

SILENCE WILL NOT PROTECT US.

A symposium on
sexual violence
in academia

SILENCE
PLEASE

FLORA ANDERSON HALL
SOMERVILLE COLLEGE
FEBRUARY 25, 2022
OXFORD

PROGRAMME

MORNING

9:15

Welcome &
Opening Remarks

9:45-10:45

Navigating Silence(s):
Personal and Political Histories of
Harassment and Activism

10:45-11:45

Enforcing Silence:
Complaint Processes,
Institutional Betrayal and
Retaliation

11:45

Coffee Break

12:00-12:45

Senior Scholars, Power,
and Solidarity

12:45

Lunch
(surprise guest performance at 13:30)

PROGRAMME

AFTERNOON

13:45-14:45

Transforming Silences:
Language and
Collective Action

14:45-15:30

Supporting One Another
as Students and Early
Career Scholars

15:30

Coffee Break

15:45-17:00

Refusing Reform:
Enacting Cultures of Radical
Change in Academia

17:00

Closing Remarks

17:30

Reception
(next door at Common Ground)

Welcome

FROM THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Welcome. This symposium came into being through collective efforts by a group of students at the University of Oxford following the release in October 2021 of “Degrees of Abuse,” an investigation by Al Jazeera into sexual misconduct at the University. As damning as that reporting was when it came to the University’s policies and norms in this area, it was only the latest iteration in a struggle for recognition and justice fought by survivors of sexual harassment, grooming, abuse, and assault in the academy and their allies. Today, we break the silence yet again.

The entire event was conceived by students, is run by students, and is funded by students. But it addresses everyone whose labour contributes to academia here at Oxford and beyond— from students and support staff to administrators, full professors, and independent scholars. It asks: How does the university work? For whom does it work? And how can we bring discussions of sexual violence into the open to call for radical change?

Welcome

FROM THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

continued

This is not the first time these questions have been asked, and we know—and insist—that it will not be the last. We embrace collective resistance as a vehicle for systemic transformation, refusing concessions and mere reform.

At the heart of this project is a desire to have difficult conversations. In this spirit, there is no keynote address.

Instead, the programme features a series of panel discussions, recognising that no one perspective reflects the diversity and urgency of feminist responses to sexual violence. These are difficult topics, and we offer a blanket content warning for the subjects that may be discussed.

Welcome

FROM THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

continued

The enormous outpouring of interest in this symposium is a testament to the pervasiveness of these issues in higher education, but also to the conviction of so many scholars, activists, students, staff members, and allies that things must change.

Today's event is not the beginning of these conversations, nor is it the end.

Thank you for being here today.

In solidarity,
The Student Organising Collective,
Silence Will Not Protect Us

FUNDING & SUPPORT

We are grateful to the following student-led organisations for financial support for this event.

Brasenose College JCR
Corpus Christi College JCR
It Happens Here Oxford
Keble College JCR
Lady Margaret Hall JCR
Magdalen College JCR
New College JCR
Nuffield College JCR
Pembroke College JCR
St. John's College JCR
St. Hugh's College JCR
Trinity College JCR
Trinity College MCR
University College JCR

We also extend gratitude to the following individuals and organisations for in-kind support and partnership with the symposium.

Anonymous
Common Ground
Lighthouse Books
Somerville College
That Event Company

Policies

CODE OF CONDUCT

All attendees are reminded that the Code of Conduct is in place at all times during this event. It can be found at transformingsilence.org/code-of-conduct

SOCIAL MEDIA

Feel free to live-tweet during these sessions or post to social media about this event

#SilenceWillNotProtectUs

@transfrmsilence

Resources

ACCESSIBILITY

Volunteers will be present throughout the event to assist anyone with accessibility needs. If you have an urgent request, please email access@transformingsilence.org. For more details on access and inclusion, please see our website: transformingsilence.org/access-inclusion

STUDENT WELFARE

We have two junior deans, Cori and Brenda, attending who are happy to speak with any students who may wish to talk to someone confidentially. They are here to support students, so please reach out to them at any point during the day. We will introduce them during the welcome address and they will be wearing specially coloured lanyards to make them easily distinguishable from other volunteers.

Bookstall

LIGHTHOUSE BOOKS

We have partnered with Lighthouse Books, a queer feminist bookseller based in Edinburgh, to offer a virtual bookshop featuring many of the books from which we have drawn inspiration and strength. We've also set up a pay-it-forward scheme. If cost is prohibitive for you, you can use the code SPEAK-UP-SOLIDARITY to receive a book (or books!) for free.

To donate to the pay-it-forward scheme, visit
Lighthouse Books at
<https://lighthousebookshop.com/shop/pif>.

Music

SYMPOSIUM PLAYLIST

We have put together a Spotify playlist called "Songs Not Silence," which features music we have found calming, energising, and motivating during the organising process.

“Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created.”

Toni Morrison, Nobel Lecture, 1993

“The story of what happens to a complaint is often the same story complaints are about: who controls the situation, who controls the narrative.”

Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 2021

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light*, 1988

“If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”

Zora Neale Hurston,

Their Eyes Were Watching God, 1937

NAVIGATING SILENCE(S): PERSONAL AND POLITICAL HISTORIES OF HARASSMENT AND ACTIVISM

**Susuana Amoah, Dr Mara Keire,
Dr Nicole Gipson**

The first panel contextualises the symposium in regards to a selection of wider histories of anti-sexual violence activism and resistance. As part of “making the personal political,” it offers a platform for panellists to speak about experiences that have informed their activism and research. From navigating ambiguous boundaries and grey areas like the on-campus/off-campus divide and humour to excavating the role of personal experience and institutional memory in resisting sexual misconduct and racial harassment, this panel will both frame conversations about power and violence broadly within history and specifically within individual lived experiences. Straddling the border of the personal and political, panellists will also address the question of how we can practice self-care when our personal experiences, research, and activism overlap.

“Tools introduced to redress power relations can be used by those who benefit from power relations.”

Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 2021

"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support." Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House", 1979

“The irony is that institutional betrayal is not only bad for those dependent upon the institution, but comes to haunt the institution itself.”

Chanel Miller, *Know My Name*, 2019

ENFORCING SILENCE: COMPLAINT PROCESSES, INSTITUTIONAL BETRAYAL, AND RETALIATION

**Dr Anna Bull, Dr Adrija Dey,
Georgina Calvert-Lee**

The panel will explain how the complaints process, national and institutional policies, and legal frameworks are inadequate to redress, and can even punish, those who come forward with reports of sexual misconduct or violence. This includes the ways that the language of confidentiality and privacy, NDAs, and legislation like GDPR and the Data Protection Act of 2018 (intended to protect individuals) are invoked to defend institutions. It places UK academia's responses to sexual harassment and violence in conversation with international responses and explores to what extent policies and procedures that silence complainants and advocates can be viewed as norms rather than exceptions. Finally, instead of regarding policies and procedures as operating in isolation, the panel will address how academic cultures of silence abet harassment and misconduct by protecting predators and constructing obstacles for complainants.

“Diversity as a door deal: you might have a door opened for you on the condition that you shut that door quickly behind you, if you shut the door on others like you. And shut that door can mean not only doing what you can to stop others from getting in but also stopping thinking of yourself as one of the others.”

Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 2021

“No insurgent intellectuals in this society escape the pressure to conform. This is especially true of those who work within hierarchical institutions, where rewards and benefits are awarded in relation to service rendered. Irrespective of our locations, however, we are all vulnerable. We can all be had, co-opted, bought. There is no special grace to rescue any of us. There is only a constant struggle.” bell hooks, “Critical Reflections”, *Artforum*, Vol. 33 (3), November 1994.

SENIOR SCHOLARS, POWER, AND SOLIDARITY

**Professor Elizabeth Frazer,
Professor Kalwant Bhopal,
Professor Priyamvada Gopal**

In this conversation, speakers will discuss how their respective activism has evolved through the course of their careers and impart knowledge they have acquired through their advocacy in academia. It will cover the phenomena of fracturing, whereby women and other historically marginalised people who rise within the hierarchies of higher education are not supportive (or are even hostile) to calls for change. The conversation will contextualise sexual harassment and violence with regards to a continuum of abuse in academic culture that manifests in celebrity networks and research inequalities that contribute lay the foundations for institutional silencing.

“Collectivity was a way to share the cost of complaint. Rather than each of us being on her own, we would stand together.”
(Leila Whitley, Tiffany Page and Alice Corble, with Heidi Hasbrouck, Chryssa Sdrolia and others)

“To become complainers, to locate a problem, [is] to become the location of the problem.”
Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 2021

“It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism.” Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*

TRANSFORMING SILENCES: LANGUAGE AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

**Professor Sundari Anitha,
Dr. Alice Corble, Deborah Davies**

In this panel, speakers will reformulate individual experiences of misconduct into a collective call for systemic change in institutions that have neglected their duty of care. Beyond making the “personal political,” it explores the avenues that have been used to speak out against sexual harassment in online and offline spaces: library spaces; the courts; and the press, while also rethinking strategies for collective action. In this vein, the panel moves beyond the British context to engage broader insight gained from global social movement and university politics, such as those in India.

“There is no single turning point which marked the shift from working alongside one another as peers and fellow students, toward friendship, toward collectivity. Instead, we were a collective long before we realized it.”

Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 2021

"We have chosen each other
and the edge of each others
battles

The war is the same if we lose
someday women's blood will
congeal

upon a dead planet

if we win

there is no telling..."

Audre Lorde, "Outlines," in *Sister Outsider*, 1984

SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER AS STUDENTS AND EARLY CAREER SCHOLARS

**Kaelyn Apple, Mia Liyanage,
Nicole Gipson**

In this conversation, speakers will elaborate on how students and early career scholars can support one another through the trying processes of resisting, and fighting to change, abusive institutional cultures. Despite occupying some of the most vulnerable and marginalised places in academia, the onus of changing institutional culture too often falls on those with the least robust support networks. As such, speakers will incorporate their own experiences to address the ways in which we can give, and receive support, from within our own peer groups to create a collective that collaborates for meaningful change but also acts as a comfort and support network to deal with the hostility, burnout, and compassion fatigue that accompany activism.

“Imagine otherwise. Remake
the world. Some of us have
never had any other choice.”

Christina Sharpe,
“Lose Your Kin,” 2016

“To refuse what has come to
be is to fight to be.”

Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 2021

“There’s nothing new
under the sun,

but there are new suns.”

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the
Trickster*, Unpublished

REFUSING REFORM: ENACTING CULTURES OF RADICAL CHANGE IN ACADEMIA

**Mia Liyanage,
Professor Alison Phipps**

A panellist-guided discussion with audience members about how we, as a collective, can reject the bureaucratic heuristic of reform — eg. incremental change to policies intended to protect universities, not people. Beyond mere calls for reform, we aspire to advocate and explore new agendas for transformation and alternative frameworks that do not perpetuate the power disparities and hierarchies which precipitate harassment and misconduct.

THE MAN: A COMPILATION

Rebecca Hazelton

The man is a feminist.

The man is not physically repellent.

The man suffers from major depression.

The man is an artist so the major depression goes untreated.

The man treats his major depression with alcohol, with pills, with a relentless pursuit of adoration, with younger and younger impressionables with badly drawn boundaries.

The man thinks he is, in some way, badly drawn.

The man is not physically repellent, although at times he finds himself so, and so fixates on these self-perceived inadequacies that he effectively convinces those around him that he is.

The man falls in love whenever a woman looks at him.

The man is an artist so this does not seem strange.

The man throws a coffee table at his beloved.

The man swears he will never do so again.

The man is an artist so he writes an essay about the wrongness of throwing a coffee table.

The man closes his eyes when the crowd claps at his essay about the wrongness of throwing a coffee table at the woman you ostensibly love.

The man hears the crowd hear him say the word *regret*, and the crowd doesn't notice the absence of *apology*.

The man is iconic.

The man has his portrait drawn by illustrators for magazine spreads.

The man gives a commencement speech that brings many to tears.

The commencement speech plays on long after the speech is over, repeated and reflected across the Internet.

The man had several terrible things happen to him as a child. No one doubts this and no one should.

The man began as a boy, and that's the tragedy.

The man is comforted by women.

Every time the man dates a woman he has to tell her how the previous woman was unhinged, unwell, unmade by his constant queries, demands, and assessments, and the new woman must nod along or she will not be the new woman any longer.

There is always a new woman because there is always a woman who is unsure of her prettiness, her talent, her ownership of the air she breathes.

The man had a restraining order, but, he reassures his new beloved, the cops knew what he was working with and had his back.

The man is an artist so when he is at his worst no one notices because it looks like creativity.

Creativity is how the man self-medicated before he became a man, when writing a poem or a story was a way to write himself out of the terrible things that had happened to him.

The terrible things became more terrible in every re-telling.

The man writes an essay about his self-perceived inadequacies and various disadvantages and the women reading it want to comfort him.

When questioned by an audience member about his behavior as a teacher or conference leader or mentor, the man becomes incensed and the audience collectively turns on the audience member, whose voice is shrill, who looks small, who shouldn't have stepped up to the microphone. No one questions the man's anger.

The man had a way about him.

The man had a mind that was very beautiful.

If the man found you brilliant, you were brilliant.

The man could make a woman feel very special when she had his entire attention.

When a woman had his entire attention, it could be very overwhelming.

The man was in the habit of sitting in his car outside her apartment building and watching her struggle with her keys while balancing groceries, but this was the only way he could express love when love was no longer wanted.

Love, to the man, was observation.

Observation, to the man, was a reflection.

Many writers warned their female students about the man. They did so by raising meaningful eyebrows, by innuendo, by waving red flags in complicated patterns by which one might guide a plane to land.

The plane, they thought privately, was rather naïve about how runways worked.

They did not warn the female students about the man in writing.

They did not report the man.

They did not consider reporting the man. To whom would they report? There were no policies in place.

They sometimes assigned the man's work in their classes because to have their students not read the famous man's work would be irresponsible.

Art, they would say, is full of authors whose behavior is questionable or looks ugly in retrospect.

Am I, they would say, to stop watching *Annie Hall*?

They did not question the man's behavior, not really.

They worked around it and tried to teach the young women they mentored how to work around it as well, never considering that the necessity of teaching this was in some way accepting it as natural, the way we counsel another to grab an umbrella when it is raining.

You cannot stop the rain from falling.

Am I, they did not say, to stop watching this happen and do something?

The man gave a voice to people who had been previously unheard and in this way the man was a hero.

And if the man, under the umbrella of mentorship, romantically pursued some of those people, leaving them in doubt of their own talent and ensuring they remained unheard, surely this did not erase his other good works.

The man is an artist so he tells her he can shape her into a success.

The man, it must be said, painted a picture of the human soul.

The human soul is a weight we have yet to successfully measure.

Attempts have been made, generally by calculating loss.

When the man heard that a famous newscaster had installed a hidden button on his desk, which he used to lock his office shut, trapping female subordinates inside with him, the man was enraged. Who would do that, the man said. What kind of man?

What kind of man am I, the man asked his readers, in his famous essay about masculinity.

There was a joke the man would tell at parties where he'd ask a woman to hold an invisible Barbie.

Point to Barbie's face, he'd say.

She'd oblige.

Point to Barbie's hips, he'd say.

She'd oblige.

By now several people were watching. Some of the people knew the joke already. This was his favorite joke when he was drunk.

Between the two of them, they identify all the invisible parts of the invisible woman's body.

Now, what area haven't we named, he'd say.

Smiling, because this is all in fun.

And she'd smile back, because a smile dictates a smile, and would oblige, although she's not aware that the people around her are shifting in different ways that she can't quite understand.

She'd point.

He'd lean forward and dart his head in, sucking her finger into his mouth. She'd jerk back in shock.

That's Barbie's pussy, he'd say.

The man hated himself a great deal, and that is a mitigating factor.

One need only read his work to see that he hated himself a great deal.

Really, the way he treated women was just a way of further punishing himself.

He knew right and wrong, and he suffered for it.

Suffering is one of the tools we, as humans, use to make art. Other tools are pens, palates, and coffee tables.

Other tools are sentences.

The man was a brilliant critic, and his hand on a student's knee after everyone else had left the dinner party was a brilliant critique of her inability to raise objections or make a fuss or in any way disrupt the set piece in which she suddenly found herself.

When there were women who would raise objections or make a fuss or disrupt the set piece, they were seen as shrill and their careers stalled or suffered or were henceforth seen solely in relation to the incident with the man.

These women were lessons.

In the many biographies of the man they would mention his behavior with women as the context needed to understand the greatness of his work.

Women are the context against which men are men.

One day a woman would read his account of their relationship in his work and wonder at how unrecognizable she was in it. The more she read the less she knew herself. Perhaps that was how it had been. What kind of woman am I, she wondered? She read to find out.

A relationship, as a term, does not tell us much.

This is why we have modifiers, like codependent, or symbiotic, or equal, or parasitic.

At writing conferences, it was understood that if the man put his hand on your knee it wasn't to be spoken of. Many women bore the invisible mark of his respect.

What kind of man am I, he asked the young woman at the conference. Can you tell what kind of man I am?

The man, it was apparent in retrospect, groomed his female workshop participants.

The male participants were unaware of this grooming.

The male participants were shocked, years later, when this behavior was revealed.

Why, they asked the women, did you not tell us what was happening?

They took the women's silence as criticism. It was very unfair; they were allies. They wore T-shirts that said *Male Feminist*.

What else did the women want of them?

The women kept their own counsel.

The man was published by *Playboy*, the mark of a true intellectual.

The female author at whom the man had thrown a table was a well-known feminist, so her story was suspect.

Many suspected that the woman's insistence on reminding them of this story was her hitching her star to his.

Her star was already a perfectly good star, though.

We could be a power couple, the man said, and the woman wondered about power.

Powerful, wrote the man in another famous essay, which was reprinted in a well-regarded anthology, is what we call a man when he is perfectly complicit in society's inequities.

When the man heard of a famous comedian forcing women to watch him masturbate, the man was enraged. Who would do that, the man said. What kind of man?

At night, by a bonfire, surrounded by other artists and writers in varying states of inebriation, the man spoke to a woman about his love for his child, how a child just made you realize what was important, how having a child left you in awe of its small hands. The woman, also a mother, stepped a little closer.

The other artists and writers in varying states of inebriation took note of how much time the man and the female writer spent together.

For years later, her name is coupled with his, brought up again and again as an amusing bit of trivia.

The woman is a footnote in the man's history.

The man likes footnotes. He likes how appending a footnote allows you to digress, but not really.

In his famous essay on power, the man talks about the assumption of authorial power. By using the footnote as he does, for sly asides, for play, he is dismantling the long tradition of academic authority and literary power.

His ex-wife finds herself mentioned in a footnote to the essay. Yes, she thinks, that's about right.

Several women tried to talk about what the man had done to them, but they were not the right sort of women.

He chose young women.

He chose women who had grown up with several disadvantages, who tended to treat their depression and anxieties with alcohol, with pills, with a relentless pursuit of validation.

He chose women of color, women from poverty, women who were at the conference on scholarship, women who were hoping to speak for their sisters.

He chose students.

He chose women who thought they were in a relationship with him.

There was no right woman to tell the story.

Years later, she would tell the story of how the man sat next to her at the end of the conference and leaned over and sniffed her shoulder. I wanted, he said, to know what you smelled like.

She was fifteen.

She told the story again and again, because the story was so funny.

The stories women tell are very funny.

Can you believe what that man did, they say.

It's unbelievable what he did.

It's unbelievable how many times he did it.

Can you believe it?

They say, ha ha, listen, can you please believe me.

One day, years later, a woman is at a party telling her funny, funny story, and another woman says, god, I'm so sorry that happened to you.

She pauses, her glass still jauntily raised. She'd been ready to deliver the punch line, but now she can't.

She's angry at the other woman for misunderstanding.

She does not want it to be a thing that happened to her.

She does not want to be the punch line.

If other people don't see the humor, then the humor disappears.

There are anonymous letters, detailing how the man groomed his students.

There are anonymous letters, detailing how the man leveraged his power at a well-known journal/press/literary festival for sexual favors.

There are anonymous letters, detailing how consensual relationships became less so.

There was a list left in a bathroom at a major conference. There was a website.

The man had his defenders.

The man had the advantage of collective disbelief.

Sometimes, the man denied.

I am a flawed man, but I am not this man.

What kind of man would do such a thing?

Sometimes, the man issued a public apology.

If I have ever crossed a line, then I am sorry.

If my actions were misconstrued, then I am sorry.

If my intention was misunderstood, then I am sorry.

When the apology was critiqued as being not an apology, there were other ways to respond.

If my various disadvantages caused me to take advantage, I am sorry.

If my questionable relationship with drinking and drugs and sex caused me to have questionable relationships, then I am sorry.

The devil of it is, a man said in his colleague's office, that no one else is writing the books that the man is writing.

She agrees. No one else is writing those books.

But, she says, we can't read the books that aren't written.

Have you ever met him? Curious, hoping for a little gossip.

No, she has never encountered that particular man.

But she knows the man regardless.

Every woman knows the man.

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transformingsilence.org