



Culture and Perspectives on Sexual Assault Policy

ANSUT Conference

Sept. 20, 2019

Acknowledgements

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Funded by "Sexual Violence Prevention Grant" (Dept. of Community Services)



Objectives

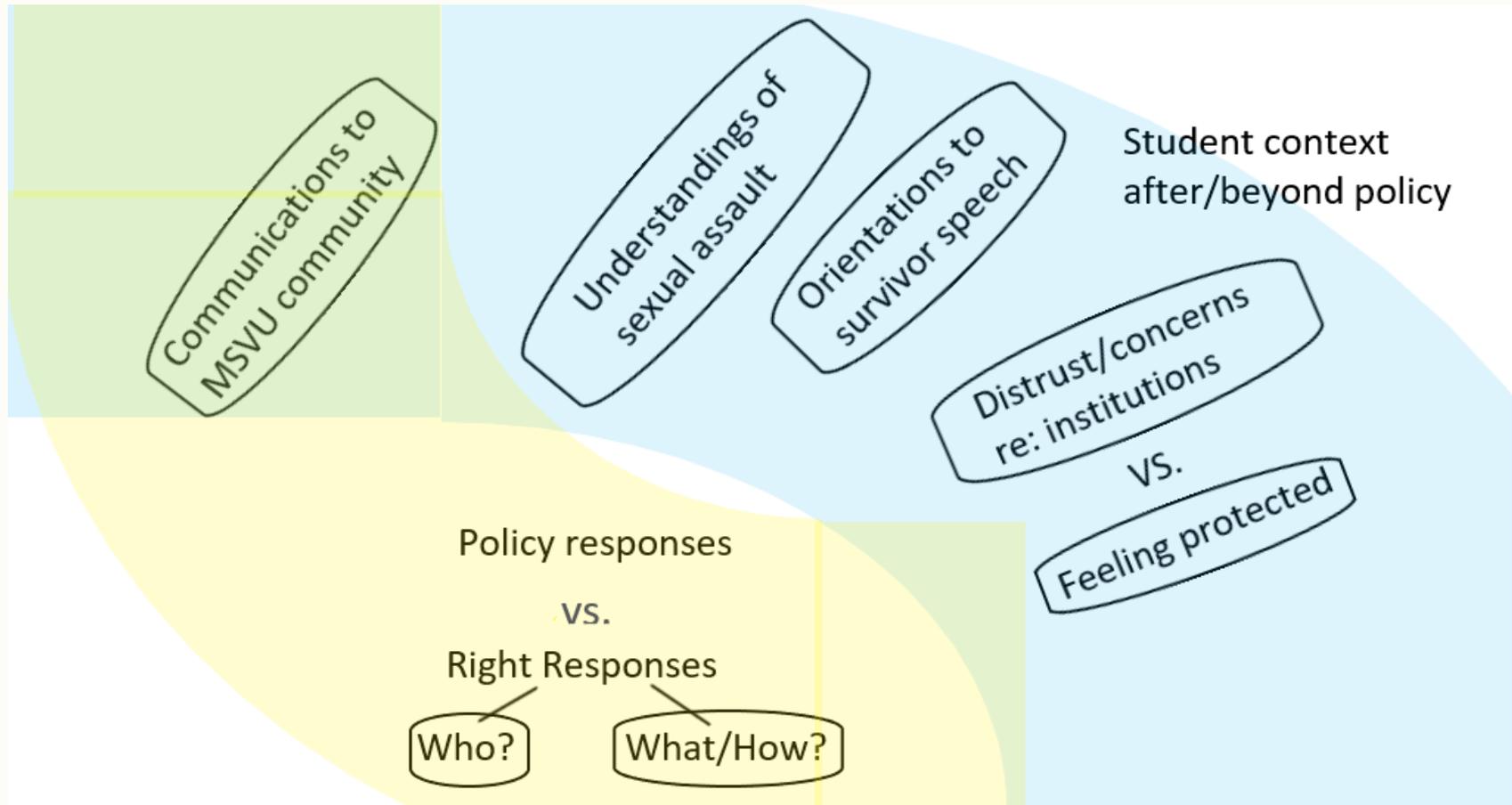
- To explore cultural and gendered influences that may shape whether and how students use a University's Sexual Assault policy
- To inform a Sexual Assault policy that will reach students in culturally relevant ways
- To provide insight into a new policy, and what kinds of support students may require in the process



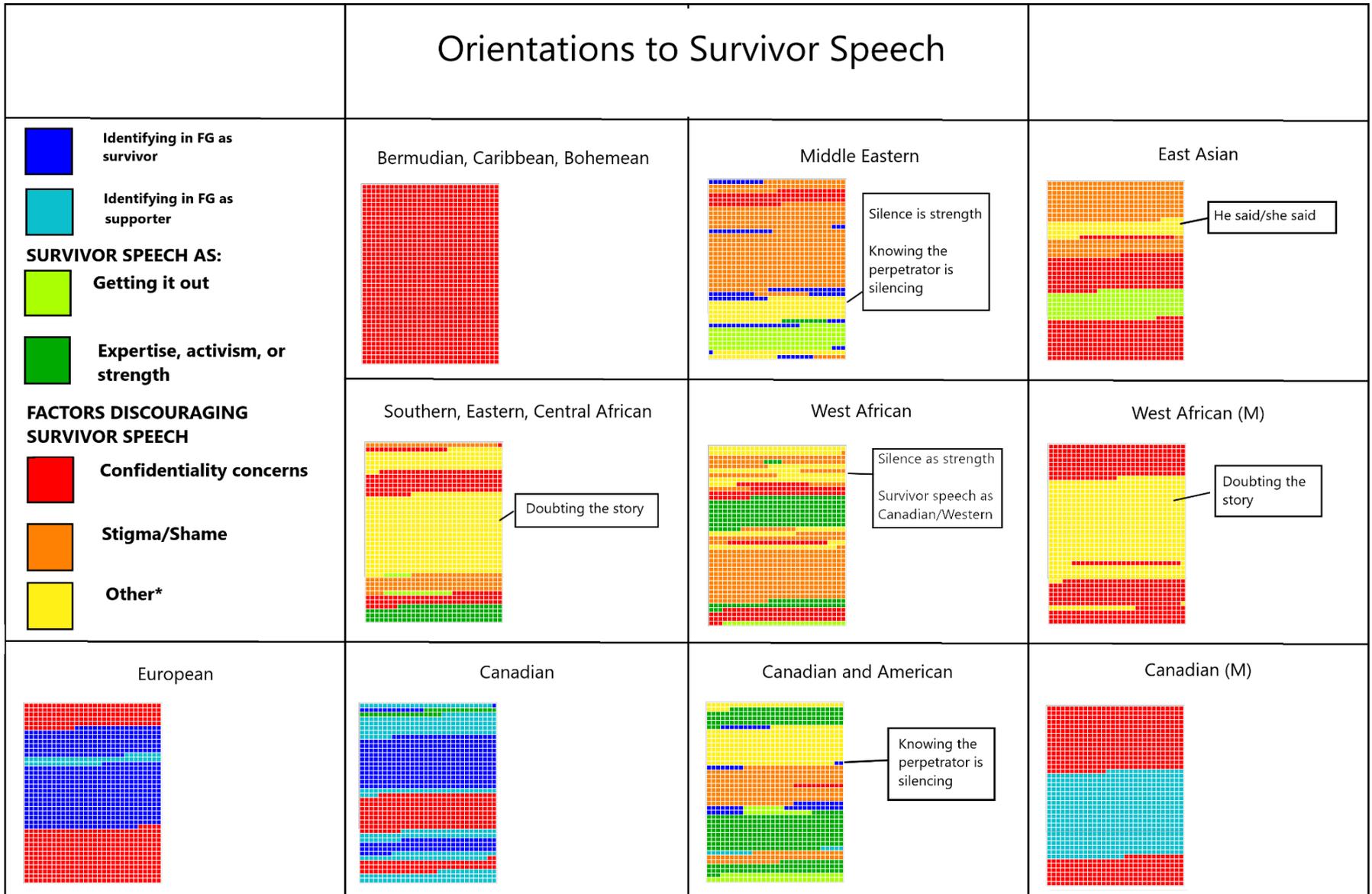
Methodology

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- Collected responses to MSVU's revised Sexual Assault Policy
 - **Participants:** international students at MSVU identifying as male and female, from these regions:
 - *Bermudian, Caribbean, Bahamian*
 - *Middle Eastern*
 - *East Asian*
 - *Southern, Eastern, Central African*
 - *West African*
 - **Focus groups** (2 – 8 participants): homogenous for gender-identity. Facilitated by RAs belonging to the same identity groups as participants
 - Data transcribed and analysed using MAXQDA.

Map of emerging analysis

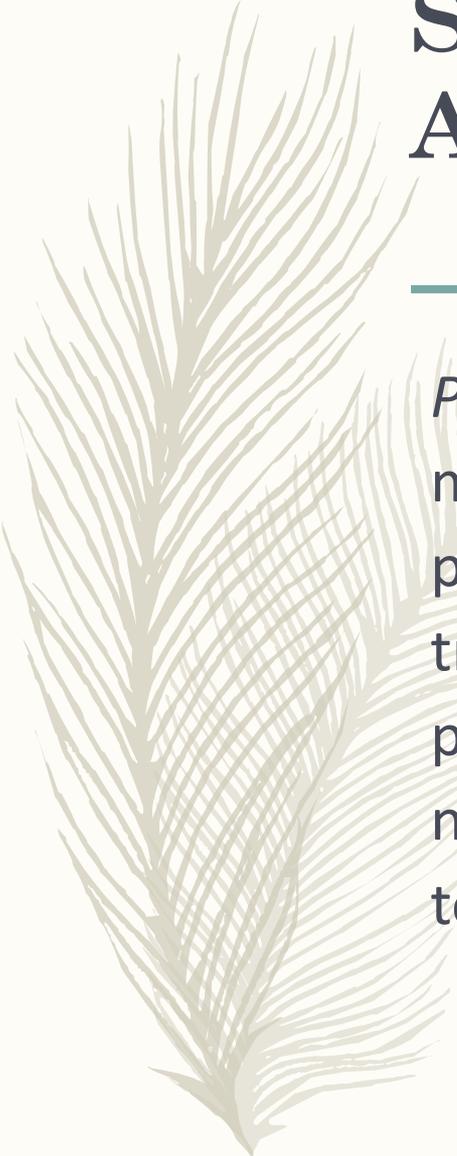


An example of a thematic analysis



Eastern, Central African

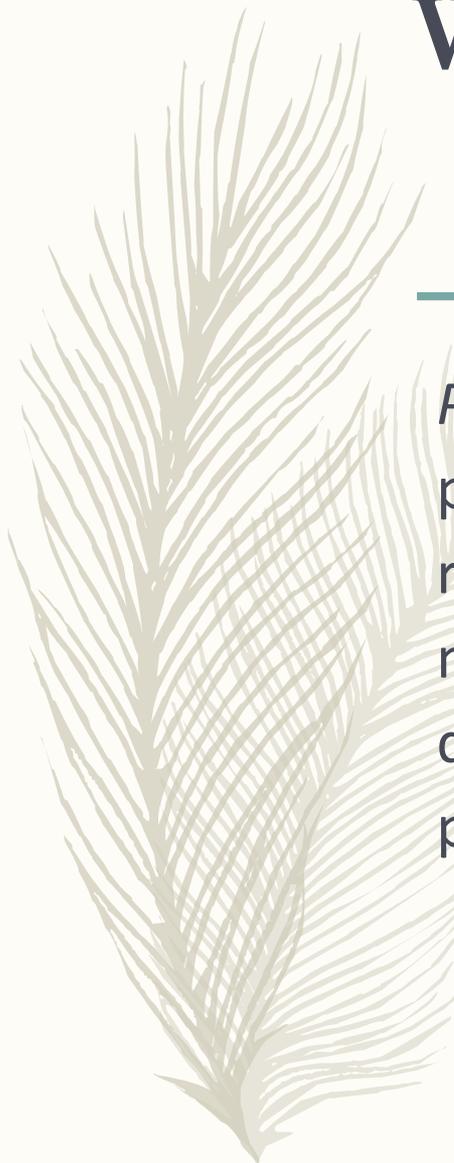
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- *Participant 1:* White people are used to counselling right? ... We are not. We don't have counsellors right? So like, the way we talk about it is like, ...it's hard to say it around your friends, because then you feel like they are not going to accept you.
 - *Participant 2:* They know your story. No, in Africa they are not going to accept it, they now know your business.
 - *Participant 1:* Yeah, and they are going to keep telling everyone. So that's what we don't, we don't want. We don't want everybody else to know. Especially people from like our country because there are so few here. Like if word travels around...



Southern, Eastern, Central African

Participant 2: Yeah, I didn't know the procedure. I mean the first natural thing to do would just probably be tell your friends, somebody that you trust and not the authorities, because to the person it feels—you're ashamed even though it is not your fault. You're ashamed, you don't really go to ...to authority.

West African



Participant 1: You know, the tendency for most people who experience sexual assault, they don't report it because they are afraid. Or because, ah maybe it brings shame to their family and they don't tell anyone, and then they're going to the police and then being blamed, you know?

West African



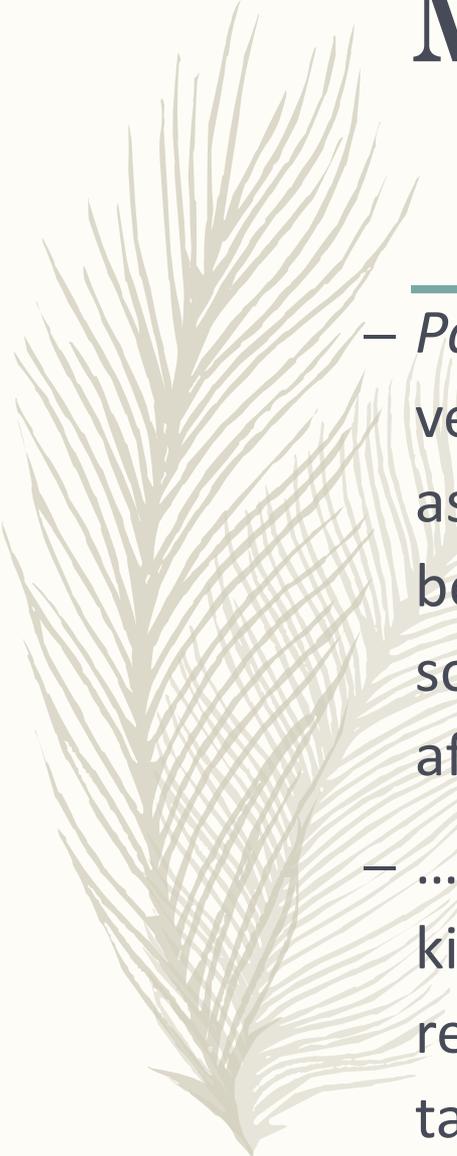
- *Participant:* They should, like, advise people from [West African country] to speak about it. Like, don't keep it to ourselves, because that is a problem. ...They should advise international students to speak about it.

Canadian and American



Participant: I think I would just advocate that there is people to talk to. And especially the counsellors, like, I think its super important to have someone to talk to, and just express your thoughts. ... when it's in your head it's just repeating the same thing over and over and it's just like, you don't want to go through that, so being able to talk to someone and have someone listen and be there for you, that's really nice.

Middle Eastern



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- *Participant*: Because our demographic tends to be very quiet about it, because there is a lot of shame associated with it.... sometimes it's terrifying because you're afraid of "Oh, so might know so and so, and they might tell so and so, and that might affect this, that and the other."
 - ... because it is such a small community in Halifax it's kind of daunting to be open about it. So the relevance of ... the whole confidentially piece and talking about it openly I think is extremely, extremely relevant.

East Asian



- *Participant:* I would like an experienced person [as a counsellor]... [with] professional certifications ... Besides, we also want to keep our information secretly.

West African (M)

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- *Participant 1*: [the biggest concern is] how to keep the victim and the accused anonymous. [If] his or her teacher or whatever [learns about it], it may change the way the teacher views the student forever even if it's not true. So yeah, you have to find a way to keep them anonymous until proven guilty.

West African



Participant 2: I feel like the policy, basically, um, local Canadian students... would probably relate to it more than international students will. [Canadian students] are exposed to it right from schools and everything, so it's not easy for an international person to want to come out and complain about things like that. So I feel they should find a way to still include [pause] something that is going to help international students relate to it better, since we all come from different regions, the policy should consider these factors.



Recommendations

Invisibility of the policy

Recommendation: We need to do a better job of disseminating information about sexual assault, and the sexual assault policy. This should involve student engagement. For example, have a small group activity, then a larger group discussion. We should hire a professor to develop this curriculum. Before implementation, it should be piloted to each cultural group who participated in this survey. Resources should be handed out to each student after the discussion.

Vagueness of the policy



- What certain words mean, the process of reporting, counselling support after graduation,
- Difficulty understanding the policy due to language barriers
- **Recommendation:** This should be addressed by simplifying the language used in the policy, perhaps making it available in multiple languages and/or having people who are able to help translate. This is another good reason to hire and train student disclosure representatives.

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- Men are concerned about racism and being falsely accused of sexual assault. They questioned the implementation of the policy and the accuracy of the investigation, how the investigation works, and who would be conducting it.
 - **Recommendation:** The Criminal Justice System route must be fully explained within the policy. Include more information as to how the investigator is picked and what their exact role is.



Communication issues

- the multiple options for disclosing and reporting (does not have to be face-face). Perhaps a phone call, live-chat, texting or an app should be made an option for those who wish to speak to someone, but do not want to do so in person.



Victim blaming, shaming are common in all cultures.

- **Recommendation:** create and implement an awareness and prevention campaign to promote awareness and education about campus sexual violence, and include information on rape culture, victim blaming, and the promotion of consent.



Diversity in the counselling staff is lacking

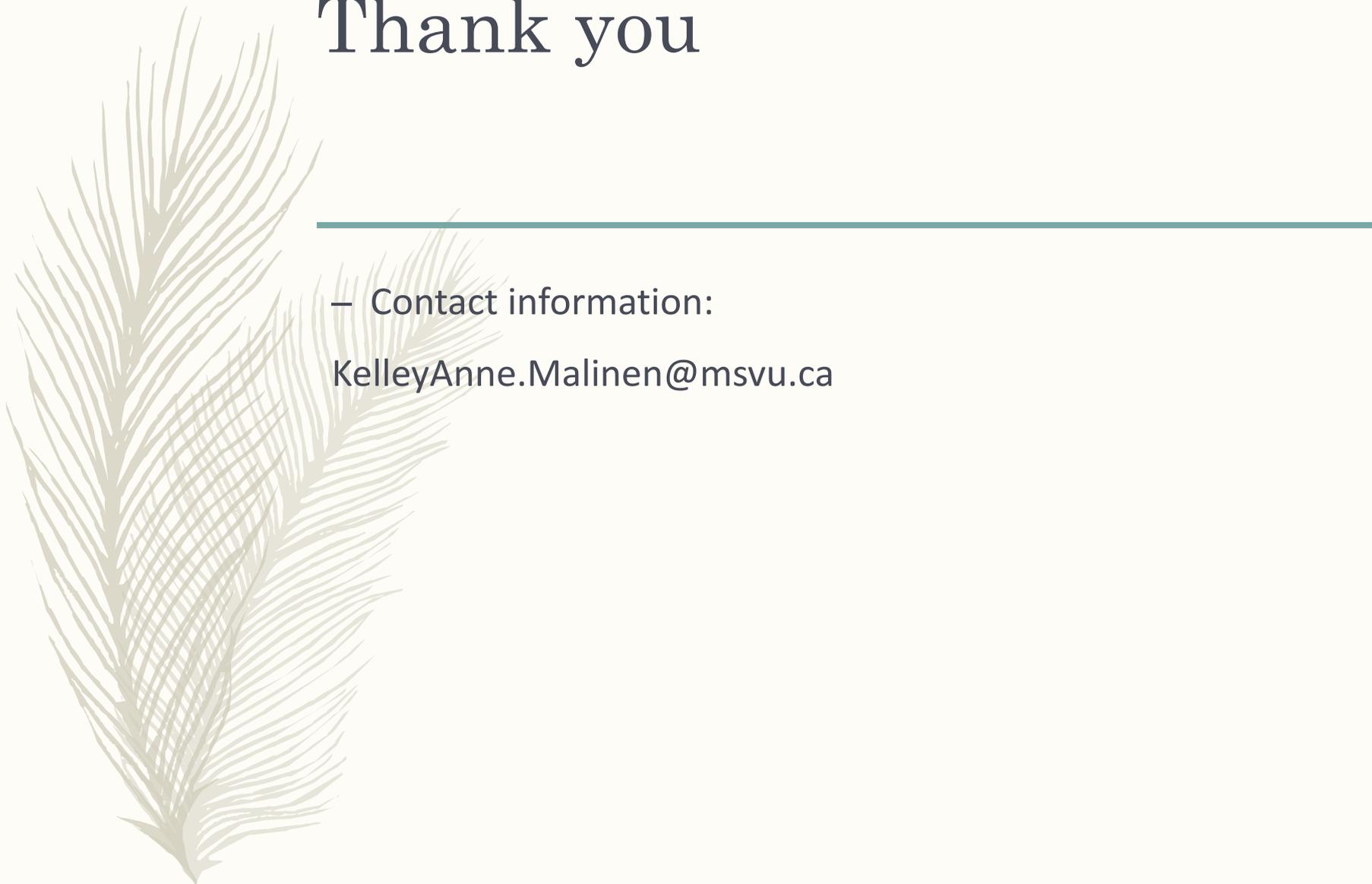
- Required education for the counsellor, having more professional counsellors with different backgrounds, peer support is important but has limitations



Diversity in security guards is lacking – mostly male and not visible on campus

- Hours of operation for sexual assault services were deemed ineffective. Moreover, security, the only 24-hour service, is mainly comprised of men.
- **Recommendation:** All services related to sexual violence must be available 24/7. Students should be able to reach-out to a security member who reflects their race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Thank you



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