



## Introduction: Disrupting the Foundations and Our Complicity in Rape Culture

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I would like to begin this issue with a note of discretion. The content of this issue on the critical interventions in rape culture includes a number of pieces that focus on sexual violence. I, therefore, hope readers will exercise caution and care when engaging with these materials. This issue seeks to address how sexual violence is embedded in our institutions, media, government, and familial relationships. In a Canadian context, moreover, sexual violence is also deeply connected to settler colonialism. As a settler in Canada, how can I critically intervene in rape culture when my very existence on this land is without consent? In what systems are we attempting to intervene when we challenge rape culture? Intervention necessarily leaves the structure intact if these interventions do not address settler colonialism. Editing this issue reconfirmed my conviction that processes of decolonization, including attempts to disrupt rape culture, are uncomfortable and unsettling, and have left me with more questions and concerns than can ever fully be answered and addressed. The questions raised in this issue are perpetual, ongoing, and unfinished. In compiling these pieces, I was constantly reminded of the importance of self-reflection and the acknowledgment of my place in the continuing colonization and displacement of Indigenous people in Canada specifically, but also globally. Indeed, I cannot actively disrupt rape culture if I am unable to draw a connection between the stolen land on which I live and the various ways in which people are subjected to sexual violence. I remind myself that my place on this land is born out of that history. Sexual violence against Two-Spirit people and Indigenous women and communities is threaded into Canadian nationhood, though images of Canada as a peacekeeper and the United States' friendly neighbour to the north often overwrite Canada's history of violence. Our current Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, for example, is a self-proclaimed feminist (*BBC News* 2016), but still remains the head of a colonial state that is established upon Indigenous land and resources. The history of violence against Indigenous people is here and it lives on in our present. As many have pointed out, the historical and contemporary acts of sexual violence in Canada are directly related to the establishment of the colonial state, where Aboriginal women as well as Aboriginal people whose gender presentations diverged from European definitions of gender were framed as sexually exploitable and available (Churchill 1997; Hunt 2015; Razack 2000). What does it even mean to be an ally in a world where it is so easy for settlers to forget about our complicity in sexual violence? How do we begin these alliances when our acts of violence are normalized and perpetuated through methods that we are aware of, but so many that we are not? The violence of colonization and how such histories of violence, particularly sexual violence, inform Canada's rape culture are often unspoken histories in contemporary Canadian media and Canadian meta-narratives of violence against women more broadly.

The naming of many who are in prominent positions as perpetrators of sexual violence as well as the #metoo movement and the emerging stories from those who have experienced sexual violence expose what many of us already know: how common acts of sexual violence



actually are. We must, however, go beyond exposing the violence of those in prominent positions, such as actors and government officials, and also consider how families protect perpetrators of sexual violence. The commonality of acts of incestuous violence often goes unnoticed, and as a result, the sexual violence that children experience is not always included in conversations about sexual violence. The home remains a space that is conceptualized as safe for children, and focus is often on violence outside the home, but this elides the ways in which the home, for so many, is a space that is marked by trauma and relationships fraught with tension, uneasiness, and the memories of sexual violence. Narratives of sexual violence are difficult to uncover, but there are narratives that are arguably even more hidden: acts of sexual violence in homes and domestic spaces, schools, and intimate relationships. The threat of “stranger danger” often overwrites the fact that so many who experience sexual violence have been harmed by people they know.

The outpouring of stories by those who have experienced sexual violence illustrates how pervasive this violence actually is, how often it occurs, how these acts of violence are not always initially read as sexual violence, and how speaking of the violence exposes many to experiences of re-victimization and re-traumatization. So many of the pieces in this issue address silence and the experiences of not being believed or not being taken seriously when victims speak about sexual violence. A major difficulty we experienced when publishing this issue was contributors and editors who were unable to participate or continue their participation because it was just too difficult, re-traumatizing, or conjured up various emotions. For this reason, we thank those who contributed but also thank those who didn't, who couldn't, and those who want to engage as well as those who cannot or do not. While silence about sexual violence and how such acts of violence remain unspoken thread many of these pieces together, silence in itself can be agentive and an act of self-care.

I am also acutely aware of the ways in which narratives of sexual violence have been, and continue to be, used against men of colour in order to justify violence towards these men. As Angela Davis (1983) pointed out in the “Myth of the Black Rapist,” framing black men as sexually violent served as a justification for lynching, and it simultaneously framed black women as sexually available to white men. In the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Laura Bush used violence against women as a justification for the war efforts, claiming that Afghan women needed to be saved from the patriarchy in their communities. There is a way that men of colour become framed as threatening and as the perpetrators of violence, particularly sexual violence. In this issue, there are attempts to intervene in rape culture in a way that does not weaponize sexual violence narratives in order to frame men of colour as violent. Moreover, many of the contributors and I are skeptical of the state's participation in meting out “justice” for those who have experienced sexual violence, through incarceration and the prison industrial complex. I have no confidence that the colonial, carceral state is, or will ever be, able to address how sexual violence comes to be produced and reproduced. I am also aware that turning to the state for answers to sexual violence necessitates and reaffirms the power of the colonial state, as Glen Coulthard (2014) argues in *Red Skin White Masks*.

Finally, restorative justice is powerful and we must recognize that while individual acts of violence are often connected to wider systems of violence, such as rape culture, individuals too must be held responsible for their actions. Unfortunately, justice systems are often lenient when acts of sexual violence are brought to trial at all, particularly when perpetrators are white, middle-class males (such as Brock Turner—a white male who was caught sexually assaulting a



woman and only completed half of a six month sentence in jail). In this way, the justice system works to excuse white, middle- and upper-class men from facing repercussions for their actions; as Kiese Laymon (2018) states, “I believe in prison abolition. But I wasn’t sure how fair it was to practice transformative justice on the cisgendered, heterosexual, white, rich male body of someone who’d been granted transformative justice since birth.” While I do not think that imprisonment and the contemporary justice system as it is can make meaningful and significant changes that will challenge and disrupt rape culture, I am hopeful about reimagining how perpetrators of violence can face repercussions for their actions—addressing individual acts of violence while challenging, disrupting, and perhaps overturning rape culture itself.

The contributions to this issue explore how complicated and difficult intervening in rape culture truly is. The issue opens with Alison Carvalho’s poem “Do You Know What It’s like to Love You?.” This poem confronts masculine power dynamics, where those we love can also be those who hurt us. Following on this, the first section of this issue, “**Challenging University Rape Culture**” examines the university as an institution that upholds rape culture and provides a compilation of grassroots challenges to the rape culture of the university. It begins with Margot Francis, Jennica Giesbrecht, Kattawe Henry, and Jessica Turgeon’s piece “Reimagining Gender and Sexual Violence Education from the Margins to the Centre,” which works through the ways in which sexual violence is embedded in our institutions, particularly university spaces. Aline Jesus Rafi and Stacy Harmon’s article, “Sexual Assault Discourse within University Print Media,” explores university spaces, focusing on how student narratives often blame victims or hold victims responsible for their experiences of sexual violence. Next, the Feminist Art Gallery (FAG) of Toronto’s incredible art contribution “#silence=violence OR ... Centuries of Activism Insisting on Justice” uses an installation composed of three murals to critique Ontario universities’ responses to sexual violence on campus. It depicts the work of activists who have brought conversations about gender based violence to the fore, working to change policies.

Priyanka Arora’s poetry, “A Pair of Eyes,” opens the next section, “**Grief, Trauma, and Healing.**” This poem emphasizes the haunting violence of the male gaze, but ends with the speaker asserting their own power over this gaze. Following Arora, Nicolette Little’s piece, “Rape-Related Mourning on a Social Network Site: Leah Parsons’s ‘Facebooked’ Grief and the *Angel Rehtaeh Parsons Page*” uncovers the complex role social media played in the memorialization of Rateah Parsons, who hanged herself after incessant cyber-bullying about her rape. Facebook became a medium for her mother, Leah Parsons, to not only challenge Canada’s rape culture, but also to work through her trauma. Heather Prost also explores the complexities of the trauma of violence in “Crystallized Tent” through her use of visual erasure poetry to heal and reclaim her memories. Poetry is also the medium of Andrea Lohf’s piece, “Bodily Violence: Deciphering Audience in Rape Culture,” which explores how poetry and song can be utilized for healing and refuting victim blaming. Next, in “Caught Between Voices, Caught Between Pages: Considering Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak* as a Pseudo-Feminist Text,” Marybeth Ragsdale-Richards analyzes the text *Speak*, which focuses on the trauma and social isolation of the protagonist who experienced an act of sexual violence. Ragsdale-Richards argues that the text itself reaffirms patriarchal structures even as it attempts to subvert them. Nikki A. Basset’s work, “A Case Study in Detroit: Can the Criminal Justice System Hold Space for All Victims of Sexual Assault?” analyzes Detroit’s untested rape kits and how they reproduce rape myths about what is considered “rape.”



Finally, the last section, “**Intersectional Perspectives**,” begins with Andrea Anderson’s poem, “The Forgotten Ones,” which builds on a rich intersectional tradition to delve into how Black women’s experiences of racism and sexism place them in a particularly vulnerable position where they are left out of conversations about sexism (which often center white women’s voices) and racism (which often center the voices of Black men). This poem is followed by Travis Hay’s article, “Tracing the Transit of Empire: ‘Mohawk Warriors’ and ‘Iraqi Insurgents’ in Canadian Newspapers,” which analyzes the ways in which depictions of men of colour as violent, particularly toward women, helped to justify colonial and imperial violence in both the Oka Crises and during the Iraq Insurgency. This section and issue ends with the poem “Colouring Resistance: A Reflection on Art and Activism” by Binish Ahmed who reminds us that there are always those who resist violence through art and other forms of activism.

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