Content, Context, and Purpose: Rethinking Academic Writing About Sexualized Violence

Overview

Despite increased public discourse and testimony about sexualized violence, we know very little about the ways these narratives circulate in college classrooms. This study will explore the content of and contexts in which women write about sexualized violence in the college classroom. The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to discover the conditions under which students choose to write about sexualized violence and 2) to map the discursive practices and rhetorical strategies students use when writing these texts. I will use thematic and discourse analysis to analyze student writing, interviews, and focus group conversations. The knowledge gained from this analysis will allow me to complicate mainstream accounts of trauma that pathologize survivors. In so doing, I hope to 1) theorize a pedagogical model that accommodates, rather than censors or pathologizes, students who write about sexualized violence and 2) build a case for critiquing the ways in which narratives of sexual violence are deployed in a range of public discourses.

Topic and Purpose

In the last thirty years, there has been a proliferation of survivor narratives in popular culture, mass media, literature, and American courtrooms (Doan, 2005). Given this, it is no surprise that survivor narratives and themes have begun to make their way into the college classroom. These narratives appear in courses focused on theoretical and clinical considerations of trauma, as well as literature and history classes (Miller, 2001). The growing number of gender studies classes has also brought statistics, theories, and narratives of gender violence into the classroom (Haswell, 2005). Courses that include themes of trauma and violence will increase the number of student essays engaging these issues (Miller, 2001). There is also evidence that students write about sexualized violence even when there is nothing in the course material or writing prompts to encourage such writing (Payne, 2000).

Despite the increased public attention to sexualized violence[1], we know very little about how it functions in the writing of college students. There is no denying that, while the feminist project of consciousness-raising has added significantly to public knowledge about sexualized violence, it is still a taboo topic (Gilmore, 2003). When women, and perhaps especially students, do write about sexualized violence, their work is often associated with the confessionary or therapeutic modes of discourse that many commercial and juridical survivor narratives adopt (Payne, 2000). Teachers of composition may be particularly predisposed to pathologize students who write about sexualized violence. The debates about personal writing that emerged out of the writing process movement in the 90's contribute to this pathologizing, for much of the scholarly conversation centered on whether or not personal writing turns the teacher-student relationship into that of a patient-therapist (Tobin, 1993). As a result, composition teachers are often threatened or anxious when they encounter writing that narrates traumatic experiences because they assume they must adopt a therapeutic position (Payne, 2000). In this way, the student-

[1] In using the term sexualized violence, I mean to point to an expansive definition including rape, abuse and incest, but also the threat of assault, partner rape, and coerced sexual acts. I have struggled with defining the scope of this project, because physical assault, threats of physical assault, stalking, and psychological and emotional abuse are all realities for college women. I have decided not to address the broader category of violence and abuse against women in this project, but it was one of the things I can imagine might shift or change depending on who responds to my call for participants.

survivor is read as disordered and vulnerable, no matter how she composes her texts or what she argues about her experiences (Payne, 2000).

There is a need, therefore, for transformative research[2] that challenges the normative trauma storyline. That is, we need research that demonstrates the variety of discursive and rhetoric strategies and multiple storylines that student-survivors utilize in their writing about sexualized violence. This must be done in a way that does not pathologize or universalize the survivor-student, but attends to the specific meanings they make through their writing and in conversations about writing. This study addresses this need by 1) sensitively reading academic student writing about sexualized violence and 2) discussing with these student-authors the rhetorical situations out of which these texts were produced. While I hope and expect to find that all student writers do not conform to the norms of the confessional or curative survivor storyline, I also recognize that these genres hold significant social and political sway. The aim of this study, therefore, is not only to create a more nuanced understanding of the resistant rhetorical and discursive choices students make when writing about sexualized violence, but also to map the ways in which these strategies interact with and potentially reproduce normative genres of survivor writing. By combining readings of student writing with interviews and focus group conversations about writing, I hope to open a space in which counternarratives to mainstream accounts of sexualized violence can emerge; thereby, resisting normative notions of trauma that render all survivors vulnerable, disordered, and passive. To this end, I plan to investigate:

What, why, how, when, where, and to whom do students write about sexualized violence in the college classroom?

Answering these questions will allow me to better understand the worlds that students create in texts about sexualized violence. Student's descriptions (via interviews) of these textual worlds will be triangulated with thematic and discourse analyses of the essays themselves to gain a fuller understanding of the storylines students construct. An analysis of *when*, *where*, and to *whom* students write about sexualized violence will contribute to an understanding of the various rhetorical situations students perceive and construct when writing about sexualized violence. Analyzing *how* students write about sexualized violence will allow me to identify the discursive practices and rhetorical strategies that these students use and report using. It will also be important to understand the variety of reasons *why* students choose to write about sexualized violence, thereby identifying the multiple motivations for writing about sexualized violence in the college classroom. Finally, I will attend to the content of *what* students write about in order to identify which details are disclosed and how they fit with the rest of an essay's content. Most crucially, this orienting question will allow me to consider the ways in which the what, why, how, when, where, and to whom of the student writing practices I study are mutually informing. Students construct worlds in texts about sexualized violence that must be examined and understood as fully as possible and on their own terms; it is not enough to *only* examine what students write. Instead, this study will attend to the fullness and complexities of student writing choices and practices.

[2] I am adopting James Bank's definition of transformative research as research that "constructs concepts, theories, paradigms, explanations, and narratives that challenge established and institutionalized knowledge" and "develops counternarratives to mainstream accounts and narratives" (Banks, 2006, p. 776).

Conceptual Framework

Contemporary theorizing of trauma has been heavily influenced by Holocaust studies, psychoanalytic theory, studies of Vietnam War veterans, and feminist consciousness-raising about sexualized violence (Herman, 1992). Trauma theory is now used as an analytic lens in a variety of disciplines including psychology, literary studies, sociology, anthropology, and ethnic and women's studies. This theory tends to characterize trauma by its symptoms, as an event that "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the person who experiences it" (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). The belatedness of trauma's symptoms, has led theorists to use trauma as a limit case for the inadequacies of language and representation; they argue that trauma is unspeakable and unrepresentable (Caruth, 1995; Felman & Laub, 1992). As such, these theorists are often invested in trauma narratives that incorporate disrupted temporalities and subjectivities, silences, and other textual elements that point to the limits of language and representation. While reading texts and testimony through the lens of trauma theory can be compelling in the case of certain narratives, I argue that it is too frequently and generically deployed. As a result, trauma is read as a pathogen, and the survivor and her writing as disordered; "trauma" itself becomes the agentic entity, rather than ascribing agency to the survivor.

Trauma theory has made significant contributions to the study of sexualized violence, helping to open up spaces in the academy to discuss the realities of posttraumatic stress disorder and the particularities of trauma narratives. However, it is the aim of this study to complicate notions of trauma and trauma writing that are deployed in the academy as well as popular culture. To this end, I also draw from feminist pedagogy, critical theory, and genre studies to build my conceptual framework and research methodology.

Carspecken and Apple's sense that "[a] critical field study is aimed not only at making an empirical – descriptive contribution but also a theoretical contribution – deepening our understanding of core social –theoretical concepts" is an apt description of this study's aim (Carspecken & Apple, 1992, p. 511). I mean to contribute rich and various descriptions of the discursive practices and rhetorical strategies college women use to create (counter)narratives of sexualized violence. At the same time, the study of psychic trauma is an important and under-theorized way of "aid[ing] struggles against inequality and domination" (Carspecken & Apple, 1992, p. 512). Psychic trauma and its corollary - posttraumatic stress disorder - are psychological remnants of the real, lived experience of victimization predicated on a sense of helplessness in a specific situation. These situations are connected to larger structural inequalities and power structures. When writing about sexualized violence is censored or survivor-students are pathologized, composition instructors reproduce these structural inequalities.

Theories of feminist pedagogy offer a useful lens through which to examine the reproductive systems of power that suggests that violence is outside the realm of most women's experiences (Brown, 1995; Horsman, 1999; Wagner & Magnusson, 2005). Drawing on the journal entries of social work students, Wagner and Magnusson argue that new practices and policies must be developed that focus on the needs of trauma survivors, rather than asking them to adapt to meet normative higher education expectations. Wagner and Magnusson study women whose experiences with domestic and sexual abuse impede their ability to succeed academically. While my study is concerned with college writing practices, rather than academic success, we share a conceptual frame that "rejects the notion that 'returning to normal' should be the goal of women survivors (Wagner & Magnusson, 2005, p. 451), suggesting instead that the classroom is

an important space to disrupt notions of "normalcy" in relation to the experiencing of sexualized violence and the genres of survivor writing.

In a study drawing from student essays, interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork, Michelle Payne argues that, rather than looking for therapeutic support, college women write about bodily violence as a way of insisting that their experiences have a place in normative, public spaces. She argues that the field of composition studies ought to take note of these writing practices and turn its "preoccupation with its own self-analysis, its own subjectivity, to the cultural systems that produce this violence for these students in the first place" (Payne, 2000, p. 119). I share her stance that, rather than reading survivor narratives through a therapeutic lens, we attend to the power structures that produce, silence, and pathologize sexualized violence; we must also consciously resist reproducing these power structures in our own classrooms.

Study Design and Methodology

Context of Study

A national survey of college students indicates that one in four college women has been raped or experienced attempted rape (Bureau of Justice 1992). This report suggests that college instructors can expect that a number of students in their courses will have experienced sexualized violence. The University of Michigan, where this study will be conducted, does not publish statistics about incidences of sexualized violence, nor does it publish statistics about the number of women who enter college having already experienced sexualized violence. Nonetheless, it seems logical that the number of women at the University of Michigan who have experienced sexualized violence will bear some resemblance to the national statistics.

The University of Michigan offers two major systems of support and advocacy for survivors of sexual violence: The Sexual Abuse Prevention and Advocacy Center (SAPAC) and Counseling and Psychological services (CAPS). SAPAC, located on central campus, provides crisis intervention for survivors of sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, sexual harassment and stalking. Its advocacy and prevention work includes a peer education program, men against rape advocacy group, and various awareness campaigns. The counselors at SAPAC expressed enthusiasm about this study, which fits with the center's social justice and advocacy focus. While SAPAC offers a few opportunities for survivors to speak with other survivors about their experiences, these speak-outs are not focused explicitly on the experience of being a student-survivor. The counselors and SAPAC are excited about offering a space to conduct a study that will 1) provide them with new information about the experiences of student-survivors, and 2) provide students with another space to speak out about their experiences as survivors of sexualized violence. CAPS offers support groups to survivors of sexualized violence, but these groups are explicitly therapeutic and do not have the same activist orientation that the SAPAC speak-outs do.

Site and Population

This study will focus on University of Michigan undergraduate women who have experienced sexualized violence. While national surveys make clear that men also experience sexualized violence in surprisingly high numbers, this study is limited to women in order to inform a feminist pedagogy and contribute to the participants' sense of safety.

The University of Michigan is an ideal location for this study for a variety of reasons: 1) As a member of the University of Michigan community myself, I will be better able to build trusting relationships with the women involved in the study. Via volunteer and advocacy work I

will be able to demonstrate a commitment to issues of sexualized violence at the University of Michigan in a variety of ways. 2) Because conversations about sexualized violence are rarely public, it can be difficult to understand the institutional contexts in which student-survivors live and learn. As a member of the University of Michigan community, already involved in survivor advocacy and support, I will have a better understanding of the social and institutional contexts of my study's site. 3) The University of Michigan is a large, elite, sate university. As such, students come from a variety of religious, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and geographic backgrounds. Students are also accepted into a variety of schools at the University of Michigan including architecture, education, nursing, business and the College of Literature, Science and Arts. While the undergraduate population at the University of Michigan is certainly not representative of all college women, it does provide some variety in terms of possible participants. Results from this study may be useful to other U.S state universities and liberal arts colleges.

The ethics of a qualitative study about sexualized violence will, in many ways dictate my sampling and selection of participants. Ethically, it is crucial that participants have full understanding of the study's aims, believe that it will be personally beneficial for them to participate, and be willing to share their writing and speak about their writing experiences. As such, I will post advertisements for the study in various campus buildings, including SAPAC. I will also ask that instructors of college writing and women's studies distribute – if they are willing – my advertisement for participants in their classes; though, it is important that these instructors do not directly ask specific students to participate. I do not want students to feel singled out, or as if their grade might depend on participation. Counselors at SAPAC have also agreed to recommend the study to women they believe would be interested in participating. A draft of the "call for participation" language is included in Appendix A.

Given the highly voluntary nature of this study, it is difficult to predict how many women will be interested in participating. I aim to have no fewer than four participants and no more than eight. Fewer than four participants will not provide enough variety of writing or experience to discuss the range of discursive practices, rhetorical strategies, genres, content, or contexts that we might expect to find in student writing about sexualized violence. With more than eight participants, the focus group will be too big to build trust or allow all voices to be heard. More than eight participants will also not allow me to give each student text and interview transcript the analytical attention required for close study.

The voluntary nature of the study also makes it difficult to predict how representative of the larger population of survivor-students at the University of Michigan the study will be. It is unlikely that a voluntary study of this size will represent 1) the ethnic, cultural, racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of University of Michigan women who are writing about sexualized violence 2) the variety of sexualized violence that women experience such as date rape, acquaintance rape, childhood abuse, incest, and stranger violence. In the future, I may be able to choose a more representative sample, but in this earliest stage of exploration, it seems most important to include women who have explicitly chosen to participate. These ethical considerations also mean that it will be important that participants approve all data, analysis, and conclusions of the study. This role is described in more detail in the following sections.

Data Collection

Students will be asked to contact me via email to express their interest in the study. This will provide me with another opportunity to ensure that participants understand what will be

expected of them and that their participation is entirely voluntary. In an email response, I will 1) reiterate the expectations of the study 2) explain the potential risks and benefits of the study 3) allow students to choose between a focus group or one-on-one interviews 4) instruct students to bring their essay to our first meeting 5) send students a consent form 6) send students a confidentiality agreement and 7) invite students to speak with me if they have questions or concerns about participating.

Students will be given a choice between participating in focus group sessions or one-on-one interviews in order to address the various needs and desires of participants. Some participants might be most interested in speaking to and sharing their experiences with a community of survivors; the speak-outs sponsored by SAPAC suggest that this way of speaking about their experiences is important and familiar to some university women. While focus group participants will sign agreements to keep identifying information about the other participants confidential, they will have to be comfortable with sharing their experiences in the semi-public forum of the focus group. Other women might be concerned about feeling listened to, sharing their experiences publicly, or confidentiality issues. Therefore, women will also have the option of participating in one-on-one interviews. Both forms of data collection will be important to this project, and women will not be pressured to participate in one way rather than another.

Interviews

One-on-one interviews will allow me to gain an understanding of the contexts in which students report writing about sexualized violence, their purposes in doing this writing, and their understandings of the rhetorical and discursive strategies they employ. The structure of the one-in-one interview provides the context to explore a single participant's piece of writing in depth, allowing me to ask questions about the specific writerly choices I observe in the participant's writing.

I will conduct two interviews with participants who choose the interview option. Both interviews will be semi-structured. Given this study's foundation in feminist pedagogy, it is crucial that interview participants feel as if they have power and voice throughout the research process. Therefore, I am invested in a social-constructivist interview technique that will give interviewees space to speak about issues and stories that feel important to them, without pushing them to speak about anything they don't feel comfortable sharing. At the same time, I must recognize that my presence, as a researcher, will shape the nature of our conversation. Therefore, the most apt (and ideal) characterization of this interview process is as one where the participant and I are co-constructing meaning and storylines that meet both our needs and interests. The semi-structured interview format will provide me with the opportunity to 1) ask the specific questions necessary for gaining a fuller understanding of the contexts, genres, and content of student writing about sexualized violence 2) give participants a clear sense of the sorts of knowledge I wish to gain for the study 3) be flexible enough to allow participants to choose what they do and do not want to discuss.

Students will bring their essay to the first interview session. Therefore, the goals of that interview will be to 1) allow students to discuss and contextualize their essay on their own terms, 2) help to provide me with a lens through which to begin analyzing the essay, and 3) help build trust between the interviewee and myself that we can work from in the second interview. To this end, the interview questions will shift and change depending on the context of the interview itself. I have provided, in Appendix B, a draft of the interview protocol; these questions are formed with the aforementioned goals in mind. The overarching questions are listed first in the

interview protocol. Beneath those questions are sub-questions that I may or may not ask depending on the previous answers and general interview context. This interview will be approximately half an hour long; this will be enough time to gather detailed initial data and develop a relationship with the participant, without exhausting her with questions and discussion.

The second interview will be scheduled several weeks after the first one, giving me enough time to complete initial analysis of the participant's essay and first interview. The goal of the second interview will be threefold 1) to ask more specific and focused questions about the discursive and rhetorical strategies that I observe and to clarify the student's purpose in writing the essay 2) to allow the student to member-check and comment on the initial analysis and 3) to allow students to contribute to tentative conclusions and pedagogical recommendations based on my initial findings. The second interview protocol and length can only be determined after the initial interview and analysis have been conducted.

Both interviews will be audio taped. While videotaping could be beneficial to observe body language, it could easily compromise the naturalness of the interview setting. Instead, I will take written notes about body language and incorporate these notes into the transcript of the interview.

Focus Group

Many of the goals of the focus group are very similar to those of the interview. I want to gain an understanding of the contexts in which students report writing about sexualized violence, their purposes in doing this writing, and their understandings of the rhetorical and discursive strategies they employ. The focus group will not allow me to ask about the specific choices of an individual writer in as much detail. However, the focus group is an important way of collecting data for three reasons 1) it will allow me to understand how students talk about their writing choices with other survivors, 2) the comments of other students may encourage participants to think about their writing in a variety of ways, without me having to push a specific agenda, 3) some student-survivors may find conversations with other survivors more meaningful than a one-on-one interview.

I do not feel as knowledgeable about or experiencing with facilitating a focus group as I do with interviewing. Therefore, I need to do more information gathering before concretizing the focus group protocol. However, the questions and follow-up questions will mirror the content and structure of the interview protocol. They will need to be structured to facilitate conversation rather than simply going around a table and answering questions one-after-another, but I am not yet sure how to do this. The focus group will also meet twice. In the first meeting, as in the interview, students will speak about the what, why, where, when, how, and to whom of their writing about sexualized violence.

Questions and topics for the second focus group meeting will be generated based on my analysis of the student essays and the first focus group discussion. As with the interviews, this will be a chance to member check, ask more specific questions about the essays, and ask for pedagogical recommendations from participants. In this case, however, I will present the essay trends to the group, rather than only analyses of specific essays. I hope this will help facilitate conversations about the variety and similarities of student writing about sexualized violence. Since the member checking will be communal, this will be a way for participants to feel safer questioning and critiquing the findings.

Each focus group session will last for two hours. I anticipate introductory processes, questions, and the closing conversation to take about a half hour together. This leaves an hour

and half for discussion, which should be enough time for all participants to work through ideas and topics together. These sessions will be videotaped. This will allow me to attend to the gestures, body language, and seating arrangements of the participants, elements that can be quite telling when discussing difficult topics.

Instructor Interviews

Based on my initial findings from the interviews, essays, and focus group it may be necessary to triangulate these with conversations with instructors. It may become important to compare student impressions of their essays, course, and instructor with those of the instructor. These interviews would only be conducted with the permission of the student participants and would, of course, require that instructors also be willing to participate. Interview length and protocol for instructor interviews cannot be determined until after the initial data is collected and analyzed.

Data Analysis

I anticipate using thematic and discourse analysis to analyze student essays, interview transcripts, and focus group videos. Thematic analysis is well suited for this study because it will allow participant voices to play a strong role in the research. By looking at the themes that emerge from the data, I will be able to attend to the issues most important to the participants. It will also be an important way to point out both the variety and similarities between the storylines that are constructed within and between different participant essays and responses. Picking up on one storyline and following it through various texts and then putting that in conversation with other textual storylines will allow me to point out the variety of resistant and reproductive storylines that circulate in student writing about sexualized violence.

Discourse analysis will also be especially important to this study. It is the purpose of this study to attend to the various contexts, rhetorical situations, purposes, and discursive strategies that students employ when writing about – and report writing about – sexualized violence. Given my critical research epistemology, the discourse analysis technique utilized by Carspecken and Apple seems most appropriate (1992). In this technique, they analyze data in context, but also bit-by-bit; they also explicitly distinguish between analysis that is objective, subjective, and inter-subjective. By adopting this method I can consider each discursive and rhetorical move in relation to the texts' larger context, but also have space to give more subjective interpretations of various phrases building my interpretations on the pervious ones. In this way, I can create cohesive understandings of the worlds students construct in their texts in relation to their writing purposes and strategies. At the same time, I can also comment on the variety of storylines, strategies and purposes within and across texts.

Ethics and Validity

In the case of this study, ethics and validity are closely bound. Part of what will ensure that this is an ethical study is a careful attention to the nuances and complexities of writing and discussing experiences of sexualized violence. At the same time, validity may be easily compromised by the need to respond first and foremost to the emotional, psychological, and political needs of the participants.

The validity of this study depends upon the trusting, committed participation of the participants. More importantly, the aim of this study is to empower survivors of sexualized

violence and make space for their voices in the academy; to this end, I have taken a number of methodological steps in an attempt to ensure that the research process is empowering and not silencing for participants:

1) *The study is focused on writing practices, not the experiencing of sexualized violence.* There is a risk in a study involving women who have experienced sexualized violence that it could be difficult, even psychologically damaging to discuss their experiences with sexual abuse. However, data collection for this study will be purposeful. At no point will participants be required to talk about the details, repercussions, or psychological experience of surviving sexualized violence.

2) *Participation will be entirely voluntary***.** Participants must take proactive steps to respond to my advertisement about the study. They will also understand that in order to participate in the study they will have to be prepared to share their writing about sexualized violence, as well as discuss that writing process. This should help to ensure that study participants believe they are prepared to speak and write publicly about their experiences. Even after this initial step, participants must also sign a confidentiality agreement and a consent form before participating; this will give participants another opportunity to decide if they are prepared to participate. Finally, the consent form will make clear that participants can withdraw from the study at any point.

3) *A high level of confidentiality will be maintained***.** Another risk to participants in studies about sexualized violence is the potential compromising of their confidentiality. Unfortunately, women who speak out about sexualized violence still risk having their stories doubted and their reputations compromised. Given this, I have built in several measures to ensure the confidentiality of participants: 1) participants may choose to participate in one-on-one interviews rather than focus groups, 2) participants in the focus group will sign a confidentiality agreement, agreeing not to disclose identifying information about any of the other participants, 3) I will remove any identifying details about participants from the final write-up.

4) Participants will have an opportunity to member-check at several points in the study. A review of all data and analysis is built into the interview process itself, giving participants an opportunity to revise responses and critique analysis early in the research process. Participants will also review a draft of the study to 1) check for truthfulness, 2) ensure that they are represented in a way they are comfortable with, and 3) double check that their confidentiality is retained. This process is especially important for survivors of sexualized violence. Experiences with sexualized violence are often characterized by feelings of powerlessness that this study actively aims to resist; it is crucial that participants do not feel censored, silenced, or misrepresented.

5) Participants will have an opportunity to offer recommendations to teachers and other survivors. Another way to empower survivors is to give them an opportunity to speak back to people in power who would characterize their narratives or subjectivities in problematic ways. To that end, it is important that participant recommendations be part of the study's conclusions.

In addition to member checking and trust building, this study will incorporate several other elements to ensure the validity of the findings. The study will triangulate evidence from three different sources: student essays, student interviews, and focus groups discussions. If necessary, I will gather more evidence via instructor interviews to confirm or complicate earlier findings. The second interviews will also allow me to gather more evidence to respond to evolving research questions, as well be an opportunity to try out alternative or competing interpretations of data.

My own bias is the element of the research process most likely to compromise the study's validity. Previous experience with students writing about sexualized violence have led to me to believe that students write about sexualized violence for a variety of purposes, in a variety of contexts and utilize a variety of discursive and rhetorical strategies. My orientation to critical theory, social justice, and feminist epistemologies also mean that I believe that women writing about sexualized violence deserve to have their perspectives and experiences validated in their lives, including the college classroom. Finally, I hope and imagine that I will find women writing about sexualized violence in resistant ways, though, I recognize the social and political pressures to reproduce dominant narratives about sexual violence. While I may be ideologically and ethically resistant to having these biases challenged, I am even more concerned with allowing women's voices to speak through and out of the data. Therefore, even if the data I collect does not confirm my political or ideological standpoints I think I will be able to assimilate it into my understanding of the research.

In order to keep track of my evolving biases, ideologies, and research practices, I will also keep a research journal chronicling my own perspectives on the research. This journal will not only record my impressions of the research experience, but also the evolution of my scholarship, volunteer, and activist work. I think this is important for maintaining validity. However, I also think this writing will be important in helping me to process research, reading, and experiences that can be emotionally fraught. Already, I have found academic and activist work with issues of trauma to be draining, empowering, disheartening, frightening and inspiring.

Concluding Comments

In completing this study, I hope to be able, first and foremost, to provide a safe, empowering space for participants to explore and speak about their experiences with writing about sexualized violence. I also hope to theorize a pedagogical model that resists pathologizing students who choose to write about sexualized violence in academic contexts. It is difficult to predict what this model might look like, because it will depend heavily on data analysis and the recommendations of participants. However, some possibilities may include 1) creating courses that provide students with opportunities to read and critique various writings about sexualized violence 2) creating courses that provide students with political, historical, sociological, or generic contexts through which to situate their own writing about sexualized violence 3) recommendations to instructors about how best to respond to and evaluate writing about sexualized violence 4) recommendations to instructors about how to (or if they should) make spaces in courses and writing prompts for writing about sexualized violence.

I also hope to open a space in which counternarratives to mainstream accounts of sexualized violence can emerge; thereby, resisting normative notions of trauma that render all survivors vulnerable, disordered, and passive. I hope that the voices of this study's participants can speak into that space in a way that allows them to feel empowered and multidimensional. In so doing, I hope that this study will build a case for critiquing the ways in which narratives of sexualized violence are deployed in public discourse. When we censor, marginalize, or pathologize the multiple storylines of sexualized violence, the diverse subjectivities of survivors, and the variety of their discursive practices, we collude in a project of silencing.

Appendix A: Call For Participants (Draft of Flyer Language)

I am looking for female undergraduate volunteers willing to participate in a study focused on academic writing about sexualized violence. If you have written a paper for a college class about sexual violence or abuse, I invite you to contact me about participating in this study. Participants should be willing to share the piece of writing they are working on or have completed for an academic class. They should also be willing to speak about this piece of writing. Participants may choose whether they would like to be part of two focus group sessions or participate in two one-on-one interviews.

The goal of this study is to provide a space for women to speak about their experience writing about sexualized violence. Women who participate in this study will also have an opportunity to be a part of a project that aims to make undergraduate teachers more aware of the best ways to read and respond to student writing about sexualized violence.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol (Draft)

Background Questions:

1. What year are you in?
2. Which school are you in?
3. Where are you from?
4. Overall, what has your college experience been like at the University of Michigan?
5. What have your experiences with writing been like here?
6. If First years: Can you describe your experiences with writing in high school?

Where

1. Can you describe the class that you wrote this essay for?
   1.1. Why did you choose to take the class?
   1.2. What sorts of topics/issues did you discuss in the class?
   1.3. What other sorts of reading/writing tasks did you do in the class?
   1.4. Did you enjoy the class?
   1.5. How big was the class?
   1.6. Did you feel as if there was a sense of community in the class?
   1.7. Did you feel anonymous in the class?

What

2. Can you describe the essay you brought with you today?
   2.1. What was the writing prompt for this paper?
   2.2. What kinds of examples do you use in the paper?
   2.3. What other authors (if any) do you cite in your paper?
   2.4. How do you introduce your paper?
   2.5. What knowledge do you hope your reader comes away from your paper with?
   2.6. What is the main argument of your paper?

2.7. How this essay different than /similar to the essays is you usually write?

How

3. Will you describe the process of writing this paper?
   3.1. Did you model this paper off of anything you read for the course?
   3.2. Was this paper influenced by anything else? TV shows? Movies? Books?
   3.3. How did you choose which examples to use?
   3.4. How did you decide what your main argument should be?
   3.5. How did you decide how to introduce your essay?
   3.6. Describe the process of revising this essay.
   3.7. Describe the process of editing this essay.
   3.8. Was this writing process similar to the ways you usually write papers?
   3.9. Does this essay sound like the essays you usually write?

Who

4. Will you describe who the audience for this essay was?
   4.1. What is the instructor for this course like?
   4.2. Do you feel like you trusted him/her when you wrote the essay?
   4.3. What made you trust/distrust him/her?
   4.4. How did your instructor respond to your essay?
   4.5. How did you feel about his/her response?
   4.6. Did you share this essay with the class?
   4.7. How did your classmates respond to this essay?
   4.8. How did you feel about their responses?
   4.9. Have you shared this essay with anyone else?
   4.10. Do you plan to share this essay with anyone else?

When

5. When in the semester did you write this essay?
   5.1. Why do you think you wrote the essay at that point in the semester?
   5.2. Can you imagine having written the essay earlier/later in the semester? Why/why not?
6. What year were you in when you wrote this essay?
   6.1. Why do you think you wrote the essay at this point in your college career?
   6.2. Can you imagine having written this essay later/earlier in your college career? Why/why not?

Why

7. Why did you decide to write your paper about sexualized violence?
   7.1. The follow up questions for this category are especially difficult to predict. I imagine that answers will emerge in the previous questions that we can refer back to here.

Final Thoughts

8. Is there anything else that you think it's important for me to know about your essay, your writing process or you?

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