Too rigid, too big, too slow: Institutional readiness to protect and support faculty from technology facilitated violence and abuse

Chandell Gosse (corresponding author), Research Administration Officer, Cape Breton University,

Victoria O'Meara, Post-Doctoral Research Associate, Royal Roads University,

Jaigris Hodson, Associate Professor, Royal Roads University,

George Veletsianos, Professor, Royal Roads University,

Abstract

Academic labour has expanded beyond the walls of academic institutions. Academics are expected to communicate with students online, use digital tools to complete their work, and share their research with broad audiences—often through online spaces like social media. Academics also face technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) in these same spaces. When this happens, employers have a responsibility to protect and support workers. However, recent events have shown that universities are not always prepared to do so. We use data from a discourse analysis of harassment and discrimination policies and interviews with university managers (including Vice President Academics/Provost, faculty Deans, and directors of human rights offices) to examine how prepared Canadian universities and colleges are to support academics targeted by TFVA. We found that institutions are unprepared in three ways: first, they focus on physical safety over non-contact harms; second, they envision perpetrators to be named, local, and part of the campus community; and third, the reporting process is cumbersome and outpaced by the speed and frequency with which TFVA occurs. We consider these findings in the context of work-overflow and context collapse to demonstrate how the institutional apparatus for

maintaining a safe and respectful working environment has not expanded in kind with the extensification of contemporary academic labour.

Keywords

technology-facilitated violence and abuse; higher education; context collapse; work extensification; organizational policy; online harassment; cyber bullying

Introduction

Technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) refers to a host of harmful and disruptive behaviors that occur in online spaces and using digital communication technologies (Bailey, Henry, & Flynn, 2021). Common forms of TFVA include inappropriate messages involving sexualized comments, rape and death threats, threats of other forms of violence, discrediting someone's achievements and credentials, and sharing private or semi-private information. These and other harms have been around as long as the internet (Dibbell, 1993), but in the last decade the prevalence of TFVA, in both higher education and other contexts, has grown and the consequences laid bare (Hodson et al., 2021; Duggan; 2014; Vogels, 2021). For many people, TFVA occurs in the context of their work. At times, the risks and impacts of TFVA are so extensive that they disrupt an individual's ability to do their work effectively and efficiently (Gosse, O'Meara et al., 2021; Jane, 2018). When such violence and abuse intersect with their work, employers have a responsibility to protect and support workers.

The consequences of TFVA extend beyond the targeted individual. When TFVA causes targets to retreat from online spaces, the public is robbed of their insights and contributions. For example, some scholars who have been targeted by TFVA have tried to protect themselves

through self-silencing strategies (Hodson et al., 2018). In many cases, scholars bear the consequences of TFVA with little support from the institutions for which they work. In cases of harassment or discrimination that occur within the workplace, universities and colleges have formal policies and practices to investigate, mitigate, and remedy such incidents. Yet, there is a growing number of scholars who have not been supported by their institutions (Ferber, 2018; Grollman, 2015; Grundy, 2017; Harvey Wingfield, 2015; McMillan-Cottom, 2015), calling into question the efficacy of these policies to address TFVA (Burnett, 2020).

This paper analyzes institutional harassment policies and one-on-one interviews with university and college administrators in Canada to explore how prepared institutions are to deal with TFVA. While the presence of TFVA has been documented and somewhat addressed in Canada, the literature around this is limited. Thus, two research questions guide this work:

1. How do harassment and discrimination policies from Canadian colleges and universities succeed or fail in protecting and supporting academic workers from TFVA?

2. What institutional practices do university managers at Canadian colleges and universities highlight and how do these succeed or fail to protect academic workers from TFVA?

We analyze data using discourse analysis and thematic coding and adopt the concept of "work extensification" (Jarvis & Pratt, 2006) and "context collapse" (Marwick & boyd, 2011), to situate our findings against a backdrop of broader transformations to the norms of academic work.

Context: TFVA: Impact and Response

TFVA can happen to anyone, but there is a growing concern about its impacts in industries and job roles that involve participation in online spaces (Gosse, O'Meara et al., 2021). Journalists,

politicians, scientists, public health officials, and academics have experienced various forms of TFVA (Ferber, 2018; Ferrier & Guard-Patkar, 2018; Nogrady, 2021; Rheault et al., 2019).

Extant literature makes clear that TFVA has significant impacts on the personal and professional lives of those who experience it (Jane, 2018; Stevens, Nurse & Arief, 2021). In academia, scholars who have become casualties of "networked harassment" (Marwick, 2021) report a loss of confidence in teaching and research, reputational damage, and adverse effects on relationships to their research, colleagues, and peers (Gosse, Veletsianos et al., 2021; Oksanen, et al., 2022). Importantly, the negative impacts of TFVA are not equally distributed. Systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia place faculty members of equity-deserving groups at higher risk (Barlow and Awan, 2016; Gosse, O'Meara et al., 2021; Vera-Gray, 2017). TFVA operates as a tool to intimidate, silence, and push already marginalized voices out of public discussion. It has become a strategy that maintains the status quo and polices the boundaries of who is allowed to speak and what is allowed to be said. In this way, TFVA becomes both an expression of inequality as well as a tool to reproduce it systemically.

Despite efforts from activists and legal scholars (Citron, 2014; Dunn et al., 2017), the support offered to targets of TFVA has been underwhelming. Social media companies (Pater et al., 2016), law enforcement (Powell & Henry, 2018), and workplaces (Ketchum, 2020) do not have strong practices in place to support targets of TFVA in ways that targets describe needing it (Gosse, 2021; Houlden et al., 2021). For example, several high-profile instances when faculty members have been targeted with TFVA have shown that institutions frequently prioritize public image over support for the faculty member (Burnett, 2020; Rodrigues-Sherley, 2022). In the face of this lack of support, targets often become responsible for preventing, mitigating, and dealing

with TFVA on their own (Gosse, 2022). They employ a variety of individualized strategies including blocking users and deleting comments (Vitis & Gilmour, 2016), taking screenshots to document and report abuse (Hodson et al., 2021), normalizing abuse, treating it as inevitable, and downplaying its impact and severity (Veletsianos et al., 2018). In some instances, targets of abuse self-monitor, silence, and/or reduce their participation online (Chadha et al., 2020). This is a particularly devastating consequence for the public sphere, as it limits diverse and equitable participation.

While the literature outlined above begins to clarify the tremendous damage that online abuse can have on the individuals who are targeted, there is far less research examining the preparedness of higher education institutions to respond to these attacks (Ketchum, 2020), and a systematic review of the literature shows that only recently have researchers begun examining new sites of harassment, such as online spaces (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Surveys of higher education professionals suggest that not only do these individuals believe that their institution is unprepared to respond to TFVA, but that they also are not certain whether their institution has policies to address this issue (e.g., Luker & Curchack, 2017). Descriptions of lived experiences in the literature suggest mixed institutional responses, and while some faculty feel supported, others note that their institutions "expressed a very haphazard response, and plans seemed to change from one moment to the next" ultimately compounding the problem (Ferber, 2018, pp. 315). Significantly, while much of this research occurs in the context of Australia, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, the current literature indicates that not only is TFVA a global problem, but that institutions worldwide are in need of policies and procedures to deal with the problem (e.g., Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2018; Oksanen et al., 2022). This project therefore makes a significant and original contribution to the limited literature that exists,

by identifying whether institutional policies in the Canadian higher education context exist and analysing those policies to determine the ways in which they support or fail to support academic workers.

Theoretical perspective: Work extensification and context collapse in academia

Jarvis and Pratt (2006) offer the framework of "extensification" to conceptualize the way that contemporary work is increasingly dispersed across different spaces, times, and scales. The authors suggest "overflow" as a key process of extensification, which acts as an appropriate metaphor for the way that contemporary work processes tend to persistently escape or transcend the boundaries of the firm. This framework aligns with the thinking of Autonomist Marxist writers who note that the current era marks a new phase of capitalism in which work transcends the traditional "work*place*", and the whole of society comes to operate as a "factory without walls" (e.g., Negri, 1989). Drawing upon these insights, Rosalind Gill (2016) argues that work in the modern university can be understood as "academia without walls" (p. 48).

One key driver of the extensification and overflow of work has been the proliferation of digital communication technologies that facilitate new forms of connectivity for workers across the knowledge economy, making it possible to be "always on" the job (Gregg, 2013). For academics, communication technologies like email, messaging apps, social media, and online teaching platforms have functioned to intensify as well as *extensify* the working day (Gill, 2016). Whether checking student emails after hours or listening to a scholarly podcast while exercising, communication technologies have enabled more flexible and porous work arrangements for scholars that "allow work to invade, permeate, or simply nag at spaces and times that were once less susceptible to its presence" (Gregg, 2013, p. 123). Melissa Gregg (2013) calls this

development "presence bleed", where the boundaries that demarcate the time and space of work begin to erode. Compounding this, certain technology uses, like social media platforms, bring what used to be disparate audiences into close proximity to one another, a phenomenon identified by Marwick and boyd (2010) as context collapse. For academics, the context collapse of online and offline spaces can mean that their professional and personal communication and audiences cease to be siloed and separate from one another. Instead, they mix, mingle, and even clash (Veletsianos & Shaw, 2018).

Presence bleed and context collapse demonstrate how the spatial and temporal boundaries that once demarcated the realm of work from other parts of life have begun to break down. In this process, so too has the division between one's personal and professional identity. Gregg (2013) writes that because of these conditions, knowledge workers in academia and beyond come to embody the responsibilities of their job role at all times of day and feel pressure to *perform* their productivity in a variety of contexts. In these ways, work tends to "overflow" (Jarvis & Pratt, 2006) across the spatial and temporal planes of modern life.

For academics, a clear manifestation of overflow is the mounting pressure they experience to promote their research online, participate in online discussions within their field, and make themselves accessible and responsive to broad audiences via media appearances and knowledge mobilization initiatives. As the model of full-time, tenured appointments has been systematically dismantled in favour of adjunct and temporary positions, the pressure to engage in this type of extra work to secure the next job or grant have only intensified (Duffy & Pooley, 2017; Marwick, 2020). We can think of these activities as examples of extensification and overflow in that they take place *beyond* the mandated job tasks of the typical workday, *outside* of the traditional space of academic work, and with audiences *external* to their field of expertise.

These activities are directly pertinent to academics' professional roles, but they are positioned outside of the parameters of the formally coded tasks of the job.

Importantly, while such forms of public engagement are rarely formally recognized within the academic employment contract, this type of engaged public scholarship is nevertheless tacitly encouraged by a variety of actors, including institutions and grant-making agencies. In a context where universities and colleges are increasingly market-driven (Popp Berman, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009), institutions stand to benefit from the publicity and reputational capital generated by faculty members who do the extra work of promoting themselves and their research online (McMillan-Cottom, 2015). Similarly, the growing emphasis that granting agencies put on knowledge mobilization activities puts additional pressure on scholars to make their work and themselves more accessible beyond their discipline.

Understanding academic labour in terms of extensification raises questions about how academic institutions have transformed to support and protect their employees within this flexible and porous configuration of work. It is towards examining those structures that this study is calibrated.

Methods

Research Data

TFVA is prevalent across the globe, including in Canada. While national data covering the topic has not been updated since 2016, research found that 17% of the population aged 15-29 had experienced TFVA (Hango, 2016). While TFVA has negative consequences for anyone who experiences it, there are unique consequences to workers whose job relies in part on digital communication technologies (Gosse, O'Meara et al., 2021); this includes scholars. To assess the

capacity of post-secondary institutions to protect and support scholars who experience TFVA in the context of work extensification, this study draws on two sources of qualitative data to develop a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study. These include textual data obtained from publicly available institutional workplace harassment policies from 41 Canadian colleges and universities and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 10 university managers across Canada (including Vice President Academics/Provost, faculty Deans, and directors of human rights offices). In order to keep our data anonymous, we use blanket terminology (e.g., the term university for all institution types and university manager for all roles) and do not provide pseudonyms for our participants.

Data Collection

In January 2021, we gathered workplace harassment policies from the websites of 232 public Canadian universities and colleges. The Canadian context was chosen partly because the that is the location of the researchers and they are familiar with the norms of academic work in this context, and because the small number of public institutions in Canada made for a manageable dataset. This list of 232 institutions came from the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association and represented all public universities and colleges in Canada. From this search we located 129 workplace harassment policies. We downloaded all 129 policies and conducted a targeted word search for any mention of the following terms: virtual, online, social media, e-/email, electronic, technology, cyber, and digital. These terms cover an array of language used to discuss TFVA, making it unlikely that we overlooked a policy that speaks to TFVA. This targeted word search revealed 41 policies that mentioned some form of TFVA. The 41 policies represent institutions from across Canada (see table 1 and 2).

To collect our interview data, we first invited administrators in the role of Vice-President Academic (VPAs) to participate in one-on-one interviews about TFVA.[1] In some cases, VPAs declined participation but suggested other colleagues in administrative roles whose work necessitated the application of harassment policies or the support of faculty and researchers. These individuals were also contacted to participate. Speaking with university managers was a deliberate sampling choice because part of their responsibility is to support faculty and researchers as they share their research. Given this responsibility, interviews with this group provide a sense of how institutions are supporting (or not) researchers who experience TVFA.

We sent invitations to 79 college and university administrators and interviewed 10 individuals who responded to our invitation. Participants came from universities and colleges across Canada (see table 3). Topics discussed in the interviews included university managers' knowledge of TFVA as a phenomenon that faculty experience, experiences with TFVA at their institutions, how effective and helpful they believe their existing institutional practices are, and the changes required to offer better support to faculty (see interview protocol here: https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Higher_Admin_s_Readiness_and_Response_-_Interview_Guide/19790020). These in-depth semi-structured interviews lasted 45 minutes to one hour and took place virtually over the course of May and June of 2021.

Table 1: Type of institution

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[1] Ethics approval for interviews was granted by the Royal Roads Office of Research Ethics.

Table 2: Location of institutional policies

<INSERT TABLE 2>

Table 3: Breakdown of participants' institutional affiliation

<INSERT TABLE 3>

Data Analysis

To analyze the policies, we converted all 41 policies that mentioned TFVA into word documents and entered them to NVivo 13 to conduct a discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is the study of text beyond its explicit and manifest meaning, to examine the text as part of a broader system of social meaning (Fairclough, 1989; 2013). In her work on policy, Bacchi (2012) frames policy as a kind of discourse. She notes that "the point here is to recognize the non-innocence of how 'problems' get framed within policy proposals, how the frames will affect what can be thought about and how this affects possibilities for action" (p. 50). Using discourse analysis to interrogate existing policies is a way to understand how institutions conceive of the problem and how this delimits the field of possible solutions. To understand how policies frame and respond to the problem of TFVA, we conducted two rounds of iterative open and inductive coding. In this paper we present findings from two of the high level (parent) codes: the policy scope and the policy procedures (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Organizational chart of parent and child codes

<INSERT FIGURE 1>

To analyze our interviews, we used a combination of inductive and deductive coding. Using Nvivo13 again, two authors coded the interview transcripts independently. The authors then met to discuss, combine, and finalize the thematic codes that emerged from the data. A total of 10 codes were identified, four of which constitute the findings for this paper (see table 4). Our interviews dealt with a broad range of topics related to TFVA. Therefore, some codes are beyond the scope of this paper. Here we present data from the four codes related to institutional readiness. Emergent themes reflected findings from the discourse analysis of the workplace policies. We thus integrated the interview data with the discourse analysis data and found that the findings supported and reinforced one another. In effect, pairing interviews with the discourse analysis made the complexity of the issues more salient by bringing texture to otherwise static documents.

Table 4: Interview coding scheme

<INSERT TABLE 4>

Findings

While the work that academics do has expanded beyond the walls of their respective institutions (Gill, 2016), the policies and instruments that are in place to protect employees from TFVA do not appear to have extended, in kind. Our findings demonstrate that the institutional infrastructures of support are rigid, narrow, and contained apparatuses that stand in stark contrast to the flexible, accessible, always-on posture that faculty themselves are increasingly asked to

maintain. Understood in the context of work extensification, these findings raise important questions about the scope of responsibility that institutions should take within this new configuration of academic labour.

Our findings paint a picture of rigid institutional apparatuses that are ill-matched to protect and support faculty whose work is characterized by overflow and context collapse. When interview participants described the current practices for supporting and protecting scholars from TFVA, they highlighted problems that were also identified in the policies. The interview data and discourse analysis of policies map onto one another in three ways:

- They echo similar limitations of where the institution has authority and responsibility;

- They reflect similar limitations with respect to who can access support and who is subject to the disciplinary apparatus of the institution; and

- They illustrate an incongruence between the instruments available to address the problem and pace and frequency of TFVA.

In this section, we organize our findings according to these three overlaps.

When and where is support available?

All workplace harassment policies we analyzed included a robust list of places where the policies apply. While some policies referenced "virtual" or "digital" environments in these lists, the focus was primarily on physical spaces, such as the physical campus and campus property. Examples from two mid-size public colleges demonstrate the typical language features in these policies: "conduct that occurs on properties owned or leased by the College" and "incidents of discrimination or harassment that occur on College premises." In some cases, policies included institutionally sanctioned events, which expands the field of policy applicability to include off-

campus properties. Examples included work and learning locations, conferences, and social functions hosted by the institution. However, the language used to describe these spaces continued to imply that they were physical, because "virtual" spaces were typically designated as such, leaving physical the de facto point of reference.

In documents where "virtual" spaces were specifically mentioned, these most often referred to institutionally licensed technologies and online spaces such as Zoom or BlackBoard. For example, one policy from a large university noted: "University-related activities include events (authorized and non-authorized) that occur on University premises or on non-University premises where there is a clear nexus to the working or learning environment at the University." The contingent provision to "bear a nexus to the University" works to limit the kinds of spaces the policy will cover. Another large university used similar language when referring to social media: "including social media, where there is a clear nexus to the work or learning environment." In these examples, as well as others, the contingency "to bear a nexus" is employed without definition or clear boundaries.

Interviews with administrators revealed a similar bias towards the physical campus or institutionally licensed "virtual" space. Participants frequently described policies and practices that are limited to what happens on the physical space of the campus. For instance, in terms of the protections and support that institutions' can offer to faculty who are targeted by TFVA, one interviewee explained that campus police can offer security by walking the person to their car. Another explained that after a faculty member received a sexually threatening message from a student, the university took "immediate steps [...] to reassure her about her safety," including assigning her a parking spot near a building entrance with security cameras and using a safe-walk program. A third interviewee explained that in cases where an ex-romantic partner is

threatening faculty, they have been able to ban the person from campus, share their image with security, and provide an alternative office space for the faculty equipped with an alarm to alert police. These security measures are crucial mechanisms to ensure the physical safety of faculty who come under attack; however, they seem to represent the extent of protection provided, and do not address the harms that may occur off campus but still in the context of work.

Some interviewees reflected upon the limitations of their institutional apparatus to respond to harassment and abuse that happens beyond the campus community. As one interviewee explained: "Our scope of action for those outside the community is limited. We can ban [them] from campus …" Another interviewee expressed her frustration with the limitations of existing policies, which, in her view were not compatible with the realities of online work:

> They're written for a traditional, face to face setting[...] They really haven't caught up with the reality that a lot of our interactions, especially after the pandemic, are online, and will probably continue to be. Social media is not going away [...] Our harassment policies are outdated and never anticipated a lot of that behavior. It's not enough to simply say, "We promise you a safe work environment." Well, what does that look like in an online world?

Participants often expressed that there is a need to improve policies to better protect and support faculty from the realities of TFVA. However, in conceptualizing the violence and abuse that faculty may experience, many still tended to focus narrowly upon institutional spaces. For instance, one interviewee reflected upon where changes need to be made to better protect faculty. In doing so, she positioned TFVA as primarily a classroom problem.

> [The policy] talks about respectful behavior in classroom environments right now. But it doesn't say virtual environments. And so, we're modifying that. I want to think about

whether or not on our learning management system we [should] actually put explicit statements there that every time a student logs on there's a statement to that effect as well.

While such an intervention is worthwhile to foster a productive and respectful learning environment, it cannot protect scholars from abuse that takes place beyond the classroom. Such a conceptualization indicates a narrow understanding of *where* faculty work and *where* TFVA occurs. When prompted about the forms of online abuse that happen beyond the classroom, this same interviewee admitted that she is "not sure what protections we can offer" beyond ensuring that the online platforms and tools they use adhere to privacy standards as outlined by the Canadian government.

The supportive infrastructure in place, as expressed by policy documents and interviewees, is largely limited to institutionally sanctioned tools. To be useful, the abuse needs to happen on the institution's property or using equipment that they own. However, as a result of academic work extensification, much of the TFVA that scholars experience takes place elsewhere, outside of traditional work hours and workspaces, and on personal social media accounts, rather than through institutionally provided digital learning platforms. Thus, the ability of such policies and practices to protect and support faculty members who experience TFVA is limited and questionable.

Who is included in existing policies and procedures?

Our findings also demonstrate that the ability of existing policies and practices to protect and support faculty from TFVA is limited by assumptions about who can perpetrate this form of workplace harassment and abuse. Indeed, all of the examined workplace harassment policies

presumed perpetrators of TFVA would be members of the campus community, limiting the applicability of the policies to people who are employed by the institution, official guests of the institution, and students. As demonstrated by a large university that focuses on distance education, language typical of this stipulation includes: "All faculty and staff, students, Board Members, contractors, postdoctoral fellows, volunteers, visitors and other individuals who work, study, conduct research or otherwise carry-on business of the University."

Notably, nearly a third of policies further specify that they apply to members of the institutional community who experience harassment *while they are engaged in their work*. For example, one small university pointed out that "This Guideline applies to all employees of the [institution] while in the course of their duties or at work-related events," and another large university noted, "This policy applies to all members of the university community engaged in university-related activities." The language of "university-related" and "work-related" simplifies and truncates the scope of harms this policy can address and puts an onus on the target of TFVA to demonstrate the work-related connection. While this language is broadly inclusive, it remains unclear when the institution is obliged to act as it obfuscates exactly what *is* and *is not* considered "work-related," and thus leaves unclear who the policies might apply to. Unfortunately, TFVA of faculty is often perpetrated by those who are not members of the campus community and are not obliged to observe the institutional mandates for respectful conduct.

We asked interviewees about what they can do when abuse is perpetrated by those who are not members of the campus community. Administrators' responses mirror the limitations of the policy documents, indicating that there is a dearth of protocols in place that can help faculty navigate such experiences. In one case, an interviewee explained that they did not initially

foresee the need for policies that deal with perpetrators outside the campus community: "our expectation was that this [TFVA] would either happen amongst students, or happen by students and maybe some toward faculty?" Another acknowledged that the institutional mechanisms were only actionable when perpetrators were students or employees, but recognized the importance of support:

> Our policies apply only to employees and students. That said, I think the institution's role is to support the person and help them to explore their external options. So, for example, if the abuse is targeted around [the] human rights code, the human rights tribunal could become involved provincially here, and I [...] think the institution has an obligation to support people to understand that.

> Furthermore, in many instances of TFVA the perpetrator is unknown, and interviewees

consistently expressed that anonymous perpetrators of TFVA pose a significant challenge to addressing the issue. One respondent explained that the major challenge for dealing with TFVA "is being able to maintain due process in a situation where anonymity is so much easier, and it can be very difficult to identify a perpetrator." Because perpetrators cannot be identified and sanctioned, administrators felt that there was little that could be done by the institution. Without a known perpetrator to hold accountable, existing procedures have little to offer. These responses from administrators indicate that the issue of TFVA is currently being approached using a punitive framework, which focuses upon the importance of being able to identify perpetrators and distribute punishment.

This narrow scope for conceptualizing *who* perpetrates an experience of faculty targeted TFVA constrains the range of possible responses available as part of the institutional apparatus

of support. In essence, these policies and practices shut down opportunities to support faculty who experience TFVA.

What is done when TFVA occurs?

Finally, our findings demonstrate that the ability of existing policies and practices to respond to TFVA of faculty is limited by the slow pace and complex structure of institutional processes. The majority of institutional practices examined in this study shared similar procedures for dealing with an incident. For informal complaints, institutions offered resolutions such as counseling for both parties, communication with the respondent on behalf of the complainant, and mediation. For formal complaints, affected individuals file a written complaint to a specified department, such as the human resources office. The complaint is then forwarded on to the institution's Human Rights or Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Office to determine if the complaint is in violation of any human rights code (if so, the complaint is no longer under the purview of the harassment policy). If no human rights code was violated, the institution launches an investigation which may involve the complainant's supervisor or dean, their union, and witnesses. This interviewee's comments were representative of the process as described by the policies and interviews. He explained:

> An investigator is engaged, sometimes that's the director of the office, sometimes it's a separate contract person. And they undertake an investigation, they meet with both of the parties, they get information from them, they ask for witnesses, they interview the witnesses, and they form that into an investigation report, which [...] may just make findings of fact and leave the final decision to the Vice President Academic.

Many of the procedures are explicit that the respondent—the person accused of the harm—must be involved in the complaint procedure. However, consulting with both parties is unrealistic for the realities of TFVA, when perpetrators can be unknown and/or unaffiliated with the campus community. In keeping with *who* these policies apply to, as noted above, there are no mechanisms through which to act in cases where the perpetrator was unknown or outside the institution's managerial reach, which is often the case with TFVA.

The procedures section of these policies also did not meaningfully engage with TFVA in any substantial way, but instead acknowledged TFVA in their outline of acceptable evidence for formal investigations. Types of tech-based evidence included screenshots, text messages, and social media messages. Due to the targeted word search used to identify which policies addressed TFVA, some policies in our dataset only mention TFVA in the procedures section as a type of evidence, and nowhere else in the policy. In these cases, TFVA was not acknowledged as a harm outright, but rather as a by-product of evidence collection.

Furthermore, such protocols are largely incompatible with the pace of TFVA. As one interviewee explained, the process is inherently "bureaucratic" and often unable to "answer the question fast enough for someone in this process." The disjoint between the realities of TFVA and existing institutional processes is further underscored by some policies that commit to re-evaluating their harassment policies after each formal complaint and investigation is resolved. While this is a worthwhile commitment that may be warranted in some instances, such protocols are incompatible with the pace, frequency, and spectrum of TFVA, where things happen too quickly for faculty to engage and set in motion these lumbering institutional processes. Instead, policies and procedures for lodging complaints and receiving support need to be swift to keep pace with the flow of the harms they aim to ease.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the institutional apparatus of protection and support is inadequate to respond to TFVA as it manifests under the conditions of academic work extensification. The limitations of these existing policies and practices emerge from their narrow focus upon the physical campus, assumptions about who perpetrates TFVA of workers, and the slow pace at which they are carried out. In the following section we reflect upon these limitations through the lens of academic work extensification and overflow in an increasingly online work environment.

Discussion

Faculty experiences with TFVA are more complicated and dynamic than the procedures and practices in place to address them. In this final section, we argue that the institutional apparatus for protecting and supporting faculty from TFVA is functionally limited by a logical and practical rigidity that necessitates authority and control over the time, space, and actors involved in TVFA. Ultimately, these institutional policies and protocols are incompatible with the realities of academic work extensification and overflow discussed above.

When and where? The limited space and time of support and protection

Contemporary academic labour is not limited to a certain time, nor the physical campus and institutionally owned equipment and software. Indeed, TFVA of faculty frequently occurs via digital platforms that are not officially sanctioned by the university, but that are nevertheless important venues where their professional role is performed. Social media platforms have become standard venues where faculty members share their research, collaborate with colleagues, engage with students, and interact with the public.

The findings in this study indicate that administration has a narrow conceptualization of when and where faculty members face violence and abuse while acting in their roles as researchers, educators, and employees of the university. The tendency to point to solutions such as banning perpetrators from campus or having security walk the faculty member to their car illustrates an infrastructure of support that is deeply biased towards the physical campus in a way that is not compatible with the realities of contemporary academic work nor the spaces in which TFVA occurs. As a result of work extensification and presence bleed, professional responsibilities overflow beyond the institution's property across a variety of contexts and roles in the faculty member's life. While these shifts in how academics do their work have meant that faculty are obliged to adopt a fluid, responsive, and always-on relationship to their work, our findings show that the apparatus of support remains stubbornly rigid in its logic and execution.

Who? A punitive framework

The procedures in place to address TVFA are designed to address incidents where all parties involved are members of the campus community. Instruments such as harassment policies and codes of conduct were commonly referenced by participants, but these can only delimit the parameters of acceptable behaviour for employees and students and function to punish those who violate codified expectations. Existing processes for handling experiences of TFVA reflect a punitive framework, typically unfolding in the form of identifying the perpetrator and alleged transgression; investigating the incident; and determining and applying a ruling and appropriate repercussions for the perpetrator. A mediation process between affected parties is also common. These protocols are designed to resolve conflicts between *members* of the institution and to

restore the normative working order. The investigation, adjudication, and punishment framework necessitate that the institution has authority over all the parties involved.

This punitive framework, where the resolutions on offer involve a system of punishments and consequences for those who violate workplace norms, is incompatible with the forms of TFVA that originate from those who are not members of the campus community, and over whom the institution has no authority. These attacks from outsiders escape the typical instruments, policies, and mechanisms because perpetrators are not subject to the rules set out by administration and the institution has no authority to enforce appropriate conduct for these sources of violence. In this way, existing institutional apparatuses of support are limited by a managerial logic that requires control over those involved as a precondition for proper functioning. But as the expectation to mobilize knowledge in a variety of contexts, promote research projects, and be seen actively contributing to the public discussion in one's field have become normative features of academic labour, faculty members' work regularly involves communication with people and groups over whom the institution has no authority ("Guidelines for effective knowledge mobilization", 2022). Context collapse has broken down the boundaries that separate distinct communicative contexts and allows faculty's work to circulate into new venues for new audiences, undermining the effectiveness of such a disciplinary and punitive approach to TFVA.

What? A process that is too big and too slow

Finally, the processes in place to address experiences of TVFA reflect a bias towards the incident, or a specific and isolatable event or transgression. The procedures found in the data tend to necessitate significant investment of time and energy from the targets of TVFA, who

must reach out to HR, file a report, and subsequently submit to a lengthy and potentially painful investigation or mediation process. These mechanisms are particularly ill-suited to faculty members who find themselves on the receiving end of a constant stream of abusive Tweets, comments, and emails that come from a diversity of people over time. Taken individually, each of these messages does not meet the threshold of severity to warrant setting the institutional processes in motion. Under these conditions, TVFA can be a daily occurrence with significant cumulative effect, but which is not worth the effort to pursue via these bureaucratic processes. In these cases, the institutional apparatus can be understood as *too big* to be an effective support. Furthermore, existing procedures typically take days and weeks to unfold, a pace that is *too slow* to be compatible with the speed and intensity at which TFVA can take place. These limitations illustrate that policies and practices in place to support faculty are incongruent with the forms TFVA that work overflow, extensification, and context collapse facilitate. These processes have expanded the setting of academic work and made faculty more accessible than ever, making them more available to abuse from anyone and at any time. The policies and procedures, however, are not agile, quick, and responsive enough to contend with these conditions.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the existing institutional apparatus for addressing TVFA cannot respond effectively to the realities of contemporary work and raise questions about the institution's scope of responsibility regarding the extent to which it has an obligation to ensure that faculty have a safe and respectful context within which they do their work. Considered through the lens of work extensification, this responsibility has not kept pace with the norms of contemporary academic labour.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous work from Ketchum (2020) who found that only one institution had media resources for faculty concerned about TFVA resulting

from their public scholarship. Similarly, the present study finds that institutions are under-prepared to help faculty who face TFVA. The limited support structure identified here also lends explanatory power to previous research that has shown that scholars largely deal with TFVA independently, with the help of friends (Hodson et al., 2018) or with a host of individualized coping strategies (Hodson et al., 2021). These responses make sense when the institutional infrastructure of support does not account for and cannot contend with many of the emergent and rapidly changing forms of TFVA that faculty face. The limits of the institutional apparatus appear particularly troubling when considering the chilling effect that TFVA has on targets, who may shy away from certain research questions or change their research agenda to avoid abuse. Furthermore, given that equity-deserving groups are disproportionately targeted for TFVA, marginalized faculty members are shouldering a disproportionate burden of coping with TFVA. In these ways, the limitations of the institutional systems of support have serious implications for equity in the workplace, the diversity of research communities, and the quality of public discourse. A more robust infrastructure of support is required.

Conclusion

TFVA is a rapidly evolving problem for workers and the organizations that employ them across the knowledge economy. In this paper, we examined the preparedness of colleges and universities in Canada to effectively protect and support faculty who face TFVA. Based upon data gathered from a discourse analysis of institutional harassment and discrimination policies and interviews with university managers, we find the existing institutional apparatuses to be insufficient in three overlapping ways. Firstly, they conceptualize the space and time of work narrowly and in a way that does not align with the norms of contemporary academic work.

Secondly, existing policies and practices are limited in who they envision the perpetrators of TFVA to be. And thirdly, existing policies and practices are too big and too slow to be appropriate for the speed and frequency with which online abuse occurs. While limitations of this study include the possibility that some policies from Canadian universities and colleges are not publicly available, that there are informal support mechanisms that this study did not capture, or that we did not capture an accurate picture of institutions readiness and response due to their complex organizational structure, this study nonetheless identifies a strong need for clarity around what support for academics should look like and who should have that conversation. When we consider these findings in the context of work overflow, extensification, and context collapse, it becomes clear that the institutional apparatus for maintaining a safe and respectful working environment has not expanded in kind with the extensification of contemporary academic labour. These transformed conditions of work demand new configurations of protection and support. To this end, future work should explore how academic institutions record instances and support targets of sometimes elusive and constantly changing workplace harms related to TFVA. Methodologically, verifying these findings through surveys will help to understand the full scale of this issue, including beyond a Canadian context. Above all, future work in this area should be guided by the necessity to rethink the scope of responsibility that institutions and employers have to their workers, and what a safe and respectful work environment means in the era of the digital workplace.

Funding

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