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In Pursuit of a Theory of Individual and Social Accountability: A Critical Engagement With Responses to Perpetrators of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education

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Abstract

South African universities are in the midst of rising sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In the face of a lack of wider institutional commitment to effectively tackle the issue, we have seen an increase in calls to find, name, punish, shame, and expel perpetrators, that is, offending men. While appropriate at times, we propose that this current response to SGBV in tertiary education runs the risk of unintentionally essentialising problematic constructs of masculinity and, due to changing demographics of universities in South Africa, reproducing problematic colonial ideas of Black African cisgender male sexuality. As queer people, we are deeply aware of the machinery of othering, and that individual and systemic dynamics operate in interdependent ways to structure our personal and social relations. Using reflexive action research and autoethnographic memory work, we locate our own experiences of shame and being shamed, calling for dialogue to move beyond simplistic and individualistic solutions towards a theory of individual and social accountability. We invite SGBV practitioners to come together to think more systemically about the social construction of gender and race, the role of institutional systems and cultures, and pedagogical strategies that could bring male perpetrators into a relationship of engagement towards rehabilitation, change, and growth.

Keywords: violence, shame, masculinity, colonialism, autoethnography

Introduction

South African universities are in the midst of a rising tide of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV),[3] leading to a sense of urgency (Ebrahim, 2023)—even panic. SGBV manifests itself in obvious and more insidious ways in different spaces within tertiary settings. Judith Butler's (1990) concept of *normative violence* frames SGBV as driven by wider social, historical, and political gender norms that render the lives of women (cisgender and transgender)[4] and other marginalised identities, such as "effeminate" men (cisgender and transgender), as precarious. The concept also highlights that not all instances of SGBV are physical and that it can manifest in more nuanced ways that are often considered "harmless," "playful," or even "normal." SGBV thus includes a range of acts in various spaces as part of the SGBV landscape in universities: sexual abuse during student parties, rape in residence bedrooms, catcalling in corridors, inappropriate comments in lecture rooms, undermining in boardrooms, inappropriate comments about bodies in social spaces, commentary on clothing, and negotiating sex for marks in offices. The perpetrators of SGBV are overwhelmingly cisgender men, although there are, no doubt, instances of female and queer perpetrators.

Against this backdrop, we have observed a justifiable urgency on the part of many activists to address SGBV in universities. In the face of a lack of wider institutional commitment to effectively tackle the issue, we have seen an increase in calls to find, name, punish, shame, and expel perpetrators, that is, offending (primarily cisgender) men. While this may be entirely appropriate in some (even many) cases, we appeal, in this paper, for recognition that this current response to SGBV in tertiary education runs the risk of essentialising problematic constructs of masculinity and, due to the changing demographics of universities in the South African context, reproducing problematic colonial ideas of Black African cisgender male sexuality.

We acknowledge this argument will be triggering for many readers, especially when, as we write this, horrific cases of SGBV continue to emerge—energising a sense of urgency and action. We ask that the reader considers this article as an invitation to dialogue around a more complex and intersectional view of men, masculinity, and race; parse out the different SGBV dynamics to reflect the complexity we believe is present; recognise that gender and power are socially re/produced in specific organisational settings and are therefore amenable to change; reflect on the raced nature of SGBV responses; and dynamically explore our instinct to seek out and expel the "monstrous other." We hope to create a "bigger container" for

[3] We mostly use the acronym SGBV unless a source uses GBV.
[4] Cisgender is a term that reflects congruence between sex assigned at birth and gender identity; transgender is an umbrella term for a diverse spectrum of people who have a gender identity and/or expression that does not correlate with sex assigned at birth.

collegial dialogue around these dynamics. This is a risky venture, but one we believe is necessary—ethically, intellectually, and programmatically.

Location and Positionality

We are two White queer social justice-oriented psychologists working broadly in the fields of sexuality and gender and, more particularly, in the space of SGBV in South African higher education settings. As observers of, and participants in, a community of practice of SGBV and gender practitioners, we seek to critically reflect on current institutional responses to cisgender male perpetrators of various forms of SGBV in university settings.

In this article, we use a collaborative autoethnographic approach, locating our joint exploration in our identities and practices as critical gender (and SGBV) researchers, teachers, and practitioners in the everydayness of gender work. As queer people, we are deeply aware of the machinery of othering, and that individual and systemic dynamics operate in interdependent ways to structure our personal and social relations. Our response is also informed by our position as psychologists, which means that we are invested in understanding (not to be mistaken with condoning) behaviour and supporting transformation at the micro level. As critical psychologists, we seek to understand individual behaviour at the micro level as mediated by wider social, political, and historical macro factors. In this paper, we want to ask deep and critical questions about how gender practitioners can position themselves, ask new questions, and navigate new ways to think about SGBV in their practice with particular reference to notions of the other—the (Black/cisgender) man as perpetrator.

Framing Our Questions

The impetus for this paper is a tension we have both been grappling with. We both agree with the following set of concerns raised in the SGBV practitioner space (McCain, 2022):

- Perpetrators are not being caught, and victims are under-supported or left with ongoing trauma (Venter, 2022).
- When alleged perpetrators are charged, finding them guilty is difficult (given evidence thresholds and the requirements of due process) and is a long, slow, and difficult journey (so due process may inadvertently privilege the rights of perpetrators over victims).
- Perpetrators may intimidate their accusers to withdraw their allegations.
- Perpetrators may be protected by seniority or their social capital networks.

While we acknowledge these concerns and agree that justice for victims of SGBV is paramount, we are troubled by a concurrent (if not related) set of ideas/practices that seems to be arising in relation to addressing SGBV in the university context:

- There is little distinction made between types of perpetrators and forms of perpetration; even though most acts of SGBV have common roots, they are not the same and may require different approaches.
- Perpetrators are often regarded as irredeemable and viewed as in need of severe punishment including expulsion and public naming and shaming, that is, cancel culture.
- All victims/survivors are assumed as wanting the same outcome of reporting their experience of abuse, that is, naming, shaming, and expulsion of the perpetrator.
- Expulsion and exclusion of perpetrators is a form of purging of the "bad," with the fantasy that such actions leave the institution "cleansed" of the bad and able to move forward with equanimity.
- Perpetrators are collectively constructed as the monstrous other, as though their "toxic masculinity" is innate and universal.
- Although perpetration is not informed by race, increasingly Black cisgender men seem to be on the receiving end of SGBV interventions. Ratele (2013) contended that Black men appear to be simultaneously positioned as hegemonic and subordinate—to be both feared and humiliated.
- Many perpetrators are often offered the opportunity to leave an institution before being found guilty and so go on to perpetrate in other spaces (for example, other universities or organisations) without consequences.

The tenuous question we sit with is this: "How can we acknowledge that justice for victims, mostly women, of SGBV is paramount without demonising male perpetrators and individualising and essentialising their "evil masculinity." We are concerned that by locating the cause of SGBV in a number of individual (often Black) cisgender men, SGBV practitioners lose the opportunity to think systemically about the social construction of gender and race, the role of institutional systems and cultures, and to bring male perpetrators into a relationship of engagement towards rehabilitation, change and growth, and possible reintegration.

We are further interested in the psychological functions of shaming or cancelling the perpetrator (for the shamer and for the shamed) and how shame may serve to alienate (alleged) perpetrators, absolving institutions and practitioners from deeper self-reflection and introspection, thereby not preventing further harmful acts by engaging in wider systemic and pedagogical transformation.

Noting the prevalence of SGBV during colonialism and apartheid (Britton, 2006), we are also interested in asking about the imagining of perpetration in post-apartheid South Africa as something inherent to Black cisgender men. Although likely to be unintentional in many instances, we are concerned that colonial

tropes of the sexually aggressive Black man lurk in our imaginations, and that our responses serve to reinforce these tropes.

And finally, recent developments have contributed to notions of young women as inherently vulnerable, rendering them infantilised and stripped of agency. These revolve around changes to the Sexual Offence and Related Matters Amendment Act (van Rooyen, 2022), in terms of which women under the age of 25 at a tertiary institution are now deemed "vulnerable," along with other people such as children and people with disabilities. Now defined as vulnerable, if they present to any person at a university and report an alleged rape or sexual assault, the person they report to has a legal duty to immediately report this to the police, irrespective of the wishes of the complainant. Failure to report can lead to a fine or imprisonment. While the motives are understandable—to find a way to close the door on SGBV and perpetrators evading justice—the means are, in our view, problematic. It is a heavy-handed response to a complex social problem.

Queering Our Analytical Lens

Recently, the queer poet Andrea Gibson (2023) posted against cancel culture on Facebook, arguing that their queerness is a key reason for their perspective on the issue. Ironically, in this post they argued: "Cancel culture reminds me of homophobia, in that it demands that we do not love certain people or that we not be public about loving those people" (Gibson, 2023, no timestamp). They further argued that their queerness has taught them:

> Believing in someone does not mean you believe they are incapable of harm. Having compassion for someone who has made cruddy choices doesn't equal a lack of compassion for the folks who were hurt by those choices. Loving people is never wrong, having compassion for someone is never wrong. (Gibson, 2023, no timestamp)

And they argued that queer people know this, and proposed that this is why "most of the most impactful voices speaking up against the downfalls of cancel culture right now are queer" (Gibson, 2023, no timestamp).

As queer persons with deep insights into modes of intersectional discrimination and prejudice, having being the recipients of a form of cancel culture at times in our own lives, we are deeply mindful of the pitfalls in the endeavour of publicly shaming people or rendering them as lives less liveable (Butler, 2011). Having been forced into the margins of society and rendered invisible by a violent gender binary, we propose that in a context of a post-#MeToo world, the binaries of good and evil are even starker. Anyone who reports SGBV is to be uncritically believed, due process is often considered a hindrance to justice, and the guilty must be damned and cast out of society. Indeed, there is a sense that one must fall in line and

collude with ideas of banishment, punishment, and vilification or else be labelled and relegated to the category of colluders and apologists. As queer individuals, we believe we must risk troubling the practices of shaming and cancel culture in the university space—and this troubling is the focus of this article.

Article Aims

This article aims to achieve two things. Firstly, it aims to open up for critical analysis the assumption that shaming and cancel culture are appropriate and justifiable responses to SGBV in the university context, and we unpack the role of shame and shaming. Secondly, it aims to invite other SGBV practitioners in the university context to engage in what Freire (1972) referred to as a problem-posing dialogue. Freire argued for pedagogical spaces characterised by dialogue and collaboration that contribute towards a praxis that aims to dismantle oppressive systemic processes. According to Freire, banking education creates pedagogical spaces characterised by mechanical learning, power differentiations, and the ideas of truth and fixed knowledge. We acknowledge the discomfort this article will probably raise, but we appeal to the reader to recognise the pedagogical value of discomfort (Zembylas, 2015), which can inform critical analysis of social practices and create possibilities for transformation (both individual and social). We invite the reader to lean into this discomfort and to continue to engage with the arguments we present in our article and to enter into dialogue with us as we work to address the complex problem of SGBV in our university contexts.

Methodology

This article is the outcome of collaborative "reflexive action research" (Frizelle, 2020, p. 19). Waghid (2002, p. 463) proposed that reflexive action involves a process of "critically examining one's personal and theoretical disposition." This is in line with Freire's (1972) idea of praxis; theoretically infused reflection works to inform personal and theoretical commitments that can "transform critical educational discourse" (Waghid, 2002, p. 463). Reflexive action research falls within the broader methodology of autoethnographic research, which was defined by Starr (2010, p. 2) as a method that generates a "cycle of enlightenment, reflection and action." It achieves this through "a critical process of self-analysis and understanding in relation to cultural and social discourses" (Starr, 2010, p. 2).

To conduct this research, we (Pierre and Kerry) engaged in autoethnographic memory work. To do this, we met online and began dialoguing around several memories of interpersonal engagements that we had witnessed or heard of that were characterised by shame and cancel culture. These memories allowed us to start the process of reflecting on the discomfort we felt about activism in the university context. The collaborative process created a safe space to air concerns that both of us had been harbouring but felt unable to raise due to, ironically, the fear of being publicly shamed and cancelled. We created a space in

which we were able to voice our discomfort, name the tension we were encountering, and start the process of turning to various critical theorists and pedagogues to explore our concerns. It is this deeply collaborative process between us that prevents this research from being nothing more than "evocative naval gazing" (Frizelle, 2020, p. 20), a criticism often raised in response to autoethnographic research. We add another level of engagement to this collective methodology by inviting practitioners doing the labour of SGBV in the higher education context to engage with us and the critical analysis we have entered into in this article. We have, therefore, not chosen to end this article with any direct suggestions for a way forward but rather, with an invitation to a dialogue where these ideas and some tentative suggestions for a way forward can be engaged.

Pathologising Masculinity and Colonising Race

Essentialising and Hegemonic Views of Masculinity

We contend that there is a contradiction (albeit unintentional) that exists in the work of many activists working to address SGBV in universities. On the one hand, we acknowledge that almost all the individuals working in this area would agree that different forms of masculinity are performative and socially and historically produced (Butler, 1990). Yet on the other hand, instances of shaming and punitive responses to SGBV feel like a slide into the belief that perpetrators of violent masculinity are inherently violent—inadvertently essentialising gender and locking men into the category of toxic masculinity.

Ratele (2022, p. 111) reminded us that our emotional lives and what we do as humans are informed by the "permeation of structural power into subjective lives." Ratele was clear that this should not imply a form of social determinism that suggests humans have no agency but rather, acknowledge that human psyches cannot be separated from the workings of the socioeconomic, political, and social context in which they are embedded. As Ratele (2022, p. 111) put it: "A great feat of economically and sexually violent structures is precisely to predispose their victims to hurt each other." If we agree with Judith Butler's (1990) notion of normative violence and how it works to constrain lives, we have to agree that much of SGBV is not driven by inherently evil men, but men who have been immersed in a cultural matrix that is itself violent.

Emerson and Frosh (2001, p. 77) similarly argued that men's engagement in SGBV is driven by "expectations and discourses that configure forms of hegemonic masculinity." They argued that the very norms that are on offer, from which boys are expected to develop a socially acceptable masculinity, are, problematically, the very same norms that drive sexually aggressive behaviours. Thus, Emerson and Frosh raised an interesting dilemma: if sexually aggressive behaviour is entirely the outcome of deviant and pathological individuals, then holding individual perpetrators entirely accountable is appropriate and enough. However, if sexually aggressive behaviour is understood as being "promoted, supported and

maintained by dominant discourses [then] emphasis put on the individual to take responsibility . . . is a way of avoiding challenging the norms" (Emerson & Frosh, 2001, p. 77) and the systems that (re)produce these norms.

We propose that if we take seriously the idea that gender and gendered relations are socially constructed, then we need to rethink how we address perpetrators of SGBV in higher education, and how we engage with men in these spaces. Ratele (2022, p. 113) proposed that dominant feminist pedagogies tend to hold a "shadowy image of men [and] appear to be uncertain of the kind of future it imagines for them." Similarly, Emerson and Frosh (2001, p. 83) argued against a feminism that assumes "an immutable or essentialist male 'common dominating sexuality.'" Instead, Ratele (2022, p. 113) proposed a "loving situated pro-feminist praxis" that recognises that men are gendered and positioned in complex cultural and social relations. Dominant feminist pedagogies offer "no progressive vision of masculinity" (Ratele, 2022, p. 113) which ironically, does very little to develop men towards "profeminist consciousness and practice [that is, men with] a sociopolitical awareness that supports women's feminist struggles and the behaviours that go with such awareness" (Ratele, 2022, p. 109).

The question that remains for us is whether it is in the curriculum, or whether it is through institutional practices and processes that we contribute towards developing socio-political awareness and changed behaviour amongst men. Or do we simply lock men into a perpetrator position that unintentionally maintains the very conditions that drives so much of SGBV?

As Emerson and Frosh argued in relation to SGBV:

> What appears to be lacking here is a theory which simultaneously holds abusing individuals accountable as agents of their own sexually abusing behaviour and at the same time is able to hold society accountable for the ways in which abusive behaviour is promoted, supported and maintained by dominant discourses. (2001, p. 79)

It is this theory that we propose needs to be developed in the South African higher education landscape. From this perspective both women and men (cisgender and transgender) need to be viewed as "appropriate beneficiaries of interventions" (Ratele, 2022, p. 113) and as co-constructors of social relations—mindful that power in these social systems is not evenly distributed. Quoting the work of bell hooks, Ratele argued that patriarchy cannot be dismantled unless men (and we include here men who have been perpetrators) are "offered opportunities to change" (2022, p. 116). What do we do with men staff and students who have perpetrated SGBV? Can a "loving situated pro-feminist praxis," as defined by Ratele (2022, p. 113), be extended towards these men students in how we respond to them when they have perpetrated SGBV? And what might this look like?

In relation to the essentialising of masculinity in relation to SGBV there is also the essentialising of the (mainly) women (cisgender, queer, butch, and transgender) survivors/victims of violence. Amanda Palmer (2023), a musician, explored this complexity in a Facebook post where she engaged with her response to accusations of abuse being levelled against Russel Brand. Palmer was a victim/survivor of SGBV and in her post, she recounted how, during a concert in front of 800 people, she declared that she had forgiven her high school groomer/predator. She described how the room erupted and someone shouted out to her, asking if she was seriously implying that women should forgive their rapists. She again repeated that *she* had chosen to forgive her perpetrator. She wrote the following about her childhood abuser:

> I know enough now about men and their wounds and traumas to know that the poor kid . . . seventeen at the time . . . was just swimming in a sea of unhealed pain. . . . I imagine the same is true of any man who commits sexual violence. (Palmer, 2023, para. 34)

She did *not* advocate for men to be let off the hook but rather hoped that victims/survivors would experience honesty and feel true accountability from perpetrators. She hopes for true understanding from men about the deep and rippling impact their violence causes women and that "maybe then these men can un-lose themselves" (Palmer, 2023, para. 37). She argued that cancelling men like Russel Brand is not the solution but rather, "radical compassion for all beings, always. For Russel, for these women, and all those affected by the endless tendrils of violence" (Palmer, 2023, para. 42). She did, however, call on men to do the work and to be accountable when called out.

What Amanda Palmer was illustrating is that victims/survivors do not all have one, universal, and fixed response to male perpetrators. We have to acknowledge that *some* women in the university context may *not* report their sexual abuse or hold their abusers accountable because they, in fact, do not want to see their abuser cancelled, publicly shamed, or expelled—no matter how jarring or incomprehensible this might be for some activists. Given changes to the South African legislative frame as noted earlier, how do we find the balance between holding perpetrators to account while acknowledging that some women may want justice in the form of a jail sentence whereas others may wish to be able to choose a different path—like restorative justice for example?

Colonial Tropes of Black African Sexuality

As practitioners informed by the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), we argue that the essentialising of masculinity in the ways described above also run the risk, again unintentionally, of reproducing colonial tropes that have essentialised and pathologised cisgender Black men's sexuality in the African context. Lewis (2011, p. 200) problematised the ways in which even seemingly "progressive and compelling accounts" of masculinity within the realm of knowledge production and activism run the risk of reproducing Western-centric essentialist ideas about African sexuality. The reason for this,

according to Lewis (2011, p. 201), is because the legacies of colonial knowledge systems have become entrenched in our imaginations as "normal, neutral, and natural." Quoting Appiah (1992), Lewis (2011, p. 200) argued that what is needed is a process of "discursive space-clearing" to make people aware of how the legacies of colonial knowledge systems have come to saturate how we make sense of the world and social phenomena like gender-based violence.

Lewis (2011, p. 205) warned that "current scholarship and policy-related research on masculinities can covertly reinforce colonial myth-making about the 'essential' nature of African masculinity in influencing, for example, gender-based violence." Lewis was concerned that the work of activists, without even realising it, inadvertently runs the risk of constructing Black African sexuality as particularly aggressive and deviant while inadvertently constructing White Western sexuality as desirable and noble. Gqola (2007) has written about the difficulties of addressing gender-based violence in the South African context because of the legacy of the colonial imagination and its problematic construction of Black African men's sexuality, which it saw as bestial and predatory.

We propose that those of us who are SGBV activists in the university context engage in a process of discursive space-clearing (Lewis, 2011) to courageously interrogate whether we are not unintentionally reproducing colonial tropes in our responses to SGBV in the university setting. One of our particular concerns is that by essentialising Black African men's psychology in the present context of higher education, we are at risk of suggesting that this is a particular problem of Black African men when we know that SGBV is a historic problem involving White men too, and is an issue that has been present in universities as far back as we can imagine. As Britton (2006, p. 145) argued, current gender-based violence is "rooted in the patriarchies of oppression found in colonialism, apartheid and the cold war." Britton saw the patterns of colonialism extending themselves within the apartheid system of White-minority rule, during which the "Afrikaner masculinist identity was protected" (2006, p. 148). How many White men escaped scrutiny around SGBV in universities during apartheid? Are we, again unintentionally, (re)producing a trope of a particularly problematic sexuality of Black men in the current university context against a backdrop of having silenced White men's problematic sexuality in the very same settings, historically?

Relocating the "Monstrous Sexual Predator"

One day, a Black male student who had been accused of sexual harassment asked to see me, Pierre, to understand what had happened and how he should respond. With hindsight and based on hearing the views of the person he had interacted with, he could see that his behaviour would meet the definition of sexual harassment. This was a relatively new experience for me; in previous experiences of sitting on an SGBV hearing panel as an outside "expert" on gender, almost all the men accused of sexual harassment or

assault denied their behaviour. What really struck me about this young man's attitude was his sense of shame and humiliation, his sense of disbelief that this act could have been perpetrated by him. He did try to argue that from the perspective of his upbringing, his conduct was unremarkable, but he could also see that the effect of his behaviour was negative. He wanted to make amends and had made a sincere apology to the woman he approached (which was accepted, and the issue was not taken forward through a sexual harassment process). But he was very burdened by his shame, and almost trapped in it. Although he was only open to this one session, it was clear that he had started a journey of recuperation, of his self and his identity, and was invested in doing better. Without excusing his behaviour, I think what was successful about our interaction was that he could feel my compassion and that I was willing to see that he was more than this transgression. He had work to do—to see how he was the product of a particular set of socially produced ideas.

How do we process shame? Klein (1988) suggested that early life consists of two distinct, but overlapping, developmental psychological positions (or orientations towards the world)—the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions—arrived at through early caregiver experiences. The paranoid-schizoid position is marked by the defences of splitting, introjection, projection, and projective identification, which ensure that others are perceived as part objects, that is, either good or bad objects. In the depressive position, a person is able to perceive the other as a whole, separate object that is both good and bad. Building on Klein's ideas, it can be argued that those who experience shame (a perpetrator, for example) may split off the shame and project it outwards, blaming a victim/survivor, or disowning aspects of the self that are intolerable. Their self is temporarily disintegrated, with negative consequences, yet this can be a survival strategy in the short term.

What of those who do the shaming of others, for example in relationship to alleged or guilty perpetrators of sexual harassment, and wish to see these individuals hounded out of public life? Perhaps they enact the paranoid-schizoid position, seeing the perpetrator as the entirely bad object. In doing so, they are further engaging in the defences of, for example, splitting and projection. In effect, their own bad parts (their shadow side, their moral transgressions, their ambivalence around sex and sexuality) are split off and projected onto the perpetrator.

We hypothesise that if we could adopt the depressive position (based on the developmental state emerging out of our childhoods with significant others), then we would be able to see that not only are perpetrators capable of both good and bad, we would be able to own the fact that their behaviour may, in fact, be a mirror of our own repressed darker impulses or, if you like, the Jungian shadow of social relations. And those who are shamed could, too, be supported to find the depressive position—should their personal and social reintegration be desirable and possible. As May (2017, p. 44) noted, "at its most

unbearable, [shame also] signals loss of all connection to the social order, the ultimate form of separation—social annihilation." I believe what I was able to offer my client was the beginning of social rehabilitation.

Although the shame literature does suggest that, in some instances, shame can have positive outcomes (de Hooge et al., 2018; Stadter, 2011 as cited in May, 2017), a key question remains: "How do we work with the shamed while not making them feel as if they are unredeemable reprobates?" If shame "is a warning that a relationship has been disrupted" (May, 2017, p. 46), how do we rebuild our relationships with the shamed? In sum, how do we activate those fruitful aspects of shame that enable cisgender men to "envision themselves as agents capable of unlearning habits of patriarchal violence" (Antus, 2023, p. 1)? Antus (2023, p. 1) argued that this is only possible if we begin to challenge our cultural representations of men, in particular, "the falsehood that patriarchal violence is committed by deviant monsters and not by 'regular' human men." Perhaps this is what is necessary to shift defensiveness and denial (activated by shame) when confronted, towards acknowledgment and accountability.

In my own (Pierre's) work, as a psychologist, I believe it is necessary for this work of understanding projection and splitting to happen at multiple levels. Firstly, I must own that I too, will engage in these psychological defences. I believe I have engaged in acts of flirting and sexual interest, which, with hindsight, could be read as inappropriate. I failed to own them for a long time and indeed, some of my early SGBV work was informed by a good/evil binary. By acknowledging this, I fall into Klein's (1988) depressive position, which is not always an easy space. Secondly, I believe that the splitting and projection I see in the SGBV practitioner space is to be examined and explored and indeed, this is the key thrust of this paper. This is precarious and delicate work—there is always the risk of presenting the self as the moral superior. And thirdly, I believe there is work to be done with perpetrators of SGBV to invite explorations of shame and guilt; this requires me to suspend my own splitting and projection (or at least to be aware of it) and to allow the perpetrator to take in their own projections, arriving at a more integrated self. As someone who has been on the receiving end of unchallenged sexual harassment over a long period with a medical professional, I am deeply committed to the idea that perpetrators should be given the opportunity to hear of the impact of their behaviour in a way that does not simply make them shut down.

A related concern that we have with the labelling of perpetrators as irredeemable monsters is that they are often regarded as deserving of expulsion from the institutions in which they have been working/studying. In this way, we collude with a phantasy that if we purge the university of these evil men, we will have solved the problem. The reality is, however, that SGBV is not (just) the problem of a few (or many) isolated perpetrators; it is a largely systemic issue with its roots in colonial patriarchy. We are concerned that a standard response of expelling perpetrators does little to address SGBV in any meaningful

way and that, in fact, it simply displaces the perpetrator to continue their behaviour in other contexts such as different institutions of higher education or even in their own communities or homes.

I (Kerry) now reflect on an incident I was told of, of a young man academic who was accused of asking students for sex in exchange for marks. It is said that when confronted by the powers above him (men), he was given the opportunity to resign rather than face a disciplinary process. What was achieved here? Was he asked to account for his behaviour? Was he asked to attend psychotherapy with an appropriately skilled therapist to explore his behaviour? Was he asked to enter into any restorative justice process to ensure that the rights of the students he violated where appropriately addressed? No, rather, out of fear of an investigation, public shaming, and policies that recommend expulsion from his position and the institution, he chose to resign. He now works at another university, leaving behind students who experienced no justice, and perhaps free to carry on with behaviour he had avoided being held accountable for. How many powerful men, even those named publicly, find work elsewhere and continue to engage in SGBV? How many male student perpetrators are expelled or leave out of fear of expulsion, only to continue perpetrating in other educational institutions, their communities, or their own homes? These are the difficult questions, we argue, that need to be interrogated.

Outing alleged perpetrators, while understandable, is a political act that can be divisive. Anitha et al. (2020) explored the ways in which a list of 72 academic alleged perpetrators of gender-based violence across India, compiled by Indian graduate student Raya Sarkar, raised important questions about voice, solidarity, and resistance in the struggle against SGBV. They considered the following questions:

> What does an act of survivor solidarity such as publishing a list of predatory men mean, and what work does it do? To what extent and in what ways can these campaigns be considered a legitimate part of collective campaigns of resistance to GBV? (Anitha et al., 2020, p. 2)

Feminists in India were divided, and some called out the lack of due process in this act of naming. But Anitha et al. argued that in a context of what they called “institutional betrayal” (2020, p. 9) and the silencing of women’s voices, it is necessary to find strategies to challenge sexist cultures. Yet the question remains: “Does a list of male perpetrators, guilty or not, achieve the goal of changing sexist systems and structures?”

In line with some feminist writing, we do see the value of shame as an emotion that can lead to reflection and change, however, we argue against some of the shaming processes, for example, publicly calling out perpetrators, publishing their names on public websites, expelling those found guilty without due process or as a way of avoiding dealing with the politics of an incident, and other ways of punishing perpetrators with the intention of scaring other men into behaving. We would far rather men come, through

appropriate interventions, to understand and feel shame for their collusion with patriarchal constructs of masculinity, and change their behaviours as a result of the shame.

We question whether any of the shaming interventions have any pedagogical effect from a Freirean (1972) perspective, that is, does it lead to critical conscientisation and, in turn, address the social and institutional norms and practices that drive such behaviour? Or does it inadvertently serve to perpetuate SGBV by simply relocating it in the case of expulsion? What is the role of higher education? Is it to simply teach the formal curriculum, or is to also address wider social norms, and work towards social transformation and justice through its pedagogical and institutional practices?

And finally, how can we understand the role of race and racism in thinking about the monstrous sexual predator? The defences of splitting and projection are instructive here. White people can split off their own shame and sexuality and project it onto Black men, and Black people may project their internalised racism into the Black male perpetrator; in the distancing that this achieves, the shame of the perpetrator is othered and excised.

Shaming Versus Pedagogical Activism

I, Kerry, have been teaching community psychology for over 20 years. I teach the module from a critical perspective, which means that I am intentional about providing a framework that enables students to view social issues through a lens of power, ideology, and systemic inequality. One of the topics that I frequently engage with during this module is the extraordinarily high levels of femicide and SGBV in South Africa. Critical community psychology is critical of mainstream psychology's tendency to locate the origin of human behaviour within an individual's psyche, biology, or cognitive schemas. My module critiques this practice and argues that while internal factors play a role, human behaviour, like femicide and SGBV, is largely mediated by wider social norms/ideology and systemic factors. From this perspective, SGBV is not simply the outcome of individual men who are innately predisposed to violence towards women but is rather, the outcome of wider ideologies of gender and sexuality and systemic inequality. I emphasise that because SGBV is socially mediated/constructed there is hope that it can be addressed by challenging wider ideologies, working with individuals to reflect on their own social positioning in the world, and challenging wider socio-economic and institutional inequalities.

During this module, I present a social constructionist perspective (Frizelle, 2022a) and highlight the importance of interventions that challenge dominant narratives around masculinity and femininity, drawing on the writing of theorists such as Ratele (2022) and Gqola (2021). I am an emotive lecturer and can often feel the impact of the lecture content as women (cisgender, queer, and transgender) nod their heads and articulate their agreement. I have, however, over the years, become more sensitive to the

responses of the cisgender men in my lectures. Although there are undoubtedly men who resist what I am saying and render me a radical feminist who is anti-men, I am aware of a number of men who sit in what I can only describe as stunned silence as they take in the statistics and the theoretical explanation I propose. I see wide eyes and hunched shoulders.

As my own understanding of what is driving SGBV has developed, so has my response to the men in my lecture room. I recall the time I looked out at the sea of faces and felt a deep sense of compassion for the men who were, possibly for the first time in their lives, being offered a lens through which to reflect on their social positioning, as men. hooks (2003) argued against shaming strategies in educational spaces and suggested that most people arrive at university having internalised social narratives without any understanding of how they have come to believe what they believe, or with any insight into why they behave the way that they do. Rather than shaming students for their problematic worldviews or behaviours, she argued that they need to be held with compassion and given the skills to reflect and transform their worldviews. As I stood looking at those men, I wondered what it was that I could offer them, many of whom could very well have been perpetrators of some form of SGBV. What alternative or solution could I offer the men who were suddenly conscientised about their social positioning as men and their related behaviour towards queer men and women? Was it my responsibility as an educator to call them out, to cancel them, or render them evil and beyond reproach? Or was it my role to provide a safe space for them to reflect on what it is to be constructed as a man and to acknowledge their own collusion with dominant narratives, with the hope that they would commit to changed interactions.

I (Pierre) reflect on memories from an anti-sexual harassment workshops. I have run scores of these workshops, and we almost always begin with an exercise in values clarification, asking participants to reflect on key beliefs about gender and relational power. For example, they will be asked to say whether they agree or disagree with the statement: “It is acceptable, as a man, to persist in asking a woman out because this indicates he is serious in his intentions.” Notwithstanding the cis-heterosexual framing of this question (different workshops would vary this question), it not only triggers what participants believe, it evokes experiences—either of participants or of people they know. It is a kind of projective test; participants are routinely enraged by this question because they feel it enables male entitlement, and usually express vehemence and shock that anyone can hold this view.

But in every workshop, there is a man or two (sometimes a woman) who agrees with the statement, and their awkwardness and discomfort in saying this is palpable. Sometimes they couch their views in the language of culture and tradition (where persistence is seen as a sign of genuine intentions, albeit the persistence is inevitably in one direction because men are seen as the initiators in social and sexual relations). There have been women who have said this is acceptable to them; they have framed men as

players who are not serious and so persistence allows them to sort the genuine from the fake. In one workshop, a progressive woman, an academic who was clearly feminist, almost shamefacedly announced that this was in fact her experience; that her now husband of many years had indeed pursued her in a way that might now be conceived of as unacceptable. We unpack these comments and unravel their roots and the tensions they express. For the men who agree with this statement (and the occasional woman, like the one noted above), their shame in the room is very evident. They feel their views are unacceptable in contemporary life, and their discomfort frames how they participate. I believe it is my job to work with and understand this shame and how it operates in the room, and in broader society.

We propose that what is needed is an approach that produces productive shame/discomfort, that is, *pedagogical activism* (Frizelle, 2022b). Pedagogical activism recognises that prejudice and the oppression of women need to be addressed in the university context, however, what is needed to do this activism is a pedagogical approach that works towards producing self-reflection and the ability to work with shame and discomfort as they arise. It is a pedagogical approach committed to praxis, that is, theoretically guided reflection leading to transformation (Freire, 1972). Pedagogical activism is an approach driven by faith in the potential of individuals to self-reflect and develop their understanding of society as complex, social, and historical epochs (Freire, 1972). Such understanding leads to individual and social transformation. Pedagogical activism is a pedagogy of care rather than a confrontational one that has the potential to close down learning. In universities, we need a pedagogical approach that will provide men with the opportunity to understand and reflect on their social positioning. This approach should not be mistaken for being apologetic or endlessly tolerant. It does, however, require the emotional labour involved in developing understanding and insights into social constructs like gender. Universities are places of (un)learning. Pedagogical activism should extend beyond the lecture or seminar room, and needs to be accompanied by wider institutional interventions, for example, unearthing and changing deep cultural practices in universities that uphold patriarchal constructs of gender relations.

A Tentative Way Forward and an Invitation to Dialogue

We are concerned that because so many universities are not interrogating their own structures and considering multiple ways of addressing SGBV in higher education, victims/survivors and perpetrators are forced to deal with incidents after they have occurred. Enraged by the enormity of the issue at hand, and without training in and engagement with other multiple ways of intervening, many activists in higher education call for the shaming and cancelling of male perpetrators (and imagined potential perpetrators). And, we argue, there is little interrogation of the intersection of gender, race, racism, and racialised othering in these calls.

We propose that we need to start thinking about how we ensure social justice for victims/survivors and, on the other hand, avoid some of the pitfalls we have outlined. We would like to invite SGBV practitioners and thinkers to dialogue around four core ideas: changing the way we frame and think about SGBV perpetration, doing work in universities that explores the social underpinnings of SGBV and its co-constructed nature, reimagining and reinvigorating pedagogical practices, and considering the possibilities of restorative justice. As Wielenga (2022) noted, consideration should be given to restorative justice because it addresses the following: the institutional and resistant nature of SGBV in universities, the drawbacks of an adversarial approach that relies on specific evidence thresholds, and the power inherent in storytelling and healing.

Last Reflections

We believe it is necessary to hold a critical stance as activists working in a learning space and in this paper, we have interrogated some of the assumptions, and possibly unconscious motivations, in treating male perpetrators of sexual ills in universities as pariahs. We argue that anti-SGBV work needs to position perpetrators differently—not in a binary form that presents them as unfailingly unfixable, pathological, and dangerous. This work should and must engage with questions of gender, race, racism, and projection.

Although individual perpetrators must, of course, be held accountable for their actions, so too must the social body that shapes ideas and practices around gender. For this social accountability to be realised, there is personal work we need to do as gender practitioners that allows us to work through these questions. We do not position ourselves as having completed this work—inevitably, we experience our own ambivalences, uncertainties, and blind spots. But if universities are living laboratories of social relations, it is crucial to ask what we can do differently around SGBV as gender practitioners. And so, we invite our colleagues to enter into dialogue around these issues.

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