclusionary boundaries between women based on race, ethnicity, and citizenship, which stifles collaborative efforts to break down those boundaries. By reinforcing the postfeminist contention that we have already achieved “gender equality,” mainstream media representations of SlutWalk inadvertently deny the premise of the movement altogether. So long as the most visible (and sometimes singular) pillar of sexual violence prevention is contingent on women and based in a falsely “gender equal” world, then we will fail to address the root causes of patriarchal violence, racialized violence, and institutional oppression.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Strategic engagement with subversive politics of representation makes it necessary for us to intervene by actively participating in mainstream public dialogue about feminist movement. (hooks, 2000, p. 75)

My thesis project is a necessary scholarly intervention into mainstream discourses about feminism, through a timely analysis of Canadian news media representations of SlutWalk. As a burgeoning feminist movement against victim-blaming and mainstream media spectacle, SlutWalk is an important object of study from a feminist cultural studies perspective. Mainstream news media are a taken-for-granted site of cultural production, and are heavily influenced by discourses of patriarchy, conservatism, and capitalism, which undermine intersectional feminism. Even still, media are an integral part of the everyday cultural terrain, so news coverage enables political movements like SlutWalk to reach wider audiences. As an activist and scholar, my goal is to understand how the popularization of feminist thought, specifically about sexual violence prevention, might be achieved through news media representations of SlutWalk.

I did a contextualized reading and discourse analysis of the representations of SlutWalk across print, radio, and televisual media during the first nine months of Canadian press coverage from 21 March to 30 December 2011. When I first read these media texts, I was pleasantly surprised by how fair and positive the media seemed in its treatment of SlutWalk and feminism. Honestly, I had thought the mainstream news media would not take SlutWalk seriously. I had anticipated countless op-eds dismissing protesters as slutty women with vulgar sexual ambitions, and explicitly lauding Sanguinetti for “telling it like it is.” My cynicism might derive from the fact that my daily reading falls loosely under the theme “White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy: Alive and Well. (Sigh).” If the *New York Times* reports on a gang rape in a way that perpetuates rape culture, I’m right in the thick of the critique (e.g., Marcotte, 11 Mar 2011). If the “War on Women” waged by GOP policies escalates, I’m reading about it (e.g., Saunders, 27 Mar 2011). If *Maxim* magazine tells men how to “cure a feminist,” I’m reading a blog that critiques the article to reassure myself that I’m

not alone in my frustration (e.g., Mosurinjohn, 26 Mar 2012). Perhaps as a coping strategy, I prepared myself for the worst, expecting to find further evidence in the media coverage of SlutWalk of an overtly antagonistic relationship between feminist politics and mainstream culture.

What I observed was surprising. On the surface, the media represent SlutWalk in a fair and positive light and support its messages about ending victim-blaming and sexual violence, including: to take the reality of rape seriously and call for police accountability (see Chapter 4); to build a diverse, inclusive, and collective show of solidarity (see Chapter 5); and to support women's liberation and sympathize with victims of gendered oppression (see Chapter 6). I started to accept these "fair and positive" portrayals of SlutWalk as the "meat" of the analysis, and began to inadvertently relapse towards objectivity (see Chapter Three). When I tried to snap out of my descriptive mode of writing about media messages, I veered far off course into a critical evaluation of SlutWalk itself, which was not the project I set out to do. I reviewed everything again, looking desperately for something obviously "wrong" with media representations of SlutWalk. Somewhere between trying to honour the intentions of the media and critiquing SlutWalk itself, and vice versa, I lost sight of my object of study: the popularization of feminism and anti-rape activism through mainstream media. My thesis is not about SlutWalk, nor about the conventions of news media. My thesis is about asking: how do we get more people on board with feminism, so that we can eradicate sexist oppression and interpenetrating axes of domination?

Prior to this turning point, I thought the culturally relevant elements of media coverage would arise from obvious points of contention between commentators and protestors and overt statements about feminism. But after it, I started to pay closer attention to subtle moments, neutral statements, and underlying assumptions. The discursive operation of power shaping our social existence does not necessarily announce itself with a headline. Rather, dominant and subversive discourses lie in the unexamined absences and taken-for-granted presences of radio interviews, opinion columns, news clips, and photo galleries. We can draw out these discourses through critical interpretation and

contextual reading of media texts, and get a better sense of the shape of the cultural landscape in which certain ideas, identities, and practices are favoured over others. My intellectual labour became suspending what I “know,” placing myself in the position of someone whose knowledge and understanding of feminism is not necessarily intentionally carved out or consciously available, and then asking, “Based on my exposure to this particular phenomenon known as SlutWalk, what do I come to ‘know’ about feminism and sexual violence prevention, even where not explicitly stated?”

In Chapter Four, I showed how discourses about police accountability and victim-blaming reproduce rape as a fact of women’s lives, to be “managed” through risk assessment, rather than prevented through social transformation. The media take for granted the centrality of the police in managing rape, adopting a recuperative stance about police accountability that glosses over institutional violence towards disenfranchised communities. The media tend to subvert victim-blaming narratives by defending the innocence of the least promiscuous victims, and avoid refuting notions about the violability of “sluts.” Overall, the media reproduce dominant understandings that the aftermath of rape is best “managed” through (white) women’s neoliberal subjectivity, which problematically circumvents messier discussions about the embeddedness of sexual violence in white supremacist capitalist neoliberal patriarchal status quo.

In Chapter Five, I showed how the media proffered oversimplified understandings of slut-shaming and solidarity that reproduce whiteness and essentialize gender differences. The media construct Sanguinetti as the poster-boy for slut-shaming and all women as the victims, encouraging a decontextualized understanding of slut-shaming as isolated, male-perpetrated attacks, rather than a culturally-rooted problem in which women also participate. Moreover, media claims about the diversity and inclusiveness of the solidarity movement are contradicted by its overwhelmingly reliance on young, white, educated, heterosexy, female faces and voices in constructing the spectacle of SlutWalk. The juxtaposition reinforces the broader reproduction of white privilege in media

representations of feminism, social movements, and “gender issues,” wherein gender comes to mean (white) woman.

In Chapter Six, I showed how media representations of women’s liberation rely on and reproduce a depoliticized postfeminist rhetoric of empowerment and choice, which is unknowingly biased towards the experiences of young, white, middle-class, educated women. Simultaneously, the media fail to represent women of colour, female ethnic minorities, and female immigrants as active participants in women’s liberation. Instead, media narratives about the seriousness of violence reproduce the Third World Woman as the ultimate and inevitable victim of sexual violence. I show how the aforementioned examples of women’s liberation and oppression comprise a grand media narrative that “positions individual women as the site for remediating ... violence” (Fine, 1989, p. 557). By dangerously overextending the effectiveness of “women’s empowerment” as a violence prevention method, the media shift consumers’ attention away from the difficult political task of addressing how victim-blaming and slut-shaming are utterly normal attitudes in rape culture.

Overall, the seemingly fair and positives messages about SlutWalk are constituted by and constitutive of neoliberal, white supremacist, and postfeminist discourses of the “reality” of sexual violence, which undermine intersectional feminist efforts to eradicate sexual violence. Across three analysis chapters, I argued that mainstream media representations of SlutWalk reproduce a watered-down version of feminism and a decontextualized understanding of sexual violence that resonates most with white, heteronormative, middle-class women. Overall, I suggest that the mainstream visibility of SlutWalk is possible only insofar as its representations steer clear of any substantive critique of patriarchy as it articulates with other forms of domination, particularly racism.

Although I am critically engaged in debates with feminist activist circles, I am compelled to find better ways of speaking to people who do not yet identify with feminism. I view the news media coverage of SlutWalk as an explicit conversation starter in that task. Throughout her writing about feminism, bell hooks argues that these “dialogues across difference” (1994, p. 76) are crucial for

stimulating widespread critical consciousness and social change. Indeed, these everyday conversations are “necessary if we are ever to change the structures of racism, sexism, and class elitism, which exclude and do not promote solidarity across difference” (1994, p. 76). I also take seriously the implicit role of media in shaping conversation in mostly imperceptible ways through the discursive reproduction of knowledge and power. What then, has my project taught me about the potential of mainstream media representations to explicitly or implicitly popularize feminist thought?

I have learned to not underestimate the power of subtlety in motivating critical consciousness-raising. In other words, I have come to value the power of showing instead of telling as a means of fostering widespread critical engagement with all that we take for granted as “true” and “normal” in the world. I realized this lesson while revising my thesis, and specifically while developing this conclusion chapter. Somewhere in the margin of my first draft, Mary Louise told me that it was clear that I had an “ideal” in mind, upon which I was critiquing the media coverage, but not necessarily clear to my reader. This motivated me to think about an exemplar of media representations of feminist issues, that is, a text or a journalist or a quote that I’m on board with. In the remaining space of this conclusion, I’ll tell you about how I came to appreciate that the most obvious “exemplar” is not necessarily the most effective one.

The most obvious answer would be for me to discuss Gail Dines’ presence in mainstream media dialogue about SlutWalk. Indeed, this conclusion could have been an homage of sorts to Gail Dines (disagree as I may with her stance on porn). She’s an anti-porn writer and professor who wrote an early critique of SlutWalk in the British paper, *The Guardian*, and subsequently participated as an outspoken critic of SlutWalk and feminist expert on numerous panels, including on CBC’s *Q* and TVO’s *the Agenda*. If popularizing feminist was simply a matter of “telling” people what to think and how to think it, then Gail Dines would be responsible for the telling. As a panel contributor, she provides important anti-racist and feminist critiques about both the SlutWalk itself and the media coverage. Specifically, she injects conversations with critiques about the overwhelming focus on

white educated women's depoliticized "choices" and lack of attention to changing violent masculine norms and rape culture. She is an articulate, passionate, feminist figure who is critically aware of the cultural context in which both SlutWalk and a media spectacle of SlutWalk have emerged. Moreover, she does not shy away from intervening on mainstream dialogue about feminism, and manages to secure several mainstream media gigs and book tours to enable her scholarly feminist interventions. But that doesn't mean she was helpful in popularizing feminism for new audiences. Therefore, I couldn't bring myself to praise her or model suggestions after her.

As part of my initial reading of my sources, I listened to, transcribed, and analysed all of Dines' media appearances. As I shifted towards an interpretative reading of the media discourse, I reflected on the most memorable media texts. Even though I was actively invested in listening to her, and despite agreeing with many of her points, I tuned her out. Honestly, I forgot about Dines, even as she insisted I remember her. I decided that I couldn't possibly herald her as an exemplar of popularizing feminism in the mainstream if I couldn't stand to listen to her myself.

With all due respect to Gail Dines, and her career as a professor, I think that she is ill-fitted to the task of popularizing feminism amongst widespread audiences. bell hooks says "there will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by a well-educated few" (2000b, p. 113). If I learned anything of value in university, it was *in spite of*, not because of, being lectured at. I don't think Gail Dines is helping make feminist ideas understood beyond academic circles because she lectures people instead of engaging with them. It might have been an intentional media relations tactic, or a request from show producers, but Dines said the *same* things regardless of her varying co-panelists' points, or the setting for the discussion. Dines tells people her preconceived argument, instead of showing them. She tells you everything you need to know and accept. She does so at great length, at the expense of other invited speakers. She tells about how SlutWalk is unequivocally wrong and harmful to young girls. She tells about how the host is asking the wrong questions. She tells about how women reclaiming slut are dupes of patriarchy, complicit in

their own oppression. She makes unwavering statements like, “Without question. And I’ll tell you why...” and “Probably, I’m one of the few people who are probably most in touch...”

Dines says that, on her extensive worldwide book tour, she hears from girls who tell her the same story about being overwhelmed by porn culture, “over and over again, from California through to Massachusetts” and around the world. She doesn’t let people “in” on the analysis. She already wrote the book on it, and you should just take her word for it (and go buy it). She presents her assessments about porn and male violence as so obvious, that listeners might feel stupid for not knowing it already. She may be passionate and articulate, but she is simultaneously divisive and rude, frequently overpowering her co-panelists. She does little to dissuade people from accepting the stereotype of the angry porn-hating feminist who, for many people not yet committed to feminism, is intimidating and off-putting.

Of course, I understand that Dines is making a living, and can’t be expected to reinvent the wheel with each invited appearance. And yes, I will concede that we can and do learn things from lectures that foster critical awareness, especially if we take on active roles beyond “listening” and memorizing. I’ve had my share of “lightbulb” moments about feminist critiques of rape culture while attending lectures on the feminist speaking-circuit (namely, by Jackson Katz and Jean Kilbourne). But for me, the lectures were a reminder of a given feminist critique, rather than a first time exposure. I was equipped to make the lecture an engaging experience. But how much can be achieved by telling the same argument over and over again, irrespective of one’s audience? Is that really one of the ways to foster widespread feminist awakening? That’s certainly not how I came into my feminism.

And so I come back to the importance of showing and engaging, instead of just telling and lecturing. To effectively harness the power of mainstream news media to engage audiences in feminist dialogue, I think we need to let feminist cultural critiques be more open, subtle, and participatory. For example, we might opt for the approach of York professor, Kate McPherson, one

of Dines' co-panelists during TVO's *the Agenda*. As an older, white, female tenured-professor, she occupies a very similar social position as Gail Dines. But what she does in and with that position is very different. McPherson keeps her answers short. She doesn't claim to know it all. She listens and respects her co-panelists. She offers historical context to hers and other panelists' points, and does so through accessible, concise statements. She doesn't play into the moderator's leading questions, instead offering nuanced answers that are really more like questions. She pulls the viewer and reader in. She says enough to pique curiosity, and then steps down. She is a teacher, but not a lecturer.

When I think about the books, people, and films that facilitated my feminist consciousness-raising, I think of people like Kate McPherson. She makes an impact, but unlike Dines, she does so quietly and subtly. She doesn't make it about her. This is the sign of a good teacher, who, in the process of opening minds and fostering critical thinking, becomes "progressively unnecessary."¹³ McPherson is kind of like the waiter who makes your dining experience amazing by being receptive and discrete. Forgettable, but in a good way. For me, Dines is the waiter who offers unsolicited menu suggestions and obviously "canned" descriptions, intervenes at the worst moments, and still forgets to bring my proper drink order. I want to forget the whole awful ordeal, and resent her for distracting from my experience of the meal. My point is that personal and social transformation are not contrived experiences with step-by-step instructions dictated to us by experts. Sometimes we need to *not* be told how to think or feel or behave. As oft-quoted educator R. D. Clyde said, "Getting things done is not always what is most important. There is value in allowing others to learn, even if the task is not accomplished as quickly, efficiently or effectively."¹⁴

Having said all that, I worry about what type of reading experience I have offered you in my

¹³ Apparently, Thomas Carruthers said this. This is according to every "Inspirational Quote" page on the Internet. To clarify, I was trying to find an apt quotation about "formal education getting in the way of learning," and I realized that this Carruthers fellow captured my idea better than what I was trying to spit out.

¹⁴ Admittedly, all I know is this oft-quoted statement is tied to the name R. D. Clyde.
<http://quotationsbook.com/quote/11875/>

thesis. Was I like Dines, serving up my analysis and getting things done, without involving you in the process? I admit that my earliest draft of this thesis was a lot more “tell” than it was “show.” I also admit that I erred too much on the side of criticism in the first draft. After many revisions, I hope that I devoted more space throughout to acknowledging the “McPhersons” of the mainstream mediascape. If I had to do this thesis over again, I might have made that task easier by selecting one media text or figure that was exemplary for showing feminist dialogue in subtle ways that subvert the mainstream status quo. One of the things I learned is that some of the most influential feminist thinkers do not necessarily out themselves as “feminist,” let alone hold themselves up as “feminist spokespeople.” Honestly, I don’t like the notion of spokespeople for feminism, because I think it creates unnecessary hierarchies and betrays the grassroots and nascent way that feminism can and does emerge everywhere. It also pressurizes every interaction, for the title puts one in the unenviable position of having to “speak for feminists everywhere” or having to devote precious airtime to explicitly refuting stereotypes of feminists.

With all that in mind, I think I might have written my thesis on Katrina Onstad, for she is sort of an anti-spokesperson for feminism who has wide mainstream appeal. She is the *Globe and Mail* Style Reporter, and Wikipedia tells me she has contributed to *Elle*, *Chatelaine*, *Toronto Life*, *National Post*, and *New York Times*. She is also a novelist and former CBC host. In other words, she works all over the mainstream media. Onstad provides the type of critical social critique that I’m on board with, and, partly due to race, class, and educational privileges, she has access to a wider audience. She pulls readers in by discussing elements of popular culture and current events that are already on their radar. She challenges common sense understandings by posing questions instead of providing impenetrable arguments.

I only included one of Onstad’s columns in my media sample, because technically, she only wrote articles that briefly mentiond of SlutWalk. As I explained in my methods, I set out to study articles with SlutWalk as the main topic. It did not sit well when I excluded Onstad’s 10 Sep 2011

column about the Playboy Bunny suit. In the column, she talks about fashion designer Marc Jacobs, feminist activist Gloria Steinam, playboy Hugh Hefner, the “*Mad Men*” trend, and reality tv star Snooki through an implicit critical feminist lens. She mentions SlutWalk in the headline and once in the text; she does not use the word “feminism” or “feminist” anywhere. To the average reader, it is not ostensibly about feminism or activism or even politics. Still, this text probably *shows* more about SlutWalk, feminism, sexist oppression, rape culture, and the importance of critical media consumption than all the texts explicitly about those things combined.

But that’s exactly my point. I don’t think we can stimulate a mass-based feminist movement by simply bashing people over the head with feminist politics. Although I value a diversity of approaches, and accept that we have space for the Dines, McPhersons, and Onstads of the world, I tend to align myself more with the latter two. In order to bridge the gap between mainstream culture and feminist politics, maybe we need to reject the premise that there is a gap, or at least entertain the notion that the gap isn’t a chasm. I am calling for a vision of feminism that allows it be part of the mundane, whether through a thought-provoking editorial or a conversation over coffee. I am tired of devoting all my energy to insisting on all the ways that feminism is getting bashed, misrepresented, and undermined in the mainstream media. If that’s all I do, then I end up discursively reifying the gap, and cementing the undoing of feminism in dominant culture. I don’t mean that we should ignore the complex ways that dominant discourses repudiate feminism, nor I am calling for an approach to normalizing feminism that sacrifices its political and radical intent. We can’t retreat, and we can’t submit. And, we can’t dominate. We don’t need a war. We need subtle advances that introduce feminist ideas into the cultural terrain of the everyday, without necessarily announcing their arrival.

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