

# **“I would like it if some of our tuition went to providing pepper spray for students”: University Branding, Securitization and Campus Sexual Assault at a Canadian University**

Mandi Gray and Laura Pin  
York University

## **Abstract:**

This is a case study of the response to sexual assault at a major Canadian university, York University. Despite extensive security upgrades and educational resources in response to growing concern about sexual assault on campus, it is demonstrated that York University’s policy and procedures provide little meaningful support to university community members impacted by sexual assault. It is argued that current responses to sexual assault at York University rely almost exclusively on prevention strategies and securitization of the campus. Such responses depend on rape myths perpetuating the false notion that strangers, who are non-students, are most likely to commit sexual assault in public spaces on campus. The analysis further examines the relationship between the neoliberal marketization of universities and institutional responses to campus sexual assault. While York presents their responses as “survivor-centric,” security-centred responses are strategically mobilized as a means to further the university brand.

## **Introduction**

This paper is a case study of York University, a large post-secondary campus located in Toronto, Ontario. Within the last ten years, York University and affiliated student groups have taken numerous steps to address sexual violence<sup>1</sup> on campus (Brewer & Sami, 2016; Ikeda &

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of simplicity, we have opted to utilize the definition of sexual violence utilized by York University. Sexual violence is a broad term that describes a sexual act or act targeting a person’s sexuality, gender identity or gender expression that is committed, threatened or attempted against a person without their consent. This includes sexual assault, sexual

Rosser, 2010; Laidlaw, 2013; METRAC, 2010; Shoukri, 2015). This has included a safety audit by a not-for-profit anti-violence organization, hiring a full-time sexual assault educator, expanding security staff on campus, creating a smartphone app for instant security notifications, installing additional closed circuit television (CCTV) video surveillance, expanding safe walk programs, direct security phone lines and a student-levy-funded peer-led helpline. In 2015, the authors became intimately engaged with the sexual assault policy at York University when another PhD student was charged with, and later convicted of, sexual assault (Hoffman, 2015a; Hoffman, 2015b). Despite the extensive security upgrades and educational resources on campus developed as a response to sexual assault, the authors learned firsthand that York University's policy and procedures provide little meaningful support to university community members impacted by sexual assault. Our own experiences on campus led us to systematically examine the disconnect at York University between administrative discourses concerning the university's response to sexual violence and the lived experience of these institutional responses.

Concerns about sexual violence on campus extend far beyond York University. In 2016, the Province of Ontario created Bill 132, which legislates that all post-secondary educational institutions have a stand-alone sexual assault policy among other changes. Unfortunately, Bill 132 does not challenge how universities investigate and respond to sexual assault on campus, perpetuating problematic assumptions about, and responses to, sexual assault. In this article, we draw on the arguments made by Julie Gregory (2012), and further her discussion of the linkages between neoliberalism, securitization and university branding that occur through institutional responses to sexual assault on campus. We demonstrate how sexual assault at York University is used strategically to protect and enhance

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harassment, stalking, cyber harassment, indecent exposure, voyeurism and sexual exploitation. For more details about how York defines sexual assault, see: <http://safety.yorku.ca/prevention-response-sexual-violence/>.

the university brand and is not “survivor-centric”: rather than challenging dominant rape myths on campus, York University has capitalized upon false assumptions about stranger sexual assault to implement further security measures on campus. York University draws on neoliberal logic and places responsibility upon community members to ensure their own safety, as demonstrated by their latest campaign titled Safer Together. This campaign strategically responsabilizes community members by imploring them to “do their part” to ensure their own safety and the safety of others, while drawing attention away from the lack of procedural infrastructure and support services to support the needs of university community members who experience sexual assault on campus.

### **Method and Methodology**

Our positionality lends immediacy to this research, as we have both experienced institutional responses to sexual assault at York University from different entry points. Utilizing a critical feminist methodological framework, we draw upon our lived experiences not necessarily as the sole site of analysis, but rather as a starting point to understand the complexities of sexual assault prevention and response at York University, and also as a means of “locating the researcher in the research” (du Preez, 2008; Kirby & McKenna, 1989). We rely upon the larger literature on feminist methodology that begins with the everyday experiences of people’s lives to examine complex social structures (Smith, 1990). Our own lived experiences and knowledge of the experiences of sexual assault among the York University community is what led us to explore institutional responses to sexual violence. Since initially meeting in March 2015, we have worked and organized with students and faculty who have experienced sexual assault on campus at universities across Canada.

It is our personal experiences that allowed for the disjuncture between official institutional discourses and what is actually happening “on the ground” to emerge. We draw upon several additional sources for our analysis including security bulletins,

meeting minutes and public statements from the university. We also incorporate qualitative responses to a survey<sup>2</sup> we conducted in early 2016, examining undergraduate students' knowledge of sexual assault resources at York University, specifically drawing on student responses to an open-ended question soliciting suggestions as to how York University could address sexual assault on campus. In summary, using York University as a case study, we argue that the university is able to capitalize on misconceptions about sexual assault to legitimate strengthening the security apparatus on campus as its primary response to sexual assault.

### **Sexual Assault on Campus and Neoliberal Responses to Violence Against Women**

Canadian feminist activists and academics have identified sexual assault on campus as a site of concern for decades (Bumiller, 2008; Ikeda & Rosser, 2010; Senn, 2011; Senn et al., 2014; Sheehy & Gilbert, 2015). However, it was not until relatively recently that the prevalence of campus sexual assault has been constructed as a serious social problem in Canada largely due to media investigations (Mathieu & Poission, 2014a; Mathieu & Poisson, 2014b; Ward, 2015), feminist activism (Ikeda & Rosser, 2010), independent reports and position papers (Gunraj et al., 2014; LaLonde, 2014) and, the emergence of campus security audits (METRAC, 2010). In response, the Province of Ontario implemented Bill 132. Bill 132 requires all post-secondary campuses in Ontario to have a stand-alone sexual assault policy in effect by January 1, 2017. More specifically, the legislation requires 1) all post-secondary institutions to provide a

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<sup>2</sup> In January and February of 2016, we administered a survey to undergraduate students in lecture and tutorial. The survey was intended to examine students' knowledge of sexual assault resources on campus and perceptions of campus safety. A total of 413 surveys were administered. Surveys that were more than 50 percent incomplete were eliminated, resulting in the removal of 7 surveys for a total sample of 406 surveys. For more information about the survey, please see Gray & Pin, 2016.

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policy that outlines the institutional response to sexual assault; 2) student consultation for policy development and review to occur, which must be repeated every three years; and finally, 3) the collection of data relating to support services, accommodations and programs specific to sexual assault. Bill 132 also requires that universities report sexual assault statistics publicly and provide information pertaining to the effectiveness of their policy.

Growing recognition of the prevalence and consequences of sexual assault on campus by the provincial government and university administrators seems encouraging. However, from our experience advocating for substantial structural changes at York University regarding sexual assault policies and procedures (and lack thereof), we have little hope for a response to sexual assault outside of the neoliberal logic of risk management, safety audits and securitization. These responses to sexual assault are particularly attractive to university administrators because they are highly visible and provide a tangible way for universities to create a perception that they are taking action to prevent and respond to sexual assault (Gregory, 2012; Ikeda & Rosser, 2010).

Women have a unique relationship to securitization. However, until relatively recently, a majority of the research within the anti-security literature did not utilize gender as an analytical lens to examine how security differentially impacts women (Hall, 2004; Glasbeek & Van der Meulen, 2014). Women are more likely to report fear of crime and are more likely to modify their behaviour due to these fears in comparison with men (Glasbeek & Van der Meulen, 2014). Women's experiences and fears of sexualized violence are categorically different from men's, resulting in unique consequences in the lives of women (Campbell, 2005, p.120). Private security firms, not-for-profit organizations and research centres have capitalized upon "women's fears by commodifying safety in the form of gadgets, alarms, and workshops that socialize women to be ever more fearful" (Hall, 2004, p.4). We have seen this emerge on campuses across Canada in the form of safety apps, bystander intervention training and safety audits,

contributing to a developing “campus sexual assault industry.” These interventions also promote the responsabilization of individual university community members through messages that encourage them to take action to ensure their own safety and the safety of their community.

Marketed interventions rely heavily upon perpetuating rape myths while minimizing the larger social and historical context that perpetuates the subordination of women in Canadian society and, more specifically, in university institutions. Dominant cultural rape myths include male sexual aggression is natural, inevitable or not the offender’s fault when intoxicated; sexual force without “violence” or perpetrated by dates and intimate partners is not a real crime; and women contribute to their own victimization through reckless behaviour or failing to resist effectively (Weiss, 2009). Alex Campbell (2005, p.120) states that there is a relative absence of public and institutional discourse acknowledging that intimate partners or acquaintances commit the majority of sexual assaults. These omissions in institutional discourses enable universities to capitalize on the widespread acceptance of stranger assault as the most common form of sexual assault. This emphasis on stranger assault provides the opportunity to market prevention paraphernalia and new forms of surveillance, which serve as a highly visible – and commodifiable – responses to sexual assault on campus (Campbell, 2005; Gregory, 2012).

The response to sexual assault on Canadian university campuses mirrors the relationship that has emerged between the state, neoliberalism and legal responses to sexual assault. Kristen Bumiller (2008) has argued that feminist discourses and activism have been incorporated into the regulatory and criminal justice apparatus. High-profile sexual assault cases provide the state an opportunity to demonstrate to the masses that sexual violence is taken seriously, and to reassure the anxious public of their ability to protect citizens (Bumiller, 2008, p.10). At the state level, increased policing and more rigorous sentencing for sex crimes are marketed as important

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policy responses to sexual violence (Bumiller, 2008). However, such policy changes occur simultaneously with budget cuts to the community-based services necessary to support survivors, including social services such as emergency shelters and access to health care (Bumiller, 2008). Feminist research and activism has been co-opted and commodified by private security companies and university administrations to legitimate policing and securitization as a response to sexual violence, while failing to account for the larger structural inequalities faced by marginalized groups on campuses across Canada. Parallels can be drawn between state responses to sexual assault and university administrators' responses to sexual assault that strategically capitalize on the language of "women's empowerment" and "survivor-centric" (Morrison, 2016; Shoukri, 2015) to further the securitization of campus, while failing to institute adequate policy frameworks, support services or advocacy positions in response to sexual assault.

### **The Neoliberal Campus**

The response of university institutions to sexual violence in Canada needs to be interpreted in the context of broader structural shifts towards the marketization of post-secondary education in Canada. Fuyuki Kurasawa (2002) argues that by the 1980s, the market became the dominant institution governing universities globally. Kurasawa (2002) labels this period as the colonization of the university by the market, which is an ongoing process. A number of scholars have further explored the relation between the political economy, the commodification of knowledge and the rise of market models of post-secondary education organization (Giroux, 2002; Jones & Young, 2004).

This marketization of Ontario universities coincides with a series of well-documented neoliberal<sup>3</sup> policy changes at the provincial and

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<sup>3</sup> By "neoliberal" we mean the extension of market rationalities of governance – competition, cost-efficiency and profitability – into the

federal levels in Canada (for example, Ranson, 2003; Albo, 1993; Siegel, 2006.). In the case of Ontario's universities, this has created a number of specific changes. Provincial funding for post-secondary education has failed to keep pace with inflation, leading to increased reliance on user-fees and tuition chargers. While in 1991, tuition fees comprised 20 percent of university revenue, by 2010 this had increased to 50 percent. This has led to increased competition among universities to attract students to their institution and capture scarce tuition dollars (Pin, Martin & Andrey, 2011). A second consequence of this heightened competition between universities has been the proliferation of administrative bodies designed to organize universities in the model of corporate entities (Giroux, 2002). This has contributed to the development of an apparatus of administrative offices intended to enhance the competitive positioning of individual universities through the demonstration of research competency, institutional effectiveness and student success.

Sexual assault prevention and response occurs within this larger trend of the neoliberalization of the post-secondary sector, including university branding (Gregory, 2012). The university brand refers to its capacity to satisfy students' needs by delivering a certain type of higher education in comparison to other similar institutions (Gregory, 2012). Branding is strategic, aimed at helping potential student recruits make "wise enrolment decisions" (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009, p.85). In an environment of heightened competition for private tuition dollars, the militarization and corporatization of university campuses nationwide is a strategy pursued to strengthen the university brand, through marketing campaigns that promote a public image of universities as bastions of academic excellence, but also locations of a fun and safe post-secondary experience for prospective students (Gregory, 2012). University branding becomes entangled with sexual assault prevention, and the emerging campus sexual

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university institution that had previously been dominated by other logics (Brown 2003).



assault industry is mobilized to further the public reputation of the university as proactive in enhancing student safety and preventing sexual assault (Gregory, 2012). The end result is that the commodification of women's safety from sexual assault works in tandem with the neoliberalization of higher education, as a component of institutional efforts to attract prospective students (Gregory, 2012). It is in this broader social and political context of government funding constraints, hyper-competition and commercial marketing campaigns, that we situate our analysis of sexual assault management at York University.

### **York University: A Case Study**

York University is a compelling case study to examine institutional responses to sexual assault on campus and its relationship to the neoliberalization and securitization of campus spaces. Over the last ten years, York has been at the centre of a number of high-profile sexual assault cases and controversies over "safety" on campus, particularly in relation to sexual assault (Ikeda & Rosser, 2010; Laidlaw, 2013; Hoffman, 2015a; Hoffman, 2015b). In addition, York University is located in the Greater Toronto Area, the region of Ontario with the largest population and the greatest number of post-secondary institutions. Due to the high number of institutions in the region, York is particularly subject to the competitive pressures of the neoliberalized university in attempting to attract and retain students. Moreover, arguably the public image of the institution has been of particular importance to York University in sustaining enrolment levels, as they have had other attempts to grow funding rebuffed by the Ontario government, including attempts to expand graduate enrolment and attempts to establish a medical school (Hui, 2014). The predominant factor in our study of York University, however, is what Stake (2005) calls an "intrinsic case-study": a study of interest to the authors due to proximity, lived experience and subjective interest.

To provide a larger historical, social and political context, we will provide a timeline of events over the last ten years at York University

in relation to sexual assault and increasing the securitization of the campus. York began engaging in public dialogue concerning sexual assault on campus in the late 2000s, in response to a series of high-profile sexual assaults in student residences (Gregory, 2012). In 2008, York University commissioned the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence against Women and Children (METRAC) to conduct a safety audit of campus following incidents of sexual assault and hate graffiti on campus. The mandate of the investigation was to “oversee a safety audit of York’s campuses to improve safety policies, procedures and operations” (METRAC, 2010, p.6). The safety audit utilized a mixed methods approach including interviews with key stakeholders, community consultations, online surveys and a walk-through of the physical environment to identify sites of concern. The safety audit resulted in numerous short-term (one to two years), medium-term (two to five years), and long-term (five years or more) recommendations. The recommendations are categorized as social environment, security services and physical environment. In a press release following the release of the recommendations, York University President Mamdouh Shoukri (2013) states that the major recommendations to be implemented include increasing security patrols, expanding the safe walk program, expanding the mandate of security officers, increasing CCTV cameras, improving exterior lighting and enhancing overall communications around safety.

In 2013, York University struck a Sexual Assault Awareness, Prevention and Response Working Group (herein referred to as the working group) to develop a stand-alone sexual assault policy (Shoukri, 2015). In 2015, the Board of Governors approved the Sexual Assault, Awareness, Prevention, and Response Policy (Shoukri, 2015). After Bill 132 was passed, the policy was revised and interim measures were released in September 2016 with a final draft forthcoming in January 2017. President Mamdouh Shoukri appointed the Senior Executive Officer of Finance and Administration at York University to Chair of the working group. The majority of the other members are from administrative offices including general counsel to the university, manager of

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communications and the office of student-community relations.<sup>4</sup> York University has also appointed a number of undergraduate student representatives to the working group. However, there are no appointees with expertise in sexual violence, despite York University being a major Canadian research university employing many faculty members with extensive publications in the areas of gendered and sexual violence. In fact, only one year after the commencement of the working group there has been no faculty membership at all, and the sole faculty appointee resigned after only a few months on the working group. The preamble to the interim policy appropriates feminist language, stating, “The Guideline reinforces York’s commitment to a survivor-centric and trauma-informed response” (York University, 2016, p. 3). Nevertheless, the overly administrative composition of the working group is particularly telling in terms of overall objectives and scope of the institutional response to sexual assault, placing sexual violence within the purview of finance and public relations, rather than drawing on responses to sexual assault established by feminist activists, scholars and lawyers over the last thirty years.

### **Reliance on Securitization**

Unfortunately, given the contemporary social and political climate, there is little surprise that the overall response to sexual assault on campus is overly reliant upon securitization and risk management. Although York University has given lip service to systemic issues of racism, sexism and other oppressions on campus, their responses have failed to address the needs of people who have experienced sexual assault and avoid making significant structural changes to the general operations of the university (Gray & Pin, 2016; Gregory, 2012; Ikeda & Rosser, 2010). According to Katherine Laidlaw (2013), in response to the METRAC (2010) safety audit, York

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<sup>4</sup> The full list of membership is available on their website: <http://safety.yorku.ca/prevention-response-sexual-violence/policy-and-procedures-development-process/>

University allocated \$1.5 million into increasing campus security. Over the last decade, York University has addressed safety on campus largely through the enhancement of security services and new technological tools (Ikeda & Rosser, 2010; Laidlaw, 2013; York University, 2016). Security measures included hiring a former police officer to improve security officer training, installing 17 new outdoor emergency phones, launching a smartphone app, the installation of 220 new CCTV cameras (for a total of over 600 cameras on campus), and hiring a former naval commander with the Canadian Forces to improve security (Laidlaw, 2013; York University Security Services, n.d.). At the time of the METRAC Safety Audit (2010), York Security Services staff consisted of twenty-four security officers, twenty-two property watch officers and five campus relations officers (p.29). Five years after the publication of the safety audit, the CBC reports that York University employs seventy-five security officers (Hoffman, 2015). Increased security staff is an effort to “improve campus patrols, night time coverage, response time to calls and special events (such as pub nights)” (Ikeda & Rosser, 2010, p.47). Beyond hiring additional personnel, York Security Services released a security application that can be downloaded onto smart phones to receive immediate security notifications (METRAC, 2010; York University Security Services, n.d.).

Securitization on campus has become a commodity marketed to students as a demonstration of genuine attempts to ensure the safety of community members on campus. Securitization efforts also include attempts to ground safety in individual responsibility and hyper-vigilance. York University recently launched the Safer Together campaign. In a media release from September 15, 2016, York University administrators outlined the need for community members to take responsibility to “play a role” by actively contributing to a safe campus as underscored in York’s message of “Safer Together.” This was followed by a list of services that community members could utilize to fulfill their responsibilities as an engaged community member:

We encourage you to utilize our services to address your safety needs including goSAFE to assist you with safe travel in the evening, safety audits, and personal safety planning to support physical and personal safety needs. You can also download the York Mobile Safety app, which offers many helpful tools and resources. A complete list of Community Safety services is available on our website. (Brewer & Sami, 2016)

The notification continues to advertise the availability of immediate safety updates available through the safety app, LCD screens on campus and the PA system (Brewer & Sami, 2016). The Safer Together campaign roots safety from assault in preventative acts undertaken through risk-management by prospective victims. In addition, it fails to communicate student support services or mechanisms to report incidences of violence or harassment.

It is not surprising that securitization is the primary response to sexual assault on campus – such requests are made by community members who truly believe that sexual assaults are committed most often by strangers, in dimly lit public spaces on campus. In our 2016 survey of undergraduate students, research participants frequently identified increasing security and policing on campus as strategies to address campus sexual assault. Included below is a selection of comments representing this perspective:

“Definitely not a safe campus by any means, especially in the evenings, more security would likely improve the situation and decrease incidents of sexual assault” (woman, fourth-year student).

“Campus needs better lighting at night and more security walking around” (woman, first-year student).

“Seems like this happens frequently, identify areas of concern and possibly more security measures” (woman, fifth-year student).

“By getting police officers into lectures and talking about real life sexual assaults that occur on a daily basis” (man, first-year student).

“Have police patrol the campus. York Security does not cut it” (man, fourth-year student).

“Increase level of security on campus. Make them more accessible at all hours” (woman, third-year student).

Survey responses suggest that undergraduate students rely primarily upon rape myths to guide their decision-making process about how sexual assault should be responded to on campus. Further to this point, Richard Francki, the former naval commander hired to improve security, noted that increasing the number of security phones on campus is unnecessary, however, because “the community is asking for them,” and because the security phones are a symbolic gesture of ensuring that “the community feels more comfortable” (Laidlaw, 2013, p.72). Policy by public opinion in regards to sexual assault benefits the institution and does very little to prevent or respond to the realities of sexual assault on campus. Symbolic responses in the form of branded rape whistles and smartphone apps allow the university to further their brand under the guise of responding to sexual assault on campus, a growing social concern on Canadian campuses. In the time since York University has implemented increased securitization measures on campus, there is no indication that there has been a reduction in the number of sexual assaults on campus. Moreover, securitization perpetuates the myth that “stranger danger” is most persistent form of sexual assault among university students, when this actually counts for a small minority of sexual assaults.

### **Rhetoric and Reality: York’s Response to Survivors**

Despite the focus on securitization and prevention, and increased spending by York University on related initiatives, the current management of sexual violence by the university leaves much to be desired. York’s approach emphasizes managing the university’s

external image, and fails to provide people who have experienced sexual assault with the information, support and services required to successfully continue their education. To detail this point, we will focus briefly on two examples: a failure to create a stand-alone sexual assault office, and the continued use of an adversarial model to address sexual violence complaints. While York has sought to project a public image of an institution that is responsive and proactive in addressing sexual violence, most existing initiatives focus on public relations, rather than the creation of the institutional infrastructure necessary to properly address sexual violence.

In response to repeated calls from student activists who have experienced sexual violence, in October 2016, York University announced that they had created a Sexual Violence Response Office (SVRO). A stand-alone SVRO is an important step in responding to sexual violence on campus, because it creates a single point of contact for people who experience sexual assault to access services provided by staff knowledgeable about the dynamics of sexual violence. As outlined in the ongoing human rights complaint against York University, the necessity of reporting sexual assault in multiple places, to multiple parties, who may or may not have the capacity to respond adequately to disclosures, is a major barrier to reporting sexual assault at York University. Despite the promise of an SVRO, York's implementation of the office has left a number of concerns unaddressed. First, the SVRO continues to be housed in the administrative office of Student Community Relations and governed by the Student Code of Conduct. By placing the SVRO within the office of Student Community Relations, the administration fails to acknowledge that sexual violence is unlike any other infraction in the Student Code of Conduct, which includes minor issues such as "making or causing excessive noise" (York University, Student Rights & Responsibilities, n.d., p.7). Moreover, the current interim sexual assault policy calls for the office to be staffed by Residence Life Coordinators afterhours. Residence Life Coordinators are wholly inappropriate to staff an SVRO, as they are undergraduate students

with very limited experience and training in responding to sexual violence.

Second, the university continues to use an adversarial tribunal model to determine the legitimacy of reports of sexual violence. This same tribunal model, consisting of a student, an administrator and a faculty member, is used to adjudicate other Student Code of Conduct violations. Tribunal members have no expertise in the systemic dynamics of sexual violence, nor individual responses to trauma. In addition, as an adversarial process, the tribunal relies on discrediting one complainant through aggressive cross-examination tactics, which are often lengthy and take place in the absence of any legal representation for complainants. Finally, while provisions have recently been made for complainants to make their initial testimony separately from their assailant at the tribunal, the latter steps of the tribunal process often require a victim to share space with their assailant. The re-traumatizing consequences of this model of “justice” are well documented in literature concerning sexual assault and the Canadian judicial system, which also uses an adversarial approach. Nevertheless, many students are forced into the tribunal adjudication process, as it is the primary mechanism through which they can appeal for safety measures to separate themselves from their assailant on campus.

Both the SVRO and the adversarial tribunal process demonstrate the limitations of York’s response to sexual assault on campus. While extensive campus resources are dedicated to enhancing security measures on campus, as well as flashy prevention campaigns, there is a lack of institutional infrastructure to deal with sexual assault complaints on campus. The SVRO and tribunal process are designed to minimize the cost of responding to sexual violence for the university, by piggy-backing on existing administrative offices and mechanisms of conflict resolution. The SVRO and tribunal process satisfy York’s obligations regarding Bill 132 to have a policy and procedure for dealing with sexual assault on campus. Nonetheless, the result is that the changes necessary to make these resources truly



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“survivor-centric” are deemed too costly to the university, changes such as creating a fully staffed SVRO available to all York community members, or replacing the adversarial tribunal model with an investigative approach facilitated by an independent third party with expertise in sexual violence. The current approach of securitization and public relations campaigns minimizes the costs of responding to sexual violence for York, while serving as a highly visible marker of university action concerning sexual violence. This approach is not merely ineffective in supporting people who have experienced sexual violence on campus, but it also plays into harmful racial stereotypes regarding the community surrounding York, as discussed in more detail below.

### **Race, Space and Sexual Assault at York University**

Sexual assault response and prevention cannot be separated from race and space. Race, space and sexual assault are consistently linked when discussing the issue at York University, specifically in reference to York University’s geographical location due to racist, xenophobic and colonial assumptions about the neighbouring Jane-Finch community. The Jane-Finch community is characterized as low-income, highly racialized and has been designated a “priority area” by the City of Toronto (Ikeda & Rosser, 2010; City of Toronto, 2006). Place becomes race geographically producing and sustaining unequal social relations and racial hierarchies (Razack, 2002). In this context, the university is a site of modernity and progress whereas the neighbouring community represents pre-modernity, poverty and disorder. Racial projects are developed and sustained through a wide number of material and symbolic practices (Razack, 2002, p.7). York University engages strategic and ongoing colonization of the surrounding neighbourhood to disconnect itself from the Jane-Finch community but also strategically scapegoat incidents of sexualized violence onto the community. In 2007, Anthony Perruzza, a city councillor for the community, sought to rebrand the Jane-Finch community as York University Heights in an effort to change the stigma of the community as one that is violent and crime ridden (Ceita, 2012, p.5). Perruzza argued that a re-branding would bring the

community and the university together to “fight the neighbourhood’s reputation for violence and hopelessness” (Ceita, 2012, p.33). The City of Toronto now references the community as “University Heights,” demonstrating the lengths the university will go to control the public image, and minimizing its close proximity to the Jane-Finch community while subsequently furthering the governance and surveillance of community members.

Most recently these assumptions were articulated and perpetuated by *Toronto Life* in an infamous article titled “Fortress York.” In the piece, York University was characterized as a “hunting ground for sexual predators” (Laidlaw, 2013, p.68). The York University Student newspaper, *The Excalibur*, had perpetuated similar discriminatory portraits of the Jane-Finch community the year before (Sholars, 2012). Outgoing Editor-in-chief, Michael Sholars (2012) wrote:

The problems are coming from the area immediately surrounding our campus, one of the most infamous high-crime areas in the country. The further you live in the Village, the more palpable a risk you take by walking home at night. This problem is compounded several times over if you happen to be female.

Despite ongoing increases to security on campus, students continue to feel unsafe from sexual assault on campus as demonstrated by both the METRAC safety audit and our survey (Gray & Pin, 2016). Ongoing concerns within the York University community manifest in racist, classist and xenophobic assumptions about the Jane-Finch community, assumptions heightened by the university’s securitization approach that emphasizes “stranger danger” and heightened personal vigilance. Sexual assault prevention programs reify assumptions about class, race and sexual assault by perpetuating the historical treatment of white, middle-class women as “uniquely vulnerable,” working in tandem with two other fictions: the black male rapist and the sexually voracious black woman (Hall, 2004, p.4). It is imperative that discussions about sexual assault on campus cannot separate race

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and space from the analysis. Yet surprisingly, a majority of the Canadian literature examining sexual assault on campus is race-neutral and heteronormative, which results in an erasure of the unique experiences of racialized and LGBTQ university community members.

### **Conclusion**

Over the last ten years, York University has made symbolic attempts at combatting sexual assault. Overall, we argue that York University has replicated the attempts of the state to demonstrate that they take sexual assault seriously without addressing the larger structural issues following an assault (Bumiller, 2008). Rather, York University focuses almost solely upon prevention strategies as a means of risk management, but also because such solutions are visible to the public and are demanded by community members despite decades of feminist research on sexual assault challenging security-centred approaches to prevent and respond to campus sexual assault. Prevention responses in the form of lighting, smartphone safety apps and safe walk programs are perceived as effective because they are commensurate with well-established rape myths. They root sexual violence in the construction of the racialized Other, the non-student, who comes to campus for the purpose of sexually assaulting students (Campbell, 2005; Ikeda & Rosser, 2010; Hall, 2004). Feminist language of survivorship and empowerment has been co-opted to further the university brand as demonstrated in the most recent draft of the sexual assault policy at York University. Such discourse furthers the neoliberal logic of university administrators, encouraging students and survivors to take accountability and responsibility to ensure that campus is safe, as demonstrated by the most recent Safer Together campaign launched at York University. While York presents their responses as “survivor-centric,” security-centred responses are strategically mobilized as a means to further the university brand.

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