

Dear PPW participants,

This paper summarizes part of the contribution of my dissertation on gender violence prevention in Spanish universities. It was the first dissertation in Spain that analyzes gender violence in Spanish academia. Particularly, this article analyzes the first peer-to-peer network of victims of gender violence in Spanish universities. It is an initial draft that I am hoping to improve and then submit to an American journal. So, any suggestion to improve it or of potential journals are very welcome. Please do not cite or circulate this work.

Thank you so much!

Tinka Schubert

Social movements for gender violence prevention in Spanish universities

Abstract

Gender violence in universities is a major social problem, especially researched in the United States. In that context, institutional measures and legislations have been made as a result of social pressure and research. In Spain, this problem has only recently been uncovered with pioneer research (Valls, 2005-2008). Social movements have a major influence in obtaining improvements in society. Nevertheless, the role of social movements in contributing to gender violence prevention has been under explored. This paper analyzes the role of students' movements to tackle gender violence within universities, analyzing the case of Spanish academia. The communicative methodology is implemented, conducting communicative daily life stories and in-depth interviews with victims, faculty and institutional representatives committed to the struggle against gender violence in universities. The contributions of the first bottom-up initiative of survivors of gender violence in Spanish academia to tackle this problem are explored. Findings show that the mobilization of victims and those who support them has a major impact on raising awareness of the problem of gender violence in Spanish academia and on challenging the university structures. It attends the need for peer support that the institution is failing to provide and empowers the victims. Thus, the paper evidences that research in social movements can provide insight into the success of students' movements to contribute to the overcoming of gender violence in universities. This is especially valuable for the context of US colleges where student mobilizations are prominent since the 1970s.

Introduction

Violence against women¹ at higher education institutions has first been tackled in the United States in the late 70s and 80s. Nowadays it is a widely recognized issue that has since then been researched by the international scientific community under diverse disciplines and developing different approaches. Nevertheless it is in the United States where most research has been conducted evidencing the progress that had been made. The key elements in advancing the struggle against gender violence have been and still are social movements, research and policies (Freedman, 2013). In this regard, bending to the pressure of society claiming for a safer environment for women at universities several legislations have been passed that establish regulations on university responses to sexual violence on campus (Potter et al., 2000; Coker et al., 2011). The most prestigious universities, such as Harvard², Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)³, London School of Economics⁴, among many others have specific regulations accounting for some of the myriad facets that this problem entails. Moreover, Title IX Officers and mechanisms such as the Office for Sexual Assault Prevention and Response at the Harvard University have been created to make sure the university complies with the laws. Simultaneously, much effort is put in developing diverse prevention programs as well as wide research on this phenomenon. To mention only some of these programs the Stop Our Silence at MIT and the Promoting Awareness Victim Empowerment program (PAVE) developed at the University of Wisconsin are noteworthy. But in spite of all the efforts made, research highlights that sexual assault persists on US campuses. According to the Campus Sexual Assault Study (Krebs et al., 2007) 19% of college women have experienced completed or attempted sexual assault since entering college. These numbers highlight the magnitude of the problem which not only affects women but society in

¹ In this article with *violence against women* and *gender violence* at universities we refer to a broad definition, including studies on all kinds of sexual violence in diverse settings that involve members of the university community.

² <http://diversity.harvard.edu/pages/university-sexual-harassment-policies-procedures>

³ <http://sexualmisconduct.mit.edu/sexual-misconduct-policy>

⁴ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/policies/pdfs/school/harPol.pdf>

general, representing a major public health issue that needs to be resolved (Potter et al., 2000). Barack Obama, as President of the United States, has taken this issue up and in March 2013 the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act was passed mandating all higher education institutions to develop extensive prevention and awareness programs. Ever more studies and from more disciplines are researching this issue for its serious consequences for the victims and for society concluding that broader perspectives and approaches need to be implemented to effectively tackle this problem (Brener et al., 1999; Koss et al., 1987; Lockwood Harris, 2013). While research evidences the implication of social movements to advancing the prevention of gender violence on college campuses (Potter et al., 2000; Coker et al., 2011) social movements theory has not yet explored this phenomenon and has neither been taken into account in previous literature on gender violence prevention in higher education.

In Spain, violence against women at universities is just recently being uncovered by pioneer research (Valls, 2005-2008) stating that similar as in other countries sexual violence also exists in Spanish universities. But more importantly it reveals that institutional resistances to recognize this problem and to identify it as an institutional responsibility constitute a major impediment to tackle sexual violence on Spanish campuses. Lacking knowledge on the different forms of sexual violence and the immense silence about it makes it very difficult for the diverse members of the university community to identify violent situations and to report them or file a complaint. Similar to the different processes of breaking the silence in other universities (Osborne, 1995; Baker, 2008; Fisher et al., 2010), also in Spain victims and those people supporting them receive retaliations for speaking up against the feudal structures.

Nevertheless, the experience of the solidarity network of victims of gender violence at universities constituted by a group of victims and supportive faculty and institutional representatives on Facebook shows an interesting approach to tackling this phenomenon. Bearing in mind the different elements that compose this problem such as the power struggle in university structures, the effects of sexual harassment towards victims and the second order

harassment towards those supporting the victims, the diverse prevention and awareness programs developed in the most prestigious universities and of course the research on this issue, this network manages to tackle the impediments to overcoming gender violence by engaging not only victims but the whole society. As a result this network not only challenges the university structures but it also contributes to the empowerment of the victims, it provides means to make this problem visible to society and it enhances a process of collectively defining the measures to be implemented in order to prevent and resolve future sexual violence on their campus.

This article sheds light on the role and impact of social and students' movements in the struggle to overcoming gender violence at universities. Therefore it analyzes the pathways of this bottom-up initiative for achieving success in tackling the problem of violence against women in Spanish universities indicating a major impact not only on the victims but also on the university structures by gaining social as well as political support to leading this struggle for universities free of violence.

The article is divided into six sections, introducing the main contributions on the struggle against gender violence in universities set forth by social movements in the first section. Then, the methods applied in this research and the data are described. In the third section, the Spanish context of the social movement in which the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities emerges is briefly introduced. Fourth, the main features of this first peer-to-peer network are presented, followed by an analysis of the impact it had on gender violence prevention in Spanish universities. The article concludes with an outline of the contributions of this initiative to social movement theory as well as some questions to be addressed in future research.

Research on social movements around gender violence in universities

Research on social movements has been conducted departing from a great variety of disciplines, such as sociology, political sciences and psychology; all of them highlighting diverse

elements that help us understand social movements. A main goal of social movement research attempted to analyze the social movements emerging during the 1960s and 1970s. Since then the discipline of social movements has further developed analyzing a great variety of movements and advancing the theoretical contributions of this current of thought. Prominent discussions focus on power relations and how social movements emerge and function, shedding light on the individual and the process to engage in collective action through identity or meaning construction (Melucci, 1996; Morris, 2000; Piven and Cloward, 2000; Snow et al., 1986; Touraine, 2000). The mobilization of resources has been widely analyzed as well as the strategies followed in the movements (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Ganz, 2000). Further interests are leadership and narratives (Ganz, 2011; Polletta, 1998; Morris and Staggernborn, 2004) as well as emotions (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2000). Scholars distinguish research between different perspectives focusing either on the structural nature of social movements (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978) or on the cultural elements (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003). Social movement theory has drawn from the experience of many diverse empirical case studies to evidence their argument, yet the social and students movements around gender violence in higher education has not been analyzed, despite their fundamental contributions to making universities a safer place. The particular context of higher education marked by power dynamics in which gender violence takes place is especially worth analyzing considering that students occupy a substantially vulnerable position in this structure and yet dared to raise their voices and achieved major progress over the course of history as the literature explained in the following evidences. Thus, many of the concepts and perspectives set forth in social movement theory could be used to analyze the movements around gender violence prevention and, more importantly, this analysis can contribute with innovative theoretical insights for social movement theory.

The struggle against gender violence in higher education draws on the interplay of diverse elements and actors. One crucial actor in promoting social change that contributes to overcoming gender violence in higher education are social movements and student activism. In

that sense, Bird (2002) emphasizes the importance of the social context of the 1960s and 1970s with diverse social movements such as the civil rights movement, or the anti-war movement that had major influence, especially on the university context in the United States. Student activism in US higher education in that time period played a major role in decision-making in universities and had major possibilities in shaping the university context.

In this context, the first cases of victims or their supporters to publicly report gender violence in academia emerged and reached a wider audience and social support. One example is the support group denominated the Women Organized Against Sexual Harassment (WOASH) who represented thirteen students at University of California - Berkeley in filing a complaint against a harassing faculty member at the same institution. They were one of the first to draw on the Title IX legislation to file their complaint, which has been taken up in recent years by the current survivors network End Rape on Campus to claim for greater protection by higher education institutions. Simultaneous to the first reports WOASH started campaigns to raise awareness. Shortly after, orientation guides on this issue for students were available on campus. Another example reported in the literature is the movement that emerged around the case of Jeanne Clery, a student at Pennsylvania University who died as a victim of gender violence (McMahon, 2008). A legislation reform was achieved with The Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act, passed in 1990, which was later renamed, in memory of Jeanne Clery, as the Clery Act. Also Freedman (2013) emphasizes the importance of social movements in the historical context to promote social change. Freedman (2013) highlights the impact of specific cases that set precedence in addressing certain issues put forward by a social movement. Her analysis helps to understand the present struggle of violence against women at higher education institutions as it sheds light on the core elements of promoting social change related to the understanding of gender violence which are the social justice movements in combination with the social pressure represented in the media. At the same time, her work indicates also the major resistances to making progress which lie in facing those social groups in society that enjoy certain privileges and who insist on maintaining them. Gold and Villari (2000), particularly, emphasize the

importance of student activism in putting the struggle against gender violence forward. In their compilation of writings on overcoming campus violence the editors and authors point to the cardinal contribution of student activists to promoting social change and also highlight the empowerment and healing that this movement gives to survivors.

At the same time, research reporting on gender violence at universities spread all over the US and soon also to other countries contemplating different fields of action. In the first place research was centered on mapping the problem in terms of numbers of cases of sexual violence on campus, implications and consequences for the victims as well as for the universities (Benson and Thomson, 1982; Bondurant, 2001; Burt, 1980; Gross et al., 2006; Forbes et al., 2004; Lott et al., 1982). Since then research has focused on the myriad facets of violence against women related to the university community with a special focus set on the student population being the largest collective of the higher education institutions. To mention only some of these aspects, we could highlight research on dating violence, the relation of drug abuse and fraternities with sexual violence, as well as rape culture (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Copenhaver and Grauerholz, 1991; Gross et al., 2006; Kalof, 1993; Krebs et al., 2007; Yancey and Hummer, 1989). Also, some studies have focused on the importance of creating an environment of zero tolerance to sexual violence on campus through clear policies of disciplinary actions for perpetrators (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Nicholson and Maney, 1998).

Cantalupo (2012) does an exhaustive analysis of the existent laws related to gender violence in higher education in the United States. She highlights that the legal regulations do not encourage colleges to have reports filed since it criminalizes the higher education institutions putting them in a bad light with news about sexual violence occurring inside its community. Potter and his colleagues (2000) have analyzed a wide range of university policies in the US and found that emphasis is put on the deterrence-based programs to prevent sexual violence but only few center on implementing prevention programs. Alongside, Bryant and Spencer (2003) argue that it must become a social norm that these policies are implemented to actually create a victim

friendly environment and encourage them to report their cases. Grauerholz and her colleagues (1999) analyze the reasons for the low numbers of formal reports of sexual violence and shed light on alternative pathways to address sexual violence and attend victims. They conclude that victims more often turn to friends to open up about their experience instead of approaching formal mechanisms and report their cases. The authors report on the Sexual Harassment Advisors' Network, a student mobilization to fill this gap in campus violence prevention and resolution providing more informal support to the victims (Grauerholz et al., 1999). Despite the efforts made over decades by research to tackle gender violence in higher education, the problem is still persistent and the key to overcoming it is still unveiled.

Simultaneous to the implementation of university policies, concerned faculty and students kept mobilizing and developed a variety of awareness raising and prevention programs. These programs have drawn the attention of another strand of research focusing on the prevention of sexual violence from a broader perspective as a community problem. Thus, social and students mobilization are put into the spotlight shifting attention from potential victims and perpetrators to empowering the community to intervene in preventing sexual violence (Banyard et al., 2005; Burn, 2008; Potter et al., 2009; Banyard et al., 2010; Coker et al., 2011; Mitchell & Freitag, 2011). In this regard, the University of Wisconsin (n.d.) has introduced the community intervention into the sexual assault policies, making every bystander responsible for taking action to prevent and respond to sexual assault. Also, in the recently published materials by the White House regarding sexual violence on campus the bystander intervention was recommended to being implemented at universities⁵.

In line with these approaches, most of the awareness raising and prevention programs developed at diverse universities already implement bystander intervention in their prevention strategies with a special emphasis on including the students as key actors in prevention and assistance to victims. Research centers on the role of the students in peer-to-peer intervention

⁵ Bystander Summary. Retrieved on April 29th, 2014 from: Not Alone Official website of the United States Government. <https://www.notalone.gov>

as a strategy to overcome gender violence on campus. In these prevention and awareness raising programs the students themselves engage in and develop actions to put this struggle forward (Mitchell & Freitag, 2011). Furthermore they also act as peer advisors bridging the gap between the institutional services provided and the students' needs outlined by Grauerholz and her colleagues (1999).

Similar to leadership studies, Coker and her colleagues (2011) emphasize the importance of targeted recruitment of the students selected for bystander training. The Green Dot Program reported by the authors has implemented the Peer Opinion Leader strategy that helps to identify the most influential and respectful peers to promote prevention of gender violence (Coker et al., 2011). It becomes evident that social and students' movements have been crucial in pushing these advances forward. Still, the role of student activism of those who initiated or who nowadays participate in developing peer education and training programs as well as the outcomes of their participation are left fairly unattended by research. Especially, the contributions and perspective of social movements theory have so far not been taken into account to analyze the great progress made by these movements.

The present analysis of the first peer-to-peer network - the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities - in Spain contributes to the existing body of literature with evidence on the positive impacts of social and students' movements on prevention and resolution of this problem. With this initiative social, political and scientific impact has been achieved, challenging institutional resistances to tackling this issue, empowering the victims and bringing this issue to the wider society.

Methods and Data

The study presented in this article is embedded in the research developed by the Community of Researchers on Excellence for All and its women's group CREA SAPPHO. Particularly, it is part

of the research agenda on gender violence prevention. Members of CREA SAPPHO have been the first to break the silence on gender violence in Spanish universities developing the pioneer research on this topic (Valls, 2005-2008). Data reported in this article follows this pioneer research and was conducted during spring 2015. The Communicative Methodology of Research (Gomez, et al. 2006) applied for this purpose has been recommended by the European Commission (2011a) to be used for research with minority groups since research conducted with this methodology has proven to contribute to efficiently overcome inequalities that these groups are suffering. Also, the only Social Sciences and Humanities research project - INCLUDED (Flecha, 2006-2011) - of the European Framework Programmes listed under the Ten Success Stories has used the communicative methodology (European Commission, 2011b).

In the case of researching gender violence at Spanish universities, previous research has already demonstrated the contribution of the communicative methodology to breaking the silence on this taboo issue. Vidu and her colleagues (2014) highlight that the use of the communicative methodology in the pioneer research projects on gender violence at Spanish universities has been crucial to provide a safe environment for the participants of the research to speak about violence against women in universities and reflect about the possible measures for its prevention and resolution. The communicative approach of research empowers students to raise their voice that had been silenced by the institutions for fear of retaliations for speaking up.

The power of the communicative methodology lies in breaking the hierarchical divide between researchers and the people being researched. The communicative methodology establishes an egalitarian relationship among the diverse actors and agents involved in the reality that is being studied. The role of researchers is to bring in the scientific knowledge and the role of the people whose reality is being analyzed is to contribute with the knowledge about their life world. Drawing from Habermas' (1987) distinction of power and validity claims, the egalitarian dialogue established with the researchers and the people being researched builds on validity claims to

accept or dismiss the different arguments provided by the participants in the discussion; the position held by the speaker is not decisive for the course of the dialogue. As a consequence, Gomez and his colleagues (2010) emphasize that new knowledge is constructed and effective solutions to social problems can be found.

In this article we report the results of communicative daily life stories and in-depth interviews with 20 people belonging to the university community. The sample is composed of participants belonging to five public universities in Spain that are located in diverse cities and are of different size ranging from less than 15,000 to more than 40,000 students. Six of the people interviewed have been victims of gender violence in Spanish universities and are members of the Solidarity Network analyzed here. Although women are more affected by gender violence, both women and men were interviewed, since gender violence also affects men who suffer aggressions by dominant and violent males (Flecha, Puigvert, & Rios, 2013). The situations of gender violence they had suffered in university relate to violence among students as well as violence by faculty toward students. The sample of representatives of institutional bodies in Spanish universities comprises seven men and women who have supported the struggle against gender violence. Last but not least, seven faculty, also men and women, who have supported the victims in their struggle were interviewed. The combination of communicative daily life stories with victims and institutional representatives, and the semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants, supportive and committed faculty and institutional representatives related to gender issues, provide insight into the different voices of the university community in regard to violent situations occurring among the student and faculty collectives.

Data analysis

Analysis of the data has also been done attending to the postulates of the Communicative Methodology. This mainly implies focusing the analysis on two dimensions: the exclusionary and the transformative dimension. The first dimension refers to all those elements and interactions that represent a barrier to identifying violent situations, to overcoming gender violence at

universities or to exploring pathways for prevention. On the contrary, the transformative dimension of the data analysis focuses on situations and interactions that make social change possible and contribute to a transformation of the reality under study. For the purpose of the present paper special emphasis has been put on the transformative dimension to highlight the potential of student mobilization for overcoming barriers to tackling gender violence at Spanish universities. The analysis of the data was developed with the Atlas.ti software for qualitative data analysis. This program makes it possible to follow the previously established codification determined by the communicative approach as well as it allows new categories to emerge from the interviews.

Spanish context of gender violence in universities and the social movements against it

Similar to other countries, gender violence in Spanish universities is a major problem for students, faculty and administration. However, in Spain, the reality of this issue has only recently been revealed to the larger society through the pioneer research projects developed by CREA – Community of Research on Excellence for All and CREA's Women's Group SAPPHO. Although members of CREA had started to mobilize against gender violence in universities years earlier (Oliver & Valls, 2004), a milestone in breaking the silence was the pioneer research to uncover this issue in 2005 (Valls, 2005-2008), which is when funding was finally received, under the national RTD plan by the Spanish Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

One of the capital contributions of this research was to provide evidence of the existence of gender violence in Spanish universities. On one hand the data provided, show that gender violence is highly extended with a majority of 62% of students who know of someone being victim of gender violence or who have suffered violence themselves. On the other hand, the research shows that only 13% of the students identify these situations as violence. Furthermore,

92% of the people interviewed do not know whether measures to prevent or resolve situations of violence against women exist in their university.

The mobilization of the concerned faculty went even further and the outcomes of the first research projects conducted by CREA SAPPHO on gender violence in Spanish higher education have been taken into account for the elaboration of the Law for Effective Equality between Women and Men (Ley Orgánica 3/2007) obliging all public institutions and, as such, public universities to have an equality committee and a protocol for sexual harassment (Vidu et al., 2014). This represents another major achievement in their struggle against gender violence because it represents the first mechanism through which victims can formally report cases of gender violence. Yet legislation alone is not enough to overcome the institutional resistances that do not facilitate an effective implementation of the law. This can be seen in the fact that the first protocol was approved in 2011 and so far only sixteen universities in Spain have elaborated and implemented a protocol for the prevention, detection and action against sexual harassment (VAW_U, 2015). Before these lengthy institutional processes, the concerned faculty continued mobilizing and conducting further research on gender violence and higher education evidencing that universities fail to comply with the regulations related to this issue (Puigvert, 2008-2010). Nevertheless, once the first mechanisms exist, the first formal reports of gender violence in Spanish higher education could be and were filed in 2011 by one professor against another professor presenting an email of the alleged professor to a student who dared to report this case. As Vidu and her colleagues (2014) highlight, the process of this report was marked by institutional resistances to put this issue forward and investigate the case. After two years of investigation, calling the victims up to four times to testify and with more and more victims joining the process to provide their testimony, for the first time the university acknowledged the sexual harassment and the state prosecutor issued a favorable report to the victims. The report concludes that criminal offenses had been committed by the accused professor and also evidences that the Dean of the School in question knew about the professor's criminal behavior for more than 20 years. Still, according to the law that was in force at the moment of the crime,

these crimes expired after three years and the university declared itself unable to take action against the professor referring to a law that protects public servants.

Similar as in many other cases of breaking the silence on violence against women at universities, the institutional resistances took a variety of forms (Valls et al., 2016). To provide an insight, the head of the Equality Committee kept the victims isolated and advised them to remain in silence in order not to disturb the ongoing investigations and continued with these recommendations even after the process concluded and with even more pressure indicating that they had to negotiate with the accused professor to quit his academic life voluntarily. On the other hand, many of the institutional representatives who clearly defended and supported victims against the harasser and the institution, were dismissed from their position in the Equality Unit. This only evidences that mobilizations are very necessary to achieve social change but not always are the initial goals met. For that reason and despite the resistances, the survivors and activists keep struggling for universities free of gender violence. In this context the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities was created and defines a new period for the mobilizations against gender violence in Spanish higher education.

The Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities

The Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities was established by those victims who dared to speak up against their harasser and filed a report. They define themselves as ‘victims of gender violence in universities in collaboration with second order victims and those who support us and are in solidarity⁶’. The description indicates that the network departs from international research on gender violence in higher education and a solid foundation for a successful recreation of one of the measures that has been highlighted in the literature as essential to alleviate gender violence in higher education, which is community organization. In

⁶ For more information visit the Network Facebook website: Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Red-solidaria-de-v%C3%ADctimas-de-violencia-de-g%C3%A9nero-en-las-universidades/834367176577567?sk=info&tab=page_info (accessed on January 5, 2016)

this regard, the members of this network are inspired by the measures that have been implemented or that have emerged at the most prestigious universities and have proved to achieve excellent results. Among those many successful international experiences that are taken into account is the PAVE (Promoting Awareness Victim Empowerment) program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Pave UW-Madison, n.d.). The fact of developing a student mobilization departing from the scientific evidences is crucial in achieving the success they have had. So far the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities counts with 1446 'likes' by people from 34 countries (March 5, 2016) among them representatives of equality units from different universities.

Their primary aim is to give support to further direct and second order victims to fill the gap in the mechanisms established by the university to respond to the victims of gender violence. Their concern was with the victims who were alone and isolated and even suffering the institutional resistances and barriers. Therefore, the network mainly wants to complement the already existing measures, since they highly appreciate the existing measures. A second aim is to continue the struggle that the concerned faculty had initiated many years ago so that perpetrators of sexual harassment are stopped and no more students have to suffer gender violence in the university context.

The victims who participated in this initiative and were interviewed for the present research all explain that the creation of a network of victims, empowered them as they saw that they were not alone. They felt that their courage to speak up actually had changed university and their personal lives. In order to raise awareness about the situation they decided to make their case public. The victims felt highly empowered by seeing their story published in all the main newspapers. That day defined a change in Spanish universities. At that moment, the institution had to give explanations for their inaction during more than twenty years in front of the sexual harassment of the alleged professor.

Support also came from the students and other social organizations such as the Unitary Platform against Violence Against Women. They all greatly contributed to the struggle that was now extended from the supportive and committed professors and the victims to the student body and the society in general. Together with the student assembly they organized a demonstration to claim for the dismissal of the accused professor and for a clear positioning of the university in front of gender violence occurring in its institution. In only two weeks they gathered approximately one thousand signatures among the students, faculty and the general society.

Simultaneously, the victims opened a page on Facebook⁷, providing information on their goals and publishing relevant information and news related to gender violence in higher education. They also use this means to advertise or inform about the activities they develop in terms of raising awareness. Only one month after their constitution more than 800 people from 28 countries pushed the button “like” on their Facebook page. Their work has also been acknowledged by the Spanish Observatory against Gender Violence of the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs and co-funded by the European Social Fund of the European Union. After only two weeks of their constitution on Facebook the Observatory included the network in their database on good practices to overcoming gender violence.⁸ The victims identified the increasing support by the society and the students as a confirmation of having taken the right decision to make their situation visible to the larger society. They also felt that the burden that they were carrying was finally lifted and due to the actions they had taken the university was forced to react in some manner. In this regard, the university approved additional measures in this moment of major social support.

⁷ Facebook page of the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Red-solidaria-de-v%C3%ADctimas-de-violencia-de-g%C3%A9nero-en-las-universidades/834367176577567>

⁸ For more information visit: http://www.observatorioviolencia.org/bbpp-proyecto.php?id_proyecto=180 (accessed on May 13, 2015).

The Unitary Platform against Violence Against Women joined their struggle launching a campaign claiming for their daughters' rights to study in universities free of violence. The stickers and bookmarks were widely distributed and whenever the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities is presented they still give them away.

Since then members of the Network have been invited by several directors of equality units from other schools and universities to share their experience and raise awareness among students. They have also been invited by social associations and have presented their work and efforts at international conferences such as the Multidisciplinary International Conference on Educational Research (CIMIE). Breaking the silence on this issue is one of the guiding principles for their activities. As a result, victims from other cases of gender violence have reached out and joined the network subsequently.

The impact of the Solidarity Network of victims of gender violence at universities

The Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities has had a tremendous impact, manifested in three achievements that are essential in the struggle against gender violence in Spanish higher education: 1) raising awareness about the problem of gender violence in Spanish universities in society; 2) challenging the feudal structures of the higher education institutions; 3) empowering the victims as well as many other people from the university community. In the following, each of these achievements are analyzed in depth.

The cardinal contribution of the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities is making the problem of sexual harassment in Spanish universities visible to the university community and to the wider society. The network has reached different social domains. Especially collectives working to address gender violence have given their support; some organizations have started campaigns claiming for their daughters' rights to study in an environment free of violence. In this vein, the inclusion of the network in the database of good

practices in tackling gender violence by the Spanish Observatory of Gender Violence represents a major recognition of their impact on society.

Yet, the impact of the network also affects the very university structures. The victims' stories not only reveal their experience of sexual violence at Spanish universities, but they also uncover the impunity of perpetrators as well as the role of the university as the major accomplice. Reading about these cases in major national newspapers has been crucial to make this reality known and to break the silence that has dominated Spanish universities for so many years. Isabel, one of the concerned faculty members, highlighted the great impact that the network had on challenging the feudal university structures by speaking up about the sexual harassment and the inaction of the university.

we can see the example of a collective of the university community, in this case the students who very explicitly do a campaign against one professor without hiding the harassment, a very direct campaign, just like those done on an international level. This is something that had never happened in Spain. This helped to say, instead of saying 'take care, we need to be careful because as students we have to be aware because they can accuse us for defamation' this means that they now say 'We are not afraid of them accusing us for defamation, we prefer to tell the truth.' In front of this situation the university does not dare to do anything. *(Isabel, faculty)*

Breaking the silence on gender violence at universities implies that it is a well-known problem by part of the university community, which builds on the silence and complicity of most of them.

This being said, the fact of breaking the silence, represents facing those people and structures that tried to keep this issue unattended and raises the question of the role of complicity in sexual violence at universities. Whereas great part of the university community just turned their back on these kind of situations and succeeded with this behavior, now they have to face questions such as 'Did you know about that?' and 'What did you do to stop it?'. From now on and in line with research highlighting the figure of the bystander to tackle this issue, the actions taken by the

individuals composing the university community are no longer neutral, but will be considered as either supporting the victims or supporting gender violence at university, drawing a clear line between victims and their supporters, on one side, and perpetrators and their accomplices, on the other.

Another important change that the network represents for universities is that it serves as an alternative instrument to address violence prevention and to support the victims at universities. As research shows, resistances to properly resolve the victims' complaints are a common response in universities where gender violence in higher education is still a taboo issue (Baker, 2008; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998). Thus, the Solidarity Network complements the already existing mechanisms implemented by the universities. Simultaneously, the actions developed by the network to raise awareness are especially aimed at providing the necessary information for students and faculty to identify violent situations and therewith increase their ability of taking action against it. Pilar, one of the committed professors, explains that she regards the network as a role model for other students and potential victims:

[the network is] a role model to guide my students, to motivate them to join and support the network and of course to not let any case of gender violence unattended. (...) I can now redirect and create a network for other victims as well as for people who have given their support to victims. At least I can explain this to my students, this exists, there are victims who dared to speak up and they created a network and they can get in touch, so at least I have something to tell them. (*Pilar, faculty*)

Finally, the Solidarity Network has contributed to the empowerment of the victims but also of many other people belonging to the university community, such as students, committed professors and institutional representatives. Along the theories highlighting the capacity for agency of the subjects, the solidarity network, has been built by the victims themselves together with second order victims and supportive faculty. So they have turned their situation around from being victims to becoming an agent of social transformation in which they engage with

diverse social agents to improve gender violence prevention in Spanish higher education. Paula, one of the directors of the equality unit at her school, emphasizes this power of transformation that the members of the network transmit. She felt overwhelmed by their strength and identified it as a sign that fighting these kinds of situations leads to an empowerment that finally is able to transmit confidence and joy to other people to fight for the things that are important in their lives:

For me it was very important, I mean it didn't have a great impact in the sense of great audience the day when they presented the network but it was very important and from different perspectives because not only for their action but for their strength and their will, and to me personally it was very helpful and also to other people who I have talked to about it. Personally it is like, it gives confidence or joy to see how people who have suffered so much had the ability to get over it and struggle against it and to make their way. It motivates you and gives you strength and energy to do many things, because not always you have a good day and you will be hit by this and you say stop now, and on the other hand you see this and it gives you the strength to get over it even though you are feeling bad to say 'we have to continue fighting'. This was amazing and I loved the way they did the presentation, they didn't seem to be victims. *(Paula, institutional representative)*

In brief, the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities has had incredible impact on the lives of many people. It has changed the lives of the victims who created it, gave them strength to continue the struggle and their academic career. But it also changed the lives of other victims who by seeing them realized that it was possible to overcome situations of sexual harassment and thus more victims joined the network. Moreover, faculty has highly appreciated the creation of the network as they can now refer their students to the network to receive a complementary attention to formal mechanisms provided by the universities. At the same time, also institutional representatives find strength in the network and the energy that

they transmit. Last but not least, all the many people who pushed the button “like” on the page on Facebook acknowledge the problem of gender violence in higher education and the importance for having support networks like this one to face this social problem.

Conclusions

The struggle against gender violence in higher education is marked by the mobilizations of activists, faculty students, victims and all those people who join their cause in pursuing universities free of violence. And yet, research has put little attention to the achievements made by these movements, which have greatly changed the power dynamics in higher education. The present article sheds light on the outcomes of one particular social movement aiming at gender violence prevention in Spanish higher education - the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence at Universities. But not only the achievements are analyzed but the pathways they followed to reach the impact they have had.

It is worthy to recall that the Solidarity Network analyzed here is the result of previous mobilizations and represents a major breakthrough in the struggle against gender violence in Spanish higher education. It has contributed to raising awareness on this social problem, engaging the university community as well as the wider society; it has challenged the feudal structures and evidenced the institutional resistances to supporting victims; and last but not least, it has empowered victims as well as many other people from the university community to join this struggle and to pursue an academic career and further change the university context.

In terms of contributions to the understanding of the role of social movements in gender violence prevention in higher education it is striking that the movement set forth by concerned members of the university community constantly evolved along the progress made. Thus, whenever the movement reaches a certain point of institutionalization and gets to a halt failing to pursue the primary aim, a new movement emerges to continue the struggle. This fact

evidences the importance of the problem and the need to effectively address it, since it affects too many people. There will always be some who will not subdue to the violence against women in higher education. The social movement analyzed here stands out for departing from scientific evidence to guide the actions to be taken and have followed the path paved by social movements on gender violence prevention in higher education from across the globe and especially taking the US context as an example. This evidence-based social movement proves to be successful in obtaining its goals and to contribute to safer universities in Spain.

Another crucial element in the success of this movement is the widespread social support which not only extends to different social domains, but even reaches across the national borders receiving support on an international level from people from within and beyond academia. The recognition of their work by the Observatory of Gender Violence represents a major support that forces universities to acknowledge this complementary mechanism to respond to situations or victims of gender violence in higher education. As the members of the network are themselves academics, they are in contact with similar social and students' movements abroad, which facilitates the exchange of knowledge about those initiatives that achieve best results.

The network has had striking results and it is especially remarkable because it is a bottom-up experience that has emerged from the most vulnerable collective of the university structure and has challenged these structures. This is a major feature to be analyzed under social movements theory, because direct and second order victims have dared to raise their voices against all odds. In such a hostile environment, they have mobilized and identified their power and assets in this struggle. One key element of this particular experience that might shed light on its success is the leadership that guides this movement. Being a leader in this movement can be highly detrimental to a single person's career or life in such hostile context. One hint that the present analysis gives in this regard is that the page on Facebook allows for a distributed leadership in which diverse people from the network can participate without making their personal data public.

Finally, the paper evidences that the use of the communicative methodology to research the role of social movements in gender violence prevention in higher education allows for the participants in the mobilizations to inform social theory about how advances can be achieved and at the same time it allows the researchers to inform about the latest evidences that can be taken into account by the movements to continue and foster their struggle and enhance success. It would be interesting to analyze social movements around this issue in the US academic context to identify those elements that lead to success in preventing or responding to the problem of gender violence in higher education. Certainly, such analysis will provide new insight into theoretical concepts in social movement theory due to its very particular nature and context marked by direct power relations.

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