

Intersections of Identity and Sexual Violence on Campus: Centering Minoritized Students' Experiences

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Intersections of Identity and Sexual Violence on Campus: Centering Minoritized Students' Experiences, edited by Jessica C. Harris and Chris Linder, contains brilliant chapters on sexual violence on campus. The book contains 12 chapters and each chapter addresses different aspects of the problem of sexual violence on campus. The book is divided into three parts. Part one deals with the historical context of sexual violence in higher education. Parts two and three deal with contemporary issues about sexual violence on campuses and conclude the studies with extensive and well-written essays on coalition building for the future. Each chapter in the book includes examples and citations to provide empirical support for the volatile and thought-provoking statements made in the book. This book is not fiction. It contains the observations and vivid narratives of victims of sexual violence on campuses in the United States. Each chapter ends with a recommendation for minimizing or effectively dealing with sexual violence on campus.

The "Forward" was written by Wagatwe Wanjuki, who in this section painfully narrates her sexual violence experience at Tuft University. As narrated by Wanjuki, "Unfortunately, three years after my acceptance into Tufts I learned that the school wasn't willing to walk the talk with their espoused values when I reported that another student raped and assaulted me...the school refused to help me" (p. vii).

In their "Preface," Harris and Linder provide the rationale for writing the book. They state that "Identifying and addressing what is missing from higher education and societal conversations concerning sexual violence on college campuses is what brought us to this book" (Harris & Linder, 2017, p. xii). True to this objective, all the chapter authors provide numerous sexual violence cases to shed light on the problem of sexual violence on campus. Harris and Linder continue their compelling "Introduction" by brilliantly igniting the interest of readers, making it clear that the current sexual violence policies are not effective because the policies do not focus on identities of the victims, who are usually minorities, especially women of color.

After the excellent introduction comes part one, which sets the tone for the historical analysis of sexual violence on college and university campuses. Luoluo Hong's chapter "Digging up the Roots, Rustling the Leaves" makes it clear that the fight against sexual violence on campuses is not a recent phenomenon. Hong who described herself as a "rape survivor who has been an activist and protestor on issues of sexual violence" (p. 23), asserts that the fight against sexual violence has roots in the history of higher education administration in the United States. By presenting two sides of the fight against sexual violence on campuses, the *Traditional Paradigm* and the *Social Justice Paradigm*, Hong draws the attention of the reader "to shift away from a traditional paradigm for prevention, education, and outreach and recognize that sexual violence is ultimately rooted in power, privilege, and socially determined injustices that should be grounded in social justice framework" (p.31).

The last two writers in part one, Jessica Harris, and Chris Linder present a picture of the intersection of racism and sexual violence. By using critical race theory and critical race

feminism, Jessica Harris's chapter "Centering Women of Color in the Discourse on Sexual Violence on College Campuses" strongly focuses the attention of the reader on how the history of racism, sexism, and colonialism in the United States continues to influence sexual violence on campuses especially against women of color. Linder concludes chapter three, "Reexamining our Roots," with an assertion that sums up the main theme of the section by arguing that, "White men have always used rape as a tool of power and control directed toward communities of color and women and non-gender-binary people" (p. 78). This is a serious assertion and should not be ignored. A further examination should be conducted to ascertain the truth in it.

In part two of the book, all nine authors are concerned with making the problem of sexual violence on campuses real and disturbing. This section of the book contains emotional stories from victims and survivors of sexual violence. In chapter four, titled "For Brandon, For Justice," the author Susan B. Marine presents the story of Brandon Teena (pseudonym) a young trans person who was raped and later murdered by two local men when they learned that Brandon was assigned female at birth. According to the story, the two assailants were able to murder Brandon because Brandon did not get adequate police protection and assistance. Although this case did not happen on campus, his story points to important lessons about how rape has an impact on young adult trans survivors and the urgency of the work that needs to be done to end sexual violence in all its forms.

In chapter five, "The Wounds of our Experience," Daniel Tillapaugh, argues that both cisgender men and women suffer sexual violence on campuses. By narrating the sexual violence stories of Aaron, Aidan, Micah, and Sam, Tillapaugh drives home the point that sexual violence on campus is not a persistent problem for only cisgender heterosexual women, but cisgender men as well.

By drawing upon the strength of trauma theory in chapter 6, Cierra V. Scott, Anneliese A. Singh, and Jessica C. Harris discuss the complexities that women survivors of color face when seeking services for sexual violence. They argue that in many instances, Black women do not care to report sexual violence cases against them to campus police because they do not see the police as a solution to their problem because the police share the notion that Black women or Latina women often create fertile grounds to promote sexual violence. The authors cite the sad stories of three Black women, Sandra Bland, Ralkina Jones, and Raynett Turner who all died while in police custody in July 2015. Concerning Latina women, the authors argue that these women often do not report sexual cases to close relatives or law enforcement officers "because of perceptions that reporting their sexual trauma may disrupt the emotional well-being of others or bring shame to their families" (p.125).

Sexual violence against people with disabilities forms the subject of chapter seven, "Sexual Victimization of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing College Students." LaVerne McQuiller Williams in this chapter presents sexual violence cases that make many sexual violence policies on campuses look very ineffective. According to Williams, the extant literature indicates that cisgender individuals with disabilities are more likely to be sexually assaulted than cisgender men or women without disabilities and yet "the experiences of sexual violence in this population have largely been ignored" (p.140). What compounds the problem is that people with disabilities, especially those in the Deaf communities may not have the courage to report sexual violence because of the "fear that their identity will not remain hidden from the community" (p. 145).

In chapter eight, the last chapter for part two, the authors Jason C. Garvey, Jessi Hitchins, and Elizabeth McDonald bring into the discussion of sexual violence, the issues concerning queer-spectrum students. They define queer-spectrum students to include “those who identify as gay, lesbian, queer or another sexual orientation other than straight” (p. 156). The authors use queer theory as an “attempt to deconstruct normalized and static assumptions of sexuality and gender that have historically privileged some and silenced others” (p. 159) such as queer spectrum students. They argue further that “Historically, administrators constructed sexual violence policies to protect white, middle class, able-bodied, straight cisgender women through the second-wave feminist surge for advocacy and justice” (p.163). This implies that policies concerning sexual violence on campuses are not designed to help all students deal with the problem of sexual violence on campuses (Wank, 2013).

The third part of the book consists of four chapters. The theme for this part of the book is about building a coalition against sexual violence on campuses. Chris Linder and Jess S. Myers, writing under the title, “Intersectionality, Power, Privilege, and Campus-Based Sexual Violence Activism,” take the lead in this part with their detailed discussion of the strategies sexual violence activists use on campus to deal with the problem on campus. In chapter 10, Naddia Cherre Palacios and Karla L. Aguilar under the title “An empowerment-Based Model of Sexual Violence Intervention and Prevention on Campus,” offer a presentation on “the nuances of sexual violence intervention and prevention on college campuses” (p. 194).

Like Chris Lander and Jess S. Myers, Naddia Cherre Palacios and Karla L. Aguilar emphasize the role of social media in combating sexual violence on campuses. In chapter eleven, “Mapping Identities,” Susan V. Iverson delves deeply into the intersectional analysis of policies on sexual violence on different campuses. By using intersectionality theory as a framework, Iverson attempts to reveal how inappropriate is to assume that all women experience sexual violence the same way as white cisgender or economically privileged women. Susan supports her argument with illustrations from 22 universities and colleges drawn from across the nation; the list includes public as well as private institutions.

Finally, chapter twelve serves as the conclusion and summary of the salient points discussed by the various authors in the book. In this chapter, Chris Linder and Jessica C. Harris powerfully and cleverly use an intersectionality approach to discuss how the other chapters of the book provide detailed information “to generate new ideas, practices, policies, and other action steps that critique, expose, and address the systems and realities of sexual violence on college campuses” (p. 14). Generally, Linder and Harris fuse the major ideas expressed by the different authors about sexual violence on campuses into language or concepts readily and easily understood by people who read the book.

Criticisms

Several arguments raised in the book can be challenged. In the first place, from my own experience and working in higher education for over 25 years, sexual harassment concerning students on campus has never been overlooked or ignored because the students involved were people of color. My impression is that sexual harassment cases on all campuses, be it private or public, have never been pushed under the carpet because institutions attempt to ignore such cases, in the end, pay a heavy price for it. Every higher education institution in the United States has an office that handles sexual harassment or violence cases. Officers in these departments

who fail to properly investigate sexual violence or harassment cases do not get away with their careless handling of such cases (Karjane, Fisher, & Cullen, 2002; Wank, 2013; Wood, 2014).

According to the information presented on pages 251 to 255, of the 16 authors who participated in the project, only two are men. The rest are women. This imbalance in the number and strength of the authors immediately provides a platform for the women to overpower the voices of the two men in the book. Again, this imbalance gives the impression that sexual harassment or sexual violence cases are of interest to women more than men. A careful examination of the references made by all the authors indicates that sexual harassment cases on campuses are of equal importance to men as well as women (Wank, 2013).

The title of the book, *Intersections of Identity and Sexual Violence on Campus: Centering Minoritized Students' Experiences*, straightaway gives the reader the insight that the contents of the book will focus essentially on the problems of sexual violence as it affects minorities especially women of color. The cases presented in the book, confirm this observation. For instance, the authors seem to present a picture that affirms their argument that white women often get better treatment when they fall victim to the incidence of sexual violence because the "rape of white women makes whiteness impure" (p.50). On the other hand, the rape of women of color does not count very much "because women of color are constructed as always looking for sex" (p.50) and therefore when they fall victim to sexual violence it is not something unexpected. To me, this perception, or line of argument makes the book an unpleasant manual for dealing with sexual violence cases on campuses, especially for cases involving women of color.

Limitations withstanding, the book adds a great deal of information to our knowledge about sexual violence or harassment on campuses. The authors have done a tremendous job through the sad stories and cases of the victims of sexual violence on campuses they share with the reader about the prevalence of sexual violence on campuses. Moreover, the book adds current literature to the discussions, prevention, and handling of sexual harassment or violence on campuses (Wank, 2013; Wood, 2014).

Although few people will believe sexual violence cases exist on college and university campuses in the United States because of the presence of the police around the clock, the sad cases and horrifying stories narrated by the victims of sexual violence, the authors have brought to the attention of the reader the fact that sexual violence on campuses is real and disturbing. Moreover, facilities such as public phones provided on key locations on campuses for students to use to alert law enforcement authorities when attacked, and the formation of campus guards to provide protection for all students make it hard for the public to accept the fact that sexual violence cases exist on campuses in the United States of America. The authors have made it clear that sexual violence on campuses is real and special efforts should be made by university administrators, campus police, and students to minimize or eliminate the incidence of sexual violence on campuses. This argument is line with what others such as Wank (2015) and Hollis (2006) have previously advocated.

The book is well-researched and contains plenty of illustrations to support controversial points or arguments raised in the book. Each chapter contains at least twenty current references to provide a solid framework for the content. Overall, this approach provides the reader with the chance to read from other sources to confirm or dispute the prevalence of sexual violence on campuses.

The authors have personal experience or training dealing with cases of sexual violence. These authors use their extensive experience to focus the attention of the reader on some of the problems and challenges college and university administrators deal with on a daily basis about sexual harassment or violence on campuses. The authors use their rich experience and training to make bold and daring interpretations of the stories the survivors of sexual violence narrate, especially stories from women of color, people with disabilities, and queer spectrum students.

Another strong side of the book is that the authors provide recommendations regarding the problem of sexual violence in each chapter. Although the recommendations appear to change little from chapter to chapter, I do not see this as a problem because the authors are writing about the same issue of sexual violence, just from different perspectives. Moreover, the suggestions or recommendations they make for fighting this crime on campus are similar to those advocated by others such as Hollis (2006) and Khadaroo (2019).

The authors have given us new meaning and significance to the problem of sexual violence on campuses by including such concepts as *cisgender*, *intersectionality*, and *identity* in the book to serve as the main structures upon which the participants have built their powerful survival stories. The terms *cisgender*, *intersectionality*, and *identity* break new grounds in our discussion about sexual violence on campuses. These concepts likely help readers expand their horizons about the problems of sexual violence on campuses or in our communities (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015).

The use of *queer theory*, *intersectionality theory*, and *trauma theory* provides an empirical foundation for the main arguments raised in the book by the authors. These theories combine with the historical discussion in part one of the book to provide a broad spectrum for understanding the overall content of the book.

The authors used their rich experience, training, and the literature to build stories that leave no one in doubt that sexual violence is a real problem on campuses in the United States and perhaps in other countries. School administrators, faculty, and students stand to gain a great deal by reading this book and applying its content when handling sexual violence cases. Moreover, people with disabilities, cisgender male and female students, queer spectrum students, and women of color, especially African American women, should view and embrace this book as a guide for managing their social interactions on campuses.

Overall, the book is a timely addition to the literature on sexual violence on campuses. It is a powerful call for coalition building among all stakeholders to join hands together to fight this social menace on campuses and create a social environment conducive to serious academic work for all students (Hollis, 2006; Wank, 2013; Wood, 2014).

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