

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
Department of Gender Studies

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The Voices of Victimhood and Survivorship

Diploma Thesis

Prague 2023

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“I declare that I wrote the thesis independently using the sources dutifully cited and listed in the bibliography. The thesis was not used to obtain a different or the same title.”

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Mitchell Hoffman

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Abstract

Sexual violence imprints noticeable marks on a victim (and later, survivor) throughout the person's life. Experiences of victimhood and survivorship prove challengingly intangible in a discursive landscape of denial, appropriation, invalidation, and dismissal. *The Voices of Victimhood and Survivorship* takes the firsthand testaments of selected victims and survivors of sexual violence and analyzes how these cases reflect the inequal dynamics of power over their own stories. Pertinent to this analysis are the disciplines of: rhetorical studies, media studies, English studies, criminology, law, victimology studies, psychology, and violence philosophy—all collaborating interdisciplinarity in the interest of a feminist hermeneutic. These disciplines synthesize the key concepts and theories to be discussed, including the meaning of voice, victimhood, survivorship, the contexts in which these discourses are produced, and how the medium and setting influence voice. Selected accounts—a judicial victim impact statement, a memoir, and an investigative documentary interview—serve as the primary texts upon which these theories comment. The thesis seeks to characterize the meaning and profile of language and power, and to cartograph the journeys of victims into survivors by means of using their voices for recovery and justice.

Key Words: sexual violence, victim, victimhood, survivor, survivorship, post-traumatic growth, voice, discourse, vulnerability

Glossary

Sexual Violence: An act of violence expressed as non-consensual sexual contact. “Sexual violence” is distinguished from “physical violence” in that the violent physical contact is of a sexual nature (Naples 1154). The term is used closely alongside “rape” and “sexual assault” (Baxi 139).

Victim: An individual experiencing or who has experienced injustice, violence, or tragedy of a specific cause. According to Baroni, a victim may suffer “tangible” losses, such as injury to the body, loss of a loved one, or loss of belongings, or “intangible” losses, such as a loss of self, loss of trust, or loss of feelings of safety (Baroni 103). A victim typically refers to one with psychological trauma regarding an incident of victimization, and implies that there has not been successful prosecution of an offender or resolution for the victim (Baroni 103).

Victimhood: A psychological, discursive, and narrative status of being a victim. Victimhood functions as a reflexive experience on trauma (de Lint and Marmo 1) and is discursively retrospective (de Lint and Marmo 5).

Survivor: An individual living their life after experiencing injustice, violence, or tragedy, typically making efforts to recover from such incidents. A survivor serves as an identity that recognizes psychological growth or recovery after trauma (de Lint and Marmo 1).

Survivorship: A psychological, discursive, and narrative status of being a survivor. Survivorship according to de Lint and Marmo is typically discursively prospective and conceptualizes the survivor’s life ahead (de Lint and Marmo 5).

Post-Traumatic Growth: Positive character development that survivors express after experiencing and subsequently processing a traumatic event. Neimeyer explains that in face of hardship and trauma, survivors exhibit tremendous abilities to adapt to life afterwards and work towards recovery to a place of psychological peace (Neimeyer 54)

Voice: An individual’s language that expresses their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives spoken from their authentic identity. Carol Gilligan characterizes voice as “something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self” (Gilligan xvi). Voice is demonstrated by speaking or writing from a place of self-assuredness and authenticity (Gilligan xvii).

Discourse: Language that interacts with, responds to, and produces social practices (Fairclough¹ 26).

Vulnerability: The ability of an individual to be victimized or harmed. Stringer additionally notes that vulnerability includes the ability to be harmed and then to be revictimized when one's experience of wounding is not acknowledged, or even doubted, by others (Stringer 148).

¹ *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*

Background

I began studying sexual violence during my undergraduate studies at the University of New Mexico. I enrolled in my first semester the in the Fall of 2015, just one year after the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) completed its investigation of Title IX violations on over a hundred college campuses nationwide. Their investigation included my university, and their investigation concluded that my university was in violation of Title IX for their failure to comply with federal protocol regarding the handling of reports of sexual assault on campus. The DOJ found that “students, faculty and staff lacked basic understanding about reporting options, duties and obligation, as well as where to turn for help” (DOJ). In response to the DOJ report, the university was under pressure to make significant changes to their campus safety awareness training, mandatory reporting policy, and Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) investigations, lest the university be disqualified from federal funding as a public educational institution.

It is within this environment that I entered my BA programs. In compliance with the DOJ’s measures to bring the university into compliance with federal law, UNM initiated a training program designed to be as “comprehensive and effective” as the DOJ required (DOJ). The sexual assault awareness campaign, entitled “the Grey Area,” attempted to clarify to so-called “gray area” between consensual and non-consensual sexual activity on campus, and among the student body and university faculty. This compulsory training informed each new student to campus that university faculty held an obligation to report any and all disclosure of sexual misconduct as part of the university’s compliance to the federal mandate. With mandatory reporting, any university employee who heard a student or colleague say that he or she had been sexually assaulted was required to report the incident to the OEO. The OEO was under pressure to complete their investigations and properly document each step, and stepped up their efforts to prove policy violations for reports of gender discrimination of any kind.

One might expect these efforts to have a positive effect on victims and survivors of sexual violence perpetrated under university jurisdiction, and one may even imagine that the campus resources and public action taken against gender-based violence would empower these victims and survivors to seek justice. Unfortunately, this was not always the case. The Grey Area training program was met with varied reactions from new students; many did not take the training seriously, believing the official actions to be reactionary and unreasonable, while many

others took the statistics seriously and became fearful for their safety while attending university. The DOJ report highlighted that “UNM students expressed reluctance to report sexual assault to UNM because they lacked confidence in the school’s response” (DOJ). The Grey Area training program fostered fear among the student body that sexual violence on campus was very frequent (which was unfortunately true; in 2014 the DOJ estimated that 1 in 6 women in college would be sexually assaulted), but it did not seem to nurture trust among the student body in campus resources for victims or the OEO (DOJ). The mandatory reporting policy may have even had a silencing effect, effectively excluding the classroom as a space for victims and survivors to write about their experiences if they wanted to retain any privacy or anonymity. This policy was included on every class syllabus, and professors had to declare that as university employees, they were mandatory reporters over any sexual assault disclosure in a student’s work. The policy responses of the university to the 2014 DOJ report changed the ways in which sexual violence could be discussed, and tied the discourse to institutions that were already found to be failing and considered untrustworthy.

There was certainly internal criticism, but criticism originated most vocally from the student body itself. Many students disliked the terminology of the Grey Area training, saying that the line between consensual and non-consensual sexual conduct should not be considered “gray” or unclear, but as black and white—absolute and definite. Other criticism challenged the university’s consistent usage of the term “victim” in their policies and training programs, and felt that university resources for victims after their cases ended was insufficient. Why was all the attention on perpetrators, and why were victims only a policy concern when it came to disciplining perpetrators? Many felt that the mandatory reporting policy infringed on their right to bring their own experiences into their scholarly life, and that they could no longer maintain the privacy that they needed to feel safe disclosing their trauma. Even though the OEO could not compel a reported victim to testify any details, they were obliged to launch an investigation and contact purported victims, asking for a formal statement and referring them to campus resources such as campus security escorts to classes, counselling services, and STI testing facilities.

I enrolled in university among the controversies and criticisms; there were accusations of coverups that privileged students in fraternities, professors of high standing, and misleading investigators and the public about statistics and the handling of sexual assault cases. I was well aware that anything I said, even if overheard, even if understood to be confidential, would have

to be reported if it involved sexual assault. It was not an environment I was prepared for. Telling an adult or superior I trusted was no longer the protocol if I wanted my privacy to be protected. I was under the impression that we would all be adults on campus, and that we could have honest, open, and adult conversations concerning controversial topics. I was hitherto disappointed to find that the institution governed the words we could use, the subjects we could talk about, and to some extent, the position we were supposed to take.

The political environment of my undergraduate education provoked me to think often about victimhood—particularly with regards to how institutions discuss, treat, and define victims. The DOJ’s guidelines recommended not only that students and faculty receive adequate training; much of the focus of the DOJ report was for the university to revise policy and to support victims through the reporting process (DOJ). However, as the DOJ report referred to people who experienced sexual misconduct of any kind as “individuals,” “staff,” or “students,” (DOJ), the university recurrently used the word “victim.” Simultaneously, the university did not seem to acknowledge the victimization process, making little to no reference to a perpetrator. A campus climate survey in 2016 tracing the change in how the student body perceived the campus’s overall safety regarding Title IX referred to sexual violence and harassments as a “nonconsensual sexual incident” (Anderson). The Title IX Coordinator and head of the OEO at the time, Heather Cowan, reportedly said that “without a report, her team can’t take action (Anderson). I recurrently noticed that the official university statements spoke of the reporting and investigation processes in an indirect manner, implying a detachment from responsibility. While adopting policy initiatives to comply with the DOJ’s guidelines, the university limited the ways through which a victim could define themselves, and the university effectively removed privacy for self-disclosure on campus or to any university employee. The official response of the university seemed to imply that victims were responsible for both the level of campus threat of sexual misconduct, and for resolving the issue themselves, even if they do not want to.

It was under these circumstances that I became aware of the power of one’s voice, and the struggle that victims and survivors endure to obtain autonomy over their identity. This circumstance resonated with Carol Gilligan’s analysis of voice, where she says that voice “is physiological and cultural as well as deeply psychological,” and that individuals strive to find collectivity in communities where their voice can resonate. (Gilligan xvi). I learned that institutions such as the university held a significant amount of influence over who was allowed

to speak, what was allowed to be said, under which circumstances discourse can take place, and the consequences for speaking about one's own experiences. In fact, one's own voice may have been the most potent, or even the only, thing about a situation that they could control. Gilligan additionally credits voice as "a new key for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural order—a litmus test of relationships and a measure of psychological health" Gilligan (xvi). I noticed the development of my own voice in tandem with my psychological health improving; studying literature made me feel more confident and gave me the language to express myself precisely as I intended to; I trained as a volunteer for a crisis intervention hotline and learned how to demonstrate listening and just be silent; and I was treated at an eating disorder clinic where I developed kinder language to refer to myself. Across all the activities of my college years, voice recurrently surfaced as a focal theme.

This project comes from many psychological and emotional places. It comes first and foremost out of compassion for those who suffer, and secondarily from my own identification of how voice has led me to a self-identification as a survivor. This study focuses in-depth on texts that exemplify survivorship, and the speaker's awareness of the profundity of their own voice. Diligent effort has been exercised to separate assumptions and judgments of mine from understanding what the speakers say in their own words within the settings that the discourse takes place. In procession with my analyses, I have chosen to focus most closely on texts that empower the survivor to have control over their own stories.

Beginning with a cursory search of different media, I looked at autobiographies, vlogs, social media posts, movies, novels, songs, and judicial testimonies created by survivors of sexual violence. In addition to the primary texts I kept for analysis in this project, I studied²: an intimate partner abuse disclosure vlog about victimization and secondary victimization by Dr. Lindsay Doe, a sex educator for the Youtube channel *Sexpanations*; the social media movement #MeToo, a copy-paste social media post to publicly close and find collectivity in experiences of sexual harassment or violence victimization; Jyssica Schwartz's *You Are Not Alone: True Stories of Sexual Assault, Abuse, & Harassment*, an anthology of stories from both anonymous and publicly identified survivors of sexual violence or harassment; and the music video *Like a Prayer* by pop singer and rape survivor Madonna. I decided to approach the sources as case studies—

² Citations to these sources not analyzed in this study will be provided in a "further reading" section following the bibliography

ones where the text was profound and substantive enough to make the interplay of power and voice visible in the discourse. I further chose not to write about works of art of fiction created by sexual violence survivors, preferring personal autobiographical accounts as more direct and concrete in terms of discourse. Some other sources I removed from the project because they were comparatively less substantive, leaving me as a researcher little to analyze. I also opted not to delve much research into social media after seeing that the institution is relatively new and the discourse changes very quickly. Separate studies with different methodologies could better accomplish the goals of this project on these media, and thus I highlight three primary sources in detail in this study: *The Ghosts of Highway 20*, a 2018 investigative documentary about a series of crimes along Highway 20 in Oregon in the 1980s and 1990s; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou's widely acclaimed first memoir; and the victim impact statements for the USA Gymnastics sports physician convicted in the 2018 sex abuse scandal. I observed that these sources have a lot to say about voice and power in one's identity as a survivor of sexual violence, and I noticed how the media influences their discourse in a manner that empowers survivors to speak.

Primarily, this study seeks to learn what language and discourse reveal about the victimhood and survivorship of a person who experiences sexual violence. This necessitates an investigation into which discursive traits define a person as a victim or a survivor within an institution and how institutions reinforce, reproduce, or subvert those discourses. Additionally, with the person experiencing sexual violence at the center of focus, it is equally important to note how the subject's voice signals their own psychological processing of the violence, their own identity in relation to victimhood and/or survivorship, and the subject's agency over their own narrative. Lastly, this discussion compares victimhood and survivorship to each other in terms of language, their relation to each other, their relationship to institutions, and their utility as concepts.

A Note on Stylistic Choices

As this study deals with the subject of voice, my own voice as a survivor will stylize the writing used throughout the work. I would like to make these choices clear here, and to put forth that just because the stylistics of my writing voice may differ from convention, and may differ from other survivors' testimonies, that doesn't mean that one is superior, more correct, or more valid than the others. Some of the stylistic choices serve to remain consistent with the institutional frameworks of the discourse studied, as well as the contemporality of the discourse at hand. Other stylistic choices intentionally draw focus towards, or direct focus away from, one subject in particular.

Beyond the introductory section, I will switch from a personal, first-person voice to an academic, third-person voice. This is done to avoid comparisons between my experiences and the experiences of the subjects studied, and to refrain from distracting the reader from the discourse at hand. I intend for this study to capture and reflect the voices of victims and survivors first and foremost, but in case a quotation from a source does not cleanly fit into a discussion, small modifications to the quotation may be made using brackets or ellipses.

Regarding gender, much of this study will be written neutrally when possible and appropriate. I will generally make the gender of the subject at hand visible when necessary by using the third person singular gendered pronouns "he" or "she," and I will use the gender-neutral, singular "they/them" when the intent is to be ambiguous or inclusive to all genders. At times, the gender-neutral third person "one/one's/oneself" may also be used, especially when stressing an individual subject. Though the primary texts of this study tell the stories of women and girls, the observations I have made should not be considered as true only for, especially for, or uniquely for women.

Violence can be a difficult topic to define the boundaries of, as doing so can make troublesome inclusions or dangerous exclusions to what is counted as "violence." I am aware of the ongoing thriving discourse in feminist theory about what should be the definition of violence, how it should be classified, and how it should be termed. Many scholars prefer to frame such violence as "sexualized" rather than sexual; Ludwig Boltzmann for example explains that "in respect of definitions it is necessary to separate 'sexual violence,' as an aspect of sexual behavior, and 'sexualized power'" (Boltzmann 172). The usage of "sexualized violence" stresses

that violence takes on sexual traits, rather than sexuality adopting violent traits; I do not see this distinction represented in the primary texts, though it can function as a research method to frame the theoretical conceptualization of violence. The pattern I intend to follow is that the study will follow the voices of the victims and survivors in the primary texts, and that the analysis will be consistent with the terms used in the institutional setting of the text. This scope of this study is not intended to include all forms of violence motivated by gendered dynamics, all forms of sex-based discrimination, or all actions that could make one feel unsafe or violated. Rather, the study focuses on when violence affects a subject, and then that subject's voice entering a selected institutional setting. I will mostly use the terms "sexual violence," "sexual abuse," "rape," or "sexual assault," since these terms are more consistent with the theoretical texts cited and narrow the scope of the project to this type of discourse surrounding violence. These terms remain inclusive of a range of experiences of victimhood and survivorship, and do not necessarily conform themselves to what is defined by the policy.

Lastly, modifications to the texts will be made to minimize the names of perpetrators. In case a perpetrator is named, he or she will be simply known as "perpetrator," "attacker," "assailant," "offender," or whatever term is most suitable to the situation between that person and the victim or survivor. This study prioritizes the voices of victims and survivors, and putting the victims or survivors first and letting the perpetrator fade to the background stands as a discursive transition of power back to the victim or survivor. Through the analyses, it is easy to find the primary texts I have analyzed, should there be any need to identify the perpetrator for related study.

Limitations and Positionality

As this study concentrates on voice in discourse of sexual violence victimhood and survivorship, I opted for detailed, in-depth analyses of a smaller group of texts separated into distinct media and institutional settings. Although there are many institutions that have noteworthy influences on voice, discourse, and conceptions of victimhood and survivorship, the ones that this study highlights are those involved in the primary texts: a victim impact statement from a criminal court case, an autobiographical reflection published in a memoir, and an interview by a documentary crew. There are a range of institutional settings (churches, prison, the military, professional sports, public schools, etc.) and genres (social media posts, visual arts, film, political protests, law enforcement, clinical practice, etc.) that this study does not have the time or space to analyze in enough depth to understand the complexity and nuance specific to each intersection. Similarly, the sources come from the U.S., in the English language, which may not necessarily translate well to discourse from other countries, in other languages, or other historical periods.

In terms of an epistemology sensitive to the presence and significance of gender, this study specifically involves the discourse of women as survivors. While other texts were considered for analysis and involved the voices of men, transgender, and non-binary survivors of sexual violence, the sources that I found most profound and that most explicitly discussed and showcased voice only involved women survivors. Language, indeed, comes into conversation with many aspects of identity, and the institutional discourse surrounding victims and survivors of other genders may not necessarily match the discourse around women, though there are certainly areas of overlap. The groundwork established in this study aims not to exclude or delegitimize other voices or experiences, but rather concentrates on sources that may not be entirely representative across all genders.

I consider this work to be a feminist project; that is, the knowledge produced through this project should serve to help understand the explicit and implicit aspects of institutions of power as they pertain to the lived experiences of individuals through their gender, as well as other components of one's identity. The study prioritizes an investigation of assumptions by using a deconstructionist approach to the discourse at hand, and a critical theorization of how the discourse produces experiences and identities of victimhood and survivorship. The principal

reason this study selects texts involving victims and survivors of sexual violence is that the discourse around this particular type of violence exposes many underlying forces within institutions and media influencing and enforcing gendered conceptions of victimhood.

This study critically examines three select texts in great detail and explores the significance of several aspects of language and discourse. Though quantitatively, discourse analysis of a wide range of texts may show certain patterns that are significant, this study employs qualitative methods to characterize the voices of the subjects studied. Qualitative methods have the capability to observe and describe the key traits within a singular text, and work well for drawing cause and effect links from institution to discourse. This study does not proclaim a representative population sample, or seek to establish any sort of standard, norm, center of data, and does not consider the commonality or prevalence of a particular type of discourse. Instead, the attention is delegated to voice, victimhood, and survivorship function in each individual text as evident through language and discourse.

The most difficult personal bias to navigate in relation to this study is my own identity as a survivor of sexual violence. Since the recovery work I completed in cognitive and behavioral therapy helped me to change my attitudes and behaviors in a healing and empowering way, I tend to view survivorship as preferable to victimhood, and favor language that leads to survivorship. While survivorship remains an integral part of my identity and a source of inspiration and strength, I have made great efforts to suspend those values for the purpose of understanding what the subjects say for themselves in the texts analyzed. A necessary component of the study is analyzing my own discourse and working to modify my voice to match those of the subjects studied more closely. Though survivorship remains a value that I idealize, the study avoids presuming this to be inevitable, universal, or uncontested.

Methodology, Source Materials, and Theory

Investigating the processes by which discourses of survivorship and victimhood of sexual violence are produced entails a thorough review of the discourse's operant power structures. The terminology and language itself can vary in denotation and implication depending on the social status of the victim or survivor, the institutional reception of the incident of sexual violence in particular, the institutional precedents for how such violence is conceived and perceived, and the victim or survivor's relationship to such an institution. Although the terminology may carry a moralistic weight, each institution from healthcare to mass media to law enforcement and judiciary systems hold their own respective regards for the choice of dubbing an individual as a "victim," "survivor," along with the attitudes an individual or institution has towards a person bearing that label. The nuances of the rhetoric of victimhood and survivorship correspond critically to various media, from autobiographies and news reports to posts on social media and public service advertisements, as the context of publicly visible narratives necessitates that the story relate to its audience an appropriate emotional disposition to the subject's experience of life after violence. In a clinical setting, for instance, language serves as an indicator of the subject's psychological processing of violence—up to and including growth or recovery from trauma (Neimeyer 53). Voice then becomes essential for detecting if, how, and when the subject has undergone his or her transformation (consciously or not) from a victim into a survivor. Other settings, especially reports to law enforcement and prosecution in judicial systems, limit the conception of the subject as a survivor as the dispensation of justice comes from the official rulings of a legal institution by means of due process (Baroni 103). The medium of the narrative, institutional setting of the discourse, and social identity of the subject all function symbiotically to reproduce and reinforce the ideas of victimhood and survivorship.

This project approaches the primary texts as a composite representation of the individuals' victimhood or survivorship. This requires an analysis of the text itself, the way it is presented, and the medium and stage through which it takes place. Fairclough characterizes discourse in tripartite sense; he categorizes the elements of discourse as "ways of acting" in the form of a genre, "ways of representing" in the form of the discourse itself, and "was of being" as the style of the discourse (Fairclough 26³), "discourse" then refers to the definitions of "language

³ *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*

and other types of semiosis as elements of social life” and “particular ways of representing part of the world” (Fairclough⁴ 26). Conceiving of discourse by these modalities and categories, it is then possible to observe patterns within language that shape and reproduce social experiences—in this case, victimhood and survivorship. Beyond merely identifying and describing this process of social production, this project seeks to answer more than just “what” discourses of victimhood and survivorship say, but also, “how” and “why” they take on the discursive properties that they do. This entails more specifically a *critical discourse analysis*; Fairclough establishes this as “an analytical framework for studying the connections between language, power and ideology” (Fairclough⁵ 23). Discourses of victimhood and survivorship span beyond the experiences of violence; their formations are contingent largely upon the institutions that influence who may speak, how one may speak, who is heard, and if they will be believed.

Labeling an individual who has experienced sexual violence as a “victim” or as a “survivor” stages the discourse around whichever identity is named. Engaging in a critical discourse analysis of victimhood reveals that the language operates within a sociopolitical framework that places judgments on and makes assumptions about the subject. Willem de Lint and Marinella Marmo extensively discuss the ways that discourse constructs victimhood. They claim that “victimology is concerned with exploring the reflexive experience of the victim” (de Lint and Marmo 1). This resonates with the texts analyzed in this project, where victims grammatically mark themselves as the object of violence, noting what happens to them and how their lives respond to the experience of victimization. Curiously, though the English language contains the verb “to survive,” no equivalent verb in the active form denotes “to be victimized,” so de Lint and Marmo’s observation of victimization as a reflexive and responsive grammatical process is likely rooted in the very language itself. They proceed to differentiate this discourse from survivorship:

Recovery depends upon engagement with formal and informal social support networks as part of a reflexive engagement that shifts from retrospection (concerning injustice) to prospection (concerning survival). de Lint and Marmo 5.

Here, the individual’s identity and perspective shift in their own history and memory of sexual violence. Victimhood has a specific point of origin in the violent survived, resurfacing the more

⁴ *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*

⁵ *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*

the individual concentrates on the violence that happened to them. Conversely, a survivor's gaze in this sense is forward. They may reflect on their past, but shifting the object of observation to the survivor's life after victimization impacts the grammar, genre, and modality of the discourse. They additionally note that "the obtainment of some version of post-victimisation equanimity in the survivor identity depends upon a positive, prospective view of a future and a complementary adoption of the means to achieve milestones" (de Lint and Marmo 9). The texts selected for analysis balance this duality, with the medium and institutional setting of survivorship discourse promoting a discursive empowerment favoring survivorship.

Since the project of this study centralizes on victims and survivors of sexual violence, the approach to critical discourse analysis takes considerations into how these discourses interact with power and ideology. Sexual violence victimization requires some form of vulnerability to the crime, and these vulnerabilities correspond to a complex intersectionality of the individual's gender, age, and racial identity, in addition to institutional or relational power differences that produce vulnerability. Rebecca Stringer explains that "vulnerability" refers not only to "the ability to be wounded" when considering victimhood; she adds the qualification that vulnerability in victimhood discourse further means "the ability to be wounded and then to have that wounding effaced, in language, by others" (Stringer 148). This component of the victimization process of sexual violence survivors complicates the discourses of victimhood and survivorship. The violence alone initiates victimhood, but the secondary victimization that victims experience when their voices are minimized or doubted becomes part of the ideology of the discourse. Survivorship, then, manifests discursively from the survivor when they exercise a reclamation of their voice and turn the discourse into one that validates their experience, and typically showcases the survivor attesting to their own strength and growth following the violence. Post-traumatic growth, as J. Curtis McMillen reports, surfaces as a self-reported phenomenon that survivors ascribe to themselves (McMillen 52), usually to psychologically reorient their remembrance of the traumatic event into one of empowerment and meaning (McMillen 51). This project looks closely at the subject's own words and how such words expose self-image and self-esteem.

Situating the analysis of victimhood and survivorship discourse within the field of gender studies lends itself to an examination of how gender interplays with social discourse. This can prove a tricky task, as there are many approaches one may undertake in order to inform a gender-

sensitive perspective on discourse. Even so, there are “areas of convergence” that Mary Bucholtz relays to:

Although the forms that discourse analysis takes vary widely, those that emphasize discourse as a social, cultural, or political phenomenon have in common a theory of discourse not merely as the reflection of society, culture, and power but as their constantly replenished source. In other words, for most discourse analysts the social world is produced and reproduced in great part through discourse. Bucholtz 45.

Taking the socially reproductive capacity of discourse into account, gender then becomes a pattern repeating itself in each of the intersecting facets of the narrative. Although difficult to conclusively and cohesively pinpoint a definitively determinant style of discourse, characterizing the discourse through an analysis of gender can present a pattern in discourse to be recognized in otherwise unlinked cases of sexual violence. It is crucial, then, that characterizing gender within a discursive setting not be abstracted or simplified. Deborah Cameron’s commentary on gender, language, and discourse specifies that discourse analysis does not merely consist of “sounds, words, or decontextualized sentences, but of more extended samples of language in use” (Cameron 947). While many texts may warrant an analysis of gender, discourse “is a highly organized linguistic phenomenon whose formal characteristics are of interest in their own right” (Cameron 948). Discourse analysis responding to an interrogation of gender then orients toward the discovery of a deep-rooted and widely-influential element of language.

Performing a critical discourse analysis of a text with an active consideration of gender necessitates an understanding of how gender and its intersectionalities function as social practice, ideology, and power. A “feminist discourse analysis” further promotes the interest of deconstructing such foundations, though Mary Bucholtz notes that this is hard to concretely define (Bucholtz 43). She notes that in gender studies, discourse analysis lends itself to examining “the intersection between language and gender,” though there are multiple different approaches to this that are not necessarily rooted in a shared feminist theory (Bucholtz 43). Therefore, when I consider gender and intersectionality within the discourses of victimhood and survivorship, I aim for a project that conveys empowerment to the survivors and critiques discursive systems of oppression. With respect to the elements of language, aspects of sentence structure, grammar, or syntax point to the deeper mechanisms of gender at play that discourse analysis reaches to uncover. This can be synthesized from data quantitatively, looking at average

diction, average vocal volume, and frequency of speech, or qualitatively, exploring the elements of direct or indirect speech, implications of words according to the speaker's identity, relative level of articulation and confidence, or other similar intersections between gender and language (Bucholtz 44). Intersectionality within the discourse analysis thus becomes a vital tool in language deconstruction. For instance, Penelope Eckert comments on the socially reduplicant language produced in adolescence as essentially gendered:

The use of vernacular language - language that is sanctioned by adults, particularly teachers—is one means to establish one's independence, one's toughness, and one's right to "make the rules." And closely related to the use of vernacular language, for many, is the use of expletives and sexual references. Eckert 387.

By considering the power dynamics of age at a particular stage in life (in this case, adolescence), discourse analysis can qualitatively align a given discourse from that demographic to the standardized statuses and activities of adolescents. Here, the language not only denotes what the discourse means, but what the discourse signals about one's own identity. Similarly, analyzing discourse with respect to intersectionality may identify how discourse reveals, shapes, or reinforces one's gender, racial, or class identity. I would conceptualize this approach to analyzing discourse as a feminist method, or alternatively, as informed by feminist theory.

Deconstructing discourse furthermore calls on a range of scholarly standpoints that can illuminate the linguistic feature most appropriate to deconstruct. Although it is intuitive that to understand discourse in a legal setting, contributions from law are central to understanding the limits and capacities of the text being analyzed. Likewise, using discourse analysis to study narratives of victimhood and survivorship of sexual violence draws upon a slew of disciplines. Norman Fairclough, notably providing the tools for a qualitative study of discourse, calls for "transdisciplinary dialogue with perspectives on language and discourse" (Fairclough⁶ 6). He constructs "a network of social practices" with regards to language, which he calls "orders of discourse" (Fairclough⁷ 24). Designing an order of discourse allows the possibility that a given discourse has likely or realistic variations in interpretive meaning, but that reasonable exclusions and likely possibilities can be made. The actual activities of discourse analysis applied to a text in turn lend themselves to a poststructuralist paradigm and critical theory-driven augmentation.

⁶ *Analysing Discours: Textual Analysis for Social Research*

⁷ *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*

A multitude of qualitative approaches operate within this framework to generate the possibility for comparison, evaluation, theorization, and ultimately, deconstruction of the overarching dynamics of power within a discourse. Sherianna Kramer suggests “treating the text itself as an object of study,” “mapping the networks of relationships into discourses to then be located in relations of knowledge of power,” “contrasting discourses against one another in order to identify the different objects that they constitute,” and “describing how the discourses are dynamic and changing,” among others (Kramer 237-238). The focus on power and power relations classifies this type of discourse analysis more solidly as critical discourse analysis (Fairclough⁸ 41-42). While important to conduct a critical discourse analysis considering feminist optics, qualitative comparisons coagulate the findings of each study into a larger, more meaningful schema of the discourses’ sociopolitical location. There also come the limitations that the discourse may merely indicate a specific set of interacting additions, rather than irrefutably prove a claim about the power structure in essence or as a whole. The texts selected then must be already related by having the same or a similar speaker, coming from the same or a similar institution, or representing the same or a similar topic. Hence, analyzing discourse of victimhood and survivorship should not aim to connect narratives that stretch over too much distance, legal or political borders, or distinct historic periods.

The discourses of victimhood and survivorship in particular occupy a point of tender contention among feminist scholars. The terms “victim” and “survivor” respectively carry a complex set of baggage when implemented in the many forums in which sexual violence discourse occurs. Using the terms “victim” and “victimhood” can portray the subject as a passive agent, lock the subject into a status within which he or she has no control, withhold the propensity to recover, highlight the subject’s experience with violence while ignoring the subject’s fully-fledged personhood, and evoke negative emotions of pity or blame from others. Ovenden critiques that victimization in discourse is often situated as “failure to use common sense” and that the identity as a political movement has been met with “victim backlash” (Ovenden 943). Ruparelia offers a different critique of the term “victim,” where institutions frame the insensitively seek to “appease” the victim (Ruparelia 665) rather than bring justice, and treat their needs in response to victimization as a “plight” that abdicates power discursively to the institution of the criminal justice system (Ruparelia 666). Similarly, the terms “survivor”

⁸ *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*

and “survivorship” may ignore the likelihood of revictimization, underestimate the lifelong effects of trauma, bring unwelcomed praise to the subject as a strong or brave character, or misidentify the subject’s relationship to his or her experience of sexual violence. Ovenden notes that popular discourses of survivors centralize “themes such as disclosure and ‘survivorship’” without necessarily “identifying and healing survivor suffering” (Ovenden 942). Thus, the terms do not rigidly or unproblematically enact the social practices of empowerment or give a survivor voice. The discourse must be understood in the wider context of what the medium and institutional settings characterize as victimhood and survivorship.

Still, both categories designate a status and positionality within institutions pertinent to the ways in which sexual violence discourse is produced. Régine Michelle Jean-Charles poignantly emphasizes the categorization of the terms within feminist circles:

Survivor narratives play a pivotal role in reshaping discourses that focus on victimization... The more conventional view relies on victimhood as its operative modality—in the 1980s and 1990s, especially, anti-rape discourses deployed the figure of the victim to marshal support for the movement. In many ways, the term survivor emerged as a response to the purveying of the victim myth. Jean-Charles 40.

Jean-Charles situates survivor narratives and survivorship as a concept linked to a political movement that challenges violence against women (Jean-Charles 40). For her, “too often, representations of sexual violence position women as eternal victims of rape, rather than as individual subjects for whom sexual violence is one aspect of their identities” (Jean-Charles 40). Indeed, survivorship plays an important role in assigning agency to an individual discursively as a multifaceted and intersectionally complex subject. Keeping in mind a feminist project to understand how victimhood functions discursively, each respective term corresponds to a point of view meant to elucidate the normalcy of sexual violence in society, and to bring justice to the victim in the terminology. Crucially, the terms occupy a vital space in sexual assault discourse and implicate the voice of the subject at hand. These labels can be thus read as loaded terms with dichotomous gendered significations. Sally McConnell-Ginet stresses that “when a referring expression uses a nominal that can be used to characterize or categorize, the speaker is assuming that the referent is indeed categorized by the nominal” (McConnell-Ginet 73). She shows that “predicative labels characterize and categorize people,” including by gender (McConnell-Ginet 69). The label “victim” for example categorizes a person by their experience of vulnerability and

wounding. Although it is possible that individual institutions or scholarly eyes may not take such a presumptuous or assumptive position, the discourse produced alludes to the prevailing essentialism of gender in conceptions of victimhood as feminine. Bergvall theorizes that popular discourses of gender imply that “women’s language is regarded as deficient when compared to men’s” and that “it fundamentally reflects men’s dominance over women” (Bergvall 277). In relation to victimhood, assumptions of a victim as “she” or “her” reinforce this gendered dynamic of feminine vulnerability and masculine dominance.

The discourse of people who experience sexual violence can show not only the machinations of relevant institutions, but also signify the subject’s psychological status with regards to an experience of sexual violence. At times, analyzing this type of discourse involving the psychology of the subject can prove quite tricky, as what may be said carry as much significance as how it was said, and what was left unsaid. Lakoff mentions that “gender and its appropriate analysis form both text and subtext,” requiring the analyst of discourse to interpret more than the explicit text, but also to consider subtext (Lakoff 163). Silence, uncertainty over one’s own voice, a range of forms of denial, and diversion tactics often make clear and direct answers difficult to impossible to ascertain. A treacherous angle to approach from, what Pamela Ballinger calls a “delayed discovery doctrine” to sexual violence where the discourse posits the victim as a person unable to recount their experience of violence or their reluctance to recognize it as violence, functions in U.S. culture writ large as “a repressed memory movement, reinforced by media talk-show culture, networks of therapists and a backlog of legal cases brought *ex post facto* against putative offenders” (Ballinger 100). Language and discourse are linked to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and related trauma diagnoses, as well as a sociocultural climate of repression, erasure, and denial that downplay the subject’s willingness, readiness, and sovereignty over telling his or her narrative. Though the effects of trauma are very much a subjective experience that can affect each individual uniquely, trauma does not necessarily equate to a permanent psychological stagnation in a particular stage of trauma processing. De Lint and Marmo explain that victims of trauma tend to make attempts at recovery, whether constructively or maladaptively (de lint and Marmo 1). They cite self-medication and addiction as reflexive to trauma and note that it may even “assist their progression from victimhood” (de Lint and Marmo 1). Likewise, recovery is not a guarantee, nor can regression or revictimization be discounted as possibilities. Post-traumatic growth is a process by which victims grow after

nurturing the self after traumatic experience. It serves as a recovery process of reclamation and transformation, with the potential to transform a person from a victim into a survivor. J. Curtis McMillen notes that cognitive processing, social support, and culture play key roles in fostering post-traumatic growth. Critical discourse analysis can typify and define turning points for trauma processing, charting a trajectory for the subject's self-transformation as reflected in his or her discourse (McMillen 50). McMillen argues that "viewing growth generically, clinicians might encourage rumination on one's schemas and narrative building" and that "some positive changes seem almost idiosyncratic" (McMillen 51). Studying discourse in a given moment may then reflect an attitude at a given point in time, but studying the subject holistically in multiple settings and points of time cartographs the subject's ability to experience post-traumatic growth. Discourse that is emotionally charged, distant or eerily devoid of emotion, absolutist or nihilistic, or otherwise characterized within a mind suffering from a post-traumatic event such as sexual violence necessitates a breakdown and evaluation of the prominent psychological factors shaping the language in such a way.

Discourses of victimhood and survivorship develop distinctly in separate discursive settings. They echo the identity of the subject who has experienced sexual violence, and are prone to changes over time. A final aspect tying a feminist prospect to this type of study concentrates at the heart of the analysis: voice. The institutional paradigm within which a victim or survivor recounts his or her narrative can have silencing, censoring, amplifying, deafening, or otherwise modifying impacts on the narrative. In a judiciary setting, for example, feminist discourse analysis may understand "the language of sexual assault adjudication processes as a way of gaining greater insight into how dominant ideologies of sexual violence... are reproduced, sustained, and (potentially) contested" (Ehrlich⁹ 645). The judicial system has rules for who may speak, how much one may speak, and certain testimonies can be overruled, thrown out, or silenced by a judge. In a clinical setting, the power differential between patient and clinician may exclude a victim or survivors voice if the vocabulary is intangible. When reporting to law enforcement, the official documentation and potential liabilities of a failure to prosecute can intimidate or otherwise stymie the voice of the victim or survivor. Lending discourse analysis to a project of empowerment of a disenfranchised demographic means "taking up a social position and 'learning to speak' of a political agenda against sexual violence in a way that

⁹ "Coercing Gender: Language in Sexual Assault Adjudication Processes"

begins to address the voice and agency of survivors” (Ovenden 950). This should not be conflated with speaking for a subject, but rather, locating the expressed voice within the discourse and how it has been shaped by actively involved institutions.

Discourse analysis is constantly evolving to cater to specific niches of texts to be analyzed. The methodologies largely deal with the kind of discourse, identity of the speaker, discursive context, and macrosocial/superstructural factors influencing each other symbiotically. Executing a feminist discourse analysis in particular considers the power dynamics that alter, obfuscate, or revise the narrative in the interest of reproducing social dynamics. It is vital, then, to be sensitive not only to subtle and nuanced elements of language, but also to be able to detect the politics of silence. Each narrative is subject to institutional limitations as well as personal from the speaker, and so to locate the subject as a victim or survivor largely depends on what is being said, how it is being said, in which setting the discourse is produced, and how the psychological image of the subject’s experience looks. With these considerations, a wide array of texts can be duly sifted through to schematize any discourse of victimhood or survivorship.

Victimhood and survivorship in sexual violence discourse are starkly visible in prolific and influential cases. Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is still widely read among public school students, and the 2018 USA Gymnastics sex abuse scandal stands as the most prolific sex abuse scandal in sports history (Graham). An appropriate text for critical discourse analysis maintains durable reverberations in public life; that is, profound texts have a sort of echoing or returning property that keeps the discourse alive after it has been spoken or written down. The texts laid forth for this analysis considers the impact of each narrative on the speaker, and furthermore to an audience, who may be successfully moved by that narrative. Since narratives of victimhood and survivorship interact with each other, either directly or indirectly, the selected texts are narratives that may be enshrined as exemplary models of navigating the type of setting in which the discourse plays out. Cases involving famous, accomplished, or high-profile individuals may resonate with the voices of those who admire the subject, but obscurity, anonymity, and collectivity comprise a vastly important body of victimhood and survivorship discourse, as is visible in Olympic gold medalist Aly Raisman’s victim impact statement. These cases in particular demonstrate critical moments for the discourse to undergo a shift in paradigm, or even change aspects of how discourse from that moment onwards will be reproduced, as judge Aquilina’s commentary in the sentencing hearing aims for

justice for the victims (55th District Court – Mason). The accessibility of the texts also provides for cumulative commentary by a range of scholars over time. The ability of the texts to represent the discourse of their respective institutional settings while also entering a broader social discourse play a pivotal in selecting which texts to analyze.

The representational aspect of the cases warrant attention to how each individual voice and each produced discourse resonates with other cases involving the same institutions. This allows for deconstructionist methods to pick identity, voice, power, and power relations apart beyond the cases individually. Each discourse forms and belongs to a sort of “community of practice” in which language in use performs gendered norms, and hence shaped discourse (Ehrlich 239). This concept “theorize[s] the relationship between gender and language in terms of local communities and social practices” (Ehrlich¹⁰ 240). When analyzing discourse of victimhood or survivorship of sexual violence, localizing and isolating the community of the discourse from the start can identify the power relationships within the institution. This can later speak to the condition of larger, connected communities. For instance, examining the victim impact statements of the 2018 USA Gymnastics sex abuse scandal collects the voices of a series female athletes, and their families, as a community exercising their voices in the institution of a judicial court. The judge, the Honorable Rosemarie Aquilina, exceptionally related to the discourse in favor of survivorship, and ensured that each plaintiff’s voice and narrative received due diligence (55th District Court – Mason). She urged the usage of survivorship terminology, telling the victims testifying that they are “survivors” and commending their strength and resolve to make their voices heard in court, such that would give each survivor ample space to speak and to treat the plaintiffs as strong and brave survivors (55th District Court – Mason). This case includes the voices of over one hundred subjects who experienced sexual assault by the same perpetrator, including several Olympic medalists. The case received nationwide and international coverage and sparked protests to and changes in university sports medicine and the sport of gymnastics as a whole—the USA gymnastics head coach, CEO, and Michigan State University president and gymnastics coaches ass subsequently faced criminal charges and convictions (Graham). As such, this case contains a wealth of discursive elements related to the project of this study, so the study analyzes this case for its profundity of discourse.

¹⁰ “Communities of Practice, Gender, and the Representation of Sexual Assault

Individual narratives given in great detail or among a body of other, related narratives also comprise discursively rich texts. Maya Angelou's 1969 memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* ranks as a bestseller and literary classic, echoing well into the 21st century. It is often included as quintessential reading for public school attendees, standing out as a widely praised book in an American literary body. The narrative recounts, among other traumas, experiences of sexual violence and Angelou's experiences of victimhood and survivorship. The text captures a rich set of perspectives in reflection that trace the journey of Angelou into survivorship, and remains in conversation through interviews with Angelou late into her life and commentary by scholars and critics. Suzette A. Henke characterizes the narrative and its emphasis on survivorship:

Maya Angelou has frequently spoken out about the profound effects of childhood sexual trauma and her lifelong struggle to heal the shattered self through autobiographical acts of narrative reformulation... She reclaims the horror of childhood sexual abuse from statistical anonymity through a poignant autobiographical account of the traumatic impact of physical violation... Henke 22.

This particular memoir contains linguistically rich and psychologically revealing discourse directly related to the purpose and topic of this study. Angelou's memoir survives as a text continually shaping the discourse of victimhood and survivorship in the memoir genre and literary world. Perhaps most notably, Angelou's memoir retrospectively recounts her experience in her own words and traces the impact of the violence on her voice. As both a literary theme and an exercise of self-empowerment, using her voice to tell her own stories according to her memory demonstrates the potential of writing to express and define one's own victimhood and survivorship.

Other texts, though prolific and influential, still encapsulate the voices of subjects who have experienced sexual violence in reflection. Interviews of Marlene Gabrielsen in the 2018 documentary *Ghosts of Highway 20* produce an emotionally wrenching yet transformative discourse. Likely the first and only victim to survive an attack by the Highway 20 serial killer in Oregon, Gabrielsen remarks on her survivorship, particularly noting how the institution of law enforcement was silencing to her, but that the documentary crew was stabilizing and validating for her. She discusses the victim-blaming discourse of the police at the time of her attack, mentioning that both her race and gender discredited her sensibilities in the eyes of the police.

Nancy Naples stresses that “the dynamics of gender, race, class, and sexuality are embedded in the diverse contexts through which survivor discourse is generated and challenged, as well as woven into the discourse” (Naples 1152). The interviews with Gabrielsen explore her marginalized identities at the time of the attack, most especially age, gender, and race. The text include not only discourse surrounding the topic of study, but permit the analysis portion of the study to consider various social identities. The medium additionally serves as an exercise in using film and interview to allow a survivor to express their voice.

Each text was selected because they stood out as exceptionally influential, personally challenging, discursively complex, institutionally representational, and accessibly visible for critical discourse analysis. There are ways in which the text echo or mirror each other, and characterize victimhood and survivorship of sexual violence within their respective institutional settings. Not only do the texts offer narratives capturing the voices of the subjects, but they promote a vision of trauma recovery, post traumatic growth, and enact a culture of survivorship. The theory provided from a range of disciplines enables the texts to highlight where discourse is being held back, denied, obfuscating, revised, and censored. The analysis of each text individually and comparatively can then find solutions that can produced a discourse respectful of the subject’s voice and conducive to his or her survivorship.

The Ghosts of Highway 20: Discourse and Voice in an Investigative Documentary

From 1978-1992, a series of rapes, disappearances, and murders of women and girls took place along Highway 20 in the state of Oregon. Prior to the murders and disappearances, one woman, Marlene Gabrielsen, reports a man attacking and raping her to the police, and undergoes a sexual assault nurse examination to collect evidence of the crime (Crombie). Though she gives a description of her assailant and shows the damage to her body and clothes from the attack, police decline to pursue charges, disbelieving the woman's claims. Decades later, Gabrielsen responds to an interview request from journalist Noelle Crombie to tell her story on camera for the investigative documentary miniseries *The Ghosts of Highway 20*. Gabrielsen features most prominently in part 1, which focuses on her account of the attack and the response from police after she reports the attack. The recording is in black-and-white, and features very little of Crombie's questions, highlighting Gabrielsen's story responses instead. The documentary provides Gabrielsen with the space and sensitivity for her to narrate her experience of violence, and includes elements of both victimhood and survivorship.

The documentary itself presents Gabrielsen's story in her words, with supporting commentary by a narrator. When she appears on screen, the documentary labels her with her first name, Marlene, with the description "survivor" underneath her name. This is contrasted against known and suspected victims of the same perpetrator, who were never found after going missing, or who were found dead. The discourse of the documentary thus uses two components of survivorship: survivorship signifying Gabrielsen having lived after sexual victimization, and the fatality to other victims who did not survive. The documentary highlights Gabrielsen's survivorship in a manner that sets the other interviews, police records, and recordings into the same discursive setting. Though each person involved in the production of the documentary have been affected by the Highway 20 disappearances and murders differently, the medium places these subjects into the same story where victimhood affected several victims, but only one remains as a survivor. Fairclough notes that "different texts within the same chain of events or which are located in relation to the same (network of) social practices, and which represent broadly the same aspects of the world, differ in the discourses upon which they draw" (Fairclough¹¹ 127). Crombie not only presents Gabrielsen's story as she responds to interview

¹¹ *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*

questions, but does so in a manner discursively different from other genres relevant to the production. Gabrielsen tells her recollection of her attack in the first person, shifting between present and past tense, while the narrator exclusively uses the past tense between interview segments. The word choice and style of other interviews, police tape recordings, and the narration reflect the experiences of victimhood by the subjects at different moments. The documentary then can be understood as a synthesis of texts whose meanings synthesize with other referenced texts in the story. In this case, the interviews of Gabrielsen portray her as a survivor on her own, and as the sole survivor out of several other victims.

The discourses of victimhood and survivorship both appear in the documentary's interviews with Gabrielsen, as both apply to her story in the context of the story. By editing the interviewer out from the Gabrielsen's recounting of her attack, the documentary allows her to choose and present her words and frame her story, signaling her as a survivor to the audience. While presented on screen as *the* survivor, the part where Gabrielsen is featured the most prominently focuses on the attack, and the police response to her reporting her attack, Crombie only uses the word "victim" in the generalized sense towards the end of part 5, where she asks for Gabrielsen's consent to use her name in the documentary:

Crombie: Marlene, we don't normally, we do not name rape victims. That's just a policy, I just wanna have a discussion with you. Just about including you—

Gabrielsen: My name?

Crombie: yeah, Marlene Gabrielsen, in the story.

Gabrielsen: Yeah, Marlene K Gabrielsen, I'm Inupiaq. I'm a strong woman. (Crombie 2:05:47-2:07:22).

Other victims are named and investigated in other parts of the documentary, but Crombie never calls Gabrielsen a victim directly during the interview. She even mentions that "you're the only survivor" to Gabrielsen in the same segment. Though victimhood appears in the periphery of the interview, survivorship remains focal to Gabrielsen's segments. This exemplifies the potential of the documentary to influence the trajectory of the discourse in a manner that gives power to the survivor. This choice shifts the discourse away from the disenfranchising and dismissive statements that law enforcement made in response to Gabrielsen's report in the case. Merely being in charge of the topic shows Gabrielsen's power in this particular setting; Lakoff remarks that "floor-holding and topic control are associated with power in the conversational dyad,"

(Lakoff 162) where one may express power simply by occupying the space or time with one's words, and choosing to center on a topic of their choosing. Furthermore, by minimizing the interviewer's questions in the segments and sectioning the interview footage from segments featuring other voices, Crombie facilitates the transference of power to Gabrielsen as a survivor.

Gabrielsen's testimony expresses a multiplicity of emotional responses to the attack. The interviews with her appear to be unscripted, though still edited or cut down, as the documentary includes many instances of Gabrielsen pausing, using filler words and phrases such as "um" and "you know." She typically looks into the camera when explaining her thoughts and feelings, and speaks in the past tense. This contrasts with how she speaks when reconstructing specific series of events and physical actions, where she does not look at the camera, and uses her hands to show what she did and what her attacker did. The section where she recounts the night of her attack initially contains statements suggesting self-blame and self-doubt:

Gabrielsen: I [pauses] was underage, shouldn't have been drinking, and I got angry about something—now I can't even remember—so stupid that I just walked off and said 'fine, I'm gonna go home' (Crombie 4:34-4:54).

The discourse of victimhood emanates most prolifically early in part 1 through Gabrielsen's interview, where she narrates her experience of sexual violence. This attitude towards her own victimization lines up with the subject matter; when discussing her victimization, she speaks about her vulnerability and comments on her perceived culpability in the attack. She characterizes her vulnerability as a result of being unaware of the danger she was in. Self-blame can also contribute to a conception of victimhood. Gabrielsen's words are crucial here, as recognition of victimhood through language entails a consideration of how the subject's identity responds to the situation at hand. Rebecca Stringer posits that "whether or not someone is recognized as a victim does not depend on what happened or is happening to them, or the apparent severity of their experience. It depends rather on the particular parameters of victim recognition that exist in their social world, including their positioning within gender relations, ethnic hierarchy, and other engines of social difference..." (Stringer 150). Given that Gabrielsen faced dismissal from the police when she reported her attack, the self-doubt and self-blame evident in the interview may stem from the invalidation she experienced and her social identity. Stringer also writes that "vulnerability is recognized not as social, but as individual, personal, and psychological" (Stringer 151), so recounting the sexual violence leans more heavily to her

individual, personal, and psychological statuses on the night of her attack. Gabrielsen then recounts that she “thought there was nothing wrong,” not suspecting she was in danger when accepting a ride home from who would become her assailant (Crombie 5:02-5:16) and that “it didn’t even faze me that this was a trap” (Crombie 5:40-5:59). In addition to her earlier implication of self-blame and self-doubt, Gabrielsen further stresses her unsuspecting mental state when she was victimized. In the context of the preceding self-doubt and self-blame, mentioning being unsuspecting and unaware in a discourse of victimhood may hint at an attitude that the victim should have known better, or made different choices to avoid the dangerous situation in the first place. Victim-blaming frequently appears in discourses of victimhood, particularly of sexual assault.

Gabrielsen’s identity as an Inupiaq (an Alaskan Native nation) woman comes up in the interview, and she suggests that law enforcement failed to recognize her victimhood because of their beliefs about Native women. She tells the camera “all the system was put in place to protect people. Not to judge them, by who you’re married to, what color your skin is. They made me feel like a smelly drunken Native” (Crombie 14:26-15:26). Her use of the adjectives “smelly” and “drunken” suggests that she has encountered such discourse revolving around her racial identity. Since Gabrielsen begins her recollection of the assault by mentioning she was underage and drinking that night, the racial stereotype of native people being drunks can be inferred from the way she speaks. Not only does one’s own self-image become implicated in the discourse through sexual violence victimization; the discourse following victimization invokes collective identity and belonging that modifies the account of violence to suit one’s expectations of language. This can include aspects of intergenerational trauma and historic oppression that affects an ethnic group; a study of the mental health effects of sexual violence on marginalized women notes the prevalence of sexual assault on Native American women as high as 39%, and stresses that “the sexual assault of American indigenous women... must be contextualized by their experiences of gendered and racialized oppression” (Bryant-Davis et. al 343). Beyond Gabrielsen’s personal experience of the attack, her identity as an Inupiaq woman situates her victimhood in the context of her racial identity. This can attribute victimhood to one’s social identity, as an expectation because of the discourse that links the two together.

Invalidation and dismissal of experience, especially in a context of oppression and intergenerational trauma, hinder a victim’s ability to initiate discourse on their own terms.

Stringer points out that victims who are “blamed for their sufferings... lose the means to prove that they have been wronged,” which perpetuates their disenfranchisement in discourse participation (Stringer 151). The denial or lack of recognition from authorities can even distort one’s own memory; Ballinger explains that “public and private memory, as well as written and oral, intertwine and intersect’ (Ballinger 121) and that even though experiences of trauma, abuse, and violence can occur privately, their “recollection, however, is facilitated by a broad social environment obsessed with memory” (Ballinger 122). Part 1 of the documentary explains that detectives latched onto minor inconsistencies in Gabrielsen’s report of the crime, as well as the fact that she was drinking, to discredit her testimony in the case. Not only did the discourse of racial stereotypes alter the direction of the investigation; the investigators doubted the reliability of her memory. The documentary challenges this dismissal, presenting the interview as a trustworthy, firsthand, eyewitness account. The medium has the distinct advantage of editing and the possibility for multiple film takes to empower the interviewee to tell the most consistent, coherent, and linear account possible. Crombie’s choice to record the interview in black-and-white may even serve as a subtle way to reduce the viewer’s perception of Gabrielsen as a Native woman, as skin color becomes ambiguous. This allows for Gabrielsen to decide when to bring in racialized discourse to the narrative, and to preemptively disrupt the discourse of racial stereotypes she had experienced after she reported the assault.

Despite this experience, the reliability of her memory uniquely stands as the place Gabrielsen appears to be the most confident about in the interview. She tells her account of the events leading up to and including the sexual assault, and does so coherently without changing details, starting her sentences repeatedly, or using uncertain language. She demonstrates with gesturing how her perpetrator grabbed her hair and how he tore her pants down while describing the attack, and speaks in a specific, linear manner when describing the physical details of the assault. Her language changes distinctively when bringing her thoughts and reasoning into the account. Gabrielsen tells of the beginning of the attack:

Gabrielsen: He grabbed this knife out of a coffee can—that’s where he kept his buck knife—the big knife he held to my throat. He put the knife to my throat, and told me I was going to do everything he said, and I said, ‘yes, I will’ and he stuck the knife in the ground next to me. He grabbed the front of my pants—belt and all—and ripped my pants straight down all the way to the front of my legs, and then he gets his knife and starts

cutting off my boots. I just kept thinking, just close your eyes, but I kept, um, and just let it happen... Crombie 8:00-8:44.

In this part of the interview, Gabrielsen is able to describe the events in order, and refers to specific personal objects and parts of her body. She uses direct, active voice here, which establishes a clear sequence of events. The clarity and precision of her account shows her strength as a survivor, to recall details from a traumatic experience with full confidence and certainty. Though she begins the interview with less certainty and more vague memory surrounding the circumstances that led her to encounter her assailant, she demonstrates none of this uncertainty with regards to the attack itself. Furthermore, the distinction between those parts of the interview lies in the lack of conditional modalities (“could,” “should,” and “would”). Shifts in verb formation are not uncommon when discourse itself shifts; Fairclough establishes that “discourses are characterized and differentiated not only by features of vocabulary and semantic relations, and assumptions, but also by grammatical features” (Fairclough¹² 133). Considering how Gabrielsen fluctuates between grammatical personhood (first and third person), conditional modalities, the interview segments effectively express discourses of victimhood and survivorship at different points.

Survivorship discourse builds up over the course of the interview as Gabrielsen remarks on the response from law enforcement and talks about later victims in the case. Gabrielsen’s vocal tone conveys distress, disbelief, shock, and pain at different points, and she cries or begins to cry at several points as well. The visibility of her emotions on camera emboldens her testimony to recount more than just her victimization. Aspects of her life at the time of her victimization and at the time of the interview 37 years later indicate her intent and resolution to survive. She reports that she “was talking real fast, real low, and real sweet. ‘Cause evidently I wanted to live” (Crombie 9:40-11:30) to her assailant after the attack, while he drove her to her stepmother’s house. Gabrielsen refers to herself as a survivor, and the only one of this perpetrator’s victims to survive, in her final appearance in part 1:

Gabrielsen: They were supposed to put this man somewhere where he could not hurt anyone else. Look what happens! I hear I’m the only freaking survivor! Crombie 16:39-16:56

¹² *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*

She also has the last words in the documentary, where she states her name, her Inupiaq identity, and refers to herself as a “strong woman” (Crombie 2:05:47-2:07:22). These statements show that Gabrielsen acknowledges the meaning of her life, her will to survive, and her strength. Her survival distinguishes her story from the other known victims, and she even appears in part 4 to suggest that there may be other victims that have not been found or reported missing (Crombie 1:11:58-1:12:11). The project of the documentary to cover the crime spree by the same perpetrator and connect the victims to each other complicates the discourse of survivorship because “survival” in this context refers to the attack being nonfatal. Nonetheless, her use of emotion, courage, and confidence in the interview lend themselves to a sense of survivorship that entails personal growth and the recognition of inner strength.

McMillen refers to such a phenomena of a survivor reporting positive changes to their lives after tragedy as “post-traumatic growth” (McMillen 48). Gabrielsen finds meaning in her survival and indicates that the tragedy of the other victims lies in the hands of the perpetrator and the investigators who did not take her report seriously. Although she speaks of her choices and vulnerability in part 1, she asserts the meaning of her survival to the interviewer in part 5:

Crombie: You’re the first and you are the only survivor.

Gabrielsen: I know, which is a miracle, you know. I mean this makes me feel really good because there is a reason why I’m here, and I guess I am not that ugly, you know, and I, I’m not worthless. Crombie 2:05:26-2:05:47.

Gabrielsen’s survivorship in the documentary marks a shift in her self-esteem and self-image here. Referring to her survival as a “miracle” subtextually recognizes the value of her life and expresses humility and gratitude out of her survivorship. Contrasted against her recollection of feeling she was “nothing,” and “wasn’t going to amount to anything,” and “brown” and “ugly” after her report to the police was not taken seriously, her discussion in the documentary demonstrates a decent shift in self-esteem and self-image in a positive direction. McMillen characterizes post-traumatic growth as having great potential, beginning with two “anchors”: “a seismic event that challenges a person’s fundamental schemas and beliefs about themselves and the world,” and “cognitive processing of the meaning of the traumatic event” (McMillen 49). In Gabrielsen’s case, the sexual violence changed her fundamental schema that the police were there to help and protect people, and her rumination over the traumatic event has allowed her to redeem, and esteem, the value of her life. The discourse of survivorship at the end of the

documentary displays a hopeful message that one may recognize, recalibrate, and regenerate a sense of inner strength from a traumatic event, even if the emotional toll does not fade away over time.

The documentary serves critically as a stage for Gabrielsen to use her voice, and to recognize the significance of her voice. She remarks that most, if not all, of the later crimes the perpetrator committed or was suspected to have committed along Highway 20 in Oregon could have been prevented if investigators took her report seriously in the late 1970s. She expresses great frustration at this injustice, noting how it contributed to the later tragedies discussed in the documentary: “If they only had listened to me [crying]—and you know I feel guilty sometimes, if they would’ve just listened to me, it could have all been avoided. All of it” (Crombie 14:26-15:26). Even though she suggests regrets and feelings of guilt, particularly contemporaneously with the attack and her reporting of the crime, at the time of the documentary she clearly acknowledges how her decisions could have saved lives, and that the fault lies with the investigators. Part 3 of the documentary covers the disappearance and murder of a 13-year-old victim, on which Gabrielsen comments:

That young lady, 13 years old, I’m sure she would have done something really awesome. My granddaughter who’s 13, she has her whole future planned out. Can you imagine that? Makes me wonder about that young lady who lost her life. They should have listened to me. Crombie 1:11:58-1:05-58.

She connects the senselessness of the crimes and the tragedy of the serial crimes here once again to the failure of investigators to believe her report. While her testimony in part 1 is spoken principally in the first person as she talks about the attack and what she did after the attack, this comment puts the focus on the other victims and the blame with the investigators. The “young lady” singular subject and “she” singular pronoun personalizes the other victim in this segment, and when commenting in part 4 about how there may even be other unknown victims, she specifically mentions that there could have been “somebody before” her who was attacked and the other listed victims “are just the ones they know about.” Her voice here suggests a perspective that views each of the victims as separate, individual, and as persons not explicitly connected to the crimes that took their lives. By contrast, her usage of “they” generalizes the investigators into an institution that collectively failed her and the other victims. It is significant that she appears in the documentary speaking as the only survivor, as she serves as the only

person to present the voice of a victim to the documentary. In this respect, she gives a voice to the others, known and suspected, who do not have the ability to speak for themselves, and provides a crucial counternarrative to the perpetrator's police interview throughout the documentary. Her visible, tonal, and verbal admonishment of the investigators and the perpetrator stand out as the only voice in the documentary to contain this type of personal connection to the violence that Crombie investigates. On its own, Gabrielsen's voice and testimony throughout the interview carries a fortified, personalized sense of survival and survivorship, but in the context of the documentary, her voice transcends the personal and disrupts what would otherwise be a discourse of victimhood.

The medium of the documentary functions as discursive space conducive to survivorship. The interview and narrative format of Gabrielsen's appearances on camera allow her to speak unscripted and without interjection, denial, or contestation. The only segment where Crombie as an interviewer is heard in dialogue with Gabrielsen on screen comes at the end of part 5, where she attributes her willingness to share her story of victimization and survival to Crombie's demonstration of compassion:

Crombie: And you haven't talked about it with people in those intervening years?

Gabrielsen: You're the first person, and you know what my thought was, when I read that message? 'Why would she care?' 'Cause that's the mindset I had with this whole thing from the gate. That's what made me come, was 'cause there's someone that actually cared. Crombie 2:05:47-2:07:22.

Here, she stresses that Crombie's care and compassion drew her to participate in the interview. She seems to indicate that nobody else cared, or that she perceives nobody would care, making the documentary remarkable for a survivor to have a platform to speak without risking secondary victimization (experiences of victimhood by having their disclosure of victimization denied, ignored, minimized, or rationalized). Proper listening and care for victims of violent crime forms a critical component of support for their recovery and survivorship; Baroni notes that "without access to adequate support, the quality of life of an individual can rapidly decline. After experiencing the trauma of victimization, an individual often continues to suffer secondary injuries that further diminish his or her ability to fully reintegrate into society" (Baroni 103). The documentary then, functions as a surrogate support system for Gabrielsen's story, picking up for the injustice and deficit of support she experienced after her primary victimization. Baroni

continues to state that “when crime victims fail to receive needed trauma recovery services, problems happen and society loses—there are more victims and more perpetrators” (Baroni 103); this resonates with the message of the documentary, where Gabrielsen left the state of Oregon for many years, and her assailant proceeded to claim the lives of other victims. She indicates that her story emboldens her voice and personal sense of survivorship.

Though the investigative documentary includes Gabrielsen’s story only in segments and as a key figure in a larger story of crime victimization, it frames her narrative in her own terms. Crombie limits the discourse of victimhood and the disempowering, silencing effects of discourse that Gabrielsen states she faced at other points in her life, and Crombie includes small details of Gabrielsen’s life that surface throughout the interview in the final production. Such snippets of Gabrielsen’s life, such as having a granddaughter (Crombie 1:11:58-1:12:11) and struggling with survivor’s guilt regarding the fates of the other known, as well as unknown fates of suspected, victims (Crombie 2:05:47-2:07:22) draw focus on her as a survivor with a life after experiencing sexual violence. The documentary gives her room to discuss emotions and thoughts as they relate to trauma, and allocates ample screentime to discuss primary and secondary victimization. In this setting, Gabrielsen can migrate anywhere between direct, specific, and explicit language to indirect, vague, and implicit language, since the discourse gives her control of her segments of the narrative. Lanham defines such implications, termed as “significatio,” as holding the potential to emphasize a point with the omission of a detail that the audience can infer, or an inclusion of a detail that reinforces a point (Lanham 138). This way, she can set the terms for the level of specificity she feels comfortable telling when describing the attack. The narration between segments of the interview and other interviews on the documentary also refer to some of these details, so that Gabrielsen is not required to speak specifically about sexual assault; In fact, her only usage of the word “rape” in the testimony comes in part 1, where she recounts telling her mother-in-law that she needed to go to the hospital and police (Crombie 11:59-13:13). The implication of the circumstances of the violence alongside the specificity of her actions and feelings afterwards points to a distinction in Gabrielsen’s memory and processing of the events. The documentary lets her choose these points, which solidifies her survivorship in the story.

The opening and closing of the interview centralize on Gabrielsen’s voice and a discourse of survival trauma. As subject of the first part, the narrative involving the serial crimes begins

with Gabrielsen's attack. She uptakes the role as a sort of central figure that frames the documentary through her experience, establishing the discourses and victimhood for the story. Her voice becomes prominent the very first time she speaks in part 1, where she calls her perpetrator "a demon in my life lurking in the back of my head," and where she reads a poem she found that expresses the feeling of post-traumatic stress (Crombie 1:05-1:44). Here, she cries, bringing her strong emotions to the camera, and draws upon the words of a poet to describe her experience. Not only does Gabrielsen appear at the beginning of the documentary and throughout, but she is in fact the final voice on screen at the ending. Crombie gives her noteworthy screentime, but crucially frames the story around her survival. In this way, Gabrielsen's voice encompasses the documentary, and she ends the story with a proclamation of her name and her identity. Though her victimhood and victimization are highlighted in part 1, the project as a whole underlines her survivorship and uses it to elevate Gabrielsen's voice using the narrative design of an investigative documentary.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: Narrating Survivorship in One's Own Voice

Maya Angelou published her first of several autobiographies in 1969. The work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* tells a story of Angelou's life starting early in her childhood and ending late in her adolescence. In her story, she pieces experiences of trauma, abuse, racial oppression, and hardship together as recurrent, omnipresent forces that she survives through. She makes extensive metacommentary on the power of poetry and literature throughout the book, and traces how reading, listening, being silent, and speaking with intent played pivotal roles in her survivorship of hardship and trauma. Angelou specifically details her sexual victimization at the age of 8 in the book, which ushers in radical changes to her voice. When the assaults begin, Angelou recalls keeping secrets from her brother for the first time, and during a court testimony, she lies to protect her perpetrator from being harmed. Perhaps most dramatically, Angelou vows to be mute when she learns of her perpetrator's violent death, believing that her voice was responsible for killing him. In survivorship later in the story, she cultivates a grand appreciation for language and for speaking, attributing this to exploring literary and poetic works such as those of William Shakespeare. Over the course of the book, Angelou repeatedly returns to voice as a reflector of one's survival, and explores the complexity of survivorship in one's personal and societal relationships.

Angelou's testimony of victimization enters the story through suggestions and implication. Angelou frames the sexual violence in terms of a childlike perspective contemporaneous with the time of the molestations and rape; her report signals to adult readers the sexually inappropriate contact her perpetrator makes by invoking the confusion and surprise she felt as a child. Focusing on her own experience through language that captures herself at age 8, the narration of the violence act as a discourse marker to characterize her development in terms of victimization and survival. Angelou evokes the surprise, innocence, and confusion in the passage where she tells of the first molestation:

But I awoke to a pressure, a strange feeling on my left leg. It was too soft to be a hand, and it wasn't the touch of clothes. Whatever it was, I hadn't encountered the sensation in all the years of sleeping with Momma... I turned my head a little to the left to see if [Perpetrator] was awake and gone, but his eyes were open and both hands were above the cover. I knew, as if I had always known, it was his 'thing' on my leg. Angelou 72.

The framing of the victimization process signals her vulnerability to a trusted adult to an audience with an adult understanding of the situation, while expressing how she experienced the molestation in the moment. She proceeds to clarify that she was “a little apprehensive, maybe, but not afraid” (Angelou 72). Here, she refers to the perpetrator’s penis as his “thing” and sexual intercourse as doing “it.” Her recount of her victimization recalls the powerlessness not only of the child to resist such a violent advance, but the powerlessness to know or even name what was happening in anything more than vague terms. Henke notes the duality of this prosaic style, explaining that “Angelou’s adult narrative voice recounts the experience of rape in a controlled style that is taut, laconic, and deliberately restrained by biblical allusion” (Henke 26). The shortening of sentences and thoughts in tandem with euphemistic allusions reinforces the narrative of victimhood from a child’s perspective. The indirect, imprecise, and implied portions of Angelou’s discourse demarcate her victimization without drawing the reader out of the moments of violence or the perspective of her 8-year-old self.

In addition to the childlike vocabulary and descriptions of mixed feelings, Angelou frequently presents statements of childlike thoughts. These comments serve as descriptors of her childhood self’s curiosity used to imagine or understand the things she was not properly taught, and also as reminders to the reader that she is narrating a childhood experience. Such comments are presented without an acknowledgement of the hyperbole or exaggeration, solidifying the innocence and inexperience of her childhood memories. During the scene where she describes the initial molestation, Angelou writes:

Then he dragged me on top of his chest with his left arm, and his right hand was moving so fast and his heart was beating so hard that I was afraid that he would die. Ghost stories revealed how people who died wouldn’t let go of whatever they were holding. I wondered if [Perpetrator] died holding me how I would ever get free. Would they have to break his arms to get me loose? Angelou 73.

The passage’s tone conveys worry, fear, confusion, and dissociation with the moment. These complex emotions indicate trauma, using a childlike hyperbole to frame these psychological and emotional processes. Because she describes childhood sexual assault here, the hyperbole can stress the intensity of the memory without the necessarily demanding a literal interpretation of her account. Lanham remarks that hyperboles employ “exaggerated or extravagant terms used for emphasis,” not necessarily intended to be taken literally (Lanham 86). Her voice in this

passage and throughout the book recalling traumatic experiences take advantage of the framework of innocence and disempowerment to allow for the hyperbole to crystallize the very moments of trauma she recounts. This exuberates how victimization feels when a person's means to communicate are limited.

Memoir serves as a liberating utility for Angelou's discourse of victimhood and survivorship. As the sole author, her voice resides centrally as a narrator, allowing her to claim a voice for herself without interference. While the discourse of the documentary is facilitated by an interviewer who gives the space and platform to Gabrielsen, Angelou's writing takes its own initiative and sets its own terms for discussion. In addition to choosing the language of narration, she presents thoughts and dialogue in her own words. Her voice tells the dialogue of her younger self, and even other people featured in the work. By writing the dialogue and choosing which interactions her life to depict, the memoir enables Angelou to portray the actions and words of others as she experienced them. She presents her perpetrator during and after the first molestation as approaching her first through calming: "just stay right here, Ritie, I ain't gonna hurt you" (Angelou 72); minimizing the trauma: "Now, I didn't hurt you. Don't get scared" (Angelou 73); and threatening to kill her brother: "if you ever tell anybody what we did, I'll have to kill Bailey" (Angelou 74). This passage curiously includes this dialogue of intimidation and coercion paired with explicit and implicit descriptions of the sexual violence, but does not mention any facial expressions, tone of voice, or other elements of communication; the reader instead must infer through the dialogue that her victimization does not use physical force, but rather, guilt, intimidation, and psychological manipulation. At different moments in quick succession, her feelings shift, demonstrating the complexity of psychological responses to sexual victimization. She reports feeling comforted and safe very briefly when her perpetrator holds her after the first molestation:

Finally he was quiet, and then came the nice part. He held me so softly that I wished he wouldn't ever let me go. I felt at home. From the way he was holding me I knew he'd never let me go or let anything bad ever happen to me... But then he rolled over, leaving me in a wet place and stood up. (Angelou 73).

The tonal consistency of Angelou's voice as a narrator while moving between intense and discomforting feelings explores the way trauma confuses, confounds, and perplexes a victim's state of mind. Hesford notes the denotation of the conception of trauma, claiming that "the term

trauma is more often used to refer to the state of mind that ensues from an injury, than to the blow itself... a devastating and not-worked-through experience...lived belatedly at the level of its unspeakable truth” (Hesford 195). The discourse here destabilizes the reader by immersing them in a reconstruction of the complexity of trauma—the language is irresolute, much is left suggested or unspoken, unexplained, and happens faster than can be processed.

In the subsequent scene where she narrates the rape, illustrates her will to resist, but the victim’s inability to resist, the attack. She avoids words like “fear,” “forced,” and “pain,” but narrates the scene to where these aspects of rape are implicit. Angelou uses monstrous imagery to portray her perpetrator in the scene, telling that “his face became like the face of one of those mean natives the Phantom was always having to beat up” (Angelou 78), and contrasts this with the imagining rescue by the superhero The Green Hornet. Her description of the perpetrator as something nonhuman, monstrous, and visibly threatening characterizes an experience of sexual violence victimization. This corresponds not only to how the perpetrator made her feel as a vulnerable child, but also to the metaphors and references a child could access to depict such an assailant. Testifying both to the terror of the experience and the shock and paralysis of enduring such an attack, monstrosity serves as a trait that relays the way a victim or survivor perceives their otherwise human perpetrator. The discourse of monstrosity also has a mystifying effect; since the perpetrator is real in the book, and monsters are not literally there, Angelou can convey the disbelief of her victimization as it was happening. Paralleled beside the larger context of Angelou’s identity in the book, presenting literary, mythological, and biblical imageries that constitute her ordinary exposure to language in that time. It is critical, then, to understand that Angelou’s writing of this scene takes this discursive route because it falls within a plausible, authentic limit she would have experienced at the time. Bucholtz explains that “much of social life takes place in ordinary conversation, and many cultures do not necessarily name or consciously recognize discourse practices that take place in the sphere of the everyday” (Bucholtz 48). In such an experience exceptionally out of the ordinary, Angelou’s voice only has access to the elements of monstrosity and confusion to understand what is happening to her in the scene. This use of figurative language additionally emphasizes her vulnerability and innocence as a child.

Angelou disrupts the contemporary voice and discourse of her childhood self’s memory in the scene when she describes specifically refers to violent sexual penetration. The abrupt

change draws attention to the sexual violence through adult, reflective commentary. In what is one of the most prolific, unsettling, and controversial passages, she writes:

Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the sense are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year-old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can't. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot.

Angelou 78.

The passage grammatically shifts from a narrative past-tense sequence of events to a commentary style in the present tense. There is a shift to a generalized and impersonal commentary involving the rape and the body; she refers to “the pain,” “the senses,” “an eight-year-old body,” and “the child,” rather than the body parts and senses as hers in the scene. In contrast to the previous passages that communicate confusion, ambivalence, and a lack of understanding what is happening, this passage directly uses the words “rape” and “violator.” By removing the personal possessive pronouns and speaking in more general terms, she is able to transcend the vulnerability of previous passages, and inject a vivid visual imagery of what she survived. Angelou invokes a Biblical allusion that simultaneously stresses the size of her body as opposed to her attacker, and constructs the rape as a spiritually violating act. As a narrator writing her own story having survived and developed a voice, the discourse in this passage suggests a personal ideology of survivorship as a sort of spiritual restoration. Fairclough reports that “certain features of the discussion of ideology are worth noting; the idea that discourse may be ideologically creative and productive, the concept of ideological complex, the question of whether discursive practices may be reinvested ideologically, and the broad sweep of features of texts that are seen as potentially ideological” (Fairclough¹³ 26). Critically examining the discourse of this passage should then consider the language as representing Angelou’s ideological understanding of victimhood and survivorship. The certainty, poignancy, and poetic expressivity that she uses as a narrator signal that spiritual growth that the growth of language is preceded upon. This becomes apparent in the passages both in terms of style and grammar, which mark the separation between victimhood and survivorship in the discourse.

The memoir details Angelou’s dramatic resolve to be mute for several years following the death of her perpetrator. She explains that after her perpetrator is found kicked to death after he was released from jail, she felt guilt and blamed her voice for killing him. Guilt and self-

¹³ *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*

blame, an internalization of victimization, overwhelm her to the point that she concludes she is spiritually impure and must remain silent. She rushes the reader through these destabilizing thoughts:

He was gone, and a man was dead because I lied... Obviously I had forfeited my place in heaven forever... Even Christ Himself turned his back on Satan... I could feel the evilness flowing off my tongue through my body and waiting, pent up, to rush off my tongue if I tried to open my mouth. I clamped my teeth shut, I'd hold it in. Angelou 86-86.

She internalizes the negativity of the tragic circumstances surrounding her sexual victimization, and becomes fearful of her own voice. She locates the worry, guilt, and fear in her body, describing it as a spiritually corrupting experience that she could feel. In the passage where she commits to muteness, she comments on her concentration on listening to everything and feeling as if she were absorbing the sounds around her. As victimization and retraumatization from how others respond to her trauma, her voice metamorphoses into a protective form. Muteness as a deliberate confrontation of the psychological effects of victimization stands as an attempt to survive life after the trauma, from a subject that lacks other discursive options to recover or be empowered. Bryant-Davis notes that in many communities, particularly marginalized racial communities, victims often choose silence as a passive resistance because withholding one's story of trauma is more bearable than speaking up and being invalidated or ignored (Bryant-Davis 339). The internalization of guilt does not undermine the severity of the trauma from the sexual violence covered in the memoir, but focuses on the self rather than on the perpetrator. Candelas de la Ossa reviews testimonies of sexual assault that portray assaults "as *devastating* and causing *hurt and trauma*" but also showing that "violations of consent that are attributed to *mistakes* are described as *easy* and *unintentional*, suggesting that not all violations of sexual consent are perceived as blameworthy violence" (Candelas de la Ossa 378). In the confusion and enjoyment of the attention she received from her perpetrator, she claims to have sought her perpetrator out for attention (Angelou 75). It is possible that post-traumatic stress of the assaults and the prosecution process triggers Angelou's younger self to this blame-shifting and internalization, and the fate of her perpetrator exacerbates the tendency to justify or excuse his actions.

Blame, guilt, and shame surround her description of the choice to be mute. She reports that adults in her life responded negatively to her choice not to speak. She implies that since the physical injuries of the rape had healed, that adults considered the incident to be over (Angelou 88). She says, “I was called impudent and my muteness sullenness,” and mentions that her silence even led to beatings from older relatives who disliked her silence (Angelou 88). She juxtaposes two distinct forms of silence in this manner: her choice to withdraw her voice for fear of what the ramifications may be, alongside her family and community’s refusal to talk about the sexual violence after the perpetrator’s death. She constructs these forms of silence as conflicting forces her life having survived sexual violence. The struggle to avoid doing or invoking harm comes into conflict with the responses of the adults in her life prompting her, and expecting her, to go back to normal. Her voice, then, paradoxically serves as the most potent form of survivorship and empowerment at this point in the story. According to Henke, “sexual assault robs the prepubescent child of both dignity and language,” which challenges the way she can mentally process the violence (Henke 27). Furthermore, even though Angelou’s upsets the adults in her life, it also minimizes her presence—minimizing the clashes between her voice and the voices or adults trying not to acknowledge the trauma. In this period of muteness in the book, Angelou transitions to using more prose, longer paragraphs, and dialogue exclusively from other figures, synchronizing her voice as a narrator with the voice of her thoughts at that time.

The memoir credits learning to read Shakespeare aloud as a transformative and revitalizing process for her survivorship (Angelou 97). Angelou embeds the emotionality and restorative aspects of developing a voice following her choice to be mute, where the pain of her trauma and the comfort of the written word create a necessary tension to leads to growth. The figure of Mrs. Bertha Flowers appears as a compassionate and patient mentor who leads Angelou to survivorship. This entails coaxing the young Angelou out of the defensive mutism from her sexual violence victimization and post-traumatic stress, and enticing her through the beauty of language to develop a voice. In this sense, Mrs. Flowers as a figure in the memoir provides her younger self with the proper guidance to develop her voice. This is framed here as voluntary; Angelou has the choice to collaborate with Mrs. Flowers, even though it is her who makes the offer. Angelou references Mrs. Flowers as a patient adult who treats her as an individual worthy of dignity:

“Now no one is going to make you talk—possibly no one can. But bear in mind, language is man’s way of communicating with his fellow man and it is language alone that separates him from the lower animals... Your grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get. That’s good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning.” Angelou 98.

Mrs. Flowers respects Angelou’s autonomy to choose silence, avoiding coercion or judgment to compel her to speak. She makes the suggestion that Angelou’s silence, a response to trauma, is maladaptive and limiting her from thriving the way she has the potential to. As the suggestion to read out loud is voluntary, not compulsory, Angelou begins to internalize the desire to develop her voice. Her internal response to Mrs. Flowers stands in opposition to her internal response to her grandmother and family’s disapproval of her muteness: Mrs. Flowers acknowledges the pain and guilt Angelou feels, while her family doesn’t acknowledge or support that this underlying pain should be there after the sexual violence and death of her perpetrator. Mrs. Flowers’ words should thus be considered a critical moment in establishing a survivorship narrative for Angelou; Naples explains that “survivor discourse is often posed in contrast to expert discourse, which is legitimated through a distinction between different forms of knowledge production, one that derives from personal experience and emotional pain versus one grounded in more systematic and presumedly objective truth claims” (Naples 1159). Not only does Mrs. Flowers’s approach intrigue Angelou with a potential to elevate her out of a state of wounding, but she serves as a figure that proposes a workable method to change Angelou’s muteness without judgment or punishment.

Angelou’s construction of survivorship does not isolate the sexual violence from other experiences of trauma, oppression, and hardship in her early life. She compounds an interwoven series of struggles against difficulty and adversity stemming from her lived experience and expressed through her identity. This memoir discusses the impact of race and racism on her personal experiences of trauma and survivorship, both stemming from racial segregation and oppression from white society, and from cultural and societal difficulties among the black community she comes from. Again speaking of hardship in a depersonalized, collectivist, and generalized sense, Angelou theorizes that “the black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of

masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power” (Angelou 272). The memoir does not trace sexual violence as a singular source of hardship, but rather incorporates its survival as one of many challenges she faces through the intersections of her racial and gender identity. Her sexual victimization is then remembered as another struggle she emerges strong out of, and she even draws strength from this triumph. She continues to point out that “the fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance” (Angelou 272). Here the discourse is self-aware in demonstrating pride in one’s survivorship. She confronts the expectation that such hardship and trauma would render a survivor weak or broken, and advocates for the celebration of the resolve to endure. Angelou exhibits post-traumatic growth in these reflections, recognizing her disruption of the dominant narrative with her survival and her awareness of the meaning of her survival as a black woman. Taking advantage of the written word, she connects her survivorship to a wider, oppositional discourse to the silencing and disparaging narratives that affect her community. Neimeyer hones this resistance of dominant narratives among sexual violence survivors, relaying that “the impressive posttraumatic growth shown by many sexual assault survivors in safe contexts that permit them to tell their stories provides evidence that it is indeed possible” (Neimeyer 56). Having developed a voice and using the space of a memoir where she has the power to tell her story, the memoir functions as a safe environment for her personally, and establishes a strong, firsthand testimony to the worthiness and propensity to survive.

In the process of regaining a voice and foraying into a stasis of survivorship, Angelou shows a transformation from euphemistic and imprecise vocabulary surrounding her sex and sexuality. She brings up the euphemism “pocketbook” for her vagina as something she understood from her grandmother, and describes the imprinting as “keep your legs closed, and don’t let nobody see your pocketbook” (Angelou 73). During the first molestation, the limited vocabulary creates distance between her body and her ability to describe and understand it, contributing to her shock and confusion as it happens. Much later in the work, she recalls a scene between her mother and her teenage self she exchanges the euphemism for clinical terminology:

“Mother... my pocketbook...”

“Ritie, do you mean your vagina? Don’t use those Southern terms. There’s nothing wrong with the word ‘vagina.’ It’s a clinical description. Now, what’s wrong with it?”
Angelou 275.

The following dialogue details an exchange where her mother asks direct questions about venereal diseases, and then uses a dictionary to teach Angelou the anatomical language to understand her genitalia. Though she enters the dialogue hesitantly and circumvents the directness, she reports that “suddenly, it wasn’t all that serious” when the euphemisms were dropped and the direct terminology was normal. Here, Angelou shows how euphemisms further detach a victim’s ability to mentally address their sexual trauma. The residual shame and worry elapse as the discourse becomes direct and every-day. Lanham notes the duality of euphemisms as containing a notion of deceitfulness or disingenuity; he defines *euphemismus* in rhetoric as both the “prognostication of good” and “circumlocution to palliate something unpleasant” (Lanham 72). The assumption that the subject of euphemism avoids something unpleasant paradoxically creates unpleasantness in the discourse, and the prophesizing of something good creates a duplicitous expectation that there is a good reason not to speak in a direct manner. Speaking as a survivor, particularly of sexual violence, Angelou demonstrates in this scene that shirking euphemism with regards to sexual anatomy alleviates the internalized shame about one’s body and empowers one to speak about it with confidence and precision.

Narratives in the form of memoir hold a critical and distinctive potential for a survivor to comment on their experience of sexual violence in retrospect. Henke explains that “in the healing autobiographical project, the narrator plays both analyst and analysand in a discursive drama of scriptotherapy” (Henke 28). As an author uses their memory and reflective maturity to revisit past experiences, the author’s own experience of the violence establishes rapport with the reader through written language. Simultaneously, the retrospective commentary of a memoir puts distance between the narrator at the time of the violence, and the narrator’s voice in the present. This presents the author with a platform to tell their own story without placing them in a setting where they lose control of the discourse. The content of a memoir is such that it fully enables an author to use their voice, and even depict how their voice has changed over time and with experience. Angelou’s autobiographical work continually returns to the theme of language, words, literacy, and speaking throughout the story and tracks a progression of victimhood to survivorship as language fosters her growth after trauma. The narrative links a multitude of

complex and compounding hardships together, shown through her memories from her childhood to adolescence, that convey a maturation of inner strength reflected in one's voice. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* resonates with many survivors of sexual violence, particularly those of marginalized communities, owing in part to its use of prose and writing style to engender faith in the veracity and sanctimony of survivorship. In the final chapter, she specifically lets go of any sense of victimhood and navigates through the crisis of a teenage pregnancy, choosing to keep the pregnancy and to finish high school at the same time. She writes that "for eons, it seemed, I had accepted my plight as the hapless, put-upon victim of fate and the Furies, but this time I had to face the fact that I had brought my new catastrophe upon myself" (Angelou 284). Rather than self-blaming or feeling shame, she chooses to persevere through the crisis and transform her situation into a positive creation of her own. In her writing, Angelou's discourse engages with the language and themes of victimhood and survivorship, bringing the reader through an emotionally challenging journey to a hopeful and inspiring conclusion.

2018 USA Gymnastics Sex Abuse Scandal: Voice in Victim Impact Statements of a Sentencing Hearing

Many U.S. criminal courts permit victims of crime to make a statement about the crime and to their perpetrator after a conviction. Known as a victim impact statement, the court considers the frequency, severity, and intensity of the crime as testified by a victim when determining a criminal sentence. The widely reported and broadcasted sentencing hearing of a sports physician implicated and convicted in one of the largest cases of sexual abuse in sports history (Graham), presided over by the Honorable Judge Rosemary Aquilina, took place in January 2018 over seven days. Aquilina permitted over 150 sexual assault victims of the same perpetrator to make statements, or have statements read on their behalf, many of whom allowed their face to be shown on camera in the courtroom and permitted their names to be made public in the media. Even as the sentencing hearing took place live, more victims came forward and joined the collective of female athletes speaking out against the perpetrator and the coverup of institutions that employed him. After each victim impact statement, Aquilina addresses the victim with remarks that affirm that their statement has been entered into the court record, and verbally commends their strength and courage to testify after having survived abuse. The case serves as a remarkable exhibition of the ways that the court system can validate the voices of sexual violence survivors, and promote a chain reaction of survivorship narratives within a community.

The courtroom in this case functions as an intricate institution to facilitate and shape the discourse around the survivors and their voices. The sentencing hearing not only featured victims who came forward from hearing about the trial in the news, but queued new victims coming forward during the hearing. Some victim impacts statements even came in a pre-recorded video format from survivors who had a schedule conflict with the court date, or who lived abroad. Family members also made statements on behalf of the victims, some of whom had died by suicide at some point prior to the trial (55th District Court – Mason). While the legal understanding is that the victim impact statements identify the speaking individuals as having been negatively impacted by a crime, Aquilina responds to the victim impact statements in a manner that acknowledges their survival and the power of their voices. Aquilina responds to Victim 2's anonymously read statement by saying:

Aquilina: Thank you Victim 2. I'm hopeful she does not feel manipulated and a victim anymore, although we use that word simultaneously with survivor. She is a survivor. I'm hoping now that her words are out, that she's publicly made this statement, that the crying will stop and be replaced with happiness and joy, because she is no longer defeated; the *defendant* is defeated. 55th District Court – Mason.

Aquilina continually reinforces the present moment and reminds the courtroom that the perpetrator's crimes are over as a result of the convictions. While she acknowledges the pain and trauma of the crimes, her dedication to designate the victims making statements as survivors aims to assist them find recovery. The terminology to some extent transcends the forum of the courtroom, as the publicity of the sentencing hearing illustrates the potential of a victim impact statement to bring about healing—possibly even justice. Jean-Charles indicates that the term “‘survivor’ is favored over ‘victim’ because the act of rape compromises or, more accurately, snatches power from the individual in ways that are both physical and psychological” (Jean-Charles 39). In accordance with the criminal proceedings ideally serving justice to the victims, Aquilina's insistence on recognizing the victims as survivors as well utilizes the court's discourse to empower them and promote justice.

The theme and metaphor of breaking silence appears across several of the victim impact statements throughout the hearing. With the knowledge that there were others who spoke up against the sexual abuse, a collectivity in survivorship of the same crime can motivate and inspire victims to go public with their stories. Olympic gymnast and gold medalist Aly Raisman appears among the slew of survivors to make impact statements on the fourth day of the sentencing hearing, praising the bravery and composure of other victims before her as her reason for showing up to testify. Raisman states:

Raisman: I didn't think I would be here today. I was scared and nervous. It wasn't until I started watching impact statements from the other brave survivors that I realized I, too, needed to be here. [Perpetrator's name], you do realize that we, this group of women you so heartlessly abused over such a long period of time, are now a force and you are nothing. The tables have turned, [perpetrator's name]. We are here, we have our voices, and we are not going anywhere. And now, [perpetrator's name], it's your turn to listen to me. 55th District Court – Mason.

Raisman notes here that she resolved to make her victim impact statement in spite of the fear and nervousity holding her back. She finds strength in the collectivity of the other survivors, speaking in the first-person plural and remarking that they are collectively in control of the discourse in the courtroom. By realizing that they are not alone, the survivors employ their voices as part of a collective effort to invert the dynamics of power between themselves and their perpetrator.

Raisman further stresses the collective power when thanking judge Aquilina for the opportunity to make a victim impact statement, saying that “each survivor deserves to be heard equally” (55th District Court – Mason). Aware of her status and prestige as an Olympic medalist, she emphasizes the meaningfulness and worthiness that each survivor’s story has; she uses her status to elevate the voices of the rest of the survivors. She appears to use specific language to express her power and the collective power that the survivors have as athletes and as former victims brave enough to break silence about sexual abuse. Deborah Cameron notes that “sometimes a speaker’s utterances create her or his identity,” where the social discourse norms “signify some *collective* dimension to... life stories” (Cameron 953). Within a discursive context in which the collectivity lies in survivorship and the forum projects to reclaim power for victims of crime, Raisman determines her own identity in the courtroom. Aquilina’s responses recognize the self-determination in each victim impact statement and weaves them together into a long narrative of survivorship.

Delivering victim impact statements during the sentencing hearing, the survivors speak in front of, and often directly to, the perpetrator. The courtroom keeps the perpetrator silent at this time, and bears witness to the grievances and trauma that those who came forward previously did not have a chance or a secure space to make. Many of the incidents of sexual violence in this case went unreported or unacknowledged for years, with the earliest known victim reporting that she was molested in 1992. Appearing in court as Victim 125, she addresses the perpetrator:

Victim 125: Who was that first girl? Am I her? Do you even remember? Do you even remember what we will never forget? Can you even remember, [perpetrator’s name], where it all began? 55th District Court – Mason.

Since the crimes spanned several decades and affected such a large quantity of known victims, those who appear to testify represent a variety of responses to the violence, as well as stages in processing the trauma. Though not mandatory to speak directly to the perpetrator (the victims ask the judge for permission to address the defendant), the option provides an opportunity for

victims to share their voices and work to resolve the complex feelings towards and hurt from the perpetrator. Such addresses meld the emotions and psychological processing of the sexual violence into the testimony repeated statement meant to convey the turmoil and destruction that the violence caused. In particular, Victim 125 makes use of erotesis, as Lanham defines: “a ‘rhetorical question,’ one which implies an answer but does not lead us to expect one” (Lanham 71). Coupled with repetition statements, such as a series of questions, anaphora, and parallel structure, the addresses to the perpetrator do not seek for him to speak, but to illustrate the inner machinations of the survivor to the court. As the perpetrator must listen to the victim impact statements and can only answer with the judge’s permission, the courtroom flips the power differential discursively between the perpetrator and the survivors.

Several of the survivors who appeared in court or submitted statements to be shown or read on their behalf during the sentencing hearing were adolescents at the time they testified. Others speak of the sexual violence occurring during their childhoods, adolescences, or young adulthood. The centralization of the age of the victims of this case constructs a discourse in the courtroom about how age and inexperience produced the circumstances of vulnerability and secondary victimization to those who reported the assaults. Amanda Cortier testifies the hierarchies of age and medical authority that sheltered her perpetrator from blame in her young mind:

Cortier: He assaulted and molested me many times, all of which with my mother present in the room. When I say assaulted, I want to be clear: I mean that he digitally penetrated my vagina and also he molested my breasts on multiple occasions, all the while blocking my mother from view and spouting something medical that we couldn’t, that we wouldn’t question... At 15, I never had any idea. 55th District Court – Mason.

She reports that she felt confused and never understood why he was touching her, but did not question the assaults deceptively framed as medical procedures since her perpetrator was an expert and her mother was present in the room. The references to confusion, placing trust in adults to know what is going on, and self-doubt about speaking up and challenging authority are all linked to her age over the span of the crimes. Age in her victim impact statement stresses the vulnerability and disenfranchisement surrounding her victimization. Eckert posits that adolescents are tethered to a discourse of “stigma and trivialization of their activities and concerns” and that other intersecting discourses such as gender and race compound on

adolescence as “responsibility, maturity, control, emotionality, intellectual capacity, and rationality” (Eckert 382). The perpetrator’s masking of the assault in some contexts with parents present and using medical jargon exploits the discourse that trivializes adolescents and bolsters confusion and silence in the victim’s mind. The victim impact statement then disrupts such discourse, rebuking the trivialization of adolescent experience as a form of vulnerability which is dangerous to ignore. By displaying the power imbalances during the commission of the crimes, Cortier provides the court with a counternarrative to the discourse that sheltered and emboldened the perpetrator, and challenges the age hierarchy that made her and the many victims vulnerable to the crimes.

Several of the survivors testifying in the case name a loss or seizure of their innocence as a major injustice of the sexual violence. Innocence emerges into the discourse as a sacred and component of the survivors’ lives that they cannot regain after it has been lost. Several survivors reinforce this concept, referencing both their vulnerability as children at the time of the crimes, and tracing the way the sexual violence damaged their ability to trust others. Jade Capua, 17 years old at the time of testimony and speaking publicly with the permission of her parents, illustrates this violation:

Capua: Life through a child’s eyes is a place where bad things don’t make sense. Rarely do you see or hear of a child that doesn’t smile at the thought of life. A child is just what I was—a 13-year-old who didn’t see the world as a terrifying place. Not until I was faced with a life-changing experience that stole my innocence far too young. 55th District Court – Mason.

Capua constructs her innocence as a sanctified component of childhood, of which she was unjustly robbed. Her use of the word “stole,” which appears in other victim impact statements, draws focus to the grief and loss of innocence after sexual violence occurs. She points to her lack of control, using the passive voice to remove her responsibility from the discourse when talking about wounding and trauma. In the context of the courtroom, victim impact statements present these feelings of wrongdoing to cartograph the extent of the damage dealt by the perpetrator. This highlights experiences of victimhood and victimization, and frequently invokes the language of theft. Acts of wrongdoing comprise a crucial portion of several victim impact statements in this case, but using voice to air these grievances can also contribute to psychological recovery. Leichtentritt explains:

The [victim impact statement] has legal, social, and therapeutic importance. It provides a better understanding of how criminal justice procedures can benefit the victim; it reveals the ways society treats its victims; and it can be a healing experience in the victim's journey to recovery... it often describes the harm inflicted on the victim, in terms of the financial, social, psychological and physical consequences of the crime. Leichtentritt 1068.

Capua's engagement with a discourse of victimhood then, does not necessarily remain confined to experiences of victimhood; rather, her confrontation and elaboration of sexual violence victimization uses the court's expected topics of discussion to process the way that the trauma has affected her life. Though she refers to her innocence as "stolen," and knows that she cannot regain the same trust or optimistic worldview of her younger self, she can use the testimonial process to grieve those losses and psychologically advance her recovery to a sense of acceptance.

The survivors testifying in the sentencing hearing stress the permanent, irreversible damage that the sexual violence has done to their lives. When recounting the circumstances of the victimization, as well as the secondary victimization from those who reported to their parents or authorities but were not believed, the victims attest to the severity of the impact of the crimes on their lives. Amanda Thomashow, for example, tells that the perpetrator "altered the course" of her life (55th District Court – Mason). Kyle Stephens parallels this language closely, stating that "sexual abuse is so much more than a disturbing physical act. It changes the trajectory of a victim's life, and that is something no one has the right to do" (55th District Court – Mason). Multiple survivors comment that the perpetrator changed the course of their lives; in terms of survivorship, this constructs the survivors' voices as formidable and resilient *despite* the perpetrator's acts of violence. While owing credence to their own personal growth as a result of trauma processing, they are compelled through the victim impact statement to clarify that they did not choose to be victims, but responded to victimization with the determination to survive. Survivor Alexis Moore addresses the perpetrator in court:

Moore: I don't like the word "victim." Being a victim implies the desire for pity. I am a survivor, but more so I am me. And those ten years [of sexual abuse] are a part of my story. They have helped to define who I am today. Today I am more guarded than I was a year ago, but I am also wiser and more aware. 55th District Court – Mason.

These words sequence her past experience of sexual violence as a precursor to many personal changes in her life's story and her identity. She crystallizes the survivorship and hones it over victimhood, not only to show her personal resolve but to exhibit her reclamation of power over her life in spite of the injustices she suffered. She among other survivors navigates the landscape this contestation to victimhood; Ruparelia argues that the court's recognition of the victim impact statement "is on individuals who can demonstrate immediately perceptible harm resulting from a recognized crime (Ruparelia 668). However, even though communicating the harm is instrumental in advocating for a maximum sentence for the perpetrator, the survivors testifying in the sentencing hearing extend their voices and stories out of these constraints to assert their survivorship.

In contrast to the victimization referenced in the recollections of sexual violence, several survivors present a prospective trajectory of their survivorship. They remind the courtroom that the damage from sexual violence does not go away, and that there are broken trusts and relationships stemming from this trauma. Simultaneously, there is an admonishing of the perpetrator and the people and institutions that failed to intervene on earlier reports. Victimhood does not appear as inevitable or inescapable in the victim impact statements; in fact, some even assert that *survivorship* is the inevitable path for them. Kyle Stephens addresses the perpetrator with the implication that this sort of growth will come to all former victims, telling him "perhaps you have figured it out by now, that little girls don't stay little forever. They grow into strong women that return to destroy your world" (55th District Court – Mason). She talks of the turmoil the sexual violence inflicted on her life and her relationships, but points to a mending that comes with growing up and nourishing her semblance of self. Her attitude here expresses that the vulnerability that enabled the crimes to happen is not permanent, and that once victims gain power, they move beyond the vulnerability through this growth. The emphasis on the survivor's own agency and power competes with the discourse of victimization, especially where the individual resolves to assert their own process of recovery. Ovenden reports that "while child sexual abuse is often located as a uniquely individualized problem, it has also been informed by wider discourses that promote 'normal' avenues of femininity, sexuality, and healing," and as such, the discourse of victimization is rejected as an infantilization of the survivor (Ovenden 943). Discursively, she explains that the lens of individuality alone makes "survivors responsible for their own healing" and that it contributes "to the construction of a particular modality of

‘survivorship’” (Ovenden 942). The victim impact statements circumvent this modality with the use of plural language; the reference to the collective of survivors as “girls,” “we/us,” and “women” suspends the fragmentation of survivor stories, and situates their survivorship as a place of belonging. The language Stephens uses here additionally places this survivorship in terms of gender. As all the known victims in the case were victimized as young girls, adolescent girls, or young women, Stephens connects adult womanhood as a status that survivors can ascertain to cast away their vulnerability. This is further calcified with the pluralist language, which establishes that the discourse is not just an individualized narrative, but a recurrent pattern. Stephens’ relationship to the perpetrator is unique here; she delivers the first victim impact statement during the sentencing hearing, and notes that she is “the only non-medical victim to come forward,” having a prolonged relationship between their families and thus a long timeline of serial abuse over the course of her life (55th District Court – Mason). These circumstances further illuminate Stephens’ personal dedication to find survivorship in collectivity, and to close the fractalization that had since silenced the other survivors.

References to physical strength serve as metaphors across several victim impact statements. While some of these terms are used literally (such as survivors referring to themselves as athletes, and Aquilina referring to Raisman as an Olympian), many survivors characterize themselves and each other in militaristic terms. Even though at the time of the sentencing hearing a verdict had already been reached and the perpetrator had been convicted, such victim impact statements engage in the confrontation with the perpetrator in court as an ongoing struggle. Raisman, for example, says that “all these brave women have power, and we will use our voices to make sure you get what you deserve, a life of suffering spent replaying the words delivered by this powerful army of survivors” (55th District Court – Mason). Amanda Thomashow’s testimony closes parallels this metaphor when she speaks to the perpetrator towards the end of her victim impact statement:

Thomashow: The thing you didn’t realize while you were sexually assaulting me and all of these young girls and breaking our lives was that you were also building an army of survivors who would ultimately expose you for what you truly are: a sexual predator. You might have broken us, but from this rubble, we will rise as an army of female warriors who will never let you or any man drunk off of power get away with such evil ever again. 55th District Court – Mason

The use of the terms “army,” and “warriors” not only merges the survivors’ voices together in a collective, but places their voices in a strong, combatative opposition to the perpetrator.

Thomashow’s testimony exposes the power dynamics of the medical profession, the university coverup, and gender in this struggle (55th District Court – Mason). The militaristic allegories here imply both a commitment to defend oneself from a threat and aligning oneself with a side in a conflict. This situates the discourse as a confrontation of the institutions responsible for the vulnerability, victimization, and eventual coverup of the sexual violence. This further rallies the survivors that testified together, repeating a shared struggle against a common enemy. The image and label of a warrior then becomes a self-defined name for the survivors to wear their identity through. Eckert asserts that especially in an adolescent’s discourse, “labeling is an important means of producing and maintaining social distinctions. The simple existence of a term for a social type creates a category, allowing it to enter into everyday discourse” (Eckert 388). By labeling themselves as survivors and warriors, the survivors elicit a normalization of their self-image and their public presentations as survivors. This replaces the label of “victim” with an endonymic role to choose for one’s self.

The courtroom in this case facilitates the permission, turn, and terms of speaking. Judge Aquilina consistently reminds the whole courtroom between victim impact statements of the importance of the survivors’ voices, the importance of speaking up for oneself, and the assurance that their stories have been heard. Many of the survivors attest to this significance, becoming self-aware of their voice in the moment of testimony and refusing to let the silencing narrative of the perpetrator’s denial and the institutional coverup of the sexual violence domineer over their own narrative. The refusal to be silent and the conscious use of one’s voice recurrently show up in many victim impact statements. Jeanette Antolin, a survivor, clarifies the challenge and importance of speaking her own truth:

Antolin: I was raised in a culture of gymnastics where we were taught your voice doesn’t matter. You follow instructions and never complain... Thank you for allowing me to read my statement. Every time I’m able to speak about my experience, it makes me feel less like a victim and more like a survivor. I pray that my words have truly shown how this man has affected so many. 55th District Court – Mason.

As a survivor, Antolin personally thanks judge Aquilina for the opportunity to speak about her experience of sexual violence. She notably refers to the culture of obedience within the sport of

gymnastics, as well as the isolation from parents that leaves many young female gymnasts in the care of the adults in power. Having her voice rooted in this experience of the sport, she exhibits noteworthy growth in her voice, being able to directly challenge her abuser and the institutions that prolonged his access to victims. Her voice indicates the grief of lost memory and stolen childhood experiences due to the sexual violence, both in direct callouts to the abuse and emotionally-charged language. She calls the perpetrator a monster several times, and addresses him directly by telling him, “I truly believe you are a spawn of Satan” (55th District Court – Mason). Baxi remarks that words function in tandem with the emotionality of a victim’s testimony, simultaneously asserting that “sociolinguistics has made important contributions to our understanding of how rape survivors resist linguistic domination in the courtroom” and that “emotions crafts testimony” (Baxi 143). Antolin’s promotion of her voice over the emotions of her injustice project her narrative as one of survivorship. She, along with most of the survivors making a victim impact statement in this case, personally thank the judge in acknowledgement of how she creates a discursive space that transfers power to the survivors.

The sentencing hearing of this trial demonstrates the way that a judge can facilitate a discursive modality towards the empowerment of victims of sexual violence. Presiding in court as a symbol of the audience, judge Aquilina functions as the audience metaphorically “hearing” the survivors make their victim impact statements. The sentencing hearing provided survivors several outlets to exercise their voices, offering a range of options to protect anonymity and to testify in court in a manner that best suits the survivor’s needs. Judge Aquilina instructs the survivors appearing in person that they should make their voice clear and speak at a steady pace, and reminds them when they are nervous or unable to speak because they are crying that they can start again (55th District Court – Mason). The victim impact statements can be written in advance, but this is not a script that is mandatory to follow; the testimony in court happens in real time, allowing for spontaneous additions or corrections based on the survivors’ feelings in the moment. Some survivors chose to testify pseudonymously as a victim with a number, and others wrote statements that others read out loud for them. Judge Aquilina verbally affirms the bravery and strength that each survivor exhibits when coming forward to make their victim impact statements, and suggests that the catharsis of speaking without doubt or interruption plays a central role in their survivorship. Jean-Charles speaks of this trajectory, saying that “understanding the rape victim-survivor narrative as an aesthetic mode... to tell stories around

sexual violence highlights the ways in which loss and trauma can also be both generative and reconstructive” (Jean-Charles 42). In this case, judge Aquilina directs the discourse to survivorship, which in turn each survivor incorporates into their narrative. The sentencing hearing stands as a stellar example of the ways that the criminal justice system can elicit, facilitate, and reinforce survivorship after sexual violence.

Conclusions

When the survivors in these texts use their voices to tell their stories of sexual violence, they modify the discourse towards a sense of survivorship. They serve as multimodal acts of resistance—resistance of the silencing effect of violence, and resistance of the trauma responsive to victimization. These survivors claim these labels for themselves when provided with the opportunity to be heard; Gabrielsen acknowledges her strength in the documentary, Angelou designates herself a survivor in her own memoir, and long string of survivors in the sentencing hearing assert themselves as warriors, fighters, and survivors. The trend in these texts is that survivors reconstruct their identities after surviving sexual violence, not avoiding the loss and damage that the victimization and response to victimization has on their lives, but celebrating their survivorship over those hardships.

An individual's recollection of victimhood in these texts compose their victimization in the greater context of how those in positions of authority responded to the violence. For these survivors, it may be difficult to disentangle the vulnerability that led to their victimization from the failure of institutions to help them after becoming victims. Victimhood discourse here removes the victim's agency to speak by placing the power in the hands of whomever they report to: Gabrielsen reports to the police, where investigators dismiss her report due to her racial identity and the fact she was intoxicated on the night of her assault; Angelou is made to testify in court without understanding what is going on, and accepts the blame for her words causing her perpetrator's death; and several victim impact statements reference attempts to report the perpetrator to the University of Michigan or the USA Gymnastics advisory, but dismissed these reports as misunderstandings on behalf of the victims. Paradoxically, the response of authorities in these texts simultaneously doubts the victim's experiences and treats them as responsible for their own safety. This paradox ultimately contributes to a sense of confusion, and these texts indicate a pattern of victims internalizing self-doubt due to this confusion.

The texts show that this is an emotionally moving discourse, where speaking through the pain enables the survivor's voice to be heard. While speaking of victimization brings up feelings of confusion, shame, betrayal, fear, and guilt, survivorship takes on a comparatively more positive tone in terms of emotionality. These texts express grand pride, self-esteem, resolve, and determination prospective to life as a survivor. This is explored distinctly in each text:

Gabrielsen expresses her pain, shock, and anger on screen while telling her story, but also speaks proudly and kindly about herself in the end; Angelou writes her trauma both in explicit and implicit terms, letting the tone and subtext trace the graduation of her voice through her life events into a confident survivorship; and the survivors testifying in the sentencing hearing proudly vow to defeat their perpetrator in court and to send a message across the sport of gymnastics that they will bring about change in the way people in power protect their athletes. Notably, the survivors' expression of emotion in their voices contrasts with the discourse of victimization that they reference, where their emotions after victimization are not validated or understood by authorities responding to reports of sexual violence.

The medium frames the emotionality around a different purpose, i.e. what the survivorship is "for" in the text depends largely on the medium the survivor speaks in. Gabrielsen's victimization initiates the story of a series of crimes that the documentary investigates, and her survivorship closes the narrative. She speaks and displays her own anger, hurt, and betrayal surrounding the police response to her report, which the documentary focuses on as an injustice responsible for enabling the perpetrator's future crimes. Angelou's victimization and the emotions surrounding it demarcate a tonal shift in the writing style, and transition the events in the memoir from one segment of her life to another. The narrative follows the progression of her life and development of her voice, bringing the story through grief and resolution into her survivorship. The victim impact statements in the sentencing hearing include these emotions of victimization as advocacy for a harsher sentence for the perpetrator. Furthermore, the court's function to provide justice to the victims builds a platform to hear and acknowledge their grievances as the violence impacts their lives to the present day. The discourses of victimhood and survivorship serve narrative roles in different media, and can be framed or modified around an institutional project.

The language that survivors use in these texts present some intriguing parallels and patterns. Whether it is Gabrielsen's likening of her perpetrator to a demon, Angelou's description of her perpetrator as an enemy from a comic book, or the survivors testifying that their perpetrator is a monster, these texts all express some form of vilification of the perpetrator through a comparison to something monstrous. The element of monstrosity in the discourse comes from a number of psychological places; this first reflects the terror of victimization along with the disgust towards the perpetrator, but furthermore, suggest the surrealness of sexual

violence victimization. The trauma, then, compounds the survival of violence with the loss of innocence and naivety, becoming aware of the danger and threat that they previously did not have the experience to grasp. Survivorship in the texts calls forth the metaphors of strength in some form. The word “survivor” itself is an identity that implies strength, and each text contains moments of survivors talking about their own strength: Gabrielsen does this at the end of the documentary where she affirms her identity as a strong woman; Angelou does this by commenting on the resilience and fortitude of the black woman as a subject of enduring through oppression; and the victim impact statements tie strength to identity through a labeling of themselves as athletes and warriors. The power of identity as expressed through voice is significant in that the survivors verbally envision the way they view themselves, discursively promoting the social practice of recognition.

These texts crucially exemplify a survivor’s consciousness of their own voice. As the texts appear as different media, their expression of voice and modalities differ from each other, but the commonality of each text analyzed to include survivors commenting on their own voice shows an awareness and appreciation that voice contributes to survivorship. Additionally, the metacommentary provided, whether by the survivor themselves or a speaker facilitating the discourse, conveys a progression of the survivor from a circumstance of victimhood, through post-traumatic growth to survivorship. This gives the impression that survivors actively and deliberately choose their words, which stand in opposition to the perpetrators and the institutions that have damaged their voices. The ability to tell of their survivorship as a narrative that is part of a complex individual with a life prior to and after the violence additionally gives credence to the survivor’s personhood and agency. The demonstration of such power stands as an act of profound resistance against the oppressive conditions of trauma.

Critically analyzing the discourse in these texts brings profound insight into the interactions between language and power within victimhood and survivorship. The voices of victimhood and survivorship attest to the creative and inventive ways that survivors of sexual violence can implement their agency and recovery into public discourse as a narrative of their sovereign making.

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¹⁴ The sentencing hearing took place over 7 days and included the victim impact statements of over 150 victims, as well as family members of victims. The sentencing hearings were televised and recorded by the press. The full compiled victim impact statements of those who chose to have their names and faces made public can be seen in video form on the Law&Crime Network youtube channel:
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