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Symposium: Buddhism and Sexual Abuse

"What Can Buddhist Studies Offer Survivors?"

A Roundtable Discussion featuring Kali Nyima Cape, Damchö Diana Finnegan, Ann Gleig, Sarah Jacoby, and Amy Paris Langenberg

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At the October 2024 Heartwood/Northwestern symposium, a panel of Buddhist Studies scholars responded to a series of questions regarding the academic study of sexual abuse in Buddhist Studies. Topics included Buddhist Studies' history of responding to the issue of sexual violence, barriers to Buddhist Studies as a field taking a survivor-centered approach, what Buddhist Studies can offer to survivors of sexual abuse in Buddhist communities, how survivor-centered approach in Buddhist Studies might open new areas of study and new perspectives on Buddhism, and the relationship between advocacy and scholarship more generally.

Keywords: Buddhist Studies; survivor-centered approaches; activist scholarship; Buddhist sexual ethics; sexual abuse

At the October 2024 Heartwood/Northwestern symposium, Darcie Price-Wallace posed a series of questions regarding the academic study of sexual abuse in Buddhist Studies to a panel of Buddhist Studies scholars, resulting in a wide-ranging discussion as follows:

1) How has Buddhist Studies responded to sexual violence and survivors?

Amy and Ann: When we began the research for our collaborative book project in 2019, we were struck by the fact that, while there were a handful of popular pieces written by journalists (Butler 1990; Downing 2002; Oppenheimer 2010), critical reflections by scholar-practitioners (Boucher 1988), and a few autobiographical reflections by Buddhist practitioners (Goldberg 2004; Haubner 2017), very little academic work in Buddhist

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Studies had focused on sexual abuse and misconduct in past or present forms of Buddhism. Moreover, none of this work attended to the experience of survivors or was survivor-centered (Gleig and Langenberg 2021a, 2025).

Bernard Faure opened his important 1998 book, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*, with a list of American Buddhist sex "scandals." Faure's focus was not primarily on sexual violence; rather, he stated his intention to highlight "doctrinal elements that may have justified antinomian behavior" (Faure 1998: 4). José Ignacio Cabezón's more recent comprehensive survey of *Sexuality in Classical South Asian Buddhism* contains multiple mentions of rape involving variously gendered, aged, and religiously positioned victims and tracks Buddhist definitions of sexual misconduct as they develop over time. Sarah also discusses this below. He does not, however, include a dedicated section on sexual abuse in Buddhism, nor does he take it up as a line of analysis (Cabezón 2017). Notably, the one academic monograph that does attend to sexual abuse and is survivor-centered comes from June Campbell, whose training was outside of academic Buddhist Studies and included many years as a translator in dharma contexts. In 2002, Campbell published *Traveller in Space: Gender, Identity and Tibetan Buddhism,* which contextualizes her personal experience as the secret consort of the ostensibly celibate Kalu Rinpoche within a feminist psychoanalytic critique of the patriarchal structure of Tibetan Buddhism.

There has been some scholarly attention to sexual abuse crises in contemporary American Buddhism. In her contribution to the 1998 volume, *Faces of American Buddhism*, renowned Buddhist feminist scholar-practitioner Rita Gross took a dismissive and troubling approach to what she termed "alleged sexual misconduct." A more helpful piece came from engaged Buddhism scholar Stephanie Kaza (2004), who offered an overview of effective responses to sexual abuse and misconduct in American Buddhism with a particular focus on the San Francisco Zen Center. Wakoh Shannon Hickey (2021) published an article recommending that American Sōtō Zen organizations look to the professional training, certification, and governance of American Protestant Christianity to address the structural issues that make sexual abuse more likely. A piece by Ray Buckner (2020), currently a Ph.D. student in Buddhist Studies, engages masculinity studies to analyze teacher responses to allegations of sexual misconduct against Gen X Insight teacher Noah Levine. Notably, significant work addressing abuse in North American Buddhism has also come from scholars not trained primarily in Buddhist Studies (Coleman 2001; Seager 2012).

Two groundbreaking dissertations by invited speakers at the Northwestern conference are important to acknowledge. In her 2017 dissertation in Women and Gender Studies at the University of Malaya, Tenzin Dadon addresses ordained women's vulnerability to sexual violence and abuse in Bhutan. She highlights the necessity of improved reporting and grievance procedures, noting that monastic authorities are sometimes themselves ethically compromised and not a reliable avenue by which nuns that have experienced sexual harm can seek redress. Namal Rathnayake's (2023) dissertation in the field of social work at Canterbury Christ Church University is a full-length study of child sexual abuse in monasteries in Sri Lanka based on ethnographic data collected during semi-structured interviews with four survivors of child sexual abuse, three monastic officials, and three child protection officers. Notably, Rathnayake was trained in social work rather than Buddhist Studies.

It is heartening to see that since, and perhaps influenced by, the global #MeToo Movement, more attention is being given to the problem of sexual violence in Buddhism. One groundbreaking event occurred at the 16th Sakyadhita Conference on New Horizons in Buddhism, in the Blue Mountains, Australia, in June 23–28, 2019. Former Tibetan Buddhist nun and Rigpa student, Damcho Dyson, gave a powerful first-person account of abuse at the hands of Sogyal Rinpoche, and former Rigpa student turned survivor advocate, Tahlia Newland, shared how the community had weaponized Vajrayāna teachings to silence survivors (Dyson, Newland, and Wicks 2019). Choela Karma Tashi Choedron and Choela Tenzin Dadon also co-presented a paper on the topic of sexual abuse at the 16th Sakyadhita Conference (Dadon and Choedron 2019). Dadon and Chodron called not only for the enforcement of traditional Vinaya discipline in Bhutan but also for a formalized grievance procedure so

that monastic women could report abuse safely and reasonably expect accountability. In speaking bluntly about the problem of sexual abuse in Buddhist monastic communities, they courageously broke strong cultural taboos against raising the topic of abuse and Vinaya codes discouraging, or even forbidding, nuns from openly challenging male monastic authority.

Overall, however, our review of Buddhist Studies scholarship in 2019, made it clear to us that there were very few scholars trained primarily in the discipline that considered sexual violence a necessary scholarly topic. In the field of Buddhist Studies in North America, our forthcoming collaborative book is one example (Gleig and Langenberg forthcoming). We articulate a survivor-centered approach as a counter to the historic silence in the field and call on other colleagues to address the exclusion of survivor voices in Buddhism (Gleig and Langenberg 2025). Another example is Sarah Jacoby's (2024) article, which examines themes of sexual coercion and consent from an explicitly survivor-centered perspective in Tibetan visionary Sera Khandro's life writings.[1]

This conference, which brought together academics, survivors, teachers, lawyers, and journalists, was an intentional effort to address historic failures and gaps in the field and promote attention to the harm of sexual abuse and misconduct within Buddhist Studies scholarship and pedagogy.

2) What are the barriers and challenges that prevent Buddhist Studies from offering support to survivors?

Sarah: There are an array of obstacles that make survivor-centered Buddhist Studies scholarship challenging. These barriers are all surmountable, and I am hopeful that we will see more space open up around these points. I am thinking of this question as it relates to Vajrayāna Buddhism, and in that domain, I see the current lack of attention to sex abuse in Buddhist contexts as part of a larger scholarly silence on the history of sexuality in Vajrayāna Buddhist texts and communities. Four main reasons for this come to mind: 1) it's secret, 2) it's complicated, 3) it's uncomfortable, and 4) scholars are supposed to be neutral.

Regarding the first point on secrecy, knowledge about practices involving sexuality is secret, requiring specific initiations and commitment vows (*samaya*). Even so, Tibetan-language biographies and other genres of Buddhist narrative literature contain extensive personal as well as prescriptive accounts of practices involving sexuality. There is a plethora of available data, and only some of it is restricted. What tends to be especially secret are lineage-specific instructions for visualizations, liturgies, empowerments, and mantras. It is possible to think about the ethics of sexuality in Vajrayāna contexts without exposing these elements of practice instruction.

The second point is that it's complicated. The most important sources for information on the history of sexuality in Vajrayāna Buddhism are found in complex and highly esoteric Sanskrit and Tibetan-language works. The philological and hermeneutical expertise necessary to read this material takes years to cultivate, given that most relevant works are not translated into English.

Another dimension of complication is that attending to survivors of sexual abuse in Buddhist sanghas in the past and present requires us to include voices of survivors that have been excluded or chosen to break from these sanghas. Buddhist Studies scholarship has been slow to recognize survivors who have left their sanghas as sources of valid knowledge about Buddhism. If scholars only consider the viewpoints and life worlds of those who have chosen to remain within Buddhist sanghas, we run the risk of missing critically important insights and experiences about abuse within these groups.

My third point is that centering survivors in Buddhist Studies scholarship is uncomfortable because to really understand esoteric Vajrayāna texts requires building and maintaining learning relationships with Vajrayāna gurus. Vajrayāna texts are not fully understandable without their corresponding oral commentaries and

[1] After this symposium Holly Gayley published a first-person account of institutional reform after sexual abuse in the Shambhala Buddhist community (Gayley 2025).

practice instructions. Not all scholars rely on lineage experts when researching historical texts because modern oral commentaries are not always reliable reflections of historical practice traditions. However, egregious translation mistakes often result from not consulting lineage experts. The connections some scholars maintain with Vajrayāna lineage holders can make it difficult to acknowledge and name harm even when we see it in these communities. Not only that, but an increasing number of translation projects are funded by Vajrayāna Buddhist philanthropists, enhancing the potential conflict of interest that arises for scholars who rely on funding and information from Vajrayāna gurus and therefore have a considerable amount to lose if they are perceived by those communities as disloyal.

Lastly, historians of religion are more comfortable claiming a stance of being a neutral observer, rather than associating their scholarship with normative agendas, even gender justice. I made this point in a recent article (Jacoby 2024: 111–12). Part of the effort to remain neutral is also connected to various ways the specter of orientalism shades contemporary discourse around sexual abuse in Vajrayāna Buddhism. Journalists reporting on sexual abuse allegations against Vajrayāna gurus sometimes recycle racist tropes that position Asian gurus as hypersexualized fraudulent predators (Lucia 2018). Tension often arises between the impetus to center sexual violence vs. state violence in scholarly research. In the case of Vajrayāna Buddhism, many gurus facing sexual abuse allegations are themselves refugees from state violence, which contributes to a concern among some Tibetan Buddhists that sexual abuse allegations against Vajrayāna gurus are smear campaigns against an already endangered minority population of Tibetans. As we continue raising awareness about sexual misconduct, abuse, and violence in Buddhist contexts, it is critical that we approach this with an intersectional approach attentive to multiple forms of harm, including ethnic and racial violence as well as sexual violence.

3) What can Buddhist Studies offer survivors, and how can we support and encourage scholarship and pedagogy in this area?

Kali: One of the potential resources that Buddhist Studies can offer to survivors is records of counternarratives to show examples of how Buddhists have been debating sexual ethics since the time of the Buddha. This is different from a stance of denial claiming that abuse is not Buddhist. Instead, it addresses an insidious factor in abuse, which is the use of doctrinal logic to groom prospective victims and rationalize the abuse to follow. That justification adds to the trauma of sexual violence when the perpetrators and community members justify violence through Buddhist frameworks, forcing survivors to not only contest the abuser and enablers but also to contradict an intimidating monolith of Buddhist orthodoxy as it has been portrayed to them. Therefore, one service that Buddhist Studies scholars can do is provide evidence of Buddhist counternarratives to show that abusive behaviors were not universally tolerated by Buddhists. Sexual ethics has been a contested issue, and such debates are relevant to people trying to make sense of abuse or to intervene in abuse dynamics.

One historical example is the story of Lama Yeshe-O, an influential figure in the tenth to eleventh century. He famously issued a scathing critique of tantric practitioners for what he regarded as extreme practices saying, "your tantrist way of practicing will shock people if other countries hear of it. These practices of you who say 'we are Buddhists,' show less compassion than a demon of action.... [Y]ou are more lusty than a mere donkey or ox..." The issue for Yeshe-O is that these extremists, in their lust, had forgotten compassion and were not considering karmic consequences of their actions. He said, "It is true that the *dharmatā* is said to be void [empty], but you ought to take karmic retribution into consideration!" (Aris and Kyi 1979: 154–55). Yeshe-O contests what he calls wrong and false behavior. Such public doctrinal scoldings against abusers by religious authorities may seem absent today, but they were not absent historically. Buddhist thinkers of the past felt permission to debate what is appropriate and permissible and what is not. In this case, a counter narrative to rationalizing abuse as transmission, practice, or a blessing is to call it out as merely lust or ordinary attached

desire that is a cause of suffering. Indeed, this is a counternarrative that Jacoby documents in the life of Sera Khandro, who scolds a monk who propositions her for sex, describing him in derogatory terms as having great lustful desire (Jacoby 2014: 176).

Another important potential contribution by Buddhist Studies scholarship is to dispel the illusion that naming abuse is just an American, Western, or contemporary practice—thus, a counternarrative to orientalist sentiments. On the contrary, there is a long history of survivors and allies in Asia, albeit a peripheral history of voices that are difficult to recover. Nevertheless, Buddhists wrote about sexual violence, naming it, dreading it, and forbidding it. An example is the autobiographies of Nuden Dorje, the treasure revealer of the Yeshe Tsogyal biography that describes her sexual assault. In his own untranslated autobiography and stories of his past life, he also writes about the violence his mother and wife experienced in past life narratives that he remembers like dreams. In another text, the *Heart Essence of the Ḍākinīs,* one of the dreaded descriptions of the horrors of degenerate times to be avoided is a situation where women will not have control over what happens to their own bodies. In that same text, a text intensely focused on consort relationships, rules are given to forbid yogis from hitting, scolding, abusing, berating or otherwise being unkind to their consort. These are moments in the historical records when violence is acknowledged by Tibetan authors, a dread of sexual violence was expressed, and rules prohibiting sexual violence were issued. Likewise, even today Tibetan Buddhists have tropes of fake lamas who are reputed to be non-virtuous (Gayley and Bhum 2022). These are not the only voices—there are also abundant misogynistic voices as well—but those looking for indigenous counternarratives could find them through the work of Buddhist Studies scholars.

A third potential counternarrative that Buddhist Studies can contribute are translations and analysis of the complex history of consort practices, which the literature describes as taking place under strict rules that distinguish it from ordinary lustful desire. My forthcoming book discusses this in terms of rules and instructions in key literature of *The Great Perfection (rdzogs chen)*. One of these rules, mentioned above, is to never abuse, disparage, or harm one's consort. Other rules strictly govern who can and cannot be a consort, asserting that choosing the wrong consort harms the entire community and causes everyone to lose their merit (Cape 2020). There are also the elaborate and structured conditions of sexual yoga, a practice that describes a practice between equals, two buddhas, who both have advanced abilities in manipulating the winds and channels. Sexual yoga is not a practice for novices. In tantric liturgies of the *yab yum* deities, the literature portrays something very different than a rape or a one-night stand. Take, for example, the body mandala of the Hayagriva *yab yum* from the *Heart Essence of the Ḍākinī.* The two consorts are described as inseparable, so united and connected with one another that they are even beyond meeting and parting (Cape 2024). The male consort's enlightenment depends on the female consort and vice versa. Despite this portrayal of the utter equality of the realization of the two consorts portrayed with symmetrical power rather than a power difference, these texts are still interpreted today in androcentric, misogynistic, or patriarchal ways. Other liturgies are certainly written from these perspectives as well. Nevertheless, such portrayals of soteriological equality provide a potential counternarrative to contest portrayals of abuse as the only Buddhist practice, a counternarrative that asserts that tantric consort relationships must be grounded in symmetry, virtue, and altruism such as the relationships aspired to by the consorts in the stories documented by Jacoby (2014) and Gayley (2019). Indeed, in Tibet, tantric couples may be lifelong companions, where the female consort is venerated, cared for, and respected by the community even after the male consort has passed away.

This is not to say that abuse is not Buddhist, or doctrines rationalizing abuse are not Buddhist. Both the #MeToo revelations and historical records make clear that Buddhist sexualities manifested in a variety of ways that included loving relationships, lifelong bonds, as well instrumental use of women's bodies, grooming, violence, and abuse. It is all there. Potentially, what Buddhist Studies scholarship can offer is some of the relevant

history, debates, and counternarratives that arose from these contesting interpretations. Ultimately, abuse is an understudied area, as Gleig and Langenberg have noted, and further research on it requires funding.

Amy: We need more designated spaces where scholars wishing to address questions of sexual violence in Buddhism do not feel quite so strung out or isolated as they develop their work in this area. Many of those presenting or participating in this conference have been part of an informal network of scholars working on this issue. Ann and I were also involved—along with scholars of Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, Hinduism, and Yoga traditions—in a comparative Luce Foundation-funded grant called the Religion and Sexual Abuse Project. Scholars need intellectual community and institutional support, especially when their research topic is not only *not* an established one in their field of study but also emotionally and ethically harrowing. A few of us have improvised the Florida-inspired metaphor of a mangrove hammock to capture the gradual process of collaboratively establishing a new outcropping in the field of Buddhist Studies. Somebody drops a mangrove seed in the bay, which takes root. Soon more seeds sprout. Detritus is brought by the current and begins to accumulate and before long you have a small landmass, which eventually becomes a hammock and soon an entire new ecosystem within the field.

This new "hammock" and "ecosystem" requires the articulation of a more robust Buddhist Studies methodology in order to be on solid ground, so to speak. We need to make room for asking critical questions about abuse, instead of marginalizing the questions, or being reflexively suspicious of those asking them. This requires that feminist methodologies be allowed a more legitimate place within this field. It also means researching figures or diverse threads of thought *within* various Buddhist traditions that ask critical questions about power and sexuality, about abuse, about violence. Sarah Jacoby's recent *JAAR* article (2024) and Kali's forthcoming work on consort practice are both excellent examples of this type of work. Buddhist Studies scholars also need to be thoughtful and critical about the entrenched and unexamined notion that abusive Buddhism is not real Buddhism, and that somehow asking the question about Buddhist sexual violence or consulting abuse survivors about their Buddhist identity or understanding of Buddhist doctrine is not necessary. The work of Michael Jerryson (2018), Paul Fuller (2021), and others on forms of Buddhist nationalism and political violence have softened the ground for this work. Scholarship in Catholic Studies on clerical abuse can also be a crucial model for furthering these methodological initiatives.

Finally, we need to normalize the topic of teacher abuse in Buddhist Studies by introducing it in every single undergraduate introductory classroom, and by requiring competence in the topic at the graduate level as well (Gleig 2026; Gleig and Langenberg 2021b; Halafoff 2021). This is important for producing broader and more inclusive approaches to Buddhism at the grassroots level. Even more importantly, many of us have seen very clearly that the undergraduate Buddhist Studies classroom operates as a pipeline to participation in Buddhist communities in general, and, unfortunately in some cases, to abusive situations. Young students are given an incomplete picture of Buddhist communities and often are taught mainly an apology of Buddhist traditions, and then sent off, sometimes through a direct handing-off process, to abusive teachers and complicit communities. Through our research, we've heard of several specific examples of this happening. Teaching a more honest picture of past and present Buddhism that resists what Evan Thompson (2020) has named "Buddhist exceptionalism" can also help challenge the Orientalist lens that often accompanies the idealization of the tradition.

4) What would survivor-centered research in Buddhist Studies be like? What might we learn about Buddhism that current approaches obscure?

Sarah: When I think of a survivor-centered approach to research in Buddhist Studies, I'm drawing from the 2022 UN Women's definition of "the survivor-centered approach," as an approach that prioritizes the human

rights, needs, and wishes of the survivor.[2] Important parts of that are avoiding victim-blaming attitudes, and ensuring survivors' privacy and confidentiality. Survivor-centered research in Buddhist Studies takes these features to heart and implements them in analyzing contemporary and historical elements of Buddhist practices, institutions, communities, and textual sources.

Prioritizing a survivor-centered approach to Buddhist Studies is a development of the #MeToo Movement and a response to the widespread harm caused by perpetrators of sexual abuse affiliated with multiple Buddhist lineages. However, it is critical to note that it is not only a response to modern values and concerns. The problems of sexual misconduct and abuse in Buddhist communities did not begin with the #MeToo Movement, or with the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. Sexual misconduct and sexual abuse are not problems confined to one geographic area, gender, or racial demographic of Buddhist practitioners. Rape and the complexities of consent appear repeatedly in the Vinaya, the code of monastic discipline, as Amy Langenberg's research investigates (Langenberg 2021, forthcoming). The fact that sexuality and sexual ethics have a history in Buddhist contexts is also made abundantly clear by José Cabezón's *Sexuality in Classical South Asian Buddhism*, in which he demonstrates the changing definition of sexual misconduct over time, beginning with prohibitions against men having sexual intercourse with protected women, and becoming more restrictive in the early centuries of the Common Era with a four-fold prohibition against sex with the improper partner, orifice, time, and place (Cabezón 2017: 488–508). Notably, Cabezón's research finds that it is not until sometime between the third-fourth centuries CE that homosexuality is proscribed in Buddhist texts (2017: 501). By the eleventh century, Atiśa explicitly prohibited child sex abuse, suggesting that this was a known problem that needed adjudication by Buddhist authorities. In addition, Atiśa prohibits sex "when women do not desire it," which provides a fascinating precedent for requiring women's sexual consent within a Vajrayāna historical context (2017: 504). All this points to the fact that sexual abuse in Buddhist communities is not a modern invention, nor is it a product of Western influence.

In the domain of Tibetan Buddhism, multiple biographies at least from the fourteenth century forward narrate how the tradition's pre-eminent female figure, Yeshe Tsogyal, was violently attacked repeatedly and raped. While some of these scenes of violence depict Yeshe Tsogyal's resistance to secular marriage, accentuating her steadfast renunciation, others are cast as opportunities for her rapists to receive liberating teachings (Gyalwa Changchub and Namkhai Nyingpo 1999: 12–18, 127–29). A survivor-centered approach to Buddhist Studies might ask different questions of these scenes, for instance: How do Buddhist narratives involving rape justify it as a necessary means to the ultimate end of liberation? Who is served by these narratives? What reading strategies do such narratives invite and preclude—how have Tibetan Buddhists read and told stories about Yeshe Tsogyal over time, and what elements of these narratives have scholars highlighted?[3] Are there ways to retell the story of Yeshé Tsogyal from the perspective of how she may have felt? Survivor-centered approaches to Buddhist Studies consider the subjectivity of the person experiencing sexual violence as well as the ways in which this violence is justified, utilized, or recast in a Buddhist framework. As such, scholars who adopt survivor-centered approaches to Buddhist Studies have varied relationships with Buddhism. Taking a survivor-centered stance is not necessarily anti-Buddhist, nor is it necessarily apologetic toward the tradition. Survivor-centered approaches to Buddhist Studies can take many shapes: they can be monographs dedicated to uncovering new data about specific historical Buddhist figures, but they can also be part of introductory-level Buddhism textbooks that a broader range of undergraduates will encounter. The point of bringing this topic into undergraduate classrooms is not to cast aspersions on Buddhism but to prevent our classrooms from becoming

[2] https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/12/safe-consultations-with-survivors-of-violence-against-women-and-girls, accessed December 4, 2026.

[3] New and important scholarship on Yeshe Tsogyal is in progress now; see Jue Liang's forthcoming book *Conceiving the Mother of Tibet* and also scholarship in progress by Elizabeth Angowski.

pipelines for Buddhist teachers who are abusers, which is a problem noted by several panelists. I had this in mind when I added a new section called "Buddhism and Abuses of Power" to the Buddhism textbook I have co-authored (Mitchell and Jacoby 2025: 417–20). What makes Buddhist Studies scholarship survivor-centered is a commitment to centering the survivor to the degree that historical or contemporary contexts allow, and to making sure scholars tell survivors' stories alongside the many other Buddhist stories we tell, in the hope of reducing the potential for harm within Buddhist communities now and into the future.

5) What is and should be the relationship between scholarship and advocacy?

Damcho: Contrasting the activity of scholars and advocates or activists seems to draw on an assumption that scholars study the world whereas advocates or activists work to change it. But scholars do not simply observe and analyze their area of study; they also represent it to others. Representation is not a neutral activity. How we represent something to ourselves and others changes how we interact with it, and in a stronger sense it changes the thing itself. This point is fundamental to various Buddhist philosophical views. Scholars take positions on what they believe their object of study to be, and they defend their particular vision of what it is. In academic worlds of shrinking resources, they are also arguing for the importance of their field of study. That is to say, Buddhist Studies scholars effectively make arguments about what Buddhism is, even as they advocate for its worthiness to be studied.

At the same time, it is worth acknowledging that by the time we become Buddhist Studies scholars, most of us will have developed personal relationships with teachers, "informants," and other human subjects in the communities whose particular Buddhism we study. As Sarah mentioned above, talking about sexual abuse can be uncomfortable in the context of those important relationships for many reasons. These teachers and friends will have views, sometimes strong views, on how their form of Buddhism or their community ought to be represented to the world. Especially when their people have been colonized, sent into exile or are simply located in the Global South, much will be at stake for them in how their community is represented in the spaces of authority where Buddhist Studies scholars' voices are heard. Indeed, it is hardly unheard of for Buddhist Studies scholars to use their authority to advocate for social justice in those communities. One sees this in the international petitions seeking fairer treatment of Tibetans that are routinely circulated and signed by scholars of Tibetan Buddhism.

Scholarly activity entails multiple ethical responsibilities. Along with the ethical claims made on us by our relationships to people in the field and by our positions in academic spaces producing authoritative knowledge, we are also bound to those who are receiving the representations of Buddhism we generate. When scholars advance a vision of Buddhism that denies or diminishes the presence of abuse in Buddhist monasteries and communities—when Buddhist Studies scholars choose not to acknowledge abuse as part of their field—this silence is an intervention that contributes to ongoing abuse. That silence also allows to stand insufficiently challenged the idealized image that Buddhism has enjoyed in the public view. Anyone who has taught Buddhism will have seen that such images are inevitably running somewhere in the background as our students engage with what we write or say about Buddhism in the classroom. This gives those of us teaching about Buddhism an additional responsibility to hold a more complex view in the face of these romantic and unrealistic notions.

Such idealized views ill prepare people for the complex reality that awaits them should they engage further with Buddhism. This can and has led to serious harm of people taken completely unaware by the abuse they encounter or experience in Buddhist spaces. As Amy Langenberg has noted, college classes serve as feeders to Dharma centers in North America; they awaken an interest and appreciation for Buddhist teachings and practices that often lead students to seek out Buddhist practice communities. Present in the audience of

this very conference, I know of at least one survivor of protracted sexual and psychological abuse who was introduced to the Tibetan lama who abused her by her college professor.

In short, scholarly activity is a form of advocacy, and that activity places ethical claims on us that can pull in distinct directions. This requires us to keep the following questions alive: what is the impact of my scholarship on all the communities whose knowledge systems or practices I am studying as well as those for whom I am representing Buddhism? How do I honor all my ethical obligations? That is to say, what is my scholarship advocating for and how is it changing the object of study? There is no single answer to these questions but asking them requires scholars to acknowledge that their scholarship functions as a form of advocacy for *something*.

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