Student feminist activism to challenge gender based violence

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Introduction

In the midst of growing attention to and concern about gender based violence (GBV) in universities, a key piece in the jigsaw of responses to GBV are student activists who resist GBV and supporting cultures. This activism has attracted criticism from some quarters which caricatures students as delicate, precious and easily offended, resorting to silencing those they deem to cause offence, thereby threatening freedom of speech. In this environment where voicing resistance, silencing, and freedom of speech are coexisting realities, this chapter explores how feminist communities help young feminists to find their voice to say the unsayable and to speak out about GBV.

Universities, gender based violence and feminist activism

As established elsewhere in this book, GBV in universities has emerged as a social, policy and scholarly concern in the UK significantly later than in some other parts of the world. The advantage of this delayed attention is that we can learn from developments elsewhere. For example, while Title IX in the US may seem to provide a legal framework of accountability that UK activists can only dream of, recent commentaries identify the limitations of this approach (Harris and Linder, 2017; Marine and Nicolazzo, 2017). These include the mechanistic way that Title IX has come to be used in the context of campus GBV, by universities driven more by the desire to protect their status and reputation than their students. These mechanistic approaches are symptomatic of an 'audit culture' or 'compliance culture' which prioritises procedures and processes (have staff completed their allotted tasks?) rather than outcomes (are students safe?), and is characteristic of the galloping neoliberal encroachment of universities. Although

universities are protected from some aspects of wider economic forces (for example, in the UK universities have not been as devastated by 'austerity measures' as have most other public sector bodies), they are by no means immune to neoliberalism's tentacles (McRobbie, 2009; Martínez-Alemán, 2014; Phipps and Young, 2015; Gill and Donaghue, 2016). The marketisation of universities and commodification of degrees come together with the deadening hand of audit cultures to interpret legislation such as Title IX in ways that arguably subvert its progressive potential. Moreover, the commodification of higher education generates an instrumental approach among students; there is a risk, familiar to many of us working in universities, that students do not engage with wider activities which seem not to directly improve grades and 'employability'. This risk may be sharper in the non-elite universities where the resources available to students are more limited and the financial pressures on students are greater. Witnessing such developments in the US must surely make us in the UK consider whether legalistic, administrative procedures can help us achieve our goal – freedom from GBV. In this chapter we argue that, in addition to developing effective systems of accountability, progressive responses also lie in student activism to resist GBV and create cultures which support freedom, resistance, and respect.

It is reassuring to see that, despite the challenges posed by mounting neoliberalism in universities, student activism is surviving and flourishing as part of a wider resurgence in feminism in and beyond the UK (Dean and Aune, 2015). A key focus of this activism is the drive to witness, name and challenge GBV, particularly as it is embodied in student communities. This manifests as what is often termed 'lad culture' (Phipps and Young, 2015), or 'rape culture' (Lazarus and Wunderlick, 1975). Students are coming together to form communities – typically called feminist societies – which are at the centre of principled resistance to sexist norms. Strengthened and informed by feminist communities, students resist and challenge the attitudes, behaviours and institutional practices that support GBV, develop their pragmatic and theoretical approaches to GBV, and hold universities and perpetrators to account. However, to date, more scholarly and media attention has been paid to the problem itself, rather than to resistance to it. To address this lacuna, this chapter explores how students come together in feminism to resist and challenge GBV, and the ways that community building and connection foster their work.

These resistive initiatives continue a long history of the university as a site for radical politics including feminism (Rhoads, 1998; Joseph, 2003; Naples and Bojar, 2013; Arthur, 2016). While universities are

far from representative of class–diverse communities and so have been rightly criticised for generating an elitist form of politics, their position as sites of intellectual endeavour where political positions can be tried and tested in relative safety makes them an important source of social change, where new understanding, behaviours, identities and cultures can be imagined, developed and practised. However, Mohanty warns, in her critique of '"post" frameworks' (2013: 968) which privatise social divisions and individualise experience, that

> neoliberal intellectual culture may well constitute a threshold of disappearance for feminist, antiracist thought anchored in the radical social movements of the twentieth century. Radical theory can in fact become a commodity to be consumed; no longer seen as a product of activist scholarship or connected to emancipatory knowledge, it can circulate as a sign of prestige in an elitist, neoliberal landscape. (2013: 971)

Mohanty's call to arms to locate scholarship about activism in sites of activism guides our discussion of student activism against GBV.

Despite some media attention to contemporary feminist activism in universities (for example Pearce, 2014) and to the problems of GBV in universities (for example Younis, 2014) there has been relatively little scholarly attention paid to student activism against GBV, but we contend that it is important to document, understand and analyse this activism. The temporality of student activism makes it rather slippery to pin down; the student body regenerates every three or four years and students typically engage in extra-curricular activities such as feminist activism for only a fraction of their time at university, so the legacy of each generation is easily lost. Documenting each generation's work, in terms of community building and support for individuals to develop their politics, policy work, activities and campaigns, is essential to enable development from one generation to another. Without this sense of a legacy, of ongoing development and growth of the student activism between different cohorts, students can be easily 'bought off' by university administration who might provide superficial responses to student demands without committing to the longer-term, organisational and cultural change required to prevent GBV.

Moreover, documenting this activism is an important part of 'claiming' emerging discourses. Student activism against GBV is part of the discourse that is generated about and around GBV, although activists are themselves rarely in control of how they and their activism

are recorded; the currency in stereotypes about feminists and feminist activism is testament to this (see, for example, Tomlinson, 2010). Gill (2016: 615) notes 'how different feminisms *materialise in media culture*' (emphasis in original), augmenting the presence of (neoliberal) 'feminism' in mainstream media, but argues that, with the exception of SlutWalk, contemporary feminist activism 'has generated relatively limited coverage' (p 616). She argues that the 'new feminist visibilities' appropriate concepts (such as 'empowerment' and 'choice') and symbols (such as the feminist 'fist') which resonate with feminism while promoting a distinctly anti-feminist ideology and, indeed, 'foment[ing] generational discord about feminism' (p 619). Similarly, we should be wary of discourses about GBV which are not embedded in student experiences of both GBV and of activism against it; instead, we contend that we should strive to put activists at the centre of our analysis of activism. However, some recent commentary has only added to these partial, problematic depictions of the feminist student, as we discuss in the following section.

The 'precious', 'protected' feminist student

Student feminist activity has been swept up in contemporary discussion about how we communicate in universities. Recent calls for trigger warnings and advocacy for safe spaces have been criticised as imposing limitations on intellectual freedom, including freedom of speech (McMurtrie, 2016). In some coverage of this debate (which rages particularly strongly in US media and scholarship; see for example, the collection of papers in *First Amendment Studies*, 30 (1)), contemporary students who call for teaching about trauma – such as sexual violence and racism – to be more sensitive to the effects on students have been depicted as 'coddled' (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2015), unable to deal with the harsh realities of life. Others express concern about the consequences of this development; although '[a]t first glance, these requests seem reasonable because at the core they are asking for a respectful atmosphere in which insults are not tolerated and student vulnerabilities respected', trigger warnings may keep students 'embedded in a culture of victimization' (Robbins, 2016).

In the UK, debates about freedom of speech in universities have highlighted the restrictive practice of 'no platforming' controversial speakers in university environments. Julie Bindel and Germaine Greer are infamous recent casualties of this practice which reflects how 'feelings have become a new political commodity … in debates in which hurt feelings are used as currency' (Phipps, 2014: 15). Indeed,

what some call causing offence is seen by others to be committing a microaggression (Sue, 2010), to which no platforming is a legitimate response. 'Traditionally about rejecting the rhetoric of violence; especially by far-right organisations, no-platforming is now used to avoid "offence"' (Ditum, 2014). Others have compellingly argued that 'no platforming' and other resistance strategies reveal the privileging of free speech at university as the domain of white men (Fenton, 2016).

These debates about trigger warnings and safe spaces, freedom of speech, and no platforming are complex, heated and polarised; there are no simple resolutions and a fuller discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter. We simply note that feminism has a long and proud history of saying the unsayable about 'offensive' things such as men's violence against women and girls, menstruation and childbirth, women's anger and their sexual desires – things that have been deemed 'shameful' and for which women have traditionally carried the burden of shame. Indeed, it is feminist work that has created a new vocabulary to name 'unsayable' offences against women, bringing them out from under the shroud of euphemisms such as 'domestic dispute', 'interfered with', 'seduction', to name them as 'intimate partner violence', 'child sexual abuse' and 'sexual assault'. While 'no platforming' and advocacy for safe spaces and trigger warnings can be valid and valuable in fighting oppression, we should also exercise caution in accepting simplistic narratives about 'taking offence', given that progressive social change has been achieved partly through 'offensive' speaking out by feminists.

It may be more fruitful to explore what purpose is served by these polarised public debates. Analysing 'the trope of the angry feminist', Tomlinson (2010: 33) argues that 'arguments about inappropriate affect are discursive technologies of power deployed strategically to suppress claims for social justice'. This analysis could equally apply to debates which emphasise the 'preciousness' of contemporary students, rather than their active engagement with and resistance to behaviours and cultures that inflict real harm. The attention to a particular range of activism (calls for no platforming, safe spaces and trigger warnings) focuses attention away from other forms of student activism against GBV (such as awareness-raising campaigns, demands for support services, fundraising for services) and simultaneously trivialises students' demands. Just as Gill (2016: 618) illuminates the media attention paid to 'celebrity and style feminism' at the expense of the myriad diverse topics addressed by contemporary feminist activism, and as Tomlinson (2010: 1) demonstrates that the trope of the angry feminist serves to 'foreclose feminist futures', the attention to trigger warnings and safe

spaces in university environments serves to undermine the legitimacy of student activism against harms.

Contemporary student activism against GBV, then, occurs in a wider context of efforts to reconfigure the university environment. These efforts are subject to considerable critique, critique which sometimes has a patronising, dismissive tone, depicting young feminist sensibilities as 'precious'. While we share unease with some aspects of attempts to remove 'offence' from public debate, we also recognise that calls for greater sensitivity in how we communicate about traumatic experiences, such as sexual and domestic violence, reflect attempts to imagine cultures devoid of GBV and other forms of oppression.

Feminism in community

Activism happens in communities. Social movements thrive in and through communities of activists joined in struggle. Relationships, coalitions and connections have held a particular significance for feminist social movements. In universities, feminists are building communities of like-minded peers, coming together to develop their own and each other's understandings, identities, politics (we explore this in more detail in Marine and Lewis, 2017). Communities can help generate activist networks and collective identities (Taylor, Whittier and Morris, 1992; Hercus, 1999). They can be a source of emotional sustainability for activists and social movements (Brown and Pickerill, 2009). They can also 'reproduce sameness' as Rowe (2008) shows in her study of women academics whose differential investments in institutional power led white women to conceive of alliances with black women as 'difficult' and 'challenging'. Rowe's call for meaningful, authentic engagement with difference echoes Mohanty's (2013) warnings that a postmodern focus on difference distracts from radical critiques of power.

It is from feminist communities that much activism against GBV emerges, as individuals support each other to learn about GBV and about feminism, to change the normative narrative of blaming victims and exonerating perpetrators, to imagine worlds without GBV, and to experiment with small and large scale interventions to achieve those worlds on campus. In the midst of debates about the changing university environment, freedom of speech and the emergence of GBV as a matter of political, public and scholarly concern, this chapter explores how women students come together in feminist communities to challenge GBV in universities. The following section briefly outlines the research project from which findings are presented, and

then analyses students' accounts of their feminist communities and of their activism.

Methods

The data discussed here are derived from a study about students' accounts of feminist identity, activism and community in UK and US universities. The participants in this study, 34 in total, represented a wide range of identities, including social class, racial/ethnic, sexual orientation, fields of study, years in school, and dis/ability statuses. Guiding questions shaping our inquiry included: how did you come to understand yourself as a feminist? What influences shaped your feminist identity? How do you live out feminism in your everyday life? Our sample was drawn from university students and recent graduates who self-identified as feminists, primarily through networks in feminist societies (in the UK) and women's centres (in the US). During the initial coding process of the in-depth interview data, 14 broad themes were identified and refined to make meaning of the students' perspectives. Key themes, explored in the following sections, were the importance of feminist space for exploring and refining one's ideas with like-minded others. For the purposes of this book's exploration of the current UK context with respect to GBV, we focus our discussion solely on the data yielded by the UK participants.

Findings

Students' resistance to GBV

In our research GBV was a common concern among participants, regardless of their own experiences. Some had experienced aspects of GBV before or at university, some were shocked to find 'laddish' cultures on campus, having expected university cultures to be more enlightened. As Laura, a white, straight-identified student bemoaned, "I thought it would be better here and I got to [university name] and it's really laddish". Similarly, Olivia, who identified as white and gay, found "this university is totally diabolical in terms of the rife sexism that is everywhere". Their experiences of the spectrum of GBV included: having drinks 'spiked' (presumably with the intention to commit sexual violence); sexual harassment by university staff and students; rapes and victim-blaming responses among their peer group; misogynistic and anti-feminist attitudes and behaviours among students and staff; and social pressures and surveillance of bodies, clothing and appearance.

However, their concern about and motivation to end GBV did not seem to be generated by their personal experiences alone; instead there was a sense in which GBV represents and reflects the state of gender relations and women's lives. While Ferrarro (1996) sees women's fear of sexual assault as a 'master offence' because it explains women's wider fear of victimisation, we suggest that GBV represents a master offence because it symbolises something fundamental about women's oppression and lack of freedom. When asked about her priorities for feminism, Katie, a white, straight woman, expressed this eloquently:

> 'I think the main ones that stand out for me are domestic violence and rape, obviously the most prominent and aggressive ones I think. But I think that's why they appeal to me because, you know, I feel like if you were sort of dropped on this world with no knowledge of society and you were suddenly told that women were married to these men who would constantly beat them and intimidate them and women would just walk the street at the risk of a man jumping out and raping them, you would think what the hell is going on?! How can that happen?'

As they expressed their deep anger and urgent concern about violence against women and girls in all its forms, the feminist student activists located GBV in its context of sexism, misogyny and men's oppression of women and girls. Perhaps reflecting the paucity of policy and scholarly developments about GBV in UK universities, the UK-based participants in this research referred less than the US participants to GBV *on campus*; UK participants spoke more often about the full spectrum – or 'continuum' (Kelly 1987) – of GBV, from the trafficking of women, through domestic violence and sexual harassment to sexual violence. Their orientation focused on their immediate environment in their university but also showed solidarity with women experiencing other forms of GBV. For example, Julie, a white, bisexual woman said "we were doing a campaign, it was about trafficking of women and we were trying to get the government to ratify this agreement to help support women who'd been trafficked to the UK".

Student activism against GBV takes various forms, few are entirely novel, having been used in activism about a range of issues over generations. Participants had been involved in: producing a zine presenting anonymous accounts of ideas and experiences about sex and sexuality, designed to challenge silences and dominant discourses about sex; producing performances of *The Vagina Monologues*; establishing,

running and attending feminist groups on- and offline; holding discussion groups, book groups, film showings; joining local Reclaim the Night marches and SlutWalks. This activism aims to provide a counter-narrative to the existing lad culture on campus, and to amplify the voices of the silenced in order to build solidarity and community. Their activism involves saying things traditionally deemed 'unsayable', things that can offend mainstream society.

As they locate the roots of GBV in the attitudes and orientations of individuals and groups, the participants also focused on attitudinal change. They emphasised the importance of not only public campaigns and initiatives such as those listed earlier, but also more intimate, personal, small scale attempts to change attitudes. Many participants told stories of engaging friends, peers, teachers and strangers in discussions about their attitudes and behaviours. For some this one-to-one advocacy meant persuading friends of the importance of feminism. Sally, a white woman who preferred not to disclose her sexuality, took up this mantle gamely:

> 'I think you can choose to either kind of take on the world or take on the bit around you. I think I'm definitely that [the latter] kind of person so even just hearing one of my friends say "I see what you mean and I guess I would identify as one [a feminist]" is really kind of satisfying.'

This kind of one-to-one engagement provides the testing ground for many feminists, and an opportunity to practise one's developing ideas and arguments. It also exposes them to the stigma of being labelled feminist and carrying the burden of being the 'feminist killjoy' (Ahmed, 2010) or, as Olivia puts it, "the boring feminist":

> 'One of my really dear friends just doesn't feel that she can … ever make those points because she doesn't want to be the boring feminist. And I think well you have to be the boring feminist! Because if you're not that person, if you don't keep making those points, if you just sit in the pub with men and allow them to make sexist jokes constantly, nothing changes. You know even if they think "she's really boring, let's not listen to her, she's very serious about life", then you know, I guess, putting your politics right at the front of your life and not just *thinking* about them but *doing* them in very small ways.'

The courage to 'do' their politics was enhanced by working in communities; resistance to GBV and the attendant attitudes and cultures happens, by and large, in and through feminist communities. Students come together with like-minded others to develop their understanding of gender and to participate in resistance to GBV among other forms of gender oppression. The next section explores their engagement with and creation of feminist communities.

Forging feminist student communities

Building feminist communities, networks and alliances has been an important part of the feminist movement, and of other social movements. Activists and scholars reflect on the joys as well as the tensions and challenges of forging activist friendships, (Rowbotham, 2001; Segal, 2007; DuPlessis and Snitow, 2007; Brown and Pickerill, 2009). Being part of feminist groups, in the wider context of cultures that demean women, particularly feminist women, can have positive impacts on self-esteem, confidence and happiness (Saunders and Kashubeck-West, 2006; Vaccaro, 2009). Indeed, in cultures where young women are constructed as the object of men's judgement, and hostility to feminism is widespread, the act of joining a feminist community is in itself an act of resistance.

While the concept of 'community' is not unproblematic and by definition involves exclusion as well as inclusion, a sense of community was a strong feature of participants' accounts. The experience of community helped them develop their feminist consciousness, politics, values and arguments. It provided an environment in which to pursue serious, informed exploration of feminist ideas, in contrast to the wider society where 'new feminist visibilities' (Gill, 2016) co-opt the language and concepts of feminism while expressing anti-feminist sentiments. Feminist communities can provide a network of like-minded individuals who come together inspired by shared values and dissent from cultural gendered norms. Participants, like Emma (who identified as white and straight), reflected on the value of "finding a group of people that you can talk to and communicate with, that is just a lovely thing, you can't put a price on that, I think that's really nice and having that community". Jess, a black, straight woman valued the fact of the network "just being there and feeling there's other people who feel like I do, and think like I do, that goes a long way, for me. Just that backing, I guess." For Lucy, a white lesbian, the action-orientation of her feminist community provides what she calls a "safe haven"; she notes "although you're sort of moaning about all these issues you feel

there are people who are being positive and saying 'right, we do need to address this' and trying to do things about this."

Finding like-minded individuals plays an important role in validating one's subjectivity, including one's values and politics, which might be particularly longed for after the common experience of being a solitary 'feminist killjoy'. Katie was not alone among our sample in feeling solitary in her feminist identification before she came to university when she spoke of her first encounter with the feminist society:

> 'it was so interesting meeting other people who have the same views as you. And a lot of the time, especially before university, because obviously not that many people before the age of 18 class themselves as feminist, I possibly felt as though I was the only one [laughs]. And obviously it's, it's so lovely to meet these other people who have the same views as you and sort of understand your views and you're not alone in thinking that women and men are equal. It's really great to have people that you can talk to about these things and have these discussions about what so interests me and what obviously so interests other people. And it really, sort of, liberates your views and makes you look on a much wider scale of feminism.'

Rowe (2008: 57) describes this search for such connections as a 'yearning': 'each yearning arises from the author's desire to constitute her humanity.' This mutual validation can generate a sense of solidarity and, for some, such as Laura, a new experience of close relationships with women:

> 'So it's been finding women that I can relate to and who aren't going to grind me down in a popularity contest has been a revelation. That's something that I've really enjoyed about [the feminist society].'

While friendships were not an *essential* part of their feminist communities for all our participants, for some, the intersection of their activism and their friendships was an important experience. For example, Emma described an early encounter with what became her feminist network:

> 'I'd just moved to [city] and I didn't really have a group of friends so I met these girls and then I suppose the turning

point in my friendships with them was the SlutWalk – and it was a day like this [good weather], and we went and we made banners up at [neighbourhood] Park, and we had a barbecue and it was just really nice and really cool and we were just hanging out and talking with people who didn't care that I questioned things, and valued that in fact.'

Some participants reflected on these connections as life-enhancing. For example, Julie expressed this in her sense of validation when she found a group of people "who feel the same way about these things as me … It is really, really cool and totalling expanding my life and my knowledge." Feminist communities then, provide important affective benefits of validation, mutual care and friendship. They also enable members to expand their knowledge, understanding and skills, as we discuss in the following section.

Personal development in feminist student communities

Experiencing a feminist student community can provide a valuable opportunity for personal and intellectual development. Participants told us about several positive outcomes: improved self-confidence; enhanced powers of analysis and criticality; greater understanding of the complexities of feminist theory and politics; honed skills in arguing and debating. A very strong theme was the value of argument. In a society which has historically constructed the public domain, political engagement and the art of rhetoric as male (see Beard, 2014), there is a long history to women's silencing in the public sphere. This history clearly impacts on women even in education and even in the 21st century. It was not uncommon for participants to describe feeling close to tears when arguing with passion, a feeling that inhibited their engagement. Others described themselves as feeling unable to articulate an argument and learning from others whom they had encountered in feminist communities.Participants in our research valued the opportunity to engage in rhetorical debate, in order to develop their own understanding and powers of argumentation. For example, Ursula, a white, straight woman, reflecting on being part of a feminist society, said:

'For me it's a really important non-judgemental environment and you can say what you think about feminism, challenge, be challenged, but do so in a comfortable environment.'

A common outcome of engaging in such environments is that students feel bolstered in their feminist views; the combination of being validated by like-minded people and learning more about feminism strengthens their confidence in their politics. Liz, a white, straight woman, reflected on how engagement with a feminist community has strengthened her resolve to say the 'unsayable':

> 'So all of those kinds of issues I think I, I've become more interested in, and less, maybe, frightened to say so as well. Because I think there was a tendency for me when I spoke to people, which was quite rarely, about feminism, because I didn't have a feminist friendship group at all, to be quite careful about what I said for fear of being branded a little bit extreme or off my rocker type thing. And now it's a lot more like I don't mind talking to people about rape statistics, prevention, intervention and consequences and all those things. So I'm not so concerned about whether people think it's appropriate or not.'

Practising the art of argument develops a range of skills, which doubtless have an impact beyond their engagement in feminism. Several participants believed their ability to articulate their arguments had improved. For example, Katie said

> 'I feel as though I can explain what I think a lot better now. Before I came to university I was just like, well you know, women and men are equal and if people were like, well what do you mean by that or what d'you think about this? I was just like, well, I know what I mean but I can't really explain it. And I feel as though my thoughts are a lot more coherent now, with everything to do with feminism I think my views are possibly clearer than they were. So it has developed in that sense I think … before university I would just get angry and be like well you're wrong! But yeah, now I'm a lot more able to argue my point.'

Discussion

Feminist communities, then, serve an important role in the struggle against GBV. They provide a network of like-minded individuals who, in their mutual validation and support, generate a collective voice that challenges GBV, among other forms of sexism, misogyny

and oppression. They provide a testing ground for exploring and developing new ideas, values, and politics, as well as for practising the skills of argument and debate. These are precious sites of resistance for young women students, providing a 'safe haven' from mainstream society which can disparage, demean and objectify them. Such sites provide an opportunity for young women students to find their voice in resisting GBV on campus and beyond. In the flurry of activity at governmental and institutional levels, their role in changing cultures should not be overlooked.

However, galvanising the resistance generated in feminist societies presents some particular challenges. Student societies can be short-lived and leave relatively little trace, as most students complete their degree programmes within four years. Few youthful organisations prioritise documenting and recording their activities; their orientation is more likely to be forward-looking than concerned with leaving a legacy for subsequent groups, let alone for researchers to pore over. This chapter and our other work (Marine and Lewis, 2014, 2017; Lewis and Marine, 2015; Lewis et al, 2016) represents an attempt to record student feminist activism, to supplement the mainstream media accounts of feminism which, as Gill (2016) and McRobbie (2009) argue, appropriate feminist concepts and discourse while promoting anti-feminist ideology, distorting the very meaning of 'feminism'. In additional to scholarship, student bodies, such as the National Union of Students, also have an important role to play in recording contemporary student feminism, and ensuring its legacy survives for new generations of students who wish to resist the behaviours, attitudes and cultures associated with GBV.

By nature of their stage in life, student feminists tend to be relatively inexperienced in their feminism. Our observation in this research is that this inexperience was balanced by tremendous enthusiasm, heartfelt commitment to challenging GBV, among other issues, and excitement about the developing feminist communities they were creating. These emerging experiences of feminism as a movement and a community seemed as important as their developing politics of GBV. There was relatively little analysis of the complexities of different approaches to GBV or of the tensions inherent in feminist politics. Perhaps one-off interviews proved inadequate to explore these complexities. Perhaps our participants were keen to present a 'united front', knowing all too well the negative portrayals and stigma attached to feminism. As we discuss elsewhere (Marine and Lewis, 2017), this study suggests that student feminists' engagement with questions of power and difference, especially related to social identity, may be rather limited

in comparison with more established groups of feminists. However, their role in forming feminist communities to challenge cultural and institutional scaffolding of GBV is vital and should not be overlooked by administrators and scholars in their work to dismantle this scaffolding.

Readers may note the lack of racial diversity in the voices represented in this chapter, and indeed, despite extensive efforts to recruit more students who identified as black and minority ethnic (BME) or of colour, we did not accomplish this goal. Given that, with respect to our positionality in this project, we functioned as etic (Creswell, 2013) researchers studying a phenomenon from the outside, we cannot presume that this means that minoritised students are not present or engaged in UK feminist societies or that they are not interested in collective resistance to GBV in universities. However, we can certainly presume that they are under-represented in these groups, as they are in this dataset, and that this lack of representation may reinforce a troubling and persistent concern that feminist communities and organising are often over-focused on white women's interests and concerns. GBV uncontestably affects women of all races, and strong arguments have been advanced that responses to GBV have historically suffered from centring whiteness, reinforcing racialised marginality (Crenshaw 1989). Our failing in this regard reminds us that it is incumbent on white feminists, young and seasoned alike, to consistently self-interrogate, and to examine the communities we create and in which we participate to be more accountable for this erasure.

If universities are serious about preventing GBV and changing the cultures which support it, they also have a role to play in facilitating feminist communities which can resist GBV. In contrast to the 'compliance culture' endemic in higher education institutions (HEIs) more widely, feminist student activism is directed at more profound cultural changes. It is through engagement in feminist communities that student activists develop their individual and collective 'voice' with which to challenge the norms and behaviours which support GBV, through activities designed to change campus cultures. However, the encroaching neoliberalism of HEIs threatens these communities as well as the very institutions of universities. 'Neoliberalism is a value system in which the economic has replaced the intellectual and political and in which the competitive, rational individual predominates over the collective' (Phipps and Young, 2015: 306). As universities are increasingly positioned as 'employability' machines, preparing students for the 'knowledge economy' rather than as sites of intellectual endeavour, and as students, perhaps particularly at non-elite universities, increasingly focus on instrumental education in order to

position themselves for paid work, there is a risk these extra-curricular activities fall by the wayside or become attractive to students only for their CV-boosting potential. These threats come just at the moment when longstanding forms of sexism and problematic masculinity are injected with a new energy by the neoliberal values of individualism, competition, anti-intellectualism, and the commodification of sexual activity. In response, now is the moment for universities themselves, together with feminist scholars, to support the development of grassroots feminist organisations that can play an important part in challenging GBV and creating respectful campus cultures.

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