

## Article

# Organisational Characteristics That Facilitate Gender-Based Violence and Harassment in Higher Education?

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**Abstract:** Gender-based violence and sexual harassment (GBVH) by and towards academics and students has been under-theorised at an organisational level in higher education institutions (HEIs). The methodology involves a critical review of the literature on GBVH and organizational responses to it, locating it in the context of an analysis of organizational power. The theoretical perspective involves a focus on power and workplace bullying. It identifies three power-related characteristics of academic environments which it is suggested facilitate GBVH: their male-dominant hierarchical character; their neoliberal managerialist ethos and gender/intersectional incompetent leadership which perpetuates male entitlement and toxic masculinities. These characteristics also inhibit tackling GBVH by depicting it as an individual problem, encouraging informal coping and militating against the prosecution of perpetrators. Initiating a discussion and action at organizational and state levels about GBVH as a power-related phenomenon, challenging the dominant neo-liberal ethos and the hierarchical character of HEIs, as well as reducing their male dominance and increasing the gender competence of those in positions of power are seen as initial steps in tackling the problem.

**Keywords:** gender-based violence and harassment; organisational approach; higher education; power; intersectionality; male dominated hierarchical structures; gender incompetent leadership; neoliberal managerialism

## 1. Introduction

With a small number of notable exceptions, the question of whether the organizational characteristics of higher educational institutions (HEIs) facilitate gender-based violence (GBVH) is rarely asked. In this theoretical article, we identify those organizational characteristics that we suggest facilitate GBVH i.e., behaviour 'that is not necessarily sexual in nature but is targeted at individuals or a group of individuals *because* (sic) of their sex or gender' (Foley et al. 2020, p. 1). The identification of these organizational characteristics is based on an extensive review of literature on GBVH, located in the context of a critical studies power lens based on Lukes (1974, 2005). The contribution of the article lies at a theoretical level. This theoretical position needs to be tested in empirical studies, and while this lies beyond the focus of this article, hypotheses for testing are identified.

There is increasing awareness and concern about sexual harassment in higher educational institutions (HEIs), not least because of the existence of the #MeToo movement and

individual revelations about students and early career academics in HEIs being exposed to such experiences. However, other aspects of gender-based violence have attracted less attention. Furthermore, relatively little research attention has been paid to such experiences from an organizational theoretical perspective (Bondestam and Lundqvist 2020). This is a significant gap. Without understanding organizational power, we suggest that it is not possible to understand or tackle GBVH. In this article, building on the insights of Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) and those of Phipps (2020) and Naezer et al. (2019), the main focus is the characteristics of the academic context in HEIs in western society that facilitate GBVH between academics and/or between them and students.

GBVH is seen as a global, complex and intractable issue. We see GBVH in HEIs as being on a continuum involving an abuse of intersectional power differentials, including but not restricted to sexual violence. The identification and reporting of GBVH is seen as affected both by the national (macro) context in terms of legislation and policy, and by gendered organisational structures and cultures (meso level) (Acker 2006; Woods et al. 2021). It is also affected by the relational (micro) level in terms of the categorical identity of the victim and the actions and reactions of those in the victim's immediate environment (Kirkner et al. 2020). These affect the interpretation of events and are influenced not only by the behaviour itself, but also by the relationship between the perpetrator and survivor; the gender, race, sexual identity, career stage and position of the harasser and the victim/survivor; the situation, including the perceived intent of the perpetrator and the perceived consequences of identifying and reporting it, and the perceptions and actions of bystanders (Gutek 2012). These three levels (macro, micro and meso) are nested, interconnected layers. Here, the focus is on the organisational (meso) level.

In this article, we provide a theoretical organizational perspective on GBVH in HEIs. We start with a review of the literature and explain how a focus on organizational power is essential to understanding GBVH, drawing particularly on Lukes (1974, 2005), and seek to identify organizational characteristics that facilitate the existence of GBVH in HEIs.

This article is important and interesting for theorists and practitioners alike. It challenges the typically individualistic approach used in understanding and dealing with GBVH. It underlines the importance of seeing GBVH as reflecting organisational characteristics, identifies these characteristics and legitimates the importance of recognizing and tackling the manifestations of these power inequalities.

## 2. Methodology and Theoretical Perspective

The methodology involves a critical review of the literature on GBVH and organizational responses to it, locating it in the context of an analysis of organizational power. We critique the concentration of GBVH research and intervention at the individual level and argue that its enactment and the organisational response to it should be located within a wider organizational environment and seen as essentially a power-based strategy (Wilson and Thompson 2001; MacKinnon 1979). GBVH is enacted because it brings actual and potential victims/survivors 'into line' while also demonstrating the power of the perpetrators. Thus, to really understand the nature of GBVH, it is necessary to see it as involving a continuum of behaviours to demean, isolate and marginalise, with rape and sexual assault being part of a larger spectrum (Kelly 1988). We suggest that the organisational response to sexual harassment in HEIs in western society is problematic, with policy and procedures being fragmented and confusing (Bennett 2009), and the onus of proof being placed on the individual victim/survivor. GBVH in HEIs has overwhelmingly been seen as an individual's problem that can be solved by discouraging complainants or allowing perpetrators to leave quietly (Phipps 2020). In both cases, the focus is on individuals. This ignores the fact that those experiencing GVBH may have difficulty identifying it as such and may be unable or unwilling to report it (Bennett 2009; Kirkner et al. 2020). Many of these limitations have been highlighted repeatedly over a 30-year period of research.

Many studies of GBVH highlight under-reporting as an issue (Gordon and Collins 2013; McDonald 2012; Kirkner et al. 2020). Studies of sexual harassment in HEIs show

very large variation in prevalence rates, depending on the size and nature of the sample, the way respondents are selected and the questions asked. People may not use terms such as bullying, sexual harassment or GBVH but if given the opportunity, may describe experiences that appear consistent with widely accepted definitions (Naezer et al. 2019).

Most studies of the prevalence of sexual harassment in HEIs focus on student populations, do not go beyond a binary understanding of gender and draw on narrow legalistic definitions (McDonald 2012). In a systematic review of top-ranked peer-reviewed articles, Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) found that sexual harassment prevalence in HEIs ranged from 11–73 per cent for heterosexual women and 3 to 26 per cent for heterosexual men. Based on that systematic review, supplemented by specific Scandinavian sources, they concluded that a median of 49% of heterosexual women in HEIs had experienced sexual harassment. Ilies et al. (2003), using US data, reported a broadly similar figure: 58% for female academic staff.

Everyday processes in organisations reflect and reproduce wider social inequalities (Acker 2006). Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality contributes to an understanding of who is the target of GBVH (Holvino 2010; Rodriguez et al. 2016). Studies frequently do not differentiate between the experiences of cisgender and gender nonbinary students (e.g., Voth Schrag 2017 in the US and Sinkkonen et al. 2014 in Finland). Cantor et al. (2015) and Howard et al. (2019) found that undergraduate students in the US who identified as gender nonbinary reported the highest rates for all types of sexual violence, while Burke et al. (2020) found that similar proportions of gender nonbinary and cisgender women were raped in Irish HEIs. In any event, those who are most likely to be victims are those who are in structurally unbalanced relationships in terms of power, and/or culturally defined as 'Other' e.g., women, especially postdocs and postgraduates or first-year undergraduate students, racial/ethnic minorities and other culturally vulnerable groups who are multiply devalued in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. Thus, intersectionality 'makes a discussion about power dynamics and the actual 'doing' and processes of inequality unavoidable' (Woods et al. 2021, p. 11).

The theoretical perspective acknowledges that HEIs are political arenas (Klikauer 2018) and uses a critical studies power lens (Lukes 1974, 2005) building on the work of Acker (2006) on inequality regimes, Hodgins et al. (2020) on workplace bullying and Crenshaw (1991) on intersectionality. Relatively little research has focused on organizational structures in higher education as facilitating GBVH. Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020, p. 16) highlight 'precarious working conditions, higher education being organised hierarchically, lack of active leadership, the ongoing favoritization of toxic academic masculinities, biased and unjust competition for research funding' as critical factors. At an organizational level, Naezer et al. (2019) also highlight the importance of 'hierarchies within and outside academia as well as the competitive and individualistic culture of contemporary academia'. Phipps (2020, p. 229) argues that: 'There is a need for deeper work on institutional cultures and how they refract gender and other power relations and shape bullying, harassment and violence'. This article builds on this work.

The manifestations of GBVH vary in their severity, visibility, tangibility and frequency, but all reflect an exercise of power that consolidates those in dominant positions. Such behaviours include physical, economic and psychological violence, recognising that these acts and their effects are only analytically distinct. Physical violence constitutes the overt face of power and is the one that is most easily identified as GBVH. Economic violence is potentially visible, but given norms of confidentiality concerning salaries and benefits, it is frequently invisible. Psychological violence includes a range of gender-based practices including incivility, bullying, social undermining, exclusion/ostracism, disrespect (Mavin et al. 2014; Miner et al. 2019); belittling, categorical or individual demeaning comments or jokes, silent treatments, constant scrutiny (Foley et al. 2020); invisibility, ridiculing and blaming (As 2004); gendered devaluation and stereotyping (O'Connor et al. 2020; Martin 2003); as well as academic career-related practices involving scientific sabotage, including taking credit for others' work (Naezer et al. 2019). With the exception of actual

physical violence, all of these manifestations may be face-to-face or online. They are often interrelated and contribute to a sense of helplessness around not being able to prevent or expose GBVH.

GBVH is seen here as involving a web of gendered power-related behaviours enacted in organisations. Early approaches to the study of power, described as primitive or functionalist, view power as a phenomenon that is possessed by individuals or groups, exercised in behaviours and reflected in superiors rightfully exercising power over subordinates. Thus, power in an organisation is understood as the capacity to influence others and exercised to ensure compliance with organisational goals. This approach is recognizable as a one-dimensional approach (Lukes 1974, 2005): A having power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do (Sadan 2004). It rests on the assumption that power is overt. This view of power assumes that people who wish to challenge power raise their grievances in overt fora and decision-making arenas, with the assumption that such fora are open to everyone who wishes to use them. By extension, not raising grievances is assumed to be due to the acceptance of the decisions of the powerful, or to inertia, or indifference. This is particularly relevant as studies of bullying and sexual harassment in HEIs find that a sizeable proportion of employees do not report these experiences, and only a tiny minority take legal action (Hodgins et al. 2020; Bondestam and Lundqvist 2020). In the one-dimensional view of power, inaction involves individual victim-blaming i.e., B's failure to challenge A is not seen to be a function of B's powerlessness but as a choice.

It is suggested that the enactment of power is typically more subtle and more covert than the one-dimensional approach. Lukes' (1974, 2005) second dimension of power argues that power is exercised covertly or stealthily (O'Connor et al. 2019b). In the case of GBVH it is suggested that it is exercised both to prevent GBVH being identified and to ensure that it is treated as an individual's problem, frequently dealt with through informal coping or mediation. The second dimension also highlights the fact that power is mobilised against whistleblowers and covertly used to protect perpetrators.

A third dimension of power is described by Lukes (1974, 2005) as latent power. In this case, the enactment of power is perceived as legitimate; indeed, it is not seen at all (see also Foucault's (1977) 'disciplinary power'). Those subject to power want to do what the powerful want them to do, even if it is contrary to their own best interests. Therefore, any challenge to power evaporates as those without power take on board the agenda of the powerful as 'natural' and 'inevitable'. This makes it hard for GBVH to be recognized and named. It is a particularly insidious exercise of power (Sadan 2004) and has been critical to feminist understandings of the persistence of gendered structures and hierarchies (Acker 2006).

MacKinnon (1979) sees GBVH as a reflection of institutionalised sexism and men's subordination of women. It harks back to traditional power dynamics between men and women and sees it as particularly likely to occur where gender is dominantly constructed in terms of the heterosexual matrix (Hearn and Collinson 2017), where contextually defined hegemonic masculinity (O'Connell 1987, 2005) is seen as the most culturally valued form. For Kupers (2005, p. 716) 'contemporary hegemonic masculinity is built on two legs, domination of women and a hierarchy of inter male dominance'. In this context, women's presence in HEIs can be seen as a threat to the symbolic gender order. Similar processes can be seen as underpinning the enactment of power in other intersectional contexts.

Mavin et al. (2014, p. 442) focused on intra-gender micro-violence between women, reflecting the existence of female misogyny as part of the gendered contexts within which women operate and where 'women are reminded of their unstable and subordinated position in the symbolic order by both *women* (sic) and men'. While such experiences are a reality and may be particularly hurtful to women since they breach expectations as regards appropriate female behaviour, women are in a minority in senior positions in HEIs. Hence, although female misogyny and gendered micro-violence exist (Kirkner et al. 2020) and may be a particular issue in female-dominated disciplines, within the broader context of HEIs,

GBVH is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, and frequently those whose leadership is uninformed by gender awareness or gender competence (Wroblewski 2019; Lipinsky and Wroblewski 2021).

It has been recognised that neoliberalism is a vague and complex concept. However, with it there is an intensification of the 'pace, intensity and moral legitimacy' of the marketisation and commodification of higher education combined with the creation of global league tables: 'symbolically the most powerful indicator that market values have been incorporated into the university sector' (Lynch 2006, pp. 5, 6, respectively). These league tables focus particularly on research output (Lynch 2014). Managerialism 'is the dominant mode of governance aligned with neoliberalism' (Lynch et al. 2012), and focuses on key performance indicators, including research metrics. The focus is on 'the quantifiable use value of knowledge' particularly research, which is 'metricized, audited' and used in the global ranking of HEIs (Morley 2016, p. 29). Phipps (2020, p. 234) argues that 'the combination of neoliberal systems with patriarchy and other structures can be used to perpetuate harm, and to avoid accountability'. Both students and academic staff become dispensable commodities: 'Neoliberal modes of value also interact with gender, race, class and other relations to ensure that some are 'reckoned up' differently to others' (Phipps 2020, p. 230). In this context, the failure to tackle GBVH can be seen as a consequence of neoliberalist policies where the protection of individuals is much less important than institutional branding (Lynch 2013, p. 9), with consequences as regards HEIs' 'airbrushing' of it.

The main theoretical contribution of this article is to identify the characteristics of HEIs in western society that potentially affects the way power is structured and exercised in them and how this facilitates GBVH. The identification of these characteristics effectively constitutes hypotheses that need to be systematically tested in empirical studies. The specific focus is on the male-dominant hierarchies in HEIs, their neoliberal managerialist ethos and their typically gender/intersectional incompetent leadership, which effectively collude with the perpetuation of GBVH.

### 3. The Nature of the Academic Context: A Facilitator for GBVH?

This article suggests that HEIs, while overtly proclaiming to censure or even outlaw GBVH, devise policies and practices that reflect and protect powerful groups, thus facilitating the existence of GBVH and a lack of accountability in that context. It focuses on HEIs' organisational characteristics (Harris et al. 2019) since they are responsible for creating safe places for students and academics in the context of public pressure to devise measures to ameliorate GBVH, and yet the continued focus at the individual level. It suggests that the relationships between academics, and between academics and students, can be seen as characterised by the same gendered power dynamics that have been recognised in a wide range of hierarchically structured organisations. They tend to be amplified in HEIs by a hyper-competitive workplace, characterised by precarious work contracts, an unequal distribution of core tasks and unbalanced power relations with high levels of direct and indirect dependency by subordinates for career progression on those in senior positions.

Lukes' (1974, 2005) second dimension of power can be seen to operate within the organisational (meso) level of HEIs. This level is located within the national (macro) context, which provides the legislative underpinning for organisational options and affects whether, at the individual (micro) level, GBVH will be identified as such and reported. Countries vary in their adoption of international frameworks that encourage, and in some cases oblige, members to collect and act on national data on GBVH (FRA 2014; Latcheva 2017), and in terms of their recognition of potential grounds for it e.g., gender, race/ethnicity or other minority status, age, parental status, academic position, sexual orientation, disability, etc. They also vary in terms of what has been called the ecosystem (Cooper et al. 2020) to which individual HEIs are exposed. In most HEIs in western societies, this ecosystem is characterised by a neoliberal focus on performativity and individual responsibility, reflecting the neoliberal managerialist ethos. Finally, HEIs vary in terms of the precarity of

their academic employees, their postgraduates' dependence on supervisors and their status as employees/students, as well as the normalized patterns of entitlement and subordination between senior and junior academics/students (Kalpazidou and Cacace 2019) and hence the latter's vulnerability to GBVH in those sites characterised by an imbalance of power (whether symbolic, economic or social).

Based on this theoretical analysis and a review of the literature, it is suggested that the characteristics of HEIs that are seen to facilitate GBVH and inhibit dealing with it are male-dominant hierarchies, a neoliberal managerialist ethos and gender/intersectional incompetent leadership which perpetuates privilege and toxic masculinities (Whitehead 2021). We recognise variation within and between HEIs in western society, but these characteristics appear to be common.

### 3.1. Male Dominant Hierarchies

There is extensive evidence that women in male-dominated occupations are more likely to be exposed not only to overt sexual harassment (Johnson et al. 2018; Buchanan et al. 2014) but also to behaviours that 'intimidate, humiliate, belittle and exclude', with 'constant scrutiny and subtle sabotage of their work and professional reputations' so as to make clear to them that 'they are unwelcome interlopers' in what are seen as men's occupations (Foley et al. 2020, pp. 2, 7). These are exercises in power.

HEIs are male-dominated organisations where the privileged masculinity of power is embedded and normalised and where there are strong pressures against identifying and challenging abuses of that power (Ivancheva 2020; Van den Brink and Benschop 2012). Changing subordinates' position in these structures requires changing men's position as 'a social category associated with hierarchy and power' (Hearn 2001, p. 70): One where 'in simply going along with institutionalised features of the gender order, men perpetuate masculinism, a bias in favour of men' (Martin 2003, p. 360). GBVH can be seen as an attempt to keep marginal groups, based on gender, race/ethnicity, sexual identity, occupational position, etc., in the place assigned to them by those (predominantly white men) who hold/aspire to hold public positions of power in HEIs. Such patterns can be reinforced by bystanders and by the victims/survivors themselves. Thus, for example, men or white women may downplay their (or others') experiences of GBVH if they see advantages in colluding with hegemonies (Boogaard and Roggeband 2010).

In terms of the second perspective on power (Lukes 1974, 2005), those in such powerful positions define what constitutes GBVH, and can restrict it, for example, to demonstrable severe physical violence. They can categorise GBVH as a non-issue in academia ('the mobilisation of bias': Sadan 2004; see also Hodgins et al. 2020) or insist that it simply reflects the individual actions of mentally unstable men.

The nature of academia is that it is hierarchical. Implicit in this is the privileging of those in senior positions—with the limits of such privileging being unclear and potentially including GBVH (Bennett 2009; Bondestam and Lundqvist 2020; Naezer et al. 2019). Academic careers often involve long periods of dependency, particularly at the start (Bozzon et al. 2019). Relationships between academics at different career stages and between them and students are hierarchical, with power and resources concentrated in senior-position holders and with others (e.g., students, postdoctoral fellows, researchers) dependent on them for paid employment and academic success, frequently in a non-transparent ad hoc way, such as through sponsorship (Ibarra et al. 2010; De Vries and Binns 2018; O'Connor et al. 2019a). Such hierarchical and dependent relationships maximise the possibilities for GBVH (Johnson et al. 2018; Good and Cooper 2016). More egalitarian workplace cultures enable women and intersectional minorities to speak up and get help before lower-level norm violations transform into higher-level ones—with higher numbers of women in leadership positions also being helpful (Zippel 2021).

Knowledge in HEIs is frequently produced in highly dependent, often isolated environments (e.g., research laboratories) where abuses of power are less likely to be noticed by others (Johnson et al. 2018). Blurred boundaries frequently exist between academics'

personal life and paid work, particularly at the early career stages. This (as in the case of harassment in the service sector: Good and Cooper 2016) increases the likelihood that those experiencing GBVH will cope by avoidance, sharing experiences and joking, rather than contesting or reporting it (Kirkner et al. 2020). Overlapping power bases also frequently exist in HEIs (e.g., power based on organizational position, on expert knowledge and the ability to reward those who are subservient). This increases the likelihood of GBVH and makes it more difficult to identify it as such. It also heightens the negative consequences of calling out abuses of power and increases the likelihood of power being used to protect perpetrators. HEIs thus constitute a particularly fertile area for the exercise of Lukes' (1974, 2005) second dimension of power.

In order to test the hypothesis that the male-dominated, hierarchical context of HEIs both facilitates the existence of GBVH and inhibits tackling it, the definitions and manifestations of GBVH might be compared between HEIs that vary in their overall gender composition, in the gender profile of those in senior positions and the extent to which they endorse a masculinist ethos of privileging those in senior positions.

### 3.2. Neoliberal Managerialist Ethos

HEIs are increasingly influenced by neoliberalism with its focus on the market and on individual responsibility (Cooper et al. 2020; Lynch 2013). Managerialism is 'the organisational arm of neoliberalism' (Lynch 2014, p. 968) with its concentration of power at the Vice Chancellor/Rector level (Deem et al. 2008; O'Connor et al. 2019b); its highly individualised, hyper-competitive, performance-driven ethos; its valorisation of research, global rankings, 'research stars' and long-hours culture (Naezer et al. 2019; O'Hagan et al. 2019). Phipps (2020) highlighted the 'power/value relations' in neoliberal universities where the value of the complainant is balanced against that of the perpetrator who may be a major source of research funding and a 'star', and whose reputation underpins that of the HEI. In this context, she suggests that there is 'an impulse to airbrush it' (Phipps 2020, p. 233). Within HEIs, the unrelenting performativity and the need to 'pay forward' so as to create indebtedness in those involved in assessment/evaluation panels, is both conducive to GBVH and inhibits its 'calling out'.

The status quo in most HEIs currently is legitimated by reference to excellence. Yet there has been an increasing recognition that evaluations of excellence, no matter how they are conducted, are not gender-neutral (Campbell 2018; Lamont 2009; O'Connor and O'Hagan 2016). Biases are implicit in evaluative practices (Van den Brink and Benschop 2012) with excellence being used, entirely uncritically, as a 'rationalising myth' (Nielsen 2016) and a legitimating discourse (O'Connor and Barnard 2021). It obscures the importance of micropolitical practices, which frequently reflect and reinforce GBVH. As currently operationalised, it legitimates neo-liberal practices and priorities. It also obscures Lukes' (1974, 2005) second dimension of power and so inhibits the identification and sanctioning of perpetrators.

The extent to which precarity is peculiar to managerialism is contested (Ivancheva 2020). However, there has been an increase in the number of temporary contracts in HEIs, particularly but not exclusively at the post-doctoral level, partly as a cost-cutting measure and partly because of the increased availability of external research funding. Precarity is also a way of freeing up research 'stars' by delegating routine tasks such as laboratory work, academic administration, undergraduate teaching and day-to-day supervision of PhD students to contract workers (Carvalho and Santiago 2010; Santos and Dang Van Phu 2019) who provide low-cost research assistance to senior academics. A 'winner takes all at any price' culture can legitimate toxic masculinities, with precarious structural conditions being potential breeding grounds for abuses of power (Hennekam and Bennett 2017): one that is not conducive to recognising or reporting them (Hodgins et al. 2020). It creates a context where early academics are essentially disposable. Precarity underlines the power dynamics in the situation: strengthening the power gap, and thus increasing the likelihood that GBVH will occur and that it will not be reported.

One of the less-recognised impacts of managerialism has been the change in the function of Human Resources (HR) from a concern with the wellbeing of personnel to that of a corporate apologist: concerned with presenting HEIs in the best possible light (Smyth 2017), with implications for recognising and dealing with GBVH (Ferber 2018). HR can adjudicate on what is or is not GBVH: an exercise of Lukes' second dimension of power (Hodgins et al. 2020), which can have the effect of silencing those experiencing it (Ballard and Eastal 2018). Frequently HR individualizes the problem and favours informal mediation, which ignores the power dimension implicit in GBVH (see Hodgins et al. 2020; Woodrow and Guest 2014 for an example of this in bullying). This approach rarely results in sanctions for perpetrators (Bondestam and Lundqvist 2020). It also usually assumes that once an alleged perpetrator is informed of their negative behaviour and the damage it is causing, they will undertake behavioural change: a problematic assumption. Perpetrators in this situation who possess resources may use these to 'outflank' victims/survivors, by placing obstacles in their way, referring to fine print in policies or to obscure 'rules of the game', which HR may collude with, while preventing victims/survivors from finding out about others in the same situation (Sadan 2004).

Reflecting the one-dimensional view (Lukes 1974, 2005), where only overtly exercised power is recognised, HR policies typically present GBVH as dyadic and favour a case management approach, with those who 'do nothing' assumed to be untroubled by it. The two-dimensional perspective recognizes that 'doing nothing' may reflect the power of the perpetrator and/or of the organization, a lack of knowledge of rights and the unavailability of external support (Hodgins and McNamara 2019; Hodgins et al. 2020; McDonald 2012) or a recognition of the negative career implications of reporting GBVH (Willness et al. 2007; Vladutiu et al. 2011).

In order to test the hypothesis that HEIs neoliberal managerialist ethos facilitates GBVH and inhibits prosecuting the perpetrators, HEIs varying in a commitment to a neoliberal managerialist ethos might be compared, with a particular focus on variation in the proportion of the academic staff in precarious positions, in the importance of global ranking and research 'stars' in such HEIs, as well as variation in the role of HR.

### 3.3. Gender/Intersectional Incompetent Leadership

Organizational culture has been used to refer to a complicated fabric of management myths, values and practices that legitimize the differential evaluation of activities/areas, categories of people (such as those based on gender, race/ethnicity) and day-to-day micropolitical practices (O'Connor et al. 2020; Martin 2006). The organisational culture in HEIs reflects and reinforces the attitudes of those in formal leadership positions. It also shapes bystander attitudes and interventions and affects the isolation/support of victims/survivors and the prosecution of perpetrators. Where leaders lack knowledge about gender as a social construct and are unwilling to tackle gendered power structures, leadership is gender incompetent (Wroblewski 2019; Lipinsky and Wroblewski 2021; O'Connor 2020), and policies and interventions can become, at best, 'box ticking' exercises. This incompetence can extend to all intersectionalities.

Second-dimension power theorists argue that those who hold powerful positions in organisations can create a culture that protects their own interests, enabling them to act with impunity (Hodgins et al. 2020). In HEIs, this means creating and maintaining structures, cultures, criteria and practices, which perpetuate the dominants' advantages. Frequently, this will be performed by leaders endorsing legitimating discourses such as excellence or choice, which make their privileging appear natural, logical and fair. Thus, leaders may deny the existence and importance of gender and intersectional inequality while at the same time reinforcing stereotypical ideas about women's and marginal groups status as 'Other' and their subordinate positioning within HEIs. Thus, for example, career cul-de sacs ('Mommy tracks'), including workloads where women disproportionately carry pastoral care, course administration or other service activities may be legitimated as stereotypically appropriate, reinforcing subordinate status as well as assumptions about



the appropriate 'care-lessness' of academia (Lynch et al. 2012), thus maintaining a power dynamic conducive to GBVH (Acker 2006).

Poor leadership has been shown to predict bullying (Bjorklund et al. 2020) and to depress research performance (Jensen et al. 2020). It seems probable that it has a similar effect on other dimensions of GBVH. Gender-incompetent leaders may implicitly or explicitly create an organisational culture that legitimates toxic masculinities, defined as 'the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence' (Kupers 2005, p. 714). Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) specifically refer to the 'ongoing favouritization of toxic academic masculinities by the leadership of HEIs as an element in normalising GBVH. Implicitly and explicitly, the culture created by those in formal positions of power in HEIs has tolerated GBVH, failing to take complaints seriously, failing to sanction perpetrators and failing to protect complainants from retaliation (Johnson et al. 2018; Husu 2001).

The competitiveness and individualism created by managerialism may amplify such stereotypes. The dominant culture may remain homosocial with a 'mate-ocracy' existing: One in which 'mini-me's' are informally favoured (Cooper et al. 2020). Thus, it may include a preference by those in senior positions for interaction with men, a higher evaluation of them, greater access to information and greater opportunities to get to know and trust them, leading to sponsorship of them (Grummell et al. 2009; O'Connor et al. 2019a). These relationships can become sources of loyalty and can engender collusion with GBVH.

Conversely, efforts by HEIs to recruit, retain and promote women/those with devalued intersectional backgrounds have been shown to prevent sexual harassment (Kabat-Farr and Cortina 2014), as does active leadership, which demonstrates that sexual harassment will not be tolerated (Lee 2018). A UK-wide review of attempts to tackle GBVH in HEIs highlighted the importance of 'the visible, vocal commitment from senior leaders' in changing the culture (Smail and Waye 2019).

HEIs are particularly vulnerable to pressures as regards the normalisation of a culture of privileged entitlement and the protection and covering up of the actions of powerful perpetrators. This is reflected in an organisational culture that tolerates or even valorises toxic masculinities as an extension of hegemonic masculinities; a culture that legitimates 'Othering', where bullying and micro-aggressions are normalised and remain hidden (McKay and Fratzl 2011).

In order to test the hypothesis that gender/intersectional-incompetent leadership in HEIs is critical in normalizing or inhibiting GBVH, HEIs with gender-competent leadership might be compared with those with gender-incompetent ones, particularly focusing on their willingness to tackle toxic masculinities as reflected in procedures and practices that devalue women and others with intersectional characteristics.

#### 4. Summary and Conclusions

GBVH by and between academics and students has been recognised in HEIs but has been under-theorised from an organisational power perspective. The methodology involves a critical review of the literature on GBVH and organizational responses to it, locating it in the context of an analysis of organizational power. In that context, it draws on work by Lukes (1974, 2005) on power and Hodgins et al. (2020) on workplace bullying. However, these cannot identify the specific organisational characteristics that facilitate GBVH in HEIs nor who is most likely to experience it. Hence, we have drawn on work on those characteristics of HEIs that facilitate GBVH as well as work by Acker (2006) on gender regimes and Crenshaw (1991) on intersectionality to suggest that those who lack social, economic or cultural resources in hierarchical relationships are most likely to experience GBVH.

Much of the work to date on GBVH in HEIs has remained within the one-dimensional perspective on power, seeing GBVH as simply reflecting individual's actions. Drawing on Lukes' (1974, 2005) second dimension of power, we highlight how power can be obscured and used to maintain the existing hegemonies at the organisational level. Building on the limited work on HEIs at the organisational level (for example, Naezer et al. 2019; Bondestam and Lundqvist 2020; Phipps 2020) we suggest that the key organisational characteristics facilitating GBVH are its male-dominant hierarchical character, its neoliberal managerialist ethos and gender/intersectional-incompetent leadership. It is hypothesized that these characteristics, working together, inhibit tackling GBVH by depicting it as a problem experienced by individuals, from individuals (Bennett 2009). These hypotheses of course need to be systematically tested in empirical studies.

Violence, harassment and bullying are often not reported to management (Hodgins et al. 2020; Bondestam and Lundqvist 2020; Clancy et al. 2020), due to fear that this might exacerbate the situation (Willness et al. 2007). HEIs are seen as implicitly facilitating and legitimating GBVH and hence as places where organisational change is fundamental to perceiving, detecting, deterring and managing GBVH. Work on the importance of the structure and culture of HEIs in facilitating it, and inhibiting dealing with it, is relatively recent and raises complex issues about the abuse of power in what are often seen as gender-neutral organisations.

In the very different context of investment banking, Cooper et al. (2020) see the norms and practices generated in its underlying ecosystem as reflecting the 'tyranny of the market', validating its masculinist culture (reflected in gendered stereotypes, homosociability, etc.). They argue that organisational initiatives need to coincide with disruption at the systemic level. Higher educational institutions have a responsibility to tackle their male-dominant hierarchies, with their neoliberal managerialism and gender/intersectional-incompetent leadership. In the context of the embeddedness of these phenomena in the ecosystem, change will involve no more and no less than societal transformation. It is suggested that initiating a discussion and action at the organizational level and in the wider ecosystem (including the state) about GBVH as a power-related phenomenon, challenging the dominant neo-liberal ethos and the hierarchical character of HEIs, as well as reducing HEIs' male dominance and increasing the gender competence of those in positions of power are initial steps in tackling the problem.

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