Problematizing the Victim/Survivor Binary: Letting Stories of Sexual Violence Breathe Through Feminist Narratives

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Abstract

This self-study is a narrative exploration of sexual violence and the process of identity deconstruction and (re)negotiation. I adopt a third-wave feminist perspective to contest the dichotomized labels victim and survivor in the existing literature on sexual violence against women. Situating myself as a woman who has experienced sexual violence, I narrate and reflect on my own account of my experience.

Narrating from a place of vulnerability opens up a space for self-reflection and identity (re)negotiation. Such narratives have the potential to engender and embody powerful sites of introspection and social analysis for author and readers. Influenced by Horsman's (2005) advocacy for pedagogies that incorporate discourse on violence and trauma, I argue that narratives of violence and vulnerability have a place within education. By incorporating narrative discourse of violence and vulnerability into education settings, it is possible to challenge (mis)conceptions of sexual violence and those who experience such trauma.

Résumé

Cette autoanalyse parcoure l'étude narrative de la violence sexuelle, le processus de déconstruction identitaire, et la (re)négociation. À l'aide de la théorie du féminisme de la troisième vague, je remets en question les étiquettes de 'victime' et de 'survivante' présentes dans les études existantes sur la violence sexuelle faite aux femmes. En tant que femme ayant vécu une expérience similaire, je présente une introspection de ce qui m'est arrivé.

Cette narration mène inévitablement à la vulnérabilité, et ouvre la voie à l'introspection et à la (re)négociation de l'identité. Ces explications peuvent être garants d'épisodes marquants d'introspection et d'analyse sociale pour les auteurs et les lecteurs. Je m'inspire également de la théorie de Horsman (2005) qui est en faveur des pédagogies incorporant le discours sur la violence et le traumatisme dans le but de montrer que les récits sur la violence et la vulnérabilité ont leur place dans le système éducatif. En ajoutant les récits sur la violence et la vulnérabilité dans un contexte éducatif, il devient possible de défaire les préjugés associés à la violence sexuelle et à aux personnes ayant vécu des traumatismes comme ceux-là.

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I never thought I wanted to write a thesis. However, upon its completion, I am so glad I did. If not for this inquiry and process, I might not have had the opportunity, or realized my need, to share and reflect on my self: past, present and narrated. Although much of what I share in this work is conceived of my innermost memories and vulnerabilities, there are many individuals without whom this thesis would never have come to be.

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Prologue: Situating Myself

When I first committed to the idea of writing a Master's thesis, I knew that sexual violence was at the forefront of my interests. The two years prior to my enrollment in graduate studies I lived in rural, northern Namibia as a volunteer high school teacher where I taught Math, English and Life Skills to learners grades eight through to twelve. While living there I found myself increasingly concerned with the severity and prevalence of sexual violence against girls and women, and the gender inequality in romantic relationships that I witnessed and read about frequently in the nationally circulated newspapers. This was what I had planned to research – I had learners with whom I had developed strong relationships of trust, and a topic (sexual and domestic violence) with universal relevance and contextual significance. I looked forward to engaging with my learners and having them share their thoughts, concerns, ideas and stories with me. However, as I delved deeper and deeper into discourse surrounding domestic and sexual violence against women, I felt a deep-seated uneasiness with my positioning (or lack thereof) in my work. I realized that I was looking to ask the girls and women I knew to share their very personal and intimate stories with me, and yet I had not yet reconciled, or storied, my own experience of sexual violence. Despite efforts to pursue my original research plan, I was unable to shake the feeling that my research was somehow dishonest –with myself, and with potential future participants and readers. I felt a need, academically and personally, to engage with my experience through writing and self-reflection before I could hope to engage with and deconstruct the stories of others.

By taking a closer look at my experience of sexual violence, and through the storying of that experience, I found myself engaging with, and struggling with, questions of identity and self-representation. Feeling constricted by the language and identities made available to define experiences of sexual violence, I had what can perhaps best be described as a crisis of identity: I did not possess, nor seem to have access to, a vocabulary through which I could

adequately articulate my experience and my resulting sense of self. Without a sense of self-definition I felt lost. I felt defective, confused and alone. I'd never not had the words before. Without the words – words I need to self-identify, to socially identify – who am I? And how do I begin to share or understand my past experience without an identity position from which to narrate? This thesis is an exploration of these questions as I take a look at identity within the context of sexual violence through the storying of personal experience.

Chapter One: Introduction - Becoming a Weaver

> *There is no "the truth," "a truth" – truth is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity. The pattern of the carpet is a surface. When we look closely, or when we become weavers, we learn of the tiny multiple threads unseen in the overall pattern, the knots on the underside of the carpet.* (Rich, 1979, p. 187)

In this chapter I provide a general outline of, and justification for, my research. I begin by summarizing the purpose of this study and what motivates my interests. I then articulate the driving research questions behind this work and the theoretical and methodological approaches through which I engage with my topic of sexual violence against women. I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of the chapters to follow and segue into my theory and literature review in chapter two.

Purpose of Study

The sharing of personal experience through narrative is a practice as old as time, and certainly as old as feminist inquiry (Bruner, 1987; Yu, 2011). Through the sharing of stories and personal experiences we are able to express ourselves, better understand the feelings and experiences of others as well as ourselves, and connect on emotional, spiritual and intellectual levels. In contemporary feminist theory, personal narrative is used as a method of consciousness-raising about women's issues and experiences. In the past, consciousness-raising has been used to universalize, but more recently is employed to diversify female identity and experience. Narratives of sexual violence are examples of such stories that are shared amongst women. However, little research has been done on the *process* of writing a story of sexual violence. With personal narrative continuing to be "one of the central hallmarks of third-wave feminism" (Snyder, 2008, p. 184) it is necessary to look at how one

goes about writing one's story of sexual violence by examining the process – the roadblocks, struggles, and surprises along the way – in order to better understand the field and practice of narrating experience.

My aim is to take an insider perspective of the storying of my own personal experience of sexual violence. In addition to analyzing my writing process about my experience, I look at how my refusal to adopt either a victim or a survivor identity influences, determines and impedes my ability to share my experience in a way that I feel comfortable. I strive to develop a better understanding of how assumed identity or lack thereof influences storytelling, which, in this case, is a story of sexual violence.

Research Questions

I explore identity and experience through and within a context of narration. My three research questions that lie at the heart of this thesis, and which I aim to explore are:

1. What does it take for a woman (me) to share her (my) experience of sexual violence? What does the process look and feel like?
2. How do the identities or labels of victim and survivor – within the context of sexual violence against women – influence a woman's (my) ability to understand her (my) experience of sexual violence, and her role in her experience?
3. If a woman (I) rejects, or refuses to perform, the identities (victim and survivor) made available to her (me), how does that influence her (my) ability to accurately represent herself (myself) in her (my) story?

Theoretical and Methodological Approach

I draw heavily on feminist theory (Butler, 1990, 1993; Faludi, 1991; Heywood, 2006a, 2006b; Snyder, 2008; Yu, 2011) and a feminist deconstructionist theoretical framework (Crotty, 1998) to work within the intersections of narrative and feminist theory. In this sense, I use personal narrative as both a way of knowing and a method of inquiry

(Bruner, 1987; Richardson, 2000). O'Reilly-Scanlon (2000) argues that, "narrative inquiry, by its very nature, has hypothesis-generating as opposed to hypothesis-testing implications" (p. 51). I have no doubt my inquiry will generate more questions than answers. As this text represents one stage in my interminable journey of self-exploration, the ability of narrative to generate new questions and to uncover new paths of inquiry lends itself well to my aims.

Chapter Summaries

I have structured this thesis into five chapters. In Chapter One, the *Introduction*, I provided the reader with a brief overview of the subject matter and goals of this research. I described the research context, purpose of the study, thesis questions, research approach and ended with a brief summary of the chapters.

In Chapter Two, *Feminism, Narrative and Identity*, I unpack relevant theory regarding the concepts of feminist theory, identity scholarship, and the use of narrative in, and as, research. Importantly, I identify and deconstruct the intersections of these areas to highlight the interconnectedness of feminist theory, narrative, and identity.

In Chapter Three, *The Language of Rape Matters*, I locate myself as a woman who has experienced sexual violence. Here, I confront the binary of victim and survivor identities within the context of sexual violence. I discuss the limitations of each identity label, problematize the bifurcation of women's experiences, and dissect language used to discuss sexual violence and the vocabulary made available to women who have been violated.

Chapter Four, *Extending the Possibilities of Truth*, includes my personal narrative of sexual violence. Relying on memory and the reliving and re-experiencing of past experience, I tell my story of rape.

In Chapter Five, *Creating Spaces*, I deconstruct the process and product of writing my story. I address struggles, roadblocks and insights encountered while putting my experience of sexual violence into words: what I learn, how I feel, and what I am left wondering. I

elaborate on how storying and sharing my experience affects me personally - my feelings, vulnerabilities and anxieties. I also look closely at how memory can generate both clarity and convolution in a writer's mind.

In Chapter Five, I also consider the implications of this research. Here I nest my self-study within contemporary social and political contexts. I address the practical and theoretical implications of this research, its relevance to education, and how it lends itself to future scholarship and inquiry. I address the questions: where does this research leave us, where do we go from here, and why does it matter?

Chapter Two: A Look at Feminism, Narrative and Identity

> *Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name – and therefore live – afresh.* (Rich, 1979, p. 35)

My Feminism: A Third-Wave Feminist Framework

In this thesis I look critically at personal narrative by writing and analyzing my experience of writing my own narrative about my experience with sexual violence. I use the term sexual violence to denote any and all forms of coercive sexual events such as, but not limited to, incest, molestation, sexual assault and rape. I acknowledge that sexual violence takes many forms and can be perpetrated by individuals of all sexes, genders and sexual orientations onto individuals of all sexes, genders and sexual orientations. The focus of this paper, however, is on sexually violent acts committed by men onto women. My intention is not to claim this form of sexual violence to be more problematic than others, but instead speak to it because it is the form of violence I feel most comfortable addressing due to personal experience.

I engage in this research using a feminist framework. However, there are many feminisms, seven of which Crotty (1998) identifies and defines as: liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, and postmodern. What Crotty refers to as postmodern

feminism has been more recently referred to as third-wave feminism. Third-wave feminism is grounded in deconstructionism, which Crotty defines as:

> A process that is universally and radically critical, anti-essentialist, and fiercely committed to breaking down traditional antinomies such as reason/emotion, beautiful/ugly, self/other and the conventional boundaries between established disciplines. (p. 168)

Anti-essentialist, this form of feminism subverts the generalization of (women's) experiences; it embraces and encourages the expressions of multifarious identities and ways of being. This postmodern, deconstructionist thinking is central to third-wave feminism, a contemporary feminism that draws heavily from these theories. It is third-wave feminist thinking that provides the conceptual framework through which I interweave my research with relevant theory.

I chose a feminist framework because feminist scholarship and practice recognize the significance of autobiographical account and personal narrative (Snyder, 2008; Yu, 2011). Through the harnessing of personal narrative, third-wave feminists (Baumgardner, 2011; Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Walker, 2002) have emphasized individuality and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and have fought for recognition of the diversity of women's experiences, feelings, beliefs and identities (Butler, 1990, 1993). These ideologies of diversity and intersectionality are essential to the integrity of what I aim to accomplish in this paper, namely to share a personal story of sexual violence and to deconstruct, or reconstruct, my experience of identity as a women who has been sexually violated. My aim is not to generalize or universalize my experience to that of other women, but rather to contribute my narrative, my story of sexual violence, to the growing literature in, and diversity of, feminist narratives.

Prior to analyzing relevant research and theory through a deconstructionist, third-wave lens however, it is important to more clearly define exactly what third-wave feminism is, how it differs from its predecessor, the second-wave, and what third-wave feminism looks like in contemporary theory and practice.

What is third-wave feminism?

Third-wave feminism is a feminist movement considered to have spawned in the early 1990s (Walker, 2002). It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what it means to be a third-wave feminist due to the fact that the movement is centered on resisting grand narratives and rigidly defined identities and experiences, thereby enabling and encouraging women (and men) to define feminism for themselves, on their own terms. Ironically then, the third-wave of feminism can be defined by its anti-essentialism and reluctance to espouse singular definitions of what it is to be a woman or a feminist.

Baumgardner (2011), a notable third-wave feminist theorist and activist, defines her feminism as "a belief in the full political, social, and economic equality of all people" (p. 10). She identifies a feminist as one who "understands and acknowledges the historic oppression of women and the existence of sexism" (p. 11). At the crux of third-wave feminism is the acknowledgement of historic and current, multiple and intersectional oppressions of people based on, but not limited to race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation and ability. This feminism resists the confines of pervasive labels (such as victim and survivor), which restrict the rights of individuals to define themselves, their beliefs, experiences, and oppressions, arguing that rigid identity structures deny individual agency. This acknowledgement of "the multiple and contradictory aspects of both individual and collective identities" (Siegel, 1997, p. 53) stems from postmodernist thought, which along with poststructuralist and multiculturalist critiques are prevalent throughout third-wave identity theorizing and narrative expressions.

Second- and third-wave: Born of the same pool, or oceans apart?

The second wave of feminism, forged in the 1960s, persisted well into the late 1970s/mid 1980s. This wave was preceded by the first wave of feminism, a movement premised on enhancing women's legal rights and citizenship, a struggle that lasted from 1848 (the year of the first women's rights convention) to 1920 when women gained suffrage in America. Years after having won the right to vote, the second-wave of feminism arose with a new set of women's rights to fight for.

It is important to note that the waves of feminism are often conceptualized and written about from an American perspective. Within Canada, women were designated the right to vote federally in 1918. However, provincial suffrage was ordained on a province-by-province basis. Manitoba was the first province to grant women suffrage in 1916, with Quebec, the last province to grant suffrage to women, conceding in 1940 (Jackel, n.d.). Feminist movements are by no means limited to a North American context, and I am not denying the existence or significance of feminist movements outside of North America. However, the scope of international feminisms is too substantial to do justice to within the confines of this thesis. In order to maintain refined focus within this paper I have limited my focus to the (North) American feminist movements.

Within a North American context, the phrase 'the personal is political' is considered the mantra of second-wave feminism, and assumes that personal matters and matters of the home are socially constructed and have social implications. It was during the time of the second wave that women fought for greater access to education and employment opportunities, as well as for reproductive justice including, but not limited to, birth control and abortion: a woman's right to choose (Baumgardner, 2011; Dicker, 2008). At risk of being simplistic, the first and second waves of feminism can be boiled down to the overarching goals of citizenship and equality, respectively (Baumgardner, 2011). Following these two

waves, the third wave commenced in the early 1990s and is active and alive today. This movement has emboldened and expanded on the second wave's quest for women's equality, by extending the fight for equality to include any and all marginalized and oppressed identity groups.

Snyder (2008) identifies three main, inextricably linked differences between second- and third-wave feminism. Firstly, while second-wave feminists use personal narrative as a way of communicating shared, or 'common' experiences of women, third-wavers typically foreground narratives which "illustrate an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism" (p. 175). In doing so, they reject the impetus of shared experience in favour of one of individuality and diversity. Secondly, third-wave feminists "embrace multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification" (p. 175). While solidarity and like-mindedness were pivotal in the second wave, these convictions are less important to third-wave activists and theorists than the need for multitudinous accounts from varying – and sometimes opposing – positions (Baumgardner, 2011; Heywood, 2006a, 2006b; Snyder, 2008). Action is favored over theorizing, with an emphasis on the importance of feminist writing and critique being made accessible and meaningful to those outside of academia (Preston, 2006). The third difference Snyder (2008) identifies is third-wave feminism's rejection of grand narratives of feminism, and instead "emphasizes an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political" (pp. 175-176).

Baumgardner (2011) acknowledges the incorporation of second-wave theorizing in the third wave, and describes the emergence of the third-wave movement as "a loose network of artists, musicians, writers and activists who were marrying Second Wave theories with punk rock and DIY culture" (p. 49). Baumgardner encapsulates the third wave as "constantly changing ways of doing feminism" (p. 23), emphasizing the versatility and latitude within the

movement. In a 2010 interview with Baumgardner, Debbie Stoller reaffirms Baumgardner's statement by saying:

> The thing to me that defined the Third Wave was a different set of strategies. The First Wave had a particular set of causes. The Second Wave had a new set of causes. The Third Wave pioneered new strategies – using popular culture, since we recognize the importance of that in our lives, and the idea of reclaiming. (Baumgardner, 2011, p. 81)

Reclaiming is a strategy commonly employed by third-wavers. Also known as reappropriation, reclaiming is the process of taking a word that was, or is, commonly used in a pejorative manner towards a community or identity group and bringing it back into acceptable usage within the group on their own terms. The process of reclaiming often begins within the communities that experience(d) oppression under the word(s) being reclaimed (Croom, 2011). Within the context of feminism, reclaimed words include, but are not limited to, slut, bitch, butch, and so on.

Another strategy appropriated by the third wave is the use of personal narrative. Personal narrative has been, and continues to be a cornerstone in both second- and third-wave theorizing and practice; however, purposes of, and meanings derived from shared narratives differ greatly between the two waves. The concept of consciousness-raising through the sharing of personal stories of experience has evolved from second-wave thinking of consciousness-raising as the unification of women's experiences and coalescence of womanhood, into a third-wave mentality of acceptance and critical reflection of the diversity of women's experiences and identities (Yu, 2011). Snyder (2008) aptly summarizes this transition in feminist thinking:

> Classic second-wave feminism argues that in patriarchal society women share common experiences, and through a sharing of their experiences with one another in

> consciousness-raising (CR) groups, they can generate knowledge about their own oppression. . .similar to second-wave CR groups, the hope [of third-wave feminists] seems to be that through reading or hearing about the life experiences of a diversity of individuals, young women will gain insight into their own lives and the societal structures in which they live. (p. 184)

Snyder also suggests that it is largely because of this third-wave tendency to encourage the diversity of identities, agendas and politics, as well as their rebellion against the notion of a common definition, that make the movement difficult to explicate. The inability to explicitly define third-wave feminism has also led scholars to question whether or not it is indeed a movement. With its basis in the heterogeneity of women's experiences, identities and definitions, the third wave has so many limbs stretching out in different directions that it can be difficult to categorize it as a unified movement – a common criticism of third-wave feminist theory.

What does third-wave feminism look like?

Third-wave feminists are known to make use of a vast array of media for the distribution of theory and personal narratives. As writers, artists, musicians and activists (Baumgardner, 2011), the products of third-wave consciousness-raising include, but are not limited to, music, art, performance art, video, blogs, zines, online forums, magazines, books, anthologies, journals, photographs, protests and demonstrations. Accessibility is key, and while many third-wave feminists rebuff esoteric academic theory (and are similarly rebuked by academics, who argue that third-wave narratives are too personal and not theoretical enough to qualify as scholarship), there are also many third-wavers who challenge academic theorists to write unambiguous theory that can be useful and meaningful to women outside of academia (Preston, 2006).

Because much feminist writing is in the form of personal narrative and employs non-traditional (non-academic) modes of knowledge production and dissemination, I engage with academic works as well as those from popular culture, current events, feminist online publications and personal narratives. I do not consider this to be a weakness of my thesis, but rather one of its foremost strengths. One of the main goals of personal narrative in feminist theorizing is to encourage and propagate the sharing of experience amongst women. It is this sharing, these narratives, that have fostered within me the belief that my experience is worth sharing, and to have the courage to share it.

Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, and the Storying of Experience

When considering stories of lived experience such as my own story, which I share later, I am confronted with many questions: *How is this research? How can the lived experience of one person transition from 'simply a story' into something meaningful within an academic context? What determines whether a story is worth sharing? Is mine? As a thesis, what does this look like and how do I classify it?* Answers to these kinds of questions vary greatly. In recent literature on self-studies, researchers differ in the ways in which they define, utilize, and accept various forms of research in which authors situate and position themselves (Barone, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Richardson, 2000; Sparkes, 2000). Studies in which researchers centrally position themselves in their work continue to be differentially defined as self-study (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998), narratives of self (Sparkes, 1996), creative nonfiction (Barone, 2008), autoethnography (Ellis, 1999; Reed-Danahay, 1997) and personal narrative (Burdell & Swadener, 1999), to name only a few.

Among the previously listed methods of inquiry, some view autoethnography as an overarching umbrella concept under which many of the other research methodologies are situated (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). However, such is not always the case, as autoethnography has also been referenced as a subtype of narrative research methods (Reed-

Danahay, 1997). This convoluted terminology highlights the overlap and disagreement among scholars regarding the definition and categorization of self-situated research methods, which can be ambiguous and confusing for those attempting to navigate the muddy waters of qualitative research. Because of this overlap and discordance within the research community, it is important for me to clarify my interpretation of the two most prevalently referenced genres of self-study, autoethnography and personal narrative.

Autoethnography.

Autoethnography, as a methodology of qualitative inquiry, is defined by Reed-Danahay (1997) as "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (p. 9). Breaking the term down into its composite parts, *auto* and *ethnography*, gives further clarity to its definition, as articulated by Hughes, Pennington and Makris (2012):

> The term auto is commonly used in the academy when referencing publications in which the author presents critical reflections and interpretations of personal experience. In contrast, ethnography is commonly referenced as a key qualitative approach to studying the rules, norms, and acts of resistance associated with cultural groups. Consequently, the hybrid term, autoethnography, is intended to name a form of critical self-study in which the researcher takes an active, scientific, and systematic view of personal experience in relation to cultural groups identified by the researcher as similar to the self (i.e., us) or as others who differ from the self (i.e., them). (p. 209)

As an increasingly popular form of qualitative inquiry (Burdell & Swadener, 1999; Hughes, Pennington & Makris, 2012; Reed-Danahay, 1997), autoethnography has been defined as "research, writing, and method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social" (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Autoethnographic bodies of research are also considered to be "highly personalized, revealing texts in which the authors tell stories about their lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural" (Richardson, 2000, p. 11). These

definitions highlight the inextricable interconnectedness of personal and cultural experience and analysis within autoethnographic research.

Writing style within the scope of autoethnography is highly varied. Moving away from a positivistic, hegemonic structure of research, autoethnographic texts continue to challenge and expand on traditional definitions of research, exploring evermore evocative and creative styles of writing and 'doing' autoethnography.

Also varied is the extent to which researchers emphasize the personal and experiential, versus the cultural and social, in their texts. Reed-Danahay (1997) stresses that autoethnographers may, and often do, "vary in their emphasis on *graphy* (i.e., the research process), *ethnos* (i.e., culture), or *auto* (i.e., self)" (p. 2; italics in original). For example, in my story which I share in Chapter Four, I place strong emphasis on the self, and on my self's experience of sexual violence. I emphasize the *auto* so much in fact, that my work may be more indicative of a personal narrative than autoethnographic methodology.

Personal narrative.

Personal narrative and autoethnography have been, and continue to be, paradoxically cited as umbrella terms, or subcategories, of one another. For a new researcher like me, these inconsistent definitions and differences of opinion within the research community are frustrating and confusing. In trying to navigate the muddy waters of this "blurred genre" (Maguire, 2006, para. 23) I prefer to think of autoethnography and personal narrative as different albeit interconnected methodologies of qualitative self-study. I believe what differentiates the two methods from one another is the extent to which the socio-cultural analysis and positioning of the author are central to the research. With personal narrative, particular experiences of the author and the merit of her or his story take precedence over the author's ability to critically tie the narrative to cultural experience; the story itself is

paramount. In contrast, with autoethnography, socio-cultural grounding and analysis are central to the very definition of the methodology.

While it is true that lived experience does not occur in a social vacuum (Holt, 2003; Stanley, 1993) and that the "personal is cultural" (Parmar & Minh-ha, 1990, p. 72), I believe personal narrative allows for more *implicit* social commentary by engaging primarily with the personal as opposed to the explicit cultural theorizing of autoethnography. Referencing Mykhalovskiy (1996), Holt (2003) comments that "to write individual experience is to write social experience" (p. 16). In this sense, personal narratives can very much be considered cultural, social and political texts. However, with narrative, the authors' positioning of self within a cultural context may take a backseat to the story itself, which can allow for, or require, more cultural interpellation on the part of the reader than is the case with autoethnography.

Narrative provides readers the "freedom to interpret and evaluate [texts] from their unique vantage points" (Sparkes, 1996, p. 486; Sparkes, 1997), communicating a level of trust between researcher and reader (Barone, 1995). Expressing trust in the reader by exposing their inner worlds, experiences and vulnerabilities, researchers are able to present themselves authentically, thereby enhancing readers' trust in *them* and in their work (Humphreys, 2005). A bond is formed and a conversation is initiated between reader and author. Rosenblatt (1978) refers to this conversation as a transaction, a relationship between the reader and the text in which both act on one another, and are acted upon. The text is an intermediary between author and reader, both of whom enter into the conversation or transaction with their own knowledge, perceptions, experiences and expectations. Thus, a given text may hold different meaning, influence different perceptions, and evoke different emotions for all whom approach it. The same text also has the potential to influence an individual differently with each reading and each encounter.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) comprehensively reference and differentiate the various methodological approaches to self-situated research. One approach in particular, *evocative* personal narrative, lends itself particularly well to what I attempt to achieve in this thesis. Ellis and Bochner (2000) state that in evocative personal narratives, researchers:

> View themselves as the phenomenon. . .their primary purpose is to understand a self or some aspect of a life lived in a cultural context. . . . The goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience, and to write from an ethic of care and concern. (pp. 213-214)

I discuss narrative as evocative text at greater length later in this chapter.

Stories and narrative.

Frank (2010) draws an important distinction between stories and narrative. Referencing Harrington (2008), Frank defines stories as "living, local, and specific," whereas narratives are "templates that people use as resources to construct and understand stories" (p. 121). By this definition, stories and narratives are not one and the same, but are instead inextricably coupled: one cannot have narrative without a story to narrate, and one cannot convey a story without producing a subjective and nuanced narrative. I imagine this relationship using a gift metaphor. The story composes the package contents, while narrative is the packaging, ultimately determining the presentation of the gift, and dictating exactly how it is to be unwrapped. Additionally, who the gift is for, and the context in which the gift is delivered and received, also greatly influence the gift content and the packaging. In other words, the stories one tells, the context in which one tells it, and who one shares one's story with all influence and determine narrative decisions and representation.

In addition to his distinction between story and narrative, Frank poses important questions that resonate with me:

> [*W]hat is at stake* for whom, including storyteller and protagonist in the story, listeners who are present at the storytelling, and others who may not be present but are implicated in the story? How does the story, and the particular way it is told, define or redefine those stakes, raising or lowering them? How does the story change people's sense of what is possible, what is permitted, and what is responsible or irresponsible? (pp. 74-75; italics in original)

These are important questions to have in the back of one's mind when sharing a story: What is at stake by sharing? Who is at risk? Is sharing the story worth the risk to yourself and others? Individual answers to these questions may differ based on a story's context, content and potential audience, as well as the context(s) within which the writer or storyteller herself is situated. Surely there is vulnerability in the sharing of stories, especially stories of self. As a story that exposes and examines deep personal vulnerability, I consider the stakes to be very high in the telling of my story. However, I believe the personal risk is well worth the potential reward of enhancing self-understanding and further expanding narrative discourse on sexual violence and identity.

Writing-stories.

Defined as "narratives about contexts in which the writing is produced," (Richardson, 2000, p. 11) a writing-story presents an author with the opportunity to critically reflect on their work and to analyze and contextualize their writing process and experience. Richardson advocates writing-stories as valuable scholarship by emphasizing:

> [Writing-stories] situate one's own writing in other parts of one's life such as disciplinary constraints, academic debates, departmental politics, social movements, community structures, research interests, familial ties and personal history. They offer critical reflexivity about the writing-self in different contexts as a valuable creative analytical practice. They evoke new questions about the self and the subject; they

> remind us that our work is grounded, contextual and rhizomatic. They can evoke deeper parts of the self, heal wounds, enhance the sense of self – or even alter one's sense of identity. (p. 11)

In addition to writing about my personal experience of sexual violence, it has been important and valuable for me to analyze my experience of the writing process. Writing and reflecting on my own narrative experience requires me to think and write critically (Brookes, 1992) about the story I tell. Writing-stories enhance an author's engagement with their own narrative, expanding and emboldening introspective self-analysis on the part of the researcher. Richardson (2000) believes that evocative writing-stories allow us to:

> Relate differently to our material; we know it differently. We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences and so on; we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves, our doubts and our uncertainties. (p. 11)

Writing-stories not only allow an author to connect with their experiences through evocative writing, but also provide a space for the author to connect with how they represent themselves – and why – and to extract further meaning from this.

What is this I am writing?

So, then, what exactly am I writing? Autoethnography? Personal narrative? A writing-story? All, or none, of the above? While I do position myself within my story as a white, middle class, cis-gendered woman, I do not draw cultural conclusions based on my experience so much as personal ones. This is not to say that my socio-cultural background, or the socio-cultural context of the story are not relevant – far from it. However, they are not focal, nor are they to be generalized to any experience beyond my own. Drawing on third-wave feminism, I am a strong believer that a woman's experience is her own. Other women may relate to the story I share. However, I cannot generalize or assume that my experience

speaks to the experiences of others; I can only stand in my own truth. To this extent I believe I employ a narrative methodology more so than an autoethnographic one. The claims and reflections present in my story represent an analysis of self and individual experience. Because of the deeply personal and diverse nature of sexual violence, and the many ways it is experienced and perceived by women, I do not feel comfortable making socio-cultural claims based on my one personal experience. That being said, as self-study methodologies are subject to contrasting interpretations, different researchers and readers will invariably disagree on my work's definition and defining traits.

Because many researchers use the terms and interpretations of personal narrative and autoethnography heterogeneously within the literature (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), the research texts I reference refer interchangeably to both autoethnography and personal narrative in describing methodologies relevant to my own autobiographical self-study. While I am making reference to personal narrative in the sections that follow, I have not altered authors' uses or depictions of terminologies used in order to stay true to the works cited. Thus, for the remainder of this review of the literature, the terms autoethnography, personal narrative, stories, self-stories and storied experience are referenced interchangeably in order to maintain the authenticity and integrity of works cited.

Personal narrative as "evocative representation."

In addition to linking writing and personal experience with cultural observation, personal narrative is often expected to be evocative in nature (Ellis, 1999, 2000; Richardson, 2000). In fact, Maguire (2006), asserts that "[e]vocative expression of personal experiences and emotions is the essence of autoethnography" (para. 10). Ellis (1999, 2000, 2004), who has written extensively on the significance of evocative text, similarly asserts the importance of good narrative as texts that engage, evoke and provoke the reader. The evocative nature of narrative can enable the researcher to produce powerful and gripping texts, which may also

provide a sense of therapeutic value or catharsis for researcher and reader alike, as personal narratives are oftentimes born out of authors' vulnerabilities and/or traumatic life events. Ellis (1999) advocates for research that:

> Includes researchers' vulnerable selves, emotions, bodies, and spirits; produces evocative stories that create the effect of reality; celebrates concrete experience and intimate detail; examines how human experience is endowed with meaning; is concerned with moral, ethical, and political consequences; encourages compassion and empathy; helps us know how to live and cope; features multiple voices and repositions readers and "subjects" as coparticipants in dialogue; seeks a fusion between social science and literature. . .and connects the practices of social science with the living of life. (p. 669)

Through evocative texts in which authors "make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 277), personal narrative has the potential to reach wider and more diverse audiences than more traditional forms of research might, thus increasing the potential for social change and emancipation for more people.

Personal narrative as emancipatory representation.

When researchers engage in narrative, "empathy and solidarity as well as emancipatory moments become possible across difference and sameness" (Sparkes, 2000, p. 32). Personal narrative challenges notions of classist, sexist, racist, able-bodied, and heteronormative traditional epistemologies by questioning:

> Whose knowledge is privileged and whose voices are expressed, recognized and heard. It boldly calls for alternative, more expansive ways, creative forms and textual spaces in which researchers construct research texts, position themselves and others. (Maguire, 2006, para. 4)

In many ways, narrative is about creating spaces in which new dialogue can blossom and diversify. These texts challenge dominant forms of representation, power, and knowledge (re)production in an attempt to reclaim representational spaces that marginalize and oppress (Neumann, 1996, p. 189; Tierney, 1998). Folks engaging in narrative research may consider themselves to be among those at the borders, or may be acting as metaphorical gatekeepers, opening up opportunities and creating a space in the conversation for those in the margins. It is also important to recognize that authors, by writing themselves into their research, "have challenged accepted views about silent authorship" (Holt, 2003, p. 2), essentially emancipating themselves from the structural confines of positivistic and patriarchal doctrines of traditional research.

Personal narrative as inquiry and discovery.

Personal narratives are progressively gaining acceptance as more than just methods of inquiry; they are methods of discovery in which, by engaging in the writing process, the author comes to learn more about themselves and their world(s) (Richardson, 2001). Richardson (1994) suggests that engaging in personal narrative and different forms of writing can lead to new discoveries within the scope of our research interests, altering our relationship to our research and the ways in which we approach it. Similarly, O'Reilly-Scanlon (2000) believes narrative inquiry to have more hypothesis-generating than hypothesis-testing implications, opening up new avenues and possibilities for future research. Personal narrative then, can be considered a self-perpetuating way of knowing, (Richardson, 2000) as inquiry and discovery intertwine and become both process and product of research (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Research questions and findings beget themselves, opening up new channels of interest and creating new possibilities for research queries and knowledge production.

Personal narrative's inherent worth.

Personal stories and narratives "have been gaining stature and value for their own sake and on their own terms" (O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2000, p. 44) in contemporary qualitative research circles. The inherent worthiness of individual and/or shared experiences is becoming increasingly accepted as a legitimate conduit of theoretical and empirical knowledge. Wall (2006) asserts, "knowledge does not have to result from research to be worthwhile, and personal stories should have their place alongside research in contribution to what we know about the world in which we live" (p. 11). The acceptance of personal narratives as valid sources of knowledge and research opens up opportunities for individuals who may have felt silenced by hegemonic, positivistic and patriarchal research doctrines to speak up and contribute their unique experiential knowledge within the research community and amongst themselves (Averett, 2009; Ellis, 2004). Sparkes (1996), in reference to his own experience of and struggles with writing his personal narrative about chronic back pain and the body-self connection, speaks strongly about the need for increased availability of alternative narratives within research contexts:

> Herein, as my own narrative of self indicates, lies a critical problem for many people. This problem relates to the availability of alternative narratives within specific cultures and subcultures on which to build alternative identities and notions of self that recognize and acknowledge, among other things, issues of vulnerability and fragility. (p. 488)

Sparkes acknowledges that a vast number of autoethnographies and personal narratives centre on topics of vulnerability, trauma and/or marginalization. He believes increasing the availability of alternative narratives provides opportunities for individuals to develop, locate and expand on the existence of relatable narratives, and to communicate, validate and deconstruct vulnerabilities. The communication and deconstruction of

vulnerability through narrative is also beginning to be embraced, and proving valuable, in traditionally positivistic fields such as medicine. Charon (2006) argues that by valuing patient narratives, health practitioners not only gain helpful insight into the experiences, needs, and vulnerabilities of patients, but only then can they truly provide care that communicates humility, trustworthiness and respect. Patients too, experience validation and catharsis in sharing their stories, and having those stories listened to and valued. There is illimitable value and inherent worth in the creating, sharing, and disseminating of narratives.

Personal narrative as feminist research.

Personal narrative as emancipatory research is increasingly popular among feminist researchers and activists (Allen & Piercy, 2005; Averett, 2009; Brookes, 1992; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) who, by "engaging in a narrative account, self-reflection, and a critique of culture. . .[attempt] to resist patriarchal standards that enforce male-dominant expectations of writing and research" (Averett, 2009, p. 360). Allen and Piercy (2005) contend that autoethnography "contributes to a richer feminism," as feminism and autoethnography combine to offer "a more fully human method of inquiry" (p. 156) that aids in efforts for equality and social change, the ultimate goal of feminist practice.

The sharing of personal stories and narratives remains a hallmark of contemporary feminism and continues to function as the primary mode of consciousness-raising within the third wave (Snyder, 2008). Preston (2006) argues, "third-wave academic feminism draws from prior movements but further blurs the lines between the academy and the real world, transgressing the borders of both by intertwining theory with practice, scholarship with activism, and intellect with politic" (p. 9). Feminist narrative within the academy, while encountering its share of resistance, continues to influence and challenge the traditional definitions and boundaries of scholarship, advocating for personal narrative as a valid form of theory. In many ways, personal narrative continues to be reclaimed and renegotiated by third-

wave scholars and activists who use first-person autobiographical writing as a "critical method and practice both to shed new light on feminist identity and to reimagine a feminist community" (Yu, 2011, p. 876).

Personal narrative and identity.

Sparkes (1996) refers to narrative as more than just widening a channel of communication within (and outside of) the research community; he attaches to it the notion of identity as a concept that lies at the very heart of personal narrative. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) similarly credit narrative with the ability to forge and strengthen identity:

> How individuals recount their histories – what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience – all shape what individuals can claim of their lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling. . .about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned. (p. 1)

Through storying and sharing personal experience, these texts "provide vehicles for talking to each other, often across the borders of discipline and identity locations" (Burdell & Swadener, 1999, p. 26), promoting discourse within and between identity groups.

While narrative is still used to communicate solidarity amongst women in the face of patriarchal oppression and discrimination, it is no longer implemented as a tool for generalizing women's experiences. Instead, personal narrative is used to convey the diversity of female experience (Gamble, 2006) and, according to Yu (2011), "subvert simplistic understandings of identity" (p. 880).

Frank (2010) speaks of identity in stories at great length, reflecting on what he calls "narrative identifying," which emphasizes the provisional status of identity and the "reciprocal processes of narrative making available possible identities and people identifying themselves through narratives" (p. 49). Identity then, is both process and product of narrative.

Frank similarly asserts that stories of past experience, what he refers to as memoirs, represent opportunities for people to reaffirm, (re)negotiate, flex or refute (collective or individual) identity confines. As he states, "[e]ach memoirist seeks greater possibility to breathe within a story that can be constricting" (p. 30).

The notion of narrative as a conduit for identity negotiation, formation and communication is particularly salient with me as a focal point of this thesis. Over the course of writing my own storied experience, I have experienced recurrent (re)negotiations of my own identity. My self-perception has shifted, and continues to shift, as I come to terms with what my narrative reveals about me, my experiences, and where I choose to locate myself within my own socio-cultural contexts as a researcher, as a woman, and more specifically, as a woman who has experienced sexual violence. Sparkes (1996) believes "there is a constant need for identities to be reflexively created, re-created, and sustained by the individual through flexible narratives of the self" (pp. 487-488). Likewise, through reading narratives and stories of other women who have experienced rape or sexual violence, I feel validation for the mental and emotional upheaval that often results from trying to make sense of my experience. This thesis both embodies and deconstructs my journey of self-identity through the storying and sharing of my personal narrative.

Identity

When presented with the task of defining identity, I am confronted by my own consciously flawed notion of identity as the very essence of who one is, something that holistically defines an individual. This shallow conceptualization assumes a fixed identity that envelops a person and encompasses their whole being, making identity that which overshadows individual idiosyncrasies, and instead unifies individuals with promises of group membership. Hall (1996) justifiably considers this an essentialist view of identity and, arguing against popular misconceptions of the term, asserts that identity is not stable and

unchanging. Instead, Hall contends, "identities are never unified and, in late modern times, [are] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (p. 17). He conceptualizes identity not as static and deterministic, but rather fluid and intersectional. Hall's understanding of identity continues to be a central working definition of identity within contemporary feminist theory, and is one that lends itself well to the purposes of this thesis.

Identity and the third wave.

Identity – its meanings, connotations and limitations – lies at the heart of feminist theory and remains a topic of much contention among feminist scholars and activists. While second wave feminists have used consciousness-raising groups to ensure solidarity and unify women's experience, forging identity bonds between women, the third wave approaches identity much differently.

Faludi (1991) places identity at the core of her definition of feminism, stating that feminism "asks that women be free to define themselves – instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and their men" (p. xxiii). Because of this impetus for women to be able to self-define, third-wave theory is comprised of multiple, varied identities, and theories surrounding identity; the emphasis is on *choice*. Henry (2006) confirms that because "the third wave does not move beyond these individual assertions of identity to a larger collective political identity. . .feminism thus becomes an ideology of individual empowerment to make choices, no matter what those choices are" (p. 132). It is this emphasis on choice that allows the third wave to espouse contrasting, multifarious, and ambiguous notions and embodiments of identity, accepting not only identity as intersectional, but also that multiple (and possibly incongruous) identities are able to exist, interchangeably or simultaneously, within an individual (Heywood, 2006a, 2006b).

Identity as performance: Victim and survivor identity.

It is impossible to explore feminist notions of identity without discussing Butler's (1990, 1993) concept of gender performativity. Butler states that gender is not a fixed identity, but can instead be understood as a performance: variable, inconstant, and contextually-nested. As gendered individuals, we perform our ascribed gender – not because this gender is within us, as who we are, but because we have been socialized to do so. Butler criticizes the rigid, heteronormative social construction of the man/woman gender binary, citing it as unnaturally delimiting since it denies the fluid and variable nature of identity.

I adopt Butler's concept of identity as performative, as well as her contestation of harsh binaries, in disputing the victim/survivor identity binary applied to women who have experienced sexual violence. In Chapter Three I contest the bifurcation of women's experience, which dictates that a woman who has been sexually violated is either a victim, or she is a survivor. I argue that rigid identity demarcations such as these silence, oppress and marginalize women who may feel that, at any given time, they identify with one, both, or neither identity labels. Consequently, I agree with Butler's assertion that "social conditions that determine us absolutely, restrict us absolutely, and actually produce victims of all of us" (Vasu & Butler, 2004, p. 119).

Identity and empowerment.

Use of the term 'victim' as an identifier for women who have suffered domestic or sexual abuse has been historically contested within feminist theory. Naomi Wolf (1993) coined the term victim feminism in reference to feminist theory that positions women as the victims of men and patriarchal society. Arguing that these forms of feminist writing and theorizing disempower women, Wolf instead advocates for power feminism, a feminist ideology that focuses on highlighting women's strengths and agency. Many feminists who study violence against women disagree with Wolf's critique, arguing that expressing the

magnitude of women's (historical and contemporary) victimization at the hands of men is not the same as unilaterally portraying women as victims (Piepmeier, 2006). While I do sympathize with Wolf's problematization of women being perpetually portrayed as victims at the hands of men, I consider her repudiation of victim narratives within feminist theory silencing to women who may find comfort in identifying as victims. Ultimately, by rejecting victim narratives as relevant discourse within feminist theory, Wolf engenders the opposite of power feminism by effectively silencing, disempowering and revictimizing women victims.

Feigenbaum (2006) also draws a direct link between identity and empowerment. She states:

> Empowerment aims to develop self-awareness, self-reflection, and action in response to imposed structures that create powerlessness. . .[it] includes basic personal and social aims, such as enhancing or cultivating an improved sense of self, which may involve developing pride in a particular group identity or affiliation. (pp. 114-115)

Feigenbaum acknowledges the empowerment in feeling at home within an identity group; however, where does that leave those who do not feel as though they have access to an authentic identity affiliation? Where is the empowerment for those (of us) in the margins? I argue that the most empowering aspect of identity is one's ability and one's right to choose how he or she wishes to identify. This choice includes more than just the freedom to select one's own identity, but also the freedom to refuse ascribed or available identity labels, if one so wishes.

Identity vs. identifying.

Just as Frank (2010) makes a necessary distinction between identity and *identifying*, preferring the use of the latter as it emphasizes the transitional and fluid nature of identity as process, Perreault (2003) finds it imperative to distinguish between identity and identification:

> To distinguish between "identity" and "identification" is essential. To some permeable extent, aspects of identity can be fixed – for example, place and date of birth, which inflect identity profoundly; interpretation of that significance, however, varies. "Identification," in contrast, can be quite fluid, changing with one's mood, information, maturation, and how one is accepted or rejected by the people around one. (p. 308)

This differentiation is important to me when considered within the context of sexual violence and its accompanying victim-survivor binary. While I personally strongly resist espousing a victim or survivor *identity*, there are times in which I find myself relating, or *identifying*, with one or both identities. At other times I feel truly incapable of identifying with either. My process of identifying is fluid, inconstant and contextual. For me and, I assume, for other women who have experienced sexual violence, the struggle of identity, identification and identifying following an event such as sexual violence can be traumatic in and of itself. I expand further on sexual violence and identity in Chapter Three, where I examine and problematize the victim-survivor identity binary within the context of sexual violence against women.

Summary

In this chapter I reviewed literature relevant to my inquiry of narrative and identity by employing a third-wave feminist framework. I have outlined the interconnectedness of feminist inquiry, narrative and identity by engaging with research that exists within these intersections. In Chapter Three I further this inquiry by focusing on victim and survivor narratives within the context of sexual violence against women. I explore the ways in which victim and survivor labels can restrict and oppress women's experiences of identity following sexual violence. I then suggest alternatives to the victim/survivor identity binary, arguing for

the importance of narrative and the sharing of narratives as a means of (re)claiming and (re)negotiating identity.

Chapter Three: "The Language of Rape Matters" - Problematizing the Victim and Survivor Binary within Sexual Violence Narratives

> *That's why I want to speak to you now. To say: no person, trying to take responsibility for her or his identity, should have to be so alone. There must be those among whom we can sit down and weep, and still be counted as warriors. . .I think you thought there was no such place for you, and perhaps there was none then, and perhaps there is none now; but we will have to make it, we who want an end to suffering, who want to change the laws of history, if we are not to give ourselves away.* (Rich, 1986, p. 25)

In this chapter I examine how the binary of victim and survivor labels in the context of sexual violence against women are conceptualized in contemporary scholarship and literature. I discuss how researchers and women who have experienced sexual violence negotiate, critique and in some cases problematize or reject victim/survivor narratives.

I approach this issue as an academic and as a woman who has experienced sexual violence. I cannot claim to hold an objective opinion on this issue, nor will I try. My thoughts, questions and vulnerabilities are central to my examination of the victim/survivor dichotomy, and are interwoven throughout the discourse of this text.

I assert that "the language of rape matters" (Axtell, 2011, p. 1), and that the language and labels used in the context of sexual violence greatly influence, both positively and negatively, a woman's ability to negotiate her experiences and her identity(ies). I argue that the sharing of experiences is essential to women's emancipation from the limiting and oppressive language that currently constrains women who have experienced sexual violence within victim and survivor identities and narratives.

I use the term sexual violence as an inclusive term that denotes any and all forms of coercive sexual events such as, but not limited to, incest, molestation, sexual assault, rape and "anything that is sexual in nature that leaves someone feeling emotionally or physically unsafe" (Ogden, 2013). I focus my attention on sexually violent acts committed by men onto women. I speak to this form of violence because it is what I know and what I have experienced. It is, however, important to acknowledge that sexual violence perpetrated by men onto women is not the only form of sexual violence; people of all sexes, genders and sexual orientations can be, and are, both perpetrators and victims of sexual violence.

How to Be a Raped Woman

> *I don't really know how to be a raped woman. I didn't in 1986 and I don't today. I just have never completely figured it out. Being a raped woman has come to define me in some ways, but I struggle still to understand and define it personally, as opposed to the stereotypes.* (Doe, 2004, p. 118)

Jane Doe's quote resonates deeply with me and very aptly sums up my own feelings as a woman who has been sexually violated. I have struggled, and continue to struggle, greatly to be able to define myself in a way I understand and with which I am comfortable. Until very recently, I had written off my inability to (re)define myself after my experience as my own personal failing and, myopically, had never stopped to wonder if other women with similar experiences might similarly be struggling. I never questioned *why* I felt the way I did; I accepted my struggle with self-identification as a natural side-effect of my experience, something that came with the territory of being a violated woman. When I began deconstructing my experience and its residual effects, it dawned on me: perhaps this was not a problem with *me*, so much as it was a problem with identity and the language and labels made available to women such as me. This was my 'aha' moment. As I engaged in dialogue with friends and colleagues and immersed myself in related literature, I realized there seemed

to be only two narratives, two identities, available for women who have experienced sexual violence to assume: victim or survivor. Thus, I look critically at these two identity labels and deconstruct what it means to be a victim or a survivor and how these concepts both shape and limit women's experiences of sexual violence, of 'recovery' and of self.

Victim vs. Survivor: What do These Labels Mean?

Victim.

In the context of sexual violence, Young and Maguire (2003) conceptualize the label of victim as one that "captures the sense of injury and injustice felt by individuals who have experienced a sexually violent act at the hands of another person or persons" (p. 41). They emphasize that the victim narrative often implies that a given situation in which an individual was victimized was beyond her control, implying innocence on the part of the victim. Because of this inferred innocence, adopting a victim identity may help mitigate feelings of guilt or self-blame that women who have been sexually violated have been socialized to internalize (Bondurant, 2001; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2004; Young & Maguire, 2003).

While being a victim may allow one to abdicate blame and be 'entitled' to the suffering that results from victimization, there are also disadvantages with assuming this identity. Wood and Rennie (1994) argue that "victims must live and act in a world in which victims are not valued" (p. 137). They highlight the reality that victims not only run the risk that the sympathy of others may result in pity and derision, but also face the possibility of their own revictimization due to the passivity and powerlessness socially attributed to them.

In a mixed-methods study of women with experiences of sexual violence, Thompson (2000) found that many participants rejected the victim label and tended to associate weakness, powerlessness and vulnerability with victimhood. A participant in Wood and Rennie's (1994) research captures this sentiment: "*Victim*, I hate with a passion. I hate it. I

think that I felt powerless enough, and the last thing that I'd ever want to think of myself as is a victim" (p. 125).

While some women prefer to be acknowledged as victims of sexual violence, others vehemently reject the term based on its implicit, or explicit, connotations of weakness. Because of a sense of helplessness that one may feel by identifying as a victim, it has been suggested that victim is one of the most negative labels to which a person can ascribe, whereas the label survivor is deemed to be more empowering (Young & Maguire, 2003). The label of survivor too, however, proves to be no less problematic than that of victim.

Survivor.

While the term victim centres on what has happened or been done to a person, Young and Maguire (2003) assert that identifying as a survivor stresses the importance of what happens *after* an experience of sexual violence. They suggest that taking on a survivor identity empowers an individual to look to future recovery instead of dwelling on the incident itself.

In contrast to the negative connotations of the victim label, the term survivor is often seen as being associated with positive traits such as strength and recovery, as well as alluding to the fact that one has progressed beyond the trauma of one's experience (Thompson, 2000). Thus, by identifying as a survivor, a woman may be insinuating that she has recovered or is in recovery from her traumatic experience. She has *progressed* from victim to survivor status.

Although the survivor identity implies an aspect of empowerment and healing, not all women are equally likely or willing to self-identify as survivors. The context of a woman's experience with sexual violence bears significant influence on her willingness to label herself as a survivor (Young & Maguire, 2003). A survivor identity is most readily taken on by women whose experiences with sexual violence have been particularly aggressive or in which they feared for their lives. Women who do not believe their experiences have been

severely violent or life threatening are more hesitant to adopt a survivor identity (Young & Maguire, 2003).

The victim-survivor continuum.

Multiple researchers have reported that participants use a journey, or continuum metaphor to describe the progression they make from victim to survivor status following experience(s) with sexual violence (Thompson, 2000; Wood & Rennie, 1994; Young & Maguire, 2003). Based on participant narratives, Young and Maguire (2003) highlight the dynamism of identity by stating, "it is not that you *are* a victim or you *are* a survivor. Instead, you move from one end where something was done to you (victim) to where you do something about it (survivor)" (p. 49). Similarly, Thompson (2000) states, "women seemed to move from victim to survivor identity, with victim firmly placed at the beginning of the journey and survivor as the final stopping point in terms of identity" (p. 331). This acceptance of identity as dynamic simplistically reflects Hall's (1996) notion of identity, in which he asserts that identity is not fixed, but fluid and prone to change.

I am conflicted about my stance on the victim-survivor continuum. I appreciate that the continuum acknowledges the dynamism of identity insofar as participants are understood to be capable of progression from victim to survivor; too often identity is viewed as static and unchanging, and this can be limiting to anyone attempting to self-identify. However, the victim-survivor continuum generates a very linear, unidirectional model of identity progression in which one can 'advance' from victim to survivor, but movement in the opposite direction, survivor to victim, is not acknowledged. Also not acknowledged is one's right and/or ability to identify with both labels simultaneously, or to oscillate between the two.

Equally disturbing is the inherent devaluation of the victim identity compared to that of survivor in this continuum. By positioning the victim identity at the beginning of the

continuum and survivor at the end, the progression stance implies that survivorship is something to aspire to, thus painting victim status as less desirable. Thompson (2000) addresses this issue while additionally problematizing the victim-survivor dichotomy through her discussion of what she has coined the 'Victim-Survivor Paradox.'

The victim-survivor paradox.

Thompson's Victim-Survivor Paradox (2000) encapsulates an identity dilemma that many women who have experienced sexual violence face by discerning that the labels one chooses to describe oneself – victim or survivor – can have conflicting consequences for women. Thompson makes two assertions: first, that identifying as a victim or a survivor influences how one is both treated and regarded by others; and second, that the identity labels used in relation to the sexual violence may result in different experiences for different women. Thompson argues:

> In order to speak about the trauma of rape one must assume a victim identity. Being a victim maximizes the possibility that the awfulness of rape can be appreciated. But adopting a victim identity also runs the risk of being pitied. . .and regarded as weak. In contrast, if one adopts a survivor identity then the trauma of rape must be minimized and salience given to [one's recovery] from the rape. While this may afford the survivor with respect from others. . .it renders her unable to talk about her experience or elicit support and sympathy from others should the need arise. (p. 330)

This identity conflict can create problems for women who may wish to draw on both identities simultaneously or draw from different identities at different points in time. The paradox also highlights the stark limitations of both terms, victim and survivor. However, there is another dilemma that the Victim-Survivor Paradox does not address: women who are uncomfortable or unwilling to place themselves in either denomination, and who wish to identify as neither victim nor survivor.

Neither victim nor survivor.

Many research findings have stressed the significance of labeling experience and labeling oneself as important steps toward "recovery" from sexual violence (Thompson, 2000; Wood & Rennie, 1994; Young & Maguire, 2003). However, these same studies also conceded that many women who have experienced sexual violence avoid and/or reject static labels altogether. These women often claim the language and labels currently used to describe women who have experienced sexual violence do not resonate with them (Young & Maguire, 2003). Holland and Leander (2004) believe that:

> A person or group is "offered" or "afforded" a social position when a powerful body, such as a governmental agency [or the academy or popular media] proposes a particular sort of subject. . .and calls on an individual to occupy the position. Faced with such an offer, the person may either accept the position in whole or part, or try to refuse it. (p. 127)

It is important that Holland and Leander reference one's ability to refuse, or rather, *try* to refuse ascribed or "offered" identities. However, what the authors do not present is what it takes for one to refuse an identity. What does this process look like? With what amount of ease or difficulty can one refuse ascribed identity(ies)? If we refuse to occupy the identities afforded to us – victim or survivor – what other options for self-identity and self-definition are we afforded?

Jane Doe (2004) states, "I have never allowed anyone to refer to me as a 'rape victim'. . .Nor am I fond of the label 'survivor'. . . .Call me a woman. Call me a woman who has been raped. Call me a woman who has been raped by a man" (p. 120). Here, Doe refuses to fit herself into a victim or survivor identity. She is not a victim. She is not a survivor. She is a woman who has been raped. By instead employing people-first language, Doe disallows these labels to define her being.

Blaska (1992) identifies people-first language as that which communicates respect for an individual by "referring to them as individuals, and then referring to their disability [sic] when it is needed" (p. 27). Originally adopted by The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, people-first language has since been adopted by various identity groups who wish to be acknowledged as individual people, as opposed to being primarily identified by their (dis)abilities, race, gender, appearance, etc. People-first language has been considered implemental in deconstructing stereotypes and promoting respect and inclusivity for all people (Blaska, 1992). Doe's self-identification as a "woman who has been raped" (p. 120), as opposed to "rape victim" or "survivor" is an example of people-first language. She demands her right to agency and self-expression by refusing to be primarily identified by her rape.

Reading Doe's quote was a particularly pivotal moment for me in my research; it was the first time I felt completely validated in my renunciation of the victim/survivor binary and in my desire to still identify as 'just' a woman. If neither of these labels, victim or survivor, resonate with me, if they similarly do not resonate with Jane Doe, or with multiple other women from multiple research studies, what does that say about the language and labels made available to women who have experienced sexual violence?

The Language of Sexual Violence

In the documentary *Miss Representation* (2011), Marie C. Wilson, talking about girls' and women's representation in the media, says "You cannot be what you cannot see." In other words, it is hard to espouse an identity you have no awareness of or access to. Her point, especially pertinent as it relates to women who have experienced sexual violence, highlights the reality that if women are only exposed to depictions of women who have experienced sexual violence as victims or survivors, their perceived options for self-identity are severely limited. A woman is a victim or she is a survivor; to be neither is to be

undefined. The images portrayed and the language used to describe and define women as victims or survivors are representative of the "dominant culture's construction of sexual violence" (Young & Maguire, 2003, p. 50) and of the power imbalances present in the production and dissemination of language. This language delimits the extent to which women can create meaning from their experiences.

Thompson (2000) describes the importance of meaning-making through language by stating:

> [language] is not simply a medium which neutrally transmits and reflects processes taking place elsewhere; language can be seen as actively involved in the construction and negotiation of mental states, the creation of certain identities and the production of social realities. (p. 330; see also Marshall & Wetherell, 1989)

Embracing the argument that language shapes reality, Spry (1995) suggests, "women live in a reality that does not recognize the complexity and diversity of their experiences with sexual assault because the words to describe them do not presently exist" (para. 12). This deficiency in the current language limits, and negatively influences a woman's "recovery", identity, and sense of agency.

Language and "recovery."

Young and Maguire (2003) talk extensively about how the (lack of) language and labels available to women who have experienced sexual violence can impede their recovery process. They state that due to a lack of choice available, labels of victim or survivor are often forced upon women unwilling or unprepared to embrace them, negatively impacting their ability to heal. Unable to articulate their feelings and experiences to their satisfaction, the "sense-making process" (Young & Maguire, 2003, p. 40) that begets recovery cannot be actualized.

While Young and Maguire's argument seems to make sense, and despite the fact that there is much talk in the research about recovery from sexual violence (Thompson, 2000; Wood & Rennie, 1994; Young & Maguire, 2003), I personally take issue with emphases on recovery. Abuse, sexual violence and rape have far too long been pathologized, mythologized, medicalized, and viewed as something that can be *healed* or *recovered from*. In this sense, the words 'heal' and 'recover' become micro-aggressive forms of victim blaming, which insinuate it is a woman's responsibility to 'feel better' after being violated, and that to not fully recover is unacceptable. I find this stance itself both oppressive and unacceptable. From personal conversations with women who have experienced sexual violence and from my own self-reflection, it has become evident that many women do not fully recover. Nor should it be expected of us. We may (or may not) learn to live with our experience, and it may (or may not) get easier with time. I agree that language plays a vital role in individual and collective meaning making, but I take issue with the language of healing and recovery in this context. As a woman who has experienced sexual violence I am less concerned with 'recovery' than I am with how to live and authentically self-identity as a violated woman.

It is, however, important to clarify that, while many women do struggle to recover from experiences of sexual violence, this is not true for all women. Writers such as Diski (2009) and Shane (2012) contest the single story (Adichie, 2009) of rape as the worst thing that can happen to a woman and something from which one must recover. Diski and Shane instead argue that the discourse surrounding rape and sexual violence needs to expand to incorporate diverse experiences of, and reactions to, sexual violence. Shane (2012) states:

> No woman's suffering (or lack thereof) should be a referendum on the suffering of others. One woman's lack of trauma need not be construed as a judgment against a woman who struggles to regain her equilibrium after a sexual violation. It is only one

> of many possible responses, all of which are equally valid because rape is an individual's experience, not a collective one, in spite of what current "rape culture" rhetoric often assumes. (para. 20)

This "rape culture" rhetoric Shane refers to, by pigeonholing women into either victim or survivor identities, denies us the right to select our own identities that authentically reflect our individual experiences of sexual violence, of agency, and of self.

Language, identity and agency.

> *How can a woman's experience of sexual violence be defined from her perspective, not as victim of or survivor of, but as a woman with narrative agency, with the opportunity to narrate the experience from the site of her own active body?* (Spry, 1995, para. 2)

I am not a victim, nor am I a survivor. I do not feel comfortable placing myself in either category because both fall drastically short of capturing the essence of who I am, how I feel, and what I have experienced. I do not identify with either label, so why must I be linguistically coerced into adopting one of these two options? Having already suffered sexual violation, I feel twice violated by not being granted the ability, the agency – the *right* – to choose for myself and say, "no, I don't want these labels; they are not me." I want an identity that acknowledges my agency.

Spry (1995) argues "the agency of a woman as meaning maker of her own experience is denied in having to choose between the categories of victim or survivor" (para. 2). Instead, Spry advocates for woman-centered language, stating that the absence of such perpetuates "misunderstanding of sexual violence since women, as intimate knowers of the experience, must struggle to articulate it [on others' terms]" (para. 11). Spry also contends that victim/survivor labels are phallocentric insofar as they define a woman according to what has been done to her – she has been made a victim or made a survivor by another man's actions.

His actions have come to define her person, and thereby "perpetuate and reify the powerful symbol of the powerless woman" (Spry, 1995, para. 16). Not only a powerless woman, I argue, but a woman who has essentially been erased from her own identity. How then, can a woman be expected to 'heal' and self-identify if the labels made available to her inherently deny her of her own agency? Defining oneself by another's actions is hardly *self*-identification; it explicitly suggests that who a woman *is*, is less significant than what has been done to her.

In an attempt to counter the phallocentric and hegemonic construct of the victim/survivor dichotomy, Spry (1995) has developed a "liberatory epistemology," which she defines as a "liberation of ways of knowing, of exploring how we know what we know, the discovery of a 'room [body] of one's own,' a site where a woman might tell a story of sexual violence where she - her body - is the locus of meaning for her experience" (para. 21). Spry has (re)located sexual violence narratives within the context of *women's* embodied stories, feelings and self-determined identities – challenging and empowering women to recognize and utilize their own agency and authority in the telling of their stories.

I appreciate Spry's call to action in developing women-centered language, however, I am left wondering exactly what this looks like. I am unsure if Spry's ambiguity here is a drawback of her theory, or if she is intentionally vague so as to allow women to create their own versions of women-centered language relevant to their individual and unique experiences. Either way, Spry's *liberatory epistemology* fills me with a sense of hope. It also, however, makes me question why her proposed woman-centered language has not yet taken root. It begs the question: why do self-proclaimed empowered women such as myself not overtly challenge oppressive terminology thrust upon us? Why are we still largely limited to victim and survivor narratives in spite of empowered calls to action such as Spry's? Young and Maguire (2003) directly address Spry's work, crediting it with the potential to engender:

> "New" vocabulary. . .that rises above the limitations of rape and sexual assault, victim and survivor. . .one that encapsulates the complex emotions and experiences of women who have been sexually violated. . .[and] empower[s] women to generate their own terminology to self-define their lived experiences. (p. 50)

This new vocabulary is what I feel the need to fight for. Self-generated terminology offers the possibility for identities that do justice to the individuality, diversity and complexity of women and women's experiences (of sexual violence).

However, while recognizing the possibility for the generation of new vocabularies, Young and Maguire also acknowledge the hegemonic power of socially constructed views of sexual violence. They mention that these hegemonic views could be responsible for preventing new vocabularies from being used, vocabularies that could more holistically and authentically encapsulate the experiences of women. How then do we get to a place where our voices and our experiences are expressed and acknowledged on our own terms? I argue that the "remaking of our own languages" (Spry, 1995, para. 27) Spry calls for can only come to fruition through women's commitment to change in the form of owning and sharing our personal stories and experiences.

Sharing Stories and Remaking Our Own Language

In the three years since my rape I have not told my story. I have not shared my experiences or my feelings. During this time I felt as though I existed in terminally stagnant non-definition; I lacked self-identity. It was not until very recently, when I have engaged in dialogue, looked at research, listened to others' stories and shared my own that I have come to feel myself moving forward. I look at the work of Spry (1995) and allow myself to become filled with hope for women who have experienced sexual violence. I feel hope for myself. Spry calls on women like me to (re)claim the language being used to define us. If we claim

this language and (re)determine what does and does not define us, the power imbalances which lay at the heart of sexual violence shift just a little bit more in our direction.

Language, as a social tool, is often used hegemonically to perpetuate the status quo and maintain unequal power dynamics, as is the case with sexual violence. However, language can also be used to emancipate and to effect change; I believe this begins with dialogue, and the storying and sharing of our experiences.

Frank's (2010) quote "[She] absolutely needs a story that will allow [her] to gain both self-recognition and recognition by others, and thus become able to be," (p. 51) emphasizes the importance of stories as constructs that grant individuals opportunities for self-recognition and for recognition by others. Through language and through stories, individuals are able to *be* whomever they choose to present themselves as. Frank defines this process as *narrative identifying*, a reciprocal process of "narratives making available possible identities and people identifying themselves through narratives" (p. 49). In matters of identity and of agency, then, stories matter. The stories and language of rape matters, and are critical tools of self-definition, recognition, emancipation and empowerment for women who have experienced sexual violence.

Summary

In this chapter I have defined, elaborated on, and problematized the victim-survivor binary within the context of sexual violence against women. I have argued for the reclaiming of language and labels used to define and oppress women who have experienced sexual violence as a means of reclaiming (some of the) power that has been stripped from us. Narrative and the storying and sharing of experience, as tools of identity (de)construction, reconstruction and (re)negotiation, play a vital role in this endeavor. In the chapter that follows, I narrate my experience of sexual violence in an attempt to reclaim my own identity, agency and power. I do so on my own terms, in my own words.

Chapter Four: Extending the Possibilities of Truth - A Sexual Violence Narrative

> *It isn't that to have an honorable relationship with you, I have to understand everything, or tell you everything at once, or that I can know, beforehand, everything I need to tell you. It means that most of the time I am eager, longing for the possibility of telling you. That these possibilities may seem frightening, but not destructive to me. That I feel strong enough to hear your tentative and groping words. That we both know we are trying, all the time, to extend the possibilities of truth between us.* (Rich, 1979, pp. 193-194)

The water is hot – too hot – as it hits my upturned face and cascades down my naked body. I crank the tap further to the left, as far as it will go, and brace myself for the scalding flow. I revel in the burn and watch as my skin flushes from pink to red, angry with me for the self-induced assault to my flesh. I ignore the burn, and avert my eyes from my body in disgust. I turn my face back up into the searing water, hoping the heat will numb my face to the tears that stream down. I let the shower water blend with and disguise the water from my eyes, careful not to let my sobs be heard above the thrumming of my watered-down tears hitting the shower floor.

~

Context

It was August 2009 and I had been working as a volunteer schoolteacher in northern Namibia since January of that year. Working under the auspices of an international not for profit organization, I had been placed at a rural high school teaching English, Math and Life Skills to learners in grades eight through twelve. I adored my learners and my teaching position, but my workload was demanding. I was beginning to feel burnt out, and desperately needed an escape from my small town. The Namibian school year begins in January and consists of three terms: January-April, May-August and September-December. Each term is separated by a school holiday, varying in length from two weeks to one month. This particular August, I had made plans to vacation to eastern Namibia, Botswana and Zambia with three fellow volunteers: Ben, Sonia and Natalie[1].

In 'Girlfriend,' the name we had dubbed the 4x4 double cab truck rented for our trip, we made our way through desiccated white desert sands of central Namibia, verdant and burgeoning wetlands of the Okavango Delta and rich, contrasting reds and greens of southern Zambia as we made our way to Livingstone and Victoria Falls, our final holiday destination.

~

The thick Zambian air whips my loose blonde hair into a frenzied halo as I lower Girlfriend's window. I smile and close my eyes. I inhale deeply the heavy smell of red earth, luxuriating in a freedom and deep relaxation I haven't felt in months. Looking over at Sonia, her lips pursed in concentration as she focuses on navigating the uneven and eroding roads while minding erratic traffic on all sides, I am for once grateful to be a bad enough driver that

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[1] The names of individuals and locations portrayed in this story have been changed for the purposes of anonymity.

my friends don't want me behind the wheel. I close my eyes and soak in the sunshine that warms my face through my open window. Deeply content and at peace, I feel exactly where I should be.

We arrive at Rainwater Backpackers' Hostel in Livingstone mid-day with no reservation. The front desk clerk informs us that all multiple-occupancy rooms are fully booked and only private rooms are available. The cost of private accommodation, however, is above and beyond our limited means as volunteers. We strike a compromise with her and secure parking for Girlfriend within the hostel compound, opting to sleep in the two tents that open out of the top of the covered truck bed. Having tented our way across Namibia and Botswana, I have been eagerly anticipating sleeping in real beds for a few nights, but would much rather be able to splurge on food, souvenirs and experiences at the falls than spend that money on private sleeping quarters.

Looking around Rainwater, I am immersed in an oasis of colour and vegetation. Trees, plants and grasses in every shade of green decorate the property and provide a romanticized exotic jungle feel. Pillows and cushions in vibrant colours and patterns lie strewn about the tiled open social area, upon which young and old travelers read, plan, nap and socialize. An enticingly spicy aroma wafts out from the restaurant/bar situated by the pool. The chalkboard sign shows the daily specials, listing reasonably priced hot foods and cool drinks for travelers to enjoy as they plan their daily jaunts. Two young girls are basking in the sun poolside. Their brown skin gleams with tanning oils, their mouths slightly upturned at the corners with lethargic pleasure. Next to them a young couple cuddles on a hammock, each reading their own book. I find myself entranced by the hostel atmosphere. Laid-back and inviting, it is the perfect place to come back to after a day of travelling and adventure.

Sipping on cold Mosi Lager, a locally-brewed Zambian beer, my three friends and I sit at a shaded picnic table leafing through the hostel's Livingstone/Victoria Falls activity guide.

Many of the activities are prohibitively priced for our budgets, but we all zero in on the Sunset Cruise. The brochure reads:

> *Sunset Cruise (or Booze Cruize)*
>
> *Jump on the pontoon style boat and grab your first of many drinks. The boat cruises up the Zambezi River between the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park (Zambia) and the Zambezi National Park (Zimbabwe) where hippos and crocodiles are plenty. Often there are sightings of giraffe, elephant, rhino, zebra and various antelope, especially after a few more drinks! Snacks on the boat and full barbecue dinner afterwards. Be sure to bring your camera, great value for money!* (Jollyboys, n.d.)

Natalie smiles, "Alcohol, food *and* hippos? 'Great value for money?' I'm in." We all cheers in agreement.

~

My worn pink cotton satchel is heavy with souvenirs and gifts for family and friends when I return to the hostel after an eventful day of bartering at the Maramba Market. I am most proud to have gotten my hands on a five billion Zimbabwean dollar note. The Zimbabwean dollar has recently been abandoned as Zimbabwe's national currency, rendering the bills effectually valueless but popular novelty items among tourists. My brother will think this is so neat!

My feet ache from being on them all day and my hairline is wet with sweat. I'm exhausted from bartering with market vendors despite being terrible at it. I relent almost as soon as I begin, deriving no thrill from whittling sellers down to a low price. Ben laughs and tells me I'm a sucker, but I can't be bothered (and feel guilty about) arguing over a few kwacha here or there.

The sweat, sand and exhaustion wash away from my body in the shower. It feels good. I start with cool water and gradually warm it up until the heat pinks and soothes my skin.

Stepping out of the shower I put on a black cotton t-shirt dress and blow-dry my hair. I apply what limited makeup I packed for the trip, luxuriating in the beauty routine I have so rarely engaged in of late. I feel refreshed and rejuvenated – beautiful even – and fully ready for a night of food, drink and fun.

The hostel shuttle to the cruise is packed with young tourists and vacationing volunteers who, like us, are on holiday from their placements in various communities in Southern Africa. We laugh as we collectively share our own personal triumphs, frustrations and anecdotal stories of "life in the bush." The shuttle pulls up to a rustic lodge overlooking the Zambezi. We pay our cruise admission fee, careful to avoid the tourist traps of overpriced knick-knacks that line the walls and display racks of the lodge. Picture packages and mementos of the cruise are offered at a small fortune. We make our way to the riverboat and beeline it to the most populous area of the boat – the bar.

There is something about 'all-you-can-_____' specials that encourage overconsumption. The buffet mentality of getting the most value for your money has led to countless stomachaches that I never seem to learn from. The open bar mentality is no different. No sooner are our glasses emptied than they are filled again. I begin to order two at once to avoid wasting too much of our cruising time in the bar line. My friends and I giggle amongst ourselves and with fellow travelers as we snap pictures of the scenery and ourselves, always keeping one eye looking out for animals as we glide smoothly down the hippo- and croc-infested Zambezi.

The sunset casts warm streaks of red and orange light rippling boldly across the blackening water of the river. Accompanying the fiery horizon and impending dusk are the eerie grunts of elusive hippos lurking in the shadowed reeds along the shore, their voices hardly audible over the now shrill laughs and boisterous conversations of the intoxicated

cruise guests. I am disappointed but not surprised there have been so few wildlife sightings tonight; we are not a discreet bunch.

When the cruise ends we carry the party back from the shuttle to our hostel bar. We are joined by other hostel guests and a few local men, regulars, friends of hostel staff. Our drinking pace has slowed considerably now that we have to pay for each drink we order. Nursing our Mosi Lagers, we attempt to hear one another over the cacophony of local music and American pop songs blasting from the bar speakers.

I mingle and chat my way throughout the group, unfocussed on anyone in particular, drifting instead between lively conversations and curious individuals. The atmosphere is loud, bold and enlivening and I feel as intoxicated by my spirited environment as the spirits themselves. I am drunk, possibly too drunk, but am emboldened to stay out by the friendly familiar and unfamiliar faces around me, and the knowledge that my tent is a mere thirty-seconds away. I don't question my safety within the hostel compound; I am among friends.

I join a conversation between Ben, Sonia and two local men – Oscar and Johnny – whom we had met the evening before at the hostel. We ask them questions about Livingstone: where we can find restaurants with good local food, what they would suggest seeing and doing before we leave, and what to avoid. They answer and field us questions about Namibia and North America. The men flirt openly, casually, with Sonia and me. I notice but, neither uncomfortable nor interested, pretend not to. Tonight I let myself feel sexy, confident and at ease – what's wrong with a little flirtation?

My liquid confidence leads me away from my current conversation to one with a table of travelers from Ireland. I love Irish accents. The poetic gruffness of their expression enthralls me. For once I am doing less talking than listening. Minutes into the conversation, I decide to join my new friends at a nearby disco. Ben and Sonia remain locked in animated conversation with Oscar and Johnny, and Natalie, who has another friend at the hostel, has

retired for the night to another tent. I am with a large group of people – travelers like myself – I feel safe.

At the disco, a mere ten-minute walk from the hostel, the music is prohibitively loud, and disappointingly obscures the melodic lilt of my new friends' accents. Tourists and locals intermingle and dance under colourful lights, gyrating as rays of reds, blues and yellows bounce off of them and seem to rein everyone in close to one another. I seem to be the only one in my party with any real interest in dancing (*why go to the disco if you don't want to dance?*) and we don't stay long before returning to the hostel. Using our gate keys we re-enter the hostel compound to a significantly quieter environment than we had left. Most guests have retired for the night; only a few stragglers remain at the bar. I bid my new friends goodnight and, through the hushed blackness of late night/early morning, make my way to my tent atop our rented truck.

I climb clumsily up the metal stepladder to my tent and fumble with the zipper. I am delighted to see I have a tent to myself tonight – Ben and Sonia must be in the tent next to me, and Natalie off with her other friend. I smile drunkenly to myself at the prospect of sprawling across the tent and sleeping well into the morning undisturbed and alone. Exhausted, I slink myself between the covers, clothes and makeup on, teeth unbrushed. I am asleep *(passed out)* the minute my head hits the pillow.

~

My mind is foggy and my vision blurs as I squint and rub my eyes against the soft early morning light that diffuses through my tent walls. I close my eyes, succumbing to sleep once again and begin to roll over onto my stomach when I feel something – *warm* – resting against my side. *My naked side.* It takes me a second to process. *My naked side? Could I*

have stripped down at some point during the night? Warm? Did Natalie come back to the tent? Oh my god, how mortifying. I nervously roll myself to face the middle of the tent.

A large man is lying there on his stomach, his face angled away from me. The blanket (our tents came equipped with bedding, not sleeping bags) is pulled up only to his waist, exposing a tautly muscled back. I cringe, assuming him to be naked beneath the blanket as well.

Who. . .is. . .th-. . .Oscar?! My mouth gapes open, wide with horror. *Oscar from the hostel bar? What. . .why. . .how is that possible?* I scour my mind for any memory, any image that could shed light on the situation. My brain is a blur of confusion, exhaustion and early-morning hangover.

Did he come back with me? No. . . No? No. I remember zipping my tent from the inside before going to sleep. *Alone. And clothed.*

Alone. AND clothed.

Did I offer him a place to sleep the night before? Earlier in the night? *Could I have? No – why would I?* I wasn't expecting to be alone. . .*and that would not explain my nudity – or his.*

I went to bed alone. And clothed. I know I did.

I can't think of one reasonable explanation why he should be in my tent. With me. Naked.

He should not be here. I should not be naked.

He should not. . .Ohhhhhh. . . . .oh, no. No. No. NO. I begin to process my current situation. *No.* I push the thought away. *No way, not possible. Not me.*

Realizing I have been holding my breath, I shudder and lurch with an explosive exhale. Sharply taking in more air, I hold it in again until it burns inside my chest. The pain of the burn is comforting inside my body, which has gone deathly cold.

Frozen. Paralyzed by shock, fear, confusion. . .I don't know what to do.

Do I wake him? *Of course I wake him.* Do I yell? *How do I. . .what do I say?* I am at a loss. I am shaking. I feel sick. I need him out of my bed. Out of my sight. Away from me. *This needs to not be happening. . .to not have EVER happened.*

I poke Oscar in the shoulder. He doesn't move. A little bit harder. Nothing. I give his shoulder a shove. I pull my hand violently away after each touch as though touching a hot stove, afraid of getting burned. I'm afraid to wake him – *afraid of what will happen when he wakes.* What other choice do I have? He can't stay here. He cannot be here. *Alone. With me. Naked.* I shove him, hard, once more. He groans and reaches his left hand to my side, placing it there. . .*affectionately? Why is he touching me?* I squirm and push his hand away frantically.

"*Hey*," I hiss, shoving him once more, "get out." It sounds more like a request than an order.

Is he *actually* sleeping, or ignoring me?

"*Oscar*!". . . "Oscar. Hey. Out. Get out! Get up. . .get out! *Get out!*" Hearing the shrill panic rising in my voice makes me flinch. My stomach is gripped in a tight fist of fear and desperation, squeezing. *Is it suffocating me or holding me together?*

"Mmmm. . .?" he groans and shifts like someone mildly disturbed and annoyed by my feeble attack.

My voice is shrill but hushed so as not to draw attention to myself and the goings-on in my tent. I don't know whom I am trying to protect in so doing, Oscar or myself.

"Get. Out." I sound firmer this time, my shaking only minimally audible. He is awake. I know he is. But he isn't looking at me; his face is turned away. Why doesn't he look at me? *Is he hiding a look of guilt, his face betraying his shame? Or worse – so much worse – a contented smile?* I am relieved he is turned away so I don't have to find out – I don't think I could handle looking at his face right now. Oscar groans again against my protesting prods, pretending not to understand what I am saying. *I refuse to give up.* I am shaking, I am on the verge of tears, and I need him far away. *So, so far away.*

"Get out, get out, *get out*!!" I shove him more aggressively with each exclamation.

He rolls over, eyes closed, and reaches for me, pulling my body to him. I cringe and spastically push against him. His touch burns with a carnal, possessive heat. I squeeze my eyes shut and push harder against him. He doesn't let go.

Oscar holds me to him with one hand while his other hand starts to wander. My shoulder, down to my breast, across my stomach. I squirm against him. For the first time this morning I feel genuinely afraid. I push my hands against his chest with as much force as I can muster.

"Baby. . .you are so beautiful. . ." *I feel sick.*

"Nooo. . .*ouhhhh*. . .get out. Get out. Don't touch me. Oh my god. Please go. Please, please, *please* leave."

He finally releases me. I don't open my eyes. My head is turned away with my eyes squeezed so tightly shut that no tears can escape and no light gets in.

He touches me again, his hand on my shoulder. I shrink away and swat at him, my eyes still shut. "No!" *Why is he trying so hard to. . .to what? Comfort me? Convince me to let him stay? Is he waiting for me to embrace his forceful, unwanted affection? Why won't he just go?* These questions overwhelm me – questions to which I'm sure I don't actually want the answers.

I don't know how long this goes on for – probably only mere minutes – before I can hear him shuffling about in the tent, gathering his clothes. The tent sways slightly as he shuffles into his pants. I hear the tent zipper open. At this point I am lying facing the side of the tent. I am clutching tightly to my knees in the fetal position, trembling, eyes closed so tightly my eyelids hurt. I hear the soft *zzzz*. . . of the zipper close behind Oscar and listen to the thud of his feet as he descends down the tent ladder. When I am sure he is gone I release a shaky breath.

~

For a long time I just lay here staring, unblinking, at the tent wall. I don't cry because I don't know what to feel; my mind can't seem to settle on one emotion. I am simultaneously embarrassed, terrified, angry, confused – terrified and angry that I *am* confused, that I have no memory of anything from the time I went to bed (alone) to the time I woke up (*not at all alone*). *How could I forget something like this? How could I have gone to bed clothed, woken up naked, and not remember? How is this possible?* Over and over again I search my mind for something – a scent, an image, a voice, a sensation – anything to jog my memory, that could help me piece together what just happened. I search my mind, over and over, and still I have no recollection of Oscar entering my tent, the removal of my clothes, or anything that happened thereafter.

Oh god. . .thereafter. Ohhh. . . . Up until this point I had barely allowed my mind to wander much past the removal of my clothes. I hadn't thought – *was I raped? – can I call it that? Is it still rape if I can't remember? Could he have done that to me, passed out? Without me waking up? Does it feel like I had sex against my will? While passed out? What would that even feel like? What if I did wake up and I just don't remember?* I feel sick. I feel sick and I feel dirty and my body is shaking. *I can't lie here like this – naked and shaking.* I locate last night's clothing, strewn about at the foot of the tent and put it on. I unzip my tent door slowly and peek out to make sure Oscar isn't anywhere nearby. I slink out of my tent, grab my toiletry bag and a change of clothes from our truck, and scurry to the women's washroom, needing desperately to wash this all away.

~

The water is hot – too hot – as it hits my upturned face and cascades down my naked body. I crank the tap further to the left, as far as it will go, and brace myself for the scalding flow. I revel in the burn and watch as my skin flushes from pink to red, angry with me for the self-induced assault to my flesh. I ignore the burn, and avert my eyes from my body in disgust. I turn my face back up into the searing water, hoping the heat will numb my face to the tears that stream down. I let the shower water blend with and disguise the water from my eyes, careful not to let my sobs be heard above the thrumming of my watered-down tears hitting the shower floor.

My body heaves violently with my sobs. I continue to shake, chilled despite the hot water, and I wrap my arms around myself. I rock back and forth and run my hands over my body, first rubbing, massaging, and then clutching, scratching, digging my nails in, anything to

evoke sensation that might distract me from the agony inside my mind. My body feels neither pain nor comfort; I feel like I am touching someone else's body, a body strange to me. *A body that has been touched by unwelcome hands.*

I feel a strange resentment to this blotchy-red body beneath my hands. I resent my flesh for not searing under Oscar's touch last night, for not alerting me of his presence, for not denying him access to me – for so complicitly allowing him to do this to me, to turn me into this sobbing mess beneath a scalding shower. I feel so betrayed by my own body in this moment. It has failed to protect me and has exposed me for what I am – vulnerable and weak. *Disgusting.*

I don't have memory of sex – I don't have memory of what happened at all. My mind can't recall, but my body knows. Betrayer that it is – it knows. And, if I am honest with myself, I know. I don't want to admit it, but I *know*. As if by phantom memory I can *feel* his hands on me, his body on me, in me. I lurch, convinced I might vomit, but nothing comes up. I turn off the water, still feeling chilled, still shaking. I dress quickly and, keeping my head down to avoid eye contact with anyone, make my way back to my tent.

I take an uneasy breath as I climb up the tent ladder and zip myself into what now feels like my own personal hell. I begin to tear the tent apart. Throwing all blankets and belongings to one side of the tent, I run my hands along the tent floor, corner to corner. I toss everything to the other side and run my hands underneath where the blankets had just been. *Nothing*. I shake out the blankets. I shake out old clothes. I run my hands along the floors again. I search tent pockets. *Nothing*. I do all of this over again. There is no sign of condom use. No packet; no used condom. It takes me a moment to absorb the severity of my situation. With no evidence of condom use – and no firm recollection of last night's events on which to rely – I

realize that my current situation has turned into so much more than "just" a violation of my body, more than my mental and emotional anguish; I need to see a doctor.

~

I run into Sonia outside my tent as I slink down the ladder. My face betrays me before any words come out that something is wrong. When Sonia asks, I try to deny it. I avert my eyes, already starting to tremble with the welling of tears. She grabs my arm, gently, and asks me again, "What's *wrong*, Jen? Are you okay? What happened?"

Eyes downcast – I can't look at her – I struggle with the decision to tell her what has happened. Can I say the words out loud, without completely falling to pieces? With a sharp inhale I begin to give a shaky recount of last night's and this morning's events. I struggle to put coherent thoughts together, finding it so hard to tell a story that I hardly know myself. My voice is barely more than a hushed whisper and Sonia huddles in close to me, hand on my arm, as we lean against our truck. She doesn't say anything as I stammer through what I both think and know to be true. I avoid using the word rape. I don't *avoid* it – *I can't say it.* The word sits on the tip of my tongue, at the forefront of my mind, but refuses to leave my lips. It sounds too. . .harsh. Too pitiful. Too certain, too accusatory to be used by someone with fuzzy and fallible recollection. How can I use a word like that when I have no memory to back up my allegation? Do I even *deserve* to use that word?

I don't have to say it. Sonia says it first, "Jen. . .you were raped." It isn't a question. I shake my head to deny what we both know to be true.

"No. . .I wouldn't say. . .*that*." The word rape is so harsh and sharp I don't want it on my tongue. I don't want to be associated with that word – the stigma, the connotations. *I'm not that girl.* I can't say – can hardly think – that word. My tears are falling freely now and my shoulders heave forward with a sob.

"Jen. . .oh. . ." Sonia pulls me close and rubs my back, absorbing my heaving sobs and allowing my tears to roll down her shoulder.

~

When Sonia calls Ben and Natalie together with us I can't bring myself to tell the story again. Sonia quietly fills them in on what I have just told her. I stand quietly and look at my shoes, my fingernails, the fence of the hostel compound, anything but into the eyes of my friends. I am so deeply appalled, embarrassed, *ashamed*.

I am still pretending to be mesmerized by the hostel fence when Ben takes my hand and reiterates what Sonia had said earlier. *There's that awful R word again.* I cringe at Ben's gentle assertion that I had been raped. I risk a quick look at him, not wanting to lose the composure I have so recently regained. His eyes are soft, and it takes a few heavy seconds before I am able to break eye contact and resume my false fascination with my surroundings.

"Jen," Ben's words are tentative and uneasy, "there's something you need to know." My eyes jerk up to his face; his eyes are now the ones turned away, down to his shoes. *What could he possibly know about what happened that I don't?* I wait for him to continue. I am holding my breath, not sure what to expect, not sure I want to hear what he has to say.

Slowly, his face tinged with shame, Ben tells me of how Oscar had attempted to enter Sonia's tent earlier last night. He had caught Oscar off guard when he had unzipped the tent from the inside, finding Oscar perched on the tent ladder. Oscar had asked Ben to let him into the tent, wanting "just to touch" Sonia, asleep. Ben continues, telling me that, at the time, he had offhandedly refused this request, telling Oscar to go away, and dismissed the incident as drunken nonsense. He had thought nothing of it. He hadn't thought of me, alone, in the next tent over. *Was I in my tent at that time? Or did Oscar see me come back last night, alone? Was he watching me? Did he wait for me?* I shiver.

Ben's eyes are full of anguish when he apologizes, profusely, to me. He tells me that it had never occurred to him that Oscar might try to come into my tent. He says he's sorry he didn't think to warn or look out for me.

The first thing I feel is pity for Ben, for his pain and for the guilt he is inflicting on himself in this moment. I feel pity, and at the same time a twinge of resentment towards him for not preventing this from happening to me. I realize that nothing about what happened last night is remotely his fault, and tell him this, but it feels good to know that someone – anyone – else is hurting too, just a little bit. It makes my current emptiness just a little less lonely.

Ben is the one who decides that the hostel security needs to be informed about what happened. It hadn't occurred to me. Of course they do. *Do they?* If Oscar had tried Sonia's tent, then had entered mine, are other women at risk? Has this happened to other women? What responsibility do I have to report this? Either way, it doesn't seem to be up for debate. I'm too exhausted – emotionally, mentally, physically – to really care. Ben approaches the front desk and speaks to the girl there in a hushed voice. She looks over his shoulder at me, flanked protectively by Sonia and Natalie, and then looks away. I see her nod and reach for the cordless phone on her desk. Moments later we are met by Ray, head of security at Rainwater. He greets us and ushers us into a private hostel suite. *So this is what I could have paid to stay in.* I can't help but smile sardonically – *the expense doesn't seem so unreasonable now.* It is a comfortable room with a queen-sized bed, over which looms a knotted mosquito net. Along the wall at the foot of the bed is a small wooden table with two chairs. The four of us clamber onto the bed. Ray picks up one of the chairs, turns it around, and sits on it backwards, facing us. He's a large man with large, round features. I am intimidated, not by him physically, so much as what he represents, and why

we're all here. That, and just the thought of having to go over the raw details of last night/this morning (*again*) fills me with dread.

Ray nods his head in my direction and instructs me to start from the beginning. His voice is deep and stern, but comforting in a way I can't quite put my finger on. This time, Sonia can't do my talking for me. I stammer once more through what I remember from last night and my experience this morning. I manage to maintain eye contact with Ray when I speak. I want to see his reaction. I want to seem. . .credible. With every word I speak I am terrified that he won't believe me. I watch his face for signs of judgment. I wait for him to call me a slut and a liar. I wait for him to demand proof. He says nothing, and his face betrays no emotion. I can't decide if I want to know his thoughts or not.

When I am done talking the air is heavy with pregnant pause. We all seem to be waiting for someone else to speak. Ray's eyes don't stray from my face once I stop talking. *Is he waiting for me to break eye contact? If I look away first will he assume that I am lying? Does he even believe me to begin with?*

He shifts in his chair; its wooden legs scrape cacophonously against the concrete floor, making me flinch. *Get a grip.* Ray looks about as uncomfortable as I feel; *or am I projecting my insecurities onto him?*

"Is there anything else?" he asks.

I am dumbfounded. *Is there – should there be – anything else? What am I leaving out?*

". . .no?" I immediately wish I sounded more sure of myself. "No."

More silence.

Ray shuffles. For some reason he *is* uncomfortable. "We've had. . .*complaints*. . .about Oscar before…"

Complaints?? I want to ask, but remain silent. *What does that mean? Have other women come forward before? If so, why hasn't he been stopped? Could this – should this – have been prevented?* I should be angry. I should be hammering Ray with questions and accusations. But I don't. I just sit and endure the onslaught of questions pounding inside my head. Under other circumstances I would say something – why not now? What has changed?

"I'll make sure he's no longer welcome inside the compound. I'm not exactly sure what can be done, but I'll personally take you to the police station and anywhere else you need to g–"

"No!" My refusal is out of my mouth before I realize, "No, I don't want to go to the police." The idea terrifies me immediately. How can I go to the police when I don't even have working memory of the assault? How can I relive the awful feeling of waking up all over again – for the *fourth* time today? No. No police. I don't want anyone else involved, anyone else *to know.* I'm on *vacation* for god's sake; the last thing I need is to be involved in a police investigation in Zambia.

Sonia grabs onto my hand and holds it between both of hers.

Ray's expression softens. "I understand. It would be helpful though for my – the hostel's – purposes, for keeping him out of the compound. And also for you, in case, later, you change your mind. You don't want to look back on this and *wish* you had reported him. This is important."

Important for whom? I am processing his words, weighing my options, deciding what to do, when he says, "And afterwards I'll take you to the hospital. For a rape test, they will want a police report."

I look up at him abruptly. *There's that R word, again.* He uses it so matter-of-factly, without judgment. I think. It hurts to hear out loud thoughts I've been suppressing all day. Rape. Rape test. Police. Hospital. I know (*think?*) Ray is right. I need to (*ought to?*) do this. I tell myself it's not for him – it's for me. *Is it? Do I believe that?* I can feel all eyes in the room on me. I nod okay. I'll go.

~

Everyone is quiet on the way to the police station. Ray expertly navigates the busy streets of Livingstone in the white hostel van while the four of us look out our windows. I hug my body tightly and am grateful for the silence. I don't want to talk. My nerves hold me paralyzed, terrified of what lies ahead, and while I had tried to convince my friends to stay behind and enjoy their day in town, I am thankful they insisted on coming. I stare out the window, seeing nothing, unable to focus on the bold colors of vendors' stands, tourists and locals smiling and laughing, shouting and bartering. This moment, this day, my entire world, is a blur. I can't even call it *my* world – it's all so foreign. This isn't my life. I'm not the girl who gets raped. I'm not the pathetic ghost of a creature I see reflected back at me in the van window, her eyes dull and empty. I don't recognize her. I don't *like* her. *How can I possibly be her?*

The van stops abruptly, shaking me from my thoughts. I focus on the building outside of my window. At one point in time was probably white, but is now graying and yellowing with

age, the paint having been stained, peeled and chipped away over the years. The police station. I'm not ready to be here. I'm not ready to do this yet.

Ray gets out of the driver's seat and slides open the van door. He suggests I come with him alone. It's best for the others to wait outside, he says. My friends look at me expectantly, waiting for my reaction. Do I want them inside with me? Do I want them to see this? I decide that I don't. I can do this, should do this, on my own. *I got myself into this mess after all.*

I smile weakly, for them, and tell them I'll be fine. *Will I?* I allow Ray to lead me into the station. I just want this to be over, and it hasn't even begun.

Despite the heavy, wet heat of the day, I get a chill walking into the police station. Two women officers are sitting at the front desk. Both of their heads are bowed over their cell phones, thumbs deftly maneuvering over the buttons. In unison they look up as Ray and I approach. Their faces are as unwelcoming as the stale air and poor fluorescent lighting that somehow make the inside of this building seem darker rather than lighter, the shadows harsh and foreboding.

For a moment, nothing is said. I don't know how to begin. The officers say nothing, and look at me impatiently. I'm frozen. *How do I begin? Where do I begin?* Ray puts a sympathetic hand on my shoulder and speaks on my behalf. The officers eye me suspiciously; their faces betray nothing as they listen to Ray recount last night's – today's – events. My eyes flit from one officer, to the other, to Ray and back again. I feel so intimidated and stupid. *So stupid.* Ashamed. *I can't even speak for myself.* I can't bear sustained eye contact.

When Ray finishes talking, silence returns. I can feel myself being assessed and weighed suspiciously by two pairs of eyes. The officers' silence is paralyzing. I continue to stand, eyes shifting, waiting for the deafening quiet to be broken.

Finally, "you need to make a statement," the officer on the right says to me. She has a commanding voice too big for her slight frame and it catches me off guard. "Come around here."

She motions around the side of the front desk and nods towards a small plastic chair next to the stools that the two officers are stooped upon, indicating for me to sit down. I make my way behind the desk and do as I am told. When I sit my head is a full two-to-three feet lower than the officers'. I feel even more insignificant than I had just a few moments ago, something I didn't think was possible. *I can't possibly get smaller.*

"Ray. . .he really told you everything that happened. I don't have anything else to say. It's really not important. It's nothing. I'm fine. I can just go–"

"If you want to make a statement, it must come from you. Not someone else. That's why it's called a *personal* statement." The officer's condescension is a slap in the face. *Doesn't she realize I'm already down?*

I pause. Nod. "Well, I. . .am not really sure I want to make a statement. I guess I just want this on record? That's all."

"If it's on record, then it *is* a statement. Either you want to do this or you do not. If you want to press charges–"

Oh hell no. Not if it requires any more conversations like this. "I don't want to press charges." I look to Ray, my eyes wide with panic. "Ray, I don't want to press charges." *Why do I feel the need for his approval?*

He nods at me, and tells me that it is best to at least have it on record, that everything else can be decided later. His voice is kind, but stern. *Since when have I ever allowed someone to make my decisions for me? Is this who I am now? A puppet, a shadow of myself?* But I don't protest, instead, I nod and look up at the officers. The one on the left has a pad of paper in her hand. The other sits with her hands between her knees. She is tall, and looms over me from her perch with unconcealed apathy.

I recount my story the best as I can for what seems like the hundredth time today. *Hundredth* is hardly an exaggeration; it has been cycling, unrelentingly, through my head every waking moment since this morning.

The officers remain silent as I talk. It isn't the comforting silence of a captive, sympathetic audience; it is a cold silence, and only makes me more nervous. I can hear my voice shaking and my words running together, but I can't help myself. Does the fact that I am so obviously nervous make me seem less credible? *Is my story even believable?* I'm not sure.

One officer takes brief notes on her pad of paper every so often. The other has moved her hands from between her knees, and is now playing with her cell phone – *texting? Is what I am saying that boring, that unimportant? My rape doesn't even deserve the attention of the police officer stooped in front of me?* When I finally finish talking, the officers say nothing. They do nothing. They just look at me – through me. They look at each other, at their notes, their phones. They ruminate on the toothpicks in the corner of their mouths. I focus on their twirling toothpicks instead of looking in their eyes.

Intimidating, condemnatory silence.

I embody humiliation. Shame. *A stupid tourist; a stupid girl.* I can hear their eyes screaming these words at me, cutting through the silence of their mouths and inflicting as

much pain as any verbal insult. I wonder if they hear my story a lot. *Am I a broken record? Another tourist crying wolf? Crying rape? A privileged white girl on vacation, unwilling to take responsibility for her actions?* I can hardly blame the officers for their hostility towards me and my loosely formed accusations. *Would I believe me?*

Eventually, "Well, since you don't know *Oscar's* last name, and *don't remember* most of the details, it would be difficult to press charges. . ." the officer with the pad of paper says, her voice trailing off. I wait for her to finish her thought, to give me encouragement, advice, names of people to contact. . .anything. Nope. More silence. *That was all she could come up with?* I feel like she hasn't listened to a thing I've said. I look to the other officer, who continues to play on her cell phone.

I feel rejected and insignificant, and for some reason, this invalidation cuts deeper than the incident I'm here to report. I can't be here any longer. I stand, wanting to rage, wanting to scream, knowing all that I had just said hadn't actually been heard. That all of my pain doesn't actually matter. *What was the point of all this?*

". . .I said I don't want to press charges. The only reason I'm here. . ." *is because Ray made me come,* ". . .is so this will be on record. Just. . .in case," I stammer. My voice is barely audible. Pathetic. I disgust myself. *If I didn't get so drunk last night I wouldn't be here right now. I made myself such an easy target. I deserve all of this – I deserve what I got. I deserve what I'm getting.*

"Can I go now?"

The officer thrusts her pad of paper at me.

"Write down what you told us then sign your name at the bottom and date it."

For a second I am stunned into silence. "Are you *fucking* serious?" *She couldn't have had me do this earlier? While I was explaining it all, perhaps? Had she not just been taking notes? Will this never end?*

"No." I'm so enraged I catch myself almost laughing. This is a joke. If it all weren't so painful this would almost be funny.

The officer says nothing, completely unfazed by my little outburst. She continues to hold the pad of paper out in front of me. Out of patience, out of caring, I snatch the pad away and briskly, illegibly, jot down my most pertinent memories of what had happened. *I doubt anyone will read this anyway, so what does it matter?* I sign my name and date it.

In one swift movement I thrust – practically throw – the pen and pad at the officer and stand up from my belittling seat. As I walk out – resisting the urge to run – I don't look back. Tears are welling in my eyes, threatening to compromise my last shred of composure. I can't afford to give the officers the privilege of seeing me break. Not completely. I'm broken enough as it is.

~

My experience at the hospital is somewhat better, but barely. It is an interminable saga of waiting in one long lineup only to reach the front and then be redirected to a different long lineup in different wing. When I finally find myself sitting on an examination table I am told that the doctor who deals with rape kits and sexual assault is working at a different compound on the other side of town. I am exhausted. Discouraged. Hung over. But I need to see a doctor. This, I need for me.

Another seemingly long drive later, our van arrives at the other medical compound, a small, one-story building with closed blinds and a dusty – empty – parking lot. Dust swirls in the slow breeze in quiet desolation like a scene from an old Western. There isn't a soul in sight. I know what I am going to find, but persist in spite of myself.

Motivated by sheer desperation, I bang on the building doors – the front door, side doors, any doors I can get my hands on. I try the handles. Locked.

I tap on windows. I try to peek between the shutters. Darkness.

I circle the building. I do it again. *Maybe he's (she's?) here. Maybe the staff is on a break. It's midday; maybe they're taking a siesta.* It is painfully obvious that no one is here. It looks as though no one has been here all day. It's Saturday. Maybe they don't work weekends. *This couldn't, at the very least, have happened on a weekday? Fucking perfect.*

All day this is all I wanted – to see a doctor. A doctor, at the very least, would have – *could have* – answered some of the questions I can't answer for myself.

I turn back to the van, this time fully, overwhelmingly, dejected. I am so tired. I am tired of hauling my shame and humiliation throughout town, having it compound with every disappointing stop. I don't have the room in my heart for any more disappointment. I'm done.

In the van there are no words. No one offers words of encouragement, or suggests another destination. None of us seem to know what to do. I am tottering precariously on the verge of completely breaking down. For reasons I don't know – *am I too proud? afraid I'll never be able to stop once I start?* – I refuse to allow that to happen. Not here. Not now. Later. Alone.

I tell Ray to forget about the doctor. I tell him I can't do anymore. I can't try somewhere else. Something about the flatness of my voice, or the emptiness of my eyes, or the defeated slump of my shoulders convinces him that I mean it – that I quite literally feel as though I have nothing left in me. He nods reluctantly.

"On the condition," he says, "that we stop at a pharmacy on the way back."

I begin to object, but he cuts me off. "Most pharmacists will not give pill prescriptions or medication without a doctor's note, but I know a man who might help. He is very good."

I slump back in my seat, a gesture Ray seems to interpret as resigned agreement. Whatever. It's not like I've made any of my own decisions today anyway – why start now?

~

My stomach tightens when we pull up in front of a small pharmacy with a blue and white sign and an open front door. *Well, at least it's open*, I think, sarcastically, *that's a start*. With what seems like the very last of my resolve, I will myself out of the van and enter the pharmacy with Ray at my flank, as he has been all day. I have to admit I am grateful to him. His supportive and determined presence has been – while overbearing – somewhat of a comfort to me. I'm surprised by how much I've come to need his gentle firmness today. I can't help but wonder if he's been through all this before.

The pharmacist looks up from his work behind the counter and smiles. He has the type of smile that reaches right up to the eyes, and I can tell immediately from his laugh lines that this is a man who has laughed heartily, and often, over his years. His feels like the first genuine smile I have seen all day, and for an ephemeral moment I catch myself feeling at ease. Ray greets the man, and when he looks at me, I offer a (likely unconvincing) tight-lipped smile. Once again, I let Ray take the lead in explaining my situation. *Have I always been so. . passive? I've never struggled with speaking for myself before. Is this the new me? The 'post-rape' me. Voiceless.*

The pharmacist nods as he listens to Ray. I can feel his eyes searching my face. Not with suspicion, though. With. . .empathy? The kindness in his eyes and the sincere warmth of his concern give me conflicting sensations of comfort and grief. I feel like in this moment I could break down and cry, somehow knowing that he – the pharmacist – wouldn't mind. *He looks like the type of man who knows how to give a good hug.* Despite age having grayed his hair and rounded his frame, it is obvious that he's strong and capable of really giving a good squeeze. *I could use a good squeeze.*

This man listens respectfully as Ray recounts my situation, his face betraying no judgment. When Ray finishes, the pharmacist briefly places his hand over my forearms, which are folded protectively on the countertop, and gives a reassuring nod before retrieving items from behind the counter. No questions asked. Relief courses through me. On the stark white countertop he places emergency contraceptives and a month's prescription of antiretrovirals. I've never taken antiretrovirals before. I never assumed I'd ever have to. However, the HIV infection rate of Zambia is far too high to avoid such a precaution.

The pharmacist explains when to take the pills and the required doses. He answers all of my questions and tells me that while the pills will greatly minimize my risk of contracting HIV, they are not one hundred percent effective. I nod, in a terrified daze, when he tells I needed to wait a minimum of forty days to be tested for HIV. That is how long it takes for the test to be most accurate. My stomach drops. *Forty days??? That's WAY too long not to know. How will I survive living in the dark for so long?* I shiver, imagining forty days of wondering every minute of every day, if I could be infected.

I continue to nod as he speaks. By now my head is moving automatically, like a bobble head doll sitting on the dashboard of a car heading for a crash. *A big crash.* I hear only

fragments of the pharmacist's words now through my inner monologue. *HIV. . .AIDS. . .Oh god. . .Forty days. . .Oh god. . .Possibility of infection. .* .Hearing the words and seeing the pills placed in front of me make the possibility of infection so much more real than I had ever considered earlier. Earlier it was just an abstraction. It was something to be concerned with, to deal with and alleviate concern, and to move on from. The possibility now is far too real. I had foolishly, somehow, thought that I could rule out the possibility of infection immediately. *I can physically feel my last shred of optimism dissipating from my system. Why would I have thought that? Wishful thinking? I'm smarter than that.*

Obviously I'm not smarter than that. I wouldn't be in this situation if I were.

The pills cost me fifty American dollars – a small price to pay in the grand scheme of things, but pricey for a girl living each month on a volunteer stipend. An exorbitant amount by local standards. *How could the average local woman afford that? Could she?* This realization strikes me hard – for the first time today I am acutely aware of my privilege, and, given the situation, how lucky I really am. I have access. I have support. I have means.

I thank the pharmacist and offer him the best (most genuine) smile I can muster. I slip the pills into my bag and exit the pharmacy. I raise my face to the sky and with one last deep inhale and shaky exhale I return to my friends. I mask my true face (my fears, pain, anger and confusion) with a fake, too-big smile and precarious stoicism, ready to pretend – *for my friends' sake or my own?* – I am okay. I say it until I believe it. *I am okay.*

~

Epilogue

The days and weeks following my rape (I still cringe every time I say 'my rape.' I still have a hard time accepting it as my reality) I did my very best to be okay. *What happened, happened. . .there's no point in making a bigger deal out of it than necessary.* These were assertions I told myself constantly, nonchalantly, my inner monologues, the mantras that I would repeat just to hear words inside my head, to keep my mind busy. To prevent my mind from going places I didn't want it to go.

When my mind was quiet I mostly felt empty. I wasn't scared or panic-stricken. I didn't hate or fear men. I just felt empty. *Void of substance.* It was like I had lost a part of myself I couldn't identify, but was painfully aware of its absence.

What I couldn't understand though, was why if I was missing something, did I feel so *heavy*? The weight that had befallen my shoulders – the guilt, shame and humiliation that my rape plagued me with – seemed too large, too overwhelming to try and relieve myself of. I was constantly operating from beneath this invisible, oppressive force that I felt too powerless to shake.

My friends had each pulled me aside individually, letting me know they were there if I needed to talk. Each time I would smile and thank them, promising to take them up on their gracious offers, with no intentions of ever doing so. I had no intention of talking about my experience at all. What was there to say? I couldn't make sense of it in my own mind; how was I supposed to talk to someone else about it? If I could just continue smiling, if I could convince my friends that I was fine, that *no*, I didn't feel the need to talk about it, then perhaps I would eventually convince myself. In a lot of ways I think I did convince myself. If

I put on a brave face and a strong front eventually I would *have to* internalize that strength. *Right?*

With time, over the course of weeks and months after leaving Zambia, the invisible weight seemed to lessen – *or perhaps I just became stronger?* – and I felt able to carry out my days closer to how I had done before my trip. The weight lessened, but was never completely alleviated.

Today, over three years since my experience, I still have moments, days, periods of heaviness. We all have our own heaviness. And that's okay. But I think, when we feel heavy, we tend to forget that we are deserving of lightness too. Reading others' shared experiences of sexual violence has alleviated some of the weight that restricts me. By sharing this story I am contributing my experience to the growing body of sexual violence narratives in solidarity with other women who might similarly be struggling under the weight of their experiences. In doing so, I hope to further shed some of the shame and fear that weighs me down, and begin to feel lighter. Maybe not at first, maybe not for a while, but the possibility of a future lightness is worth the risk. Perhaps there can be lightness in airing my experience letting my story breathe.

I *am* okay. But I think I deserve – *we deserve* – to be more than that.

Summary

In this chapter I have shared my personal narrative of sexual violence. It is important for me to assert that while my experience did occur in Zambia, what happened to me is not a reflection on the culture, people, or country of Zambia itself. My experience is not unique. It is not unique to Zambia. It is, however, uniquely mine insofar as it represents my own experiences, which I have aimed to portray as fairly and candidly as one can when talking about oneself. My story is just one example of one rape in one place at one time. It is nothing more than that, and I do not intend for it to be interpreted in any other way.

In Chapter Five I reflect on my narrative and on the writing and remembering processes that brought my narrative into being. I explore questions and insights exposed and generated by my narrative, as well as discuss the importance and implications of the inclusion of sexual violence narratives within education.

Chapter Five: Creating Spaces - Naming the Unnamed and Speaking the Unspeakable

> *Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language – this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable.* (Rich, 1979, p. 199)

In this chapter I reflect on my narrative. I analyze and deconstruct the narrative itself as well as the negative spaces that exist between my words, in which lie the things I struggled to communicate, my anxieties during the writing process, and the things I didn't say. Engaging in this critical reflexivity I am able to name, depict and uncensor previously unspoken – unspeakable – memories, feelings and images from my experience of sexual violence.

Considerable Ease and Discomfort

I sit down to write. The cursor blinks on the page – is it encouraging or taunting today? I inhale deeply, gathering myself. This part always makes me tense, nervous. I'm unsure of what is going to flow from my fingertips, and how I'm going to feel about it. Am I representing myself accurately? Am I allowing my present self to be true to who I was in this story, my past self? What does the me in my narrative say about the me I am today, and vice versa? Am I okay with what my narrative says about me, how vulnerable and open to interpretation – to judgment – it leaves me in the eyes of my reader? In the eyes of myself? Could others' scrutiny of me be any harsher than my own?

This vignette, written as a stream of consciousness at the beginning of one of my writing sessions, depicts some of the questions and anxieties present during the writing of my

story of sexual violence. The questions I ask myself here highlight one dimension of the omnipresent self-doubt felt during the remembering and writing processes through which my narrative was born. However, they also represent tools of inquiry and introspection that have helped guide and inform my process of writing about personal trauma.

Brookes (1992) describes her narrative of sexual violence as being "written with considerable ease, on one hand, and, on the other, with discomfort" (p. 17). Her words very simply, yet accurately, sum up my experience of narrating my experience. At times, words would flow onto the page so effortlessly that I wasn't so much recalling past events as I was reliving them. Other times, the anxiety and discomfort involved in reliving my experience was stifling, silencing and paralyzing. The ebb and flow of ease, struggle and discomfort was, and continues to be, my constant narrative companion.

I have structured this chapter in three sections. First, I explore my process of narrating my experience of sexual violence. Engaging in ambivalent reflexivity, I look at the concerns, anxieties and roadblocks experienced during my writing process and the many questions my narrative has produced. Reflecting on my narrative and my narrative experience, I explore how, or if, my refusal to self-identify as a victim or survivor is reflected, or refuted in my writing. The relationship between narrative and identity is also explored as I (re)negotiate the ways in which I self-identify through story and narrative analysis.

I discuss my process of remembering lived experience as recalled in my narrative, and connect this process to relevant memory research and theory. I critically reflect on my process of remembering and elaborate on what this process looks and feels like. I then address the implications of this self-study for researchers, educators, students, and girls and women who have experienced sexual violence. How does my work factor into the conversation of sexual violence against women and the importance of narrating and sharing experience? What place do narratives and dialogue surrounding violence and trauma have

within education settings? Looking to society and social policy, how can increased access to safe(r) educational spaces in which to discuss sexual violence influence policy and social (mis)understandings of sexual violence?

Ambivalent Self-Reflexivity: Anger, Confusion, Guilt and Self-Blame

My experience of sexual violence is enveloped in guilt and self-blame, shame and self-doubt. Acknowledging these emotions compounds my discomfort and my shame: I know I shouldn't blame myself for my experience. I know that what happened was not my *fault*. But then, why do I feel somehow responsible? Why do I both desire, yet feel somewhat undeserving of compassion for my experience? Why have I allowed shame and doubt to silence me up until now (Brookes, 1992)?

Research has shown that women are more likely to consider nonconsensual sex as rape and allow themselves to be viewed as victims of rape, if their experience fits within the stereotypical rape script in which a woman is raped by a stranger and experiences physical struggle, injury or is threatened with physical harm (Bondurant, 2001; Koss, Dinero, Seibel & Cox, 1988; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011). In contrast, women such as myself who have been sexually violated "by someone they know, or have interacted with socially. . .are more likely to question their own behaviour and assume responsibility for a failed sexual script" (Fonow, Richardson & Wemmerus, 1992, p. 111). Lacking detailed memory of an attack due to alcohol consumption, drugging, or other factors, may cause women to further question their behaviour and their culpability in an attack. I personally am plagued with the question *what if, at the time, it seemed like I wanted it?* I have no reason to believe I would have given my abuser this impression, but I similarly have no evidence to prove otherwise. *If I didn't fight back or resist, what does that say about me? I shouldn't have gotten so drunk. I shouldn't have put myself in that situation. I was stupid. Irresponsible. And thus, responsible?* These questions speak to how deeply entrenched victim blaming is within social

scripts of sexual violence. Everyone is influenced by rape culture and the pervasiveness of victim blaming in our society, regardless of whether one has experienced sexual violence or not.

Recognizing my thoughts, seeing them written on this page is hard for me, and shames me for another reason; I could never conceive of incriminating another woman in her own rape, so how can I, as a strong and educated *feminist*, allow me to victim-blame *myself*? I am ashamed to acknowledge the extent to which I blame myself for my experience, yet I feel utterly incapable of shaking these feelings. Where is my self-compassion? Does society's propensity to victim-blame and to call into question the actions of assaulted women have that much power over me? While I cannot claim these questions to have relevance to anyone else's experience other than my own, I am reminded of Jenny Diski's (2009) haunting words of her own self-victim-blaming: "Nevertheless, for many years, I thought of the incident as 'when I got myself raped'. . .I did figure I was somewhat responsible" (para. 22-23). Why do Jenny and I feel this way?

The guilt I harbour regarding my experience is very much interconnected with my feelings of self-blame. Often, I have felt guilty that my experience of the rape itself was not *worse* than it was, than other rapes I had read about, heard about, or seen portrayed in the media. I came to this uncomfortable realization while storying my sexual violence experience. In a self-reflective note-to-self I wrote:

> *There are moments in sharing my story that I almost wish my rape had been more awful of an experience than it was. I feel that, because my rape wasn't especially 'violent,' or I didn't leave me with bruises, haunted memories of forced entry or fearing for my life, that I am less deserving of feelings of trauma, that my experience is somehow invalid and unworthy of compassion. What happened to me wasn't "that*

bad." There are so many rape stories more horrific than mine – who am I to feel self-pity, or to deserve the sympathy of others?

Because I feel my rape "wasn't that bad," and have conflicting emotions surrounding this internal struggle, I have a hard time accepting a victim identity. I also find myself incapable of identifying as a survivor: I didn't *survive* anything. My experience doesn't feel, to me, like something to have survived from – I never felt as though I was not going to *survive* it. This victim-survivor conflict is present during my narration of, and reflection on my experience of sexual violence. Thus I find it both interesting and necessary to look at how these identities – victim and survivor are or are not represented in my sexual violence narrative.

Playing a role: Writing myself as victim and survivor within my narrative.

When I step outside of my narrative and reflect back on it, I realize the "me" depicted in my narrative seems very much a victim. She is uncertain, scared and ashamed of what has happened to herself. Following her violation, she is withdrawn and passive. She allows those around her to decide what is best for her. Any anger she feels she internalizes and directs at herself. At no point is she asked what she wants: whether she wants to report her assault to the hostel, or to the police, or if she wants to go to the hospital. At no point either, does she really demand a voice. In many ways she is a "pitiful creature" (Mosionier, 1983, p. 168), considered incapable of thinking for herself, and denied agency by those around her. She 'allows' herself to be shamed at the police station and left untreated at the hospital. For her, her rape does not end in the tent; she continues to be raped of her dignity and agency throughout her interactions over the course of the following day (Campbell et al., 2001; Lahn, 2012).

One of my greatest challenges narrating my experience of sexual violence has been remembering myself, and allowing myself to be portrayed in this way, as a victim. I found I

didn't accept the me I was writing about; I didn't *respect* her. I wanted her (me) to have externalized her anger, to assert her wishes, to yell at the police, to be strong, to know it wasn't her (my) *fault*. The anger that I internalized immediately following my violation is, once again, being self-directed here, in my narrative reflection and analysis: *how could I have been so weak*? There is so much at play in this situation, and so much wrong with this propensity for self-directed anger, some of which may stem from my own individual, personal tendency to internalize, but definitely, some of this is socialized. We are all influenced by rape culture (Ogden, 2013) in which victim blaming teaches us women to feel ashamed of and responsible for our victimization. I cited Wood and Rennie (1994) earlier, but I reference them again now because of how relevant their quote is to my current situation: "victims must live and act in a world in which victims are not valued" (p. 137). In my story, the past me very much takes on a victim status. It is a status that was not valued at the time (by Ray, the police officers, or myself) and it is a role that I still struggle to accept seeing myself in now.

Although I do not consider the me in my narrative a survivor, when I reflect on the interactions between my friends and myself at the time, I realize that I very much wanted my friends to see me as such. I desperately wanted my friends to see me as fine and "recovered." Minimizing my emotional response to my rape in front of them was important to me. Seeming fine took precedence over actually *being* fine. Why? Because, while I wanted my friends' support and sympathy to an extent, I didn't want them to pity me, to see me as weak, as a lesser person than I was before the rape. Even at the time, in the moment, I recognized the social devaluation of victimhood and tried to overcompensate by acting as a survivor. The word *acting* is important here because it implies that neither of these identities *were me*; instead, I was playing a role, *performing* these identities as best I knew how (Butler, 1990, 1993). It might, then, be fair to say that in my narrative I did not assume a victim or survivor

identity, so much as enact a performance within the limited boundaries of the social script(s) made available to me: victim or survivor.

Narrative and (re)negotiating my identity.

Prior to embarking on this research, I assumed that narrating my experience of sexual violence would provide me with clarity regarding my identity. I expected the clouds to part, the angels to sing, and for me to *know* precisely how I wanted to move forward, how self- and socially-identify. Needless to say, this hasn't exactly happened. Following the narration of my experience, I find myself perhaps with more questions than when I began, such as: *If I am neither a victim nor survivor, what am I? (Why) do I require definition? Must my experience with sexual violence factor into my identity? What does how I identify say about me, about my experience? About my past, present and future self?*

What I *have* come to understand from my inquiry, however, is why I have struggled so vehemently against being subjected to the victim-survivor identity binary. I have found validation in the renunciation of these labels, lifting a very heavy weight off of my shoulders. I no longer feel stifled and constrained within victim and survivor identity confines, but feel capable of movement through, between, and away from them. Victim and survivor do not define me, but I feel justified in calling on them for support if or when I need them. They are roles I can play, or not play, as I navigate, perform and negotiate my identity(ies), of which my experience of sexual violence is just a part.

Memory and Narrative

(How) can you write that which you don't remember?

One of my biggest anxieties about writing my story of sexual violence is that I am essentially narrating a rape of which I have no specific recollection. I feel that being unconscious and not remembering the physical act of sexual violence, compounds my vulnerability in sharing my story. I am left wondering: *how do I produce an effective and*

credible narrative that does not include the most pivotal event of the story? Can I write that which I don't remember? How does doing so affect the verisimilitude of my story? Does my lack of memory in this regard call into question the memories I do *have surrounding my experience?* These are questions that both shape and confound my inquiry into memory and the remembering of my experience. Here, I explore what my remembering process looks and feels like, and link my process to relevant memory research.

Remembering: An embodied experience.

My process of remembering and recreating memories of my sexual violence experience is not how I would have expected it to be. Before engaging in this inquiry I had preconceived notions of memory recall as a mental exercise that involves effortlessly gathering freely available memories floating about in the mind as well as scouring the murky depths and the darkest corners of memory for forgotten and misplaced snippets of recollection. I have not had the experience I imagined. I discovered that in this case I do not mentally hunt and gather memories so much as emotively cultivate and (re)produce them.

The moments I come to remember most saliently are not so much recalled as they are *felt*. My confusion, anger and self-loathing manifest themselves physically in my gut, inside of me, working their way through my body, mind, and fingertips. It can be a shudder or a chill, or a sharp and blinding contraction. My embodied memory of the morning after my violation, how my emotions were present *inside* of my body are most vivid. Physically and emotionally, I am able to transport myself back into that experience and feel what I felt in those moments. It is around this embodied and felt memory that I build the details of my narrative.

Relying on emotional recall in which I place myself back into my experience emotionally and physically (Ellis, 1997, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), I am able to feel and relive my memory.

Research studies have shown that women's memories of rape and sexual violence tend to be "less clear and vivid, [and] involve less visual detail" (Tromp, Koss, Figueredo & Tharan, 1995, p. 618) than memories of other unpleasant life experiences (Koss et al., 1996). Penn (1998) suggests, "telling [a] story of. . .rape becomes for the woman a physically acted out re-experiencing of the rape. The memories that [accompany] her words [are] so explicit and so dramatic that they could be called, 'embodied'" (p. 302). Given these understandings, it makes sense that I have come to rely on emotional and physical memory of my experience more so than on details of mental and visual recollection.

Fox (2010), in discussing his care giving experience during his father's battle with Alzheimer's disease, elaborates extensively on emotional recall exercises he used to "re-member" his father. Fox made use of dialogue with loved ones and props such as photographs and journal entries to help him "move around in [his] experience" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 230). I do not have props or photographs to aid in recalling and narrating my experience of sexual violence. However, fortunately, I have not felt them to be needed in order to place myself back into my experience. If I close my eyes and allow myself to go there I can feel my memories almost immediately – *the ache of confusion, anger, guilt – hangover*:

> *My mind is a frenzied blur of emotion and sensation as I attempt to recall lost moments, unconscious moments, or helpful details. I am there and I feel it. I shudder and cringe. My shoulders creep up to my ears, my chin tucks, and my body folds in on itself. I become as small as I feel – felt – in that instant.*

What I recall emotionally manifests itself physically in the present, reminiscent of my body's reaction to my experience in the past.

Charlotte Delbo, French writer and Auschwitz survivor, differentiates between what she refers to as intellectual, or reflective, memory and deep, "sense memory" ("mémoire des

sens") (Langer, 1991, his translation of Delbo's *La mémoire et les jours*, 1985). Delbo distinguishes between her ability to recall and easily narrate clear and rational recollections of thinking memory, and her embodied, visceral sensory memory of lived experience, which she claims eludes definition and linguistic expression. Brookes (1992) has similarly reflected on her sexual abuse:

> Mostly, I remember feelings. I remember feeling out-of-control, afraid (of him), unable to breathe, to speak, unable to remember. . .what I do remember most about [my abuse] is locked in body memories which I carry as tension in my body. (p. 27)

It is this sense memory, this memory felt within the body, through which I also most vividly remember my sexual violence experience.

I liken my memory recall process to (re)placing myself in my memory, in my past experience. Mitchell, Strong-Wilson, Pithouse and Allnutt (2011) have suggested that all memory is situated and placed. These places in which our lives are enacted and memories created become "anchor[s] to our memories" (p. 3). By reconnecting to my memoried experience, I re-place myself in Zambia at the hostel in my tent. This re-placement is both mental and embodied, "more evoked than constructed and therefore quite resonant" (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 3).

I differentiate my process of remembering from memory work (Haug et al., 1987). While memory work centers on the reconstruction and social interpretation of (collective or individual) memory, my process of engaging with memory has been much more evocative than reconstructive. I summon and resurface memories that exist within my body; I do not reassemble them in my mind. Also, while engaging with my memory has not been a passive process, I would hardly be able to consider it "work." My memories are embodied, situated within tissue lying just below the surface of my skin. To engage with this memory is to invoke, or to arouse it. It does not require reconstruction, does not need to be recreated or re-

formed within my consciousness. My visceral recall is reflected in the writing of my narrative, especially during the moments in which my embodied memories are particularly salient. These are the moments in which my embodied experience, memory, and narrative truly become entangled, intertwined, and merge into story. Waking up in the tent and my ensuing struggle against Oscar is one such example. This is perhaps the most powerful scene in my narrative and, while it remains the hardest for me to read, it was the easiest to write. I believe much of this scene's power spawns from the clarity of my visceral memory in these moments. By reliving this experience in my body I am able to communicate these moments more effectively in story.

Educational and Socio-political Implications of this Inquiry

Sexual violence against girls and women is a universal and culturally pervasive crime against humanity. It is not a new phenomenon but unfortunately, continues to be a stark, and far too frequent reality for girls and women. Within a North American context, sexual violence continues to be inadequately understood and addressed within education, media and social policy. This reality needs to change. Despite the fact that sexual violence has become a pervasive normalcy within society, the ways in which we talk about sexual violence is not normalized. There needs to be a shift in this type of conversation to promote dialogue and reduce the stigma that envelops sexual violence and those who have experienced it. This shift can be brought about in many ways. Incorporating into the classroom novels or short stories that deal with sexual violence is one such method. Engaging with current events surrounding women's issues, or critically analyzing and discussing healthy and unhealthy portrayals of sex, sexuality and violence within the media are others. Encouraging and participating in inclusive and sensitive discourse about sexual violence is instrumental and necessary within education and pedagogy to bring about long overdue social change.

Sexual violence discourse within education.

Rehtaeh Parsons. Audrie Pott. Steubenville's Jane Doe. These are three school-aged girls whose sexual abuses at the hands of their male peers have very recently made headlines. Following their abuse, each of these girls was incessantly revictimized by their other classmates and peers: bullied, harassed and slut-shamed. Two of these three girls committed suicide in the aftermath of their abuse. The crimes committed against these three young women are tragic, repulsive and inexcusable. They are also indicative of the fact that sexual violence is not adequately addressed within our education systems.

Not everyone may agree that sexual violence discourse and awareness belongs in education settings. Educators may argue that it is not our *jobs* to address sensitive and contentious topics in the classroom, while others argue that education settings are exactly where these discussions need to take place (Horsman, 2005). Horsman (1990, 2005) argues that because experiences of violence negatively influence literacy and learning, resistant discourses must be included in pedagogy in order to challenge and change social perceptions of violence. Additionally, sexual violence education and awareness are important within school and education settings because that is where children and youth receive the bulk of their socialization. The cases of Rehtaeh, Audrie and Jane Doe (and many other unnamed girls), who suffered sexual violence at the hands of their peers are symptomatic of rape culture within our society and thus, our schools.

Valenti (2013) asserts that "boys across North America didn't get the idea to rape and humiliate their female peers out of thin air; they learned it" (para. 9). Children grow up in a social climate that "trivializes violence, demeans girls and women as sex objects, and insists that 'boys will be boys'" (Warwick, 2013, p. 2). In her public appeal to Nova Scotia officials following the suicide of Rehtaeh Parsons, Warwick calls for sex education curricula that promotes healthy ideas of sexuality, teaches media literacy and deconstructs misogynistic

beliefs and behaviours that "dehumanize boys as well as girls" (2013, p. 2). Consent-based education that emphasizes the importance of respecting the boundaries (sexual and non-sexual) of all individuals is another method in which sexual violence can be discussed and deconstructed within education settings (Salisbury, 2013). Shannon Salisbury, a self-described teacher, mom and activist is currently developing a teacher-training model that provides information, lesson plans, resources and teachable moments for educators with the intention of instilling within children and youth the importance of consent, respecting boundaries and deconstructing unhealthy beliefs surrounding the causes, stigmas, effects and language of sexual violence. The language used to talk about sexual violence and rape culture needs to shift in order to allow new vocabularies, relationships and narratives to emerge (Holdsworth, 2013).

I advocate for the inclusion and encouragement of personal narrative within education settings as one possible tool for approaching topics such as sexual violence. While narrative expression can be unpredictable and emotionally charged, this should not be considered a threatening aspect of the genre, so much as garnering within students the potential for social change and fostering deeper self-understanding and empathy for the experiences of others. Personal stories and narratives also connect people and promote solidarity by calling "individuals into groups and [calling] on groups to assert common identities" (Frank, 2010, p. 60). Burdell and Swadener (1999) argue:

> The strength of the more personal nature of [narratives]. . .is that within education, we are working with individual children and youth who are attempting to write their identity. Indeed, personal narratives. . .have long been used in education to evoke perspective taking, compassion, and critique of prevailing "common sense" assumptions and to problematize categories of difference. (p. 25)

Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to this as "ethnographic consciousness" within the classroom. They argue, "when we learn how to open ourselves to ourselves and to each other [through personal narrative], we find it easier to drop some of our resistance to different ideas" (p. 244), which can foster a classroom spirit of collaboration, understanding and openness. This understanding and openness is essential in making schools and education environments safe(r) spaces in which difficult topics such as sexual violence can be discussed, demythologized and destigmatized.

Incorporating discourse about sexual violence and deconstructing the normalcy and misogyny of sexual violence against girls and women can be approached many ways. Engaging with personal narrative within a classroom setting is only one of many possible tools for deconstructing sexual violence within education. While I support the use of narrative and personally feel comfortable with the genre, this may not hold true for everyone. I believe there is no one best method for engaging with topics such as sexual violence. Ultimately, educators need to employ methods with which they are comfortable, and which are authentic to them. Strong-Wilson (2006) advocates for teachers to engage with their own personal narratives and formative stories so as to connect with and reflect upon their own memories and past experiences.

Mitchell et al. (2011) ask the necessary question, "how [as educators] can we delve into emotionally weighted memories of suffering, fear, violence, and hatred without causing further emotional damage?" (p. 6). There is no one straightforward answer to this question therefore I answer Mitchell et al.'s question with one of my own: how can we continue to *refuse* to delve into emotionally weighted subjects when we, as educators, are aware of the continuing suffering, fear, violence, hatred and emotional damage present in the lives of our students?

"Some girls rape easy:" Sexual violence in contemporary politics.

Schools and educational institutions exist within, and are greatly influenced by, socio-political realities. Education settings are not only drastically influenced by social policy, but also are the institutions from which future social and political leaders are produced. There continues to be desperate need for change regarding conceptions of women's rights and sexual violence against women in social policy. This truth was made disturbingly obvious during the 2012 American Presidential campaign. During this campaign, onslaughts of controversial and misogynistic comments were made by influential politicians. In October 2012, former member of the Wisconsin State Assembly, Republican Richard Rivard, when discussing an alleged statutory rape of a school-aged girl by an older male peer said, "some girls rape easy." Rivard claims this statement to have been words of advice passed on to him by his father; however, while he did apologize for his comment in the wake of public outrage, Rivard did not retract his statement (Marley, 2012). Another Republican, former U.S. Representative from Missouri, Todd Akin, argued against abortion in cases of rape by attesting that with "legitimate rape," it is almost impossible for women to become pregnant (Jaco, 2012). "Legitimate rape?" "Some girls rape easy?" Both of these repugnant, ignorant comments are reflective and representative of the victim-blaming rape culture that permeates society and politics today. If these statements made by Rivard and Akin are any indication, we are in desperate need of social change regarding the socio-political status and representation of girls and women in North America. Our role as responsible citizens is to consider the sources of our news, and to take action against those who employ oppressive, pejorative and misogynistic language or whom advocate for sexist policy. Part of taking action as educators, is to educate our children and youth – future educators and policy-makers – about sexual violence and to equip them with the information and empathy necessary to navigate media and social policy critically and conscientiously in the spirit of social justice.

How does this research contribute to the conversation of sexual violence?

My self-study represents a small, personal contribution to the growing body of (feminist) literature on sexual violence against women and sexual violence narratives. At times during this research process I have questioned the value, or significance of this work – it seems like such a small drop in the bucket. Such a small drop. Such a big bucket. What I remind myself at these times, however, is that it took other women's courage, and other women's narrative contributions, to validate my own experiences and encourage me to contribute my narrative to the growing and evolving collective. Frank (2010) suggests, "a life that is not fully narratable is vulnerable to devaluation" (p. 75). He argues that, "resistance to these silences begins by making lives narratable" (p. 75), thus changing people's sense of what is possible, permitable and worth sharing. There is power in being the writer and recipient of texts that evoke empathy and generate action. The more stories we share that speak our truths and that challenge dominant narratives, the more life will be breathed into resisting these hegemonic narratives and making space for others to tell their complicated and complicating stories.

My research, however, does more than just contribute a story of sexual violence to the collective. It also provides insight into narrative reflection and the experience of narrating a story of sexual violence. This narrative reflexivity is important because if we as researchers, educators, feminists and so on wish to encourage dialogue regarding sexual violence and the sharing of experience, then we need insight into that process – the fears, anxieties, roadblocks and challenges women may face by writing their narratives. By encouraging women to narrate and share their experiences, what exactly are we asking of them to do, and to go through? I have come across many narratives of sexual violence (Brookes, 1992; Diski, 2009; Doe, 2004; Shane, 2012; Yarish & Macnaughton, 2013), but no work that goes into detail describing the narrative process. Increased research and insight into this aspect of sexual

violence narratives would benefit researchers, educators, therapists, policy-makers and, above all, women who have experienced sexual violence and are considering sharing their experience(s). One such benefit is increased information and understanding of the mental, emotional and physiological aspects of narrating traumatic life experiences. As researchers, educators and/or supporters of those who have experienced sexual violence, it may be irresponsible to encourage the narration of experience without first having a better understanding of what the narrative process involves. Developing a better understanding of narrative processes may also provide further insight into one's own experience of sexual violence, potentially aiding in the (re)negotiations of one's identity, minimizing shame and self-blame, and promoting empathy and compassion for oneself and for others.

Future Research

There are two main areas of research I would like to see expanded on from my self-study. First, it is necessary to look more closely at pedagogy surrounding sexual violence education. What might this look like in the classroom? How might educators be best trained and informed to engage in dialogue about sexual violence within the classroom, and what might this look like for students at various ages and stages of development? How do we begin to create safe(r) spaces in schools and educational institutions to accommodate and encourage such dialogue?

Second, while reading other women's stories of sexual violence, and creating my own, has been therapeutic and valuable to me, it is important to look beyond my experience to how other women react to reading, sharing and narrating experiences of sexual violence. Just as our individual experiences are not the same, neither are our reactions to difficult material that may present as triggers for some women. Further research examining how women who have experienced sexual violence relate to other narratives of sexual violence,

and how they relate to their own, would provide valuable insight for participant and researcher alike.

Lifting the Silence, Shifting the Conversation

"I will never understand why it is more shameful to be raped than to be a rapist" (Sarah Erdmann, 2013). The confounding verity of this statement is so impactful – it is something I've never explicitly considered and begets a question I've never asked myself: why *should* I be more ashamed than my rapist about what has happened to me? *I shouldn't*. What message is this backwards shame communicating to girls and women? To boys and men? In order for this shame trajectory to shift, there needs to be a shift in the way we as a society think and talk about rape and sexual violence. My goal with this thesis is to play a part in that shift. By talking about sexual violence, by sharing our experiences, by engaging in authentic and empathic dialogue with children, youth and ourselves, we are effectively "lifting the silence" (Ogden, 2013) and allowing the truth about sexual violence and those who have experienced it to circulate, so as to bring about a shift in the conversation. By shifting the conversation we can reverse the shame from the shoulders of the oppressed and the victimized onto the shoulders of the perpetrators and the oppressors. More than that, it is my hope that with increased self- and other-awareness, empathy, and access to information about sexual violence, we can do more than shift the conversation and the shame, but also shift the staggering sexual violence statistics that plague our society into the right direction – nonexistence.

As I have referenced Adrienne Rich throughout the progression of this thesis, I find it only fitting that I end with a quote of hers which has given me confidence throughout my journey, and which is emblematic of the raison d'être this research: "when a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her" (Rich, 1979, p. 191).

Epilogue: Moving Forward

As indicated in my prologue, this self-study was born out of a 'crisis of identity:' I struggled to define myself in the wake of my sexual violation; I struggled to articulate, navigate and communicate my lack of self-definition. I may not have the words – yet – to adequately capture who I am and what I have experienced, but I know who I am not. I am not my experience of sexual violence. It does not define me, but I have made room for it within my identity and accepted it as part of my truth.

I wasn't sure at first if there was a place for my story, for my truth, outside of myself. I wasn't sure if my story was worthy of taking up space amongst the narratives and truths of others. It wasn't until I engaged in this process, however, that I realized our truths don't actually take up space – they create it. Truth lifts the dense burden of silence and acts as a placeholder for more truth. Within this created space truth begets truth – it encourages the sharing of more truths, and makes our truths more acceptable, available and valid.

I am here, situated in my truth, and there is so much space around me.

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