

An Affective Politics of Life after Sexual Violence:
Dwelling in a Sexual Violence Sensorium

An honors thesis for the Department of Anthropology

Amelia Haney

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INTRODUCTION

Feeling My Way

I stood beside my dad at a mirador, a little shaded park looking over the harbor of the city I had lived in for the past five months. A few moments earlier on our walk down one of my favorite streets, a couple of construction workers catcalled me. I was seething. My fingers rubbed raw as I dug my bitten-to-the-quick nails into the decaying wall we leaned against, cracking off bits of concrete into the scraggly bushes below. I clenched my jaw and narrowed my eyes at the naval pier with its long, gray ships on opaque water. My dad, his back to the ocean, asked me, “What do you do with all of this anger?”

I shrugged and thought of a night a couple of months earlier. While travelling in Tierra del Fuego, I had a long conversation with a friend, another woman who was struggling with the street harassment as much as I was. Holding hands across a dark room at the end of the earth, we shared our experiences of sexual violence. We were angry. We were angry when we were catcalled. We were angry that we could not leave our homes without being reminded of how it feels to have someone else lay claim to your body. And we were angry when people told us that we were being too sensitive. That night was the first of many moments in which I have realized how something that was done to me six years ago deeply affects my daily life, my interactions with and within the world, and my relationship to my body. I was- and still am- angry that I have to live with the awful consequences of someone else’s actions. I do not remember if I ever answered my dad’s question. I only remember knowing that I had to *do* something. I had to act to make my anger productive instead of paralyzing. This thesis is my fumbling attempt to turn pain and anger into hope.

When I returned home from studying abroad and began formulating a project on everyday life after sexual violence, I expected “rape culture” to be a central aspect of people’s experiences. Combining an affinity for feminist blogs with a loyalty to post-structuralist theory, I asked how rape culture and personal experiences of life after sexual violence were co-constituted. I anticipated that rape culture- as the discourses, institutional supports, and social practices that normalize sexual violence- would permeate people’s daily lives even long after their experiences of sexual violence. Even while I was interested in embodied experiences of the aftermath of sexual violence, I thought these particularities were always already contained and produced within some larger concept, and I always reverted to the abstract.

Over four months, I conducted interviews with people I contacted through a local rape crisis center. These conversations always challenged, and at times completely contradicted, my expectations. All of the people I spoke with are members of a group of survivors who participate in public speaking engagements, sharing their personal experiences in order to educate communities. Because they participate in this activist work, they understand sexual violence as a collective political, cultural, and social problem, and not only an individual experience. They are invested in a community committed to preventing violence and supporting survivors, and have thought about the issues of rape culture and sexual violence much longer than I have. But our conversations did not focus only on their activism or their involvement in the community. More so, we talked about how their experiences of sexual violence continued to affect- or not- their everyday lives. This includes their work with the rape crisis center, but also their commutes to work, their time spent with friends at home, their trips to the grocery store. Even as I constantly struggled to neatly connect daily life with rape culture, our conversations pulled away into the tangled feelings, senses, and emotions of everyday life.

When talking about their experiences of sexual violence, people make explicit connections to rape culture: like a nurse who asked a woman if she would ever drink again- while performing a rape kit; a boyfriend who coerced a woman into sex, even when she had said no; and a mother who told her daughter to never talk about her assault. The blaming and silencing forces of rape culture surrounded their experiences of violence. But when our conversations turned to their lives now, after sexual violence, people shifted from a language of politics and cultural critique to one of emotion and sensation. As their lives go on after sexual violence, they express that trauma lives not only in discourses and institutions, but is felt more within their own bodies and the physical spaces of their lives. And so even while their lives are intimately affected by sexual violence, their experiences are not wholly reflected in the concept of rape culture, or the politics that oppose it. After violence, people seem to live not only in a rape culture, but more within a sensorium of sexual violence – in which their lived experiences of the aftermath of sexual violence are emotional, sensory, and embodied. When we approach sexual violence only within a rape culture, we miss those moments of life before violence that inform how people experience and understand rape and assault, as well as how people negotiate life in the aftermath of violence. Within a rape culture, trauma is bound in space and time, and cut off from the rest of a person’s lived experience. Sexual violence is held up as evidence of rape culture, and the wound of trauma becomes a marker of political identity.

One participant told me, “I wanted to do this interview so I could be asked these questions and think about this. I’ve never really asked myself this before.” My participants were looking for answers as much as I was. We were grasping together toward some sort of understanding of how to live in the world after sexual violence. Instead of answers, we found a new set of questions- one that does not neglect the seriousness of rape culture, but that asks about

how it feels to dwell after sexual violence. We kept our conversations close to the ground, focusing on individual experiences within daily life. An attention to the individual and the everyday helps us understand how broader structures of power materialize in and flow through the spaces we understand ourselves to inhabit, as well as how it feels to become yourself in, through, and against power. By starting with the personal, we learn how it feels to inhabit power.

Even as I root my analysis in personal experiences, I do not tell my participants' full stories. This is an effort to textually represent the presence of the aftermath of sexual violence in lived experience. In part, I wish to avoid the paralysis of graphic representations of violence in which the trauma of the incident of sexual violence itself is emphasized to the point of foreclosing other realms of experience, understanding, and possibility. But more than that, it is because the aftermath of sexual violence does not enter daily life as a complete narrative. Instead, it is partial and unexpected, experienced as feelings and fragments. It can be confusing. It leaves you asking questions.

In the first chapter, I ask how the concept of rape culture has influenced activist and scholarly approaches to sexual violence, and what we might learn by encountering people who have experienced sexual violence in not only a rape culture, but also a sensorium of sexual violence that takes seriously feelings of everyday life. In the second chapter, I focus on experiences of traumatic triggers in order to ask how the aftermath of sexual violence is embodied in everyday life through sensory, felt experiences. In the final chapter, I focus on communication and community in order to ask how people may work together to prevent sexual violence and make the world more livable for those who have already experienced it.

CHAPTER ONE

From Rape Culture to Sexual Violence Sensorium

Sharon waves from the porch as I pull into the driveway. Securing a knot of green yarn with a knitting needle, she stands to meet me at the top of the steep steps of a narrow yellow house. We introduce ourselves with nodding heads instead of shaking hands. Sharon, a graduate student in her late twenties, is a crisis hotline volunteer and member of the Survivor Speakers Bureau at the New Beginnings Rape Crisis Center. She became involved at the center after graduating from a nearby college and regularly answers calls on the hotline and talks about her own experiences with sexual violence at public events. We sink into opposite ends of a worn brown couch next to a shelf of books on sexual violence, rape culture, trauma, and a thick copy of the DSM V from her undergraduate years studying psychology. A fat tabby cat eyes us from a windowsill across the room. The cat extends a leg overhead; Sharon hugs her knees to her chest. “I don't know whether it's a malicious things or a this is how society works in his head thing,” she says of her ex-boyfriend she calls “the boy in the really bad relationship.” “There's a lot of cultural norms that play into it,” she continues, “People talk about a sex drive, and drives are things that are uncontrollable, so there is the concept of sexual desire being uncontrollable... you get things like that where sex is this uncontrollable thing. And I think that we are still dealing with the many generations later of that.”

Anti-sexual violence feminist authors have widely criticized the notion of an uncontrollable sexual desire as fundamental in excusing rapists' actions and blaming victims for their own victimization, both of which are central concepts to *rape culture*. In a blog post of hers she later emailed me, Sharon defines rape culture as “the social norms and attitudes that allow the vast majority of rapes and sexual assaults to go unreported, that allow rapists to face little to

no punishment for their crimes, that believes that rape, if it happens at all, happens only once.” It includes “anything that minimizes a rapist’s responsibility for their actions, anything that denies what the survivors said” and the “things that make survivors reluctant to come forward, reluctant to make accusations, and feel guilt over things that are clearly not their fault.” *Rape culture* is not only these “social norms and attitudes,” but also their institutionalization in legal and medical systems, their manifestation in political discourse, and their constant representation in the media, all of which normalize and legitimize sexual objectification and violence.

Rape culture is not any one thing, no matter how ubiquitous it may seem. It is some slippery notion that at once creates and manifests in the particular discourses, institutional practices, cultural representations, and social perspectives that normalize and justify sexual violence. Over time, anti-sexual violence scholars and activists have conceptualized this nebulous notion and its materializations by naming it “rape culture.” While this conceptualization has been important for unifying disparate experiences and mobilizing change, it has also limited scholarship and activism in relation to sexual violence to an always oppositional, responsive politics.

Broadly speaking, anti-sexual violence feminism is dependent on the concept of rape culture in order to challenge rape culture itself. Experiences of sexual violence are held up as evidence of rape culture, which seems to collect all rapes, sexual assaults, and other forms of intimate violence within one concept, cutting them off from their personal contexts and histories. Rape culture is at once abstracted from subjective experience and severed from it. It is conceptualized as a sort of container in which objectified experience floats (Morton 2013:99), pushed and pulled by the forces and manifestations of power and dominance which may be shifting and changing, but are always contained. The abstract container of rape culture is taken as

universal. It is not that all experience is contained within it, but that any experience outside does not matter, especially not as a point of politics, and that particularities and subjectivities are erased through abstraction. In this way, the concept of rape culture sets the terms of how we may approach, understand, experience, and value sexual violence, its aftermath, and rape culture itself. The concept of rape culture colors personal experience and purports to define which elements of experience, if any, matter.

However, as Michel Foucault argues in response to this notion of reality as a universal and universalizing container of objectified experience, “We do not live a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light; we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (Foucault 1984:3). The concept of rape culture is taken as this sort of void that binds all experiences of sexual violence. But experiences of sexual violence and its aftermath are relational and contingent; they cannot be collapsed into a coherent whole, and they cannot come to define each other, even if they overlap. Rape culture is not the container it is conceptualized to be. It is a multiplicity of meanings and forces that intersect with other aspect of collective and personal life, history, and identity.

Rape culture is an assemblage of institutions, discourses, and social practices that come together to make sexual violence a normal and natural, if at times unfortunate, aspect of human sexuality. Michelle Murphy, in her ethnography of chemical exposures and women office workers, defines an assemblage as “an arrangement of discourses, objects, practices, and subject positions that work together within a particular discipline or knowledge tradition” (2006:12). Assemblages make objects perceptible and “describe the material and yet relational way things

[come] to matter” (Murphy 2006:13). Assemblages also produce what Murphy calls “domains of imperceptibility” (2006:9) in which objects become invisible or nonexistent. Within the rape culture assemblage, the domain of imperceptibility is the lived experiences of violence. Also within the domain of imperceptibility is the very idea of rape culture, which is made invisible within itself through its own processes of naturalization and normalization. Rape culture is not identifiable as rape culture; it is simply the way things are. The components of the assemblage of rape culture work together within a Western knowledge tradition that understands the whole as always more than the sum of its parts. In this way, assemblages like rape culture can take on a sense of totality, absoluteness, and inevitability. To be valuable within this knowledge tradition, political claims must always reach to the overarching, the universal. But at the same time, rape culture does not exist as a singular thing. It can only be referenced, only ever defined by its shifting parts. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, in her ethnography of global connection, identifies this sort of elusive yet always present quality as “a particular kind of universality: it can only be charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters” (Tsing 2004:1). Rape culture is known through lived experience, even as it is taken as a universal, abstract truth.

As Donna Haraway notes in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, the dominant response to such seemingly whole but difficult to grasp concepts has been the searching for “a new essential unity” (2004:14). Within anti-sexual violence feminism, scholars and activists have tried to create a complete and coherent concept that could stand against rape culture. By naming rape culture and identifying its institutional, discursive, and sociocultural components, feminist scholars and activists sought to make visible the domains of imperceptibility created by the assemblage of rape culture. They sought to recognize sexual violence and the suffering it caused, and to problematize the structures that made it possible. By rearranging and transforming the

discourses, objects, practices, and subject positions surrounding sexual violence, women's movements formed a counter-assemblage to rape culture. I use the idea of a *counter*-assemblage in order to emphasize how women's movements were framed in explicit opposition to rape culture. In this way, women's movements and the feminist politics they created are defined as opposition, and are always in response to that which they oppose.

Even if they are always responsive, these politics are not merely reactive; they are also creative. Anti-sexual violence feminism is invested in identifying conditions of rape culture, materializing these conditions, and making them visible. Because it must seek out aspects of rape culture within a domain of imperceptibility, this politics creates that to which it responds. It seems to be what Foucault defines as a heterotopia- a space of resistance and contingency that arises because of the structure, but that is not contained entirely within it. Heterotopias are spaces in which difference is constantly cultivated. They are spaces for imagining practices that critique, mock, and perhaps overturn the structure, but can only ever arise from the structure itself (Foucault 1984). However, even if anti-sexual violence feminism is partially or almost heterotopic, it does not have the potential to overturn the structure of rape culture, because even as it critiques the conditions of rape culture and the structure itself, it operates within the same knowledge tradition as its object of opposition, valuing universality over difference (Haraway 2004, Holland 1997) and addresses the pieces of rape culture as always part of a larger whole.

By seeking to gain legitimacy within the same knowledge tradition that encompasses rape culture, dominant forms of anti-sexual violence feminist politics are constrained by the very structures they contest. This feminism is not invested in cultivating difference or contingency, but rather in imagining a stable universal that can stand outside of rape culture in ultimate detachment and opposition. As Sara Ahmed argues in her work on feminist attachments, "A

politics that is critical cannot be ‘anti’; it cannot simply ‘overcome’ through detachment the affects of the histories of violence, justice, and inequality that structure the demand or hope for transformation” (2004:172). And yet this feminism strives toward universals that abstract from individual experience, and takes those abstractions as truth that then defines experience. Deductively defining experience from pre-existing politics isolates sexual violence as evidence. This isolation fetishizes the wound of sexual violence by using it as a point of power and proof. Ahmed challenges this fetishism by arguing that “the transformation of the wound into an identity cuts the wound off from the complex histories of ‘being hurt’ or injured, histories which cannot be gathered together under a singular concept” (2004:173). When mobilized as evidence to support an always already existing politics, sexual violence is isolated from the rest of a person’s life. In this way, the only trauma that is made to matter is of the event of sexual violence itself. What is left out of this construction are the moments of life before violence that inform how people experience and understand rape and assault, as well as life after violence, in which trauma continues to be deeply embodied and sensory. Even so, the rape culture concept has been important for mobilizing change, and is rooted in a commitment to preventing sexual violence and supporting those who have already experienced it. The rape culture concept has been developed throughout a complex history of scholarship and activism, and its complications and limitations, as well as its advantages, cannot be understood outside of this history.

A Critical History of “Rape Culture”

“Rape culture” as a term first emerged during the early 1970s. Anti-sexual violence scholars and activists developed practices and ideas to connect individual experiences of sexual violence, in order to make sexual violence visible as a collective, cultural problem. The feminist practice of consciousness raising was central to women’s movements of this period, and was

used in the context of sexual violence to bring women together to discuss their experiences of sexual assault, rape, and the patriarchy more generally. Through consciousness raising, scholars and activists began to understand sexual violence as socially produced and legitimated, and to build a body of evidence to support that understanding. They created communities dedicated to preventing sexual violence. Through community outreach, in the form of rape crisis centers, survivor support hotlines, policy groups, anti-violence projects at hospitals, and self-defense classes, they recognized that in order to combat individual rapes, it was necessary to first combat the systems and ideas that make rape possible (Brownmiller 1975:397). This required identifying and defining cultural supports for rape, as well as how they were produced and reproduced. “Rape culture” as a concept was materialized in opposition to rape culture as an assemblage. Its origin story is inherently one of resistance, of making a culture visible in order to dismantle it.

Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, her landmark investigation of rape as a social product and collective responsibility, begins her genealogy of rape in prehistory with caveman’s first violation of cavewoman. She traces a “masculine ideology of rape” through ancient Babylonian and Mosaic law, by which “ancient patriarchs” defined rape as “a property crime of man against man” and “used rape of women to forge their own male power” (1975:18). She reaches a contemporary culture that supports male aggressiveness and sense of entitlement to sex as well as a “female paralysis of will” through “deliberate, powerful, and destructive... conditioning” (1975:401). Along with other feminist scholars during the 1970s, Brownmiller developed a concept rape intrinsically entangled in culture, formulating the concept of rape culture as the systems of masculinist dominance that normalize and perpetuate sexual violence.

Despite the pioneering importance of Brownmiller's analysis, tracing masculine domination to the dawn of time has its own naturalizing effects. Even in her critique of patriarchy, Brownmiller seems to accept woman's status as a natural victim of man's aggression. She goes so far as to argue that human anatomy, our literal nature, "may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of a male ideology of rape" (1975:14), due to "man's structural capacity to rape and woman's corresponding structural vulnerability" (1975:13). She argues, "When men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it" (1975:14). This argument is damning to both sexes, constructing men as inherently aggressive, women as inherently powerless, and heterosexuality as inherently violent. (Not to mention that it is wholly dismissive of other gender identities and sexualities.) Brownmiller's work has been greatly influential in radical feminist thinking about rape, and I do not wish to devalue its importance in exposing the social foundations of sexual violence. However, Brownmiller's critique and other feminist works of the time that follow her same logic posit a universal, ahistorical dominance, moving from the prehistoric to the present without a serious account for changes in the nature of power over time.

Brownmiller's notion of power is that of a constant, universal, and almost agentic domination in which all men seem to oppress all women. But modern power does not emanate down from a single source. Instead, it flows laterally through the institutions, discourses, social relations, and even material spaces that make up our daily lives. Michel Foucault traces a historical shift from the singularly held, punishing power of the Medieval sovereign to the diffused, ordering power of the modern democratic state. Modern power is invested in "generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them" (1978:136). It "extend[s] the general forms defined by law to the infinitesimal level of individual lives" in order to integrate them into

societal demands (Foucault 1978:221). This divides populations dualistically between those who adequately meet societal needs, and those who do not, creating the “constant division between the normal and the abnormal” (1975:199). The abnormal must be corrected through discipline to meet societal standards, meaning that “the whole indefinite domain of the non-conforming is punishable” (1975:179). Power is constantly shifting, and new forms of abnormality are constantly created in order to be punished and excised. Within the context of second-wave and radical feminism, and newer forms of anti-sexual violence feminism that have emerged from these traditions, womanhood is constructed as a general form to which women are normalized. But a normal or normalized womanhood is inherently a fiction, and lived realities are pulled apart to maintain fantasy. As Haraway argues, “There is nothing about being ‘female’ that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as ‘being’ female” (2004:14). Gender is itself a mechanism for normalizing and ordering life within power, “forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism” (2004:14).

Within modern power, control is diffused through mechanisms of observation and normalization by which the object of control becomes simultaneously a subject of its own domination (1978:201). Foucault argues that power relations in the modern form “are both intentional and nonsubjective” (1978:94). Using a logic similar to Murphy’s assemblage, Foucault argues that the “tactics” of power become connected, “attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere” (1978:95). In this way, rape culture is an assemblage, or what Foucault refers to as a “comprehensive system,” in which “the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet... no one is there to have invented them” (1978:95). However, within this logic, resistance is complex, because, as Foucault argues,

“this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978:95). “Rape culture”- as it is conceptualized as opposed to how it exists in the world- is anti-sexual violence feminism’s continued monarchical fantasy, by which scholars and activists purport to stand outside of and critique a singular object.

The second-wave feminism represented by Brownmiller addresses rape culture as a timeless, sovereign form of dominance that works from above to constrain and repress women. But modern power necessitates a consideration of how power works not only on, but also in and through bodies. In order to understand how rape culture may function within modern power, it is necessary to construct an alternative genealogy to Brownmiller’s that accounts for changes in the nature of power and seeks to understand rape culture as a diffused assemblage of power relations. Following Foucault, I begin my more modest history of “rape culture” with psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic constructs of sexuality and violence mark the medicalization of sexual violence, by which patriarchy and masculine dominance were embodied.

In psychoanalysis, sexual behavior and deviance was constructed as inherently individual and largely unconscious. Unlike early investigations of sex and sexuality which tended to treat rape as a symptom or unhappy consequence of sexual disorders and to dismiss rapists as “degenerate, imbecilic men” (Brownmiller 1975:11), psychoanalysis allowed for a more serious consideration of sexual aggression, and subsequently for a more serious consideration of rape. Within psychoanalysis, rapists were constructed as individual sexual psychopaths, driven by their own pathology without cultural supports. Second-wave feminist anti-sexual violence scholars and activists critiqued the medicalization of sexual violence, arguing that the pathologizing of rape “reduced rapists responsibility for his actions since he was considered unable to control his pathological impulses” and women’s victimization was “simply a by-

product of his pathology” (Donat and D’Emilio 1992:11). Dominant feminist interpretations took up psychoanalysis as proof that men’s sexual urges were seen as uncontrollable, meaning that women were made responsible for controlling male sexual desire (Jackson 1987, Anderson and Doherty 2008). From this perspective, rape was redefined as “not only a male psychological aberration, but also an act in which women... contributed to their victimization” (Freedman 1989:21). Even if this feminist interpretation is an oversimplified, or at least ambiguous, understanding of psychoanalysis (Forrester 1989), it demonstrates how psychoanalysis was drawn into the assemblage of rape culture as the medicalized foundation for victim blaming and normalized sexual aggression.

During the 1960s and 1970s, feminist scholars and women’s rights activists developed an understanding of sexual violence as culturally produced and supported in response to the naturalization, normalization, and individualization of sexual violence they identified within patriarchal institutional traditions and psychoanalysis. By framing sexual violence as a collective, cultural problem, they sought to destabilize and denaturalize male dominance in order to shift blame from victims, as well as to argue that if the root of sexual violence is a cultural construct, then it can be deconstructed and changed. Susan Griffin, in her work on how rape made women fearfully passive and dependent on men for protection, reflects on how sexual violence seems universal and eternal, confiding, “I have never been free of the fear of rape. From a very early age, I, like most women have thought of rape as part of my natural environment—something to be feared and prayed against... I never asked why men raped. I simply thought it one of the mysteries of human nature” (1971:26). Demystifying rape, understanding that it is not a part of human nature, means that it can be resisted.

Efforts to connect individual experiences of sexual violence within a structural framework of rape culture relied on testimonies to give emotional power to legal and social analysis. The New York Radical Feminists' *Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women*, published in 1974, was one of the firsts works to introduce "rape culture" to the public (Connell and Wilson 1974). The next year, Renner Wunderlich and Margaret Lazarus produced *Rape Culture* (1975), a documentary which also included testimonies of sexual violence, as well examinations of mass media and scholarly meditations on 'rapism' and male-centered morality. Through a rigorous analysis of historical constructions of sex and sexuality, an examination of collective fear and anxiety, and an effort to share testimonies of sexual violence, the anti-sexual violence activism of second-wave feminism developed a concept of sexual violence as a collective, social issue intrinsically produced from and supported by culture.

Moving forward with "rape culture" out of the 1970's, feminist anti-sexual violence scholars worked to elaborate the concept by defining and analyzing the social norms and beliefs that supported sexual violence, as well as their institutionalization. In other words, they sought to fill in the conceptual container of rape culture by investigating the components of the assemblage of rape culture. In an effort to understand how sexual violence was supported in culture, studies foregrounded the societal level before the personal. Through surveys, focus groups, and interviews, scholars produced statistical evidence to empirically support the concept of a rape culture. They sought to investigate how rape myths, specifically victim blaming, were embedded in institutions and public perceptions, and how this influenced social practices to normalize sexual violence. These studies used testimonies of sexual violence, decontextualized from personal history and social situation, as tools to examine the understandings and perspectives of others who had not experienced sexual violence.

In 1980, Martha Burt published the first study examining a connection between a belief in common rape myths and a tendency to blame victims. Her work initiated the elaboration of the discursive component of the assemblage of rape culture. Referencing the work of Griffin, Brownmiller, and other feminist scholars during the 1970s, Burt claims, “The burgeoning popular literature on rape all points to the importance of stereotypes and myths- defined as prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists- in creating a climate hostile to rape victims” (1980:217). According to Burt, these myths derive from psychoanalytic understandings sexuality. They are founded in the idea of an uncontrollable male desire for sex, by which women can be said to be “asking for,” deserving of, or even desirous of assault. Burt identified victim blaming as central to rape culture and connected it to other “deeply held and pervasive attitudes such as sex role stereotyping, distrust of the opposite sex (adversarial sexual beliefs), and acceptance of interpersonal violence” (1980:229). Burt’s study initiated an era in research on sexual violence that was crucial for advancing understandings of and providing empirical support for the concept of a rape supportive culture.

Through a focus on victim blaming, scholars investigated the institutionalization of rape myths, elaborating institutional and legal components of the assemblage of rape culture. Vivian Berger argued that rape myths were embedded in legal definitions of sexual violence, resulting in an inherent skepticism of victims’ claims and a tendency to blame victims for the violence committed against them, which created a hostile environment that discouraged victims from prosecuting and speaking out (Berger 1977). Drawing from Brownmiller’s critiques of legal definitions of rape as a property crime, Dianne Herman argues that rape laws were “established not to protect women, but to protect women’s property value for men” (1984:46), which devalued the experiences and testimonies of female survivors. Gordon and Riger cite

institutionalization as crucial to the legitimization and reproduction of rape culture, arguing that sexual violence is itself “a problem of society that results from years of inequity and reinforcement of myths and social lessons taught to both women and men by the way rape has been handled in the criminal justice system, medical facilities, media, schools, churches, and other important institutions in our society” (1989:46). These legal definitions and institutional approaches produce and reproduce sexual violence as normal and natural.

Beyond critiquing the institutionalization of rape myths in order to counter the normalization of sexual violence, scholars used broad surveys to generate statistical evidence on the prevalence of sexual violence in women’s lives (Russell 1982), as well as its devastating impacts (Campbell 1989). Sociologists and psychologists collected empirical data from victims of sexual violence about their demographic characteristics, the nature of their rape or assault, their emotional and psychological responses, and if they reported to the police or sought medical care. Gordon and Riger’s *The Female Fear* considers the responses of women- both those who have and those who have not experienced sexual violence- to questions about social norms and narratives of sexual violence in order to investigate the lived consequences of rape myths. They posit that rape myths support victim blaming, arguing, “The widespread acceptance of myths about rape reinforces women’s early experiences [of sexualization], heightening fear and fueling the idea that they are responsible for attacks” (1989:7). Interviewing women about feelings of anxiety in public spaces, opinions towards victims of sexual violence, and precautions taken to ensure safety, Gordon and Riger argue that women live constantly afraid of sexual violence and that “for many women, to be raped, is, in essence, to die” (1989:9).

Unlike Burt’s studies of social attitudes towards sexual violence and the investigations of institutionalization, which both emphasize the importance of societal perspectives, Gordon and

Riger argue that “the political, economic, psychological, and emotional consequences of rape are largely ignored” and that “this tendency to view rape in legal and medical terms results in emphasizing the consequences of a serious social problem, rather than its prevention” (1989: 124). However, while they do move outside of the strict definitions of institutions, Gordon and Riger continue to focus on the areas of life and society that fall within the rape culture concept—dimly lit streets, tree-lined paths in public parks, newspaper columns reporting sexual assaults. By using the rape culture concept to define what matters in sexual violence, Gordon and Riger perpetuate the treatment of rape culture as a totalizing structure, rather than an assemblage in which power is flattened. Within this conceptualization, rape culture shrouds itself over every alleyway. It inhabits every darkened street. It even works its way into women’s minds. It is everywhere and always inescapable, and life is contained within it. More importantly, it retains that strange sense of agency as something that itself acts, rather than something that is practiced, or a cultural concept that influences practice.

Shifting from the survivor testimonials prominent in consciousness raising and the works of early radical feminists, academic efforts to define and analyze rape culture refocused attention from survivors’ own experiences and understandings to social perceptions and legal definitions of sexual violence. Burt’s studies sought to understand societal understandings of sexual violence, which was important for developing a robust scholarship on victim blaming, but also neglected the understandings and experiences of survivors themselves. Considerations of the institutionalization of rape myths exposed how legal and medical definitions of sexual violence result in victim blaming, while, as Gordon and Riger point out, ignoring its lived realities. Studies focused on demonstrating the prevalence of sexual violence consider the perspectives of survivors, but focus on the event of sexual violence itself and its immediate aftermath, obscuring

the ways that sexual violence affects survivors outside of institutions and can be felt throughout the rest of their lives. Each of these aspects of scholarship was vital for exploring and defining rape culture as a concept, but their limitations reflect the ways that rape culture- a politically motivated construction born out of active resistance movements- constricted and misrepresented the lived experiences of not only survivors, but women in general.

While the work of second-wave feminism and the development, definition, and elaboration of the rape culture concept were critical for creating community, mobilizing political action, and promoting changes in law, both have been rigorously critiqued for constructing women as universal, eternal victims without capacity for pleasure or resistance. Second-wave feminists ignored the “history of women’s resistance to oppression” and constructed “an unchanging, aggressive male sexuality of which women have been eternally the victims” (Arnold 1989:36). A second important challenge was that, with the rape culture concept, second-wave feminists claimed a universal sisterhood by “supporting a notion of universal patriarchy and timeless sexual victimization” that left no space for understanding perspectival differences in experiences, such as race and class (Hall 1983:341). More generally, this aligns with Lila Abu-Lughod’s analysis in *Writing Against Culture* (1991), in which she critiques the culture concept as a fundamental force in creating and essentializing others and freezing difference across time and perceived cultural divides. In rape culture, the culture concept constructs men and women as fundamentally different categories from each other, and fundamentally similar within themselves. This obscures not only important differences among women, but also important similarities with men, as well as rejects consideration of men who are survivors of sexual violence and the experiences of people who do not conform to the gender binary.

Emerging with critiques of second-wave feminism, a third wave of feminism, overwhelmingly sex-positive, redefined rape culture not as less violent or dominant, but as less inherent and eternal. Sex-positive feminists not only critiqued the social norms and institutionalized myths of rape culture, but also moved toward transforming it and developing alternatives (Buchwald et al. 1995). Theorizing that “suppressing female sexual agency is a key element of rape culture,” they argued that “fostering genuine female sexual autonomy is necessary in fighting back against it” (Friedman 2008:6). Sex-positive feminists critique a commodity model of sexuality (Friedman 2008, Filipovic 2008), which considers sex as “not so much an act as a thing: a substance that can be given, bought, sold, or stolen” and develops a script for heterosexual relationships in which “women ‘give it up’ and men ‘get some’” (Millar 2008:30). Alternatively, they argue for fostering a “consent culture” and a performative model of sex as an act, both of which are centered on mutual consent, comfort, and pleasure.

However, as sex-positive feminists have endeavored to carve a space for women’s sexuality and power, they have adopted a cultural narrative of sexual liberation that is not only constrained by the rape culture concept, but also forecloses the vast range of experiences of womanhood and sexuality. In resistance to the second wave’s universal woman and experience of womanhood, the third-wave has simply displaced it with a new universal. The rape culture concept itself remains largely unchanged. Even as feminism’s response to rape culture has changed since the 1970’s, the general understanding of rape culture is still rooted in second-wave feminist definitions. It remains defined by victim blaming, slut shaming, and the propagation of rape myths that naturalize and normalize sexual violence. Even third-wave anti-sexual violence and sex-positive feminism continues to approach rape culture as a universal and ahistorical form of dominance.

In 2011, The Slut Walk, a sex-positive campaign against victim blaming and slut shaming, popularized the term rape culture with its mission to reclaim women's sexuality. "Rape culture" continues to refer to the discourses and institutions that normalize and trivialize sexual violence and blame victims. But resistance to rape culture within popular sex-positivism has adopted the hyper-sexuality of mainstream third-wave feminism, which can open space for women's sexual pleasure, but can also mandate it. In the introduction to *Yes Means Yes*, one of the most celebrated books about sexual violence to come out of sex-positive feminism, Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti argue that a driving sentiment behind rape culture is that "women who dare to take pleasure in their bodies and live their lives on their own terms deserve whatever they get" (2008:6). This statement comes immediately after a description of Friedman's rape in which "she had been drunk, she was willingly partying with a group of male athletes, she was unapologetic about liking to drink in public sometimes, she was no helpless virgin, and she had the nerve to claim that none of these factors made the violence perpetrated against her any less heinous, or her rapist any less culpable" (2008:6). This narrative, very importantly, challenges victim blaming and promotes understandings of women's sexuality that are not constrained to the Madonna/whore paradoxes of masculinist dominance. However, it also insinuates that in order to "take pleasure in their bodies" and live "on their own terms," women should be having sex. It constrains possibilities of resistance to rape culture that are not based in active sexuality.

This constraint demonstrates the pitfalls of resistance movements that are constructed out of constant opposition. If repressing sexual agency is a key element of control within the rape culture assemblage, then reclaiming sexual agency must be a key element of resistance within the anti-sexual violence feminist counter-assemblage. In this way, rape culture manifests in third-wave, sex-positive resistance when women are constrained into saying "yes" to sex and sexuality

as the only way to truly resist rape culture. Even if there is possible space within reclaiming sexual agency for not having sex, resistance must always be related to sexuality in some way. Within the counter-assemblage of anti-sexual violence activism of third-wave feminism, there is no resistance outside of sexuality. This dominant feminist narrative excludes the understandings of survivors of sexual violence who may not have positive relationships with sex and may continue to experience sex as connected to violence. The presence of compulsory sexuality- if not necessarily compulsory sex- even in resistance to those same ideas reflects that rape culture remains a deeply culturally embedded and socially generative force. It demonstrates how thoroughly our understandings of sexual violence are determined by the rape culture concept.

The rape culture concept also continues to influence how sexual violence is approached academically, framing a contemporary turn toward discourse analysis. Still largely dominated by psychologists, more recent literature on sexual violence has moved from an analysis of the manifestation of rape supportive myths and norms in institutions and public perceptions to examine “rape supportive discourse.” In a study similar to Martha Burt’s 1980 landmark examination of rape myths and victim blaming, Irina Anderson and Kathy Doherty analyze reactions of focus group members to stories about sexual violence in order to examine the “cultural vocabularies of motive- the sense-making resources that allow perpetrators to act, their actions to be explained away and the testimony and subjective experience of victims to be dismissed or denied” (2008:22). Analysis of rape supportive discourses demonstrate how the norms and ideologies that normalize and trivialize sexual violence are embedded not only within institutions and media, but even within modes of thought and expression. However, this continues to reflect how the rape culture concept is utilized in academia in ways that constrain approaches to studying sexual violence to an abstracted, cultural realm while neglecting

survivors' understandings and perceptions of their own experiences, or even of the cultural norms that support victim blaming.

In their study of cross-cultural narrative constructions of sexual violence, medical anthropologists Keith Bletzer and Mary Koss (2004) refocused attention on survivors' narratives by approaching sexual violence ethnographically within discourse analysis in order to explore scripts of coercion and consent among three different communities in the Southwestern United States. Interviewing survivors, Bletzer and Koss gave critical attention to survivor stories- which are still widely utilized in contemporary activism around sexual violence- to present survivors' own expressions and interpretations. However, even while presenting important perspectives that situate sexual violence within the perceptions of survivors and explore it as an experience embedded in everyday life, Koss and Bletzer, and a focus on discourse more generally, render a fundamentally embodied experience disembodied. Discourse analysis considers expression as most fully reached through and contained within language, and obscures the unspeakable, unscripted, even seemingly irrational ways in which sexual violence and its aftermath are often felt and understood.

Since its emergence from consciousness raising sessions and early radical feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of rape culture has been instrumental in framing a critical understanding of sexual violence as socially legitimated and culturally supported. The rape culture concept has been employed by activists to unify survivors, motivate political and legislative change, and challenge dominant cultural norms in popular media and discourse. Scholars have worked to better understand the historically situated ideologies that generate rape myths and victim blaming, and how those ideas are institutionalized and embedded in public perceptions and ways of understanding sexual violence. Despite its usefulness in analyzing the

structures and systems that support and order experience, understanding, and practice in relation to sexual violence, the rape culture concept is also limiting. Within anti-sexual violence feminism, the rape culture concept is desired as a way to identify and overcome the obstacles to a future without sexual violence and to a more livable world for survivors. But a reliance on the rape culture concept constrains resistance to particular categories of experience, and to particular components of the rape culture assemblage. The assemblage of rape culture is not only discursive or institutional, and investigating only these elements constantly abstracts from individual, embodied, and felt understandings of survivors that slip beneath the concept itself. In order to construct a world beyond rape culture, anti-sexual violence feminism should abandon its investment in universality in order to engage in a heterotopic cultivation of difference that could destabilize the structure of rape culture, or at least ground feminist politics within practice at the level of experience that can be opened up to partiality and possibility.

Surviving within a Sensorium of Sexual Violence

“It's dirty. It's messy. It's complicated. Don't try to act like it's pretty because I don't buy it.”

-- Dylan

Dylan, a 33-year-old man who is “transgendered and transitioning,” describes himself as “a multiple sexual trauma survivor.” He, like Sharon, is a member of the Survivor Speakers Bureau at New Beginnings. Along with speaking publically about his experiences of sexual assault, he is writing a book about sexual violence prevention and activism. In a small, bright seminar room on a warm fall afternoon, Dylan takes a seat beside me at one end of a large wooden table. He clasps his hands on the table in front of him and smiles, only occasionally glancing at me out of the corner of his eye- eye contact feels “weirdly vulnerable” for him when he’s talking about his experiences of sexual violence. Even so, he is warmly friendly and speaks

confidently. We laugh together as I fumble with a new tape recorder, and neither one of us notices as an hour passes as he tells me about his experiences.

Dylan's first assault was while he was in college. He does not talk about it much, and leaves it out when sharing his story at Survivor Speaker events. "There are some things that feel a bit too intimate," he says, rubbing his hands together in his lap. Talking about his assault, he traces it through space. He describes passing through and pausing in particular places: the bar where he met his assailant, the sidewalk outside, the taxi, the train in the morning, and the aftermath felt in his single dorm room. But between careful details of places and the assailant's actions, there are moments of forgetting, in which, Dylan explains, "The memories I that I have kind of go in and out," fading from both trauma and time.

Ten years later, Dylan's assault remains embedded in the landscape of the city. "I don't actually remember the house, but there are some landmarks that I remember. That every time I drive through there..." He pauses and laughs, "I'm a little bit like ugh." He pulls up his shoulders, shivers, and reaches across the table with flat palms, as if pushing something away. "I remember there's train tracks and a Dunkin Donuts and I remember that and so every time I pass that Dunkin Donuts, which is not very frequently, I'm just like ugh, because that is all I remember."

Motivated by his first assault, Dylan got an internship the following summer with a sexual assault prevention program in a different state. Not knowing anyone in the area, he rented a room with Bill, a local pastor in his late fifties. Living alone together in close quarters, they became good friends. When Bill started "being slowly progressively more inappropriate," Dylan told him he just wanted to be friends. Bill was respectful and Dylan "cared about him and wanted to believe that he would respect my no." Then at the end of the summer, Bill assaulted Dylan,

saying he wanted to help him “get used to being touched by men again.” With the help of police and a blanket over his head, Dylan moved out the day after his assault, and “could hear [Bill’s] voice... could hear him and he was chatting and laughing with the police officer.” With the support of his internship organization, Dylan immediately decided to prosecute the case.

In the preliminary hearing, part of Dylan’s case was thrown out because, as he explains, “There was some minor detail about him exposing himself to me that I didn’t get right.” Even though Dylan knew that correct answer, he could not bring himself to say it in front of his mother, and with Bill sitting in the courtroom, smiling. He laments, “That’s the thing about testifying; everybody wants it to be really neat and clean and for you to get all of the details correct. Like what world are you living in? It’s not like a scavenger hunt. It’s describing how a 56-year-old man sexually assaulted me.”

Like his first assault, Dylan’s experience of sexual violence with Bill is a part of his everyday life and perceptions of world. As part of his activism with New Beginnings, Dylan recently participated in a discussion with the Metropolitan Boston Transportation Authority. Talking about it, he presses his hand into his stomach, cringing. “My stomach is starting to hurt a little bit. My stomach hurting is an indication that I’m feeling anxious.” He associates public transportation with older men and says, “I don’t like to be where older men are. Older men can be really triggering for me... Especially if something about them is off or they are flirting with me in any way, I cannot deal. So I tend- I don’t ride the bus. Older men seem to ride the bus. And I just can’t deal with it.” Old men and public buses do not themselves fall within the rape culture concept, but they are fundamental aspects to Dylan’s understandings and experiences of the aftermath of sexual violence.

Dylan's account of his experiences of sexual violence does, at times, fit within the concept of rape culture. He explains that the victim blaming within the court and a lack of support from his family felt like ways of normalizing sexual violence and making his assault something that he should just "get over." But when I asked Dylan if rape culture affects his daily life now, about ten years after his second assault, he responded simply, "No, not really." Dylan's experiences and understandings of sexual violence and its aftermath are not only within a rape culture, but also a rape sensorium in which the aftermath of sexual violence is more about feeling, and less about the categories of experience defined by the norms, institutions, and discourses addressed by the rape culture concept. The rape culture concept is just that: a concept that can be meaningful, and does offer an important framework for some moments of experience. It becomes problematic when it is taken up as a complete representation of the experience of sexual violence that overlooks large swaths of experience, particularly the sensory, embodied, material, and spatial aspects of life after violence.

Jane Bennett, in her treatise on the agentic force of things, explores how "objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder and thus that life will always exceed our knowledge and control" (2010:14). While her theory is particular to material things, Bennett helps understand more broadly how "conceptualization automatically obscures the inadequacy of its concepts" and how to address the "discomfiting sense of the inadequacy of representation [which] remains no matter how refined or analytically precise one's concepts become" (2010:14). The unknowable, imprecise, material, and sensory aspects of sexual violence and its aftermath that are left outside of the rape culture concept are particularly vital to address because they are parts of the lives, understandings, and feelings of people and affect how they live with deeply traumatic experiences. Or rather, it is not so much that these moments of experience and

understanding are left out, but instead that they are not brought in. With the conceptualization of rape culture, ways in which real people understand and experience their real lives are left to linger unrecognized at the “limits of intelligibility” (Bennett 2010:3). Dylan’s shrugs and shivers in his expression of sexual violence and its aftermath, and his experiences of being triggered by a particular space or a particular type of person, are not neatly expressible or readily conceptualized. But they are fundamental aspects of his understanding of sexual violence and what it means to move through the world as a survivor. And so to better understand how sexual violence and its aftermath are lived with, there must be a way of acknowledging and valuing the unintelligible.

Considering the aftermath of sexual violence as sensed and felt in daily life allows for an attention to the unspeakable and the unknowable. It creates space for feelings, thoughts, and reactions that are outside of the rape culture concept. Rape culture is only part, albeit an important part, of survivors’ lives, and it precludes other aspects of understanding, experience, and expression. By recognizing life after and apart from sexual violence as part of survivors’ experiences, and acknowledging how past experiences can seep into the present, a sensory understanding of sexual violence and its aftermath demonstrates that one life event cannot be cut off from the rest. Within a sensorium, sexual violence is recontextualized within personal histories, and the broad narratives of rape culture become intimate. These felt understandings and experiences of an affective world form a sensory field in which memory and trauma are embedded, a sensorium of sexual violence particular to the experiences and understandings of single survivors.

Encountering survivors and sexual violence in a sensorium that includes a culture, rather than a culture that excludes the senses, permits the development of an understanding of the ways

in which survivors “are alive to the world around them, of how they comprehend it, of the different modes of awareness with which they take it in and discover that it matters” (Basso 1996:54). In his exploration of how Apache notions of wisdom rest in specific sites of ancestral significance, Keith Basso argues that anthropology pays insufficient attention to *sense of place* and is missing “an interest in how men and women dwell” (1996:54). Through a process of “interanimation” in which individuals project meaning onto places and geographic objects draw out meaning, “places come to generate their own fields of meaning” and “give rise to their own aesthetic immediacies, their shifting moods and relevancies, their character and spirit” (Basso 1996:56). Dylan’s anxious understandings of the train tracks and Dunkin Donuts in Medford and old men on public buses are not inherent features of a physical, story-laden landscape, but rather of an embodied, materialized memory-scape which then draws those physical features into Dylan’s sensorium of sexual violence. As Basso explains, “For the self-conscious experience of place is inevitably a product and expression of the self whose experience it is, and therefore, unavoidably, the nature of that experience (its intentional thrust, its substantive content, its affective tones and colorings) is shaped at every turn by the personal and social biography of the one who sustains it” (196:55). In this way, senses of place are rooted in personal histories and experiences, which allows for considerations of sexual violence and its aftermath in everyday life throughout life, and allows sexual violence to be a part of lived experience without wholly defining it. An attention to affective, interanimating spaces provides a way of taking seriously the muddy, inhabited materiality of dwelling underneath the abstractions.

Within the rape culture concept, historically produced social norms manifest in institutions and discourses determine survivors’ understandings, and personal experiences of sexual violence are used to support a political project of resistance. From this perspective,

survivors of sexual violence seem strangely preserved in a state of victimization. They are considered only in relation to the already produced political project. The concept of rape culture was developed to understand sexual violence as socially and culturally situated, experienced, and supported. It was used to elevate sexual violence from the individual in order to challenge the normalization and trivialization of sexual violence that fostered hostilities like victim blaming, as well as to recognize sexual violence as a widely experienced, socially legitimated and structurally supported form of trauma. The rape culture concept guided, and continues to promote, meaningful changes towards sexual assault prevention and understandings of survivor experiences. However, it also constrains understandings of sexual violence and loses the individual, which is reflected in the scholarly construction of the term that arose from individual testimonials, then moved to considering others' perceptions of sexual violence and survivors to discourse analysis in which survivors own voices may be represented, but only around the event of sexual violence and always as evidence of an already existing political concept.

Within a sensorium of sexual violence, individuals develop their own understandings and definitions. There is a flattening of the politics of sexual violence and rape culture, so that survivors' experiences are not simply the supportive evidence for the rape culture concept, but the significance of this concept to describe some moments of experience is not overlooked. As Tsing argues, "As soon as we let go of the universal as a self-fulfilling abstract truth, we must become embroiled in specific situations" (2004:1). The significance of the universal is made in practice. People who have experienced sexual violence navigate, grapple with, sometimes use, and sometimes reject the concept of rape culture based on their situations. Developing a sensory, personal perspective of sexual violence and its aftermath is not an attempt to understand sexual violence as less social, cultural, or collective, but instead an effort to understand the social,

cultural, and collective as fundamentally produced through, understood by, and felt in the practices of everyday life. In a sensorium, sexual violence is not less political, but the political is practiced and grounded in lived experience, and cannot be cut off from history. Approaching sexual violence through the perspective of a sensorium grounds perception and interpretation fundamentally in individual standpoints. This orientation encourages a different form of the politics of sexual violence that is not determined by theoretically reproduced cultural narratives, but rather generated from survivors' understandings of their own experiences and the ways in which their experiences do, or- of equal importance- do not affect their daily lives. Allowing this orientation to guide activism and scholarship opens space for serious consideration of survivors' silences and shrugs in expressing their experiences of sexual violence and its aftermath, as well as the felt dimension of living with trauma in affective materiality. Understanding sexual violence not only within institutions, discourses, and the limits of the rape culture concept not only critiques the violence of rape culture itself, but also constructs an alternative narrative more sensitive to survivors' lived experiences and sensory understandings of experiencing, coping with, recovering from sexual violence.

CHAPTER TWO

Inhabiting Sensoriums of Sexual Violence: Coping with Accumulated Traumas

Understanding how people who have experienced sexual violence inhabit sexual violence sensoriums requires an attention to how they understand and experience the aftermath of trauma in the material spaces of their daily lives. Sexual violence and its aftermath are not experienced or understood entirely within the conceptual realm of rape culture. Rather, these experiences are deeply embodied and emotional. In the aftermath of sexual violence, people experience sensations that seem unmediated by culture, and that trigger memories and re-experiencing of trauma. But these sensations are a manifestation of affective intensity, rather than a discursive concept. Taking seriously affective encounters and embodied, sensory experiences works toward an understanding of how people inhabit the space- conceptual and physical- beneath the abstractions of the concept of rape culture. In lived experience, trauma cannot be cut off from the rest of a person's life. It accumulates over time, and must be contextualized in personal histories and memories, as well as affective spaces. But in the aftermath of sexual violence, people do not live constantly in crisis. Affective intensity is mediated into manageable signals through embodiment, and people who have experienced sexual violence can adapt, cope, and work toward recovery.

In order to consider people's sensations of the aftermath of sexual violence and how they impact lived experiences and understandings, I focus on affect. According to Brian Massumi, affect is "a domain of intensity, indeterminacy, and above all potentiality, which the signifying logic of culture reduces, or qualifies" (Mazzarella 2009:292). As William Mazzarella explains, affect theory is "a way of apprehending social life that does not start with the bounded, intentional subject while at the same time foregrounding embodiment and sensuous life"

(2009:291). Affect is “presubjective without being presocial” (2009:291); it is “both embodied and impersonal” (2009:292). Mazzarella argues that no experience is pre-cultural, even if it may be perceived as such, because through affect “society is inscribed on our nervous system and in our flesh before it appears in our consciousness” (2009:292). From this perspective, even the ability to experience is cultural, but this does not mean that every sensation is consciously conceptualized. In relation to sexual violence, affect theory helps foreground the sensuous, embodied experiences of the aftermath of sexual violence in daily life. It helps understand how a sensation can be culturally produced, yet have the feeling of being pre-conscious. The experience of “being triggered,” of feeling a sensation that elicits a traumatic memory or a re-experiencing of trauma, is precisely such an experience that is culturally mediated without being felt as such.

Traumatic Triggers from Psychology to Phenomenology

Psychologists Tanja Michael, Anke Ehlers, Sarah Halligan, and Daniel Clark describe triggers as “a wide range of stimuli, including internal and external cues” that elicit intrusive, unwanted memories of trauma (2005:2). Triggers are not specific to trauma from sexual violence. The notion of traumatic triggers seems to emerge out of investigations of “shell shock,” and is generally used in reference to diagnosed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (van der Kolk 1987:63). Though it emerged from and is still rooted in psychology, the concept of “triggers” and “triggering experiences” has widely proliferated throughout anti-sexual violence feminist communities. While several of my participants have been diagnosed with PTSD, I use the term “triggers” in a broader sense, as it is used in people’s descriptions of the aftermath of sexual violence in their daily lives.

Instead of a strict definition within a diagnosis of PTSD, I take triggers to be *something*- a look from a stranger, a touch on the back, an unexpected phone call- that causes survivors to

experience anxiety, panic, fear, and other emotions that they had during their experience of sexual violence. Often, survivors do not know all of their triggering cues, so “intrusive memories appear to come out of the blue” and are felt with a sense of “nowness” in the present (Michael et al. 2005:2). As Glynis George proposes in her ethnography of contested discourses and narratives of childhood sexual abuse in Western Newfoundland, “It is the *feeling* of memories that resurface through touches, smells, and voices which affect [survivors] so profoundly, but defy precise, discursive description” (George 1996:56). These feelings generally resurface as sensory fragments and impressions in flashbacks and bodily sensations, rather than as recognizable memories or articulated thoughts (Michael et al. 2005:2, Ehlers, Hackman, Michael 2004:404). In this sense, being triggered is an experience of affective intensity that is, at least initially, pre-subjective.

However, as useful as a concept as it is, the notion of traumatic triggers is situated within a dominant trauma discourse that is rooted in the ideas of psychological interiority and the capacity for traumatic experience to “shatter assumptions” of safety and security. As Sharon Wasco argues in her critique of dominant trauma discourses in relation to sexual violence, “These paradigms can be exclusionary and tend to decontextualize acts of violence against women” (2003:309). Wasco argues for a more phenomenological approach to sexual violence which would counter this decontextualization and consider how experiences of trauma are both affected by and affecting of people’s full lives.

This dominant trauma discourse posits that people are psychologically self-contained and are capable of understanding their experiences in isolation. A presumption of interiority posits that individuals harbor a sort of absolute truth that must be accessed. As Nancy Holland notes in her feminist engagement with Jacques Derrida, even feminist thought that critiques the structures

of power that generate trauma and triggers, “continues to see itself as freeing women from the confines of patriarchal oppression so that we may realize our true inner natures” (Holland 1997:7). This pervasive “will-to-truth” is part of a longer tradition in Western discourse that aligns confession of truth with freedom and resistance, while covering over the fact that truth is produced through confession in relations of power. In his account of incitement to discourse on sexuality through the prohibition of talking about sex, Foucault challenges the notion of confession as liberation:

The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth lodges in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom: traditional themes in philosophy, which a ‘political history of truth’ would have to overturn by showing that truth is not by nature free- nor error servile- but that its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power. [Foucault 1978:60]

The ritual of confession entails an opening up to power. Confession does not defy the authority, but rather meets its requirements, and the authority “prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile” (Foucault 1978:61-62). Within anti-sexual violence feminist scholarship and activism, speaking the truth of an experience of sexual violence is inherently an act of resistance, of “breaking the silence” imposed by rape culture. I do not mean to devalue the act of speaking, and I do appreciate its power and meaning for many survivors of sexual violence. I only wish to suggest that anti-sexual violence feminism incites a confession of its own, and perpetuates the decontextualization and isolation of experiences of sexual violence through its investment in a complete, coherent, always already produced internal truth.

A phenomenological approach to sexual violence challenges this investment in interiority and confession by arguing that people do not exist apart from their worlds, and that truth is not individual. As Merleau-Ponty argues in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, “Truth does not inhabit on the inner man, or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (Merleau-Ponty 2007:137). People can only understand their experiences of sexual violence through their relationships, because those relationships are fundamentally a part of the lived experience of sexual violence and its aftermath. Merleau-Ponty argues, “Man is a knot of relations” (Reynolds 2004:24) and “these relations are not something that we can or should separate or unravel” (Reynolds 2004:24). As Sharon says of her abusive relationship from high school, “Relationships do not exist in a vacuum.” Sexual violence is not separate from the rest of lives and relationships.

Implicit within dominant trauma discourse is the notion that before trauma, the body and the world were safe and stable; that the known and familiar were not already permeated with uncertainty and fear. This excludes the lived experiences of anyone for whom the world was unsafe or unstable before trauma, or whose life in general has been traumatic (Wasco 2003). Sharon directly challenges this notion of prior-safety by explaining that the trauma of sexual violence did not shatter her world, but rather reinforced what she had already experienced throughout her life. The really bad relationship did not shatter assumptions of the world as a safe space. Instead, as Sharon explains, “That relationship served as confirmation for a lot of the things that I was learning, which was basically that I was worthless and that what I wanted didn’t matter and why was I occupying space.”

As Wasco argues in her critique of the application of contemporary trauma frameworks to sexual violence, “A more phenomenological approach to violence against women suggest that

this social problems starts well before, and may continue long after, the assault itself” (2003:312). Understandings of sexual violence are filtered through past experiences and understandings of self, and this entangled assemblage of memory and meaning affects the ways that people live after trauma. Separating sexual violence from the rest of a person’s experience- as is done in dominant trauma models and feminist discourses- misrepresents how people who have experienced sexual violence understand their own trauma and inhabit daily life.

Triggers in Daily Life and the Accumulation of Trauma

Sarah started going to New Beginnings six years ago for individual and group counseling. Through two groups, Sarah has formed a close circle of friends, and she participates in the Survivor Speakers Bureau as a way of “being able to give a voice to [her] team.” Like many survivors of sexual violence, she continues to experience triggers years after her assault. “There are times where I definitely get triggered about things,” she says after telling me about her assault by the coach of her rugby team. After her assault, she immediately sought help, drawing on her training as a social worker. Some of Sarah’s interactions following her assault were clear manifestations of rape culture, such as a nurse asking if she would every drink again- while performing a rape kit. Others were more ambiguous, like her conversations with police officers who were sympathetic, but made it clear that sexual assault was not a priority. But as our conversation turned to her life after sexual violence, and how she experiences its aftermath in the everyday, Sarah talked less about her interactions with institutions, less about victim blaming and silencing, and more about her feelings and experiences of being triggered.

“That’s been a constant thing,” she says of triggers, “More so lately and it’s been a lot to do with the stress of my job. I’ve had one nightmare. Safety’s been a big concern. I’ve really been really protective of myself. And making sure that I get home safe in whatever way that is,

whether I'm with [my boyfriend] or not." Sarah's triggers are related to how she feels internally. Stress from her job, where she works with children who have experienced trauma, can make her more aware of and more sensitive to triggering sensations. This heightened awareness works its way into her daily life in the ways she protects herself and focuses on safety. Sarah inhabits a particular sensorium of sexual violence with an anxiety that is constantly possible, if not constantly present. Describing one particularly difficult triggering experience, Sarah expresses her embodied responses to traumatic triggers as both disruptive and elusive:

There was this situation that happened the Sunday before Halloween and it totally freaked me out. Ben and I went out to watch the Patriots game... and this guy happened to be sitting next to us... He was really friendly and he was in the Coast Guard... and then he kind of got a little touchy... he started to touch my shoulder and then he actually grabbed my butt... he actually asked me if I was going home with him... I was really triggered. I felt like every man was out to get me. I couldn't walk. I couldn't take the train without feeling really scared... And so the next day I had to take the day off work. And inside my body was shaking. It was this weird- I felt like my bones were shaking inside- this weird internal tremor. And it really affected my eating. I wasn't as hungry, but I was having a lot of GI issues, which is exactly what happened when I had to take short-term disability. It was that same kind of thing where my body just reacted and I couldn't emotionally react. ... I don't know all of [the triggers], but definitely, like the way someone looks at me... if I feel like someone is coming into my emotional space, not so much my physical space... it's more about the conscious things that I can think about are the things that wouldn't [be triggering]... I don't necessarily know a lot of the other triggers.

Sarah describes responding to this trigger- a man invading her emotional space- with the same feelings and bodily reactions that she felt after her assault and during other experiences of being triggered. After she was home with her boyfriend, Sarah directly connected her feelings with those she had experienced before. Reflecting on her interaction with the man in the bar, Sarah realized that her body was reacting before she started to feel triggered. She had crossed her legs away from the man, shifted her shoulder to not face him. But in the triggering environment, Sarah's experiences of panic and fear came unexpectedly, "all of a sudden." Only after she was

no longer feeling triggered did she contextualize those feelings within her experience of sexual violence and its aftermath. This “nowness” that permeates Sarah’s feelings when she is triggered makes being triggered itself traumatizing. The lived experience of trauma histories cannot be confined to the past; past trauma enters present life not as memory, but as very real and very current trauma. But when the triggering experience itself is over, trauma from triggers is associated with past experiences, and triggers add to the dull ache of accumulated micro-traumas.

Sharon, who is also a member of the Survivor Speakers Bureau, experiences triggers related to intimate partner violence that always occurred in private spaces. Like Sarah’s, Sharon’s triggers happen “all of a sudden” and are not at first associated with memories. Rather, they are feelings of panic and anxiety- experiences of pre-subjective intensity. Sharon usually only experiences triggers in personal interactions, most often with intimate partners. For Sharon, triggers are simultaneously deeply embodied and alienating from her body. Her response to triggers is not always the same, but it is always rooted in anxiety. She explains, “Sometimes that response is flashbacks, sometimes it’s dissociating, sometimes it’s panic attacks, sometimes it’s someone telling me that I did something weird when they said that, and I go ‘huh?’ which probably means I dissociated... It’s all anxiety responses.” While dissociation- which she describes as leaving her body, so that her body was acting without her being aware of what was happening- is a prominent part of her life after sexual violence, Sharon explains that her most common response to triggers is flashbacks, or at least something that “falls within the vague definition of a flashback.”

Sharon describes flashbacks not as the intrusion of fragmented images, sounds, or other sensations, but rather as “generally an inability to cognitively separate what is going on now

from what happened before.” When I asked if she meant that she was having intrusive feelings and thoughts, but still separated her present life from her past experience, she clarified:

I was cuddling with [my boyfriend] recently and all of a sudden—I don’t know what happened specifically, I wish I could remember because then I could tell him not to do it and then he wouldn’t do it and then it wouldn’t happen—all of a sudden I couldn’t – I wasn’t cuddling with Dan anymore, I was cuddling with the really bad relationship. And I couldn’t make the mental separation between where I am now and where I was then. And so that’s— I guess that’s a really cognitive response, except it’s kind of not, because cognitively I should have been able to make the distinction ... In the moment it’s the experience of being there with the really bad relationship. It’s feeling the things that I felt then; it’s thinking the way that I thought then.

Sharon’s experience of “nowness” within a triggering episode is to feel like she is completely back within her past trauma experience; her past memory becomes indistinguishable from her present reality. Though Sharon’s and Sarah’s experiences with triggers are different and specific to their personal experiences of sexual violence, “nowness” is central. During a triggering episode, feelings are pre-subjective, not yet mediated through memory. Only after Sharon and Sarah are no longer feeling triggered do they associated that experience with past trauma. In this way, they are retraumatized in their daily life. Their past experiences of sexual violence enter their lives as very real and very present trauma. Along with “nowness,” Sharon and Sarah share an experience of triggers as embodied emotional and sensory responses that have physical effects.

Trauma and the Body: Embodied Experiences and Understandings

In their description of triggering experiences, Sharon and Sarah emphasize felt, physical responses to triggering affective intensity. Their bodies respond to triggers even before they recognize that they are triggered. In response to pre-subjective affective intensity, bodies learn the world and develop habits. Merleau-Ponty argues, “It is the body which ‘understands’ in the acquisition of habituality” and “to understand is to experience harmony between what we aim at

and what is given, between the intention and the performance- and the body is our anchorage in the world” (2007:144). While there is nothing harmonious about being triggered, Merleau-Ponty’s notion that the body itself learns and responds, and physically anchors subjectivity, is useful for exploring embodied experiences of triggers and trauma. Trauma lives not only in memory, but also within the body.

For Sharon, triggers are literally embodied within her physical self. While Sharon uses the word “triggers” when talking about some external stimuli that could trigger a traumatic re-experiencing or remembering, she has developed her own vocabulary to describe the type of trigger she most frequently experiences. Instead of “triggers,” she refers to them as “landmines.” They are particular parts of her body and particular things she does with her body that can, but do not always, become sites of a triggering response. It is possible to know that there are landmines in a general area, but not always precisely where, and not precisely when they will explode. She explains that:

With landmines you're, you know, walking along and everything looks just fine and normal and there's no problems ahead of you and then all of a sudden: pow! And that's kind of what most of my triggers are like, especially because as I do more work with them, it becomes harder and harder to find them, but they're still totally there and people end up tripping over them all of the time, even when I thought I'd dismantled them... All of sudden I'll have a panic attack or I'll have a flashback -- but I dismantled that one! But it's still there. They're landmines. The other thing about land mines versus triggers is that triggers are things that cause something to happen. So if A then B, always if A then B. Whereas with landmines, you can have six people walk on it before the seventh person blows up... you have to hit it just right before it explodes. And some of them are hare-triggered and some of them are buried in such a way that the trigger has to get jostled enough.

By referring to her triggers as landmines, Sharon conveys that her experience of “triggers” is deeply embodied, even if her response to those triggers is at times to dissociate, to become disembodied. “Landmines” are felt with the same affective intensity and sense of “nowness” as

other triggers, but they are even less predictable. Because they are inscribed physically within the body, they cannot be accessed through memory or language, and can only be found when they explode into a full triggering episode. Sharon also explains that a trigger will not always be triggering. There is a relation between internal and external states and cues that is not fully conveyed within “triggers.” And Sharon can “do work”- like going to therapy and practicing grounding techniques- to manage landmines, or even “dismantle” them so an experience is no longer triggering.

Later in our conversation, Sharon deepened her explanation of how the trauma of sexual violence and its aftermath dwells in her body. She described how massage therapy had helped her learn to feel her body and manage her “body memory flashbacks.” Like her landmines, but maybe buried even deeper, Sharon explained how particular moments of trauma seemed to live in parts of her body, even when those traumas were not accessible in thought:

There is something associated with people touching my neck that is traumatic that I have no idea what it is, but it exists. In particular with my neck, talk therapy isn't going to help because I have no memory of whatever it is that caused them. The body memory flashbacks I get when he's working on my neck are things like, 'Oh, I got held down against something by my neck.' When the heck did that happen? And that's not a useful memory, because it has no context. This sensation reminds me of this other sensation. I don't have the context for it; I don't know what happened to my memory. And some of that's because in trauma situations the language functions of the brain shut down, and so encoding—you can't encode it in words and therefore later you can't access it in words.

Body memory flashbacks do not have the same sense ofnowness as other triggers. Instead, Sharon expresses that “this sensation reminds me of this other sensation,” and these triggers are recognized as memories with a cognitive distinction between the past and the present. However, these memories are almost entirely within the body and inaccessible in any other way except through bodily sensation. As a part of her body, they are very much a part of Sharon's lived

experience of the aftermath of sexual violence and affect her daily life in how she interacts with others and what she can do with her body.

Sarah and Dylan also describe physical, embodied responses to triggers. They describe how physical responses precede cognitive ones. Sarah's heart races and her stomach gets upset. Dylan's stomach starts to ache and he experiences "that feeling of anxiety or kind of 'ugh' in my body... feeling with my body." The aftermath of sexual violence is deeply embodied, and trauma seems to live within and emerge from the body. But at the same time, as much as trauma lives in the body, and as much as it is physically experienced and understood, trauma can also cause people to live outside of their bodies through dissociative experiences.

Along withnowness and sensory experiences of trauma, Sarah, Dylan, and Sharon also express experiences of dissociation during their traumatic experiences as well as in response to triggers. Dissociation, clinically understood, is the feeling of being outside of one's body. It is a common response to trauma, especially sexual violence, and allows a way for the cognitive and emotional self to escape a situation when the bodily self cannot. When dissociated, people may behave uncharacteristically or lose control of actions and emotions. Depending on the severity of the dissociative episode, people may not have any memory of what happened while they were dissociated, or they may remember the time clearly through an "out of body" experience (Duckworth and Freedman 2012).

Sarah dissociated during her second assault and described the experience as like "those doctor shows where the patient is really sick and they're on the stretcher and sometimes they can seem themselves, like a ghost above. That's what I felt like, like I was watching myself go through this." This is the only time that Sarah dissociated from her body, but she also describes dissociating from her feelings for six months after her first assault. She was "numb"; she was

“functioning, but couldn’t feel anything.” She explains, “It was just like life was happening and I just was kind of waking up and going to bed, waking up and going to bed.”

Dylan dissociated in a similar way during both of his assaults. He, like Sarah, was aware of his surroundings and what was happening, but he was unable to move or respond. He explains, “I was there physically, but I was not there emotionally. I couldn’t process what was going on and I didn’t have any other safety, like an out, so I just kind of dissociated.” During his second assault, he describes, “I could hear the laugh track on the TV, but I could not move. I was just so stunned that he was touching me that I just couldn’t move. I’m just frozen. I’m freaking out inside. I’m freaking out, but I can’t move. I couldn’t process it. It was like all my circuits emotionally were blown.”

While Sarah and Dylan experienced dissociation primarily during their assaults, Sharon dissociated as not only a part of her experience with sexual violence, but as a part of everyday life. She describes, “There was a lot of becoming unaware of my body as a result of what happened, because one of the things that happened a lot because I didn’t want to be doing the things that I was doing was that I would dissociate. And so even afterwards I was very dissociated from my body, and I was very dissociated particularly when people were doing things to my body.” Unlike Sarah’s and Dylan’s experiences with dissociation, Sharon would have not only the feeling of watching herself from outside of her body, but more often she would leave situations completely, explaining, “Most of the time I was dissociating I was dissociating so badly I didn’t know. I would lose whole chunks of time.” Because it was “an almost constant thing” after the really bad relationship, being dissociated became normal for Sharon: “Pretty much anything would cause some level of dissociation or panic. This was just kind of how life

was. All of a sudden you end up in a different position than where you were and have to keep going as if nothing happened.”

Sexual violence and its aftermath are deeply embodied experiences that can cause people to leave their bodies. In lived experience, dissociation can be disorienting, frightening, frustrating. Through dissociation, the inherently embodied experience of sexual violence can become disembodied. It can create feelings of anxiety, antagonism, and even hatred toward the body. But after dissociation, the experiences of coming back into the body can foster deeper understandings of an embodied self.

Living in a Traumatized Body

Embodied trauma can change survivors’ relationships with their bodies, making their bodies feel alienated and fragmented. When violence is committed against the body, and particularly when it is met with a dissociative response, survivors can feel uncomfortable and unsafe within their own bodies. As Gay Becker, Yewoubdar Beyene, and Pauline Ken explain in their ethnography of embodied memories of the trauma of genocide among elderly Cambodian refugees, “Trauma violates bodily knowledge, and in doing so, renders the world unknowable. Notions of self and world are thrown into disarray as trauma permeates the known and familiar with uncertainty and fear, making the body itself alien and unfamiliar” (2000: 321-322). In his phenomenological meditation on memory, Edward Casey adds, “Traumatic body memories result in the fragmentation of the lived body” (Becker, Beyene, and Ken 2000: 333). These arguments employ the “shattered assumptions” trauma model that assumes people’s worlds and bodies were safe and stable before trauma, which perpetuates the compartmentalization of trauma in life histories. Even so, they are important in pointing to trauma’s capacity to make the body even stranger and more fraught. In relation to the trauma of sexual violence, people

describe how they become alienated from or uncomfortable with their bodies not necessarily directly through their own perceptions, but more through a changed understanding of the perspectives of others.

Before the really bad relationship, Sharon was “kind of indifferent” toward her body. After the relationship ended, she explains, “I don't know that I hated my body, but I hated how other people saw my body.” She tried to, and sometimes still tries to, “intentionally run away from the perception of beauty that everybody has.” While in college, she did things to “hide [her] shape and hide [her] body,” “trying to gain weight, self injury and trying to make the self injury cause scars. Because clearly scars are not beautiful and therefore people will run away and then it will be fine.” The boy in the really bad relationship “made the association between this is how people see me and this is what people want to do with me.” She explains, “The thing that I can't seem to unlearn from the really bad relationship is that someone seeing me as pretty is linked with them doing things that I'm not comfortable with and not caring whether or not I'm comfortable with it. That me being pretty is all the excuse they need to do these things. And that's really scary.” Sharon was made to associate her own appearance, her own body, with violence and trauma. Her feeling of being alienated from her body manifested even deeper through constant dissociation as a response to triggers. For years after the really bad relationship, Sharon lived both apart from and deeply within her body. She was unaware of its movements and would find herself in places with no idea of how she had gotten there. At the same time, she was extremely conscious of the space she occupied, was “hyper vigilant” of the people around her, and had panic attacks when people called her pretty. Sharon's dissociation did, to some degree, make the world “unknowable.” But Sharon describes it as “probably defensive.” Even while she lived outside of her body, Sharon was aware of how other people saw her. And her

anxiety about others perceptions created a sort of undesirable embodiment by which she was made to face the potential violence of desire. But instead of her body itself becoming unfamiliar and alien, Sharon came to know it differently, through the perceptions of others, and experienced it not with indifference, but with anxiety and panic.

Like Sharon, Dylan did not have an unfragmented or unalienated experience of his body prior to sexual violence. Dylan has always had a complicated relationship with his body in that “having to live as a girl was always torturous.” Through his assaults, his body did become increasingly fragmented; certain parts of it came into focus as feeling not only uncomfortable, but also unsafe. His chest in particular feels unsafe, both because of acts during the assaults and because he feels it makes him “visibly identifiable as a woman,” even while he identifies as a man. As a part of his transition, he explains, “I am reshaping my chest, which I feel really good about... having a female body just doesn’t feel safe for me.” Dylan explains that he is not getting top surgery because of the assaults, and that he would have been transgendered regardless of whether he was sexually assaulted, but he does think that “having a masculine chest will feel safer,” and that this feeling comes out of his assaults. Like Sharon, Dylan’s heightened anxiety towards his body comes from the way that other people perceive him and how they might act on those perceptions.

Within sexual violence, trauma must be understood not as something that happens, but something that is done. It is not an accidental car crash. It is a deliberate act of violence committed by a person. Sharon and Dylan lived in their bodies differently after their experiences of sexual violence. Sharon wanted her body to disappear and Dylan felt unsafe within his own body. Their experiences of their bodies changed with a violent shift in their understandings of how others understood their bodies. Their bodies did not become uncomfortable or unsafe

through trauma; they were made that way. Sharon's and Dylan's relationships with their bodies and understandings of their selves did not simply fragment and fall apart; they were torn apart by the violence of people they trusted, even loved.

Trauma can increase feelings of distance and fragmentation toward the body. But it can also make survivors more aware of their bodies, how they move through the world, and how they respond to trauma. Through paying attention to their bodies, survivors can find ways to recover, to manage, and to cope with trauma, even while trauma may never go away (Wasco 2003). Survivors can learn to recognize their bodies' habituated responses to triggers. Dylan knows he is triggered or anxious when his stomach aches. His stomach aching signals that something in his environment, either external or internal, is making him anxious and allows him to ground himself or leave the situation.

Sarah explains that she knows when she is triggered not because she actively recognizes threatening cues, but because she has learned her body's response to her environment: "It's like my heart racing, my stomach will get upset, I usually have to go to the bathroom... it's less about my intellect picking up on it, my brain, it's more of my emotion, and then feeling the emotion, and so then I react, or feeling the physical interaction." Sarah's body responds to her environment before she realizes that she is triggered. Her response is embodied in the moment that she begins to feel triggered- during the triggering event- but also throughout the whole time she is triggered. And even when she does recognize the connections between her current feelings and her past traumatic experiences, she cannot always control her response, explaining, "There's a lot of times where things come up and there's been times where I've reacted very inappropriately and I know a lot of times in the moment that it's happening and there's nothing I can do. I just need to go through it and kind of experience it." But being able to recognize her

body's initial responses to a triggering sensation can help Sarah do what she needs to in order to avoid a full triggering episode. She is able to reach out for help- from her boyfriend after a nightmare, or from her school's psychologist after being triggered on the train to work.

Affective intensity is mediated through embodiment. Through embodied experiences and understandings, people who have experienced sexual violence are able to respond to triggering stimuli even when they cannot be sure of what it is. Even if survivors are not always able to notice and respond to their bodies reactions to triggering sensation, their awareness of embodied signals of trauma can help them, at least at times, avoid being triggered.

Coping through Responsive, Reflexive Embodiment

To manage the aftermath of trauma, survivors learn to inhabit their bodies differently. Survivors can respond to the feelings of their bodies, recognizing that these signals “may be meaningful without them being fully aware of the meaning that their action creates or embodies” (Crossley 1994:12). When Sarah finds herself crossing her legs or Sharon finds herself being hyper vigilant and monitoring the people around her, they do not know in the moment what is causing their body to move, but they do know that it means they are uncomfortable and could be triggered. As Nick Crossley explains in his examination of reflexive embodiment, “In this sense, the behaving actor is not a fully fledged subject in the Cartesian sense. She is not fully transparent to herself” (Crossley 1994:12). Survivors give deference to embodied understanding, even when their feelings do not have complete meaning or sense. Through processes of recovery and learning to live within one's body after sexual violence, an inherent ambiguity emerges. In order to make sense of their experiences, both of sexual violence itself and life after, survivors accept that there are certain things, particularly triggers, which they cannot fully know and cannot control. This acceptance, paradoxically, helps them gain understanding and control.

By recognizing their responses to triggers and working to associate those responses with encounters, spaces, sounds, touches- the *something* that is triggering- survivors can develop ways to manage triggers and trauma. By accepting triggers and the ways that they affect the body and self, people are able to adapt. Sharon explains that by recognizing that her experience with sexual violence in the really bad relationship continues to affect her through the panic and dissociation, she is able to accept that she has triggers, or landmines, what they are, and how to deal with them. She also explains that this acceptance allows her to find ways to cope with trauma:

Humans are infinitely adaptable. You live with something long enough and it just becomes normal. And part of it is recognizing that this is a thing that you're living with. I guess part of normalizing it in a way that it becomes manageable is recognizing that this is a thing that you are dealing with. There is something in acknowledging the situation that helps normalize it and helps make it adaptable.

Sharon explains, "Understanding that [an intimate act] is a trigger for me helps me accept that and have fewer emotional reactions to it and really gives me the power to say this is not something that I can do right now because it is triggering." By accepting something as a trigger and recognizing her response to it, Sharon is able to avoid certain situations entirely or prepare herself and feel empowered to leave the situation before her trigger, or landmine, explodes.

For Sharon, her awareness of her triggers and responses is a part of her daily life in her general orientation toward the world. On an icy evening, I joined Sharon on her walk to class through a downtown park. As we passed a row of benches, she pushed toward me, distancing herself from the unoccupied benches. She later mentioned how, in better weather, there are often people sitting in the park who would move toward her. She said it felt like they were lunging at her, even though she thought they were more likely simply moving forward without any mind to her. Even without the triggering sensation of being lunged at, Sharon's habit was to move away

from them benches. She also described being hyper vigilant in the park, of constantly tracking and assessing everyone around her.

When we spoke later, Sharon explained, “I had this realization that I don’t move in space the way I described to you as often as I think I do. It turns out that when I’m walking around [my neighbourhood] or to class or somewhere familiar, I read. And therefore don’t pay attention to anyone.” But she elaborates that this isn’t because she feels safe, but instead just safe enough, explaining, “I always have the mind set of nothing is really truly completely safe, but I feel safe enough here that I don’t really pay attention.” She clarifies, “I don’t think all spaces are dangerous. I just don’t think they’re safe.” Sharon’s feeling that no space, public or private, is completely safe is a way of coping. Within private spaces, accepting that certain intimate acts are triggering normalizes anxiety and a feeling of not being safe within those contexts. During the really bad relationship, but also throughout her life, she explains that “all of the places that I thought were safe weren’t, and weren’t in some pretty terrible ways. And so it’s just easier to not feel safe, so that when something happens, it’s not, ‘Oh god, how could this have happened? This was a safe place.’ And so you add that cognitive dissonance into everything else.” Sharon’s acceptance and recognition of her triggers helps her cope with and manage the aftermath of sexual violence in her everyday life, but it also normalizes the micro-traumas and triggers of everyday life.

Sarah also expresses that recognizing and accepting her triggers helps her manage the trauma of her experience of sexual violence. She describes having a “very high startle response” and that she noticed herself “reacting in a very large way” when she was surprised by something. Asking herself why that was happening, she started to notice that wherever she was, she would position herself where she could see everyone. She explains, “I was just like this is what I’ve got

to do in order to feel safe, so I could see where everyone was.” It was automatic, a habit her body had developed in order to feel safer. Being able to see and watch everyone is not an absolute necessity for Sarah to feel safe anymore, but when she can, she still makes an effort to be able to monitor her space. She did not need to do this before her first assault.

Taking a cue from her body’s response of being startled, Sarah noticed a bodily habit and was able to consciously take it up in order to feel safer. Positioning herself and organizing her space in a certain way has helped her avoid and manage triggers, as well as recognize those that affect her the most. Sarah explains:

I know when I’m triggered and I’m able to say it- and I was able to say I don’t feel comfortable right now and I feel like any man is out to get me [in reference to being triggered by the man in the bar]. And once that triggering feeling goes away, I’m fine. I mean I’m fine enough. I’m always very aware of my surroundings, to the point that I set my office up so that my desk is always to the wall and I can always see the door. I set myself up for success, because I’ve learned over time that these are things that I need in order to kind of feel the safest I can.

In Sarah’s daily life, being “fine enough” does not mean living without triggers or being able to live completely outside of her trauma history; instead, it means finding ways to manage and respond to that history in the present. In this way, the aftermath of sexual violence becomes a normal part of Sarah’s life, down to the level of how she uses her body in space.

Dylan, like Sarah, has shaped his daily practices in response to an embodied feeling. He noticed that driving through certain areas related to his first assault, as well as thinking about or being around older men, made his stomach ache. Even while public transportation is not a part of his experiences of sexual violence, Dylan associates it with older men and the possibility of being in close proximity to older men without an opportunity for immediate escape. Because of this, he never takes public transportation. In relation to his chest, Dylan describes how he can be touched on his chest, but that at times the thought of it makes him feel “emotional in [his] body.”

But even while his embodied feelings of anxiety shape his daily practices, Dylan says, “You get used to it.” Getting used to it means that he is able to avoid the spaces and situations that he finds triggering, but it also means that feelings of anxiety and discomfort become normal parts of daily life.

Through being triggered and responding to triggers, survivors develop embodied habits. Recognizing these habits can help survivors accept triggers and develop conscious practices to cope with and manage the aftermath of sexual violence in their everyday lived experiences. But this acceptance also makes the tensions and anxieties of trauma a normal part of life. As Sharon explained, “Understanding what’s going on helps make it a part of life.” Acknowledging that “this is a thing that you’re living with... a thing that you’re dealing with” helps make it possible to live with and deal with trauma and triggers, but it also suggests that these things will always be a part of life. As Sarah expresses, “This particular situation will affect me throughout my whole life.” Triggers may become less frequent and less severe, but they may never completely go away. In order to cope, survivors accept trauma and triggers as an ordinary part of life; the upsetting becomes the norm.

Even while inhabiting spaces of trauma and violence, survivors strive to create a sense of normalcy. They strive for what Kathleen Stewart calls the “daydream of an ordinary life” (2000:406). Stewart writes, “The ordinary throws itself together out of forms, flows, powers, pleasures, encounters, distractions, drudgery, denials, practical solutions, shape-shifting forms of violence, daydreams, and opportunities lost or found. Or it falters, fails. But either way we feel its pull” (Stewart 2007:29). The ordinary cannot be inhabited. It is a cloudy desire for a stable and average “still life” (2000:406) which helps resolve anxiety and discomfort. But even as people “daydream” a sense of normalcy, “something sticks out of the side of things like the

shock of the Real” (2000:411). The ordinary always resists attachment. It is always already crumbling, and people work to maintain their dream while trying to forget that it is a dream.

Ordinary Violence in Unordinary Life: The Dual Anxiety of Living with Contradiction

The normalization of trauma and triggers within everyday life creates a dual anxiety within survivors. On one side, they are anxious about the trigger and the trauma itself. On the other, they are frustrated with the ways in which past trauma affects their present lives. In between, there is a frustration that in order to feel safe, in order to manage trauma and triggers, they must organize their lives and guide their actions, and, to a certain degree, be controlled by those very things which they are trying to control. Sharon, Sarah, and Dylan recognize that their efforts to decrease triggers are directly in response to past trauma, but they also know that they do what they need to in order to feel as safe and as comfortable as possible.

This dual anxiety creates a frustration not only with having to deal with triggers and live with trauma, and not only with knowing that those efforts are necessitated by past trauma, but also with feeling as if, no matter how frustrating it becomes, it is impossible to stop trying to understand trauma or manage triggers without losing a sense of control and a move toward recovery. Sarah, who describes herself as a very friendly and open person who is “always running around and meeting people,” says that she gets upset when she has to be distant or cold toward someone who is making her uncomfortable. But at the same time, she feels she has to do it, explaining, “I get frustrated when I have to do it, but I also know that it’s a safety thing.”

Sharon expresses a similar frustration when talking about dissociation. In public, she says, her dissociation is at a relatively normal, manageable level, but in intimate situations “it’s still more common than it is for other people, and potentially will be forever.” When I asked her how she felt about that, she took a deep breath and after a long pause replied:

I don't know. It just kind of is. There are times where it makes me really, really frustrated and angry and want to tear my hair out. But for the most part, most of the time it just is. It's just a thing and I have to deal with it. I would like to be normal. I would like to not have all of these triggers in terms of intimate situations, because there are things that I would like to be able to do with my partners. And I can't; and it sucks.

She also worries about dissociating and having a panic reaction that might make her harm her partners. She explains, "It hasn't happened yet, so I guess I should really stop worrying, especially since I'm not panicking as much anymore and I'm not dissociating as much anymore. But I still worry about it." And she also worries about worrying about it.

Within Bourdieu's concept of "ordinary violences," "underlying identifiable institutional discriminations and exclusions, there will also inevitably exist a diffuse substrate of mundane forms of suffering" (McNay 2012:232). These are the "aspects to oppression and inequality that cannot be deduced from the objective perspective of social structures, but can only be discerned through a phenomenological analysis of embodied experience" (McNay 2012: 233). By engaging with survivors in their lives outside of the institutions and the politics of rape culture, it becomes possible to notice the "mundane forms of suffering" of everyday life after sexual violence. Traumatic triggers are very much a part of the suffering of the aftermath of sexual violence, but they can be, to some degree, managed and "dismantled." And survivors are not constantly triggered. For Sarah, it is important that people know that she can still be a "real, normal person." She says, "I want people to know that I'm still ok. I'm not this creepy weird person who doesn't go out at night or doesn't do anything. I have a life. I'm not completely triggered all of the time. I can go and do things; I really enjoy just typical things." Living with triggers can be frustrating, but it is not constant, and it can be managed.

On a more hidden level is the frustration of even having to live with trauma and triggers at all- the violence of the upsetting becoming normal. But within a deeper substrate is the dual

anxiety of survivors knowing that they do things because of their past trauma, but that they have to do these things in order to cope and recover. The ordinary violence of the aftermath of sexual violence is not necessarily being triggered, and perhaps not even the frustration of having to manage triggers, but instead the anxiety of having to always accept the upsetting, the frustrating, and the triggering as a part of life in order to live well.

CHAPTER THREE

Social Life after Violence: Language and the Politics of Representation and Connection

People do not reach understandings on their own. Our experiences, perceptions, and the meanings we make from them are always already mediated through personal and collective histories and encounters. Our relationships with others and with ourselves are imbued with and embedded within culture. Within the context of sexual violence, culturally contingent sociality is vital for making meanings that help people understand their experiences and work toward coping and recovery. A shared language of sexual violence creates contexts in which people can understand their personal experiences; it both transforms and is transformed by the objects of which it speaks. Sociality is at once mediated through language and necessary for the development of a shared discourse for communicating experiences of sexual violence and fostering supportive communities. To be shared, experience is objectified and decontextualized from the context of its creation. As an object, experience can circulate in language; it can be shared, taken up, and adapted to be meaningful in new ways. Yet the objectification of a shared language can be restricting and erasing. When sociality is embedded within institutions and power structures, communal understandings can constrain the expression of personal experience. The abstraction that mediates sharing also essentializes experience, cutting sexual violence off from the rest of personal and collective life, history, and identity, and perpetuating the fetishization of the traumatic wound. At the same time, language is a powerful tool for both critiquing rape culture and navigating life after sexual violence. In order to mediate between personal experience and collective meaning, a feminist discourse against sexual violence should avoid objectifying personal experience within collective meaning, while also not collapsing into incommunicable difference.

Entextualization: Making Shared Objects

Natalie, a woman in her early forties, has been volunteering on the rape crisis hotline for several years and recently joined the Survivor Speakers Bureau. Her experiences of sexual violence happened nearly thirty years ago, but she has only begun discussing them publicly within the past couple of years. Natalie explains how explicitly naming of her experiences as molestation, sexual assault, and rape, as well as herself as a survivor, was critical for her to understand “what really happened.” By connecting her experiences with texts in online message boards and stories and narratives from the hotline and speaking events, Natalie *entextualizes* her experiences. Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban define *entextualization* as the process by which people conceptually frame experiences, turning something into a text, or an object, that can be named and shared through that name (1996). For Natalie, learning about other people’s experiences of sexual violence online and through New Beginnings helped her to understand what she had experienced, and to develop a way to speak about it:

I was silent for so long and I know how it feels for people to be uncomfortable with your story and for them not to want to hear details or they just want you to shut up and get over it and just move on with your life, but it’s like you have to be able to share with somebody. It’s absolutely insane and I think it’s a hard thing to have to go through by yourself. And I did, with my other assaults. I went through that stuff for years by myself. And it affected me negatively in so many ways. Before [New Beginnings], I would participate in online groups of survivors, so it was easy to post under an anonymous name. I did that kind of thing for a while, which was leading up to—I need to be able to share about this without hiding behind a computer. I kept quiet for so long. When I did speak up about my cousin [an experience of molestation during her childhood], I was dismissed. And the person that robbed me hit me in the face and told me to shut the f up, so I just literally shut up until he died. I said nothing until he died, and I was like thirty. To verbalize [my assaults] was hard. I was able to write it sometimes. I just realized that I just can’t keep being fuzzy about what really happened; I just have to call it what it is and that’s that. Once I started accepting that I’m a survivor, and I’m moving forward and this is just what’s happened in my life and I don’t have to hide behind anything.

Through entextualization, Natalie situates her experiences within already existing narratives of sexual violence, making them objects of knowledge as much as moments of experience. Entextualized as molestation, assault, and rape, Natalie's once incommunicable experiences of sexual violence are connected to existing narratives within the cultural frames that pull inexpressible experiences into transferable objects. In this way, her experiences can be more easily communicated and shared. Natalie is able to describe her experiences as not only individual and personal, but also as associated with the meaning and importance of sexual violence as a cultural category.

The texts and objects materialized through entextualization are created from and refer to lived experiences and practices, and become a circulating representation that can be shared, taken up, and adapted. In circulating, objects are at once decontextualized and recontextualized. As Silverstein and Urban explain, "To turn something into a text is to seem to give it a decontextualized structure and meaning, that is, a form and meaning that are imaginable apart from the spatiotemporal and other frames in which they can be said to occur" (1996:1). When it is decontextualized, a text and its meaning "can be clearly transmitted across social boundaries such as generations, without regard for the kinds of recontextualizations it might undergo" (1996:1). Entextualization entails decontextualization by which an object has meaning apart from its singular, specific situation. The object can be recontextualized without losing meaning, even as that meaning changes in relation to new contexts.

An online narrative of childhood sexual abuse is an entextualization that turns experience into a circulating text, both emerging from and disconnected from lived experience. Decontextualized from its own genesis, this narrative can be recontextualized within Natalie's experience, and can help her entextualize her childhood sexual abuse as itself a shareable,

circulating object. Both the initial narrative and Natalie's experience- the text and the context- are changed through this recontextualization. The text of the online narrative is adapted to be meaningful within Natalie's experience; whereas the context of Natalie's experience is transformed into an expressible, shareable object by the meanings of the text. This, Silverstein and Urban argue, is the utility of textual objects, and people "engage in processes of entextualization to create a seemingly shareable, transmittable culture" (1996:2).

However, equating the objects of entextualization with culture misses the fact that entextualizations are abstractions from cultural practice and experience. And even as entextualization is useful for fostering shared meanings and collective communication, it allows for the essentializing of experience by presuming that all experiences under one particular name are fundamentally the same. Within the context of sexual violence, entextualization tends to be decontextualization of the incident of sexual violence itself. Entextualization abstracts from the history of experience, cutting the incident out from the rest of a person's life while circulating the incident as a representation of that person's lived experience. As Silverstein and Urban point out, "Textuality and entextualization practices turn out to be about 'identity'" (1996:10). Entextualization is about the creation and circulation of representations of identity. When entextualization is limited to representations of the incident of sexual violence itself, decontextualized from the rest of a person's life and identity, it perpetuates the fetishization of the wound. Within the circulating entextualizations of sexual violence, the wound itself, the experience of trauma, comes to stand for the person who has experienced violence.

Even with this potential for distortion or exclusion, entextualization is critical for allowing people to transform an overwhelming and unspeakable experience into something that they can hold onto and share within a community. Taking seriously the need for sociality for

coping and recovery, I want to, at least for a moment, set aside the problem of the fetishization of the wound to consider the importance of collective meanings, understandings, and definitions within people's experiences of life after sexual violence. Natalie's account demonstrates that entextualization is important for two reasons: first, through entextualization, individuals can better understand their own experiences; second, communities are able to form around collective definitions and understandings that facilitate the sharing of experiences. Through entextualization, people as individuals as well as members of communities negotiate between personal experiences and collective understandings in order to both set and critique the limits and possibilities of common language.

Entextualization and Personal Understanding

On a personal level, entextualization can create a sense of social legitimacy that can be invaluable for helping people understand their experiences and work toward recovery. By entextualizing a painful and traumatic experience as sexual violence, people are able to access a domain of meaning, significance, authority, and authenticity outside of themselves. As Sara Ahmed argues in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, "Pain surfaces in relationship to others, who bear witness to pain, and authenticate its existence" (2004:31). The pain of sexual violence is socially produced and socially experienced; it cannot be fully grasped apart from collective understandings. Sarah and Sharon express that entextualizing their experiences within larger discursive frameworks not only authenticates their pain, but also gives them claim to a set of meanings that help them understand sexual violence and its aftermath, as well as to a set of ways for surviving after violence.

Two days after her assault, Sarah visited her gynecologist, seeking a more conclusive answer to what had happened on that night she cannot remember. Waking up in pain the morning

after, Sarah knew that something was very wrong. Drawing on her training as a social worker, she had an idea of what steps she needed to take in order to get an answer. Sarah went to the emergency room and consented to a rape kit in order to get a toxicology screening, which could not be done apart from the kit. Sarah knew that she would not get any meaningful information from the rape kit, not only because it would not be processed for several months, but also because she had showered before going to the hospital, washing away any evidence. Frustrated with the emergency room, Sarah consulted with her regular gynecologist two days after the assault, and got the answer she needed:

The Thursday I talked to my doctor and she actually said that I had a cut in my vagina and it was a result of penetration- repeated penetration. That was kind of my answer of what had happened... I was glad that I had an answer. So that was kind of like, okay, now I can move on. Now I know what I need. Now I know that there's something wrong and I need to go and fix it. Not that I can make it completely better, but I needed to take the steps in order—the steps I needed in order to take care of it in the best way I could.

To some extent, Sarah knew what had happened by the morning after her assault. She knew enough to go to the hospital, to know that the rape kit would be useless, and to know that a toxicology screening may help explain why she did not remember most of the previous night. Even still, Sarah expresses needing “something more,” and needing an external answer in order to know how to move forward. Through entextualizing her experience within a medical framework of sexual violence, Sarah was able to transform a confusing, cloudy experience into a transferrable object of knowledge that could motivate her towards recovery and give her the authority to claim social and institutional resources. Knowing that this really bad night was sexual assault, Sarah felt empowered to contact New Beginnings and begin the counseling that has been central to her healing.

Sharon describes a similar experience of seeking authentication in institutional definitions. Instead of a few days after her assault, Sharon got her affirmation many years later. Even though the statute of limitations had passed and she could not pursue legal action, Sharon felt a sense of validation in knowing that her experiences fit within the legal definitions of abuse and sexual violence. Although she had stopped questioning whether the really bad relationship was abusive, Sharon explains that there was still a sense of affirmation in knowing that she could have pressed charges:

One of the things that telling my story and interacting with people and answering questions helped me do was to talk to a rape crisis center in [my home state] and to find out what the legalities of my case were. And when I called them up I really had no intention of doing anything... but it was good to find out the answer. And since you're probably curious, the answer was that had I talked to them sooner such that it was within the statute of limitations, it probably would have... what happened was prosecutable... I'd kind of gotten to the place where, especially in talking to the people at New Beginnings and other survivors—there's an amount of weight that's put on whether or not it's a legal thing that isn't necessarily related to the trauma it caused... So in that sense, I had stopped questioning whether or not it was an abusive situation, but I think there was a kind of affirmation in finding that out. And I think it did help, because it wasn't just in my head, it was—we believe this is not a thing that he is allowed to do.

Through entextualizing her experience within a legal definition of abuse, Sharon's experience became something that was real in the world, and not just “in her head.” Even while Sharon had already come to understand her relationship as abusive through her involvement with New Beginnings, there was still a more tangible affirmation in entextualizing the relationship within a legal framework, and being able to claim an additional level of legitimacy. Her work at New Beginnings helped Sharon understand her experience of sexual violence as significant and meaningful for herself and within the community. Knowing that her experience was within a legal definition of abuse meant that it was wrong not only for herself and likeminded people, but

wrong without any caveat. With the affirmation of a legal framework, it was abuse, and it was never acceptable in any context, and he could have been punished.

Sarah and Sharon express how entextualization is personally meaningful and powerful for them, as well as how their ability to transform their experiences into transferable objects depends on an already existing set of circulating entextualizations and transferable meanings. As Kate Meheron argues in her examination of women's AIDS-related testimonies, referencing Jacques Derrida, "The iterability of speech acts resides in their dependency on historically antecedent codes of language usage; a dependency evidenced in the ways that utterances partially replicate preexisting forms of expression" (1997:172). Dependency and replication are not inherently constraining or fetishizing. Entextualization matters as a way of mediating the compounded anxieties of life after sexual violence. In the way that accepting a sensation as a trigger can help control triggering experiences (itself a form of entextualization), understanding an experience as sexual violence gives people a narrative, a set of meanings, for how to respond and move forward. At the same time, it is important to consider where those narratives and meanings come from and what contexts and communities they create.

Discursive Socialities and (Re)Making Meaning

Discourses are the circulating sets of narratives and meanings that create the necessary and seemingly preexisting cultural contexts that allow for entextualization and recontextualization. In their study on the dominant discourses on rape, psychologists Nicola Gavey and Johanna Schmidt define discourse, following Foucault, as "a shared cultural framework of meaning that is patterned by systems of statements, sets of metaphors, and regulated practices that cohere to provide a particular way of understanding an object" (2011:138). Lula Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz complicate this notion in their introduction

Language and the Politics of Emotion by arguing that discourse is not stagnate, but instead is “an elusive area, an imprecise and constantly emerging and emergent interface between language and culture, created by actual instances of language in use” (1990:8). Taking these definitions together, discourse can be understood as an assemblage of meanings and practices that at once generates and is generated by personal understandings and expression of experience. Discourse guides entextualizations, but is also shaped and transformed by these entextualizations. It creates the contexts for communication, but is also constrained within these contexts.

Anti-sexual violence feminism is a discursive discipline in which new entextualizations and recontextualizations of sexual violence are produced. The discipline encourages expressions of experiences of sexual violence and rape culture which it constrains and shapes. It “permits construction, but within narrow confines” (Foucault 1970:59). Foucault defines a discipline as “a domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true, a play of rules and definitions, of techniques and instruments” which suppose “the requisites for the construction of new statements” and create “a sort of anonymous system... without their meaning or validity being linked to the one who happened to be their inventor” (Foucault 1970:59). A discursive discipline “is a principle of control over the production of discourse” (Foucault 1970:61). It does not produce discourse, instead it influences the practices and molds the contexts in which discourse is generated and enacted. Within this discipline, common discourse connects people, helping them to feel less isolated, more supported, and more empowered to manage life after sexual violence. At the same time, discourse is a tool of representation and shapes the objects of which it speaks within the confines of the discipline.

Shared Understandings in Supportive Communities

Entextualizing an experience of sexual violence not only situates it within a discursively mediated cultural framework that not only opens up meanings for individuals, but also fosters communities of support and understanding. For Sarah, it was only by connecting with a medical definition of rape and a communal understanding of sexual violence that she understood her experience as sexual assault. Sharon felt the full weight of her experience only after gaining legal affirmation. For Natalie, it was only by reading online testimonials of child abuse, which already existed as part of a discourse of sexual violence, that she came to understand her personal experience as molestation. Before entextualization, Sarah, Sharon, and Natalie all felt that their experiences were wrong and traumatic. But only after recontextualizing these experiences within a discourse of sexual violence were they able to communicate about them and become a part of a community oriented around sexual violence.

Collective understandings and definitions of sexual violence foster communities in which people do not have to explain their experiences or justify their reactions to trauma and triggers. As Natalie, Sarah, and Sharon express, communicating with other people who had experienced sexual violence is central to their ability to entextualize, and therefore understand, their experiences and to find ways to cope and recover. The meanings and attachments generated within collective discourse can be both a vital resource for individuals, and a motivating factor in the reproduction and expression of common language. Dylan, Sharon, and Sarah all express that their participation in the Survivor Speakers Bureau is motivated by a commitment to community and a sense of collective responsibility. They understand telling their stories as a way of helping others.

Dylan explains that even while talking about his sexual assaults can be difficult and emotional, he enjoys the opportunity to reach out to others:

Sometimes you'll see me smiling. It's weird, but I sort of—I like to tell my story in some ways because... I feel like every time I tell my story in this kind of context, I'm helping people that may either have experienced sexual assault or in the future will... When you get sexually assaulted, it can be so isolating. And so I feel like telling my story is a way of giving people another person who has not experienced what they have, but who has experienced sexual violence, and you know, that they're not just along in that experience.

Sharon expresses a similar motivation for wanting to speak about her really bad relationship. She explains that speaking has been helpful in her recovery, but that what matters most to her is a commitment to helping others avoid and/or cope with similar situations:

Being a survivor speaker is about giving back to the community and reaching out and impacting other people. And if you are just doing this as part of your own healing, this might not be the right thing for you to do... Reaching out to people and having people come up to me and having people say, 'This thing that was similar happened to me...' And that reaching out and that connection I think has been healing. And I like to think that hopefully people hearing my story will not get into that situation that I was in, or will recognize it soon and get out sooner.

In a later interview, Sharon elaborated on her commitment to helping others through sharing her experience. She explained that she thinks speaking is important because it helps people in "being able to recognize the story lines and therefore change them. And it's so important to be able to recognize the story lines, because then you can say I want it to have a different ending."

Sarah also expresses her commitment to changing people's minds—to making them think differently. But on a more personal level, she explains that she participates in speaking engagements in order to support the other members of her therapy group:

Another reason why I speak is that the girls that were in my group—they can't. There's things that are going on for them that just make it more complicated and I know that they want a voice. And so I'm really good at public speaking, and so why not be the voice... This is my way of being able to give a voice to our team.

For Sarah, speaking is not only about reaching out to the broader community to support expressions and understandings of sexual violence, but is also about representing her community.

Entextualizing their experiences within the discursive contexts of sexual violence helps people who have experienced sexual violence not only understand their own experiences, but also enlists them in the creation of a shared language, a communal way of speaking about, understanding, and representing sexual violence. They recontextualize the texts of their experiences within a collective context in order to help others understand. Sharing their stories through this common language, Dylan and Sharon help construct discursive contexts through which others may entextualize their own experiences and enter communities of support. For Sarah, recontextualizing her experiences within a common language is a way of representing other members of the community. Recontextualizations within a common language are crucial for fostering supportive and understanding communities that help people overcome sexual violence and work toward recovery. At the same time, recontextualization changes and shapes survivors' stories and understandings.

Discursive Representation and Institutional Scripting

Dominant discourses on sexual violence, such as those adopted and generated by institutionalized definitions from organizations like New Beginnings, enact a cultural framework of meaning that shapes the contexts in which people are able to understand their experiences. This determines to which meanings they may attach, and how they are able to express their experience to gain resources and legitimacy. Invested in representation, discursive communities

guide people's speech, shaping the ways in which they understand themselves and their experiences.

Natalie explains that when she accepted what had happened to her- through entextualizing her experience as sexual violence- she shifted from seeing herself as a victim to understanding herself as a survivor. According to Foucault, "discourses ... [are]... practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990: 9). Natalie's shift from victim to survivor demonstrates how discourses can transform their objects. As Glynis George explains in her ethnography of contested discourses of childhood sexual abuse in Western Newfoundland, connecting experience to an existing discourse "clarifies the meaning of ambiguous memories and ambivalent emotions" and facilitates changes in the ways people consider themselves (George 1996:58). When individuals entextualize their experiences within discourses, they enact discourse as a practice of self-transformation, mediated through an already existing cultural framework. Adopting a discourse of sexual violence that constructs silence as victimization, Natalie transforms herself from victim to survivor through the act of speaking about her experiences of sexual violence.

Understanding personal experience within a broader discursive context can be both empowering and constraining, as discourses themselves are constructed and limited. Sharon, discussing her experience and perception of discourses in relation to sexual violence, describes how the ways of talking about sexual violence, or scripts, can be both constraining and liberating, depending on how a person's experience relates to an available discourse:

A lot of the scripts that we have are restrictive, and are problematic in their restrictiveness, but also can be really freeing. Like the script that we have that assault is male on female can be really silencing for people who don't fit into that. And part of it is that I don't even know what all of the scripts that we have now are, because it used to just be the stranger script, and now it's not. But I don't know that we've- we certainly haven't created scripts for all of the situations. And

I think the more outside what you think of as the norm- the more outside the norm a person feels their experience is, the more silenced they are by that. Because they are variant from the script.

The more variant a person is from an existing script of sexual violence, the less discursive context they have to entextualize their experiences, and the less access they have to cultural frameworks of meaning and authority. Scripts are circulated within discursive communities, and within institutional communities, scripts are embedded within systems of power that invest in and shape representations of sexual violence. New Beginnings is, after all, a social service agency. As E. Summerson Carr explains in her ethnography of scripted talk in American drug and alcohol rehabilitation clinics, “Social service professionals talk about people and problems in ways that resonate with broader cultural narratives, and thereby appeal to powerful, institutional audiences who can help them to help others” (Carr 2011:2). Social service providers at New Beginnings work script people’s expressions of sexual violence, to “set the terms of these representations” (Carr 2011:2), so that they are consistent with institutional understandings and goals.

The New Beginnings Rape Crisis Center is the institutional core of Natalie’s, Sarah’s, Sharon’s, and Dylan’s lives after sexual violence. Whether receiving counseling, volunteering on the hotline, or participating in speaking engagements, they all have nothing but overwhelmingly positive opinions of the center. The center is both a supportive community that helps people who have experienced sexual violence, and an advocacy organization that guides people’s understandings of their experiences and seeks to change societal views. As Michael Silverstein argues in his investigation of linguistically generated cultural concepts and semiotically mediated sociality, “We see that any schemata of cultural conceptualization are ultimately anchored and given felt or intuited ‘presence’ for their users by the authorizing or regimenting forces that

emanate from ritual centers of institutionality” (Silverstein 2004:644). As such a ritual center of institutionality, New Beginnings’ explicit commitments to raising awareness about sexual violence and “ending sexual violence through healing and social change” influence community members’ interpretations of their own experiences and investments in social advocacy. While New Beginnings is committed to providing a safe space for people to heal, institutional practices also guide people’s conceptions of sexual violence, and outline the discursive contexts within which participants may entextualize their experiences.

Because Natalie, Sarah, Sharon, and Dylan participate in the center’s advocacy work, they are more likely to understand their experiences politically and their interpretations of sexual violence and its aftermath within the organization’s vision for cultural change than people who receive services but do not participate in prevention or community awareness programs. The Survivor Speakers Bureau is a fundamental part of New Beginnings’ commitment to community outreach and education. The center is invested in how speaker’s messages represent the community and it’s mission. New Beginnings as a crisis resource center is invested in allowing community members to define their experiences- as illustrated by a recent internal study on participants’ preferred language to refer to their experience of sexual violence and to themselves. At the same time, New Beginnings as an advocacy organization seeks to promote a more uniform and accessible message in order to have an emotional and inspiring, yet predictable and consistent impact on audiences.

Natalie recently completed training for the Survivor Speakers Bureau. She describes how the training mediated between allowing speakers to make decisions, and guiding their language:

It was two sessions. We did the ice breakers, the survivors with each other. They had speakers come and share their testimony with us, and guide us with how we would share a story. We had an assignment of writing down our testimony and how we were gonna share it...They give you pointers [on how to write a story].

They want you to leave enough room where people can ask questions. If you say absolutely everything— with me sharing about, we're talking about the trust thing, whatever, with my friends. So for sake of time-- it's supposed three minutes-- because the rest of the time is questions and answer. But with me having issue with trust and friendship or whatever, because I'm sharing about the rape, I'm not talking about my dynamic with my friend betraying me. but I can mention and then "my friend told everybody in school" and then somebody can ask well, what happened. And then I can say well she did this, this, and this, versus describing it all.

As a Survivor Speaker, Natalie is supposed to tell her “story” about her rape. Natalie told me that having a close friend in whom she confided about her rape tell everyone else in their school was more traumatic than the rape itself. But in her speech, she was instructed not to focus on that situation, and instead only to reference it and that she could elaborate if someone asked a question about it. Natalie’s dynamic with her friend, even while directly related to the aftermath of sexual violence, is not in keeping with New Beginnings’ primary goal for the Survivor Speakers Bureau, which is to raise awareness and educate communities about sexual violence in general, if not necessarily the most personally meaningful situations surrounding them. This is reflected in Sharon’s statement that “being a survivor speaker is not about you healing.”

New Beginnings is invested in supporting survivors and preventing sexual violence, and has been an indispensable resource for Natalie, Sarah, Sharon, and Dylan. And it is also invested in representing sexual violence in a certain way to the greater community, which entails a level of scripting of speaker’s experiences. As positive and collaborative as relationships between community members and the center staff are, they are also embedded within institutionalized power dynamics. As Abu-Lughod and Lutz argue, “power relations determine what can, cannot, or must be said about self and emotion, what is taken to be true or false about them, and what only some individuals can say about them” (1990:14). As a member of the Survivor Speakers Bureau, Natalie must talk directly about her rape. But she can only gesture toward the aftermath

of her relationship with her friend. In our conversation about her molestation, assault, and rape, Natalie described how her friend's betrayal was more traumatic than her rape, and she thought it to have more influence on her life. Natalie described a devastating fear of rejection and dismissal. She explained how she struggles connecting with and trusting other people, and gets angry when anyone shares even trivial information about her with other people. Natalie connected these challenges that she faces in her everyday life to her friend's actions, even more than to the sexual violence itself. Natalie is invested in community outreach and finds power in sharing her story with others. At the same time, her expression of her experiences is limited to that which is most relevant to New Beginnings' mission. By investing in representations of sexual violence that emphasize only the incident of violence, New Beginnings is both doing important work to educate communities about rape and assault, and perpetuating the fetishization of the wound of sexual violence by binding trauma to the moment of violence itself.

Discursive Misrepresentation and Erasure

As much as it can be positively transformative and collectively supportive, entextualization within discursive contexts can also be constraining, particularly within an institutional and representational context. Even when moments of a person's experience are represented within the discourse, there may still be important aspects that are cut out. These left out moments are important to consider in order to understand sexual violence and its aftermath as it is experienced within everyday life, apart from institutional politics of representation. And it is in those instances of experiences that are passed over and excluded that new communal language and a transformative discourse may be created.

The capacity for discourse to be erasing and limiting is demonstrated by the communal development of an anti-sexual violence discourse in second-wave feminism. Michelle Murphy,

in her ethnography of women office workers and workplace pollution, explores consciousness raising as a “discursive instrument” through which women gathered to share their experiences and develop a common language (2006:62). Consciousness raising was also a fundamental tactic in anti-sexual violence activism, and, as Murphy explains, “It was a powerful technique for translating seemingly idiosyncratic personal events and emotions into a gender-based ‘experience’” (2006:62). Consciousness raising was a concerted search for common ground on which to mobilize a feminist politics. But in looking for likeness, second wave feminists abstracted from women’s stories to construct a universal idea of womanhood experienced by a universal woman. In this way, as Murphy argues, “Consciousness raising functioned first by valorizing variation and then by covering it over” (2006:62). The discursive instrument intended to recognize women’s lived experiences ultimately erased many of them.

One contemporary dominant anti-sexual violence discourse, created within this context of second-wave feminism, is the “trauma of rape” discourse. Gavey and Schmidt define a dominant anti-rape discourse as that which provides “an overarching conceptual framework or template for shaping understandings of the impact of rape” (2011:439). While this discourse has been important in challenging past frameworks that denied and trivialized sexual violence, it also “carries a degree of absoluteness that can readily default to a presumption of traumatic impact... The thread of the central logic is linear and prescriptive: *a* (rape) therefore *b* (trauma), in which *b* refers to a set of predictable psychological injuries” (2011:449). By presuming that all responses to rape will be essentially the same, the “trauma of rape” discourse is situated within a broader cultural framework that supposes an interiority of emotion and is guided by an ideology of inner reference (Ahmed 2004:8, Carr 2010:3). Within this framework, as Abu-Lughod and Lutz explain, “The amount and kinds of emotion that people experience are assumed to be predictable

outcomes of universal psychobiological processes. A particular experience is assumed to stimulate identical emotions in all nonpathological humans” (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:2). Accordingly, when an individual does not adopt the “trauma of rape” discourse to entextualize their experiences, or deviates from its presumed impacts, they are seen to be “pathological” and in denial about their own experiences. In this way, it becomes possible “for others to presume that they could harbor more knowledge about the psychological reality of a woman who has experienced rape than the woman herself” (Gavey and Schmidt 2011:445). As Carr argues, a person’s speech is considered to reflect their internal state. Inconsistencies between a person’s talk and a dominant discourse are viewed as the result of “psychic residue that is layered over the innermost region of the self, preventing a sobering account of its contents” (Carr 2010:13). In this way, deviation from or contradiction of a dominant and collectively accepted discourse is delegitimized as a result of misunderstanding in the face of trauma, such that a person’s deviant expression is not taken seriously, and more work must be done to help them express what they must ‘really’ mean. That person’s experience is effectively erased through a dismissal of their expression.

When a person’s experience aligns only partially or not at all with a dominant discourse, their experience may be erased from collective understanding and their expression may be limited. Dylan describes the frustration of partially diverging from the dominant “trauma of rape” discourse and being told by others that he was misinterpreting his experiences and having an inappropriate response. Coming out as transgender and beginning to transition, Dylan expressed that his desire to transition was, at least in part, motivated by not feeling safe within a female body after his sexual assaults, and thus seeking safety within masculinity. Dylan entextualized his assaults within the “trauma of rape” discourse in order to understand them as

traumatic, and to help frame his experiences of nightmares and triggers in the aftermath violence. Dylan has been diagnosed with PTSD, and these psychological responses to trauma fit well within the “trauma of rape” discourse, and grant him legitimacy with a dominant framework.

However, Dylan’s external transformation does not fit within the discourse of internality, in which effects of trauma are psychological and should be managed through developing speech that can accurately convey presumed internal realities. Dylan’s response to trauma does not fit within the “predictable set of psychological injuries.” He explains how others responded with disbelief and negation to his deviating from this dominant discourse by transforming externally as well as internally: “I’ve had people say that that isn’t true. But I sort of laugh at them because I’m telling them that it is true. You don’t have to agree with me, but it’s my experience.” Dylan entextualizes his experience of sexual violence as traumatic within the “trauma of rape” discourse, but in the entextualization process, he is made to leave out part of his experience that does not fit within the logic of this dominant discourse. Part of Dylan’s experience of life after sexual violence is delegitimized within the dominant framework and left out of reproduction, and is erased from collective understandings of sexual violence.

Even when this lack of common ground with a collectively accepted and reproduced discourse is not entirely erasing, it can still be limiting. Through entextualizing his experience with the “trauma of rape” discourse, Dylan’s experience is severed between the aspects that fit within this discourse and those that do not. And so even while part of his experience is represented, other equally important parts are excluded. It is not that dominant anti-sexual violence feminist discourse overlooks Dylan’s ‘real’ experience. Rather, as William Mazzarella argues in his exposition on the importance of affect in social theory, “Public discourse addresses us simultaneously on two levels of impersonal generality. One is abstract and pertains to the

formal, legal assemblage of citizenship and civil society. The other gets us in the gut: it is equally impersonal but also shockingly intimate, and solicits us as embodied members of a sensuous social order” (Mazzarella 2009:300). This dualism is particularly apparent in the “trauma of rape” discourse. On the abstract level, by assuming a predictable psychological response to rape and its trauma, this discourse addresses Dylan as a liberal citizen whose rational self is entirely contained within a coherent individual. On the embodied, sensuous level, the “trauma of rape” discourse addresses Dylan directly as a person who has experienced intimate violence, and ascribes to him a shattered psyche. The “trauma of rape” discourse at once abstracts from Dylan’s experience, and then sets the terms of his experience. These discursive erasures and limitations are not spontaneously generated, but rather are constructed in institutionalized power relations.

However, common languages and communal discourses should not be abandoned in response to their limitations. It is within these communities that people who have experienced sexual violence develop collective meanings, understandings, and explanations from their personal experiences. As such, a politics that seeks to be built from and always rooted in experience could not exist without collective communication. These communities could be spaces for recognizing and accepting the contradictions, incompleteness, and constant change of individual and collective identities.

Sharon explains how she, like Natalie, sought out online message boards in order to understand her experience. In talking about the language of dissociation, she describes how there are online communities in which anonymous users come together in order to collectively develop a language for talking about dissociation:

There is a common language that has sprung up within the community of people who dissociate because we- especially with the advent of the internet- we find

each other and talk about things. But also within the psychological community. And so I don't know how much anybody else is pulling on the same language I am because we all talked about it. And some of that is that language is this really cool thing that it grows up and people consensually all use the same language, and some of it is that people have consensually developed this language. And then you go- I don't know how to talk about this. Oh! That's how I talk about this.

The language of dissociation is both collectively generated and individually framing. This language is a discourse of dissociation by which individuals, especially those new to the community, entextualize their experiences and learn how to talk about dissociation. At the same time anyone, no matter how new to the community, can contribute to the development of the language. And so even while entextualizing their experiences within a discursive context of dissociation, anonymous contributors simultaneously shape the discourse from which they draw. Sharon's account of the development of a discourse on dissociation demonstrates not only the importance of community and collective communication for generating entextualizations and creating the discursive contexts in which they occur, but also the possibility for seizing the power of discourse through the creation of new frameworks of meaning. As Foucault argues in *The Order of Discourse*, "Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" (1970:52-53). Communally generated language that cultivates change has the capacity to challenge and shape dominant discourses.

Even within the most dedicated and supportive communities, there are moments of erasure and limitation of expression. Experiences of sexual violence and its aftermath are dissected and compartmentalized. Instead of reflecting any manipulative intent by *New Beginnings*, I argue that this demonstrates the difficulty of mediating between the affective intensity of personal experience and the need for some degree of qualification and entextualization in order to communicate and foster supportive communities. The practiced

division of life experience into discrete components that are held apart from each other demonstrates how discourses can reify experience by removing it from, and even negating, its generative context. This dynamic is particularly challenging within a discursive framework of sexual violence that constantly redirects attention toward the event of sexual violence itself as a source of commonality and solidarity.

Away From Wound Fetishism and Toward Partial Connection

The dominant feminist discourse against rape culture deductively defines experience from a pre-existing context. Past entextualizations of sexual violence generate discourses, which in turn shape future entextualizations, limiting the meanings that experiences can take on within existing discourses. Within this discursive context, sexual violence is isolated from the rest of a person's life, removed from its personal context, and recontextualized within an always already existing discourse. This isolation transforms sexual violence into a sort of evidence for an existing political project, which fetishizes the wound of sexual violence by using it as a point of power and proof. Sara Ahmed challenges this fetishism by arguing that "the transformation of the wound into an identity cuts the wound off from the complex histories of 'getting hurt' or injured. It turns the wound into something that simply 'is' rather than something that has happened in time and space" (Ahmed 2004:32). This thesis has responded with an inductive politics that values particularity and partiality by which the wound can be a source of community and empowerment, but never severed from the rest of life, history, or identity.

Sociality that is rooted in experiences of sexual violence should not be cast aside with the dismissal of the wound as identity. As Donna Haraway warns in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, by always foregrounding individuality, "We risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connection" (2004:20). The task becomes developing a

politics that can both prevent sexual violence and make the world more livable for those who have already experienced it. This politics would have to bring people together without essentializing their experiences. It would have to be constantly open to difference and shifting partialities of identity, while still cohesive enough to be powerfully transformative.

For people who have experienced sexual violence, connecting with others is fundamental in making meaning and working toward recovery. Online message boards, confessional conversations with friends, and group therapy sessions are essential for helping people frame their experiences and understand what help they need. And importantly, it is within these communities that people who have experienced sexual violence develop collective meanings, understandings, and explanations from their personal experiences. As such, a politics that seeks to be built from and always rooted in experience could not exist without collective communication. Collective communication is necessary, but must be, in a way, cautious about its assumptions, and about the extent of its decontextualizations and recontextualizations. As Ahmed argues, “Stories of pain can be ‘shared’ only when we assume they are not the same story, even if they are connected, and allow us to make connections” (2004:174). These communities could be spaces for accepting and expressing the contradictions, incompleteness, and constant change of individual and collective identities. In Haraway’s terms, “This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia” (2004:39). These communities could be Foucauldian heterotopias, sites for cultivating tactics of coping with and challenging rape culture and the trauma of sexual violence in the ways that it is experienced as felt and embodied within daily life. Such heterotopias could challenge not only the structures of rape culture, but also deconstruct the perception of rape culture to be open to a multiplicity of experience within a sensorium of sexual violence.

Striving toward such a politics of partiality to represent life after sexual violence can help imagine a means of mediating community and mobilizing experience without fetishizing the wound as identity. This could work toward what Sara Ahmed calls feminism's collective project: to find "a way of responding to the pain of others, as a pain that cannot be accessed directly, but is only ever approached" (2004:174). In the context of sexual violence, this politics of partialities would allow for a constant nodding toward the variety and complexity of individual experience, mediated by the need for qualification in order to communicate, socialize, understand, and transform.

CONCLUSION

Notes Toward a Hesitant Politics of Partiality

My own initial expectation that rape culture would be central to life after sexual violence was rooted in the dominant anti-sexual violence feminist politics that is formed always in response to rape culture and is invested in cultivating universality rather than difference. Even as it creates the objects of its opposition, this feminism is constrained by the very structures it challenges. It is built within the framework of an always already existing overarching political project for which personal experience can provide evidence—rather than a politics made in practice from the ground up. Isolating sexual violence as evidence fetishizes the wound of sexual violence by using it as a point of power and proof. It constructs sexual violence as not only an experience, but an identity. Taking an experience of sexual violence as evidence and identity not only cuts it off from the rest of life, but also freezes a person within their trauma. What is left out are the moments of life before violence that inform how people experience and understand rape and assault, as well as life after violence, in which trauma is experienced as embodied and sensory.

On a more tangible level within individual experience, the fetishism of the wound complicates and misrepresents identity for individuals who have experienced sexual violence, the very people for whom it seeks to advocate. Sexual violence cannot be partitioned and held up as evidence of rape culture without losing many of its meanings or overlooking very real moments of violence and trauma. Trauma is understood through past experiences, and is projected into the present and the future. In order to live with trauma as a part of everyday life, people reach toward the shaky ground of the ordinary. Accepting sexual violence and its aftermath as a part of life helps people manage trauma, but it also normalizes trauma within everyday life, creating a dual

anxiety for people who have experienced sexual violence. Not only are they anxious about trauma and the ways in which past experiences affect their present lives, but they are also frustrated that in order to feel safe they must organize their lives and guide their actions, and, to a certain degree, be controlled by those very things which they seek to control. And yet, people sit with these contradictions as a way of living.

It is within these paradoxical experiences of suffering, coping, and recovering that survivors of sexual violence understand their daily lives. Even while the assemblage of rape culture generates the social and cultural conditions that allow for individuals to be sexually assaulted, a feminist response that only addresses rape culture and points to experiences of sexual violence as evidence cannot imagine the ordinary, the banal, the everyday which people navigate in order to manage and recover from sexual violence. For people who have experienced sexual violence, the wound can be, but is never only nor mostly, a source of identity.

However, sociality built on experiences of sexual violence should not be cast aside with the dismissal of the wound as identity. For people who have experienced sexual violence, connecting with others can be fundamental in making meaning and working toward recovery. It is within these communities that people who have experienced sexual violence develop collective meanings, understandings, and explanations from their personal experiences. As such, a politics that seeks to be built from and always rooted in experience could not exist without collective communication. These communities could be spaces for accepting the contradiction, incompleteness, and constant change of individual and collective identities. A grounded politics of partiality could help imagine, in Haraway's terms, "contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes" and could help negotiate "the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true" (2004:7). Striving toward such a politics of partiality

to represent life after sexual violence can help imagine a means of mediating community and mobilizing experience without fetishizing the wound as identity. This could work toward what Sara Ahmed calls feminism's collective project: to find "a way of responding to the pain of others, as a pain that cannot be accessed directly, but is only ever approached" (174). In the context of sexual violence, this politics of partialities would allow for a constant nodding toward the variety and complexity of individual experience, and a cultivation of this difference, mediated by the need for qualification in order to communicate, socialize, and understand.

The institutions, discourses, and practices included within the assemblage of rape culture can be important parts of people's experiences of sexual violence. But they are not the only parts- and we gain a different understanding of what matters in everyday life after sexual violence by looking at the embodied, emotional experiences within a sensorium of sexual violence. As people who have experienced sexual violence learn to bear the unbearable and accept the upsetting and the uncontrollable as ordinary in order to control it, they embody a politics of partialities that makes tenuous connections in the paradoxes of everyday life. When feminism loosens its grip on totalizing wholes like rape culture and becomes rooted in the always-qualified, always-incomplete webs of everyday life, it may become more than *counter*. Emptying out the container of rape culture and taking seriously the moments of daily life after sexual violence that do not fit within it, feminism can begin to articulate an inclusive politics that is not only against, but also for something that is not yet, and perhaps could never be, entirely known.

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