

## **Transforming Consent Conversations** **A Case Study on the Learning of Feminist Public Educators**

Lisa Trefzger Clarke

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# TRANSFORMING CONSENT CONVERSATIONS: A CASE STUDY ON THE LEARNING OF FEMINIST PUBLIC EDUCATORS

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## Abstract

*This case study explores the experiences of nine female-identifying feminist public educators working with Ontario, Canada, sexual assault centres who regularly facilitate discussions about sexual consent and gender-based sexual violence in schools, post-secondary institutions, and community workshops. The educators discuss their experiences of adaptation and “inoculations” for inspiring transformative learning in their audiences, and the ways in which their practice and person have been transformed through their profession. With a focus on the relationships between intersectional feminist pedagogy, social justice education, transformative learning, and public pedagogy, the educators describe their resilience from trauma, critical thinking, and self-reflective practice, highlighting the benefits of co-facilitation, debriefing with colleagues, and mentorship.*

## Résumé

*Cette étude de cas explore les expériences de neuf éducatrices communautaires féministes s'identifiant comme femmes qui travaillent dans des centres d'aide aux victimes de violence sexuelle en Ontario (Canada) et qui animent régulièrement des discussions sur le consentement sexuel et la violence fondée sur le genre dans les écoles, les établissements postsecondaires et les ateliers communautaires. Les éducatrices partagent leurs expériences d'adaptation et d'« inoculations » pour inspirer l'apprentissage transformateur chez leurs auditoires et les manières dont leurs pratiques et leur personne ont changées grâce à cette profession. En se focalisant sur les liens entre la pédagogie féministe intersectionnelle, l'éducation à la justice sociale, l'apprentissage transformateur et la pédagogie sociale, les éducatrices décrivent leur résilience aux traumatismes, leur pensée critique et leurs pratiques auto-réflexives en soulignant les bienfaits de la co-animation, du débriefage avec les collègues et du mentorat.*

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In the field of feminist public education, a framework of feminist pedagogy informs social justice education in the public sphere—inside and outside educational institutions, in community, and in professional development workshops. This type of public pedagogy is the basis for a community-based anti-oppressive/anti-racist approach to educating youth, families, service professionals, and citizens on the intersections of sexism with other forms of oppression. As defined by the United Nations (UNHCR, n.d.), gender-based violence, including sexual violence, involves “harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.” Public education available through Ontario-based sexual assault centres<sup>1</sup> focuses on themes of sexual consent and gender-based sexual violence (GBSV)—including healthy relationships, drug-facilitated sexual assault, digital or online safety, sex trafficking, and childhood sexual abuse—and how these issues connect intersectionally to racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and ableism.

In Ontario, female-identifying feminist public educators working for sexual assault centres come from a variety of academic backgrounds, including women and gender studies, journalism, and education. In this case study, I explored how these educators perceived their work, and their growth and learning; how they have adapted to presenting their material and if they have experienced transformation in their practice, and ultimately in themselves. Some participants have been in the field for 1 year, and some for over 20. The educators demonstrated a number of ways in which they innovated in their work, valued the mentorship they received and provided to others, and were changed by their work. They also provided their recommendations for further investment in their field of work and the sexual assault services sector.

### Background

For over 40 years, the sexual assault centre movement in Ontario has been grounded in feminist grassroots support and advocacy for survivors of sexual violence. Funded in large part through the Ministry of the Attorney General, the sexual assault centre movement evolved over decades; many of the sexual assault centres providing professional services in counselling and education to over 30 communities across the province have organized under the membership of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC, n.d.). In 2015, the Ontario government launched the *Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*, which followed a less robust plan in 2011. In addition, it provided a revision to the Ministry of Education’s health and physical education curriculum, last updated in 1998, to meet minimum standards in healthy sexuality, consent, and relationship education for students in kindergarten through Grade 12. With this action plan and updated provincial education standards, the centres in the province were recognized for their contributions to the prevention of and response to GBSV. An investment in both core programming and province-wide public education followed. With the change of government in 2018, a critical debate reopened regarding sex education and its role in Ontario schools and for families (CBC News, 2019), challenging sexual assault centres, educational institutions, survivors

1 For the context of this case study, I use the term *sexual assault centre*, also known as *rape crisis centre*, to refer to non-profit organizations receiving core funding through the Ministry of the Attorney General in Ontario to provide crisis supports, short-term counselling, and public education to those impacted by sexual violence and harassment.

of sexual violence, and many families to advocate for the human rights of young people to understand the fundamental principles of consent.

“Questioning our assumptions is a process of critical reflection and forms the heart of transformative learning” (Cranton, 1998, p. 190). The primary role of the self-identified feminist public educator working with Ontario sexual assault centres is to inspire student and community audiences to question assumptions about socio-cultural norms that reinforce the beliefs of rigid gender roles, harmful behaviour toward women and LGBTQ+ communities, rape myths, and toxic masculinity. They are using the principles of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990, 2009) to create moments of disorienting dilemmas and inspire critique and perspective taking in order to ignite social change through attitudes, behaviours, and action.

Feminism itself is in a constant state of critique and self-reflection (English, 2005, p. 257; Fowler Sanders & Kemezis, 2017, p. 74), and is transforming. Feminists, in welcoming this identity, are by nature embodying the uncomfortable space of gender oppression and its intersecting socio-cultural prejudices, and actively placing their bodies in spaces of challenge to ignite perspective. Melinda Lemke (2017) described feminist pedagogy as a “pedagogy of risk” with an “overarching goal of transformative sociopolitical change” (p. 144). This transformation and socio-political change, connected to adult identity and space, intersects with the field of public pedagogy. How this transformative learning impacts feminist public educators is largely unstudied. I, myself, feel I have been transformed by my years of work as a feminist public educator and wanted to explore, with my colleagues, how our work and our lives have been impacted by our role in GBSV prevention education.

## Literature Review

### *Feminist Theory and Critical Feminist Pedagogy*

As described by Leona English and Catherine Irving (2015), the work of feminist educators relies on access to feminist learning, and this can vary depending on socio-cultural, academic, and geographic location (p. 103). Feminist theory crosses many disciplines of study by placing an intersectional analysis of power and inequity of gender at the centre (Brookfield, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991). In the field of adult education, much of the focus in feminist theory has been on how women learn formally, informally, and non-formally through collective action and motherhood and in response to socio-culturally enforced gender roles. Through the understanding of intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1991), we see how social movements like #IdleNoMore, #SameLove, #MeToo, #SayHerName, and #BlackLivesMatter better describe how gender oppression relates to racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and colonialism (Brookfield, 2010; Hart, 2005; Mojab, 2005).

Like social justice frameworks, critical feminist pedagogy endorses “a nonlinear and contradictory logic” (Kark et al., 2016, p. 297) that is both “critical” and “critique” in its relation to adult education (Carpenter & Mojab, 2013, p. 160). Building an understanding of diversity and inclusion under the scope of critical feminist pedagogy continues to prioritize women’s ways of knowing and women as learners (Crenshaw, 1991), while exploring innovative and transformative processes for social change. The goals of critical feminist pedagogy, as defined by English and Irving (2015), are (a) fostering social analysis, (b) supporting women’s leadership, (c) building organizations, and (d) creating social change (pp. 104–105). After

two centuries of feminist movement, there continues to be personal and professional safety risks to the feminist educator, especially in the public sphere outside of formal and informal classroom learning, as "reformists or provocateurs" (Cranton, 2016, pp. 96–97).

### ***Transformational Learning Theory***

Transformational learning theory posits that through a disorienting dilemma, such as a "trigger event" that catalyzes a social movement, old forms of knowing become problematic and precipitate critical reflection and transformation (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). The intersections of transformational learning theory and critical feminist pedagogy have strong alignments in their goals toward equity and parity through social change. Jack Mezirow (2009) defines transformational learning "as the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives)—sets of assumption and expectation—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change" (p. 92). It is the socio-cultural distortions of meaning perspectives, such as hypermasculinity and rape myths, that support "unjust social practices, exploitation, exclusion and domination" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 16). The links between transformational learning and feminism, in the experience of English and Peters (2012, p. 104), for instance, have not been strongly explored in adult education research (see also Cranton, 2016, pp. 47–48; English & Irving, 2015, p. 246). Some clues to moving forward come from the work of English and Irving (2015) as they review the field of transformational learning and recommend elements that are unique to women's transformational experiences: the importance of relationships, body, emotion, race and class, and creativity and the arts (pp. 250–253). Through the field of popular education, and the theory of public pedagogy, these elements may transcend gender through activities such as theatre of the oppressed, somatic learning, and social justice education.

### ***Public Pedagogy***

The theory of public pedagogy is a relatively new area of scholarship. In an extensive literature review, Jennifer Sandlin et al. (2011) defined this theory as the study of "various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning that occur beyond the realm of formal educational institutions—including popular culture, informal educational institutions, dominant discourses, and public intellectualism and social activism" (p. 597). This theory describes the work of feminist public educators: in a review of public pedagogy literature, the parallels include building "citizenship within and beyond schools," critically examining "popular culture and everyday life," facilitating presentations and workshops in "informal institutions and public spaces," highlighting and discussing "dominant cultural discourses," and igniting and empowering "public intellectualism and social activism" (Sandlin et al., 2011, p. 343).

In order to address the high incidence of GBSV in Ontario, curriculum-endorsed sexual consent and healthy relationships education needs to be best practice (Haskell, 2011), transformational, and facilitated by specialized feminist public educators because (a) "many non-specialist teachers in Canada do not feel willing to provide broad-based sexual health education," (b) others are not willing to cover all topics, and (c) often teachers "do not use interactive teaching methods, do not encourage questions, and provide limited coverage of some of the topics in the curriculum" (Cohen et al., 2012, p. 300). There is a role for Ontario

sexual assault centres, therefore, to address this gap and provide public education about GBSV through a feminist, community-based lens.

### Research Methodology and Rationale

Using Ontario as an example of a region that funds the field of feminist public education, my methodology was an exploratory case study (Yazan, 2015) in which I interviewed eight feminist public educators working in Ontario. I also conducted a self-interview. I used an interpretivist framework to gain perspectives on the learning of feminist public educators who teach on topics of sexual consent and GBSV in this professional context. These educators offer workshops and presentations to students, community members, professionals, and families in educational and community settings about consent-related topics, including healthy relationships, healthy sexuality, cyber-harassment, and sexual exploitation.

The data collection for this research was conducted through complementary methods of semi-structured telephone interviews with the participants and a self-interview using the same interview questions. To encourage participant elaboration, I engaged in a conversational style of interviewing. Through the stories of my colleagues, I queried (a) what they had learned from their experiences, (b) how they applied their new learning, and (c) how their practice is different in some way as a result of this learning. There is value as educators to engage in effective reflection by exploring experiences in the field. I believe this also includes public educators who hold sets of values and professional identities, personal and professional boundaries, and shared experiences (Bolton, 2006, p. 211).

Participants shared the same membership or identified as feminist public educators working with Ontario sexual assault centres. They had different geographic and social locations and represented diverse ages, cultures, and experiences in the field. All participants identified as female, five as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and three as members of the BIPOC community. Their ages ranged from the mid-20s to mid-60s.<sup>2</sup>

I was interested in how learning to deliver GBSV and sexual consent education had shaped their identity and practice, how they may have built skills and adaptation (as I have) to manage difficult conversations, how they debriefed workshop audience harassment, and if this learning was transformative. In particular, I was interested in seeing how educators adapted their feminist and public pedagogy during difficult social justice discourse, which I view as “disorienting dilemmas” (Mezirow, 2009), and managed resistant students’ “habits of mind” (Mezirow, 2009). Sandlin et al. (2011) believe that in the field of adult learning, there is missing research on the interactions of adults and the larger cultures they live in—the identities that are portrayed to us and enacted through public pedagogies (p. 5). Additionally, this case study honours the works of scholars like bell hooks (2003), English and Irving (2015), and English and Peters (2012), who called for more feminist education to continue the movement toward a more socially just and equitable society.

2 More detailed descriptions could impact anonymity and confidentiality.

## Transforming Consent Conversations; Transforming Ourselves

### *Sharing and Supporting Transformative Educational Practice*

The majority of English-service sexual assault centres in Ontario have provincial membership with the OCRCC, and, for a time, the Government of Ontario sponsored a 1-day learning workshop for educators under the Draw the Line campaign as part of *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment* (Government of Ontario, 2015). In addition, the OCRCC offered ongoing anti-racism/anti-oppressive training at membership meetings, as well as less formal peer mentorships and partnerships. Networking with colleagues across the province and advocating for partnerships, mentorship, and shared learning were valuable support, as GBSV education can be a lonely vocation with high stress and high stakes.

One study participant's goal was to preserve the important feminist work and the community connections her predecessor had built. This reinforced the value of the historical context with strategically shifting culture. She described a realization that

it's okay to not only experiment with things that we haven't done in the past, not necessarily deviating from the entire goal or deviating from the initial framework, but adding into that framework, experimenting trying new things, reaching out to community partners that we haven't done in the past, trying to be more creative in that aspect.

Another educator described mentoring other educators at her workplace as building "the storyline or the arc of where you are going in a workshop or presentation so that you are really intentional about building that. That you continue to grab people's attention through both activity and teaching." She described mentoring her colleagues in a speaker-bureau type of model, including using a shadowing process for training, and doing a written debrief of each presentation to reflect on the types of "inoculations" that were used, the "pushbacks" experienced, and the arc of the storyline of the presentation. In addition, one educator who led several provincial-level trainings of other educators described her process of "holding space for other colleagues who didn't get anti-o[pression] training, as well as the immigrant experience, with compassion."

Some educators described co-facilitation with peer volunteers, public education volunteers, and other staff in the organization. This was effective for expertise, diversity, and safety. As one educator described, "I definitely think there was a shift, a positive shift, when I started opening up the opportunities to work with other organizations and to work with other staff members and volunteers with the new organization." Most educators indicated at least one other colleague within the organization with whom they could debrief a presentation or seek support.

In contrast, one educator in a rural setting did not have many volunteers and colleagues to draw on for co-facilitation support. For her small centre and large geographic region, she not only provided GBSV and sexual consent education, but also sex-positivity and healthy sexuality education, which in more urban settings would be provided by a public health nurse. She realized how different and innovative her practice is compared to more urban-based centres.

Isolating experiences and high demand for their work had several educators also reflecting on the need for self-care, including debriefing and counselling access, robust



health benefits and vacation time, opportunities for professional development, and opportunities for sabbaticals.

Some feminist-identified public educators have played leadership roles in reaching out, through the OCRCC, to educators at individual centres, offering mentorship and resources. This has been augmented by a Google group of all educators where communication and support can be requested. One educator described this work as “collaborative, not competitive” and that conversations about decolonization, anti-racism work, safety, and rural-urban differences were very helpful:

We’re thinking about it more globally and that we’re part of a movement that’s happening, and I also really love the idea of joint responses to things. So, for instance, the #MeToo stuff. There’s been a lot of conversation amongst centres around how they’re responding to that, and conversation again for this sex ed curriculum...that was a big thing that was coming up at the last Draw the Line day. What was each centre doing to engage with this really ground-shaking thing that is happening with our sex ed curriculum, and how are we equipped?...There were some agencies or organizations that had not had too much response to it and you could tell they were getting ideas of ways to move forward in the work, so it’s cool.

The caveat, she explained, is that she and her centre also needed to be in the process of unlearning and that it is all educators’ responsibility to hold that emotional labour as part of their work in the field.

### *Adapting Pedagogical Methods*

Several of the educators described their early education work as lecture style at the front of the classroom. One explained:

So when I began this work, I was working with another educator and it was very much a delivery of a concept—healthy relationships, sexual consent education, healthy dating, but very much presentation style. A person coming in to the front of a classroom and talking.

Another educator explained that at the beginning of her career, she moved to lecture style because it was “nerve-wracking” to receive inappropriate or harassing comments from the audience about topics of consent and violence. One who had been in the field for over a decade described that she became more patient and that at the beginning she was “militarized in her approach,” but that was not accessible and trust-building. A fourth expressed the need to be “guarded” in her work, and this was echoed by a colleague who said that initially she would “shut down” or “not invest in people who initially were very defensive or closed off to the concept.”

However, all educators, whether 1 year or over a decade, experienced a change in their practice. One participant explained: “I feel...there’s a softer skill that you learn. You learn how to think on your feet a little bit...Some audience participation is welcomed and is excellent as the conversation, and then some is ‘okay, I need to diffuse this before it escalates.’” The description of shutting down described, to me, a trauma response, and so I wanted to understand how they mitigated harm to their bodies.

As they grew their practice, the educators expressed a need to be well informed on the topic. An educator explained that she prepares by "not just knowing what I'm going to be saying in my slide show, but thinking through: What might I need to ask? How might the audience interact with this? And how am I going to respond to that?" Another, located in a rural area, expressed this as, "I guess, just the preparation—keeping current of anything that's going on." She elaborated on this to describe current events happening in her region, such as cases of sexual harassment. As a practical skill, she explained:

I did a lot of self-examination, really making sure that I was using a feminist lens and, as we know, we're always growing and learning....I really wanted to do AR/AO [anti-racism/anti-oppression] in my work, so I was really challenging that and expanding it because we are very White here, so "anti-racism" is different here than it might look elsewhere.

In particular, an educator described a term, *inoculations*, that she used based on a teaching from a communication expert. "I realized we do [inoculations] intuitively as educators around topics that 'get people's backs up,' but I had been intentional in thinking about how I apply them, and embed them more intentionally depending on the audience." She described the way she cites statistics in her work, as well as other topic material depending on if her audience is medical students or a male-only space: "So it's this tap dance that I do around...how much trauma-based information do I bring about the brain and neuroscience to inoculate, for instance."

Other educators echoed the confidence that information on sexual consent and GBSV, whether statistics or research, stands on its own, and that over time, they were more able to focus on preparing for interactions with the audience to engage and inspire learning.

I want to know "are you bringing me into a shark tank because you have this group of students in the room who have been punished because of something that has happened?" Are they going to be automatically defensive, because they think I'm there to tell them they're bad people... it doesn't mean that they don't want to understand. You can align yourself with people who have different views because, at the base of it, you have a similar interest and you'll get there, just at different paths and different times.

In contrast, one educator described her personal presence as the educator as an "act of disruption to education" because the majority of female-identifying feminist public educators in Ontario identify as White settlers and many audiences do not "expect" a Black woman to be the educator on topics of GBSV. She has to assess the audience and present the analysis in different ways for personal safety because of intersections of both sexism and racism.

### ***Reading the Audience: Bodies on the "Firing Line"***

Audience engagement was described in detail by an educator with over a decade of experience: "If I want greater participation, the more informal I make it, the more engaged people are going to be. Because I often find, even though I prefer to go in with a PowerPoint and a guide...they're going to engage with me more as a conversation, and they are going

to participate more if it's less formal." In addition, this was described by an educator with only 1 year of experience:

I remember when I first started doing pub ed, I was taken aback by having people be so abrupt in their ways of trying to poke holes or being very direct in it, and I'm not somebody who backs down in that sense. I tend to meet somebody where they're at. I notice that as a public educator, I'm trying to facilitate learning, I'm not trying to facilitate a debate. I'm not trying to facilitate somebody to feel their questions were not valid in any capacity, and so I've learned to step back and let them explore their own feelings around why they feel it's necessary to interrogate the work that I'm doing.

Several educators spoke specifically of this experience of stepping back and providing space for critical thinking by audience members in real time: a moment of transformation (Mezirow, 1990). They discussed how they used feedback from audience members, teachers, and youth workers, for instance, to adapt their presentations with quizzes, videos, current news, and other materials. An educator with over a decade in the field said:

I will make sure that I am up to date every day, so that when I come in, I can give real-life examples and it makes it so much more meaningful to the audience than if you're just talking in generalities about the issues. My programs aren't really set in stone. For example, I'll bring in something like human trafficking, which I never talked about early on...and now I find opportunities, like if there's a film and there's hazing activities, initiation, we kind of say, "this reminds me of," and then bring that in, as well, and that's often something they never heard about. It's new information.

In summary of their learning, participants adapted to audience members' feedback on the topics of GBSV and sexual consent. This could be positive, such as resource sharing, or harassing, such as male audience members attempting to "poke holes" in the learning. "You never know what's going to happen until it happens, but it's always good to prepare... We have a couple of, I guess, strategic answers at the ready," explained one educator. Another complemented this: "I don't think you can come up with a pushback or a question that I haven't already answered in the last 8 years."

Educators needed to actively adapt to audience resistance during facilitation. When teaching on the topic of GBSV and sexual consent, there are contested viewpoints of the issue, often deriving from the family home. An educator recounted: "You can often hear the parents' opinions and lessons in use when they [youth] are talking...they don't know where that opinion came from, but that's just what they've been told."

One participant clearly articulated why this adaptation was necessary: "There's a physiological response to being put essentially on a firing line at the front of the room and being expected to know everything and have to defend everything that you're saying." A second educator also explained the impact of the female identity in this work:

When men say the exact same thing, it's taken at much greater validity and value than when trans folks or women of colour say the same things. It's not valued as much as myself, as someone who is a White woman, who's a settler here, but I would also say that younger people would prefer

somebody who was more diverse to connect to, because if I'm up there I'm always perceived as straight.

The educators all discussed a "flexibility" in their practice that included a range of strategies, such as the citation of statistics; a presentation roster featuring lecture style or more informal, participatory facilitation; the clothing or gender expression they adopted during facilitation; increased safety in co-facilitation with a colleague; and the number of current events, like sex trafficking, that they embedded in the presentation.

Educators facilitated learning in all-female, mixed-gender, and male-dominant spaces, and this could affect their observations about their audiences. One described this as follows:

I've noticed that whenever I'm speaking to a space of all women, even regardless of age or other aspects of their background, that they're a lot more receptive to what I'm talking about because they can usually relate to a lot of the topics that I'm speaking about to a specific experience in their own life, not always in terms of dealing with severe sexual violence, but they have an understanding because they navigate the world in a way where they have to think about these things on a daily basis, whereas when I'm speaking to men, again also regardless of age or other aspects of their identity, there is a level of having to explain these topics before I get more in-depth about the topics that I'm speaking about.

The ways educators described their experience with male audience members varied, and they also discussed adapting facilitation to mitigate harmful comments: "I have to really thoroughly explain the definitions of these topics and these subjects before I even get into talking about experiences...I've noticed that a lot of men are more fixated on more statistical information as opposed to real-life experiences." This was echoed by another educator: "With all-male, or primarily male audiences, I started to notice that they would 'gang up' on ideas that just reinforced rape culture and harmful cultural norms, like asking questions such as 'What if it's just bad sex?' 'What if she just regrets it in the morning?' 'What if both of us are drinking?' 'What, you're saying that we can't even drink water?'"

In contrast, one participant said "that women in mixed-gendered spaces are far more hesitant because they feel like they're being watched in their response to everything that you say, whether they're agreeing or justifying what's been said. Survivors are often quieter and withdrawn in the conversations and don't speak up until the end for a one-on-one kind of conversation."

Facilitating learning in uncomfortable spaces comes through experience and adaptation, but causes a toll on our bodies through hypervigilance and hyperarousal; I believe, like my colleagues, that committing to self-reflective practice, debriefing, self-care, and ongoing research are keys to resilience in this form of public pedagogy.

### ***Transforming Personal and Professional Practice***

Several of the educators described how building their feminist understanding of anti-oppressive/anti-racist learning, and professional skills-based learning being offered at the OCRCC, has helped them to gain a deeper appreciation of intersectionality, interrogate their own biases, and learn how to educate in community on how GBSV connects to racism, ableism, classism, and colonization, for example. "The more examination to ensure that it

[facilitation] is in a feminist lens, and intersectional and everything, makes me examine myself more. It helps me examine more of my biases that I didn't really know I had." One educator also reflected that the question of "transformation" was valid, but the experience is hard to describe. Over the time that I learned from and with this group of educators, I observed that we, individually and collectively, became far more fluent in describing the intersections of oppression as foundational to gender-based violence; I believe this collective experience to be both complex and transformative.

Another interview participant described that after years of experience with facilitating racist, homophobic, or transphobic comments, she is "not afraid to call it in." She, like the other educators interviewed, said that "at one point I had my own beliefs, values that weren't necessarily progressive. And that it is because of the compassion that people held for my learning process that I am able to get to where I am today."

This terminology references supporting audiences to "lean into discomfort." One educator described this as "how do I support you in a learning process to help you dismantle systems of power that have influenced your ways of thinking around privilege that may be misguided? How can I support you as an individual in seeing a different way of being and knowing?"

"For transformative change to occur," explained one educator, "everyone has to get on the bus." She reflected on the ways in which knowledge is even disseminated: "Who gets access and who doesn't?" She believes that over the last 10 years, she has seen the value of this education for everyone, meeting audiences where they are at, but also being able to tell people when they are being oppressive in a way they can hear.

Several participants also described the experience of providing GBSV and sexual consent education, especially to certain audiences, as personally transformative. "I would say in the last 2 or 3 years, which is when I started working with men, has probably been the biggest transformative change in me." She continued, "Consent is not black and white." Another educator described the diversity of her work with racialized, older immigrant women versus teen male hockey players; both groups need to have the educational material tailored to their needs, but observing their capacity to learn and their experiences coming out of the training has been "extremely transformative" for her.

Another educator said about a recent workshop with queer and trans youth that she realized that she needs to be more "on purpose" than "on point." After 10 years of experience, she sees herself as a facilitator of conversations about healthy relationships, communication, and consent; she is not the "all knower," but a "supporter" to facilitate knowledge transfer. She can learn as much from the participants as they can learn from her.

For most educators, it was easiest to describe the personal transformation in relation to professional learning. "It definitely caused a change, my learning over the years, in my beliefs around the use of personal stories. Change around my approach to connecting with audiences. Change in my relationships. It's kind of like I'm a constant reflection of the lessons I'm learning." This experience of personal transformation was echoed by another educator: "In a broad sense, it's affected my worldview, for sure. And just every interaction, every story and every time, because there is interaction during the speaks, those are all gifts." I myself reflected that

I have learned to slow down and listen to what the audience, young people and survivors, are trying to say and meet them where they are at. I have

gotten far more interested and influenced by learning about colonization and feminism, leading to a more informed and diverse understanding of oppression, privilege, and patriarchy. This helps me to be more humble and self-reflective, while wanting to take action through the opportunities and skills around me in my workplace and personal life. I've learned that you can't make change alone, and that it takes patience and one-on-one and small group conversations. Most of all, this work has transformed my personal life. I have invested in having stronger boundaries in my life about what I consent to for my body and mind, and what I don't. This has led to hard conversations with partners, my children, my family, and friends. I am more open to having hard conversations, but I am far less open to letting people harm me or consenting to harm in order to make someone else feel better.

Many of the educators throughout the interviews noted their experiences of personal bias and subsequently self-reflecting on those issues with the support of colleagues to improve their practice. One educator, in particular, expressed, "I've been proven wrong so many times and I see that as transformative." She described that when she is going to enter a classroom where she knows many young, White males are in attendance, she has learned that

the people who are oftentimes told that they don't have the capacity and that they are blinded by their privilege oftentimes do have the capacity to interrogate their feelings and interrogate their own preconceived notions. I'm able to have, really often, conversations that are just human-to-human, independent of our identity and our walks of life.

As another educator summarized, "When I walk through that door, I have to check my assumptions. Talk about lessons learned to not make assumptions about people....It also has made me appreciate the movement because equity work is a process."

One of the most interesting results from this inquiry was a description not only of practice and personal transformation, but also of "agency transformation," meaning that the centre itself, where the educator worked, was transformed by her experiences of learning. She shared this insight:

One of the biggest things in our field is the turnover issue because they [public educators] tend to be the lowest paid in an agency, the less valued, as though you just throw somebody straight out of university, an undergrad, into this, and then, of course, they're going to move on as soon as they get a better-paid job. And so with the turnover across the province, I feel having stuck around for 8 years makes me a veteran. But the institutional knowledge, the power that I have within an agency... There's a ton of intentionality around trying to make the content highly reputable in academic forums because we've had this longevity, because we've had some of that clout built-in, which is another form of transformative change.

### Conclusion and Implications

The goals of critical feminist pedagogy, as defined by English and Irving (2015), are (a) fostering social analysis, (b) supporting women's leadership, (c) building organizations, and (d) creating social change (pp. 104–105). The sexual assault centre movement in Ontario has supported these goals for over 40 years. The work of feminist educators is to challenge dominant ideologies and their intersections of gender and sexual orientation, as well as race, age, and class (Giroux, 2000; Sandlin et al., 2011, pp. 344–345), predominantly through social activism, including dialogue. In Ontario, feminist public educators have built the practice of sexual consent and GBSV education by engaging in formal, informal, and non-formal learning and organizing to ignite intersectional, transformative, socio-political change. In this case study, female-identifying feminist public educators associated with sexual assault centres demonstrate professional and personal transformative learning to achieve feminist activism by engaging in co-facilitation, debriefing with colleagues, and mentorship.

I believe the next steps to growing this field of practice come from within adult education studies. Judit Illes (2012) turned the lens on teaching about sex, gender, and violence by calling on facilitators and teachers to envision sexual citizenship as a form of civic engagement—the missing link in public health. Through this paradigm shift, GBSV can be discoursed in spaces of public learning through the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), a concept that may further bridge ideologies. By expanding the conversation of sex, gender, and violence into a public health model, which collaborates with the work of public health nurses and HIV/AIDS educators, feminist educators may inspire innovative allyship and a “confirming” environment (Goodman, 2011) where participants have already been exposed to some context and therefore are better aligned for transformative moments.

The implications of this study are far-reaching, including women's learning, feminist pedagogy, social justice education, transformative learning, and public pedagogy. This sector and field of practice is underrepresented in adult education literature, and I believe the narratives of these educators will ignite excitement about and respect for the resilience, adaptation, and transformation of my colleagues.

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