

**No More Excuses:
A Manifesto for Holding
McGill University
Accountable for Sexual
Violence**

By: Annie Kitson, Alessandra Madlangbayan, Danielle Philip

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PART I: OVERVIEW

Introduction

To McGill Administration and students,

Ansel Elgort, Dustin Hoffman, Chris Brown, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Woody Allen, Britney Spears, Cristiano Ronaldo. Besides fame and fortune, each of these people you may recognize have been accused or convicted of sexual assault or harassment. It seems that fame is littered with everyday scandals, but sexual violence is commonplace beyond Hollywood and reaches every corner of society, including universities. This manifesto explores the prevalence of sexual misconduct across Canadian university settings, as well as the shortcomings and successes of these institutions' initiatives regarding sexual violence on campus. Most importantly, this manifesto will delve into McGill University's sexual misconduct policy and the initiatives around it, offering both critiques and suggestions to existing approaches. In mentioning the sexual violence policy, we refer not only to the official document McGill makes available, but additionally to the universities' planning and implementation strategies behind it. As such, we see McGill's sexual violence policy as a **complete failure** to its students.

As McGill students, we are incredibly aware of the frequent cases of sexual misconduct on and off-campus and have witnessed how **ineffective** this institution's procedures are for survivors of this type of violence. Students have a right to feel secure while completing their studies, which is why we feel we must point out for you the utter limitations of McGill's policy approach. Our manifesto serves as an educational resource for administration and students to ensure that future generations of the McGill community will experience a safer student life than we do now. **One that actually endorses consent rather than forms of sexual violence.**

Acknowledgement of Previous Work

The ideas behind this manifesto are not new.^{1 2 3} Many McGill students before us have come up with similar ideas, critiques, and suggestions that we include below. We not only acknowledge and respect these works, but they are the very foundation for *why* we are creating this piece. As such, we include several of these initiatives, organizations, and suggestions in our own work. Our manifesto hopes not only to take the ideas of those before us and place their proposals into a cohesive piece, one that embodies theirs and our own student-led suggestions and critiques, but also to offer a historical and statistical background to the prevalence of sexual misconduct on McGill University's campus and the surrounding environment that led to the birth of this long line of student reform approaches. You have probably heard of many of these accounts beforehand but, because of the utter **lack of meaningful change** from the administration's behalf, we think it's obvious we have to show the administration just how important these matters are.

The Audience

Our manifesto is aimed at addressing the McGill administration and the students of our campus. To clarify, we use McGill's Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education (OSVRSE) and various other student-led initiatives and organizations as resources in our piece. We do not intend to critique these organizations, and use them strictly as resources to define the action conducted around a larger McGill policy. We are aware that a majority of

¹ Kai O'Doherty, "McGill Administration Continues to Fail Survivors of Sexual Assault: An Open Letter to the Administration of McGill University," *The Feminist Student News and Protest Archive*: (2) <https://feministsnaparchive.omeka.net/items/show/343>.

² Juliet Morrison. "Recovery amid the Silence about Sexual Violence at McGill." *The McGill Tribune*, 7 Dec. 2021, <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/recovery-amid-silence-on-sexual-violence-at-mcgill-07122021/>.

³ E. Cable, "no one reached out to me": A survivor's experience reporting sexual assault on campus. *The McGill Daily*, March 21, 2022, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2022/03/no-one-reached-out-to-me-a-survivors-experience-reporting-sexual-assault-on-campus/#close-modal>.

students and staff, even those in these organizations, lack the power and resources to make definitive changes to McGill's sexual misconduct policy and policy execution. **Students, however, have the ability to demand change just as we do now.** We encourage fellow students to take this manifesto and run with it, continuing beyond the confines of this document to force the administration to do better. As such, the demands and critiques of this manifesto are aimed primarily at those individuals with the power to make these changes possible, including but not limited to, The Board of Governors, The Office of The Provost, and the McGill President.

Outline

The primary purpose of this manifesto is to **demand change from the McGill administration.** Secondly, this piece serves to inform students of the administration's shortcomings in addressing the prevalence and threat of sexual violence on campus, and empower them to take a stand. Our manifesto is divided into three parts. The first explores the context in which sexual violence policies emerged, in which we provide examples of the policies adopted by several Canadian universities McGill should learn from and compare our university to. Part II is a deep dive into the policies and resources available to McGill students, analysing the implementation of the flawed strategies devised by the McGill administration to combat sexual violence on and off-campus. Our manifesto then concludes in Part III with a series of critiques and detailed elaboration of our demands for the current sexual violence policy in place for the 2022-2023 academic year.

Transformative and Restorative Justice Frameworks

This manifesto takes into consideration both Transformative Justice (TJ) and Restorative Justice (RJ) frameworks. TJ prioritizes values of accountability, and not punishment for

punishment's sake. It teaches that accountability should be learned as a "skillset," not just a consequence, that leaders such as universities can teach by example to its students and staff.⁴ The importance of this framework is its core ideals of actively cultivating "healing, accountability," and "resilience" in order to foster a safe environment for individuals to exist in.⁵ Thus, McGill must be able to utilize transformative justice as "a non-negotiable aspect of our future," one that through its legislation and policy implementation not only gets to the root of the causes of, in this case, sexual violence, but additionally inspires a community cultivated around ideas of safety and healing.⁶ TJ works to hold accountable the institutional structures for violence, however its approach requires small scale interventions by professionals who are trained in trauma-informed support which McGill lacks. For this reason, we believe that RJ is a more realistic approach for McGill to adopt to its services and supports.

RJ works at individual and community levels, focusing "on the importance of relationships," including efforts to "repair" broken relationships and those that have been violated.⁷ This approach is centered around the idea of repairing harm. For example, RJ encourages face-to-face dialogue from everyone involved in a case of harm, making sure that each individuals' needs are met, and replacing "punitive approaches" with those that are "in favor of collective healing and solutions."⁸ It looks for justice "outside of the legal system," which we believe is crucial for McGill due to its legal limitations in providing detailed case information to its community.⁹ Most importantly, RJ asks "whose responsibility is it to actually

⁴ "Everyday Practices of Transformative Justice," Videos, Barnard Center for Research on Women, accessed March 27, 2023, <https://bcrw.barnard.edu/videos/everyday-practices-of-transformative-justice/>.

⁵ Barnard Center for Research on Women, "Everyday Practices of Transformative Justice."

⁶ adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017), 82.

⁷ Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2021), 215.

⁸ Sujatha Baliga, "A Different Path for Seeking Justice for Sexual Assault," *Vox*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2018/10/10/17953016/what-is-restorative-justice-definition-questions-circle>.

⁹ baliga, "A Different Path for Seeking Justice for Sexual Assault."

meet the obligations and needs that are created through violation?”¹⁰ In a university setting where sexual violence occurs inside the bounds of our campus, we think McGill needs to take a part of this responsibility, keeping the restorative justice framework in mind when re-evaluating its current sexual violence policy and the approaches behind it.

We ask that both the administration and students keep these approaches with them when reading this piece, and imagine ways in which McGill and its community could adopt TJ and RJ frameworks.

Our demands from the administration:

- **Provide an in-person, mandatory program that fosters relationships between students to prevent violence**
- **Make services more accessible to students seeking help**
- **Offer more transparency to the McGill community regarding sexual violence cases and procedures**

Provincial Frameworks

In the wake of the #MeToo movement, several policy changes emerged across Canadian provinces in 2016 and 2017. Given provincial jurisdiction over education in Canada, several versions of legislation came into being that aimed to address the growing problem of sexual violence in universities. The Ontario legislative assembly was the first to enact legislation with the passage of Bill 132, the Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act (Supporting Survivors and Challenging Sexual Violence and Harassment), in 2016. Schedule 3 of this

¹⁰ Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, 215.

legislation hones in on the university setting, mandating that all universities and colleges that are recipients of government funding for post-secondary education establish a sexual violence policy.¹¹ Ontario's sexual violence policy mandate for universities also included student inclusion and consultation in the process of creating and implementing university sexual violence policies. Once a sexual violence policy has been put in place by a university, it is subject to a review of its policies every five years, during which student consultation will once again be mandated.

The National Assembly of Quebec passed similar legislation in 2017. The emergence of Quebec policy targeting sexual violence mandates in the university setting came as a result of a highly publicized report of two female students in Montreal's Concordia University that were lured off campus after being contacted about opportunities for professional development. Once they were off campus, the two female students recounted being drugged and assaulted.¹² These reports emerged in November of 2017, and shortly after, the National Assembly of Quebec began to work on policy specifically addressing sexual violence on university and college campuses across the province. Bill 151, an act to prevent and fight sexual violence in higher education institutions, was introduced by Quebec's Minister of Higher Education, H  l  ne David, and was passed in late 2017 by the Quebec legislature. Higher education institutions in Quebec were given a deadline of 1 September 2019 to "adopt a policy to prevent and fight sexual violence" on campuses, with legislation providing specifications on how to develop sexual violence policies.¹³ The legislation passed by the National Assembly of Quebec required that

¹¹ "Bill 132, Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act (Supporting Survivors and Challenging Sexual Violence and Harassment), 2016," Legislative Assembly of Ontario, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-41/session-1/bill-132>.

¹² Raquel Fletcher, "Quebec sexual assault bill focuses on campuses," *Global News*, November 17, 2017, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3867384/quebec-sexual-assault-bill-focuses-on-campuses/>.

¹³ "Bill 151, An Act to prevent and fight sexual violence in higher education institutions," Assembl  e Nationale du Qu  bec, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-151-41-1.html>.

sexual violence policies include mandatory training, the provision of psychosocial and support services for victims, and a code of conduct with guidelines for relationships between students and superiors. Higher education institutions in Quebec were given an initial deadline of January 1, 2019 to adopt a policy to prevent sexual violence, and a second deadline of September 1, 2019 to implement that policy.

Though the universities and CEGEPs of Quebec were given over a year to meet the first of the two deadlines, several universities in Montreal and over a dozen CEGEPs across the province failed to meet the January 1 deadline and/or drafted sexual violence policies that did not fully comply with Quebec’s guidelines — both of which McGill University were guilty of.¹⁴ Delays were attributed to the revisions having to go through McGill’s Board of Governors, much to the chagrin of former Minister for Higher Education, H el ene David, who felt that such an important policy should have been prioritized by McGill and the other CEGEPs prior to the January 1 deadline. The failure to meet not only the deadline, but also the provincial guidelines is emblematic of the way McGill treats sexual violence on campus — **it has continually failed to be a priority for the administration and the solutions it offers still fall short.**

Five University Policies

In order to fully assess the effectiveness and sufficiency of educational institutions’ initiatives to prevent sexual assault cases on and off-campus, we have reviewed the policies of 5 different universities across Canada including [the University of Toronto \(UofT\)](#)¹⁵, [the University](#)

¹⁴ Karina LaFramboise, “Some Quebec universities, CEGEPs miss deadline for sexual violence policies,” *Global News*, January 11, 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4839917/some-quebec-universities-cegeps-miss-deadline-for-sexual-violence-policies/>.

¹⁵ University of Toronto, “Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment”, January 1 2023, <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/sexual-violence-and-sexual-harassment-policy-january-1-2023>

[of British Columbia \(UBC\)](#)¹⁶, [St. Francis Xavier University \(StFX\)](#)¹⁷, [Queen’s University](#)¹⁸, and [McGill University](#)¹⁹. Although no particular rubric was referenced, we conducted our analysis based on three factors: confidentiality and disclosure process, the access of support and services, as well as the policy update every three years. In our research, we discovered that many of the universities’ strategies fail to address important rules that are worth particular attention. In particular, we have found in our analysis that many of these policies deal with internal conflict in details of reporting steps which prolongs the investigation process for survivors.

In terms of similarities, all educational institutions have structured their policies by listing their policy statement, a set of clear-cut definitions, procedures of disclosures, reporting, and appeals as well as their approach to maintaining confidentiality among the complainants and respondents. UofT²⁰ and UBC’s²¹ policies both emphasize the power of their prevention centers in providing support and counselling to survivors of sexual violence. As both universities indicate, support is offered to students no matter where the incidents occurred and whether the disclosure concerns a member of the university, yet both policies state their lack of power in continuing with investigations if allegations were made anonymously or by a third-party. Particularly, UofT notes that prolonged wait-times in the disclosure process and reports can delay the overall process (e.g. if the student delays their disclosure to the Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre) and affect the university’s ability to continue with the

¹⁶ University of British Columbia, “Sexual Misconduct and Sexualized Violence Policy”, last modified May 2022, <https://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies/sexual-misconduct-policy/>.

¹⁷ St. Francis Xavier University, *Sexual Violence Response Policy*, February 1 2020.

¹⁸ Queen’s University, “Policy on Sexual Violence Involving Queen’s University Students”, last modified November 1 2022, <https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/board-policies/policy-sexual-violence-involving-queens-university-students>.

¹⁹ McGill University, *Policy Against Violence*, October 6, 2022. https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/policy_against_sexual_violence.pdf.

²⁰ University of Toronto, “Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment.”

²¹ University of British Columbia, *Sexual Misconduct and Sexualized Violence Policy*.

investigation. The UofT policy also states that administration is unable to address allegations made against someone who is not a part of the university community, regardless if it occurred on or off-campus. Queen's²² policies include a list of its sanctions for the assailants. However, they remain lenient with punishments for offenders from a written apology to a requirement to withdraw the educational institutions and its services. Although Queen's assembles a list of sanctions for assailants, there is no evidence to prove that sanctions increase with the severity of the violation. Also, the university prevents anonymous or third-party reports from being taken seriously due to possible lack of evidence, which goes against an individual's right to confidentiality.

StFX²³ has failed to publicly update their policy (which has not been updated since 2016) and possesses no mandatory sex education training for its students. Additionally, the university has failed to address incidents involving alcohol and drugs, which implies that they could be cited for violations under policies dealing with non-academic misconduct in relation to substance abuse. This condition could be very problematic as it would deter survivors from coming out of fear of being punished for consuming alcohol or drugs in the moment of sexual misconduct. The set condition can be problematic, StFX is already known for its party school reputation which could hold many in the community in danger of being victims. Finally, McGill University's²⁴ policy centers around the aid of the Office for Sexual Violence, Response, Support and Education, which was designed to assist survivors assess their options after experiencing sexual violence, in endorsing a culture of consent for all students and staff. The policy applies to all members of the McGill community and its objectives are set out by the community themselves

²² Queen's University, "Policy on Sexual Violence Involving Queen's University Students."

²³ St. Francis Xavier University, *Sexual Violence Response Policy*.

²⁴ McGill University, *Policy Against Violence*.

which include students and academic and administrative staff. Despite these statements, McGill fails to address off-campus activities in regards to these cases and does not possess substance use amnesty for those who experienced sexual violence which is problematic as alcohol and drug use on and off-campus are increasingly prevalent.

The Student for Consent Culture have created their own system based on 45 criteria which navigates school's practices when it comes to responding to sexual violence. As Queen's University's rating was unknown, we decided to calculate its grade based on [SFFC's evaluation framework](#). These are the following ratings for 2017.²⁵

- StFx = D-
- UBC = B+
- UofT = C
- Queen's = C
- McGill = C-

As mentioned, OSVRSE plays a major role in the process of disclosure and reporting of sexual misconduct cases, as the office offers many resources available to McGill including its mandatory course on sexual violence prevention called "It Takes All Of Us".²⁶ That being said, **we question if these policies, specifically McGill's, are truly being considered in the events of sexual misconduct on and off-campus.** Also, we question the services provided to the McGill community in their prioritization of student's, staff and faculty needs and failing to promote the importance of taking accountability and community-building. Although the delivery of training programs are vital to a community's understanding of consent culture, are they

²⁵ Students for Consent Culture, "Scorecards", <https://www.sfcccanada.org/scorecards>.

²⁶ "Online Modules." Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education, last modified February 9, 2023. <https://www.mcgill.ca/osvrse/education/online-modules>.

plausible mechanisms in preventing sexual violence? In our years at McGill, we have heard and witnessed cases of sexual violence which have been suppressed from public conversations. Although these policies emphasize the importance of consent culture on campus, we are interested in finding out to what extent these policies and training programs are successful in educating students. By doing so, we have analyzed McGill's approach to handling sexual violence on and off-campus, effectiveness of their educational course as well as the overall delivery of OSVRSE's services.

Recent Context

This section will serve our third demand in demonstrating how social change work, like our manifesto, has to be done in order to make improvements to larger institutions. If people knew beforehand how non survivor-focused the sexual violence policies were for the institutions demonstrated below, we believe they would demand for change as we are doing now. McGill's providing transparency goes beyond informing its campus-wide community, and connects it to this legacy of disrespecting survivors.

We have given an overview of recent Canadian legislation regarding university policies of sexual violence as well as the contents of specific universities' sexual misconduct policies. In conducting our research behind this information, we discovered a shocking pattern: Nearly every Canadian university we review above did not have a stand-alone sexual violence policy until around 2016. At the time of writing, this was only **seven** years ago. McGill is 202 years old! So, why is this? Given that many of these universities have been around for nearly two-hundred years, one would consider 2016 surprisingly late to have a proper policy against sexual violence for such prestigious institutions. They would be correct. The answer, we speculate, lies behind

the more recent, explosive survivor awareness movements in the media, which we will briefly provide context for here.

Chances are you may be familiar with the [#MeToo](#) movement that swept the internet in 2017, originally founded by Tarana Burke in 2006.²⁷ During this time, the hashtag gained momentum upon centering around allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein, who has been since imprisoned for sexual assault. The online movement worked to provide survivors with a platform to share their stories with, empower, and confide in one another. Additionally, the movement brought awareness in a more casual, social media-oriented context to the utter normalization and prevalence of sexual violence in modern society. The movement became so powerful that TIME magazine even named women involved in the #MeToo movement as persons of the year in 2017, calling them “The Silence Breakers.”²⁸ As a result of this movement and the ideology behind it that supports survivors’ stories, sexual assault accusations have since risen in Canada; in Montreal alone, there was a **67% increase** in police-reported sexual assault cases after the #MeToo Movement began.²⁹ The MeToo movement was only one of several groundbreaking scandal initiatives that took place circa 2017.

Another popular instance that brought light to sexual assault injustice in a university setting was the People v. Turner case in 2015, where Stanford University student Brock Turner was originally indicted on five charges of sexual assault, two of which involved rape, and was

²⁷ “The #MeToo Movement in Canada: Learn the Facts.” Canadian Women's Foundation, 22 Dec. 2022, <https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/the-metoo-movement-in-canada/#:~:text=In%202017%20the%20hashtag%20E%80%9C%23MeToo,than%2050%20allegations%20were%20made.>

²⁸ Ailix Langone. “What Is the Time's up Movement and the #MeToo Movement?”, *Time*, March 22, 2018, <https://time.com/5189945/whats-the-difference-between-the-metoo-and-times-up-movements/>.

²⁹ Christine Rotenberg and Adam Cotter. “Police-Reported Sexual Assaults in Canada before and after #MeToo, 2016 and 2017 .” *Statistics Canada: Canada's National Statistical Agency / Statistique Canada : Organisme Statistique National Du Canada*, Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 8 Nov. 2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54979-eng.htm>.

ultimately sentenced to a mere six months in prison.³⁰ This is an absurdly short sentence for RAPE. The Turner case sparked outrage even beyond a university setting, as did the case of Dr. Larry Nassar, who was a former Michigan State University and U.S. Olympic team medical doctor for women's gymnastics. He sexually assaulted more than *ninety* women and girls and was found possessing child pornography. Nassar, after undergoing a trial with an astounding *eighty-eight* victim impact statements, was sentenced to sixty years in prison, but not after extensive effort by both Michigan State and the U.S. Gymnastics association to cover up Nassar's abuse and threaten the families that spoke up against him.^{31 32 33}

Not only were such momentous cases of survivor empowerment, legal injustice, and cover-up being unveiled to the public eye around 2015-2017, their popularity in media worldwide also indicated that future scandals to occur would not be so easily swept under the rug. Given the nature of many universities' reputations, legacy and prestige are what continue to provide them with private and government funding in addition to high rankings. If a university such as McGill were to be caught in a scandal as large as that of Brock Turner, it could deeply and harmfully affect the institution's reputation. We suggest that many stand-alone sexual misconduct university policies were made not out of pure regard for student safety, but also for legal and representational protection. Is this all the McGill administration cares about? What if we, as students of this campus, are walking around with a Brock Turner, or many like him, among us? THIS is why it is so important for McGill to provide us with updates, clarity, on their

³⁰ Michael Vitiello, "Brock Turner: Sorting Through the Noise." *HeinOnline*, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals%2Fmcglr49&id=670&men_tab=srchresults.

³¹ Athlete A. Directed by Bonni Cohen. San Francisco: Actual Films, 2020.

³² Hadley Freeman, "How Was Larry Nassar Able to Abuse so Many Gymnasts for so Long?" *The Guardian*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/jan/26/larry-nassar-abuse-gymnasts-scandal-culture>.

³³ Juliet Macurt, "Gymnasts Worldwide Push Back on Their Sport's Culture of Abuse", *New York Times*, August 5, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/03/sports/olympics/gymnastics-abuse-athlete-a.html>.

sexual violence policy and procedures. We don't know what you, the administration, have been sweeping under the rug, and how safe you, a student, truly are on campus.

In the sections that follow, we analyze McGill University's sexual violence policies and initiatives not only to critique these resources, but also to offer suggestions that go beyond the legal perspective, turning towards a more student-oriented point of view. **We demand that the administration take these facts and critiques as tangible ways to fix your policy. We demand that students not only understand for themselves the lack of protection and preventative options they have on campus, but additionally how serious and prevalent sexual violence is at McGill.**

PART II: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT MCGILL

Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education

McGill University created the Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education as a resource for survivors of sexual violence in the McGill community (including students, faculty, and staff). OSVRSE was designed primarily to help survivors navigate the options available to them after an incident involving sexual violence, which can involve accompanying the survivor through internal and external reporting processes. OSVRSE is not to be confused with an investigating or reporting office — survivors turning to OSVRSE for support will be given the appropriate avenues to report to, should they choose to. The aim of OSVRSE is to provide assistance to survivors of sexual violence through a survivor-centered, feminist, and intersectional lens, in a non-judgemental and confidential manner.³⁴

³⁴ "Our Office," Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education, McGill, accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.mcgill.ca/osvrse/our-office>.

The assistance offered by OSVRSE comes in a number of different forms. OSVRSE provides resources for both survivors and friends of survivors. For the latter, there are [resource sheets with helpful tips](#) on what to say and do, and what would be less helpful during a time of crisis for one's friend(s). Survivors can choose between various activities in a group setting to help them work through their trauma: [trauma sensitive yoga, group therapy, and support groups](#) (specifically for survivors navigating the intersection between queerness and trauma, another for growing after a traumatic event). Survivors are guided through the different options they have for reporting the incidence of sexual violence — either through campus channels and administration or through police services. Survivors are also directed towards the appropriate [off-campus services](#) that they might need after an incidence of sexual violence, including medical, emotional, and psychological services. OSVRSE provides a thorough step-by-step [safety planning guide](#) for survivors.

OSVRSE has several initiatives aimed at expanding student awareness for the services they offer. [Peer Educator Teams](#), though on hold at the time of writing, are student volunteers tasked with growing the social media presence of OSVRSE to raise awareness, plan events such as workshops and a sexual health fair. OSVRSE also offers a monthly newsletter that McGill members can subscribe to that informs the public of upcoming events and opportunities to volunteer in OSVRSE initiatives. One of the other prominent OSVRSE outreach initiatives is the [Taking It All Off podcast](#), hosted by Bianca Tétrault and Charlene Lewis-Sutherland, occasionally featuring other members of the McGill community. The 13 episodes that have been released on SoundCloud at the time of writing cover a number of different topics, ranging from dating, the frosh experience, masturbation, and much more.

On paper, OSVRSE appears to be a wonderful solution gifted to us by the McGill administration. With all of its programs and initiatives designed to assist survivors of sexual violence, OSVRSE should be more than adequate to help survivors navigate the steps and options after a traumatic experience. In a perfect world, survivors would be able to get the help they need when they need it. However, the reality for survivors seeking help is far from the experience that McGill peddles. For many students wishing to utilize OSVRSE's many services, it is simply unreachable. Appointments are often unavailable and students are forced to wait for more openings for weeks, unsure when or if they'll actually be able to access the services and assistance they need. Students seeking help after a traumatic experience shouldn't have to jump through bureaucratic hoops, bounced around between different staff members and offices, sending multiple emails and making multiple calls and leaving voicemails just to be able to get the help they need. **Making students wait and fight for limited appointments with overworked, thinly-stretched staff members — is that how McGill wants to show up for their students during their time of crisis?**

The Effect of It Takes All Of Us

After many calls to action from students, staff and faculty, McGill has recently updated its educational course, It Takes All of Us (ITAOU).³⁵ The learning program, which was initially created by our neighbors at Concordia University through the e-learning company KnowledgeOne³⁶, is meant to serve as a medium to educate the McGill community on consent culture and sexual violence awareness. The course takes the form of five modules which include character-driven scenarios with a trauma-informed approach while attempting to focus on a

³⁵ Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education, "Online Modules."

³⁶ D. Lupeanu, It takes all of us! Retrieved April 20, 2023, <https://knowledgeone.ca/it-takes-all-of-us/>.

survivor framework rather than victims. Students and staff are expected to complete the online program by April 28, 2023 in order to avoid any account penalties.

As a team of three, we reviewed the course together and have gathered several critiques regarding the delivery and overall effectiveness of ITAOU. Firstly, the course fails to adhere to specific situations at McGill and the scenarios are too vague. As the course was created by Concordia University, it lacks statistical information that is personal to McGill's students, staff and faculty's experiences. Although it is important to understand national figures, including updated statistics from McGill will give the community a better sense of how the administrators are handling sexual violence within the institution. The course's main goal is to increase the awareness of sexual violence prevention within the community in order to promote a culture of consent. However, we found that the program fails to be informative to students of the subject in many ways. To start, ITAOU is presented in a gentle, soft-spoken tone which takes away from the severity of the subject. Not to mention the little effort it requires to complete, we found that the course failed to exert any emotion with its monotone delivery which makes it hard to empathize with the scenarios. The course is also very bland and easy to run through, which is why students are more likely to skim through the modules in order to fulfill their graduation requirements. Lastly, it is not until the last slide that on and off-campus resources, such as OSVRSE, are linked and mentioned. These supports should be accessible from the beginning of the course with more information on what McGill has to offer.

Not only was our group dissatisfied with the outcome of the course, other students have been public about their views on ITAOU as well as McGill's approach to sexual misconduct allegations.³⁷ It was discovered through a series of surveys that **folks in the community remain**

³⁷ Yara Coussa, "Letter to the Editor: McGill Doesn't Care about Us." *The McGill Daily*, January 14, 2023. <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2023/01/letter-to-the-editor-mcgill-doesnt-care-about-us/>.

dissatisfied with the support they are given. IMPACTS: Collaborations to Address Sexual Violence on Campus is a 7-year project conducted by Dr. Shaheen Shariff which aims at dismantling and preventing such violence on university campuses around the globe.³⁸ In May 2018, surveys were conducted in order to reveal student and staff experiences and thoughts on McGill's approach to handling sexual misconduct cases. Not only did 78% of students and 77% of staff believe that McGill's policy against sexual violence was difficult to understand, **the majority believed that the policy was insufficient at resolving cases of sexual violence.** Key discoveries also showed that there are many loopholes in the disclosure and reporting process which resulted in distrust among the community.³⁹

In hopes of gathering more information on annual reports and outcomes of sexual violence cases at McGill as well as the rates of disclosure and reports, we emailed OSVRSE on March 24th, proposing a meeting time to discuss our questions in regards to how they respond to sexual violence cases based on McGill's policy. However, we have yet to receive a response after 18 business days. In their message, they also announced that their online booking portal is open but remains limited. We understand that OSVRSE plays an important role in providing support to students affected by sexual violence, which is why students should not have to worry about restricted time slots and workshops cancellations. We realize that OSVRSE is currently short-staffed and therefore unable to accommodate, however individuals have a right to access adequate services on campus from trained professionals. We understand that the team at

³⁸ "Impacts: Collaborations to Address Sexual Violence on Campus." Define the Line, <https://www.mcgill.ca/definetheline/impacts>

³⁹ Impacts Partnership Project & McGill Ad Hoc Panel To Conduct Campus Study on Sexual Violence. *Climate Surveys on Sexual Violence at McGill University: Interim Report*. May 16, 2018.

OSVRSE has minimal power in the funding that goes towards its staffing, **which is why McGill administration needs to step up and take accountability for the services they fail to provide.**

Similar to ITAOU, there have been previous attempts at spreading support for sexual violence survivors on campus with workshops such as #ConsentMcGill which is a week-long university-wide initiative designed to spread awareness about the understanding of consent and sexual violence prevention.⁴⁰ Although workshops can serve as an effective way to spread awareness about sexual violence prevention, they are not enough to evoke change within McGill’s approach to sexual misconduct prevention.⁴¹ Similarly, programs like ITAOU may inform an individual, but its remote form and gentle, soft-spoken delivery will not be effective in preventing this type of behavior on campus.

It was found that a third of Canadian students, staff and faculty will experience at least one instance of sexual violence during their studies.⁴² Meanwhile, McGill is spreading awareness by using another university’s educational course in hopes that its students and staff will receive a passing grade and go on with their lives. Based on IMPACTS’ research as well as student and staff recommendations, it is clear that there is a need to invest in more full-time staff at OSVRSE of trained professionals in trauma-informed support as well as incorporate mandatory, in-person education on topics of sexual violence and consent that are provided on a regular basis. As our demand clearly states, it is evident that **McGill administration requires a program that is invested in nurturing relationships between individuals that is practiced within a**

⁴⁰ “Events.” Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education, September 23, 2021. <https://www.mcgill.ca/osvrse/get-involved/events>

⁴¹ McGill University. “Let’s Talk about Consent Culture! A Vlog-Making Workshop.” *Define the Line*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.mcgill.ca/definetheline/channels/event/lets-talk-about-consent-culture-vlog-making-workshop-289636>.

⁴² “Impacts: Collaborations to Address Sexual Violence on Campus.” *Define the Line*, <https://www.mcgill.ca/definetheline/impacts>

transformative justice approach between individuals in the community as well as implement mandatory training that supports survivor and community-healing.

A McGill Sexual Violence Case Study

This section will further emphasize the importance of our third demand in demonstrating to both students and the administration McGill's current lack of providing the campus with sexual violence updates in any form. Students will learn about demands and complaints made before them by previous students and are encouraged to follow in these footsteps by demanding more information from McGill pertaining to sexual violence on campus.

We will take a closer look at a case study from one of McGill's more recent displays (or complete failures) of handling sexual violence accusations on campus. Before we begin to analyze, in this case, the disappointing shortcomings with which the situation was managed by administration, we will first describe the context of McGill's handling of the sexual misconduct situation. We pull information from resources both inside and outside of the McGill student community to express our disappointment with the event's outcome and offer suggestions according to our third demand as to how McGill could work within legal guidelines to better gratify and protect its student body.

On December 14th, 2020, a campus-wide petition was launched by several McGill students expressing concern that a first-year student living in [New Residence](#) had been and would continue to be committing sexually inappropriate (Assault. RAPE.) behavior with young women, several of whom identified as *minors* at the time. The aftermath of the offender's

actions, decided by McGill, are still not known to us nor the vast majority of students on campus.⁴³ This is a problem begging to be reworked.

Student Juliet Morrison of *The Tribune* [covered the incident](#) in impressive detail, describing how only “on paper” is McGill’s sexual violence policy one that is survivor and student-centered.⁴⁴ She goes on to describe McGill’s overall “lack of clarity” around the institution’s reporting procedures, acknowledging as we will Quebec’s [“Code of Silence,”](#) a piece of legislation that prevents schools from being able to publicly declare the disciplinary actions used against accused students.⁴⁵ That being said, we want to acknowledge McGill’s inability to inform students directly of an offender’s punishments, and do not wish to make demands the university cannot agree with. **However, providing students with some reassuring tweets and vague emails is not enough.** In fact, it’s pathetic, and students should be enraged by it. As The McGill Daily articulated in March of 2022, “The McGill administration fails to support survivors – and Quebec’s privacy laws don’t change that.”⁴⁶ **As such, the privacy policy should be seen as a challenge for McGill administration to work around in order to still provide information to its students, as we ask in our third demand. What it should not be is an excuse to do nothing.**

On December 16th, 2020, McGill University posted a [tweet](#), one of the only pieces of information released to students during the course of the event, attempting to reassure the McGill community that the administration was “committed to proactive measures,” additionally mentioning that the university cannot “divulge any information that could reveal personal

⁴³ Lea Sabbah, “McGill Is ‘Looking into’ Sexual Assault Allegations from a Petition with 50,000 Signatures.” *MTL Blog*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.mtlblog.com/montreal/mcgill-is-looking-into-sexual-assault-allegations-from-a-petition-with-50000-signatures>.

⁴⁴ Morrison, “Recovery amid the Silence about Sexual Violence at McGill.”

⁴⁵ Morrison, “Recovery amid the Silence about Sexual Violence at McGill.”

⁴⁶ Cable, “no one reached out to me”: A survivor's experience reporting sexual assault on campus.”

information” about members of the community.⁴⁷ Underneath this tweet are several comments regarding the matter, many of which are student suggestions and inquiries, and **none** of which were responded to. One student asks if the accused person had been removed from New Residence and was therefore not able to assault more young women? Another asks McGill to “clarify the role” of the services list McGill simply tacks onto every post related to sexual misconduct, as if that will make students feel better.⁴⁸ The lack of response and/or improvements from the university, despite the presence of student coverage, demands, and inquiries, is absolutely unacceptable. **We demand that McGill find new, perfectly legal ways to keep the student body informed of sexual misconduct procedures so that students do not feel left in the dark about their peers and, consequently, their own safety**. Examples include offering more frequent, even if vague, updates on the current stage of the investigation process, and providing students with a list of potential ramifications that accused students could be subjected to if found guilty of their actions. [The University of British Columbia](#), for example, notes in its sexual misconduct policy that “suspension or termination” may be appropriate consequences.⁴⁹

Feeling safe on campus should be the right of every student, and a lack of clarity on McGill’s disciplinary measures does not provide us with that feeling. It makes us feel worse. The fact that the accused student still remains on campus, as evidenced per comments on the above-mentioned Facebook post (although not updated since 2020), and allegedly only had to complete the It Takes All of Us course again, is absolutely absurd. How can students be encouraged to step

⁴⁷ McGill University. “McGill’s senior administration was recently made aware of alleged sexual misconduct on campus. As soon as we became aware, we began looking into the matter.” Facebook, December 16, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/McGillUniversity/posts/pfbid02cEf85zQ9qB4J7pivFj2HXfBJPgQegU9Hb5Lcb8RYEcbWguKJQxsPNAhoXmJHNmKBI>

⁴⁸ McGill University. “McGill’s senior administration was recently made aware of alleged sexual misconduct on campus. As soon as we became aware, we began looking into the matter.”

⁴⁹ “Policy No.: 131 Approval Date: Responsible Executive: Title: Sexual Assault and Other Sexual Misconduct Background & Purposes.” n.d. Accessed April 17, 2023. <https://med-fom-psychiatry.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2017/02/Proposed-Policy-131-Feb-2017-attached.pdf>.

forward about reporting sexual violence when they are completely unaware of their courageous endeavor's effects? If McGill were to do more to encourage survivor reports by **actively offering support** instead of copying and pasting a resource list, as well as provide survivors and the community with more information, it would be practicing a more survivor-oriented, holistic form of care. In this way, the university would be actively demonstrating and advocating for survivor support rather than keeping the entire process secretive even beyond its legal bounds. In these actions (or lack thereof) McGill is saying: *You can report sexual violence, but we will do the bare minimum to keep you safe and supported.* We additionally ask how survivors are expected to regain agency and a sense of wholeness after this investigation process is complete or even in-progress? No answer is provided by McGill. **Students– should we really feel so left in the dark by the most prestigious university in Canada? It is time for change.**

Other students support these ideas. SSMU has already [made strides](#) in advocating against the 'Code of Silence,' passing a petition on October 29th of 2020 that calls for the repeal of this policy, specifically Bill 64 in the policy that prohibits administrations from “disclosing the penalties imposed on an attacker targeted by a complaint.”⁵⁰ **We demand that McGill administration discuss ways they can support this vast array of student legislation, petitions, and demands that are repeatedly asking for change with no response. We should not have to beg for a response.** Even if these demands of more sexual violence disclosure and advocating against Quebec's Code of Silence policy were somehow not-before seen by administration, our manifesto works to compile them into one, accessible resource. **There is no excuse.** Secondly, even if the university cannot make public, legal statements with involved-members' details, there are other ways to keep students informed and defended without

⁵⁰ Saylor Catlin, “Breaking the ‘Code of Silence.’” *The McGill Daily*, November 24, 2020, <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2020/11/breaking-the-code-of-silence/>.

overstepping legal guidelines, as suggested in this section. Some include: actively coming to survivors to support them (if they accept support) rather than just providing lists of resources, offering restorative justice publicly as a model as [Queen’s University](#) has done, and doing more to keep the McGill community informed as detailed above.⁵¹ Any step is a step; “what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system.”⁵² And student demands must be the catalyst for larger, institutional change. Likewise, small steps from the administration such as making more informational, public statements are instrumental for creating a campus environment that is survivor-centered and student, not offender, oriented. We want McGill administration to do more to publicly acknowledge that sexual violence is something deeply *wrong* within our campus, not just a problem to deal with.

McGill University can and must do more to keep us safe, informed, and proud to be on campus. A student body who consistently feels unsafe and uncared for is asking you to “Do. Better.,” and has been asking for some time.⁵³ **It is time the university listened.**

PART III: DEMANDS

DEMAND I

Our first demand states as follows: McGill needs to provide an in-person, mandatory program that fosters relationships between students, staff, and faculty to prevent violence. ITAOU is meant to increase awareness across campus, yet we believe that it **fails to be specific to McGill’s community and hold the institution accountable for turning a blind eye to**

⁵¹ “Restorative Approaches and Practices,” Student Conduct Office, accessed April 19, 2023.

<https://www.queensu.ca/studentconductoffice/process-and-resolution/restorative-approaches-and-practices>.

⁵² brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, 36.

⁵³ McGill University. “McGill’s senior administration was recently made aware of alleged sexual misconduct on campus. As soon as we became aware, we began looking into the matter.”

sexual violence on campus. Not only should these courses be held on a regular basis; it is crucial that McGill offers in an in-person format in order to avoid mindlessly flipping through the modules without retaining any information. We attempted to contact OSVRSE on two separate occasions in hopes of receiving information on the statistics about annual reports and outcomes of sexual violence at McGill that were exempt from the course. As expected, due to the limited staff, we received zero response.

Kaba's concept of transformative justice is an important tool towards encouraging accountability and how we need to hold the system responsible, which is why this concept needs to be implemented within the university's sexual violence services. Individuals need to understand how they've harmed others and this can be made possible through acts of community-building, the strengthening of bonds and "focusing on things that we have to cultivate so that we can prevent future harm."⁵⁴ In the context of McGill's history with sexual violence cases, an open letter⁵⁵ was written to the Student's Society of McGill University (SSMU) in April 2020 regarding allegations of sexual violence against incoming VP Internal. Not only did SSMU fail to hold the individual accountable; they attempted to solve the case by releasing a senseless statement. This is the main issue with accountability, as institutions have no incentive to admit to the flaws in their system. The student letter addressed the need for all staff members as well as SSMU officers to undergo "training on sexual violence, consent and

⁵⁴ Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, 202.

⁵⁵ Our Turn Task Force, Education Undergraduate Society, Music Undergraduate Student Association, Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Student's Society (SACOMSS), QPIRG-McGill, The Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE), Black Students' Network McGill (BSN), SSMUnion, Queer McGill, Bachelor of Arts and Science Integrative Council, "Open Letter Regarding Allegations of Sexual Violence Against Incoming VP Internal," *The Feminist Student News and Protest Archive*, <https://feministsnaparchive.omeka.net/items/show/342>.

workplace harassment that is intersectional, trauma-informed and survivor centric, as well as SSMU's internal HR and GSVP policies".⁵⁶

The services offered at McGill should not only prioritize the safety and wellbeing of students, but also consider transformative justice in their approach to responding to harm and abuse. **Students, staff, and faculty need to be taught accountability as a skill** in these types of programs in order to minimize the space in which sexual misconduct occurs.

DEMAND II

As we write this, it's that time of year when the McGill campus is overrun with tour groups of fresh-faced high school students from Canada and around the world, contemplating the next step in their education, wondering if they'll find a home at McGill University for the next three or four years of their lives. They'll hear statistics about the university, learn all about the world-class professors and our school's stellar reputation as one of the best universities in Canada and around the world. They might catch a glimpse of what life is like at McGill University as they look around the campus. What they won't be able to gather from a tour of the McGill campus is the way that the university will respond to them in their time of need. McGill may tout all of these measures that they have available for students — the Office of Sexual Violence Response, Support, and Education, and other university resources such as the Student Wellness Hub and Security Services. **But there is a stark difference between having resources and having accessible resources.**

We are demanding that the administration at McGill University turn their words into action by more heavily investing in student services geared towards survivors of sexual

⁵⁶ Our Turn Task Force, et al., "Open Letter Regarding Allegations of Sexual Violence Against Incoming VP Internal."

violence. Your concern for the wellbeing of your students shouldn't end with just the creation of university resources. **The creation of resources like OSVRSE is rendered meaningless if students are competing against one another for limited appointments, or if the office can't continue to run their programs because of a staff shortage.** The administration's concern for our wellbeing is incredibly **shallow** and revolves around maintaining the school's reputation, when it should be about the safety of the students and should include continually working on the resources that they offer, constantly looking to improve them to help students that have survived sexual violence, making sure that those same students are able to access those services when they need them. Not weeks and weeks later but guaranteeing that students are able to speak and consult with McGill faculty and staff in a **timely manner**. The creation of an office like OSVRSE is just the first step of many in creating a safe environment for students at McGill. Because McGill has failed to make it a priority thus far, OSVRSE has failed to reach its full potential as a resource for students. The demand for the services of OSVRSE should be so much more alarming to the administration than it currently is — as is the university's failure to keep pace with this demand. **Continue to invest in services by allocating more funding and resources to organizations like OSVRSE and the Wellness Hub, and hiring more full-time staff members that can assist survivors during their time of need.** OSVRSE can be an amazing resource for survivors of sexual violence in the McGill community — but it can't do so without the McGill administration putting in the necessary effort and investment to unlock its fullest potential.

DEMAND III

Our third and final demand is that McGill offer more transparency to its community regarding its sexual violence cases and procedures. In this manifesto, we have offered

suggestions as to how to make this demand a reality, such as actively responding to students' questions on media platforms, providing more email and media updates (even if non-disclosing. *Vague is better than none.*), student and survivors' concerns with McGill's current sexual misconduct policy and providing more than just a copied and pasted list of resources for students to access. Additionally, McGill could work to add "restricted access to specific groups or spaces, or ineligibility for positions of leadership" as further ramifications for accused students.⁵⁷ The list could go on. This manifesto makes it clear that more needs to be done and **NOW**. And that it is up to students to demand for change.

Students before us have already contributed to this work, asking McGill to "inform the development of future policies and procedures, and revise existing ones," to which they received **no response**.⁵⁸ Like them, "we are tired of empty words and hollow actions" from an administration that is *actively choosing to ignore* the numerous cries for help and reform against sexual violence. Against rape. Students should not have to beg to be heard from the most prestigious university in Canada, one that's system turns a blind eye to its student's suggestions and demands despite its claims of "unequivocal support."⁵⁹ ⁶⁰ If the support McGill currently provides is its best, as students at The McGill Daily have argued, "there is no reason for survivors on campus to have faith that the university will support them through their trauma."⁶¹

We encourage fellow students to allow this section to make them feel as angry as we do. **We are**

⁵⁷ Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, 202.

⁵⁸ O'Doherty, "McGill Administration Continues to Fail Survivors of Sexual Assault: An Open Letter to the Administration of McGill University."

⁵⁹ "QS World University Rankings 2023," Scimetrica, n.d., <https://www.universityrankings.ch/results&ranking=QS@ion=World&year=2023&q=Canada>.

⁶⁰ "McGill's New Survivor-Focused Sexual Violence Policy Reinforces Prevention, Support and Response." Newsroom, McGill University, last modified March 28, 2019, <https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/mcgills-new-survivor-focused-sexual-violence-policy-reinforces-prevention-support-and-response-295780>.

⁶¹ Cable, "no one reached out to me": A survivor's experience reporting sexual assault on campus."

not taken care of here on campus, that is clear enough. We must come together to show care through advocating for change from the administration, and for more transparency as we demand.

This system can be changed, and McGill can “prevent future violence from happening” by making proactive changes to end this cycle of insufficient procedures.⁶² To students, sexual violence on campus goes beyond that of legislation and formal procedures. It is a living, breathing threat to their own safety on a campus they entrusted with their protection. McGill needs to do more than conduct investigations, but additionally keep its community informed to “show compassion” and “understanding toward survivors and the people that serve and help them.”⁶³ Sexual violence involves more than just consequences for actions. *It involves taking care of the community these actions have been thrust upon and torn apart.*

This manifesto should serve not only in demanding the McGill administration make changes, but also as a resource providing evidence as to why. From case studies pertinent to McGill to student voices, suggestions, and factual statistics, we have compiled a document that supports our demands on many fronts.

McGill Administration,

Now there is no excuse not to act.

⁶² Mia Mingus (n.d.) “Transformative Justice: A Brief Description” Transform Harm.org. <https://transformharm.org/transformative-justice-a-brief-description/>

⁶³ Carrie Rentschler, Benjamin Nothwehr, Ayesha Vemuri, Arianne Kent, Nina Morena, and Emma Blackett, *Survivor-Centered Research: Guidelines, Principles, and Resources* (Montreal, QC: Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies, McGill University, 2022), 11.

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