To Unlearn is to Re-learn:

Building Sexual Violence Prevention Experts' Capacity for Gender Transformative Practices

By

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A project submitted to the Faculty of Education

In conformity with the requirements for

the degree of Master of Education

Queen’s University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

March 25th, 2022

Abstract

Sexual violence prevention in higher education follows a long legacy of research and practices that prioritize the experiences of white, cisgender, and heterosexual women, often marginalizing the experiences of trans and gender diverse students. This paper describes and argues for the importance of a capacity building tool for institutional sexual violence prevention experts that aims to address trans oppression through gender transformative practices. Ultimately, this project recognizes and acts upon the need for new ways of doing sexual violence prevention that focus on disrupting structures of oppression faced by transgender students on campus, and meeting their needs.

Acknowledgements

During the completion of my project, I went through several *big life* events including the passing of my father, moving provinces and severe changes in my health. Thus, I would like to begin with expressing my immense, ocean deep, gratitude to my supervisor, and mentor Dr. Lee Airton for making this journey possible. Thank you for your time, patience and unwavering support intellectually, academically and emotionally. This work would have not been completed without you. Next, I would like to thank Gabrielle Bouchard who's google bio reveres her as "a Canadian feminist" but to me she is *the* mentor and activist who seven years ago, pointed me in the direction of gender transformative pedagogies, and who's ever calming presence allowed me to explore my own identity, and develop reflexive ways to build community where others could do the same. To my beloved friend, Dr. Bruno de Oliveira Jayme, who has supported me, my work and my spirit since we first met, your unyielding passion for art, critical pedagogy and educational practices of liberation has deeply inspired me and this thesis project - I thank you for existing in the academy, and in my life. I would like to give my loving gratitude to my mother and dad Anna and John Impey who always support and love me unconditionally, even when I take on too much, like a masters degree in a pandemic. I also cannot forget to articulate my deep gratitude for my friends, who lift me up and have been my invaluable support system for years, Aaron, Ander, Ciel, Earth, Gift, Joshua, Jon, Leila, Sarah, Sarena and my whole Montreal community. Last but never least, I give my forever thanks to my family who did not get to see the development of this work but eternally influence my sense of humour, perseverance and creativity; my Bubbie Frima Malka Mittleman, my Zeyde Dave Mittleman, my uncle, Jack Mittleman, and my intellectual and bold father Sun Hadley.

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Introduction

In 2018, I stood in an auditorium of ninety male University football players. I was leading a workshop in consent and bystander intervention when the topic of male survivors came up. One man in the back shared an anecdote with the group that he had heard from "someone" about dancing with a "hot girl" at a club to later find out she was a trans[1] woman (he used more explicit words). Does that make this person – who he knows from his anonymous source – a survivor of sexual violence? The volunteer facilitator I was training at the time panicked. I responded for her by asking the group to help their teammate out and explain why this would not be considered sexual violence given the definition we had learned earlier. One of the men who had early claimed, coyly, that he was a feminist, eventually replied saying it was a harmful misconception and that it is un-consensual to not disclose your personal history to a stranger. I added that the question itself, while I applauded our ability to discuss it in the group, was a stark example of why a trans person would not feel comfortable disclosing to a stranger. He became quiet in thought. This was one of the many unscripted moments I was self-taught to be prepared for. However, what this story demonstrates is that I had failed to teach the volunteer facilitators to do the same.

Within higher education, sexual violence prevention (SVP) workshops like the ones I lead for five years, have become a popular prevention method. However, in my experience and within the literature that I will later review, those who deliver prevention programming are not always prepared for the unscripted, unexpected vulnerability that arises and requires engagement beyond a scripted reply. This is particularly true when sexual violence prevention (SVP) engages

[1] *For the purpose of this paper, trans is defined as anyone who self identifies within the large spectrum of diverse gender identities, this includes but is not limited to, transgender, transsexual, non-binary, gender non-conforming, agender etc.*

with transness and oppression. As prevention on campus has followed a long legacy of activism and sexual violence organizing prioritizing white, cisgender, and heterosexual women (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018), it is understandable that many sexual violence prevention educators (SVPEs) have not been introduced to gender transformative practices that use SVP on campus as a tool to also address trans oppression and interrupt violence faced by trans students (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020).

During my two years as the lead facilitator at Concordia University's Sexual Assault Resource Centre, I spent my time attempting to incorporate gender transformative approaches (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020) into my SVP work. As the first story articulated, I found this to be a very challenging task as there was little institutional support for it, and at the time, no resources. While no one in higher administration outright denied the necessity of ensuring our work was inclusive to trans students, restrictions such as time, budget and resources were always a concern when I wanted to make changes to our curriculum, policies, and processes. Often, I was also told that students were 'just not ready' to hear about trans oppression and we needed to slowly and cautiously reflect on how to do this work. While I did meet some resistance from higher administration to talking about trans experiences in the prevention education I developed and lead, I mostly found that a need to 'get it right' often meant not doing it all. Therefore, my project has been created to not only address the gap in knowledge regarding gender transformative SVP (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020), but is here to guide higher education SVPEs in their own unlearning and relearning, supporting them to embrace gender transformative approaches in ways that may not be easily institutionally accessible due to the barriers I and many others have faced therein.

Research Problem: Trans Students and Campus Sexual Violence

Sexual violence within higher education is a well-documented issue that has drawn the attention of activists, administrators, and researchers across disciplines (Griner, 2020). However, LGBTQ+ students have remained mainly absent from research and subsequent prevention campaigns, despite being a group that is considered at much higher risk of sexual violence than the general student population (DeKeseredy, 2017). Research on trans higher education students and sexual violence is even more uncommon, and they are often misrepresented within the limited data on sexual minority (i.e., LGBQ) student experiences (Griner et al., 2020, p. 5706). However, even scarce research has provided insight into basic statistics that illuminate prevalence. In 2020, Griner et al. reviewed the responses of 204 trans student participants of the U.S National College Health Assessment–II (NCHA-II) and concluded that they experience "significantly" higher rates of sexual violence on campus when compared to both cisgender women and cisgender male peers (Griner et al., 2020, p. 5712). Other U.S. based studies mirror this finding, the most cited has been the 2015 Association of American Universities (AAU) *Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct.* The authors surveyed 7,500 trans undergraduate and graduate students from institutions across the U.S., concluding that 29.5% had experienced sexual violence during their time in higher education, making them at highest risk compared to all other students (Cantor et al., 2015).

While the AAU survey and the NCHA-II study provide us with a scope of the issue faced by trans students, they have their limitations. As Griner and colleagues (2020) note, most participants in the NCHA-II survey were white, leaving the authors to call on future research to address Black, Indigenous and trans students' of colour (BIPOC) experiences of sexual violence on campus. Mirroring this lack of attention to BIPOC students' experiences, the AAU report only addresses racism once, briefly, in the findings. As the majority of research on campus

sexual violence is "identity and power-neutral, failing to incorporate an analysis of power and dominance" (Linder et al., 2020., p. 1031), these two examples of exclusion stem from a deep structural problem seen in SVP, namely, that systems of power (such as white supremacy, whiteness, and trans oppression) and their impacts on students often go ignored.

As discrimination that targets trans students on campus is informed by a myriad of systems of oppression, prevention efforts on campus must address power, inequity and oppression perpetuated by socialization learned in and outside of higher education (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020). As Black transgender students face "significantly higher rates of sexual violence" (Coulter et al., 2017, p. 730) than any other student population, prevention programming must address anti-Black racism and incorporate specific needs of Black trans students on campus into programming and education, for example. In this case, prevention efforts may be more effective when tailored specifically for a certain group or community (p. 734). While I articulate this, it is imperative to note that my project cannot claim to address the needs of BIPOC trans students as it is designed by a white non-binary person (myself); however, addressing structural racism and accountability to students is an important facet of this work and is embedded throughout my project and further in this paper's conceptual framework.

While limited by its failure to directly address how racism informs sexual violence, the previously mentioned 2015 Association of American Universities' (AAU) *Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct* report does illuminate some structural issues within higher education that create barriers for trans student survivors. When the AAU study asked participants to report their confidence in their university to protect survivors and conduct a "fair" investigation, trans students were least likely to have a positive response (Cantor et al., 2015, p. 39). Similarly, trans student participants were also least likely to believe that campus

officials would take action to challenge the norms and wider spread discrimination on campus that allowed for violence targeting them to exist (Cantor et al., 2015, p. 39). What this demonstrates is that it is not only high rates of sexual violence that prevention efforts on campus must address but the more deeply entrenched norms that undergird the reality that trans students cannot trust in their institution's support nor resolve in addressing transphobia (i.e., trans-specific discrimination and harassment).

It is a well-known phenomenon that the prevalence of sexual violence is due to the societal perpetuation of certain beliefs about sex, intimacy and power that are absorbed through cultural, social, and individual levels (Burnett et al., 2009). While universities have begun to address trans oppression and the violence it creates on campus, overall, there is a "cultural resistance" to the existence of trans identities within higher education (Griner et al., 2020, p. 5718). To demonstrate the ideologies behind this resistance, researchers often cite the ways in which higher education's unwavering adherence to the gender binary creates hostile environments for trans students (Goldberg et al., 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017). An attachment to perpetuating the gender binary in higher education upholds resistance to trans students on campus by normalizing negative responses (individual and institutional) to the ways trans students express themselves (e.g., dress, pronouns, etc. – see Keenan, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2017). While universities have been altering policies and creating some support for trans students, trans students see it as only one step in untangling higher education from the gender binary, and subsequent trans oppression (Catalano, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016). Thus, more is needed than bureaucratic shifts such as policy adoption, to transform higher education. Contemporary SVP must counter the cis-heteronormativity embedded throughout university culture (Coulter et al., 2017; DeKeseredy et al., 2017).

Overview of the Paper

In this paper, which offers context and scholarly grounding for my project, I will argue that applying a gender transformative approach to sexual violence prevention (SVP) in higher education can utilize two pedagogical approaches: engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) and liberatory consciousness (Love, 2010). Together, these approaches can encourage sexual violence prevention workers (SVPEs) to conceptualize SVP education as something more than a transference of knowledge and, instead, as a critical space of co-learning and unlearning that can address power, injustice and trans oppression.

In the first section of this paper, I review and critique literature on the key issues in higher education regarding sexual violence, prevention, and trans student experiences thereof. This literature review illustrates the urgency of incorporating gender transformative approaches into SVP on campus through further the ethos of higher education and its adherence to oppressive structures that impact trans students. Next, I provide a conceptual framework for this project, expanding upon the theories and principals of engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) and liberatory consciousness (Love, 2010) while briefly discussing contestations surrounding the contemporary use of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1985) in higher education SVP. This project carries forward my own pedagogical principles of non-judgement, care and empathy, demonstrating an understanding that everyone's re-learning has to start somewhere. I now turn to the literature on trans student experiences, sexual violence, trans pedagogical practices and trans oppression that has guided my work.

Literature Review: Trans Students and Campus Sexual Violence

In summer 2014 I was sitting in the event space of the Centre for Gender Advocacy (CGA), at Concordia University in Montreal Quebec, surrounded by peers and posters of previous events they had held such as Take Back the Night, a yearly rally against sexual

violence. The posters were vibrant against the beige walls and, as I looked around at the thirty people sitting next to me in a circle of chairs and ragged vintage furniture, I did not know that many of us would become friends out of solidarity given our interest in addressing sexual violence happening on our campus and in our communities. Over the next two days, we were trained to facilitate a consent workshop for schools in Montreal that otherwise would not have access to this kind of training. I went on to deliver hundreds of workshops over the next five years. Roughly a year after my training, I gave a workshop back at the CGA and was afterwards approached by a non-binary participant. They bluntly told me that the workshop I was giving lacked nuance, and that I should consider trans experiences more, both in the content and how I facilitated. Afterwards, I begun to think about why I had not been taught how to do this. It is only now that I can reflect on and conclude that, at the time, the mainstream cultural movement's eye was focused sharply elsewhere, highlighting only the sexual violence experiences of cisgender women.

Like many Canadian universities at the time, Concordia had no stand-alone sexual assault policy and an understaffed Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC). The SARC only opened its doors in the fall of 2013 after two intensive years of student campaigning, led by the Centre for Gender Advocacy (Litwin, 2018). At the time of my training, these lagging resources, and the lack of structural supports such as policies, collided with reporting on the sheer volume of sexual violence that existed on Canadian and U.S campuses and was a focus of mainstream media. Within a few years of my entry into SVP, an avalanche of student activism and survivor stories appeared across national news, such as Columbia University's Emma Sulkowicz's protest and performance art piece, "Carry That Weight" where she dragged a mattress across campus to raise attention to the administrative silence and lack of resources for student survivors of sexual

violence (Nathanson, 2014). Within Canada, issues such as the lack of stand-alone policies (Partridge, 2015) garnered attention. Additionally, survivors were appearing more and more frequently to illuminate the cracks in administrative responses that left them without support or justice (Mathieu & Poisson, 2014). However, in the media, as in my training, trans students' experiences were generally absent.

Today, after the peak popularization of Tarana Burke's #metoo movement, mass media's attention has faltered slightly but the prevalence of sexual violence on Canadian university campuses is still an unrelenting issue. This is well demonstrated by findings from the 2018-2019 Council of Ontario Universities' (COU) survey (CCI Research, 2019), *Student Voices on Sexual Violence*. This survey reached 11,600 university students and 42,000 college students, finding that, on average, 60-70% of student respondents in an Ontario university had been sexually harassed, and 23% had experienced a "non-consensual" sexual experience (i.e., sexual assault). Within this study, 1.8% of the participants identified as trans, non-binary, or Two-Spirit (CCI Research, 2019, p. 2). The study reported that both sexual harassment and stalking were experienced by women and gender-diverse survey respondents was higher than the overall rate in universities (p. 3). Further, a recent Statistics Canada study concluded that 47% of trans participants experienced "unwanted sexualized behaviors" with 18% experiencing sexual assault (Burczycka, 2020). Overall, Burczycka's results demonstrate one of the reasons that that many trans students "[do] not feel safe in and around their school environment" (p. 20). While both surveys do not solely report on the experiences of trans students, they provide a foundation for my literature review and project by demonstrating the need for focused interventions that aim to interrupt the high rates of sexual violence experienced by trans students in higher education. However, the root issue to be examined by this literature review is not the *quantity* of sexual

violence enacted against trans students, which is considerable, but the *deficit* in preventative methods that can address it. In the next section, I discuss literature that problematizes the ethos of higher education and its effects on prevention efforts, and I will substantiate the need for my Sexual Violence Prevention Expert (SVPE) capacity building project.

Being Trans in Higher Education

When I began researching trans student experiences in higher education, I chose to ask: what is it that higher education needs to address? While I could begin to answer this with an articulation of the many barriers trans students face, I have chosen instead to begin with an explanation of the theoretical concepts that ground the studies within my literature review. This discussion of theoretical concepts was not left for my conceptual framework below because theoretical perspectives help better articulate the underpinnings of oppression that affect trans students' experiences in higher education (Seelman, 2014). Furthermore, while these concepts inform my project's existence, they are better discussed alongside the literature because they are not the key concepts utilized in my project's development. The concepts grounding studies in my literature review are: genderism and trans oppression.

Higher education can be examined through a multitude of concepts that critique the prioritization of cisgender (non-trans) and heterosexual bodies in institutional environments. However, the concept of genderism is commonly utilized to deconstruct the norms and behaviors that shape higher education (Farmer et al., 2020; Goldberg et al., 2019). Ingrained in the belief that cisgender bodies and identities are the normal way to do gender, genderism categorically defines expressions of transness and gender non-conformity as abnormal phenomena (Farmer et al., 2020). Western education takes up genderism's constrictive nature and perpetuates it through policy, administration, pedagogy and hiring practices (Goldberg et al., 2019). However, most

cisgender students and administrators fail to recognize and address systemic issues, such as their own and the institution's adherence to genderism, that deeply affect trans students (Beemyn, 2019, p. xiii).

While articulating higher education's adherence to genderism can illuminate harmful norms that contribute to a discriminatory environment for trans students, genderism's capacity to theoretically articulate trans experience has been critiqued. As genderism broadly refers to harm created by a prioritization of the gender binary, it does not rely on centering trans experience to function (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 10). Other concepts, such as 'trans oppression' (Nicolazzo, 2017), can also help answer the question, *what* is it that we are *looking* at? Unlike genderism, trans oppression considers the interlocking systems of oppression (white supremacy, ableism, etc.) that maintain and create administrative and attitudinal barriers that directly affect trans students differently based on their social positioning (Nicolazzo, 2017). In the literature that is discussed next, both concepts are used to explain students' reported experiences, and describe what gender transformative SVPE should address: trans oppression and an unwavering adherence to genderism in post-secondary institutional cultures.

In Z. Nicolazzo's (2017) seminal book, *Trans in college: Transgender students' strategies for navigating campus life and the institutional politics of inclusion*, Nicolazzo provides a detailed exploration of her 18-month ethnographic study on the needs and experiences of nine trans students at City University (CU) in Arizona. Throughout the study, participants expressed similarity in experiences and convergence, where their experience took a "different direction" in how the institution responded to their gender, sexuality, disability, and racial, cultural, and ethnic identities (p. 47). Nicolazzo's central research finding is echoed by other literature (e.g., Beemyn, 2019; Catalano, 2015; Golberg et al., 2019a): that trans students

experience an overwhelming number of barriers – pedagogical, social, and emotional – that impact their academic performance, sense of belonging, and trust in their institution's interest and ability to protect them from discrimination and violence.

As trans oppression and genderism in higher education render trans lives and non-conforming gender expression abnormal phenomena, many trans students are forced to conceal or adjust their gender expression in order to be considered intelligible by students, staff, and faculty (Goldberg et al., 2019). The result is a perpetuation of an unconscious bias in relation to what 'trans' does and does not look like, on the part of campus service providers (Nicolazzo, 2017, p.118). Thus, to resist this narrative perpetuated by trans oppression, my project utilizes Harper Keenan's (2017) definition of transness as a form of "limitless possibility [for] bodily expression" (p. 539). This axiom of 'limitlessness possibility' forces projects, such as my own, to prioritize trans experiences and experiences of trans oppression as never one thing but instead a constellation of possibility. This is particularly relevant for the forthcoming discussion of literature that focuses on Black trans students' and trans students' of colour experiences of trans oppression in higher education.

The omnipresence of trans oppression within higher education greatly mediates Black trans students' experiences in both Black-centering spaces (e.g., resource centres for Black students), and campus LGBTQ+ centres (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 68). Within Nicolazzo's research, Black trans students expressed difficulty accessing spaces on campus that would recognize both their gender, racial, ethnic and cultural identities as inseparable from one another (pp. 68-69). As LGBTQ+ centres were often run by white staff, catering programming to white students, Black trans students' needs often go unmet (p. 68). This greatly differs from the experiences of white

trans students who often find some kinship in campus LGBTQ centres and access programming and resources made with them in mind (p. 68).

While the exclusion of Black trans students from support services on campus is important to note, the issue extends past this barrier. Nicolazzo (2017) found that the only spaces campus where transness may be visible are coded as white such that the broad institutional understanding of *what trans looks like* becomes a white subject; this results in the production of Black trans students as further unintelligible (p. 69). As the ideology of whiteness in higher education promotes hegemony and normalization across various interlocking systems of domination and oppression" (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018, p. 135), whiteness must be addressed in work countering trans oppression. While my project does not envision itself as a 'visibilizing' project, (i.e., inappropriately speaking to the experience of Black trans students and trans students of colour), it uses this aspect of the literature to recognize and discuss the interruption of whiteness in the institution as one necessary part of gender transformative sexual violence prevention work.

Gender Transformative Prevention

Recalling Keenan (2017) and the tethering quality of defining transness as limitless possibility, I turn to the scant literature on gender transformative sexual violence prevention (SVP) and its own limitless possibilities. Gender transformative approaches embrace this limitlessness by recognizing gender as an ever-changing concept, while also instilling possibility into an institution with embedded trans oppression (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020). This is well observed in the body of research on campus SVP. Historically, the movement against sexual violence in higher education evolved from second wave feminism and prioritized the experiences of educated white cisgender women (Jessup-Anger et al., 2017, p. 4), which has considerably narrowed the scope of available research. This is well demonstrated in Linder and colleagues'

(2020) content analysis that explored ten years of research on sexual violence in higher education. The paper concludes that out of five hundred and forty articles, only one study explicitly included transgender students (Linder et al., 2020, p. 1029). Thus, sexual violence prevention experts (SVPEs) are often inheriting a legacy that defaults to the exclusion of trans students. However, my project understands this exclusion as married to trans oppression, and not as a necessary fault of individual SVPEs. Rather, it is an inherited structural problem.

Due to the lack of gender transformative approaches being researched and passed down to SVPEs as part of their training, SVP education often perpetuates a trans-exclusive construction of gender. This is illustrated by Klein et al. (2021) who explored LGBTQ+ exclusion in sexual assault education. The authors interviewed twenty-three U.S based SVPEs who facilitated campus prevention education. Overall, the SVPEs highlighted the global exclusion of LGBTQ+ students from their work. A note-worthy finding was the omnipresence of cis-heteronormative ideologies (e.g., that affirms and perpetuates genderism and prioritizes heterosexual dynamics) in educational materials (pp. 7-8). Furthermore, SVPEs reported that educational materials often tokenized trans student experience by only referring to the high rates of violence they experience but doing little to address this (p. 9).

Gender transformative practices in SVP are a way to think about and do prevention work that pushes beyond tokenization (Nicolazzo & Marine, 2020). As speaking to any transformative methods of praxis can be elusive, I ask: what account of gender and praxis do we evoke when utilizing gender transformative SVP methods? Currently, only one study illustrates possible answers. Marine and Nicolazzo (2020) demonstrate how SVPEs in higher education engage with gender in their work on a continuum from *gender unaware* to *gender transformative*, the latter being a way to conceptualize prevention work as also an avenue to address trans oppression. This

contributes to what Keenan (2017) calls the *survival* of trans people both broadly and within higher education. As touched upon earlier, gender transformative SVP focuses on transforming "cultures" and utilizing a "transformative and evolving understanding of gender" (p. 5013). SVPEs utilizing a gender transformative approach are aware of and take action against interlocking systems of oppression on campus as they understand their compounding effect on trans students (p. 5018). However, these practices are not easily adopted within an institution.

The inflexibility characterizing many university processes can interrupt gender transformative approaches, for example, higher education administrators may disapprove of content that engages gender diversity or trans oppression due to fear of backlash from the larger non-trans community (e.g., parents, funders etc. – see Klein et al., 2021). A common community reaction to a university's in-house SVP education (i.e., run by employees) is for student leaders to create their own programs that address identities and phenomena that are left out, such as gender diversity and any discussion of oppression (Marine & Trebisacci, 2018). In my career as an employee who runs SVP education for a university, I have assisted many student groups in doing this. Thus, it is imperative that those with institutional power share the resources it grants with students who are addressing sexual violence on campus (Burns, 2020). Additionally, the institution must recognize the labor of advocacy, and support spaces for trans students that are free from institutional interference. This is what the literature refers to as trans kinship networks.

Supporting Kinship Networks

I previously argued that gender transformative SVP pushes SVPEs to reflect on and challenge our own ideologies and ways of *doing* and *thinking* about gender in our work. Changing our thinking around gender and subsequently our SVP work lends itself to the development of a praxis that actively supports trans students. However, this does not always

mean taking on the work ourselves. In my own unlearning process as an institutional SVPE, using power granted to me through my position often meant g*etting out of the way* of student leaders and activists: being readily available to make institutional power more accessible. A few examples are: liaising between students and the dean of students; allocating funds to student projects; and providing mediation between higher administration and student groups when requested. Getting out of the way also meant acknowledging that students did not always need my *expertise* or help. Often what marginalized students needed most was each other. In general, literature on trans student experiences defines this phenomenon as kinship networks, an imperative aspect of trans university life (see Nicolazzo, 2017, pp. 122-135).

At their core, kinship networks are peer groups where trans students feel welcomed and supported in their gender identities and gender expressions and can seek refuge from institutional trans oppression (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 123). While these groups do not always have to be trans only spaces, they reflect a radical way of accepting trans students in all their experiences (p. 124). Kinship networks have an array of purposes and goals from friendship and solidarity to direct activism on campus, and can form both online and offline; in whatever form, they are fundamentally safer "bubbles" within the university (pp. 123-124). In fact, these kinship networks are ecosystems of trans support which students may not find elsewhere. As kinship networks support trans student success, supporting kinship existence and development is imperative to supporting trans students' wellness on campus (Nicolazzo, 2017). Further to this, as kinship networks are spaces where trans students can express themselves freely, they counter the trans oppression in higher education that constricts trans possibility. Thus, these networks' existence can be seen as part of the structural change that SVPEs must support if using gender transformative approaches.

In this section, I highlighted the underpinning theories of genderism and trans oppression that further illustrate the *why* of trans student experiences of higher education and their experiences with violence and discrimination on campus. With a focus on gender transformative approaches to SVP, I demonstrated a need for SVPEs to develop flexible and liberatory practices that do more than comply with institutional policies and nominally include gender diversity in their work; flexible, liberatory practices are required to concretely address the structure of trans oppression on campuses. As trans student experiences are mitigated by interlocking systems of oppression on campus, gender transformative approaches demand attention and action simultaneously on an individual *and* a structural level. Gender transformative practices also include knowing how to *get out of the way* when necessary to support trans students in developing their own networks and resistance strategies. In the next section, I will focus on the need for SVPEs to embrace engaged and critical pedagogical practices in their work in order to integrate gender transformative processes and develop a liberatory consciousness that can better equip them to address individual and structural violence directed at trans students. Thus, the conceptual framework to be discussed in the forthcoming section is grounded in the scholarly work of bell hooks, Barbara J. Love and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.

Conceptual Framework

This project and my own re-learning have only been possible due to a legacy of research, community work and inquiry done by Black women, women of colour and trans scholars, and community members. I have not only had the privilege to learn from many community members but also scholars who have paved the way towards more transformative ways to conceptualize pedagogy. On that note, this work is guided by two main practices and theories: liberatory consciousness and engaged pedagogy. Additionally, my project engages with many trans

scholars who have developed ways to view research, life, and teaching through a lens of trans critical pedagogy. While not one of the two concepts I chose to create my project around, it is important to note that Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality remains an imperative, yet complex source of theoretical guidance for my work.

Over the years, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality has been 'picked up and carried around' within projects addressing violence and injustice on campus. However, intersectionality is often enacted as a way to simply correct for exclusionary practices of white feminism by bringing an analysis of marginalized identities to the forefront of academic life and research (Carastathis, 2016, p. 38). As I will further discuss, the misapplication of intersectionality within higher education is well contested. I aim to not reproduce questionable pedagogical practices, and my conceptual framework complicates my project's engagement with intersectionality by integrating two related pedagogical practices: engaged pedagogy (hooks, 2009) and liberatory consciousness (Love, 2010).

Fundamental to this conceptual framework and the instructional design of my project are two ideas: those who benefit from oppressive systems can be taught to unlearn their harmful socialization; and, while it is individuals who perpetuate harm, the structures that allow this harm can be addressed (Love, 2010, p. 599). Developing a liberatory consciousness can allow one to face patterns of behavior that may be barriers to embracing liberatory practices (p. 599) such as gender transformative sexual violence prevention (SVP). In order to provide tools to sexual violence prevention experts (SVPEs) who seek to learn how to do the tangible work of gender transformative SVP, my project has developed its advice on liberatory and power-aware facilitation practices from engaged pedagogy (hooks, 2009). As I will describe, engaged pedagogy provides foundational principles to this work of co-learning, developing emotional

awareness, and building vulnerability, as well as the understanding that, together, doing these three things in SVP can influence transformational change in learners (hooks, 2009, p. 20).

Engaging Prevention: Beyond the Transmission of Knowledge

The most transformative conversations I had with participants (mostly cisgender men) in sexual violence prevention (SVP) trainings I have facilitated have been after the training. They would apprehensively approach me to divulge details of experiences they felt uncertain about, using their new understanding of consent and accountability to clearly re-evaluate their own behavior. I often valued these moments above all others. Over the years I evaluated my own approach, questioning the difference between trainings where I encouraged genuine engagement, questions, and disagreement and the ones where I was cold, regurgitating dramatic facts and statistics in attempts to evoke an emotional response. It was often the trainings I actively created a space for liberatory expression (within reason) where the above unscripted after-training interaction became possible. As both myself and the student participants seem to grow from this pedagogical approach, I concluded that, as hooks (2009) ascertained, students and educators learn better when they are engaged "beyond a surface level" (p. 19) and when education is viewed as a practice of freedom: celebrating students' and educators' integrity and ability to become self-actualized (pp. 14-21). It is through the cultivation of this deeper engagement (beyond the surface level) in the SVP educational space that a stronger sense of community can be influenced, lending itself to fulfil important aspects of SVP.

One part of comprehensive SVP that we learn as sexual violence prevention educators (SVPEs) is the need to create a community response, which can be seen through the inclusion of bystander intervention in contemporary SVP that teaches students to identify and intervene upon sexual violence (Edwards et al., 2018, p. 51). However, when facing the insurmountable crises of

structural injustice (including epidemics of campus sexual violence), students need environments where their desire to make a difference is encouraged (Curtis, 2012, p. 356). In a way, SVPEs must become harbingers of hope, which is a daunting task. It is imperative that engaged pedagogical practices embody the idea that "hopefulness [is] about collective action [that] hinges upon moving from being an isolate…to becoming a public self with an enlarged sense of belonging, accountability, and shared possibility" (p. 368). As "we live in chaos, uncertain about the possibility of building and sustaining community" (hooks, 1994, p. 27), fostering a need for collective action against sexual violence on campus is a daunting task with no linear path. Thus, my project integrates another important aspect of engaged pedagogical practice: building the capacity to be vulnerable.

Embracing Vulnerability

In the sexual violence prevention (SVP) trainings I have provided, I often found myself saying "I used to feel that way too" even if it meant admitting something that might result in participants no longer seeing me as the "expert" I was presenting myself to be. Educators are never all knowing (hooks, 1994, p. 22) and to admit we are not *all knowing* in an educative environment is to be vulnerable. When educators demonstrate vulnerability, it creates the freedom for learners to engage with their own (p. 21). Because effective SVP pushes students to change their behavior and identify their place in addressing systemic oppression (Edwards et al., 2018, pp. 50-51), SVP trainings and education demand a lot from participants, emotionally and intellectually. All stories I have shared in this paper this far illustrate students working to unlearn harmful biases and feeling safe enough to raise challenging questions. These required deep vulnerability on part of the participants and myself. Vulnerability is an important aspect of SVP because, without it, we cannot uncover the unspoken issues that students may be experiencing

that is blocking their capacity for self-actualization as empathetic individuals a part of a larger community.

Before discussing how embracing vulnerability is incorporated into my project, it is important to note that, in the context of SVP, being vulnerable does not mean SVPEs extending past their own boundaries nor disclosing information in a training that will create an unsafe learning environment. Instead, as engaged pedagogy requires vulnerability to create an environment susceptible to co-learning and deeper engagement (p. 21), addressing vulnerability is taken up in my project in several ways. As an example, the concept of vulnerability as an engaged pedagogical principal urged me to provide direct examples of my own experiences in attempting gender transformative practices, and including my unlearning and relearning process throughout my project. In so doing, I demonstrate how I embraced vulnerability and developed my tolerance for experiencing it.

Similar to the concern of oversharing, vulnerability or sharing aspects of experiences with participants may concern some SVPEs as we have all have facilitated difficult and often discriminatory (e.g., sexist, racist, transphobic, etc.) dialogues that harm us personally and deter the group from a transformational experience. These difficult conversations stem from the structural roots of education as a tool of settler-colonization which, as hooks (2009) and others have argued, indoctrinates students into a structure that prioritizes heterosexual, cisgender maleness and whiteness. While engaged pedagogy is not a set of best practices, it utilizes a dialectic approach to conversation to counter this hegemonic way of doing education and replace it with transformational spaces of deeper learning. Within the educational space, a dialectic approach shifts the paradigm to value other lived experiences and knowledge systems (hooks,

2009, p. 36). One way this can be done is through allowing conversation to naturally occur between participants, even if a disagreement arises.

While it can be argued that the application of engaged pedagogies in SVP means that we (as SVPEs) allow ideas to emerge and be discussed that conflict with our curricular goals, engaged pedagogy prioritizes a space that genuinely promotes the understanding of different ways of "seeing and knowing" (hooks, 2009, p. 46). Thus, in a space where engaged pedagogy is utilized, trans experiences have a better chance of coming into voice, and nuanced discussions can interrupt the default norms of the institution that uphold trans oppression. Encouraging engaged dialogue in SVP education allows for student biases embedded in racism, sexism, transphobia and whiteness to arise, be noticed, and be interrupted in a way that promotes understanding and change over defensiveness.

Complexifying and Questioning the Application of Intersectionality

I remember joining the conversation surrounding the importance of incorporating Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality into sexual violence prevention education. The sexual assault resource centre I was employed in at in a large Canadian university that had been criticized that their training was not intersectional. To respond to the critique, I was charged with facilitating focus groups with student leaders and activists to address the gaps that they had

identified. I found one common theme in the focus groups: many of us had little understanding of how to apply intersectionality's theoretical praxis to sexual violence prevention (SVP). Even though I was working with those who asked for more intersectional SVP, we were equally confused when the question inevitably came up: how does one 'do intersectionality?' The result from these conversations was that I changed the trainings to include scenarios that produced

dialogue that challenged the floating misconception that only white cisgender women experienced sexual violence. For example, myself and volunteer facilitators wrote a scenario about a person with they/them pronouns so we could casually introduce the concept of non-binary identities. A year later, a new volunteer suggested we introduce oppression through identity (ability, race, gender) and ask participants to discuss together how these identities intersect and affect one's access to support resources. After this change in the training curriculum, the discussions focused on how experiences of sexual violence differ dependent on the forms of oppression one experiences.

While I admit the resulting dialogue produced by the updated training curriculum seemed more enriching for participants, as many found a way to connect the content to their own experiences of oppression, our application and conceptualization of intersectionality was flawed. This was clear after a training where I had obviously failed to address worries voiced by a group of predominantly Black male athletes. At one point in the training, one athletic brought forward the fear of being falsely accused of sexual assault. As my usual response to this concern was to discuss the low rate of false accusations and refocus the conversation onto why we assume survivors lie, that is what I did. However, as a 2017 U.S. study demonstrates, Black men are three and a half times more likely than white men to be incarcerated for sexual assault and later found innocent (Gross, et al., 2017). Thus, my practiced response failed to validate the reality of their experiences as Black male athletes, many with the hopes of going pro and becoming famous. Their fear resided in the reality of being directly targeted by structural racism. Revisiting this experience through engaged pedagogical principles of vulnerability, co-learning, and recognizing power (hooks, 1994, 2009), I would have more closely listened to these experiences, learning from them and reflecting deeper on my own position of power in that moment as a

white SVP educator. To build upon this reflection, the remainder of this section explores how other institutions 'do intersectional sexual violence prevention,' and illustrates my reasons for choosing to incorporate concepts such as Dr. Love's liberatory consciousness to guide my project's development.

As examined within my literature review, much of higher education's SVP programming is criticized for its lack of attention to power hierarchies, and to the experiences of marginalized students (Klein et al., 2021; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020; Marine & Trebisacci, 2018). While institutions clamor to respond to these critiques and be viewed as 'race- and gender-aware,' intersectionality has been taken up in a variety of ways in higher education sexual violence prevention (SVP). For example, on their website, McMaster University's Sexual Violence Prevention Office (2022) identifies intersectional SVP as a praxis that embodies the understanding that one's experience of oppression is dictated through possession of an "intersection of multiple marginalized identities" (n.p.). Similarity, Queen's University's 2020-2021 *Sexual Violence Prevention Framework* highlights how experiences of trauma and sexual violence differ depending on someone's "identities and social locations" (Queen's University, 2020, p. 25). Both definitions from Queen's and McMaster demonstrate a use of intersectionality theory in SVP as a way to view oppression's impact on those with overlapping marginalized *identities*. In other words, identity is the object of analysis in these cases. While a focus on whose identities is represented in SVP is important to more inclusive SVP education, applications of intersectionality must begin to move beyond this form of additive representation of identities as opposed to oppressions (Karunaratna, 2017). In other words, "who people are" can never be understood apart from the way things work (Nash, 2019, p. 75). Thus, my project follows scholars' apprehension in operationalizing a definition of intersectionality as a "unified theory of

multiple oppressions" (Carastathis, 2017, p. 8) and instead prioritizes engaging sexual violence prevention experts (SVPEs) in recognizing, understanding, and using their individual and institutional power. This is because, when engaged as more than an additive theory of identity, intersectionality illuminates the *real-world* power structures that impact policy, procedure and individual attitudes in institutions that create barriers for trans students, such as those grounded in trans oppression and genderism. Thus, I now turn to how the development of a liberatory consciousness can be to utilized in gender transformative practices through building an awareness of the power SVPEs harness as "experts" and professionals in an institution that functions within multiple interlocking systems of oppression.

Similar to other scholars addressing trans student experiences in higher education (Catalano 2016, Stewart & Nicolazzo 2018), I chose to engage Barbara J. Love's (2010) theory of liberatory consciousness as a way out of my own trap of 'doing intersectionality' without doing much at all. As engaged pedagogy teaches how to be vulnerable and accountable educators while acknowledging power structures and our own compliance within them (hooks, 2009), liberatory consciousness acknowledges that "no single human can be charged with the creation of oppressive systems in operation today" (Love, 2010, p. 601). However, everyone can choose to become aware of and interrupt injustice (p. 601). My project applies both axioms by turning its attention to those with institutional power (i.e., SVPEs) without the use of guilt or shame. It uses the steps, awareness, analysis, action and accountability of liberatory consciousness (Love, 2010) to demonstrate to (mainly cisgender) SVPEs how to do better without triggering their own defensiveness: through being reminded that gender transformative approaches and addressing injustice in the institution are skills that can be learned. Moreover, there is no shame in not knowing where to start.

Within liberatory consciousness, building *awareness* of oppressive systems is the beginning (Love, 2010, p. 602). How my project incorporates awareness as it pertains to a practice of liberatory consciousness is two-fold. Firstly, while it may seem counterproductive, my project does not provide a 101 on gender nor related forms of oppression as there are many of these resources available that will be included in a resource list. Instead, my project breaks down my own process of awareness building in the section named *Awareness, Analysis, Action and Accountability*. This breakdown of my own experiences and mistakes in incorporating gender transformative practices into the SVPE tool enacts principles of vulnerability and awareness (hooks, 1994, p. 21; Love, 2010, p. 602).

After awareness, the development of a liberatory consciousness requires that one learn the skill of *analysis* to develop an analytical mind that can perceive structures of oppression and tangibly connect them to behavior (one's own and others') (Love, 2010, p. 603). Within my project, analysis is encouraged throughout as I break down research on trans oppression and experiences that may be new to many cisgender SVPEs. Furthermore, I also teach analysis in the mapping activity *Identifying Trans Oppression* which encourages SVPEs to reflect on oppressive processes and policies within the university that further trans oppression.

While the practice of developing a liberatory consciousness engenders a reflective state, it does not cease to prioritize *doing* something about the oppression that one can now (after application of the framework) witness and better understand. Thus, the third step in the development of a liberatory consciousness is *action* (Love, 2010, p. 603). Love acknowledges that action against oppression has many avenues including doing it yourself, encouraging others to act, and similarly to *getting out of the way,* or, providing resources to others who are taking action (p. 603). There are several ways my project acts upon Love's articulation of action, one

being the candid inclusion of my own experiences that are there to encourage SVPEs to reflect on my own actions and not necessarily repeat them but take away tangible examples that can encourage their own action. In addition, the project ends with an activity where SVPEs revisit the mapping activity and choose areas within their work where they can start to use a gender transformative approach and identify barriers to trans students that they can personally work to alleviate. As a whole, the project supports individual change within both SVPEs' consciousness and their work in order to impact structural change.

When interrupting oppressive structures and the behaviors that re-enforce them, there is a strong need to enact and learn about personal and community *accountability* (Love, 2010, pp. 603-605). For Love, there "are no easy answers" (p. 605) on how to be accountable when developing a liberatory consciousness. This is mirrored in the broader social justice community dialogue surrounding sexual violence and accountability (e.g., Thom, 2018). However, as difficult as accountability may be to achieve, thinking of accountability within liberatory consciousness means forming "new agreements" (Love, 2010, p. 605) to guide how we interact with one another. As a theory married to its capacity to evoke action, liberatory consciousness may not give the answers, but it does show the way. While there is no specific action that one can take toward accountability due its elusiveness, the project as a whole encourages personal accountability through inciting deep engagement on gender transformative approaches, and one's own work. Institutional accountability is also discussed within my project's section *building partnerships with trans students and student groups on campus* where I break down several reasons why accountability has to be cultivated if partnerships are to be made with students. In the end, this project engages individuals in their own process of unlearning in order to relearn harmful ways of doing SVPE, and ultimately become part of a community that recognizes

human fallibility and practices compassionate accountability even when engaging issues like sexual violence.

Conclusion

This Master's project *To Unlearn is to Re-learn: Building Sexual Violence Prevention Experts' Capacity for Gender Transformative Practices* is at its core an expression of deep admiration for peoples' capacity to change. In my six years of experience with designing, implementing, and facilitating sexual violence prevention (SVP) trainings, I know with confidence that SVPEs in higher education have little access to capacity building tools that support gender transformative prevention work. As a capacity building tool for sexual violence prevention educators (SVPEs) on post-secondary campuses, whether employed by an institution or student activists, my project is grounded in an understanding that "comprehensive prevention includes well-conceived content and effective pedagogy" (Edwards, et al., 2018, p. 49-50). To be effective, prevention curriculum and its facilitation must create room for the unlearning of harmful assumptions and behaviors that perpetuate interpersonal violence (pp. 49-50). As sexual violence does not happen in a vacuum, programming must help students understand structural oppression and address personal power and their role in violence and prevention (Edwards, et al., 2018; Linder et al., 2020).

As I demonstrated in the literature review, genderism and trans oppression govern the ways that gender is conceived of and mediated in higher education. This deeply impacts how trans students are treated within the institution and creates the foundation for the high rates of violence and discrimination they experience. As genderism and trans oppression dictate the conditions for how one does gender on campus, trans students are directly targeted for being outside of university norms. To counter the hegemonic categorization of gender identities and

gender expressions found in society, and mirrored in higher education, I turned to Keenan's (2017) beautifully formulated idea that transness represents a "limitless possibility of bodily expression" (p. 539). The idea of limitless possibility also drives the intellectual foundations of my work, as I recognize the possibility in all SVPEs, no matter where they begin their journey into a gender transformative approach.

Following a history of power-neutral research on sexual violence on campus that invisibles the needs of trans students, SVP on campus more often than not continues this legacy of exclusion. Thus, sexual violence prevention experts (SVPEs) on campuses inherit programming and processes that are not built to address trans oppression on campus. As demonstrated by Marine and Nicolazzo (2020), gender transformative approaches to SVP urge us to reach beyond institutional norms and find flexible, transformative ways of doing gender in SVP. This includes recognizing that in order to address sexual violence against trans students, the structures that support its existence, such as white supremacy and trans oppression, must also be prioritized in SVP. SVPEs must be equipped to address how power influences SVP and build our own capacity as SVPEs to carry out this reflexive work.

In recent years in higher education, sexual violence prevention programming, has been very effective in picking up and moving around Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. However, the way intersectionality has been utilized in higher education has been critiqued for its additive view of intersectionality, treating the analysis of oppression as a math equation. After all my years and experiences, my confusion about 'how to do' intersectionality persists. Determined not to reproduce my own errors (though I do embrace and promote the ability to make mistakes) I chose to use two pedagogical and liberatory practices that my work felt at home within: bell hooks' engaged pedagogy, and Dr. Barbara J. Love's liberatory consciousness.

Engaged pedagogy is utilized throughout my project in places where I acknowledge my experiences but, instead of teaching what I know and positioning myself as an expert, I guide SVPEs through my own processes, encouraging them to reflect on the ways they think about and use gender in their own SVP. Using engaged pedagogy to create a pedagogical tool helps my work embody the idea that "knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know" (hooks, 2009, p. 185).

Knowing that best practices, as they relate to trans students, do not necessarily create meaningful action against trans oppression (Nicolazzo, 2017), a final decision I wish to highlight in closing this paper is as follows: I chose not to create a check list of how to steps that could guarantee gender transformative work. Instead, I followed Love's (2010) practice and steps to break down my own experience of gaining awareness of the need for gender transformative approaches in order to build awareness in other SVPEs, inviting them to do the same. As a whole, my project is hopeful, recognizing that while we may be stuck in stagnant institutions, we are always changing.

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