

MAKING THE PERSONAL POLITICAL:
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION IN AN ANTI-RAPE
PROTEST FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

South Africa is recognised as a country with unusually high levels of rape and sexual violence. The majority of those who experience sexual violence do not acknowledge, disclose or report it, and do not access support. Many factors have been identified which can inhibit acknowledgement and disclosure. While silence is to be honoured as a chosen response, unwanted silencing is of concern. The annual Silent Protest at Rhodes University is a day-long anti-rape protest which draws attention to the attitudes and practices which silence victim-survivors, and enacts solidarity with victim-survivors of sexual violence. I conducted a three year “critically engaged, activist ethnography” with the community of Silent Protestors and organisers. My focus was on the stories that victim-survivors told about the impacts of participating in the protest. Changes in the research context allowed for a participatory action research cycle to be incorporated into the methodology. This offered an opportunity to implement and evaluate some changes suggested by my research contributors.

My contributor’s narratives highlighted the ways in which as a society we position those who have been subjected to sexual violence in ways that are limited and limiting and which diminish victim-survivors’ sense of agency and value. This malignant positioning restricts the choices available to victim-survivors. The anticipation of being positioned in negative ways can inhibit victim-survivors from disclosing a violation and accessing care and justice. Participation in the Silent Protest seems to stand against some of the factors which inhibit acknowledgement and disclosure. Through their participation many women took up opportunities to share their story with at least one other person and to receive and offer care. Most described participation as having been beneficial and having helped them move towards living well again. The ways in which the Silent Protest positioned victim-survivors and the choices they were offered in relation to that positioning seemed to open up opportunities for thinking, feeling and acting in ways that they preferred. This suggests that interventions which mobilise both political resistance and mutual care hold promise for developing more accessible and effective services to those affected by sexual violence.

Statement of originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge; the content of this thesis is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Kim Barker

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IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT LANGUAGE USED

- a. **Victim-survivor:** As I explore in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 9, the terms most used to refer to those who have experienced sexual violation, namely ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’, are far from neutral. Each of these identifiers highlights certain aspects of the experience and aftermath of sexual violation whilst obscuring others, and each calls forth different identity constructions and evokes particular understandings and responses. ‘Victim’ suggests a passive (possibly helpless) experiencer but it also captures the sense of imposition and violation of sexual violence. ‘Survivor’ suggests an agentic position but can have the effect of diminishing both the conflictedness of this position and the suffering experienced. Reducing women’s experiences and responses to one pole of this simple binary has ‘real effects’, running the risk of diminishing and totalising their experience (Duvall & Béres, 2007; McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011). They also suggest a fixed identity state rather than a moment-by-moment negotiation of subjectivity. There is no existing term which adequately captures the complexity and fluidity of subject positions taken up by and ascribed to women who have been subjected to sexual violence. This will be discussed further in Chapter 9, but throughout this thesis, I have used several linguistic strategies to disrupt the limiting effects of these terms, namely:
- I refer to ‘women/those who have experienced rape/sexual violation’ or ‘women/those have been raped/sexually violated’; and
 - in order to simplify linguistic complexity and issues of reference, I also use the rather clumsy compound ‘victim-survivor’ to foreground the complexities of naming, whilst acknowledging that this too is an inadequate signifier. It is not my intention to reify these positions through the use of this term, but to trouble and disrupt them.
- b. **Meaning of the term ‘sexual violence’ as used in this thesis:** Throughout the thesis I use the terms rape, sexual assault, sexual violence and sexual violation fairly interchangeably. I am aware that they all have different definitions and connotations, but the women who contributed to this study had a range of different experiences of sexual violation and used many different words and phrases to describe what they had

been subjected to, most often not the terms I have used above. It was not a requirement of the research that my contributors disclose the nature of the sexual violation they had experienced; I simply invited “women who have experienced any form of sexual violence and intend to participate in the Silent Protest this year” (Appendix A: Information sheet sent to potential research contributors) to contribute to the research. I specifically chose not to specify rape, or to define sexual violence in order to allow the women who chose to contribute to the research to define or categorise their own experiences. In quoting from their narratives I have used their own words, but in my own writing I want acknowledge the broad range of experiences of sexual violation and it seemed that using a range of terms would be more inclusive. This aligns with Nicola Gavey’s (2018, p. 162) argument for a dimensional view of “sexual victimization” where rape as exists as one extreme on a continuum of sexual violence with other forms force, coercion and manipulation.

- c. **Research contributors:** I am aware that those who volunteer to participate in research projects are usually called ‘participants’ in academic research. I would argue however, that the women who signed up for this study did far more than participate. They contributed to the generation of knowledge by sharing their stories and specifically to the participatory action research cycle which formed part of this journey. I have therefore chosen to call them ‘research contributors’. This also assists with avoiding ambiguity as they also chose to participate in the Silent Protest so there was the potential for confusion about which participation I was referring to if I called them participants.
- d. **Pseudonyms:** Ideally, I would have liked my research contributors to select their own pseudonyms and should have invited them to do so at the time when I was conducting interviews. My research journey has been so protracted that many of my contributors have left the university and I no longer have contact details for them. I therefore selected pseudonyms which resonated with the meanings of their of their own names.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is not a field in which I would have chosen to work. In one sense it chose me, and I will tell that story in due course; in another sense, however – as a narrative pastoral therapist working with women in South Africa – it was unavoidable. The sheer scale of sexual violence in South Africa means that an overwhelming number of individuals (women, men and children), families and communities live with its impacts. Those impacts are significant.

South Africa is not alone in this - there *are* no rape-free societies (Wang & Rowley, 2008 emphasis mine) - but experience and statistics have taught me that we who live here can never talk about sexual violence as an abstract or intellectual notion. It is a painfully-lived and complex reality which shapes women's lives in particular, as that which has happened either to them or to someone they know and love, or as that which inevitably may happen. Due to its painful history, South Africa is a particularly divided society across race and class and the disparities are immense; to be poor and black in South Africa is to be at substantially increased risk of sexual violation. Reflecting on this particular context, Jane Bennett (2007, p. 58) posed the following question, which has haunted me and informed this research journey:

What does it mean to live in a society in which so many know so much about the micro-politics of gender-based violence: its perpetration as a norm or rite of passage; its tentacle intimacies; its irrelevance in the face of starvation, desperate unemployment, or just making it today?

The need for appropriate and effective services in South Africa which respond to the harms experienced by those who have been subjected to sexual violence is undisputed. Unfortunately, in most instances these services are limited, inconsistent or entirely absent, particularly in poor, rural and otherwise resource-scarce contexts.

It is also of concern that where services *are* available, the therapeutic and/or supportive responses to rape focus on individual or group 'therapy' sessions with an 'expert' counsellor or therapist. These Western biomedical model-informed approaches construct the individual who experienced the violation as the one with the 'problem' and place the responsibility on the individual to 'recover' whilst failing to address the culpability of the perpetrators or the society in which their actions were made possible. Whilst certain therapy modalities have

been found to be effective in reducing some distressing symptoms that women may experience in the aftermath of sexual assault, therapy seldom offers them a contextualised awareness of the collective and highly political nature of sexual violence: rape as a “matter of political and public concern, because politics is about who has power over whom, and rape (and its threat) is one of the multiple ways in which people wield power over each other” (Du Toit, 2005, p. 253).

But what is the alternative? What kinds of services or interventions would be most appropriate and beneficial in South Africa? How could these be offered on the kind of scale that is needed, given the extent of sexual violence in our country? How can one invite women who have experienced sexual violence into a shared political narrative which might offer an alternative understanding of their own violation? And if one did so, would they experience this as beneficial?

These questions, strongly informed by a narrative approach to therapy, had already been formulating in my mind in response to my work with women who had experienced rape when, by chance, I encountered the Silent Protest, an annual protest against rape and sexual violence held at Rhodes University in Grahamstown (now Makhanda), Eastern Cape.

1.1 Introducing the Silent Protest

The Silent Protest was initially conceptualised to draw attention to and challenge the culture of silence around sexual violence in our country: the vast majority of rapes go unreported and undisclosed, even to friends or loved ones. Many women choose silence, or are silenced when they do speak up, by the responses of those to whom they first disclose (Ahrens, 2006). Some survivors are silenced through fear of the perpetrator; some are afraid of not being believed, of being blamed and shunned, of being interrogated, retraumatised, or labelled. Attitudes and beliefs in societies which judge the person who was raped more harshly than the perpetrator are powerfully silencing. In addition, victim-survivors are aware that there is little chance of obtaining a just outcome even if they do report. The silence, however, extends beyond the victim-survivors themselves; many who are aware of sexual violence happening to others choose not to speak up either. And none of this is news anymore.

Women's movements globally, those within South Africa, and even the Silent Protest itself, have made great strides in raising awareness about the prevalence of rape and sexual violence as well as the complex power dynamics and meta-narratives or discourses which serve to silence women.

This widespread and heightened awareness has made it possible for more women in more contexts to break their silence – even if this occurs sometime after the event(s), away from home within educational, activist or therapeutic contexts.

1.2 A brief history of the Silent Protest

In February 2006, a group of South African gender activists initiated a series of political actions in protest against rape in the country, and in particular to support women who had reported sexual violence. They called this the 'One in Nine Campaign'. This name was derived from the most reliable statistic available at the time: that only one of every nine women raped would report the rape to the police. The initial focus of the Campaign was to express clear support for the complainant known as 'Khwezi' in Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma's rape trial, as one who had chosen to speak out and had met with a vicious backlash.

In March 2006, the One in Nine Campaign issued a national call for public expressions of support for women who speak out about rape and sexual violence. In response, Theresa Edlmann of The Spirals Trust in Grahamstown sought the mandate of the Eastern Cape NGO Coalition's Regional Executive Committee to initiate and organise a protest meeting in Grahamstown. This was granted and The Spirals Trust undertook logistical planning and publicised the event. During the lead-up to the protest, Larissa Klazinga (then employed as a Hall Administrator in the Rhodes University residence system) mobilised university support in large numbers for the public meeting. Faith communities, schools and NGOs also responded to the call and around 600 people gathered outside the Grahamstown High Court during the lunch hour of 24 March. It was the biggest One in Nine gathering in the country.

Several gender activists and religious leaders addressed the protest gathering. Significantly, a group of nine women stood at the front of the crowd, eight with their mouths taped shut with clear tape to visually represent the eight out of every nine women who would not report their sexual assault.

In 2007, Larissa Klazinga, with the support of the One in Nine Campaign and student organisations on the university campus, organised the first Rhodes University Silent Protest. This protest was held shortly before Freedom Day in April and aimed to highlight the ways in which women in South Africa are far from being 'free'. Klazinga wanted to find a way of visually representing this lack of freedom and, following the symbolism used at the previous year's protest, felt that black gaffer tape placed across protestors' mouths would offer a powerful, unsettling and provocative visual symbol.

Eighty women volunteers opted to tape their mouths shut for the entire duration of the protest, relinquishing food, drink and speech for the day, symbolising women who do not report sexual assault. As Klazinga explained: "This protest [is] an attempt to make 'visible' that silence, to force people to note the vibrant woman, the person who was a regular contributor to conversation and debate, now forcibly silenced, her voice taken away while her physical presence remained" (Klazinga, 2008, p. 5). The Protest volunteers distributed flyers which also explained the rationale: "I am silent today because ...", citing South African rape statistics. Early evening saw the protestors gather for a march down the main street of the town towards the Anglican Cathedral, where a debriefing event was held and protestors could share their experiences of the day.

When I encountered the Silent Protest in 2011, it had been an annual event on the university calendar for five years. The Protest had evolved in response to feedback and dialogue, as well as to changes in the socio-political context. It had grown to be the biggest annual protest against sexual violence in South Africa and was unique worldwide in its carefully constructed day-long programme of events. Every year, women who had experienced sexual violence participated in the Protest, as well as many others. Some chose to self-identify as victim-survivors of sexual violation by wearing a t-shirt bearing the words 'Rape Survivor'. This was one of three purple t-shirt options for staff and students wishing to participate in the Protest:

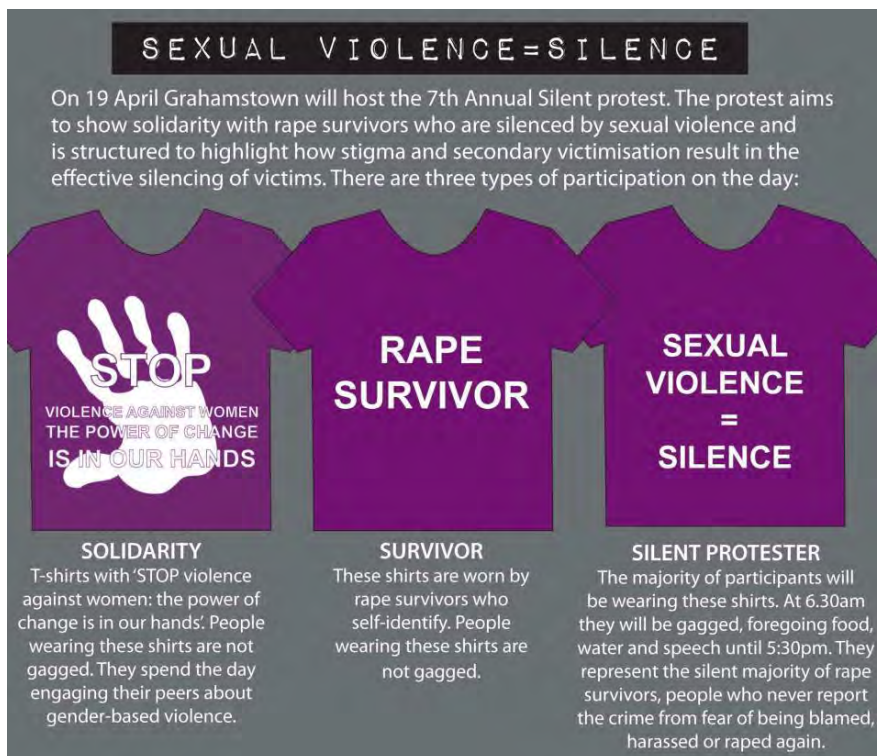


Figure 1: Infographic explaining t-shirt options (2007, Silent Protest Archive)

1. The vast majority of participants signed up as 'silent protestors': mouths taped and foregoing speech, food and drink (as mentioned above). Klazinga had never expected that such vast numbers would choose this option, as it was not and was never intended to be an easy protest. Those who signed up to be taped had essentially volunteered their bodies as walking, breathing placards for an entire day. The tape on their mouths and the t-shirts they wore conveyed the core message of the Protest.
2. Those who were unable to have their mouths taped for the day could opt to sign up as 'solidarity protestors': wearing t-shirts declaring that they were in 'Solidarity with Women who Speak Out'. Men first participated in the Protest in 2008, and this particular t-shirt was the only option available to them at that time.
3. Self-identified 'rape survivors'.

The process and the events of the Silent Protest were carefully curated (or "choreographed", to use Klazinga's word), evolving slightly each year and offering a reflexive and challenging experience to all participants. The events were as follows:

1. An early morning gathering where protestors were addressed by the organisers, after collecting and putting on their purple Protest t-shirts. A ritual to represent silencing followed, in which self-identified rape survivors taped the mouths of those who would

participate as silent protestors, one by one. This took some time due to the number of participants, and the hall would become progressively quieter.

2. Protestors then marched in silence through the streets of the town, to the steps of the University's main administration building. After some moments of acknowledgement of the victim-survivors in their midst, they dispersed to attend lectures or go about their working day.
3. At lunchtime, the protestors gathered again in a central location on the University campus, to enact an hour-long 'die-in'. They lay spread out on the ground in silence for an hour (to the occasional accompaniment of background music, speeches and so on), visually symbolising the profound impact of gender-based violence upon women. They then dispersed once again to fulfil their various academic commitments.
4. In the late afternoon, protestors gathered to march to a central venue, most often the Anglican Cathedral in the centre of town for a 'Breaking the Silence' ritual and debriefing, at which their mouth tapes were finally removed, to a growing chant of "Stop the war on women's bodies". Food and drink were then provided and an open-mic session offered individual protestors the opportunity to address the gathered crowd about their experiences of the day. Many used this opportunity to speak of their own experience of sexual violation. Each story was both unique and familiar, locating the speaker within the extensive and unasked-for community or sisterhood of those who have been violated. These stories were both difficult to articulate and painful to hear; the communal care and support for those who shared their stories was palpable, but it came at a cost. None of the participants walked away unmoved. Each witness bore the impact of the trauma for some time after, alongside the awareness that their presence had somehow contributed to a space which had received and 'held' those stories.
5. The Protest ended with a noisy, celebratory and defiant 'Take Back the Night' march which took participants back towards the University campus.

Despite the continual growth and evolution of the Silent Protest, the primary message remained one of solidarity with all who have experienced sexual violence, representing a politics of care.

1.3 Encountering the Silent Protest

I knew nothing of this history, and very little about the nature of the Protest itself when a friend mentioned that she had been invited to speak at the 2011 Breaking the Silence event at the Cathedral. Knowing that she was apprehensive, I arrived at the Cathedral just prior to the event to offer my support – my own expression of solidarity. I was unprepared for what unfolded; this is my journal record of it the following morning:

I arrived at the Cathedral at about 5.20pm. It was deserted, but as I looked up High Street I saw a huge crowd of people dressed in purple slowly advancing along the road towards the Cathedral. They moved sedately, and silently. The sombre silence was deafening. Their protest and message so eloquent.

I slipped into the Cathedral as the crowd reached the traffic lights and settled in at the back, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. I was clearly an outsider - my age betrayed me if nothing else. I had worn purple to express a level of support, but I was 'other'. Young people began to stream, silently, into the sacred space. I watched as they filled up pew after pew: the middle section, then the side sections. Soon every seat was taken and still they came.

The Dean of the Cathedral quickly opened up the sanctuary at the front of the church, and announced: "Friends, please come forward and fill up the seats at the front". It occurred to me, as the students surged forward, that for many of them the inside of a church would be unfamiliar space and wondered what it was like for them to be in here. It also occurred to me that I had never seen the Cathedral full to capacity in this way. This was unlike anything else I had experienced there, in quality as well as magnitude.

I was struck to see people walking with arms around one another in solidarity and caring. I watched as friends leaned against each other in the pews. Hugged. Communicated with their eyes, as for many their mouths were taped. It was an image of vulnerability and mutual support. This felt like community in a way I had never before witnessed, in this church or any other.

Eventually everyone was inside: sitting in the aisles, standing in the back, tightly packed into the pews. And the event began. The primary organiser invited all those who were taped up to break the silence, not by removing their own tape but by removing someone else's. By this stage I was sandwiched between students, and I turned to the student next to me.

I removed her tape as gently as I could, and tears were very close to the surface. I felt an overwhelming gratitude and awe for the courage it had taken to fast not only food and water for a day, but speech as well. I could not find words for this and could only whisper

'Thank you. Well done'. As the chant gradually swelled in volume as more and more voices were added - 'Stop the war on women's bodies!' - I realised why I was there.

I was there for a woman I loved dearly: a survivor of incest who had spoken out and was not believed. She had endured repeated violation until she was old enough and physically strong enough to say "No more. Ever. Or I will kill you".

I was there for the friends who had told me at school of violations by family members and family friends, and I had been helpless to respond.

I was there for my friend, who had been raped and abused repeatedly by an uncle in her teens.

I was there for the countless women I have sat with as a therapist, who have haltingly told their stories of sexual violence, often for the first time.

I felt held within the safety of community as I reflected on the stories of women that I love.

Two things happened that evening that captured my attention and curiosity. The first was that even as an outsider in many senses of the word¹, I experienced a sense of solidarity and community unlike any I had previously encountered, and I was intrigued about what had given rise to it and what its potential effects could be.

The second was that I witnessed young women standing up in front of hundreds of people and talking about their experiences of sexual violation, some of them breaking their silence for the first time. I heard them saying things like "I have never spoken about this before", and "For the first time, I realise it was not my fault". It seemed that there was something about the Silent Protest that was potentially effective in diminishing the sense of guilt and shame that I had encountered over and over during conversations with women who had experienced sexual violation, and which often silenced and isolated women. Something seemed to be happening there that could take months and months in individual therapy; this was community work in action without a professional in sight.

The scale of this impact really struck me, in the context of hopelessly inadequate therapeutic resources for those who need them most in our country. I was curious about the process

¹ I was much older than the students; was not at that time a student myself; was not wearing a purple Silent Protest t-shirt; and had not participated in any other events of the Silent Protest that day. I had not experienced rape or sexual assault, although, as a woman in South Africa my day to day experiences were shaped by the same "cultural scaffolding" that make sexual violence a very real threat (Gavey, 2018).

which had facilitated the apparent shifts in cognition, affect and behaviour being described by at least some of the Protest participants. I was also curious about the sustainability of those shifts. I wanted to find out more. I had many questions, which were reflected in the complex nature of the research questions I articulated in my research proposal.

1.3.1 Original research questions

1. How do women who have been subjected to sexual violence narrate their experience of participating in the Silent Protest, and the impact that their participation has/had on them?
 - a. Some women who have been subjected to sexual violence participate in the Silent Protest more than once. How do these women describe the experience and impact of participating in the Protest over multiple years?
 - b. Are these impacts sustained over time? If so, what supports or sustains these impacts?
2. How do the intentions of the Protest organisers in their careful construction of the events and processes of the Protest, as well as the researcher's own observation of the event, speak to or diverge from the narratives of 'experience' and 'impact' as described by the participants?

Underlying these questions was a curiosity about what we could learn from womens' stories of participation in the Silent Protest that could help us develop more relevant, helpful and accessible practices for supporting victim-survivors in coming to live well again (McKenzie-Mohr, 2008) after experiencing rape.

1.4 Prior research regarding victim-survivors' experiences of participation in anti-rape protests

I discovered that while there is fairly extensive research evaluating the relative benefits of various approaches to therapy or counselling with those who have experienced sexual violence (some of this literature is discussed in Chapter 4), several studies which invite women to talk about their own journeys towards living well again after rape (McKenzie-Mohr, 2008; Thompson, 2000), whatever they understand that to mean, and one study explored the impact of testifying publicly about sexual violation in the context of war (Sharratt, 2011), there were no previous studies which had specifically focused on the experience or impact of participating in collective social action, such as anti-rape protests, for women who had

experienced sexual violence². My approach was therefore exploratory, seeking to ‘listen’ attentively to and highlight the ways in which women narrated their experiences and accounted for the impact(s) (if any) of participation.

1.5 Why focus only on women?

In this study, I recruited contributors who identified as female and who had themselves experienced sexual violence and participated in the Silent Protest at Rhodes University. This was due to the nature of the Silent Protest and its politics. Until 2012 only women were permitted to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt and the focus was specifically and exclusively on violence against women. Men could participate only as allies. In 2013, the year in which I conducted my research interviews, men were permitted to wear the Rape Survivor and Silent Protestor t-shirts for the first time; none chose to do so. In 2014, one of the changes implemented during the action research cycle of this research study was to be intentional about acknowledging sexual violence against men. The available statistics for both male and female rape were included on the t-shirts. A male and female victim-survivor were each invited to speak at a pre-Protest event. On the day, a few men chose to wear Rape Survivor or Survivor t-shirts.

I fully acknowledge that sexual violence against men, boys and transgender people is a significant problem. A South African study conducted amongst school-going youths aged 11-19 found that 9% of male respondents had been forced to have sex in the year prior to the study (Andersson & Ho-Foster, 2008). In a further study involving school pupils in 445 schools across 10 southern African countries, the overall reported prevalence of forced or coerced sex for 16-year-olds was 28.8% for girls and 25.4% for boys (Andersson et al., 2012). Another study conducted at a Cape Town clinic for sexually transmitted infections found that 40% of the female participants and 16% of the male participants had been subjected to sexual assault (Kalichman et al., 2005). There are however taboos and silences around male and transgender rape, and acknowledgement and disclosure are as (or more) difficult for them than for women, for both similar and different reasons. I hope that my study and others will invite

² Since the time I conducted my research, one other study has been published which considers the impact of participating in the Silent Protest (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016). I discuss this particular study in Chapter 8. There has also been a proliferation of research around participation in online activism, such as the #MeToo movement in recent years. This will be considered in Chapter 4.

more nuance and complexity in our thinking around those who experience sexual violence, of all genders.

1.6 Overview of the research journey and this thesis

My primary interest in embarking upon this research journey was to listen to the stories of women who had experienced sexual violence, stories about the impact or effects of participating in the Silent Protest, whichever t-shirt they had chosen to wear and whatever their own participation looked like. I wanted to understand whether participating in the Silent Protest benefitted them in ways that were relevant to them. I immersed myself in the world of the Protest organiser(s) and the participants through participant-observation, the analysis of archival material, and through a series of interviews with 31 key contributors - Protest organisers and Protest participants who had themselves experienced sexual violence. Thus, over the course of more than three years, I constructed a “critically engaged activist ethnography” (Petray, 2012) of the Silent Protest at Rhodes University.

After two years of involvement with the Silent Protest as a participant-observer, I was confronted by changes in the research environment which raised ethical dilemmas (which I address in more detail in Chapter 5). In response, the nature of my research engagement with the Silent Protest also evolved (with approval for the changes being sought and granted by the Rhodes University Psychology Department Ethics Committee), and a participatory action research cycle was incorporated into my research methodology. This offered a unique opportunity to draw upon the initial learnings from interviews and participant-observations, and to motivate for and implement changes in certain aspects of the Protest, with the intention of further supporting and promoting the well-being of participating victim-survivors. The narrative of this process and an evaluation of the changes therefore constitute an additional element of the research record.

My intention in this thesis is as follows:

1. To tell the story of the research journey itself, as this has value in reflecting upon and conceptualising research with activist groupings and social movements. Such research is complicated and can take unexpected twists and turns. Researcher positioning and ethics can be foregrounded in unanticipated ways. The compatibility of such research with the time-limited demands of graduate study is also an important consideration.

2. To foreground and amplify the narratives of women who have been subjected to sexual violence, with a particular focus on complex expressions of agency, resistance and activism in response to sexual violence. In doing so, I would be standing alongside other feminist activists and scholars who listen ‘otherwise’ and write with the intention of ‘troubling’ dominant discourses regarding women who have been raped and the impacts of rape, in the hope of destabilising these discourses and expanding possibilities for thinking, speaking and being.
3. To construct poetic texts from my research contributors’ words, inviting readers into a shared sense of their complex and compelling narratives.
4. To consider the ways in which victim-survivors are positioned within “swirling discourses” (Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 17) and the implications of that positioning, with particular reference to the acknowledgement and disclosure of sexual violence. I will also examine the ways in which victim-survivors resist, refuse, subvert, circumvent and evade that positioning, and construct alternative positions for themselves in language and action.

To understand the significance of this research, it is necessary to get a clear sense of the socio-political context in which the Silent Protest arose, and within which this research was conducted, particularly with reference to sexual violence. This is outlined in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3, I describe my own theoretical positioning as a researcher who is critically and actively engaged in feminist poststructuralist ethnography. I highlight the aspects of social constructionism, discourse theory and positioning theory that inform the arguments I put forward in this thesis.

Chapter 4 reviews the literature relevant to my argument, particularly around silence, acknowledgement and disclosure in relation to sexual violence and identified factors that support women in coming to “live well again” after sexual violation. I also consider research related to participation in social action.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe the methodologies adopted in the course of this research journey, with Chapter 5 focusing on the process of the research and Chapter 6 on the approaches I adapted and integrated in order to come to a deeper understanding of the narratives and other information gathered in the course of the research journey.

In Chapter 7, I offer a response rather than an answer to my research question about the narrated impacts of participating in the Silent Protest for women who have experienced sexual violence. I highlight the key benefits and challenges of participating described by my research contributors.

This leads to further analysis in Chapter 8, where I specifically focus on the ways in which women who have experienced rape are usually positioned, and the impacts of this positioning as well as the alternative subject positions which the Silent Protest makes available to them. I offer my contributors' reflections on the impacts of occupying alternative subject positions.

Chapter 9 focuses specifically on victim and survivor subject positions, which are particularly salient within the context of the Silent Protest, where protestors have the option of wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt. In this chapter, I explore the choice to wear the t-shirt as a resistant and transgressive political action and consider the agentic and creative responses of victim-survivors even to something as apparently fixed and stable as the identifier 'Rape Survivor' on a t-shirt.

Finally, in Chapter 10 I draw together the various threads of this thesis into forward-focussed conclusions. I also make recommendations and describe the limitations of this exploratory study.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Sexual Violence: A global perspective

Since the 1970s, sexual violence has increasingly come to be recognised as both a violation of human rights and a public health issue with significant human and economic implications (Callender & Dartnall, 2011; Dartnall et al., 2009; Loya, 2015). Although the prevalence of sexual violence varies between countries and regions (World Health Organisation, 2013), we know that it is a global phenomenon and that the lifetime risk of sexual violence for any woman is significant. Despite this, dominant discourses regarding sexual violence are overlaid with stereotypical assumptions regarding race, class and geographical location of both perpetrators and victims.

Recent enactments of resistance and social media campaigns highlighting the extent of sexual assault on college and university campuses globally – such as the #RURferenceList protests, Emma Sulkowicz’s “Carry That Weight” performance piece and protest (Smith, 2014), the #EndCampusRape campaign as well as broader online protest action such as the #MeToo campaign – challenge many of these assumptions and make more explicit the links between an almost universal sense of male entitlement and the sexual violation of women. However, prevailing discourses continue to shape the global imagination, and any consideration of sexual violence in Africa must acknowledge and trouble the pervasive influence of these. At the same time, we need to recognise the ways in which intersecting oppressions increase the risk of being subjected to sexual violence for women of colour, women in poverty, women in strongly patriarchal societies, women with limited education, women who do not identify as cis-female or heterosexual, and women living in areas or countries where infrastructure and resources are limited. These factors play a significant role in the context of this research.

Sexual violence as a deliberate tactic of torture and domination within the context of war has a history as long as war itself but has received particular attention in the global arena in recent years (Rowley et al., 2012, Crawford, 2013). This shift has had both benefits (such as higher priority given to preventing and addressing sexual violence in wartime) and inadvertent costs (suggesting that wartime rape is something separate from and different to ongoing gender-

based violence which research has shown is untrue) in ongoing efforts to eradicate sexual violence.

International research has also been concerned with sexual violence within the context of political transition and/or post-conflict instability (for example, see Sigsworth & Valji, 2011; Thomas, Masinjila & Bere, 2013) and in disrupted living conditions following natural disasters. It is worth noting that this research also suggests that sexual violence during times of transition or upheaval is not an aberration but an intensified continuation of the pre-existing “continuum of violence” against women (Cockburn, 2004, p. 43 cited in Ramisetty & Muriu, 2013, p. 489); “its root cause is not political turbulence, but patriarchy – that is, male rule over women and children” (Thomas, Masinjila & Bere, 2013, p. 519).

Despite this recent focus on sexual violence in more exceptional circumstances, what strikes one most clearly when engaging with the global literature on sexual violence is – to borrow Hannah Arendt’s term – the sheer “banality of evil” (1963/2006). Rebecca Campbell and Sharon Wasco, reflecting in 2005 on the previous 20 years of rape scholarship in the United States, point out that the most significant research findings of that era highlight the sheer prevalence of rape (consistently showing that approximately 1 in 4 women in the US have experienced completed rape – many more have experienced attempted rape) and the fact that the vast majority of women who are raped know their attacker (Campbell & Wasco, 2005). Even now, nearly two decades later, research from around the world continues to confirm that sexual violence is by and large a common everyday occurrence (Dalton, 2013; Dworkin, Krahe & Zinzow, 2021; Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021) most often perpetrated by ordinary and unremarkable men, many of whom seem to experience little dissonance between their behaviour and their experience of themselves as generally decent human beings (Gavey, 2018). This particular sense of themselves remains largely unchallenged in a global discursive milieu which supports and perpetuates male dominance and entitlement while discounting the experiences of women and girls.

Having sketched the major research themes relating to sexual violence in the global context, I now focus more specifically on South Africa, which is the local context of this research.

Although this research was conducted in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown)¹, a small town in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, the majority of my research contributors were South African university students who do not ordinarily reside in Makhanda. I will therefore focus on the national context.

2.2 Sexual violence in South Africa

Over the past three decades, conversations about rape and sexual violence have moved from the margins of public and academic discourse in South Africa² to occupying a fairly central place in our collective imagination (Dosekun, 2013).

Sexual violence in South Africa is pervasive, transcending the usual dividing lines of race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religious belief, and gender (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). We are represented both nationally and internationally as a “rape dense” country (Bennett, 2007, p. 57) and with good reason. Whilst statistical comparisons between various countries’ levels of sexual violence are questionable at best due to the range of legal and popular definitions of rape in different contexts, varying methods and capacity for recording reported incidents, and varying levels of underreporting (Africa Check, 2014), it has been consistently noted that South Africa’s rape statistics are amongst the highest globally for a country not at war.

There are two primary sources of data used to determine the prevalence of rape in South Africa. The first is the South African Police Service (hereafter SAPS) crime statistics, which are released annually, and the second is a range of prevalence studies undertaken by independent research bodies.

The 2012/2013 SAPS crime statistics, which relate to the period during which I conducted my interviews, showed that 62 649 sexual assault cases were reported to the SAPS nationally during that period (118 incidents of sexual assault per 100 000 population), which translates to an average of 172 sexual offences reported per day (South African Police Service, 2014). This figure represented a 9.4% decrease in the reported sexual assaults from the previous year. During the 2019/2020 reporting period, 53 295 sexual assaults were reported (South

¹ The name of the town was changed from Grahamstown, a name with colonial roots, to Makhanda during the course of my PhD journey.

² In 1990, Lloyd Vogelmann’s *The Sexual Face of Violence* was the first book published which addressed sexual violence in South Africa. His extensive bibliography referenced only two published and two unpublished studies conducted in South Africa.

African Police Service, 2020). Whilst over this period there has been a significant decline in the number of sexual assaults reported to SAPS, it is unclear whether perpetration or case-reporting itself have decreased. Making SAPS solely responsible for reducing crime levels, as measured by annual crime statistics (a decision taken in 2004), provides a perverse incentive for police to underreport categories of violent crime for which there exist no other corroborating data, such as the various forms of assault (Bruce, 2010). A further confounding factor is the failure to consistently disaggregate crime statistics in these categories according to province and gender (Gould, Burger, & Newham, 2012).

Internationally, research findings suggest that the vast majority of sexual assault cases are not reported to the police. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. Independent research therefore paints a somewhat different picture to official SAPS statistics (Keehn et al., 2014) although neither source can be considered entirely accurate (Simpson & Kraak, 1998), in part due to the complexities of accounting for repeat victimisation, particularly in domestic environments, and the challenge of ensuring confidentiality and safety for persons responding to interview questions or questionnaires in household surveys (Simpson & Kraak, 1998).

It is however important to note that sexual violence does not occur in isolation but as one aspect of a pervasive pattern of gender-based violence, which includes physical, psychological and economic abuse. It has been suggested that, given the frequent occurrence of gender-based violence in South Africa³ if all the individual acts which fall under this scope were considered “acts of war”, the country could be accurately described as being engaged in a civil (or “uncivil”) war along gendered lines (Bennett, 2007; Artz & Kunisaki, 2003; Watson, 2014).

³ The most recent and reliable figures regarding the lifetime prevalence of gender-based violence in all its forms (emotional, physical, economic and sexual) in South Africa arise from an extensive research project led by Gender Links which surveyed 5621 South Africans (2800 women and 2821 men) across four provinces. Key findings were released in November 2012 showing that ‘over three quarters (77%) of women in Limpopo, 51% of women in Gauteng, 45% of women in the Western Cape and 36% of women in KwaZulu Natal report experiencing some form of violence ... at least once in their lifetime, both within and outside their intimate relationships’ (Gender Links, 2012, p. 3). It is interesting to note the variance across the provinces as well as the discrepancies between what women and men report. In Gauteng, 78% of men admitted to perpetrating violence against women in their lifetime, in KwaZulu Natal, 41%, in Limpopo, 48% and in the Western Cape 35%.

Whilst comparisons across studies are difficult, a comprehensive review of prevalence studies conducted up until 2002 in South Africa foregrounded the forced sexual initiation of approximately one-third of all adolescent girls, and the sense that “rape reported to the police represents the tip of an iceberg of sexual coercion” (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002, p. 1231). Jewkes and Abrahams (2002, p. 1240) conclude:

Although a reliable numerical reflection of the complete spectrum of sexual coercion is not possible from available data, the fragments of evidence suggest that the experience of non-consensual or coerced sexual intercourse at some stage in a South African woman’s life is certainly the norm and may be little short of universal. The evidence points to a conclusion that women’s right to give or withhold consent to sexual intercourse is one of the most commonly violated of all human rights in South Africa.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider Jewkes and Abrahams’ (2002) conclusions, and what they suggest about the sheer scale of trauma inflicted on women and children in South Africa as well as the resilience required to go on in the face of such an onslaught. My awareness of this has informed and shaped this research study.

Research conducted subsequent to Jewkes and Abraham’s (2002) review consistently supports similar conclusions. A report published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2013 offered the first systematic review of the global and regional lifetime prevalence estimates of both intimate partner violence and sexual violence by a perpetrator other than a sexual partner (non-partner sexual violence) (World Health Organisation, 2013). The findings are sobering. Just over one-third (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. These figures are even higher in Africa, which at 45.6% has the highest prevalence of all seven WHO regions (ibid., p. 20). The global prevalence of non-partner sexual violence is estimated to be 7.2% (ibid., p.18) whilst Africa again has the highest prevalence worldwide, at 11.9% and sub-Saharan Africa is even higher, at 17.4% (Abrahams et al., 2014).

A more recent study conducted in the Rustenberg mining district in the North-West Province of South Africa (Steele et al., 2019, p. 1) found that 24.9% of participants had experienced sexual violence at least once, and for 9% of participants this had occurred before the age of

15. It was also noteworthy that the average age of participants in the study was only 31 years. Just under one-third of those who had been sexually violated had told no-one of their experience(s).

2.2.1 Sexual abuse of children

The WHO review (2013) focused exclusively on the prevalence of women's reported experiences of sexual violation from the age of 15 onwards, thereby excluding earlier experiences of sexual violation. Although there has been limited available data on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005), it was reported to have reached 'epidemic proportions' three decades ago (Human Sciences Research Council, 1997). The recent Optimus study which gathered data from over 13 600 children between the ages of 15 and 17 in South Africa confirmed this conclusion, with a finding that more than one-third of participants had experienced sexual assault with physical contact at least once in their lives. Many had experienced recurring sexual assault – 10% of both boys and girls had been victimised four or more times (Artz et al., 2016, p. 9).

2.2.2 Sexual violence at school

Both home and school environments can be unsafe spaces for children in South Africa. In 2011, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women "expresse[d] grave concern about the high number of girls who suffer sexual abuse and harassment in schools by both teachers and classmates, as well as the high number of girls who suffer sexual violence while on their way to/from school [in South Africa]" (cited in Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 2014, p. 3). Sexual harassment and abuse of school-going children by educators in South African schools is widespread and well-known (Human Rights Watch, 2001), with impunity due to "inadequate structures and processes capable of ensuring accountability" being cited as one of the crucial causes (Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 2014, p. 1).

2.2.3 Levels of violence

Another notable feature of reported rape in South Africa is its frequent association with high levels of violence. Researchers have drawn attention to the similarities between many rapes committed in South Africa and those perpetrated in contexts of war in terms of the ritual humiliation of victims and the extent of the injuries inflicted (Artz & Kunisaki, 2003). There is

also a high prevalence of multiple perpetrator rapes (Jewkes et al., 2012; Rape Crisis, 2013), with these attacks being relatively well-represented in police statistics as well as in prevalence studies because they generally fulfil the widely accepted ‘rape scripts’ for ‘real’ rape (rape perpetrated by a stranger in a sudden attack, accompanied by violence) and are more likely to be taken seriously. They are therefore also more likely to be reported.

2.2.4 Rape of lesbian, bisexual, transgender or gender non-conforming women

Another particular manifestation of rape associated with high levels of brutality and for which South Africa has become known internationally is the derogatorily named practice of ‘corrective’ or ‘curative’ rape. This term is used when heterosexual men specifically target LGBTQIA+ women to rape, under the guise of ‘curing’ their sexual orientation. Gqola (2015) proposes that corrective rape is more accurately about “punishing women who lie within the sexual eligibility window for heterosexual male consumption, but ... ‘dare’ not to be available – hence the belief that they deliberately choose to make themselves ‘unavailable’ to male sexual gratification and can therefore be punished and/or violently recovered” (p. 9). In ‘daring’ not to be available, lesbian women can be seen as constituting a “threat to patriarchy and heteronormativity which demarcate women’s bodies as male property” (Mwambene & Wheal, 2015, p. 58). Despite active lobbying, ‘corrective’ rape is yet to be classified as a hate crime in South Africa. Prevalence figures are therefore impossible to cite with any accuracy, as all rape cases are considered to be in the same category and corrective rape is even less likely to be reported to the police due to widespread homophobic attitudes within the SAPS.

In conclusion, what is clear is that whilst the exact prevalence of rape in South Africa is unknown, and due to the factors mentioned above will never *be* known, sexual violence constitutes a problem of immense proportions, with overwhelming numbers of individuals, families and communities living with its ongoing effects.

2.3 Factors contributing to sexual violence in South Africa

There are a range of complex and intersecting factors which contribute to high levels of sexual violence in South Africa, not least of which is the ongoing impact of racialised oppression and poverty. In the sections which follow, I will however focus on three major factors identified by researchers in the field to have a direct causal link to perpetration of sexual violence, namely gendered inequalities, endemic violence and impunity.

2.3.1 Gendered inequalities

Whilst researchers generally agree that gendered inequality is one of the primary causal factors in violence against women and children, different theories exist with regard to the potential impact of changes in gender equality upon rates of sexual assault. Martin, Vieratis and Britto (2006, p. 321) outline four different hypotheses:

Although liberal and radical feminist theory predicts that gender equality should ameliorate rape victimization, radical feminist theorists have argued that gender equality may increase rape in the form of male backlash. Alternatively, Marxist criminologists focus on women's absolute socioeconomic status rather than gender equality as a predictor of rape rates, whereas socialist feminists combine both radical and Marxist perspectives.

Martin et al. (2006) used factor analysis to explore "the relationship between women's absolute and relative socioeconomic status on rape rates in major U.S. cities using 2000 census data" (p. 321). The results showed that although the rates of sexual assault were lower in areas where women "enjoy a higher absolute socioeconomic status" – supporting the Marxist hypothesis – the rates were higher in cities where women were closer to socioeconomic parity with men, which supports the backlash hypothesis. Martin et al. (2006) conclude that a more integrated theory is needed which takes into account the interaction of both class and gender concerns. In South Africa, whilst precarity related to socioeconomic status is definitely an additional risk factor for rape, the research discussed below confirms that men's attitudes towards women play a significant role in sexual violence.

In an anonymous survey conducted with a random sample of 1686 adult men in Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Eastern Cape, 27,6% of the men who responded admitted to having forced a woman to have sex against her will (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell, & Dunkle, 2010, p. 23). The majority of these men had raped more than once, and most had first raped when they were teenagers.

These respondents cited a range of motivations for raping. The most common was a sense of sexual entitlement, whilst boredom/entertainment-seeking and punishment of either their own girlfriend or another woman for some perceived offence were other common reasons given. It seemed widely accepted that punishment of women through rape was

both legitimate and appropriate. These findings support Moffett's (2006, p. 134) assertion that "[in South Africa] sexual violence is an instrument of gender domination and is rarely driven by a racial agenda", and the researchers concluded – as have many other researchers and practitioners in the field, such as Clowes et al. (2009), Thomas, Masinjila and Bere (2013) and Gqola (2015)) – that the primary underlying cause for the high incidence of sexual violence is gendered inequality:

Our findings on motivations for rape indicate that the most common ones lie in our society's accentuated gender power hierarchy and the concomitant socialisation of children from early childhood into social norms that legitimate the exercise of gendered sexual power ... Building a more gender equitable society is crucial for efforts to prevent rape (Jewkes et al., 2010, pp. 29-30)

Whilst unequal gendered power relations featuring dominant masculinities undoubtedly play a pivotal role in the high levels of sexual violence in South Africa, we cannot ignore the other inequalities which construct the backdrop against which these gendered power relations play out and shape their particular expression in this context. Socioeconomic and racialised inequalities intersect with heteronormativity, age and gender in complex ways which render particular groups of multiply marginalised women at greater risk of experiencing sexual harassment and assault (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; Clowes et al., 2009).

2.3.2 Endemic Violence

The high levels of sexual violence in South Africa can also only be understood in relation to the high levels of violence in our society in general, and in the widespread acceptance of violence as a legitimate approach to managing interpersonal relationships (Collins, 2013). Citing a range of locally generated research findings, Collins (2013, p. 31) points out that:

In South Africa, violence] is understood as an essential tool for raising children, a useful disciplinary technique in educational institutions, an acceptable strategy in pursuing sexual encounters, an indispensable resource in intimate relationships, and an effective way of establishing social status. Across the board, it is regarded as a useful and effective resource.

It is worth highlighting that these attitudes towards violence permeate South African society, cutting across boundaries of race and class.

There are many contributing factors to this widespread acceptance of violent attitudes and behaviour. Some of these include: the ongoing effects of the dehumanising systemic violence of apartheid and poverty; high levels of militarisation and violence historically through conscription and engagement in the liberation struggle (Rape Crisis, 2013); the witnessing and experience of violence from an early age (Mathe, 2007); and the absence of effective consequences for violent behaviour, with a resulting sense of impunity (Sikweyiya, Jewkes, & Morrell, 2007).

Due to the fact that many forms of violence are both legal and acceptable in South Africa, many victims of that violence find it difficult to recognise or name what they have experienced as actual violation, even though they may be living with the traumatic effects (Boonzaier, 2008). If they do speak out, it is likely that members of their own family and community, caught up in the same discursive milieu, will minimise the seriousness of any such offence. Within such a context, it makes sense that the resulting dissonance and sense of alienation could be alleviated when victim-survivors participate in and surrender to violent practices and behaviour themselves.

2.3.3 Impunity: SAPS and the criminal justice system

Whilst underreporting of sexual violence and low conviction rates for sexual crimes are worldwide realities, the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system in South Africa in responding to sexual violence has led to a general sense of impunity. As a result, rape victim-survivors have little or no faith in the ability of the South African criminal justice system to “offer [them] services, to protect [them], to treat [them] with dignity and respect and, above all, to support [their] claims to justice and to act as a deterrent to rapists” (Keehn et al., 2014, p. 90).

Studies which have documented the treatment of rape survivors who do report sexual assault highlight the many reasons why most victim-survivors choose not to. These include:

- police personnel trivialising, ignoring or disputing reports of rape (Swart, 2013);
- refusal to open a rape case on spurious grounds, in order to keep rape statistics down (Swart, 2013);
- police failing to correctly identify or arrest the perpetrator (Jewkes et al., 2009);

- corrupt practises amongst police officials, including the ‘loss’ of dockets in exchange for bribes;
- negotiation of cash settlements from perpetrators in exchange for withdrawal of the case;
- rape of victims by police officials (CIET Africa, 1998 cited by Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002, p. 1232; Vetten et al., 2008);
- inconsistent adherence to both legal and administrative guidelines and procedures by police officers, prosecutors and magistrates (Vetten & Motelow, 2004);
- inability to trace victims when a case finally proceeds (Jewkes et al., 2009);
- infrequent, inconsistent and incorrect administration of sexual assault evidence kits and the resultant absence of DNA evidence (Jewkes et al., 2009);
- the limited training and skills of community service doctors who are often the ones administering the sexual assault evidence kits;
- low prosecution and conviction rates; and
- prison sentences which are regularly shorter than the mandated minimum sentences (Vetten et al. 2008, 2010; Smythe & Waterhouse, 2008; Mpani & Nsibande 2015).

These findings point to pervasive gendered prejudice and dismissive attitudes and practices in relation to rape and sexual violence across the South African criminal justice system. Such responses are exacerbated for women living in poverty, and in rural areas with limited access to legal and other resources (Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 1997, p. 7). In such areas, when a sexual assault is actually acknowledged by family or community members, it may be dealt with through traditional patriarchal dispute resolution mechanisms rather than involving the police and justice system (Keehn et al., 2014, p. 91), which generally involve the payment of compensation to the victim-survivor’s family for the violation.

It is clear that state service providers do not always respect the rights of rape survivors, and often fail to comply with norms and standards as set out in national legislation and policy (Keehn et al., 2014). With such limited chances of achieving justice, it is hardly surprising that victim-survivors of sexual violence are most often unwilling to subject themselves to the almost inevitable re-traumatisation that reporting and engagement with the criminal justice system will entail and choose not to report.

2.4 Rape as a citizenship issue

Various authors draw attention to the broader social context which enables and perpetuates sexual violence (see for example Shakespeare-Finch & Armstrong, 2010, Koss, 2006, Astbury, 2006, Rozee & Koss, 2001, Taylor & Norma, 2012) with Muldoon, Taylor and Norma (2016, p. 568) describing sexual assault as “a gendered crime generated at a societal level by a rape culture and its myths” and a betrayal of women’s “citizen identity”. In a similar vein, Louise du Toit (2005) talks of rape in South Africa as a “matter of political and public concern, because politics is about who has power over whom, and rape (and its threat) is one of the multiple ways in which people wield power over each other” (Du Toit, 2005, p. 253). In fact, du Toit (2005) goes so far as to argue that South Africa’s track record with sexual violence relegates its women and children to second class citizens. She believes that rape ought to be framed as a citizenship issue because of its political and public nature, in opposition to discourses which minimise and individualise rape by constructing it as personal and private.

Research which has documented the ways in which South African women experience the threat of rape and how it shapes their lives and choices (Dosekun, 2007, 2013; Gordon & Collins, 2013; Kelland, 2011) supports du Toit’s argument. Lindsay Kelland (2011) argues that “part of the harm of rape can be explained by seeing rape as making good on the threat of sexual objectification” (p. 182). The pervasive sexual objectification of women through every form of media as well as everyday gendered interactions constitutes an unrelenting threat to women’s sense of safety and well-being which the act of rape follows through on, thus reinforcing the threat for those women not yet raped. This echoes Susan Brownmiller’s (1975) argument in her seminal work *Against Our Will* that rape is fundamentally about power and is a means by which all men, more or less consciously, keep all women subordinate through fear. Whilst this characterisation of rape is not universally accepted, it is difficult to deny that all women’s lives are to some degree shaped and constrained by sexual violence.

A politicised understanding of rape inspires resistance and activism for change. It focuses attention on the intellectual and political labour that is required to shift the *status quo*. In South Africa, although gender activism was overshadowed by the struggle against apartheid, the story of women’s ongoing resistance to gender-based violence through protest and other

forms of resistance is an important story to trace. It offers a backdrop against which we can understand the emergence of the Silent Protest.

2.5 Resistance, Activism and Protest

Activism implies acting upon, acting against, acting for causes and issues of social concern, and not only personal concern. There is an implied sense that it is for the social good, working towards social change, a move towards something better – at least in the eyes of the activist committed to bringing about desired change. By its very nature activism creates a tension – a polarised tension, a dichotomy, of two opposing camps – us and them. These camps are like two groups of protagonists: those who are on the right track and those who are not. A varied spectrum of activities ensues – holding this tension; moving with it; never letting it sag and never releasing it. Therein lies the continuation of the struggle.

(Nair, 2004, p. 30)

Foucault (1980) famously declared that wherever there is power, there is resistance (the relationship between power and resistance will be explored further in Chapter 3). Women have always resisted rape through whichever means were available to them – the stories of Lucretia in the 6th century BCE and Tamar in Old Testament times come to mind. It was however the co-ordinated labour of activists in and around the women's movement in the 1970s which shifted the discourse from rape as a rare, private and individual experience to a public and political reality which affected innumerable women and which required radical action (Rutherford, 2011). It is against the backdrop of the gender activism of the past 50 years that the Silent Protest takes its place. With the focus of this thesis being on the participation in anti-rape protest by women who have experienced sexual violence, it is necessary to briefly sketch the history and intentions of such protests, with particular reference to South Africa.

2.5.1 Advocacy and activism in the global north

2.5.1.1 **Speak-outs and rape crisis services**

In the North America of the late 1960s, a radical, collective feminist anti-rape movement was gathering momentum, and the first recorded instance of women speaking publicly about their own experiences of sexual violence seems to be a rape speak-out held on 24 January 1971 in St Clement's Church hall in New York. Organised by the New York Radical Feminists, the flyer for the event characterised rape as a logical outcome of patriarchy and drew attention to the

fact that husbands and boyfriends were as likely to be perpetrators as were strangers. This was a ground-breaking moment for gender activism and for those who shared their stories. Until then, most rapes were not spoken of or acknowledged, particularly where the perpetrators were known to those who had been violated. No recording was permitted at this event, but journalist-activist Susan Brownmiller (1975) kept her notes from that evening. What struck her most powerfully was that every woman who spoke, whether she had been raped by a blind date, a therapist or a stranger in an alley, believed that in some way it had been her fault. This is a significant factor in women's silence around rape.

This first speak-out gave rise to many more, and publicly launched the women's movement in the United States. Nancy Matthews in her 1994 book *Confronting Rape: The Feminist Anti-Rape Movement and the State* describes the notions upon which the early anti-rape movement was founded, as follows: "...first, the radical political insight that violence against women is a fundamental component of the social control of women, and second, that women should try to do something to turn victims into survivors" (Matthews, 1994, p. xi). This construction of a journey from victimhood to survival is something to which I shall return in Chapter 9.

The early women's movement engaged in radical activism, challenging the state and criminal justice system to change attitudes and practices in relation to sexual violence, and their activities extended to vigilante-style intimidation of perpetrators. The response from women who had previously felt they had nowhere to turn was immense, and volunteers soon began setting up rape crisis centres which provided a range of services (Matthews, 1994).

At this time, anti-rape activists offered their services as an alternative to a criminal justice system which they felt failed rape survivors, and they therefore initially distanced themselves from the state and state support. Over the first decade, however, as their orientation shifted increasingly towards providing supportive services to individual rape survivors, their relationship with the state changed, and it was largely state funding that ensured the survival of the movement whilst transforming it from "grassroots activism to professionalised social service provision" (Matthews, 1994, p. xii).

This transformation has meant a shift away from the rape crisis centres' initial egalitarian and non-hierarchical organisational structures, and also a shift away from an empowerment

model focusing on peer counselling and support. Rape crisis work has become increasingly professionalised, with trained mental health practitioners now specialising in 'treating' sexual assault victims with further specialisations in child sexual assault, rape and intimate partner violence. Whilst the early work was largely volunteer driven, it now depends on paid, 'professional' movement leaders, therapists and NGO CEOs. Matthews (1994, p. xiii) concludes that "[w]hile rape crisis work originated as an expression of the new feminist politics, today it is also a manifestation of a therapeutic society" in which "...therapeutic frameworks often disguise social ills as personal trauma" (ibid, p. xiv), and the focus has shifted "to therapeutically managing the aftermath of rape rather than to changing social relations in order to prevent rape" (ibid, p. xiv).

I want to flag this 'taming' and professionalisation of a movement that was initiated with the hope of bringing about a change in the social order. Hannah Britton (2006) outlines a similar trajectory in South Africa, which she has called "the growing institutionalisation and NGO-isation" (p. 145) of the women's movement. I will return to these ideas in Chapters 8 and 9.

2.5.1.2 Public activism against rape and rape culture

Whilst the rape crisis centres came to offer individualised services in a private and confidential space, another strand of gender activism took up the challenge of public action in order to raise awareness and, over the years, activists have taken to the streets, university campuses and other public spaces in a range of demonstrations, marches, sit-ins and protests. In more recent years, the internet and social media have become both tools and sites of protest for gender activists. Collective anti-rape protest provides a platform for the expression of collective outrage at the injustice of dismissive or indifferent responses to rape and for calling perpetrators, government structures and civil society to account (Campbell, Baker & Mazurek, 1998; De Klerk, Klazinga & McNeill, 2007; White, A., 2001).

Two examples of public action are Take Back the Night marches, which began in the 1970s and, according to the Take Back the Night Foundation website, became "the first worldwide effort to combat sexual violence and violence against women" (<https://www.takebackthenight.org>), and SlutWalks. Both of these movements began as particular protest events in response to particular situations, and each was effective in a particular way; they allowed feminist activists to challenge prevailing understandings and

perspectives about rape and to introduce new ideas into social dialogue through the media attention which focused on the protests and the ensuing public and private debates (Hill, 2016). SlutWalks were particularly provocative in this sense.

Initially organised in response to a public comment by a Toronto police officer that in order to avoid being raped, female students should “stop dressing like sluts”, SlutWalks were a direct challenge to victim-blaming discourses as they are manifest in what has been called ‘rape culture’⁴. Protestors were encouraged to wear whatever they wanted, many choosing short skirts, stilettos, lingerie and other stereotypically sexualised attire. Organisation of the events happened informally, largely through social media. The first march attracted nearly 3000 protestors, and the attention generated within both mainstream and social media rapidly led to SlutWalks becoming a transnational movement (Valenti, 2011). Over the ensuing years, SlutWalks have been critiqued for addressing only white women’s experiences of sexual violence whilst reproducing and reinforcing the shame of black women who are frequently referred to as ‘slut’ or ‘ho’ (Gouws, 2017, p. 26); the need for intersectional analysis in activist planning has therefore been highlighted. Although SlutWalks have been shown to be flawed in their conceptualisation, embarking upon such action has enabled activists to open up new conversations and introduce new perspectives into social dialogue.

Another example of international gender activism initiated by university students and effecting change in public discourse is the growing anti-rape movement on college/university campuses in the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere, which has been enacted slightly differently in each location. Online activism is a key element of contemporary protest, with the #MeToo campaign being a highly visible example. Although these developments in anti-rape activism are both significant and worthy of attention, my own research journey with the Silent Protest (2012–2014) pre-dated these expressions of activism, and they are quite different in nature. The Silent Protest was an embodied enactment of resistance whilst the #MeToo often involves anonymous, online engagement. This does not make it any less

⁴ ‘Rape culture’ generally refers to a society, culture, institution or environment where the prevailing attitudes and beliefs normalise and justify sexual violence, blame victims rather than perpetrators and minimise the impacts of sexual violence, whilst accepting as normative the association of sex with coercion and violence.

significant, but it is beyond the scope of my thesis to engage in a comparison or analysis of these more recent approaches to anti-rape activism.

2.5.2 Gender Advocacy and activism in South Africa: A brief history

Whilst scholars such as Kuumba (2006) refer to a long “herstory” of African women’s creative and subversive collective resistance to “expressions of patriarchy and other forms of injustice” (p. 112), and whilst there is ample evidence of this in the everyday survival strategies of women in South Africa, it has also been well-documented that gender advocacy was subordinated to the broader struggle for liberation during the apartheid era.

2.5.2.1 The anti-apartheid struggle and the women’s movement

During the years when the women’s movement was growing in strength in the Global North and second wave feminism was reaching its zenith, South Africa was in the grip of increasing resistance and uprisings against apartheid’s oppressive policies and practices. Whilst the influence of feminist discourse and consciousness-raising was certainly felt in South Africa, in terms of the anti-apartheid movement its importance was relegated due to more pressing concerns. Seidman (1993), for example, cites various speeches made at African National Congress (ANC) gatherings, demonstrating how the struggle for racial and/or class equality was constructed as primary, whilst gender issues were to be avoided as potentially divisive and distracting. This mindset prevailed, despite pockets of lobbying and protest until, in April 1992, in the lead-up to the country’s transition to democracy, the Women’s National Coalition (WNC) emerged, bringing women together across race and class divides to produce a Women’s Charter (Gouws, 2014).

At that time, there was a sense of urgency in ensuring that issues pertaining to women were adequately addressed in the envisioned changes in legislation and practice in the country. With this achieved, at least in terms of ANC policy at the time, many of the prominent activists who had been at the forefront of the WNC were drawn into government structures, either as members of parliament or in other positions where they were shaping and/or implementing policy. These changes led to the demise of a co-ordinated national women’s movement but activism, lobbying and mobilisation around gender equality and gender-based violence (GBV) in particular, have continued to be carried out by women’s organisations drawing on a different “repertoire of action” (Gouws, 2014, p. 19).

However, this has not always been straightforward. According to Gouws (2014), there was ongoing conflict and contestation between women activists and feminist academics around the nature of their relationship and issues of representation, and who may speak for whom. White women academics, in particular, were accused of speaking on behalf of black women and thus disempowering them, as well as speaking in abstract terms about experiences of living that had no relevance for the lived reality of black women. For a time, these heated debates led to an impasse which was resolved, in part, by the establishment of Women and Gender Studies programmes at a number of universities. What has emerged from this conflict however, is a heightened awareness and sensitivity in relation to the intersectionality of oppressions and identities particularly relating to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. These layers of identity currently shape the focus, agendas and organisational practices of different women's organisations in South Africa (Britton et al., 2009, p. 16 cited by Gouws, 2014, p. 20), with different organisations engaging with a range of issues from different perspectives, and also having differing relationships with government structures.

2.5.2.2 Anti-rape protest in South Africa

Against this backdrop of the changing trajectory of a national women's movement, I will now outline the history of specific protest action against rape and sexual violence in South Africa. In order to understand the nature and impact of the Silent Protest, it is important to have a sense of its local historical context. Whilst specific instances of mobilisation and protest action are sparse, they are worth noting.

Early anti-rape mobilisation

ANTI-RAPE STAYAWAY IN PORT ALFRED, EASTERN CAPE

In early May 1986, a middle-aged black woman was raped and stabbed in the township of the Eastern Cape seaside town, Port Alfred, by a known rapist. He was identified and arrested but soon released without being charged. In protest at the failure of the police to take action against the man, the newly-formed Port Alfred Women's Organisation (PAWO) initiated an all-women work stayaway which lasted for seven days after the incident. The police, in turn, detained about 16 community leaders including the chairperson of PAWO and her husband once the stayaway ended (Forrest & Jochelson, 1986).

This particular protest seems to have been a pivotal moment, in which sexual assault came to be openly and explicitly addressed in this community as a form of oppression against women. The stayaway and subsequent detention of the organisation's leader also seemed to strengthen the political identity and agency of the women involved (Forrest & Jochelson, 1986). Seidman (1993) links the growth in strength and visibility of community-based women's organizations such as PAWO with a new emphasis on gender-specific issues in the labour movement specifically, but this new emphasis had some influence within the broader anti-apartheid movement as well.

THE FIRST ANTI-RAPE PROTEST MARCH

On 3 February 1990, the day after then-president FW de Klerk announced the unbanning of the ANC and the imminent release of Nelson Mandela, the first documented march against rape and sexual violence in South Africa took place in Soweto. The march was organised under the banner of the Interdenominational Women's Prayer League, led by women inspired by their faith and moved by the dire situation in their community⁵. Organisers included Leah Tutu and Maggie Nkwe and the march was led by Mary Mabaso. Maggie Nkwe described how it came about: "One day in church, at prayer time, one woman stood up and prayed for her granddaughter who had been raped. Another woman stood up and prayed for someone she knew who had been raped. Then another, and another, and another. Then we realised that this was an issue we had to take up. These rapes must stop" (SPEAK Collective, 1990, p. 17).

However, the timing of the march was unfortunate. Media attention was focused on the momentous political developments, and minimal coverage was given to the historic march. What coverage there was, was largely bemused and dismissive: why make rape an issue at this particular moment in history? Were the women trying to detract from the more significant events unfolding? Even the local community offered little support. Sadly, the argument that there were 'more pressing issues' is one that is well-rehearsed when issues of sexual violence are raised to public awareness.

More recent anti-rape mobilisation

⁵ Since 1976, rape had increased significantly in Soweto. 'Jackrolling' became a pastime amongst young men who were too old to go back to school and could not find jobs (Vetten, 2000). 'Jackrollers' abducted and raped young women, specifically targeting those whose social circumstances exceeded those of the jackrollers, making them seem "unattainable" or "amahaiza (snobs)" (Vetten, 2000, p. 44, citing Mokwena, 1991). Vetten (2000, p. 48) suggests that for this gang, "[r]ape was a conscious tactic to keep women in their place, as well as a way of destroying their opportunities and potential".

Over the years, various international campaigns against gender-based violence have found their way to South Africa. For example, although the international 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence campaign was initiated in 1991, it was held in South Africa for the first time in 1998, as a government-supported intervention strategy to combat violence against women and children. Other 'imported' protest actions include Take Back the Night marches, SlutWalks, and the One Billion Rising global campaign.

One response to sexual violence that was firmly rooted in the South African experience and statistics (albeit contested) the One in Nine Campaign. I described in Chapter 1 how the Silent Protest emerged from the activism of this campaign.

Whilst this study focuses on the Silent Protest, I want to acknowledge the #RURferenceList⁶ protests which also took place at Rhodes University approximately eighteen months after my ethnographic research came to an end. The #RURferenceList protests, were sparked by the anonymous posting of a 'reference list' of names of male students on a Rhodes student social media group. No explanation was offered. However, as friends tagged each other and discussion grew, it became clear that there was an intended link between the names and sexual violence. Students gathered in large numbers and confronted some of the men on the list, removing them from their residences and calling for them to be suspended from the university and arrested.

The intention, planning, nature and enactment of politics in the #RURferenceList Protests were very different to the Silent Protest, and the logo/graphic with which they became associated clearly rejected the more care-full politics of the Silent Protest. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the resonances and differences between the two protests, I acknowledge that this would be a helpful exercise.

2.5.3 What have gender activists in South Africa achieved?

In an emotional opinion piece published in February 2013, shortly after the rape and murder of Anene Booysen in Bredasdorp in South Africa made headlines around the world, Ferial Haffajee declared that the existing movement against gender-based violence in South Africa

⁶ For my further reflections on the nature and impact of the #RURference List Protests, written in collaboration with Professor Catriona Macleod see <https://theconversation.com/angry-student-protests-have-put-rape-back-on-south-africas-agenda-58362>

had achieved nothing in the previous twenty years, despite much “talk, talk, talk” (Haffajee, 2013). A swift response from Lisa Vetten outlined some of the very concrete achievements of South African gender activists (Vetten, 2013). These included:

- a. the establishment of rape crisis services and, more recently, a supportive role in government-run facilities such as Thuthuzela Care Centres, the police’s victim-friendly rooms, the courts and health clinics;
- b. research and advocacy regarding law enforcement, which resulted in the re-establishment of specialised Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units, and Sexual Offences Courts, and several key legal judgements relating to the state’s responsibilities towards women in general and rape survivors specifically (Ndashe, 2004);
- c. establishment of the National Working Group on Sexual Offences in 2004 which advocated for and ultimately achieved significant changes in legislation, with the Sexual Offences Amendment Act of 2007. This body continues to monitor implementation of the Act, providing regular feedback to Parliament and thus holding the state accountable (Vetten, 2013);
- d. ongoing research which has furthered our understanding of rape prevalence and perpetration with a view to effective prevention strategies, conducted by the Medical Research Council, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, and the Gender, Health and Justice Research Unit, amongst others.

Whilst these achievements are significant, others have expressed concern that “[m]ost gender-based violence advocacy efforts are directed at law reform, law enforcement and victim support” rather than “transforming deep-rooted social attitudes and beliefs” (Van Zyl, 2005, p. 238). This seems to echo Haffajee’s (2013) frustration and begs the question: has anything fundamentally changed over the past three decades, in either the prevalence of sexual violence or the way in which rape and rape victim-survivors are discursively constructed?

Advocacy efforts can have unintended outcomes. For example, a focus on victim support can reinforce the traditional gendered positions of women and children as being inherently vulnerable to victimisation and in need of protection, whilst men who are sexually assaulted

are seen as 'unmasculine'. In addition, whilst it has been a positive development to have sexual assault laws which are gender neutral, this does run the risk of obscuring the gendered power relations which underpin the vast majority of rapes, thereby depoliticising and individualising issues of sexual violence.

Therefore, whilst the achievements of gender activists working in challenging circumstances are to be acknowledged and celebrated, there remains much care-full and thought-full work to be done. Van Zyl (2005) later points to the vital role of social and political movements in continually problematising and reworking the accepted *status quo*: "It is through mobilisation that political development of citizens as *agents* can occur, issues can be kept alive and rescued from institutionalisation where they become 'the domain of technocrats and professionals'" (p. 244). This is one of the key intentions of the Silent Protest, located as it is within an educational institution where the foundations of young people's engagement as citizens are being forged.

Unfortunately, activist engagement with rape and gender-based violence is often restricted to conversations amongst academics and activists. For the majority of women in South Africa, their only awareness is of the unrelenting threat of sexual violence, the constant vigilance and decision-making required to achieve the goal of safety, and the isolating and life-shattering consequences if you do not manage to get that right, making you feel as though you are entirely responsible for ensuring that you are not raped – and there are few counter-stories circulating which challenge these perceptions.

It is therefore unsurprising that, despite the pervasiveness of sexual violence, most victim-survivors never report the violation, and many do not speak of the experience at all, even to trusted family members or friends. In Chapter 4, I explore this central tension between silence and disclosure following sexual trauma, and its links to the Silent Protest. However, it is necessary, first, to locate myself within the theoretical landscape and within my own life trajectory in Chapter 3, as my epistemology informs both my engagement with the literature on rape acknowledgement, disclosure and reporting, as well as the history of anti-rape activism. My theoretical positioning also fundamentally shaped my methodology and the interpretive tools I employed and thus the nature of the arguments that this thesis makes.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL POSITIONING AND INTERPRETIVE TOOLS

Thought is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions, it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites. It cannot help but liberate and enslave. Even before prescribing, suggesting a future, saying what must be done, even before exhorting or merely sounding an alarm, thought, at the very level of its existence, in its very dawning, is in itself an action – a perilous act.

Michel Foucault (1970/2005, p. 357)

I need to state upfront that I am not a theorist; I am a practitioner. I am motivated by curiosity about practices that foster positive change and healing, not only for individuals but within systems and communities¹ and by the desire to employ, extend and improve those practices. While I am more concerned with the implications of applying theory than with theory in and of itself, I am also fully aware that the decisions I make, the questions I ask, and the ways in which I make sense of this research journey are all informed by the interpretive lenses of my epistemology – how I think about what I think I know. The process of clarifying and articulating my epistemological positioning within the theoretical landscape has challenged me to think deeply about ethics and the purpose of conducting research (I will discuss this further in the Methodology chapters). It also required me to acknowledge the complex and overlapping discursive and experiential factors which play a role in that positioning.

3.1 My theoretical positioning

Against the broad backdrop of postmodernism, I adopt a poststructuralist, critical, feminist orientation to psychological knowledge generation and practice (Hooks, 2014), supported by the understandings and practices of social constructionism and of narrative and collaborative therapies. I draw on the narrative metaphor as the central focus of my research and therapy practice, seeking out and listening to the stories people tell about their lives. In thinking with those stories, I find discourse theory and positioning theory to be valuable thinking tools (interpretive devices) which open up possibilities for creative sense-making.

¹ I define healing as any sustained change, shift or movement in thinking, feeling, being or doing (i.e. physical, psychological, emotional or spiritual), from a state of suffering to a state of diminished suffering (or enhanced well-being), where the person experiencing the change, shift or movement describes it as beneficial and supportive of their well-being.

During the course of my research journey, I had the opportunity to incorporate a (participatory) action research cycle into my research methodology, a choice which seemed congruent with a responsive, feminist approach to research.

In the sections which follow, I will expand upon my understanding of this theoretical positioning and upon some of the aspects of my own life story which have contributed to that positioning.

3.2 Researching in a 'post'-era

Postmodernism emerged as a philosophical movement that was part critique and part expansion and opening up of modernist thinking, incorporating what had gone before. A key feature of postmodern epistemology is its abandonment of the mythical quest for objective knowledge generation as well as the search for 'truth' in grand theories or overarching metanarratives (Lyotard 1984, p. 53). Postmodernism sees value in the details of contextualised, local and particular experiences and knowledges. It also accommodates the co-existence of multiple, equally valid and often apparently contradictory perspectives (Burr, 1995, 2015) inviting researchers to account for these perspectives through nuanced qualitative analysis. The willingness to embrace multiple perspectives is part of the richness of postmodern research, which invites "indeterminacy rather than determinism, diversity rather than unity, difference rather than synthesis, complexity rather than simplification ... social science becomes a more subjective and humble enterprise as truth gives way to tentativeness" (Rosenau, 1992, p. 8).

Beyond acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives and knowledges, 'post'-era thinking also raises questions about how these different perspectives have arisen, how they are circulated and sustained or resisted, and the impacts that they have on peoples' thinking, being and acting (Romainoli & Mc Namee, 2021). Questions also arise about the relative value and validity of different perspectives within particular contexts.

3.2.1 A social constructionist perspective on knowledge generation

Social constructionism's primary concern is with the "historical and social nature of meaning-making processes" (Romainoli & McNamee, 2021, p. 316). According to Burr (2015, p. 222), a key tenet of social constructionism is that our knowledges or understandings of the world are

not grounded in “an observable, external reality” but arise rather from human thought or sense-making within particular social contexts.

Social constructionism therefore questions all taken-for-granted knowledges and our assumptions about how the world appears to be and wants to make sense of how these knowledges have been constructed. Social constructionists see all assumptions and knowledges as specific to the culture and period of history in which they are located, and as products of conditions prevailing in that cultural and historical location. In other words, “societies construct the ‘lenses’ through which their members interpret the world” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 16).

Further key assumptions of a social constructionist perspective are that people construct knowledges and constitute reality between themselves in language and embodied activity, organising and sustaining these realities through narrative and the various social processes of their daily interactions (Romaioli & McNamee, 2021). In addition, the understandings (or constructions or knowledges) which circulate in a particular context have implications for social action. Each construction will invite, permit, require, encourage or sustain certain types of action, while excluding or discouraging others (Burr 1995; Freedman & Combs 1996).

This perspective invites us to investigate the often unacknowledged agendas that underpin our world views (Sheldrake, 1998) and reminds us that what we ‘know’ and accept as ‘truth’ is in fact only an interpretation which a community of people have come to share over a period of time. When we lose touch with the history of an idea, we tend to assign it ‘truth’ status, and these ideas can have real and constraining effects on how people understand themselves and their duties and obligations in society, as well as how they act upon those understandings. A social constructionist perspective challenges the apparent ‘truth’ of the ideas that shape societies and practices and asks: “How do we know this? What is the history of this idea/knowledge? What other knowledges are available to us?” Social constructionist perspectives therefore invite a more humble, tentative and questioning approach to ‘knowledge’.

3.2.2 Poststructuralist approaches to knowledge and power

In questioning the history and current status of different knowledges or ideas, the relationship between knowledge and power becomes important, and a poststructuralist perspective, particularly drawing on the work of philosopher Michel Foucault, can be helpful in making sense of the workings of the knowledge-power nexus.

Even a cursory analysis of any community or society reveals that not all perspectives, ideas, constructions or discourses (ways of seeing and being in the world, to be discussed under Discourse Theory below) are afforded equal status. Certain knowledges, narratives and discourses dominate in particular places, cultures and eras, whilst others are marginalised or subjugated. Foucault (1980, p. 82) defined subjugated knowledges as “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated.”² For example, the knowledges and ways of being of women, people of colour and the LGBTQIA+ community have often been subjugated in Foucault’s sense in that they were considered to be ‘emotional’, ‘primitive’, subjective and/or unscientific, and were marginalised within a Western patriarchal hegemony. This only began to change relatively recently. The knowledges of children, people who suffer ill-health, those who experience physical or cognitive limitations, people who have experienced trauma or psychological distress – these groupings of people are similarly often marginalised in favour of the knowledges of ‘experts’ who speak on their behalf.

Despite the existence of multiple, overlapping, even “swarming” (Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 17) constructions or knowledges, people are not free to locate themselves or understand themselves in terms of any of those knowledges, at any time, and in any context: “we are not free to select how we know ourselves” (Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 18).

The poststructuralist movement challenges the taken-for-grantedness of this and asks questions like: “How did this particular construction/knowledge take hold and become dominant? Who determines whose perspectives are validated and whose are not? What are the effects on people’s lived experiences when certain knowledges dominate and others diminish?” Poststructuralism therefore moves beyond structural or essentialist accounts of

² Foucault (1980:81-82) defines subjugated knowledges in two ways. The first definition refers to ‘historical contents which have been buried or disguised’. It is Foucault’s second sense of the term that I refer to here.

difference, inequality, dominance and marginalisation to unpack the macro- and micro-operations of power within which knowledge, subjectivity and experience are formulated and re-formulated.

3.2.2.1 Discourse Theory

The term 'discourse' to which I referred above is a central concept in poststructuralist literature which both formalises and extends the notion of competing constructions, knowledges and perspectives. I appreciate the clarity of Drewery and Winslade's (1996, p. 35) description of discourse as being a "set of more or less coherent stories or statements about the way the world should be. They are social practices – organised ways of behaving. They are the frameworks we use to make sense of the world and they structure our relations with one another". Discourses arise in different ways and from different sources: 'experts' within institutional settings, be they academic, religious, government or commercial; lay people's common sense and reflection upon experience; cultural narratives, ritual and mythology disseminated through oral traditions and practices; the media in its various manifestations; and so on.

Foucault (1972, p. 49) insists that these discourses do not simply describe an objective reality; instead, they incite "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak". Foucault (1980, p. 81) further develops this notion of "...the productive potential of power..." which understands power not as simply an oppressive or dominating force possessed by some and imposed on others as in a modernist understanding of power. Instead, Foucault (1980, p. 119) suggests that power is something which "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourses".

According to this understanding, discourses actively construct what we 'know' about ourselves and our external reality and normalise the ways in which we come to regulate our own and others' thinking, being and acting. As Ussher expresses it (2011, p. 4), "discourses produce identities, subject positions, and 'institutional sites' from which a person can speak or be addressed". Subjectivity – or one's sense or experience of whom one is – is therefore not understood as a personal achievement arising from within, but rather as "constructed within language and cultural practices" (Ussher, 2011, p. 4). This process of subjectification, or becoming a subject, "works both to constrain and enable possibilities for how we

understand ourselves and other people, and how we experience and act in the world” (Gavey, 2011, p. 185). Poststructuralism therefore affords discourse a central role in the construction of social interactions and practices, the fixing of identity conclusions, and thus in the shaping of lives.

As we have seen above, however, all discourses are not equal; the discourses which dominate in a society determine what knowledge is held to be true, right or proper in that society (Parker 1989, p. 61). Therefore, those who control or influence discourse control or influence knowledge and possibilities for being in the world. At the same time, the dominant discourses within a particular context determine who will be able to occupy its powerful positions (Freedman & Combs 1996, p. 38). This results in self-perpetuating systems of domination and suppression.

What is most fascinating about discourse is that as humans going about our everyday lives, we are largely oblivious to its workings and effects, the ways in which it shapes our hopes and desires, our choices and actions, our expectations of others and ourselves, and our ‘knowledge’ of what it means to live a good and meaningful life. In fact, according to Foucault (1988, p. 118), “relations of power are perhaps among the best hidden things in the social body”.

In his book *The Person in Narrative Therapy: A Post-structural Foucauldian Account*, which closely examines both Foucault and Michael White’s theoretical perspectives on subjectivity and the possibility of agency and change, Michael Guilfoyle (2014) offers an account of the ways in which discourse and power infuse our interactions and our sense-making, and subtly shape our self-understandings and the “conditions of possibility” which seem to be available to us for living. This includes the ways in which the workings of power are concealed so that we come to experience its effects as natural and self-evident, and our self-understandings as fixed and given.

Of particular relevance to my central argument in this thesis is Guilfoyle’s (2014) observation that what a successful discourse conceals is not some “objectively true state of affairs” but the possibility and “habitability” of alternative ways of knowing and doing (Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 32) and by doing so a discourse comes to “seem self-evidently true” (ibid, p. 32). Guilfoyle (2014) therefore does not suggest that one discourse or set of discourses may be better than

another, or should replace another, but that the “hegemonic effects” of a dominant discourse should be troubled and disrupted to illuminate the many other available ways of knowing and doing. This resonates with Gergen’s (2001) assertion that a central aim of social constructionist scholarship is to enrich and expand the cultural resources available to people to make sense of their realities.

I will argue that the dominant discourses around (or constructions of) sexual violence and its impacts obscure many other potentially beneficial ways of knowing and doing.

A further helpful perspective on the ways in which power and discourse operate to obscure their workings and effects is to recognise how discourse points to the internal characteristics or states of the individual as the cause of their responses and actions rather than the broader discursive context in which an individual’s actions arise. This individualisation of responsibility and ‘blame’ for actions and experiences denies the impact of relationships and broader economic, social, cultural and political factors. An intensely individual emphasis is evident in the discursive construction of sexual violence where rape myths and victim-blaming discourses (to be discussed further in Chapter 4) locate responsibility for the attack in the actions of the one who endured it and even trauma-informed therapeutic discourse similarly locates the ‘problem’ within the individual victim-survivor, requiring him/her/them to engage in the labour of recovery.

3.2.2.2 The narrative metaphor

With Jerome Bruner’s (1986, 1991) masterful and often-cited contributions leading the way, the past four decades have seen the inception, development and proliferation of ‘narrative’ scholarship and research in the Social Sciences – an era widely referred to as ‘the narrative turn’. A broad range of approaches to and understandings of narrative have proliferated during this time, and there are many “divergences and ongoing debates” (Woods, 2011, p. 400) (for example, for a detailed analysis of a range of perspectives on narratives and identity, see Smith and Sparkes, 2008). However, what all narrative approaches are concerned with are the ways in which human beings (uniquely, it seems) make sense of their lives, and share that sense-making with others by telling stories about their experiences.

However, as Catrina Brown (2007b) points out: “Just as our lived experiences exist within a field or web of power and knowledge, so do our stories” (p. 137). A poststructuralist narrative

perspective acknowledges the close (enmeshed) relationship between power, discourse and narrative and the role that these play in constructing subjectivities: like the discourses in circulation in our social worlds, the stories we tell about ourselves and the stories told about us, do not simply represent us, they shape and constitute “our identities, our sense of the world we live in, and our positioning within that world” (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011, p. 50). In short, our lives are storied (Bruner, 1986, White, 1995) and “our identities are narratively constructed” (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 5).

Experience and narrative

Anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) describes a conversation about war that she shared with children in a village in Mozambique, whilst their village was under attack. She realised that their expression of thoughts and feelings changed during the course of the conversation and that: “[t]he narrative of the attack was not the actual experience of that violence, it was trying to find a meaningful way to deal with it” (Nordstrom, 1997, p.21). She goes on to suggest that the storyteller uses narrative to organise and even “domesticate” experience “*after the fact*”. She suggests that narrative “flows through the cracks and bridges the disjunctions” in order to construct a “whole”, bringing a sense of intelligible meaning to the fragments of experience in memory (ibid. p. 22).

This is an important perspective for this study, which generated narrated accounts of my research contributors’ subjective “actual experiences” of participating in the Silent Protest and the impact that these experiences have had on their living. However, working within a poststructuralist framework requires me to problematise the notion of experience as fixed, natural or essential. As Nordstrom (1997) does in the paragraph above, Joan Scott (1992, p.38) points out that experience is “at once already an interpretation and in need of interpretation”. White (1992, p. 125) suggests that our stories or descriptions of life never simply represent or reflect some external, neutral, pre-existing reality. We make sense of our experiences through the stories we tell about them (Brown, 2007a, p. 179); we “language” or “interpret” our experience into being. However, stories are inherently social and political achievements and “just as our lived experiences exist within a field or web of power and knowledge, so too do our stories” (Brown, 2007b, p. 137).

In the next chapter, I consider the ways in which the experience of rape defies narration and how, even when victim-survivors do take the risk of telling the story, it is constrained by the words available, the discourses in operation, and the allowances and disallowances of memory through 'traumatic disruption' or dissociation. We can only assume that there are always elements of the experience which remain un-narrated, marginalised and silenced by these constraints.

Arthur Frank (2012) suggests that what we do tell in our stories is a way of "holding our own" (p. 46) in the relational and discursive contexts in which we find ourselves. By holding one's own, he means "seeking to sustain the value of oneself or identity in response to whatever threatens to diminish that self or identity" (ibid.). What counts or is foregrounded in the telling of a story will therefore shift depending upon who is hearing the story, the nature of the relationship, and the broader context of the telling. The resources available to us to draw upon in naming and organising our experiences and in telling our stories are always inevitably constrained by the sociocultural and discursive context in which we find ourselves. Both what we tell and how we tell it will be shaped by our perceptions of how it will be heard and received; what we tell and how we tell it will impact how we remember the experience and the ongoing impact it has on us.

Whilst, according to Frank (2000, p. 135), the telling of autobiographical stories can play a role in repairing "a self that has become what it never expected to be", how we tell the story and how it is heard and responded to will impact the nature of that repair. Our descriptions of life constitute and shape our lives; they have "real effects" (White, 1992, p. 125).

"A self that has become what it never expected to be" certainly resonates with the ways in which I have heard victim-survivors of sexual violence describe their sense of self post-violation. Various practitioners and theorists speak to the importance of (re)constructing a narrative of the experience of violation both in managing the distress which the violation can evoke and in reconnecting the victim-survivor to their own values and purposes, as well as to others in their circle of care (Herman, 1997; Pennebaker, 1997; White, 1995, 2004; Yuen, 2009).

In the context of both life in general and during research, when we are generating accounts or narrations of experience (Tomlin, 2011), "what is seeable, hearable etc. shifts with the

interactional space the researcher inhabits, with the time and the purpose in telling, and with the discursive possibilities available (or brought to conscious awareness) at the time of each telling” (Davies, 2003, p. 144). Narrative therapy offers me a way of hearing and thinking with and about these stories: staying close to the storyteller’s words and story but remaining fully cognisant of the constructed nature of the story and the multiple influences on that construction. Thus the texts which constitute our research ‘data’ are “texts in motion, texts that produce moments of life as it is being lived; they form archives that enable us to study that production” (Davies & Davies, 2007, p. 1157).

As researchers, we are therefore not looking for ‘truths’ about our research contributors; we can only work towards a “complex representation” (Blumenreich, 2004, p. 80) of the “multiple, political and contestable” meanings (Brown, 2007a, p. 182) attached to experience and how these are constructed and organised, acknowledging that as researchers we are active co-constructors/generators of data along with our research participants (Davies & Davies, 2007).

In the light of this, I am very aware that the narratives of the women who participated in the Silent Protest, were co-constructed in the conversations that I shared with them. I am also aware that the very nature of the researcher relationship was co-constructed – certainly my research contributors challenged my positioning of them and positioned me in ways I had not anticipated. I discuss various effects of this co-construction and co-positioning in Chapter 5.

Insights from narrative therapy

In line with the descriptions above, Michael White suggests that our narratives are not simply reflective of our own experiences and thoughts but are “carriers of culture” (White, 2004, p. 104), with each story we tell embedding the unquestioned normality of cultural norms and practices deeper into our lives. Other people’s narratives, about themselves and about others, also have a significant impact. If a claim is made about a person’s ‘nature’ or identity by that person or another person, or as an institutional response to them as a representative of a group of persons, this utterance “can function like a prescription, pressing the person to obediently become this version of a self” (Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 26). Narrative therapists therefore choose not to make utterances about people, do not draw on diagnostic terms or

categories of normality and pathology and stay close to the language and imagery people draw on in telling their stories.

Narrative therapy does however invite people to examine the assumptions and ideas (discourses) which inform their stories, and to evaluate the effects of their relationships with those ideas.

Because a poststructuralist perspective does not see identity as fixed or essential but rather as discursively constructed, the possibility exists that a person can step into/live out/enact/occupy different versions of themselves at different times. Narrative therapy intentionally troubles the “settled certainties” (White, 1995, p. 23) which people find limiting or constraining or an obstacle to living well. A narrative therapy conversation may therefore involve unpacking ideas about ‘normality’ or ‘being a successful woman’ or ‘trauma’ and evaluating the impacts of those ideas on a person’s choices or self-understanding. Close listening and questions which invite further exploration of possibilities for being and doing that people have not yet considered are characteristic of this approach.

People’s stories about their lives may initially be “problem-saturated” and draw upon discursively constrained or “single-voiced” descriptions of life (White, 2004, p. 135) which tend to fit in with cultural norms and expectations and limit the possibility of even imagining living differently. The process of narrative therapy has been compared to an archeological dig, where forgotten or overlooked “sparkling moments”, “alternative storylines”, unstoried experiences, actions, commitments and values are retrieved and explored, until they can take up a place in the narrative of a life.

However, because narrative therapy is constructed within a poststructuralist frame, this does raise questions about who the ‘person’ or agentic subject is who will step into/live out/enact/occupy these different versions of themselves.

3.3 Narrative therapy, poststructuralism and agency

Foucauldian theory seems to paint a fairly pessimistic picture of people being obviously controlled or manipulated under the influence of dominant discourses and knowledges without any awareness that this is happening: we have even been recruited into managing our own thoughts and behaviours to comply with ‘the way things are’. However, Foucault also

seems to insist that the possibility of resistance is always present, according to his frequently-cited statement: “Where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather, consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power ... These points of resistance are everywhere in the power network” (Foucault, 1990, p. 95). These perspectives seem contradictory and present a challenge in terms of how we understand human subjectivity, choice and action.

This is the central challenge which Guilfoyle (2014) addresses in *Who is the Person in Narrative Therapy*: he explores how it is possible to reconcile Foucault’s fairly pessimistic insistence (particularly in his early work) that our subjectivities are discursively constituted – the “product of social discourses and power dynamics” (2014, p. 18) – with the far more optimistic view that White’s approach to narrative therapy takes in viewing people as “perpetrators of influence” (White, 2007, p. 103) and assuming that people are “imbued with personal agency, intentionality, and the capacity for resistance” (Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 12) and therefore able to enact changes in their thinking and acting.

Guilfoyle’s (2014) argument is that Foucault’s ideas make room for agency in a way that enriches the theoretical underpinning of narrative therapy and allow for its practice to remain consistent with post-structuralist sensibilities. For one thing, it is clear to Guilfoyle (2014) that the intention behind Foucault’s work in exposing the workings of prevailing discourses is not to support the ways in which they construct or position people, but with the disruptive intent of troubling them and opening up the discursive field. Guilfoyle (2014) goes on to argue for three ways in which the enactment of agency is congruent with poststructuralist thought.

Firstly, because we are embodied, human beings have the capacity to act, to do and to effect change in our environments. This capacity to act precedes and exists outside of discourse.

Secondly, resistance precedes power. Our human capacity for refusal is one of the first responses to the world available to us, preceding our exposure to narrative, discourse and social practice. Within this understanding, power is seen as a *response* to resistance, rather than the other way around: “The final word on power,” says Deleuze (1988), “is that resistance comes first” (p. 74 cited in Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 10)

Finally, although humans have the capacity to act and to refuse discursive positioning, it is necessary to story the refusal itself and/or the movement towards an alternative discourse, otherwise we will only have the 'old' subject position within the rejected discourse to fall back on. Harris, Carney and Fine (2001, p. 6) call such stories "counter stories" in that they "refuse dominant constructions of social realities, reveal the fractures in structures, relations, discourses and practices of domination and, indeed, change the subject" and refer to the dominant constructions or discourses as "master narratives".

Guilfoyle (2014, p. 17) emphasises that both the refusal and the movement towards an alternative discourse (which White calls the "migration of identity") are not at all easy, constrained as they are by the "swirl of discourses" within which the action is being played out. In fact, Guilfoyle (2014, p. 14) believes that Foucault's most significant but "underappreciated (and inadvertent) contributions" to narrative therapy practices – and, I would argue, to notions of change, recovery and 'healing' – were "his powerful series of demonstrations that personal freedoms and preferred developments can be very hard to come by" due to the operations of discourse and power. Harris, Carney and Fine (2001, p. 8) agree that master narratives are "frustratingly heavy and difficult objects to move" but choose to theorise them as "porous, multiple, contradictory and therefore interruptable".

3.3.1 Positioning Theory

I have already referred above to the concept of 'subject positions' and return now to offer an account of what I mean when I use that term. According to Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart and Sabat (2009, p. 5) positioning theory contributes to our understanding of social action in that "[i]t is concerned with revealing the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that are realized in the ways that people act towards others". First posited by Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1991, p. 44), positioning theory sees the environments in which each person lives and acts as comprised of multiple and overlapping systems of understanding and categorising people, which serve to structure and shape our self-understandings and interactions:

Positioning as we will use it is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says

positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. ... One lives one's life in terms of one's ongoingly produced self, whoever might be responsible for its production.

Thus, within our systems of understanding and daily interactions and practices a range of subject positions are made available to individuals conferring both rights and duties – “normative constraints and opportunities for action” (Harré et al., 2009). Depending upon the way one is positioned, “there exists a local repertoire of what are admissible social acts or utterances for certain persons” (Harré, 2004, p. 29). It is important to note that the prevailing discourses in a particular context imbue subject positions with their meaning, and positioning theory sheds light on the practical outworkings of discourse and power dynamics in people's living and doing.

By way of example, a psychologist may be positioned by different clients, or by the same client in different moments, as a compassionate listener, as an expert on human relationships or as a person with special powers in reading minds and having insight into what is unspoken. Each of these positionings invites certain ways of interacting while disallowing or limiting others. However, each of these local positionings are framed and constrained by the broader social and discursive context which also positions psychologists in particular ways and prescribes “rights and duties” (Harré, 2004, p. 29) regarding what is expected and admissible in their interactions with clients.

Positioning theory is interested in the way these “rights and duties are taken up and laid down, ascribed and appropriated, refused and defended in the fine grain of the encounters of daily lives” (*ibid.*). Positioning theory therefore helps us to interrogate and make sense of the “underlying structure of presuppositions” (Harré, 2004, p. 31) that influence chosen actions, and how these are taken up or refused in the unfolding of interactions.

Of particular interest to me in relation to this research is the way in which an analysis of subject positions helps me to understand the “normative constraints” and “opportunities for action” (or lack thereof) that a particular subject position implies and requires within an unfolding storyline (Harré, 2004, p. 6) – in other words, what one may or may not do, be or say. As Harré (2004, p. 6) explains:

it becomes clear that access to and availability of certain practices, both conversational and practical, are determined not by individual levels of competence alone, but by having rights and duties [or not] in relation to items in the local corpus of [socially sanctioned] sayings and doings.

Expressed differently, and linking positioning theory to the narrative metaphor, Guilfoyle (2014, p. 58) describes subject positions as “character slots” which are assigned to people by the particular storylines in which they find themselves. These positions provide the person with a place to stand in relation to their own life experiences (autobiographical storyline) and their interactions within their broader social context. Different subject positions would support different self-understandings and ways of being and doing.

A particular character slot or subject position also allows others who share a similar sociocultural worldview to make assumptions or “understand” something about the person and their actions (Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 58). Every person is positioned in relation to others’ subject positioning within the network of relationships in which they find themselves and this allows people to co-ordinate their patterns of relating within the broader dynamics of social alignment – this is essential to the workings of power (Guilfoyle, 2014). A sex worker, for example, may be positioned as immoral in certain narratives, and this may limit spaces where they are welcomed or what they are allowed to claim; should they, for example, report having been raped or assaulted, they may be positioned as unworthy of justice or seen as an unreliable complainant.

I have discussed previously how discursive constructions (which is what a subject position is) form or shape subjectivity by pressing the person towards compliance with the discourse. Guilfoyle (2014, p. 62) suggests that as soon as we make any claim or statement about who we are or what has happened to us, for example disclosing that we have been raped, “we have become subject to some discourse or other; we thereby inhabit subject positions”. And because knowledge is embedded in power relations, we become a product of that discourse – or in Foucault’s formulation, “we become the very objects of which discourses speak” (1972, cited by Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 63).

However, the hopefulness and deep insight of positioning theory arises from two notions. The first is that we are multiply positioned within a range of social discourses at the same time.

Where a modernist perspective assumes that individuals are long-term and fairly stable members or representatives of a particular social class or group, with their identity being inextricably linked to that of the group, poststructuralist thinking sees persons as multiply positioned in a range of contexts, with that positioning being fluid and contestable (Törrönen, 2001, p. 313). In terms of this understanding, an individual exists as a “collage of subject positions” which may have no inherent relationship to one another and “cannot be fixed into any kind of stable unity” (Törrönen, 2001, pp. 313-314). Positions are therefore less fixed or stable than roles and may shift with each utterance in an interaction (Harré, 2004).

According to Guilfoyle (2014, p. 67), “[t]his multiplicity allows for some degree of dynamic movement around the person’s dominant, problem-saturated positions”. Harré et al. (2009) suggest that this allows for any positioning act to be challenged, albeit within the limitations of the discursive context. However, Harré et al. (2009, p. 10) suggest that even the discursive context (meta-positionings) can be challenged:

Change in positionings can change the meanings of the actions people are performing, since beliefs about positions partly determine the illocutionary force of members’ actions. Changes in the meanings of actions can consequently modify, sometimes drastically, the story-lines that are taken to be unfolding in an encounter.

Gavey (2011, p. 186) draws upon the interpretive tools of both discourse and positioning analyses to better understand the “cultural conditions of possibility” for particular ways of being. It is of relevance to my research to consider how women who have been raped are positioned within discourse and the impacts of this positioning on the “cultural conditions of possibility” for disclosure, support-seeking and coming to live well again after rape.

3.4 Feminist theory and research practice

Current feminist theories or feminisms take into account the multiple, concurrent positionalities of all women, and men, and include an analysis of power and the multiple ways in which people can be both oppressed and oppressing (McCauley, Buchanan, Campbell & Moylan, 2019). Intersectionality as an analytical framework accommodates this complexity. In a recent interview with *Time* magazine, Kimberlé Crenshaw, the scholar who first coined the term, described intersectionality as “a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each

other”(Steinmetz, 2020). Intersectional analyses therefore highlight and foreground the needs and concerns of persons who are multiply and simultaneously marginalised. Intersectionality recognises the heightened vulnerabilities and risks which accrue to those with overlapping and interdependent devalued social identities due to race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, physical (dis)ability, immigration status, religious belief and other identity markers. Recognising this, feminist researchers therefore resist perspectives which attempt to decontextualise women’s suffering from the environment in which it has arisen and, instead, draw attention to the relationship between social injustice, and women’s emotional distress.

From this perspective, feminist theory goes on to challenge all oppressive practices, structures and relations (Williams & Cervin 2004, p. 4) and it is therefore anticipated that feminist research should have an empowering and emancipatory effect on the lives of all the women involved by creating “new relationships, better laws and improved institutions” (Reinharz 1992, p. 75). Feminist researchers consciously place the various peripheral or marginal conditions of women at the centre of their research, acknowledging that the researcher cannot possibly be neutral, detached or objective, and committing themselves to the essentially political nature of the research process (Gatenby & Morrison-Hume 2001, p. 3). This enriches the research and locates it firmly within the real world, but it is not simply about generating knowledge; for feminist researchers, the goal is to turn “feminist insights into concrete actions aimed at achieving social change” (Maguire et al., 2004, p. xii).

Feminist theory underpins and is interwoven into my methodology and my approach to thinking with the narratives of my research contributors. I will therefore expand upon this brief introduction at various points in later chapters.

3.5 Relevance of my theoretical positioning

The reason that I have taken such care to outline the relevant aspects of a poststructuralist perspective and the workings of power is because I believe it is central to the argument that I want to make in this thesis: how women who are raped are positioned within multiple, overlapping discourses in their everyday living and in their support-seeking, and that this positioning has a significant impact on their meaning-making about themselves, their experiences, and what is possible for their lives. During the course of this research journey, I

was able to witness and hear about the ways in which victim-survivors are constructed and positioned when they participate in the Silent Protest, and I noticed how different understandings of the women were foregrounded in this context (I discuss these in Chapters 8 and 9). A critical, poststructuralist perspective drawing on the interpretive tools of discourse and positioning theory provides me with a place to stand from which I can try to make sense of what I am noticing.

3.6 Reflexivity: how my own story intersects with the story of the research

Having described the theoretical ideas and practices that I draw on in this thesis, I want to take a step back and locate my valuing of those ideas in my own story. I have attempted to write this chapter several times as purely academic discourse and kept reaching the limits of what I could say in that register before I was able to say what seemed most important. I realised that I could only write this chapter and, I suspect, much of this thesis, by interweaving academic discourse with narrative. The unfolding events, plots and sub-plots are inextricably linked with the process of knowledge production that is this research journey. It is not unusual when writing about action research to ‘tell the story’, and, as that is what my research journey became, I could justify the use of narrative on those grounds. Critical and feminist approaches also emphasise the importance of self-awareness and reflexivity (Lafrance, 2019) – the ongoing, disciplined awareness of how our own stories, values, belief systems, education and identity markers (such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability and so on), or as Radtke (2017, p. 359) puts it, “what we already know”, impacts on research processes and our meaning-making.

I am also inspired by a lecture recently given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2021), in which she critiqued the “uncritical reverence” which theory is often afforded. She expressed concern about the “messy complicatedness” of life being reduced to the “neat and tidy confines of theory” and called for a renewed emphasis on storytelling and, even more importantly, on listening to and deeply hearing the stories told.

I fully acknowledge that this thesis is my story of the research journey, and only one amongst many that I could tell. Seen from a post-positivist perspective, all social research is, at best, a co-construction between the researcher and their research contributors and, at worst, a

reiteration of the researcher's beliefs, values or interests held long before the research process began and 'verified' by the particular findings the researcher chooses to focus upon. I cannot claim to be exempt from my own biases and beliefs; I can only remain self-reflexively alert to their existence and influence. I can also strive to remain true to those who trusted me enough to enter into a relationship, however transitory, within which their stories were constructed and shared. I will also strive to narrate with integrity, my own experience of and sense-making in relation to the research journey, which impacted the way in which it unfolded.

I came to this research journey as a once-upon-a-time speech and hearing therapist and more recent applied linguist, feminist practical theologian, and narrative therapist of seven years' experience. Each of these roles or identity markers represent bodies of knowledge with which I have engaged through formal study as well as a range of lived experiences and practices, all of which have shaped my understanding of and engagement with the world and its inhabitants.

I was (and still am) also located within an intricate web of relationships with family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and students, in ever-widening spheres of local and global community. When I began this research journey, I was a wife. I am now a widow. I was the mother of two young daughters – they are now fledgling adults who have begun their own tertiary studies. I am a daughter, sister, sister-in-law, niece, aunt (now a great-aunt), cousin and friend. Within my immediate family circle, there are five women who experienced sexual violation, either as a child or adult. I was aware of two of their stories prior to embarking on this research, with the other stories emerging in the conversations and spaces made possible by this work. There may be others whose stories have still not been told.

The years it has taken to complete this research journey have been marked by experiences of precarity in relation to employment, finances, national and local politics, life choices, and the chronic terminal illness and passing of my life partner – all have profoundly influenced my sense-making in relation to the world. Over these years, the contexts in which I lived and worked changed several times, and this too has had an impact.

I am a white, middle-class South African woman, who grew up enjoying privileges that I had no idea were only afforded to me because they were denied to Black South Africans and South

Africans of colour. I became aware of the particular dynamics of our country through story: Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* was required reading as a matric setwork in my white, middle-class government school. Clearly the Nationalist government had no idea about the power and impact of story, but I suspect that whoever ensured that Paton's novel was included as required school reading did know. The novel irrevocably disrupted my sense-making in relation to my life in South Africa and set me on a path towards working for social justice. However, I am still deeply aware of the limited perspectives that my particular location in the raced, gendered and classed political landscape afford me and of the need to remain alert to recognising those limitations where I can and attempting to mitigate their impacts on my thinking and practice.

The previous paragraphs barely scratch the surface but serve to acknowledge some of the significant life influences on my positioning in relation to theory and practice. I will expand further on the academic influences below, but I embarked on this research journey firmly established in social constructionist thinking and grappling with poststructuralism and, in particular, its relationship with feminism. At the outset, I was searching for the 'best' or 'most correct' understanding of the world (or perhaps the most sophisticated and impressive one for my supervisors and examiners) but, at the time, did not know enough to recognise the irony of my quest. I have come to realise that my epistemology has been unavoidably shaped by what I have read and thought and been exposed to during the course of my academic journey and continues to evolve. Although I deal with different influences under separate headings below, it is with the understanding that this is, in itself, a theoretical exercise: it is impossible to disentangle the whole and trace individual strands.

3.6.1 Speech and Hearing Therapy

The most profound legacy of my studies in Speech and Hearing Therapy was its theory-informed but practice-focused ethos. This was captured in the question that our Head of Department, Professor Claire Penn insisted that we ask of any research project, namely "So what?". She was adamant that in a country like South Africa we do not have the luxury of doing research that will gather dust on a library shelf and have no impact on practice; an ethical researcher would only embark on a study that would address a pressing need in some way, a study that would directly benefit the research participants or others like them. This

insistence was strongly reinforced during the year I spent working in the under-resourced Speech Therapy department of a township hospital after graduating.

3.6.2 Applied Linguistics

Applied Linguistics deepened my fascination with language, with the work done by words and the pauses between words, with tone, rhythm, silence, turns taken and conversational repairs made, with narratives told/performed/constructed – with all that language is able to hold, create and convey, and all that it cannot. This was a helpful segue into post-structuralist theory in which language assumes a central position.

3.6.3 Feminist Practical Theology

It was whilst studying practical theology that my latent feminism found language and a voice. I began to see power dynamics, exclusions, sexism and marginalisation, where before I had simply seen ‘the way things were’ – and once I had seen, I could not unsee. In fact, as Maguire puts it (2003, p. 1): “Feminism was like a dry cloth on a foggy window that allowed me to see more clearly”.

I came to understand feminist practical theology as a participatory exercise committed to acknowledging the messiness and ambiguity inherent in the lived experiences of people as told in their words, through their stories, rather than focusing on developing systematic, coherent and “correct” theological accounts. I appreciated the fact that within this approach I became a facilitator in the process of generating theology, rather than a professor of ‘knowledge’ or ‘truth’. I was challenged by this approach’s humility, openness and sense of mutuality – as Kotze and Kotze (2002, p. 215) put it : “pastoral care is not about me caring for people so that they benefit, it’s about caring with people so that we both benefit” – as well as by its commitment to engaging in ethical political practices that help transform the cultures that shape the lives of people (Kotze & Kotze 2002, p. 215).

3.6.4 Narrative Therapy

I have mentioned that I came to this research as a narrative therapist of seven years’ experience. My reading, training, writing and experience in this field have shaped the way in which I see and experience the world. For example: I listen for stories; I am alert to the dynamics of power relations in those stories; I pick up on discursive positioning; I find it almost

impossible to take for granted any taken-for-granted assumptions; I am invested in 'thickening' rather than 'uncovering the layers' of my own and others' narratives; I am fascinated by words and their effects; and constantly, I wonder about practices that most effectively support desired changes.

Having situated this study within a particular theoretical landscape and my own life journey, and having outlined the interpretive tools I will be drawing upon, in Chapter 4 I review the literature around acknowledgement, disclosure and reporting. I also consider the factors which have been found to inhibit and facilitate acknowledgement and disclosure, whilst acknowledging chosen silence as an agentic strategy. I highlight the discursive construction and positioning of rape and victim-survivors of sexual violence, and in particular, I give consideration to the literature on the subject positions of 'victim' and 'survivor'. In closing, I review the available research on victim-survivors' participation within activist settings.

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW: RAPE DISCLOSURE, SUBJECT POSITIONING AND ANTI-RAPE ACTIVISM

4.1 Rape acknowledgement, disclosure and reporting in South Africa

As I discussed in Chapter 2, sexual violence in South Africa is a common experience for many women. However, although even the numbers of reported rapes are high, they represent only the tip of the iceberg of sexual offences in our country. The Silent Protest grew out of the activism of the national One in Nine Campaign, whose name highlights the statistic most frequently cited in the early 2000s – that only one out of every nine women raped in South Africa will report the rape (Jewkes et al., 2010). The extent of underreporting of rape and sexual violence in South Africa has however been the focus of some debate, with many suggesting that it is far fewer than one in nine who report. More recently, an estimated figure of one in 25 was cited (Dartnall & Jewkes, 2013), whilst other researchers have reported that the South African Police Service (SAPS) estimate a figure as low as one in 36 (Vetten, 2000). What *is* clear is that the instances of sexual violence reported to SAPS represent a very small percentage of the total occurrences of this crime.

The Silent Protest was conceptualised specifically to highlight and challenge the multiple silences, taboos and myths around sexual violence in South Africa, which inhibit women from speaking out when they experience violation. The Silent Protest focuses on the tension between silence and disclosure – the impulse to speak and the impulse to remain silent – which almost inevitably follows sexual violation (Herman, 1997). The black gaffer tape which protestors wear across their mouths is a powerful and provocative visual image of oppressive silencing. The tape makes onlookers uncomfortable. The image of a taped mouth visibly challenges the beliefs (taboos, prejudices, myths, stigma) and practices which circulate in families and communities and which make it difficult or impossible to speak out about sexual violence.

4.2 Tensions between disclosure and silence

Various researchers have aimed to show that what is understood as an imposed silence compounds the suffering of those who have been raped, and I discuss some of these studies

later in the chapter; their varied findings however suggest that it is not that simple (for example Gueta, Eytan & Yakimov, 2020; Littleton, 2003). Women, and men, may choose silence for a range of different reasons. Silence can be a powerful, considered and wise choice. So, although it is important to reject beliefs and practices that prevent people from speaking out, at the outset I wish to honour silence as a viable choice.

The Silent Protest offers a fairly unique platform which invites and even encourages those who have been raped to acknowledge and speak of their experiences of sexual assault. There is the option of choosing to wear a Rape Survivor t-shirt and the possibility of speaking out at the Breaking the Silence event, as well as other opportunities connected to the protest. It is therefore a possibility that is foregrounded for protestors – and this was certainly the case for my research contributors.

As central themes of the Silent Protest, disclosure and reporting were also central themes in many of my conversations with research contributors, who related stories about disclosure and non-disclosure and the complex processes happening between the two. When I first heard their stories, I was not surprised that disclosure was difficult – it seemed self-evident – and I simply went along with the taken-for-grantedness of this. As time went on, however, I grew more curious about particular patterns in what I was hearing.

Whilst the One in Nine Campaign encouraged women to report sexual crimes and stood in solidarity with those who did report, the decision which clearly precedes reporting is whether or not to disclose the violation at all, a decision which, in turn, depends upon whether one even identifies what has happened as a sexual offence. Whether or not one chooses to tell the story of what happened – with or without a label – seems as dependent on one's perceptions of the receiving context for that disclosure as it is on the nature of the violation itself.

As I listened to my contributors' stories, more and more questions arose for me about the factors which inhibit and facilitate the acknowledgement, disclosure and reporting of sexual violence, and how it is that the Silent Protest seems to offer a platform which stands against inhibition, and facilitates speaking out.

As a foundation for exploring these questions, in this chapter I will review some of the literature on silence and disclosure as it relates to sexual violence. I will consider both the

discursive and practical lived realities as contexts within which these processes take place. I will also briefly outline some of the avenues for disclosure available to those who wish to disclose sexual violence in South Africa, together with the various responses they may expect if they do disclose.

Of particular relevance to my thesis is the discursive construction of rape and rape survivors and the ways in which they are positioned within particular discourses. I consider the implications of this positioning as a factor which inhibits disclosure. In 4.7 below, I review the literature concerning the two most widely referenced subject positions for women who have been raped, namely 'victim' and 'survivor'.

4.3 Teasing out acknowledgement, disclosure and reporting

In conceptualising the 'breaking of silence' after rape, I have found it helpful to differentiate between:

- a. *acknowledgement* as a process of recognising, acknowledging or labelling, if only to yourself, that your experience fits the criteria for rape or sexual assault;
- b. *disclosure* as an informal sharing of the story of what happened with a family member, friend, peer or trusted other. Disclosure does not necessarily carry a particular expectation of action to follow, but disclosures are made with the hope or expectation of attentive listening and meaningful response, such as the listener's belief in the truth/veracity of the story, acknowledgement, validation, care and support, and;
- c. *reporting* as a formal report of a sexual violation made to a person or institution with the authority and power to take further action, and with the clear hope or expectation that further action will be taken.

Although acknowledgement of a violation as rape need not precede disclosure – one can tell the story of what happened without labelling it – one would clearly need to label an experience as rape or sexual assault in order to report it as a crime.

The literature in this field draws attention to a range of complex and intersecting factors which impact upon acknowledgement of an experience as sexual assault, as well as on the decisions made by individual victim-survivors to formally report, informally disclose, or to remain silent. Some of these factors are fairly universal and affect choices related to

disclosure and reporting worldwide, such as the stigma which attaches to sexual violence, whilst others are more localised, such as cultural or religious beliefs or practices. There are also certain factors which play a unique role in the South African context – although underreporting is a universal phenomenon, the levels of reporting in South Africa fall significantly below those of developed countries (Daly & Bonhours, 2010).

In Chapter 2, I discussed how the criminal justice system in South Africa repeatedly fails women who have been sexually assaulted, with the result that most women are extremely reluctant to report the violation. This is a significant impediment to justice for victim-survivors but there are additional factors which further inhibit formal reporting in this country. However, I have chosen for the purposes of this thesis to focus specifically on acknowledgement and disclosure rather than on choices to report. Whilst all my research contributors spoke about the role that the Silent Protest had played in their own processes of acknowledgement and disclosure, participation in the Protest had not impacted upon anyone's decision to report their sexual assault.

I will first discuss the literature dealing with rape acknowledgement and then consider factors which play a role in disclosure in the sections which follow.

4.4 Unacknowledged rape or “the unnecessary sort of event”

Research has consistently shown that the majority of those who are raped do not acknowledge, even to themselves, that what took place was sexual assault or rape, particularly immediately following the assault. This is referred to in the literature as ‘unacknowledged’ or ‘hidden’ rape (for example, see Koss, 1985, 1989, 2011; Littleton, Rhatigan & Axsom, 2007; Littleton, Layh & Rudolph, 2018). This is not the result of ignorance. It is also more complex than simply not associating what has happened to you with widely held constructions of sexual assault or rape.

Meira (not her real name¹) was one of my research contributors and a self-declared feminist involved in anti-rape activism even prior to “the unnecessary sort of event” which she was reluctant to call rape. Whilst it is not common practice to draw on ‘research data’ outside of analysis chapters, and rarely in poetic form, her narrative about her sexual assault both

¹ Pseudonyms were selected for each research contributor, which had the same meaning and similar origin to their original names.

captures and conveys with great clarity the complexity of rape acknowledgement. She offers an invaluable insight into the active cognitive processes at play, when one tries to make sense of sexual assault. What follows therefore is a poem constructed entirely from her own words, whilst retaining the integrity of the narrative as shared with me in a research interview².

Disbelief and self-blame

*I blamed myself a lot
which was funny
after it happened
I'm like, "I can't believe that happened"
I actually laughed
I was laughing
like I actually named
I called myself a slut afterwards
after it happened*

Cognitive struggle between prior knowledges and current thoughts and responses

*I was like, "But wait no"
like I've learnt all this stuff
but then again
I couldn't
it was very
I got very confused
and it just went downhill for me.
We are intelligent people,
we know about this stuff
we know this is rape,
this is sexual assault
this is happening.
We've learnt about this
we know about it
but it's now happening
like we /sigh/
this is where I
now this is rape culture
we knew how to prevent it
but that's not the fact
it's actually /laughs/
it was unbelievable*

² In Chapter 5 I account for the research process and how the interviews were conducted and in Chapter 6 I outline how I approached the so-called analysis of my contributor's narratives and argue for the use of poetic texts to evoke a more complex sense of my contributors for my readers.

Positioning and re-positioning in relation to self-blame

*I still blamed myself
I still to some ...
No, I don't actually
no, I don't now
I don't blame myself at all
I was about to say some
I don't
I just realised I actually don't /laughs/
[The self-blame] is what I actually told myself
I never actually heard it from other people
So it was me sort of making
forming other people's opinions of me already*

Imagining others' responses

*so I had formed this opinion
that people may think
"oh, it was a sexual experience gone wrong"
or, "oh, this is what happens when you get too drunk"
I sort of formulated that
And that wasn't helpful at all*

Redefining, re-naming and comparing the experience

*So I guess the SlutWalk was what taught me
and then I read up about it later
those definitions there
I realised
I could have actually taken him to court
if I wanted to
cause it was
and I didn't think that it was
in my society
but it was actually legally considered rape
and I was like oh, ok
it was sexual assault
I still prefer to say sexual assault
cause rape does sound very violent
and everyone always thinks it's like vaginal or whatever
mine wasn't
but it was still as traumatic,
it was a violation to me
So that was a big thing that I struggled with a lot:
"well, I can't really be upset
because worse things have happened to other people".*

*Like I still struggle a bit with that
Cause I say it could have been worse you know
it's how you personally sort of see it.
it was what I always refer to as
"the unnecessary sort of event"
Cause I don't believe anyone needs to go through that
it was an unnecessary (.) traumatic thing ja.*

Unwanted and wanted responses

*cause that whole pity
I don't want people to pity
or to feel sorry
uhm but understanding is what I would like
I think ja
I don't know.*

Framing in a way that helps

*I also think it helps you if you're like
"Aaah I've had the worst of the worst"
like I really kind of think that.
it's not a comforting thing to hear
but the worst,
for me the worst
has happened, ja.*

Meira's sometimes halting words eloquently convey some of the complexities in making sense of what had happened to her after the violation. She touches on many factors which I will consider in this chapter: self-blame (and refusing blame); incredulity; disbelief; confusion; anticipatory stigma; the difficulty of finding a label that 'fits'; minimising the violation; comparisons with others' stories; fierce refusal to be pitied; and a construction of rape as the worst thing that can happen (to a woman), which, for her, is helpful. Her careful and nuanced engagement with the discourses which construct rape and rape victim-survivors presents us with a process of acknowledgement that is both a 'yes' and a 'no', as well as a 'maybe'.

Acknowledgement of sexual assault and rape is relevant to the current study for several reasons. The first is that the Silent Protest itself implicitly and, at times, explicitly promotes acknowledgement as a necessary precursor to disclosure and reporting. Participation in the Protest opens up opportunities for acknowledgement and disclosure, and a number of my research contributors told stories about acknowledgement (sometimes for the first time) and disclosure (also, sometimes for the first time) as a direct consequence of their participation.

It is therefore important to review the available research regarding the processes, costs and benefits to victim-survivors of acknowledging, disclosing and reporting a violation, and factors which may inhibit acknowledgement and disclosure are also of relevance to this study.

Non-acknowledgement of sexual violence is relevant (in a broader sense) to this study; any study looking responses to sexual violence or practices which support women in coming to live well again after sexual violation will always be limited because participants in research studies will necessarily belong to a small subset of victim-survivors who are willing to contribute to research on the topic. Whilst some indirect approaches have been developed to identify women who have experienced rape even when they may not acknowledge or label it as such (for example Campbell et al., 2004), these are limited in reach; research has mainly focused on university students as an easily accessible research population. One can therefore only assume that there are ways of coping, healing and moving forward following rape that remain hidden and unresearched because the women who draw on these survival practices remain hidden and unresearched. Research with those who have been raped can therefore never be considered adequately representative of or generalisable to all victim-survivors.

4.4.1 Prevalence and nature of unacknowledged rape

A recent meta-analysis of research on unacknowledged rape showed that, even when inconsistencies and contradictions across the research are accounted for, around 60% of women who experience rape do not label it as such (Wilson & Miller, 2016). Meira's narrative does however suggest that a simple binary classification of those who acknowledge and those who do not may be too simplistic.

In their meta-synthesis of qualitative research looking at female victim-survivors' labelling of sexual violence, Rousseau, Bergerona and Ricci (2020) identify what they refer to as "an ambivalent discourse" (p. 1) and note that acknowledgement is not all-or-nothing but seems rather to fluctuate over time. Lipinski et al. (2021) refer to this as "ambivalent rape acknowledgement" (p. 1) and agree that a simple binary of acknowledged and unacknowledged rape fails to capture the complexity of acknowledgement as a process. Just over half of the participants in their study who would previously have been classified as having had an experience of 'unacknowledged rape' could more accurately be described as 'ambivalent'.

Much of the research on unacknowledged rape has been carried out with college students in North America. One study which focused on non-college, lower income rape victim-survivors found that the incidence of unacknowledged rape was much lower, possibly as the average age of the non-college women was older than a college cohort and the average time since the assault was longer so the women would have had more time to process and possibly re-label an experience of sexual violation (Littleton, Layh & Rudolph, 2018). The time elapsed since the incident does seem to increase the likelihood of labelling (Littleton, Rhatigan and Axsom, 2007). Rousseau, Bergerona and Ricci (2020) also found that accessing information about sexual violence and/or social support increases the likelihood of acknowledgement.

What these studies show is that acknowledgement of rape is not static, but changes over time. In fact, one longitudinal study yielded the unexpected finding that around 20% of victim-survivors who labelled an experience as rape when first surveyed, labelled it as something else in a later survey (McMullin & White, 2006), which highlights the fluid and dynamic nature of the acknowledgement of rape, even to oneself. It seems more accurate to understand acknowledgement as a process influenced by a range of factors, and that particular experiences after the rape play as important a role as the characteristics of the assault itself.

4.4.2 Moments and movements in rape acknowledgement and disclosure

As with everything associated with sexual violence, the process of (non-)acknowledgement is complex and associated with many factors. In order to make sense of the impact of the factors themselves, I have identified three key 'moments' or 'movements' in that process. Moment/Movement One is characterised by shock and disbelief as one grapples with acknowledging that the experience was real and did in fact happen. Moment/Movement Two centres around deciding whether or not to tell someone what happened. Moment/Movement Three involves decision-making about what to call the experience of violation. The label that one assigns to the incident precipitates further decision-making about what further action to take.

4.4.2.1 **Moment/Movement One: What just happened? and Did it really happen?**

'What just happened?' and 'Did it really happen?' seem to characterise the first responses of the majority of my research contributors following an experience of violation, and whilst these responses are described in different ways in the literature, they seem almost universal

(Herman, 1997; McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011). Muldoon, Taylor and Norma (2016) describe how, in cases reported to the police – regardless of the nature and severity of the sexual violation – the most common initial response of victim-survivors is “stunned disbelief” (p. 570). Family therapist, Kaethe Weingarten (2010) describes this as a “terrifying confusion” and sense of “intolerable injustice” which often follow an experience of trauma. Catrina Brown (2013) emphasises that uncertainty and ambivalence about narrating the trauma is a common response and is not only a product of the trauma itself but also reflects the influence of dominant discourses around sexual violence. Muldoon, Taylor and Norma (2016) suggest that a sexual assault not only violates the victim’s body but betrays their “citizen trust” (p. 570) – the sense that the world is a safe place, that people are good, and that life is generally fair. This shattering of prior assumptions and beliefs can also result in later attempts to re-frame the assault in a way that leaves some sense of safety intact.

Consequently, whilst this immediate response is almost automatic and reflective of the vulnerability and helplessness of a victim at the time of the violation, Weingarten (2010, p. 1) describes how people who have experienced trauma may then “strive not to know what they know”. Muldoon, Taylor and Norma (2016) also identified reactions showing that people “wished or washed away” (p. 570) the experience of sexual assault, rendering it unreal in their mind or hiding (from) it entirely. Reactions like this were found to be associated with longer-term psychological suffering.

As one effect of this sense of “stunned disbelief”, those who have experienced sexual violation tend to withdraw from the immediate context of an assault without drawing attention to either the perpetrator or themselves (Muldoon, Taylor & Norma, 2016). This seems to relate to the need to make sense for themselves of what just happened. If sexual abuse is ongoing, the necessity to construct a narrative which somehow holds, bears or contains the trauma becomes even more urgent.

However, Charles Lemert (1993) suggests that “many people experience a gap between what they know and what they can say. The gap is a source of powerlessness. What cannot be said cannot be acted on. What is inarticulate cannot be protested and changed, or, in happier circumstances, it cannot be sought” (p. 22-23). Following a sexual assault, a victim-survivor may not even have a clear sense of what they know, let alone having the linguistic and discursive resources needed to speak, act, protest and effect change. Due to the silences in

relation to sex and sexuality as well as to sexual violence, these resources are most often simply not available “within webs of resource-provision that we call discourse and culture” (Frank, 2018, p. 560). Those ‘webs’ are limited or constrained by particular ideas that allow for particular ways of understanding and articulating but disallow others.

Consequently, whilst a sexual violation is a physical reality, making sense of it can be complex, especially when it is framed by the perpetrator as ‘normal’ or ‘consensual’ or in some other way that is at odds with one’s own understanding or affective response.

It is important to note that the immediate shock and disorientation are often mirrored in those to whom the sexual violation is disclosed: “stunned disbelief”, denial, repression, and forgetting can happen on a collective level as well as an individual level after trauma and are often experienced by witnesses and those to whom the trauma is disclosed (Brison, 2002). One example of collective denial and repression was the marked absence of testimony relating to sexual violation during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and the lack of sustained commentary regarding its absence. On an individual level, it is evident when an adult’s immediate response to a child’s disclosure of sexual assault by a person known to them is disbelief.

Acknowledgement may also therefore be a process for those who receive the disclosure. Susan Brison (2002) writes of “massive denial” (p. 9) as the usual response of those who receive disclosures of sexual violence. People also try to make sense of the rape in “ways that leave [their] world unscathed” (Brison, 2002, p. 9) or, in Muldoon, Taylor and Norma’s (2016, p. 570) understanding, in a way that leaves intact their “citizen trust” and sense of the world as a good and safe place. Nicola Gavey (2018) describes this collective denial as an “inability to hear, to acknowledge, to imagine, to identify with the one raped in order to maintain their own illusions of safety and control” (p. 9), and if those who receive the disclosure do acknowledge, this may only be temporary. Within a short space of time, the recipient may reformulate the disclosure in their own terms and suggest that the assault could somehow have been avoided or evaded.

4.4.2.2 Moment/Movement Two: Should I tell someone? Who could I tell?

Both the anticipated and actual responses of those who receive a disclosure, have a profound effect on victim-survivors. Even if a sexual assault is not labelled as such, the victim-survivor

often struggles with the prospect of telling even one person. Whilst holding up the ideal that victim-survivors *should* disclose their trauma, the emphasis in the literature is most frequently upon factors internal to the victim-survivor which inhibit or facilitate disclosure; many of these will be discussed below. There is, however, not often a clear acknowledgement of the concomitant need for those receiving the disclosure to hear and respond to the story well – with compassion, acknowledgement and validation of the experiences being narrated.

In listening to my research contributors grapple with disclosure, I was expecting to hear about their self-reflexive thought processes in preparing to speak out – how they made sense of the experience, pieced the story together, and decided whether or not they would cope with the telling of it. However, I was struck by the fact that their thought processes were predominantly other-focused when deciding about disclosure: How would a disclosure be received? How would the listener respond? How would they as victim-survivor be perceived and positioned afterwards?

Susan Brison is Professor of Philosophy at a North American university, who has twice been raped. Brison (2014) writes: “One was the best kind of rape, as far as my credibility as a victim was concerned. The other was the worst” (no page). The second rape occurred during a sabbatical in France. Brison was attacked by a stranger while out running, dressed in tracksuit pants and a sweater. The incident was extremely violent, and she was almost killed. The nature of the crime meant that it was widely reported and highly visible, and the police were involved from the start. The perpetrator was arrested and convicted. Two years later, Brison wrote a book about this attack: *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (2002) which drew together personal narrative and academic analysis.

It was, however, some 15 years later before Brison was ready to publicly disclose the first rape, which had occurred long before the second attack when she had been at college and was raped by an acquaintance. At the time, she had told no-one; she blamed herself and felt she was unworthy of receiving any help. Her story highlights how one’s anticipation of others’ responses influences the decision to disclose, and how the nature of the sexual assault – whether or not you feel it will be recognised as ‘real’ rape – influences whether or not you expect to be acknowledged and validated as a legitimate victim. The expectation that one would receive a negative response has been called ‘anticipatory stigma’.

Simply by growing up and living in the world, all women hold a complex awareness of the discursive milieu into which their stories would be shared, and this profoundly influences the decision to disclose or not. Disclosure thus seems to depend as much, or perhaps more, on the receiving context as it does on the victim-survivor herself. Courtney Ahrens' research (2006) highlights the experience of the many victim-survivors who try to disclose at least once but are silenced by a negative response and never again attempt disclosure. What Ahrens' and others' research does show is that whilst disclosure in itself has not been conclusively linked to better psychological outcomes (see 4.5 below), negative responses to disclosure most certainly result in poorer outcomes (Ahrens, 2006; Bhuptani et al., 2019; Ullman, 2010). Consequently, the benefits or otherwise of disclosure seem highly dependent upon the nature and response of the receiving context.

Sorsoli (2010), who interviewed women subjected to childhood sexual abuse, realised that she was "not simply listening to the impossibility of words to capture traumatic events, but also to the impossibility of many relationships, existing within this society and culture, adequately holding these stories and the reality of such events" (p. 139). These constraints evoke an image that McClelland and Fine (2008, p. 232) first introduced – of young women wrapped in a "kind of collective discursive [political and cultural] cellophane" that limits and constrains what they can say and how we can hear them. These authors point out that the women's voices are not absent: "Perhaps it is that they are saying things we are primed not to hear, or cannot hear, or will not hear" (ibid.). What *are* the things that we as a society are primed not to hear, cannot hear, and will not hear about rape? And what are the implications of our not hearing? These are important considerations as we reflect upon the range of factors which can hinder a decision to disclose.

4.4.2.3 Moment/Movement Three: What do I call what happened to me? and What implications will that have for who I am able/allowed to be in the world?

Several of my research contributors spoke of "not calling it rape", especially to begin with, saying things like, "I put it behind me, didn't look at it", "I didn't know what had happened", and "It didn't seem to be rape". Without the words with which to identify or categorise an experience, it is very difficult to construct a narrative. And if one cannot construct a narrative (even to tell oneself), disclosure would be impossible.

The decision about how to language or name an event is not neutral, certainly from a poststructuralist perspective, which understands that our stories shape our experience: “[h]ow one categorises the event, even unconsciously, will profoundly influence how one experiences it” (Gavey, 2018, p. 31).

This Moment/Movement raises important questions about whether or not it is beneficial to label a distressing event ‘rape’ or any other name. Closely linked to this are questions around the benefits, or otherwise, of disclosing such an event to another person, whatever label we assign it. I briefly explore the research pertaining to these questions before discussing the range of factors which inhibit acknowledgement and disclosure.

4.5 Is it beneficial to victim-survivors to acknowledge and disclose a sexual assault?

Several studies have explored the impacts of acknowledgement and disclosure of rape upon ‘psychological health’, with mixed findings. Littleton and Henderson (2009) explored previous contradictory findings regarding the psychological well-being of unacknowledged victim-survivors, particularly in terms of the presence or absence of post-traumatic symptoms. Their own study found that acknowledged victim-survivors are more likely to struggle with post-traumatic symptoms.

Littleton, Layh and Rudolph (2018), in a later study, found no differences in mental health consequences between those who did and did not label a sexual violation as ‘rape’, whilst Littleton, Grills, Layh and Rudolph (2017) found that non-acknowledgement of rape was positively associated with subsequent re-victimisation. Women who did not acknowledge a sexual assault were more likely to engage in behaviours such as high alcohol consumption in public spaces, quite possibly in an attempt to manage the impacts of the unacknowledged trauma, but which increased the likelihood that they would be targeted again for sexual harassment and assault.

Lipinski et al. (2021) found a higher incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in women whose acknowledgement of a sexual violation was characterised as ‘ambivalent’ than in those who had not acknowledged the violation at all. This study offered helpful nuance to the existing literature, which, as mentioned above, has not demonstrated

clear differentiation in psychological impacts following rape, between those who acknowledge the sexual assault and those who do not.

The available research therefore does not seem to provide clear and unambiguous evidence that acknowledgement is beneficial to those who have experienced sexual violence. Lipinski et al. (2021) have suggested that the mixed and complex findings call for further research to explore the relationship between acknowledgment and mental health outcomes.

There seems to be a need here to differentiate between the impacts of acknowledgement and disclosure, as I have previously defined them. There seems to be no specific research regarding the benefits, or otherwise, of *disclosure* of rape when it is unacknowledged or unlabelled – in other words, the benefit of telling another person “this happened to me” without giving it a label. Nevertheless, some older research looking at inhibition rather than disclosure and which offers helpful nuance to this discussion is the work of James Pennebaker (1997) who, using detailed measurements of stress responses in laboratory settings, explored the health implications of inhibiting disclosure or disclosing traumatic events, primarily through writing.

Pennebaker, a social psychologist by training, became fascinated with the links between secrets or hidden traumas, disclosure and health. The primary discoveries of his decades-long series of studies suggest that:

holding back or inhibiting our thoughts and feelings can be hard work. Over time the work of inhibition gradually undermines the body’s defenses. Like other stressors, inhibition can affect immune function, the action of the heart and vascular systems, and even the biochemical workings of the brain and nervous systems. In short, excessive holding back of thoughts, feelings and behaviours can place people at risk for both major and minor diseases (Pennebaker, 1997, p. 2).

This is poignantly echoed in the words of Lake (not her real name), one of my research contributors:

[F]or women who’ve never spoken out, I can’t imagine the strength it takes to just hold that in (..) for that long (..) I mean some people would think that might be weak but I think that takes so much strength to not just be like, “Somebody help me! (.) This is what has happened” [...] like that to someone.

In contrast, according to Pennebaker (1997), confronting our hidden thoughts and feelings – and expressing them, whether in writing or speech – counteracts the negative impacts of inhibition, and can have significant short- and long-term health benefits. Speaking about things that have upset or traumatised us also shifts our sense of what we value, our thinking patterns and how we feel about ourselves. In short, “not disclosing our thoughts and feelings can be unhealthy. Divulging them can be healthy” (Pennebaker, 1997, p. 2).

This aligns with what victim-survivors themselves (as well as researcher-practitioners working in the field of sexual trauma) suggest is important in the process of coming to live well again after rape. Judith Herman’s (1997) highly influential work on trauma and recovery highlights three crucial foundations of any process towards decreasing distress and increasing well-being for those who have been subjected to sexual violation. These are: establishing safety; an opportunity to reconstruct the story; and re-establishing connection, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

Establishing safety

Herman (1997) states that a person who has been raped “needs to know that they are physically and emotionally safe before the ‘work’ of healing can begin” (p. 71). Whilst this seems self-evident, it is not always considered in the immediate aftermath of a disclosure about sexual violence. It also follows that one cannot ensure safety for a victim-survivor who has not disclosed.

Given that the vast majority of sexual violations are perpetrated by someone known to the person who is violated, and may not be isolated incidents, disclosure is necessary in order to remove either the perpetrator or the victim-survivor from the context in which the violation was made possible and/or tolerated, thereby avoiding repeat victimisation. Ensuring physical safety also includes access to any necessary medical intervention, particularly the provision of post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV, and emergency contraception.

An opportunity to reconstruct the story of the traumatic experience

As discussed in 4.3.3.2, Herman (1997) and others (Muldoon, Taylor & Norma, 2016) have described how the various impacts of trauma disrupt our sense of self and our memory of the experience. Healing or recovery seem to proceed more smoothly when we have the opportunity to fit the pieces back together, usually by reconstructing some kind of coherent

narrative about the experience. Nonetheless, the telling of a story presupposes and requires a willing and engaged listener who is able to receive the story and respond with care and compassion, as will be discussed below.

There are also different and sometimes conflicting views regarding what constitutes a 'healing' or helpful reconstruction of a traumatic event. The 'trauma debriefing' approach suggests that experiencing 'catharsis' as soon as possible after a trauma is essential; that a retelling of the traumatic experience accompanied by an intense release of emotion shifts the survivor forward on the recovery journey. Repeated retellings, accompanied by decreasing displays of emotion are thought to demonstrate progress in recovery. However, this insistence on the emotional intensity of the retellings seems to undermine the body/psyche's own mechanisms of survival.

Michael White (1995, 2007) and other narrative therapists (Yuen, 2009) suggest that imposing any requirement to re-live an experience of helplessness and disempowerment may simply be re-traumatising. They suggest that instead, those who have experienced trauma need to be assisted to find a different and safer place to stand (position themselves) when recounting the experience, in their own time, and in whichever way they choose to do so. Their therapeutic work focuses on the person's responses to the situation in which they were violated, and what they did in order to survive and/or minimise risk and harm to themselves. This provides an agentic, active position from which the reconstruction of the story can proceed.

Re-establishing connection between the victim-survivor and a broader community

This will be discussed further in Chapter 8 but is of crucial importance within the context of the Silent Protest.

These three fundamental elements of care (more often framed as intervention within therapeutic discourse) for victim-survivors seem to be fairly universal; studies conducted in a range of contexts have shown that high-quality, compassionate and culturally appropriate post-rape care can moderate both immediate and longer-term impacts on a victim-survivor's physical and psychological health (Jewkes et al., 2009). If a person does not acknowledge or disclose the assault to trusted persons close to them, they are unlikely to access the other services available (as limited as these may be).

4.6 Factors which contribute to non-acknowledgement, inhibition and non-disclosure of sexual trauma

If one looks at disclosure through the lens of a biomedical or trauma-focused model, one is likely to identify factors within the physiology or psyche of the person who was violated (intrapersonal factors) which account for non-disclosure and I discuss these below.

However, if one considers disclosure from a critical feminist poststructuralist perspective, one's view is broadened to consider the impact of many more factors, particularly the discourses in circulation in the socio-cultural context, and the subject positions that these make available. This is the perspective I take in this thesis, which acknowledges the intrapersonal factors but looks beneath and beyond them as well.

4.6.1 Intrapersonal factors

4.6.1.1 Neurobiological impacts of trauma

There has been extensive research, discussion and debate about the neurobiological/psychobiological impacts of trauma, particularly sexual trauma, with reference to stress hormones, dissociative responses and memories of traumatic experiences. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover these debates in any detail, but I refer to recent reviews of the relevant literature for transdisciplinary perspectives: Dalenberg, Brand, Gleaves, et al. (2012); Loewenstein (2018); McKinnon et al. (2016); and McNally (2021). What does seem clear is that the body's various conscious and automatic responses to a sexual assault all impact on how the person who experienced the assault perceives and responds to the experience and may contribute to the sense of "identity shock" described below, making the assault difficult to acknowledge, process and disclose.

Rebecca Campbell (2012) has highlighted the role played by the various stress hormones during a sexual assault. In a complex but entirely automatic way, these hormones 'flood' the body in response to a situation which is perceived as dangerous or life-threatening. The hormones trigger fight, flight or freeze responses. They can also impact affective responses in the moment, after the assault, and in the hours and days which follow. Both flattened or blunt affect and rapid mood swings are possible, and rational decision-making processes may also be impacted, making it difficult for the person who was subjected to the assault to make sense of the experience which triggered the responses – and articulate it. If they do report or

disclose, these neurobiological impacts may interfere with the coherence and logical flow of the narrative, affecting the manner in which the hearer receives and responds to it – particularly if the hearer is unaware of these possible impacts of trauma.³

Other researchers suggest that the impact of dissociative responses to trauma on cognitive functioning and memory at the time of the assault as well as on disclosure and long-term psychological well-being, is significant (McKinnon et al., 2016).

4.6.1.2 Identity shock

Through careful study of statements in police case files made by people who have experienced sexual violence and those who make statements as witnesses of incidents of sexual assault, Muldoon, Taylor and Norma (2016) identified a “master narrative” which captured the responses to sexual assault most frequently described. They called this master narrative “identity shock” (p. 565), a term which seems to capture intensely disruptive cognitive, emotional, physiological and social responses to a sexual assault. These authors describe “identity shock” as a normal and unsurprising response to an abnormal violation of one’s sense of social safety and/or relational safety. The same sense of “identity shock” was described whether the assault was classified by the police service as ‘serious’ (such as rape, for example) or ‘minor’ (such as unwanted touching of or with genitals, or indecent exposure, for example) (Muldoon, Taylor & Norma, 2016).

This sense of “identity shock” being related to disrupted cognitive processes is echoed by Gavey (2018) who describes how many women who have been raped feel that they are not the same person as they were prior to the violation, to the extent that they feel their self, or a part of their self has died (p. 38). Herman (1997) also observes that “[t]he traumatic event thus destroys the belief that one can *be oneself* in relation to others” (p. 38). A

³ Although Campbell (2012) also suggested that the neurobiological impact of trauma results in fragmentation in the laying down of memories relating to the trauma, making recall and consolidation difficult, this claim has been challenged (McNally, 2021). Richard McNally (2021, p. 4) reviewed a range of recent research in the area of trauma and memory and concluded that the evidence suggests that memories of trauma are no more fragmented than memories of other life events, and that even during an extreme freeze response (‘tonic immobility’) a victim-survivor is aware of what is happening and able to recall events afterwards. However, alcohol intake can impair or prevent the storage of any memories, including the experience of trauma (McNally, 2021, p. 4).

poststructuralist feminist perspective on selfhood or subjectivity understands the self to be continually constructed and reconstructed in relation to others, within particular social and cultural contexts. Jewkes et al. (2010) agree that women may choose not to define forced sexual encounters as rape, even to themselves, because to do so could have profound implications for their sense of identity. For most of us, our sense of self is constructed within what is experienced as at least a somewhat predictable environment in which we have some level of choice, autonomy and agency. If these are removed, our fundamental sense of who we are in the world will be profoundly affected.

Patricia Henderson (2011), writing about care in the context of HIV and AIDs, describes how frequently ill people are not recognised within the context of their illness, which can lead to particular forms of alienation and even “social death”: “A person who is ill may come to know what it is to remain unseen within a space of relatedness that in other circumstances would offer a degree of recognition” (p. 25). Women who have been raped describe a similar kind of alienation, particularly when a sexual violation is undisclosed, or disclosed but not validated or responded to. Under such circumstances, perhaps you are unable to be yourself because you cannot trust that others are who you thought they were.

Whilst the response Muldoon, Taylor and Norma (2016) have called “identity shock” was identified within the narratives of women reporting sexual assault to police services and may therefore not be representative of all who experience sexual assault, this pattern of response may contribute to non-acknowledgement, particularly in the immediate aftermath of an assault.

4.6.1.3 Nature of the assault

Studies suggest that those who have experienced sexual assault are less likely to acknowledge or disclose it if: it was not a violent attack; if the perpetrator was known to them, particularly if they had been in a prior romantic relationship or if alcohol had been consumed prior to the assault (Littleton, Layh & Rudolph, 2018; Wilson & Miller, 2016). This is clearly illustrated in Susan Brison’s experience of two separate sexual assaults, as discussed in section 4.4.2.2 above. However, the impact of the assault itself upon disclosure does not seem to be due to some inherent characteristic of the assault but rather how the victim-survivor imagines or predicts that others will respond to particular characteristics of the assault.

4.6.1.4 Socio-demographic factors

Whilst I have been unable to locate any published studies specifically exploring a relationship between socio-demographic factors and rape acknowledgement and disclosure, one study with “community women” (as opposed to university students) found higher levels of acknowledgement than amongst university students (Littleton, Layh & Rudolph, 2018). One hypothesis was that this could be related to age, or length of time since the assault. Similarly, whilst education level as such has not been identified as a factor, accessing information about sexual violence does seem to increase the likelihood of acknowledgement (Rousseau, Bergerona & Ricci, 2020).

4.6.1.5 Personality and attitude factors

Researchers have investigated whether individual personality or attitude factors play a role in acknowledgement and disclosure of sexual assault, but found no support for this hypothesis (Koss, 1985).

4.6.2 Relational/contextual factors

The intentionality of sexual assault and its violation of personal and physical integrity add dimensions to the trauma experienced by victim-survivors that are not present for those involved in accidents or natural disasters (Shakespeare-Finch & Armstrong, 2010). The intentional nature of human-inflicted violence or violation can destroy one’s sense of the world as a safe place and of people as basically trustworthy, thus severing the very connections which usually sustain and support us (Gavey, 2018).

4.6.2.1 Relationship with the perpetrator

When the perpetrator is known to the person who is sexually violated – as is most often the case in sexual assault – additional barriers to disclosure and reporting can include direct threats and manipulation; feelings of fear, pity or even love for the perpetrator; deference to the perpetrator’s power or authority; and economic dependence upon the perpetrator (Naidoo, 2013). Victim-survivors may feel that maintaining the integrity of a family or community takes precedence over reporting or seeking justice. They may feel that they will be personally responsible for the conflict and unravelling that may take place within their family or community if they do report the assault. This leaves many victim-survivors in an impossible situation and was a very real challenge for several of my research contributors.

For Hlengiwe, for example, the person who sexually assaulted her over a period of time was her brother, a well-known and respected person in her community:

It will bring destruction to a lot of people [if I disclose or report]. That makes me feel guilty. What I know, it will destroy a lot of lives. If I tell, it will be me doing the destroying.

If Hlengiwe were to disclose, she also does/did not expect to be believed or supported:

My father would blame me if I told him ... my parents would not believe me.

This is a no-win situation for Hlengiwe: speaking out and seeking justice would both heal and destroy her, and so she chooses to “be stagnant where I am”. It is clear that there is no choice in the situation that offers Hlengiwe a preferred outcome.

Many people who are aware that others are suffering sexual violence also fail to speak up or report incidents, often for similar reasons. This points to the complexities of community and family relationships in acknowledgement, disclosure and reporting, as well as the pervasive impact of gendered power relations.

4.6.2.2 Family structure, support and poverty

Many practical factors within the home environment could play a role in non-disclosure: precarity related to poverty; overcrowding; the absence of significant caregivers; illness in the family; natural disasters; war, and so on. These factors may all render the receiving context unwilling or incapable of responding when a disclosure of sexual violation is made.

In South Africa, poverty and race are inextricably linked, due to the country’s shameful history of apartheid. Due to the precarity of living in poverty, black women are both more at risk of rape and less likely to report and/or access adequate post-rape care which, as we will see below, is extremely limited in the public sector.

As more than one of my research contributors mentioned, however, relative wealth or comfort in a particular home does not necessarily mean that parents or caregivers will be more available to victim-survivors; work commitments, travel and other preoccupations can pose obstacles and caregivers may therefore not necessarily be able to offer the kind of listening, validation and care that the person who has been sexually assaulted needs.

4.6.3 Structural factors

4.6.3.1 Post-rape services and care in South Africa

Across South Africa, services for those who have experienced rape are limited, inconsistently rendered, or entirely absent, particularly in resource-scarce contexts such as rural areas. South Africa is however by no means unique in this: in most countries worldwide, services for rape survivors are inadequate (Dartnall et al., 2009).

The Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, the first dedicated service offered to adult rape survivors in South Africa, was established by volunteer gender activists in 1976, with People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) being established two years later and now having offices around the country. By 1991, there were seven rape crisis centres around the country. Counsellors who are trained and employed by these organisations currently staff the government's Thuthuzela Care Centres (referred to below), as well as so called 'victim-friendly' rooms at police stations, courts and health clinics (Vetten, 2013b). There are several other NGOs spread across the country which provide services to those who have suffered sexual violation (Vetten, 2013b), but the reach and impact of these services is extremely limited.

A systematic investigation in 2002–2003 of sexual assault services provided by the public health sector across all nine South African provinces identified a range of problems with service provision. These included: structural inadequacies related to the spaces in which physical examinations were conducted; long waiting times; problems with sexual assault evidence collection kits (frequently unavailable or incomplete); health care providers' varying attitudes towards sexual assault, often arising from inadequate training and experience; failure to offer appropriate treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or offering incorrect treatment; failure to offer an HIV test in approximately one-third of cases; unreliable availability of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP); and poor intersectoral collaboration between the health sector, NGOs and police, with the result that sexual assault survivors were "seldom referred for counselling" (Christofides et al., 2003, p. v). Christofides et al. (2003) concluded that "women often receive very poor-quality medical care after sexual assault" (p. v)⁴.

⁴ They did not specifically investigate the care of children and adolescents or men.

During the (almost) two decades since the abovementioned research was conducted, various developments have occurred, such as the establishment of comprehensive victim-centred 'one-stop shop' specialist post-rape care centres (primarily the Thuthuzela Care Centres) which are managed jointly by the Department of Health and the National Prosecuting Authority, in collaboration with the South African Police Services and which offer medical, psychosocial, police and legal services under one roof (Johnson, Mahlalela & Mills, 2017). Psychosocial support services available at these centres are provided by lay counsellors who are employed by NGOs and seconded to the centres. Whilst this has been a positive development, and indications are that the provision of PEP to those who report rape is more consistent across facilities, only 55 of these centres have been established to date (Johnson, Mahlalela & Mills, 2017) and they do not appear to have achieved the integration and collaboration that was envisaged. In particular, it was found that "mental health care" was often not prioritised nor even mentioned at the acute phase, "which is focused on forensic examination, biomedical intervention and legal advocacy" (Gevers & Abrahams, 2015, p. 18). There is also a common (although untrue) belief in South Africa that if one does not open a case with the police services, one may not access post-rape care through the state sector (Johnson, Mahlalela & Mills, 2017).

The only specialised post-rape mental health services are therefore provided by the NGO sector or private practitioners. These NGOs are limited in number and reach, vary in terms of the nature and quality of mental health services offered and occupy a precarious position due to funding cuts and ensuing financial pressures whilst having increasing numbers of victim-survivors seek out their services (Naidoo, 2013; Rape Crisis, 2013; Gevers & Abrahams, 2014). These facilities are usually situated in urban centres and are thus difficult to access for many women. Language barriers and the cultural appropriateness of services offered can be further obstacles.

When services are limited in terms of accessibility, visibility, credibility or cultural appropriateness, they may not even be considered as options when someone experiences a sexual violation, which further limits options for disclosure.

4.6.4 Discursive factors

[R]esearchers and practitioners should look beyond the act(s) of sexual violence to the cultural messages, relationship role expectations, and social norms that influence not only survivors' pre-rape worldviews but also their post-assault disclosure experiences and reactions from friends, family, and service providers. These too may be sources of distress (Wasco, 2003, p. 315).

Sexual violence is not only an assault on a person's body; it catapults one into a tangled web of meanings and understandings around sexuality, sex and violence that are steeped in taboo, prejudice, stigma and myth. In most societies we do not speak easily of sex and sexuality in the everyday sense of its practice(s) and thus experiences of sexual violation are overlaid with a sense of myth, mystery, voyeurism and curiosity in a way that a straightforward assault on the body would not be. In this section, I will discuss some of the discourses around rape and sexual violence which impact upon disclosure.

4.6.4.1 Normalising of sexual violence and coercion

Research conducted in South Africa has shown that sexual violence and coercion are common practices in so-called 'normal' heterosexual relationships amongst university students in the Western Cape (Clowes et al., 2009; Schefer, Clowes & Vergnani, 2012) and KwaZulu-Natal (Gordon & Collins, 2013) as well as amongst youth in urban and rural townships in KwaZulu-Natal (Varga, 2004). Researchers conclude that these forms of violence are seen as "an appropriate and effective way of regulating interpersonal relationships" for many in our country (Collins, 2013, p. 31) and are even constructed as 'normal', acceptable and expected expressions of love (Wood et al., 1998; Sathiparsad, 2005; Gqola, 2007). Whilst our legislation now prohibits rape within marital and other conjugal relationships, popular belief and practice still override legalities.

The result of this normalising of violence within interpersonal relationships is a difficulty in recognising and naming sexual violence for what it is. In 2005, Nicola Gavey first drew attention to the fluid boundaries between rape and "just sex", boundaries that have continued to dissolve with the rise in hook-up culture and online interactions of a sexual nature, as she discusses in the second edition published in 2018. She argues (2018) that the very nature of accepted and everyday "taken for granted, normative forms of

heterosexuality” (p. 2) and the discursive scaffolding which support and sustain it, often make it very difficult for those who have been raped (and perpetrators, presumably) to distinguish a sexual violation from ‘normal’ (if unpleasant or ‘bad’) sex. Similarly, in South Africa, Boonzaier and van Schalkwyk (2011) found that women in abusive relationships described their own forced sexual experiences not as rape but “like somebody that’s been raped” (p. 279). Beliefs and practices within the social context therefore constrain what counts as an experience of violation and may invalidate one’s apparently unjustified suffering. It also follows that if one does not identify sexual violence as such when it occurs, one is unlikely to report it.

4.6.4.2 Rape scripts

In their metasynthesis of qualitative research on rape acknowledgement, Rousseau, Bergerona and Ricci (2020) found that women whose own experiences of sexual violation differ from widely accepted ‘rape scripts’ may minimise, normalise or rationalise the experience. They are also more likely to blame themselves for either ‘provoking the rape’, failing to avoid it, or not responding to the attack in a way they feel they ‘should’ have.

A script, in this sense, is a cognitive ‘story’ about the expected or ‘normal’ way in which particular situations play out, including having a sense of the usual sequence of events, of the roles played by different people, and what one can usually expect in that situation. It serves to guide ‘normal’ responses or behaviour when one finds oneself in a particular situation (Littleton, Rhatigan and Axsom, 2007). By way of example, a rape script for “real rape” (Burt, 1980; Lievore, 2003), which has also been referred to as the “blitz rape script” (Parrot, 1991) usually casts a stranger as perpetrator, and specifies significant force or violence in the unfolding action, with sustained and vigorous resistance from the victim. Researchers have looked at how closely a victim-survivor’s rape experience matches both the rape scripts in circulation within their social contexts and/or the rape scripts that they personally endorse. The hypothesis is that if one’s experience of rape does not match the accepted rape scripts, you will be less likely to label the experience as rape (Wilson et al., 2017). Whilst some studies support this (see Littleton, Rhatigan & Axsom, 2007 for a full review; Cleere & Lynn, 2013; Littleton, Layh and Rudolph, 2018) it is also clear that the processes at work are more complex than this hypothesis suggests. Whilst it is the case that victim-survivors seem less likely to label an assault as rape if it does not involve violence; if they are or have been romantically

involved with the perpetrator (Newins et al., 2018); if they have engaged in previous consensual sexual activity with the perpetrator; or if they consumed alcohol prior to the assault (Littleton et al., 2018), sexual assaults that are violent and perpetrated by strangers, therefore matching societal constructs of rape, may still not be labelled as such. In addition, findings are inconsistent across location, time period and socioeconomic status – contrary to what one would expect if this were the only factor at play.

4.6.4.3 Victim-blaming discourses, stigma and prejudice

Whilst rape scripts shape our assumptions about what a ‘real rape’ is, victim-blaming and other rape myths centre around the character or behaviour of the person who was raped. Around the world, sexual violence evokes a stigma that does not accrue to other forms of assault (Kennedy & Prock, 2018; Kohsin, Wang & Rowley, 2007; Jewkes et al., 2002; Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005; Ahrens, 2006; Lisak, 2010; McMullin & White, 2006; Wang & Rowley, 2007, Belknap, 2010) – a stigma linked to patriarchal power, taboos around sex and sexuality, religious and cultural beliefs, and the unwillingness of other persons to acknowledge their own vulnerability to sexual assault.

Even when they do decide to report, those who have experienced sexual assault and speak out are often disbelieved by family members and their broader community, police personnel, medical professionals, and the justice system. The perception that they somehow invited or provoked the rape can lead to secondary victimisation with many women being subjected to further shaming, trauma, interrogation, marginalisation and even death (Schmitt, Robjant, Elbert & Koebach, 2021; Callender & Dartnall, 2011; Campbell, Self, Wasco & Ahrens, 2004; Parpart, 2010). Many victim-survivors also report being afraid of being shunned, labelled, humiliated, or pitied (Rape Crisis, 2013) – even before they have told their story. This has been referred to as ‘anticipatory stigma’ and is a significant obstacle to accessing care after a sexual assault.

In their qualitative study – which explored the reasons why so few people who have been raped choose to seek help from formal social systems such as legal, medical or mental health facilities or rape crisis centres, even when these are available, Patterson, Greeson and Campbell (2009) found that victim-survivors believed that these systems “would or could not help [them] or would psychologically harm them” (p. 127). Discourses around what constitutes ‘real rape’ and the perceived blameworthiness of those who have been raped

played a role in this decision-making, as did victim-survivors' lack of faith in these institutions to protect them from perpetrators. However, respondents were also afraid that persons staffing these services would either not believe them or not care about them, thereby intensifying their distress beyond what they felt would be manageable. Not accessing the services was therefore a conscious choice not to expose themselves to potential further psychological harm.

Victim-blaming discourses circulating in society are frequently internalised and experienced as guilt or shame – emotions which are profoundly silencing. Amongst my research contributors there were few who had experienced direct victim-blaming responses from others but most still blamed themselves in some way, for at least a period of time; some still blamed themselves when I interviewed them. Having been exposed to these discourses all their lives seemed to have primed them for guilt even prior to experiencing sexual violation. From a Foucauldian perspective, we can see how young women are recruited into self-surveillance by these discourses, which are internalised and shape subjectivity both prior to and after experiencing sexual assault.

4.6.4.4 Discourses about rape and its harms

Few life experiences are as discourse-laden across all societies as rape and sexual violence. As Mithu Sanyal (2019) sees it: “[r]ape is not just a word, it is a whole story – with a beginning and a tragic ending, part cautionary tale and part sensational literature” (p. 4).

We hear many such stories about rape and those who have been raped in the South African context and are inevitably shaped both personally and professionally by that collection of stories and the discourses they draw upon (Frank, 2016). Following Frank's (2016) logic related to stories about experiences of illness, it is through hearing stories about others who have been raped – told in hushed tones of horror and *pity, always pity* – that women learn what rape means, what it is to be a person who has been raped, and how the people around them “are likely to respond or not respond to their suffering” if they are raped (Frank, 2016, p, 17). We hear stories of how women are shunned or questioned; how they receive no justice; how this mother or that father rejected their child; how families are torn apart; how lives are destroyed; how police fail; how women fight back, and so on. Gavey (2018, p. 10) points out that even in the stories intended as entertainment – such as novels, films and

television series – we are most often invited to identify with the character solving the mystery (or even with the perpetrator of sexual violence), but very seldom with the person who experienced the sexual assault, who is usually depicted as “one-dimensional, disposable, passive, often doesn’t even get named, whilst the others in the plot have agency”.⁵

Even for those responding to rape victim-survivors in a professional capacity, it is also through hearing these stories about rape that we learn what a rape victim-survivor is, and what we “can be in response to them” (Frank, 2006, p. 17). We also learn through these stories what care in this work looks like: “what actions or inactions count as good or bad, and in what situations” (p. 17). We draw upon these stories in making ethical decisions when we encounter those who have experienced rape.

In one of the many contradictions related to rape, however, whilst there may be stories in the public domain, in many contexts rape is not and may not be spoken about in spaces where real conversation could be possible and discourses could be unpacked and challenged such as homes, schools, faith communities, friendship groups and so on. Brison (2002) speaks of the “intersection of multiple taboos – against talking openly about trauma, about violence, about sex” (p. 19) which effectively silence many who are raped and paralyse “would be supporters” even if people who have experienced sexual violation do disclose.

However, Joanna Bourke (2012) has pointed out that the particular story that ‘rape’ evokes is dependent on local and particular political, socio-economic and cultural environments; how rape is constructed, perceived and even experienced⁶ is not static, it can and will change as the discourses which shape our meaning-making change.

Through persistent feminist academic and activist labour over the past 50 years, there have been some shifts in the discursive construction of rape and those who experience it.

⁵ The Accused, which starred Jodie Foster as a woman who was gang-raped in a pub, was a rare exception. The character played by Foster was depicted as resisting the system and demanding justice.

⁶ One aspect of the struggle of victim-survivors to make sense of rape can be attributed to the gap between an event happening and one’s experience of it – they are not the same thing. We can only make sense of the sensory perceptions, as well as our physical and affective responses using language and within the frameworks of meaning that our culture assigns to those events. There is therefore also a gap between an event and one’s memory of it as the memory is a representation in which meaning-making has intervened. We construct and lay down memories within particular contexts and we recall them in different contexts and with different purposes. The context shapes both the remembering and the articulation of the memory (Gavey, 2018).

Identifying the prevailing ideas about rape as ‘myths’ which support a cultural context in which sexual violence thrives, much work has been done to deconstruct two predominant myths: firstly, that rape is not particularly serious and causes no lasting harm; and secondly that women are somehow at fault for provoking or inviting rape i.e. victim-blaming discourses (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). Whilst there has certainly been a shift in both popular and professional discourses around the harm of rape – which I will discuss further below – victim-blaming is particularly tenacious and is still often implicit in responses that women who have been raped experience when disclosing and reporting the rape (Anderson & Doherty, 2008; Lea, 2007; McMahon, 2007, Campbell et al., 2001; see also Ahrens et al., 2007). Victim-blaming is also prevalent in ordinary people’s constructions of rape (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). Consequently, although it may currently be expressed in more subtle and nuanced ways, victim-blaming remains pervasive, possibly because it is linked to the psychological need to believe that one is safe in the world – if we find someone blameworthy for their own victimisation, we can reassure ourselves that the world is still a fundamentally safe place in which we have control over what happens to us.

There have been other shifts in the ways in which rape is conceptualised in law and broader society. For example, whilst rape was previously considered to be a rare occurrence, perpetrated by isolated, aberrant individuals, it is now recognised as a pervasive public health crisis which affects women everywhere (Brown & Loeffler, 2011; Dartnall, Makhosane, Loots & Jewkes, 2009). There has also been a shift in how rape is approached from a legal perspective, from viewing it as a “crime against men’s private property” to a fundamental violation of human rights (Brown & Loeffler, 2011, p. 7). Along with this shift, there has been an expansion in definitions of what constitutes rape moving beyond a narrow definition of vaginal penetration of a woman by a man. There has been an expansion in what rape might look like (such as including non-violent, non-consensual sexual violation, or sex when one party is unable to consent), as well as in who can be raped (acknowledging male rape and that rape can occur within any kind of relationship, including marriage). Against this backdrop, I would like to highlight one particular conceptualisation of rape which has become more influential in recent years.

Rape as (irreparable) harm

In her book *Rape: From Lucretia to #MeToo*, Mitha Sanyal (2019) points out that there is hardly any other topic as full of contradiction as rape. One source of contradiction is the way in which the harm of rape has been conceptualised. There are multiple and opposing positions on a continuum, ranging from understanding rape as the worst possible thing that can happen to a woman – a fate worse than death – to its negative impact on women’s well-being being entirely minimised and/or denied.

The discourse of rape as the ‘worst possible thing’ or as resulting in irreparable harm or damage primarily arises in discussions about upper- and middle-class women, and the irreparable loss of honour and social standing that a woman would suffer if it were known that she had been raped. Interwoven with discourses around honour, sexual purity and virginity, a woman who had been raped would be considered defiled and impure, a state captured in the widely used phrase ‘damaged goods’ or as it has become now, simply ‘damaged’. This discursive construction of rape seems reasonable in a patriarchal context in which women are considered the property, firstly, of their fathers and then of their husbands; their worth resided in their fitness for marriage and childbearing. However, the discourse of ‘rape as damage’ also draws upon the notion that a woman’s (spiritual) essence is somehow linked to her sexuality, and that rape disrupts something fundamental about a woman’s identity.

The flip side of this discursive coin applies to black women, to all working class and poor women, to any woman whose moral choices could be called into question, or whose position in life rendered the concept of inherent honour meaningless. Women in these categories were held responsible for provoking or inviting rape, and its impacts on them were considered negligible. I have discussed the work that has been done to shift these victim-blaming discourses, but such discourses about rape and its ‘victims’ still influence public opinion in Western contexts albeit possibly in more subtle ways and play a significant role in much of the rest of the world (Anderson and Doherty, 2008).⁷ Gavey and Schmidt (2011), in their discursive analysis of focus group discussions with New Zealand men and women about rape and its impacts, identify what they call the “trauma of rape discourse” as the dominant

⁷ In Section 4.7 I discuss in further depth research on attitudes towards the terms ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ in relation to rape.

framework of understanding upon which their participants drew: “It centers on the contention that rape *is* traumatic, and depicts this trauma as unique (different to and worse than), severe, long lasting, and in need of healing” (p. 443).

This understanding of rape as a traumatic event which can have a somewhat predictable pattern of response in those who are raped, which after Gavey and Schmidt (2011) I will refer to as the ‘trauma of rape discourse’ is, in some ways, an improvement on the discourse presenting ‘rape as irreparable damage’, shifting the focus away from the questionable characteristics of individual women (Wasco, 2003) and onto the traumatic event itself as the source or cause of the victim’s distress. The pattern of response would be studied and labelled firstly as Rape Trauma Syndrome (Burgess and Holstrom, 1974); later, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became the dominant diagnosis for women’s responses to sexual violation.

A diagnosis and a label construct a space for common understanding, credibility and the provision of care, where previously women who had experienced rape may have been subtly or overtly blamed for their own responses, such as freezing in response to a sexual assault, or delaying disclosure. Identifying and naming patterns of ‘symptoms’ has also introduced a (questionable) level of uniformity to sexual assault research (questionable because there is still a wide range of interpretation when it comes to a PTSD diagnosis). This has allowed researchers to build upon previous findings as well as to compare and contrast findings and, over time, to document the harm of rape in terms accessible both to professionals and the wider public (Wasco, 2003). Understanding rape as trauma has also given rise to research into treatment approaches which can reduce the identified symptoms and alleviate distress for rape survivors (Wasco, 2003).

The success of this reframing of rape as trauma in shifting both professional and popular discourse is evident in findings such as those from Gavey and Schmidt’s (2011) focus groups. There has, in a sense, been a “swing from a universalizing presumption of ‘no harm is done’ to an equally universalizing presumption of ‘severe harm is done’” (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011, p. 449). However, such a reframing is not neutral, and various feminist scholars and researchers (Sharratt, 2011; McKenzie-More & LaFrance, 2011; Wasco, 2003; Burstow, 2003, 2005; Worrell, 2001; Gavey & Schmidt, 2011) have critiqued the ‘trauma of rape’ discourse in

terms of certain inadvertent but nonetheless negative impacts on rape victim-survivors' self-narratives and meaning-making, and therefore on their lived realities.

'Trauma of rape' discourse constructs women's 'normal' responses to an abnormal and traumatic event as "individual pathology rather than a response to [a] social injustice" (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011, p. 50). It narrows down the harm of rape to a checklist of symptoms, without taking into account the meanings of expressions of psychological suffering in that particular context. Locating 'the problem' within individual women fails account for or address the problematic relational, social, religious, cultural or political contexts within which rape occurs (Wasco, 2003, Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). In addition, 'rape as trauma' discourse treats rape as a single traumatic event, whilst subjective experiences of rape are more frequently described as a process in which the responses of others to a disclosure or reporting of the rape can be as distressing and traumatic as the rape itself (Wasco, 2003).

In the case of sexual violation in an ongoing abusive relationship, there are multiple and complex factors beyond rape itself which contribute to any psychological impacts. In addition, with its emphasis on trauma as a response to violent and/or life-threatening events, 'rape as trauma' discourse fails to account for the fact that whilst most rapes do not involve violence, they still evoke intense responses in those who are raped, many of which could frequently be overlooked in a checklist of PTSD symptoms. For example, one of the predominant responses to rape is a sense of guilt and shame. These 'symptoms' are not accounted for in a PTSD diagnosis but play a fundamental role in inhibiting acknowledgement and help-seeking. Research indicates that similar responses can be evoked by sexual assaults which are considered by police to be 'less serious' (Muldoon et al, 2016).

However, arguably the most concerning impact of the 'trauma of rape' discourse is that in constructing psychological distress or suffering as psychopathology or 'mental illness', mainstream biomedical discourses shape the way in which people make sense of their own and others' responses to life events (Marecek & Lafrance, 2021). In much the same way as there are widely-held rape scripts, there are also post-rape trauma scripts which are taken-for-granted and have become "baked into the vocabulary" (p. 3) people draw upon. Citing Rose (1998), Marecek and Fine (2021) assert that we "use the language and concepts made available by the psy disciplines to think [our]selves into being" (p. 3). The concepts and

language available to us limit the subject positions we can take up and the possibilities for healing available to us.

Gavey and Schmidt's (2011, p. 442) focus group participants, for example, understood rape to be a life-changing event leaving a scar or wound which could be re-opened at any time by particular triggers. Gavey (2005, p. 199) called this an "ominous time bomb metaphor" which leaves rape victim-survivors and those around them vigilant for the "ever-present possibility of psychological disruption (or pathological eruption)" (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011, p. 443). Consequently, even when victim-survivors believe that they are approaching a position of being able to live well again after rape, this threat or possibility persists. The belief that a potentially irreversible traumatic response inevitably follows rape undermines agency and individual coping strategies. It is also one of the reasons why women do not identify what happened to them as rape – "if I am not psychologically 'damaged' by the event, was it in fact rape?".

Thus, whilst the 'trauma of rape' discourse seems to offer a "more enlightened and sensitive framework of meaning, [it] brings forth its own ways of potentially othering, stigmatizing, violating, and obstructing avenues of support and understanding for women who have experienced rape" (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011, p. 445). The sense that women who have been raped require specialised professional care may leave ordinary people feeling disqualified to offer adequate support and fearful of saying the wrong thing, thereby causing further harm, and so may avoid offering any care at all.

In critiquing the 'trauma of rape' discourse, I do not wish to undermine or diminish in any way the significant impacts that rape can have. As Gavey and Schmidt (2011) point out: "When the traumatizing potential of rape was routinely denied or underplayed, as it was just three to four decades ago, the act of asserting that 'rape is traumatic' was an important and radical counterclaim" (p. 449). However, what was once politically charged and disruptive has now become the mainstream understanding, at least within feminist and biomedical contexts and, as Gavey and Schmidt (2011) argue, this allows us more freedom to consider its validity as a claim and its "psychosocial and political effects" (p. 449). When this understanding is dominant and unquestioned it presumes psychological injury and disallows women's own views about the place and impact of rape in their lives.

Whilst research suggests that rape can evoke some common negative psychological effects, “not all women who are raped experience them, and for many of those who do, the distress they experience decreases over time” (Gavey and Schmidt, 2011, p. 452). We also need to be mindful of the vast community of women whose rape is unacknowledged or never disclosed, and who would not participate in a research study – we know very little about their psychological suffering or resilience.

Two very distinctive subject positions available to women who disclose that they have been raped are ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’. In the next section I review the literature related to the histories and implications of these subject positions, which are particularly salient within the context of the Silent Protest, my research contributors’ engagement with these positions will be explored in Chapter 9.

4.7 ‘Victim’ and ‘survivor’ as subject position and identity claim

One of the key strategies of the Women’s Movement in the 1970s can be captured in the phrase ‘breaking the silence’. Through Speak Outs, marches and the scholarship of feminist academics, the reality of sexual violence as a common experience for women was finally recognised. This work established the possibility of claiming victimhood for many women who had previously remained silent about the traumas inflicted upon them. This had not necessarily been a chosen silence. The narrative and discursive resources for talking about rape as a common reality for women simply had not existed in the socio-cultural context. Their stories had therefore not been “narratable” (Frank, 2004, p. 62) or hearable.

‘Narratable’ is a word which reminds us that “social conventions determine what’s worth telling a story about ... Stories do not merely narrate events. They convey an action and actor – either one or both – the socially accredited status of being worth notice.” (Frank, 2004, p. 62, with reference to the work of Michael Bérubé, 1996). Thus, to make a story narratable is to assert the relevance, the value or the impact of the action, together with the worth or value of the person who acts or is acted upon. Once a story is narratable and can be told, the act of storytelling continually shapes and reshapes the boundaries of who is recognised within the social domain: “[storytelling] renders present what would otherwise be absent” (Frank, 2004, p. 62). The acknowledged presence of women who have been raped evokes an obligation to act and has implications for the allocation of relevant resources and services.

The possibility then of calling oneself a *victim* of rape or sexual assault and being able to tell one's story was therefore a progressive, helpful and agentic step on a personal and collective level. The victim position highlights the harm done by sexual violence, emphasising its traumatic impacts and adverse psychological consequences (drawing on 'rape as irreparable damage' and 'trauma of rape' discourses). Psychologist Ronnie Janoff-Bulman (2010) who writes about post-victimisation responses and coping, uses the term 'victim' deliberately in order to linguistically relieve victims of any responsibility for being victimised. However, she points out that this does not suggest that they are incapable of responding to and improving the situation. Whilst her intention may not have been to position women in this way, it may be an unintended effect, as I will discuss below.

This emphasis on the victim position did allow women to advocate for interventions and relevant resources at all levels of civil society, which led to the establishment of rape crisis centres and other services for women who had been raped, the engaged scholarship of academics writing about sexual violence, the movement towards bringing about legislative changes, and so on. The victim position therefore served a strategic and important function, and still does in some ways. For example, legal discourse and practice requires women who have experienced rape to adopt the demeanour of a victim when in court or engaged with the criminal justice system. If they do not, they are unlikely to be recognised as genuine, credible victims who are deserving of justice (Koss, 2000).

However, as Megan Blumenreich (2004) points out, when we are referring to people in the context of suffering and precarity, "even seemingly positive simplifications can have negative consequences" (p. 85). Whilst the language of victimhood captures the sense of imposition and violation which sexual violence evokes, it also has unintended effects. It can position women as passive, weak and helpless in an essentialised way, and has implications for producing binding and limiting subjectivities both for women and for men who may feel an obligation to protect and avenge. Certainly, within our patriarchal and hetero-normative South African cultures, every newsworthy narrative about rape evokes regular waves of outrage and protectionism as well as passionate and meaningless speeches by politicians. These responses are inevitably short-lived and utterly ineffectual.

It was therefore a deliberate choice to subsequently eschew the term 'victim' in favour of the more agentic connotations of survivor. First used in relation to people who had suffered the

horrors of genocide – specifically the Holocaust (the Shoah) – and literally survived, this term was taken up in feminist activist circles, and subsequently in more common usage, to signify those who have been sexually violated and live on. ‘Survivor’ appears to offer an agentic subject position emphasising an intentional, active, resistant response to sexual violation, but the term can have the effect of diminishing or invisibilising both the conflicted nature of this position and the suffering experienced.

The concept of survivorship has however been adopted and developed by survivor and recovery movements, which have become increasingly widespread and commercialised (Alcoff & Gray, 1993). Rape survivor movements tend to draw extensively on the ‘trauma of rape’ discourse (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011) to emphasise what they see as the ‘inevitable’ psychological harm of trauma, and the need for both the intervention of experts and personal empowerment (Crossley, 1999; Haaken, 1996, 1998; Reavey & Warner, 2001). What was introduced as a liberating concept with the intention of achieving political change at a discursive level, has therefore been reinscribed (Naples, 2003) or subsumed (Alcoff & Gray, 1993) within neo-liberal discourse as both an individual choice and a moral responsibility, with the sense that you *should* put your trauma or suffering behind you and heal, move on, or overcome. The expectation is that survivorship is a state that you can achieve or arrive at through personal effort, irrespective of your location in the broader socio-political and economic context, and irrespective of the support and other resources you can access.

‘Survivors’ are therefore offered particular ways in which to heal and speak of their experiences, specific practices and attributes to take up (Marecek, 1999; Illouz, 2008; Govenden, 2012). There is a strong emphasis in the survivor and recovery movements on a confessional format of disclosure – the sexual violation must be shared with others in order for you to heal, but only in a particular way, usually in order to elicit an emotional response in the hearers. Survivor discourse therefore produces particular subjectivities in those who subscribe to the discourse, which can serve to silence those who do not wish to buy into the entire survivor ‘package’ or who feel that it does not align with their lived experience. Those who have experienced rape therefore find themselves in a double-bind, positioned simultaneously as irreparably and inevitably damaged (whether within an ‘irreparable harm/damage of rape discourse’ or a ‘trauma of rape discourse’, as discussed previously) *and* as responsible for their own healing.

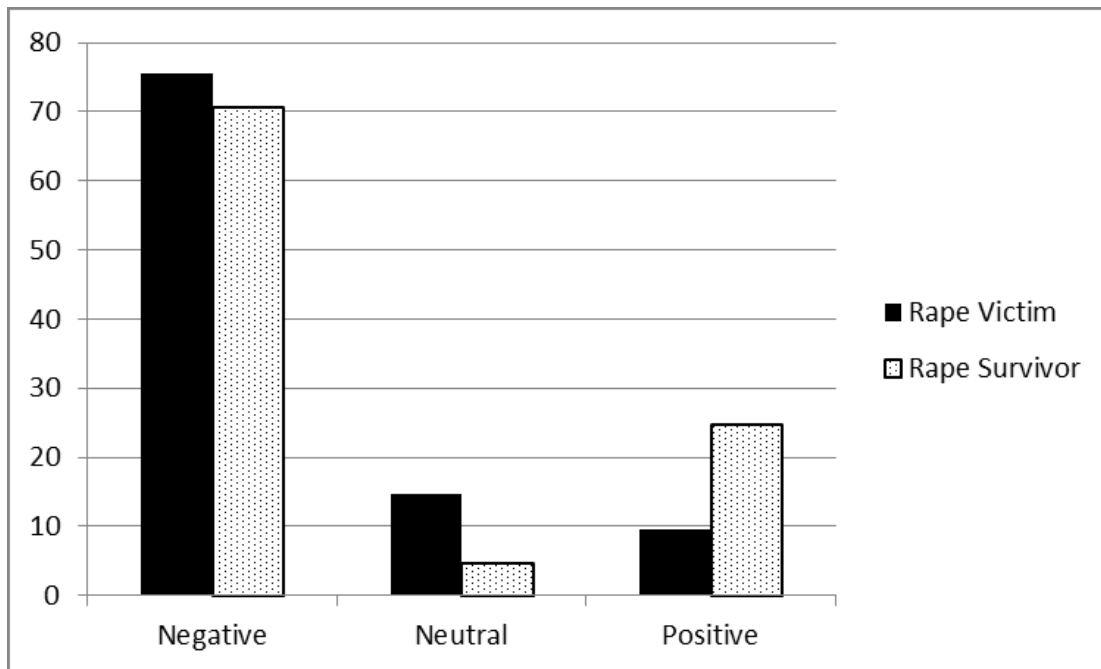


Figure 4: Number of negative, neutral, and positive characteristics ascribed to ‘rape victims’ versus ‘rape survivors’ (Hockett, McGraw & Saucier, 2014, p. 93)

Hockett, McGraw and Saucier (2014) conducted a series of studies to investigate the effects of the signifiers ‘rape victim’ and ‘rape survivor’ on (largely white American undergraduate) students’ perceptions of and responses to women who had been raped. In addition to the findings cited above, the following results are also salient for understanding perceptions of ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ identity:

- a. the attributes that respondents listed for ‘rape victims’ were largely personological i.e. essential and enduring attributes such as ‘timid’, which presumably existed prior to the rape and would endure beyond it;
- b. for ‘rape survivors’ respondents listed far more process-type attributes that would have emerged as strategies to deal with the rape and that are therefore an outcome or direct result of the rape.

In other words, the survey respondents understood victim status as something that you are (part of your identity), based on pre-existing personality factors, which makes you somehow more vulnerable to attack, whilst they see a survivor as something that you become. It is an earned status with an emphasis on agency and engaging in adaptive coping strategies. Simply stated, a woman is inherently a victim but can become a survivor, as though sexual violence is some kind of character-developing challenge or test.

In a further study conducted by Hockett, Saucier and Badke (2016), respondents were presented with a rape vignette and asked to state whether they perceived the woman in the scenario to be a rape victim or a rape survivor. Four and a half times more respondents described her as a victim. This may reflect a widely held perception of women who are raped – as perpetual victims. A final study showed that respondents more readily attributed blame for rape to a person labelled as a rape victim than any other label, regardless of the respondent's gender or underlying attitudes about rape.

Whilst these findings raise challenging questions about a socio-cultural intolerance of 'victims', victimhood and vulnerability to which I shall return in Chapter 9, what is clear is that whether someone is positioned as a victim or survivor, attitudes towards anyone who has been raped are predominantly negative. Hockett, McGraw and Saucier (2014) and Hockett and Saucier (2015) express concern about the real-life implications of these attitudes which would be held by persons in the victim-survivor's immediate circles of care and support, as well as by the woman herself. It is problematic that in any engagement with women who have been raped, be this in a setting of informal care, psychotherapy, research, or within the legal system, we are linguistically primed to assign a woman to one or the other category and treat them accordingly, based upon immediate, unconscious and unwarranted assumptions about who they are and what they have become as a result of the rape, and thereby missing the complexity of their individual experiences. Other research in the field of sexual violence has shown how such negative attitudes are an important factor associated with poorer provision of care and services by families, friends, communities and relevant service providers, and potentially to a poorer long-term outcome for many women who have experienced rape (Ahrens, 2006; Ahrens, Cabral & Abeling, 2009; Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, 2007; Bhuptani et al., 2019).

Thus, women who have been raped have two inadequate constructs or subject positions (modes of being) available to them if they acknowledge the rape to themselves or disclose it to others. Monica Thompson (2000, p. 329) calls this dilemma the "Victim-Survivor Paradox". Whether one behaves in a way that suggests survival or victimhood will influence the way in which others respond. Either of these terms will invite certain responses, rather than others and the effects of each identifier will be different for different women. An important feature of the paradox is that one has to either highlight or minimise the importance of the rape, in

order to assume the relevant identity. Even if these terms were less problematic in and of themselves, the simplistic and apparently mutually exclusive binary of 'victim' or 'survivor' suggests a static and unchanging state of being, which fails to acknowledge the complexity and fluidity of subject positions taken up by and ascribed to women who have been subjected to sexual violence. Reducing women's experiences and responses to one pole of this simple binary clearly has 'real effects', running the risk of diminishing, constraining and totalising their experience (Duvall & Béres, 2007; McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011). The selection of an inadequate word is never neutral; each identifier makes available different subject positions and calls forth different identity constructions, which have real effects.

Ideally, one would want to be able to draw upon both terms/identity claims, and access both the respect and the care which 'survivor' and 'victim' evoke, respectively. In the absence of more flexible positioning, most victim-survivors take up both subject positions at different times and in different ways (Thompson, 2000). They therefore need to be actively and continuously involved in constructing and claiming an identity that feels congruent for them.

It is particularly important to note how both 'victim' and 'survivor' subject positions:

- a. are devalued within the broader socio-cultural environment;
- b. individualise the assault and obscure the broader socio-political context in which it has occurred;
- c. individualise the responsibility for living on after the violation;
- d. offer the one who has been violated a particular place to situate themselves as they make sense of the violation and their responses;
- e. essentialise identity claims; and
- f. limit the possible ways of being and responding for the one who has been violated.

Significantly, as Hockett, McGraw and Saucier (2014) point out, the dichotomy between 'victim' and 'survivor' and all that these terms evoke, is replicated in the literature on rape victimisation. Most of the available research and theorising focuses on what happens to women who experience rape, both during and after the rape. Most papers on sexual violence begin with an emphasis on the significant negative outcomes to be anticipated for women who have been raped (even when the focus of the study is the activism, resistance or resilience of victim-survivors, such as in Phadamanunni and Edwards (2016) paper). This

foregrounding of the victim identity almost seems necessary to emphasise the importance of the scholarship being presented. In contrast, there is far less focus on ‘survivor’ processes or attributes – that is, what women ‘do’ both during and after rape which minimises or mitigates the impact of the trauma. There is a small but significant body of research which positions women who have experienced rape as active and agentic, or pursuing positive and hopeful outcomes (for example, see Fahs, 2011; Mason & Clemens, 2008; Perl, Westin & Peterson, 1985; Thompson, 2000)

As Hockett et al. (2014) also point out, “institutionalised modes of inquiry have historically shaped how people think and behave in society” (p. 85). The current body of scholarship can thus be seen as endorsing or ‘institutionally legitimising’ the rape victim label. It is clear that our research agendas are far from innocent or unbiased – how we conceptualise women who have experienced rape in our research does not simply reflect but shapes how society conceptualises them. The resulting negative connotations affect responses to rape victim-survivors at every level of society, from family to schools to the justice system. Consequently, the research intended to understand and assist those who have experienced rape can, in itself, reinforce the status quo, keeping women who have been raped in the position of perpetual victims.

This raised an important ethical challenge for me in terms of how I position and represent the women who participated in my research, and I have chosen to consciously address the limitations of the available subject positions and to highlight the ways in which my research contributors resist and ‘trouble’ their positioning themselves.

As someone who has experienced rape, academic and author Tami Spry (1995, p. 28), offers a challenging critique and rejection of both ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ as linguistic categories (and subject positions) available to women who choose to narrate their experiences of violation:

A woman's body is viewed as surviving a powerful force or being victim to a powerful force, *rather than existing as a powerful force in its own right*. Within the restrictive dualistic conceptualisation of victim or survivor, a woman's body is viewed as an object that something was done to, that was ultimately overpowered. A body that is not under her power is not, in a very real sense, her own ... The power and agency of her

body is denigrated or erased completely as we are linguistically asked to focus not on her, but rather on what was done to her by the male body. (Italics mine)

Spry (1995) therefore sees both victim and survivor as phallogentric terms and argues that the “absence of woman-centred language” (p. 27) means that women are unable to offer to themselves or their culture “a complex and problematized understanding of sexual violence” (p. 28) or to express the diversity and range of their experiences of sexual assault because “there are no words to describe them” (p. 28).

Whilst the limitations of language and discourse are very clear – and I will circle back in Chapter 9 to discuss this further and offer some suggestions – what strikes me are the myriad creative ways in which women do express their experiences, both within and outside of language. Spry herself has carried out ground-breaking work using performative auto-ethnography and non-traditional texts to focus on issues of gender-based violence, mental health and race.

Suzanne McKenzie-Mohr and Michelle Lafrance (2011) in a paper in *Feminism and Psychology* coined the term ‘tightrope talk’ to refer to the ways in which women who had experienced rape found “creative and nuanced ways” of talking about their experiences in ‘both/and’ ways that both affirmed their agency and the “integrity of their identities as women reacting to and overcoming hardship” (p. 57), whilst rejecting the blame that usually adheres to victims. The victim-survivors in their study also managed to “speak beyond” simplistic binaries such as strong/weak or powerful/powerless, to articulate more complex identity positioning. McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance’s (2011, p. 61) careful analysis highlights the active, fluid and continuous dance of positioning and re-positioning that victim-survivors engage in:

[The women] navigated simultaneous and seemingly oppositional ideas in order to make meaning in a way that dominant rape narratives had failed to do Holding and balancing contrasting elements of their complex stories, refusing to negate or oversimplify parts of their experiences [even whilst being aware of the potential for misunderstanding]

The ‘tightrope talk’ which rejects blame whilst claiming agency is both “a dangerous undertaking” (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2011, p. 63) and a “complex and subtle discursive accomplishment” (p. 64) for women who have been raped – dangerous because their words

can so easily be re-inscribed within the terms of the dominant discourses and their nuanced meanings misunderstood.

Whilst the complexity and precarity of the moment-by-moment positioning dance explored in McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance's (2011) work and the full implications of discursive constructions exposed in Spry's (1995) article are fairly rare in the literature on sexual violence, they resonate with what I heard in my research interviews and in groups with women who had experienced sexual violence. Echoing the findings of McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance, engagement with and performance of both victimhood and survivorship was complex, nuanced, fluid and contradictory. My research contributors constantly and actively negotiated and re-negotiated subject positions in relation to these concepts in ways that resisted categorisation. I discuss this in Chapter 8 with reference to the narratives that my research contributors shared about participation in the Silent Protest at Rhodes University.

Although not a survivor movement as such, the Silent Protest does foreground and emphasise speaking out about sexual violence and publicly declaring one's 'status' as a rape survivor, by choosing to wear a Rape Survivor t-shirt. In Chapter 9, I focus on women's creative and nuanced engagement with both these t-shirts and survivor identity, in the context of the Silent Protest.

4.7.2 Acknowledgement, disclosure and reporting in this study

In the first two chapters of this thesis, I outlined in some detail the prevalence of sexual violation in South Africa, as well as some of the factors which support and sustain violence in this country. This is significant in the context of this study when one considers the sheer number of young women entering tertiary education at any particular South African university who will already have experienced sexual violence, most of whom will not have reported it within the criminal justice system, and many of whom may never have acknowledged it to themselves or disclosed it to even one other person. Additionally, many young women experience sexual coercion and assault at university, sometimes in situations where alcohol has been consumed, and these violations are also seldom reported.

Encountering the Silent Protest on the university campus – either through the awareness campaigns prior to the Protest or by witnessing or participating on the day of the Protest – can potentially challenge and disrupt a victim-survivor's unconscious, chosen or enforced

silence of non-acknowledgement and/or non-disclosure. The central message of the Silent Protest is to encourage women to speak out about sexual violence, with the reassurance that they are not alone and will be supported. It is therefore a matter of ethics to consider the reasons why victim-survivors choose not to disclose, and whether or not the challenge or disruption that the Silent Protest represents is more likely to be experienced as beneficial or detrimental by women who have experienced sexual violence.

If the Silent Protest *does* support acknowledgement and disclosure in a way that those who have experienced sexual violation find beneficial, it is important to understand how and why it achieves this.

I have therefore spent some time attempting to account for the factors which have been identified as obstacles to acknowledging, disclosing and/or reporting a sexual assault. These are significant firstly, and perhaps most importantly, because they limit the choices available after a sexual assault. Without easily accessible, safe and trusted spaces and persons to whom they can disclose and/or report sexual violence, women who have been raped can feel isolated and disempowered and as though they have no option but to remain silent. This applies not only to crime reporting but also to accessing medical services and emotional support.

It is particularly important to recognise that the discursive construction of rape influences both those who experience rape and those who receive their disclosures, as instantiations of broader society. Current dominant constructions render those who hear the stories less able to listen with openness, more anxious about their ability to listen and respond in a helpful way, feeling that they lack skills or capacity, and make it more likely that they will minimise, deny, avoid, or blame the person disclosing rape. This has further impacts on victim-survivors; research has shown that the trauma of sexual violence is not caused simply by the event itself but by the responses (whether real or anticipated) of those around the victim-survivor, broader life-conditions, and how life has continued for them after the violation. It is therefore necessary, in addressing the needs of those who experience rape, not simply to provide more of the same services already available but to carefully consider all the contextual factors in order to develop, adapt and institute responses which address both the practical and discursive factors which give rise to distress and suffering. It is also essential to identify those

factors which support and enhance women's own inevitable efforts to move forward towards living well again after the rape.

These considerations raised an important ethical challenge for me in terms of how I position and respond to the women who contributed to my research, as well as what I choose to focus on and how I represent them in my writing. I have therefore chosen to specifically address the limitations and implications of the available subject positions for those who have experienced rape, and to highlight the ways in which my research contributors resist and 'trouble' this positioning through language, narrative and action.

4.8 Research on the participation of women who have experienced sexual violence in public protest

Despite almost half a century of gender activism around sexual violence, there has been extremely limited research regarding the impact of participation in activism and protest by women who have experienced sexual violence. This seems significant, as it relates to the literature on how women who have been raped are typically characterised. Resistance and activism do not easily fit the 'rape as trauma' or 'irreparable harm' picture and therefore would be less likely to be the focus of research.

Working within the terminology of a medical model, Judith Herman (1997) identifies various factors which contribute to so-called recovery from sexual violence, including: public acknowledgement of the traumatic event; some form of community action which assigns responsibility for the harm and takes steps towards restitution (repairing the injury); and finding meaning in the experience that transcends the limits of personal tragedy, most often by joining with others in social action. Herman (1997) cites a follow-up study of women who had been raped in which Burgess and Holmstrom (1979) found that women who had become active in the anti-rape movement had made the best long-term recoveries.⁸

The single article written about participation in the Silent Protest in South Africa (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016) affirms the possibility that those who have been raped can experience validation and empowerment as a result of their participation in collective

⁸ There are however no details provided as to why this was the case.

protest. One of the researchers conducted once-off interviews with nine victim-survivors who had participated in the Silent Protest. Participants first completed questionnaires to assess their post-traumatic symptomatology. During the interviews, they were asked to tell the story of their assault (which was then re-inscribed by the researcher into her own words as a case narrative), their psychological responses to the rape, and their prior experiences of disclosure. They were also asked about their experiences of participation in the Silent Protest, particularly with reference to the “extent to which survivors found participation contributed to healing”. The researchers then identified themes across these narratives. In the article the authors frame their approach by carefully describing “*The Psychological Sequelae of Exposure to Rape*” (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016, p. 819), as the researchers believe: “To situate the experiences of women participating in the *Silent Protest*, it is important to understand the psychological impact of rape” (p. 819) [italics mine]. The authors seem to suggest that there exists a one-size-fits-all impact of rape, and even that rape itself exists as a clearly identifiable event that is experienced similarly by all who are subjected to it.

Unsurprisingly, due to the fact that they were focusing on individual healing, Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2016) found that participation in the Protest was a “highly personal experience” (p. 825) which had the potential to offer both positive impacts (validation of participants’ experiences, challenging powerlessness, and diminishing a sense of alienation) and negative impacts (distress caused by remembering the experience of violation, guilt at not having spoken out about the violation, continued and sometimes intensified self-blame, and ambivalence around assuming a survivor identity). Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2016) caution Protest organisers not to promise or suggest that participation in the Protest offers any form of healing. It is important to note that this has never been a message of the Protest. Narratives told by participants over the years have suggested that women experienced benefit from participating but the Silent Protest exists primarily as a political call to action in response to a profound violation of human rights. The cautions and mitigation of risk which Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2016) offer in their recommendations emphasise the need for expert, professional information-provision to assist victim-survivors in managing possible experiences of ‘triggering’ related to the Silent Protest, and the need to channel participants towards more appropriate professional therapeutic interventions in order for substantial healing to take place. This is one example

of the re-inscription of transgressive discourses into the dominant medicalised understanding of responses to sexual violation. This is discussed further in Chapter 9.

Although not a protest so much as a collective practice, Colleen Galambos (2001, p. 65) reports upon a study which invited participant comment on a collective healing ritual developed for “survivors of rape”. Drawing upon Jungian theory and precedents in the literature where therapeutic rituals and symbolic actions had been used in a range of contexts, with apparent benefit, Galambos (2001) hypothesised that therapeutic rituals may support recovery and promote growth for those who have experienced rape. Whilst the Silent Protest is not intended to be a therapeutic ritual, aspects of the day itself contain elements of ritual (such as silencing with the black tape; fasting, and later removing the tape to accompanied shouts and chants; candle-lighting) and symbolic action (such as the die-in as described in the Introduction); and wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt). The participants in Galambos’ (2001) study completed a questionnaire shortly after participating, so their responses simply present a brief snapshot of their impressions of the ritual and offer no sense of the longer term impact of participating. Even so, what she found was that participants’ primary motivations for attending were to support others and to receive support. It seemed that for at least some of those present, the most significant aspect of the ritual was to hear the stories of other women who had experienced rape, and some participants requested that more space be given to this should there be future such events. One participant commented that “The most important part of the vigil is knowing I’m not alone” (Galambos, 2001, p. 71).

This suggests that participating in collective rituals and practices which allow victim-survivors to connect and listen to each others’ stories can be beneficial. In a similar vein, Al Fuyes (2004, p. 491), writing about “community-based conceptualisations and articulations” of (war) trauma and healing amongst refugees in a camp on the Thailand-Burma border asserts that no matter how personally victimised individuals may feel, “the refugees are capable of naming and responding to their collective sense of reality and can be active participants in their own healing and community building” when they are invited to articulate their own understandings of their suffering and when their own healing practices and rituals are prioritised. Laurence Kirmayer (2004, p. 33), in an article on cultural diversity and healing practices, also suggests that healing rituals and symbolic actions can “have effects on

physiology, experience, interpersonal interaction and social healing” as well as contributing to both an individual and collective sense of identity.

4.8.1 Potential benefits of participation in collective protest

Drawing upon the limited available literature, it does seem that participation in collective protest has the potential to offer those who have been subjected to sexual violence an experience of solidarity and validation: that they are not alone; that they belong to a community of women who have been similarly violated. Fellow participants may therefore become a “community of acknowledgement” (White, 2007).

Collective anti-rape protest can also provide a platform for the expression of collective outrage at the injustice of indifferent responses to rape at every level, and for calling perpetrators, government structures and civil society to account. Such protest action helps to shift the discourse on sexual violence from a private event to a broader political issue. Michael White (1995, p. 88) suggests that assisting people to “establish an account of the politics of their experience helps to undermine the self-blame and the shame that is so often experienced in relation to abuse [or sexual violence]”. Collective protest could also offer those who have been raped the opportunity to perform preferred identity claims, and have these compassionately witnessed (Weingarten, 2003).

In summary, this chapter has considered a broad range of literature on rape acknowledgement, disclosure, and to a lesser extent, reporting. The factors which inhibit and facilitate disclosure and reporting are significant to this research due to the emphasis placed during the Silent Protest on ‘breaking the silence’ and speaking out about sexual violation. The research seems to suggest that the receiving context for disclosures is as, if not more important than characteristics of the sexual violation or individual factors related to the person who experienced the assault. The way in which rape and those who have experienced rape are discursively constructed significantly impacts on the openness of those who receive disclosures and their ability to respond well. The research suggests that whether one refers to those who have experienced rape as victims or survivors makes little difference to the negative way in which they will be perceived. Non-acknowledgement and non-disclosure may therefore be conscious or unconscious self-protective strategies.

Participation in collective protest offers those who have experienced sexual violation an opportunity to express their resistance and outrage together with others, whilst not necessarily disclosing their own experiences. Protest offers victim-survivors a different place to stand in relation to their own experience of sexual violation and the limited available research seems to suggest that this could be experienced as beneficial.

In Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, I describe the methodologies adopted during this research journey, and my approach to data analysis, before considering the narratives that my research contributors shared regarding their own participation in collective protest action, namely the Silent Protest.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

5.1 A story of an emergent methodology

Propelled by a desire to know what is unknown, to unravel mysteries, to be surprised and jostled by what turns up, qualitative researchers embark on an intellectual adventure without a map or even a clear destination.

(Marecek, Fine & Kidder, 2001, p.31)

It is not unusual in qualitative research for one's research practices to change in response to the interesting, the challenging or the unexpected in the research environment. In fact, for feminist researchers, responsiveness and fluidity can be key features of research practice. Maguire (1993) suggests that feminist research is not an event but a process "that we are living through, creating as we go" (p. 176). Nonetheless, although my research project was located within these paradigms, I did not expect that it would need to be quite as responsive or fluid as it proved to be.

My research journey refused to fit – or rather to remain for any length of time – within a neat paradigm. It is only now, trying to account for my 'responsive' methodology that I have recognised one of the reasons for this. I had been trying to integrate two conflicting paradigms, which approach the construction of knowledge from opposing perspectives. One was a researcher-driven, research question-focused qualitative approach, and the other was an ethnographic approach which is far more exploratory and where knowledge construction is guided by one's encounters in the field:

Ethnography is about discovery. Skillful ethnography is about making some room for the creative imagination and some disciplined intuition. It is about entering the field without totally predefining the domain of interest and without presuming that you already know what is universal, because most of the time those presumptive universals are generated out of one's own perspective-dependent, context-dependent, and hence local world (Shweder, 1997, p. 154).

In my initial research proposal, I stated that I would conduct a multimethod qualitative study within a poststructuralist feminist research paradigm. I outlined two strategies to this approach, the first of which I called: *Consultation with Silent Protest participants who have*

experienced sexual violence; the second I called *Construction of the Silent Protest's 'backstory' within the South African context*.

The first strategy proposed conventional, in-depth, semi-structured interviews as well as optional focus group discussions with women who had experienced sexual violence and had chosen to participate in the Silent Protest at Rhodes University in Makhanda. These conversations would focus on the impact that their participation in the Protest had on their ongoing processes of meaning-making in relation to the experience of sexual violence. The second research strategy involved archival research regarding the history and evolution of the Silent Protest as well as extensive participant-observation related to ongoing planning and discussion around the Protest and the Silent Protest itself.

Whilst the first strategy is employed extensively in qualitative research in the field of Psychology, it was the second strategy that both complicated and immeasurably enriched the research journey. Immersing myself in the world of the Silent Protest organisers, both by exploring the archival material and attending all planning meetings, briefings and the Silent Protest itself as a participant-observer raised new questions and challenges. These are the tools or strategies of ethnographic research. In contrast to my first strategy, where I formulated the research questions and developed an interview schedule, ethnographic research is participant- or contributor-driven rather than researcher-driven, as is participatory action research which my research journey also expanded to embrace¹.

Drawing on Frank (2012) and Robert and Rinehart (2015), ethnography is an inductive process in which the contributors or 'insiders' are acknowledged as the experts on their own experiences, and the researcher's primary role is to immerse herself in the world of her contributors, to pay attention, to observe and to learn. This is participant-observation which gives the researcher a more holistic sense of the experiences of their research contributors in context, and the meaning that those experiences might hold for research contributors. What the researcher will learn cannot be defined in advance in a hypothesis or research question, although many questions may arise in the course of their observations that will guide their further observations and interactions.

¹ Permission for the addition of a Participatory Action Research cycle into the research methodology was sought and granted by the Rhodes Psychology Ethics in Research Committee.

Whilst interviews and focus groups are also strategies used in ethnographic research, they are generally more open and exploratory than in research guided by specific research questions.

However, even as an inadvertent ethnographer, it seemed that I continued to transgress boundaries and become 'too involved'. I have since discovered that ongoing negotiation of boundaries between activist and researcher identities is not unusual in research involving social movements (Bloom & Sawin, 2009; Gillan & Pickerill, 2012; Loperena, 2016; Petray, 2012). In negotiating ethical challenges, I repeatedly chose shared activism alongside and in solidarity with my research contributors. I found myself in situations with research contributors which had a sense of both therapy and pastoral care, and which were really both – and neither. Finally, I stepped completely into the activist/researcher-in-solidarity identity when the opportunity opened up for an action research cycle to be added to the research process. I was recruited into being the primary organiser of the next annual Silent Protest, which allowed for the implementation of some of the changes suggested by my research contributors. My research approach came closest to resembling what Theresa Petray (2012) has called "critically engaged activist research", which "blends a theoretical approach towards power and resistance with a practical methodology for ethnographies of social movements" (p. 12).

I will describe in the sections which follow what motivated my shift into ethnographic and engaged/activist research, but I need to mention that it is only in the writing of this thesis that I have recognised the significant differences between the approaches I was trying to integrate (answering researcher-driven research questions and doing ethnography). I could choose to only tell one story or the other in this thesis, but that would compromise the integrity of the account. I would rather describe and account for the approaches which I adopted and/or developed, in an attempt to manage these conflicting paradigms in an ethical and care-full manner.

My first task in discussing my methodology is to outline the process of the research and account for my ethical choices along the way: what propelled me into making the choices I did and engaging in the way I did. Research is most often portrayed as an intellectual pursuit dependent upon rational, carefully considered decision-making. Textual accounts of research

practice usually present a “neat, packaged, unilinear view of research... failures are often neglected” and “... dilemmas in the field are glossed over in an anodyne appendix” (Punch, 1994, p. 85). Even within critical feminist research paradigms, which acknowledge the situatedness of the researcher and the impact of her life experiences, belief systems and worldview, reflexivity seems to take place primarily in the head, rather than in the body, and up until fairly recently, with little reference to emotion. Nevertheless, along with Rachelle Chadwick (2021), I was aware that my responses in the research field had been largely intuitive, visceral and difficult to articulate. They arose in the realm of affect and resisted being encoded into language.

My second task (and challenge) was to account for my struggle in deciding how to respond, on an ethical level, to my research contributors and to the stories they had shared with. They had shared their stories with the intention of contributing to knowledge and practice in responses to sexual violence. However, the many readily available modes of engaging with their stories as research data in order to ‘code’ and ‘analyse’ evoked significant discomfort for me. The nature of the stories and the nature of our engagement seemed to require a different mode of responding, but initially it was difficult to articulate either the discomfort or the alternative modes of responding which resonated with me.

In this chapter, I will describe the process by which my methodology was changed and shaped both by the context in which I was conducting the research and the changes that took place in my thinking, feeling, knowledge construction, and responding along the way. In the next chapter (Chapter 6), I will describe how I grappled with the practice of data analysis and the approach which I came to adopt in ‘listening to’, ‘witnessing’ and ‘thinking with’ the narratives of my research contributors.

5.1.2 Personal narrative in accounting for the research journey

I have chosen, in this chapter, to recount my own narrative, chronicling the research journey. First person narrative is not unusual in accounts of both ethnographic research and participatory action research. Winter (1996) suggests that a “...narrative format can be seen as expressing and recognising the basis of action research – the sequence of practice and reflection” (p. 26). A narrative format resolves some aspects of my dilemma in writing up this journey in that “unlike science, [narrative] leaves open the nature of the connection between

events, it invites remaking and negotiation of meaning ... there is openness to competing interpretations” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 7).

Nevertheless, I fully acknowledge that I participate in creating my experience through the very act of describing it (Delgado, 2000, p. 61); I am inevitably biased and I *will* tell my own story: in fact, I *can* only tell my own story, no matter how I frame it. I am therefore consciously choosing to centralise my own story in this chapter and the next, through the use of personal narrative and choosing to write reflexively, exposing my thought processes and my personal involvement in the knowledge construction process (Hall, 1996). Whilst personal narrative has not been widely used in knowledge construction within academic writing, it is supported by feminist researchers who tend to experiment with innovative formats and create new genres in writing about their research endeavours, in order to ‘trouble’ and disrupt the hegemony of Western scientific discourse (Winter, 1996; Stanley, 1990; Brydon-Miller et al., 2004). Brydon-Miller (2004) expresses her support for the use of personal narrative as follows:

[The] use of personal narrative, once considered anathema to serious academic writing, recognises the subjective presence and active participation of the scholar in any research endeavour. To pretend invisibility through the use of the passive voice or a bland third person narration of events masks the multiple ways in which the researcher, scholar, author shapes any act of enquiry (p. 6).

In order to relate my story in an unfolding, chronological sequence and to stay true to my experience of the journey, I drew upon the extensive records that I had kept along the way, including planning documents, workshop handouts, letters, e-mails, minutes of meetings, transcripts of meetings, and a personal research journal which I kept throughout the research journey. This journal was not a daily record of events but a space in which I reflected upon significant events, interactions, conversations, dilemmas and shifts during the research journey, and upon the intersections between my personal and research lives. I have included or referred to entries from this journal throughout this thesis.

The research journey was long and complex: for the sake of clarity, in the next section I will present a summary of the activities which comprised the research process, after which I will

narrate the story of how the research journey unfolded and the ethics which informed the decisions I made.

5.2 Summary of research activities

April 2011	Attended Silent Protest 'Break the Silence' debriefing event as an observer – described in Chapter 1 (Introduction)
April-May 2011	Wrote about what I had borne witness to, shared this with colleagues and engaged in a range of conversations about the Silent Protest.
June 2011	Met with Larissa Klazinga, primary organiser of the Silent Protest. Warm and positive response to the possibility of conducting research on the impacts of the Protest.
July 2011	Together with a visiting colleague from Waikato University, New Zealand, conducted outsider-witness interviews with the primary organiser of the SP in the presence of others who had participated in the protest or played a role in organising. (Ethical approval from Waikato University)
February 2012	Registered as a doctoral candidate at Rhodes University, Makhanda Perusal of archival material related to the Silent Protest at Rhodes University
March 2012	Participated in all events of the Silent Protest (as a Silent Protestor) with my mouth taped with black gaffer tape. This was an embodied experience as a 'social justice ally'. Engaged in participant observation and kept extensive notes regarding my observations. I also followed social media posts and media articles before, during and after the Silent Protest
April – November 2012	Attended formal review meetings for the Silent Protest Engaged in numerous informal conversations with primary organisers and colleagues Continued perusal of archival material
June 2012	Discussed my proposal for a Debrief Cafe ² with my supervisor and then the primary organiser of the Silent Protest. Both approved moving ahead with the idea.
July 2012	Submitted research proposal to Higher Degrees Committee and received approval
February – April 2013	Participant recruitment via online sign-up process for the Silent Protest; e-mailed individual invitations to each Protestor who indicated via a response button that they were interested in receiving information about PhD research regarding the Silent Protest

² The Debrief Cafe is an intervention which the researcher designed in consultation with protest organisers, survivor participants and therapists, in order to address concerns about the lack of post-protest support for participants, both those who have publicly shared their testimonies of violation and survival and those who have not. The concept has the support of both the primary organiser of the Silent Protest and the Head of the Student Counselling Centre at Rhodes University who offered her staff and interns to help facilitate the Debrief Cafe. The Debrief Cafe offered a safe and creative space to students who participated in the Silent Protest and wanted to continue the conversations which it evoked. They had the option of participating in small group facilitated discussions; producing artwork using art materials that will be available; participating in group movement activities such as circle dancing or yoga; engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer or meditation, or simply 'hanging out' in the space and listening to music, with coffee, tea and snacks available all day.

April 2013	Conducted pre-Protest interviews with 23 research contributors: women who had experienced sexual violence and intended to participate in the Silent Protest in 2013
19 April 2013	Participated in the Silent Protest (as a solidarity protestor); assisted with re-taping of participants' mouths and logistical details
20 April 2013	Set up and facilitated the day-long Debrief Cafe
April – early May 2013	Conducted 21 post-Protest interviews with research contributors, as well as 8 additional interviews with contributors who had participated in the Protest on more than one occasion, some in an organizing or support capacity Participated in post-Protest reflections
May 2013	Organised that Silent Protestors be present at a march specifically for academic university staff against sexual violence, in order to protest against University management's ignoring and rendering invisible the Silent Protest
May – September 2013	Facilitated 3 monthly discussion groups with research contributors who chose to participate. These group discussions were transcribed and formed part of the data set which was analysed..
May – November 2013	Transcribed interviews
September 2013	Conducted 16 'six months post-Protest' interviews with research contributors Presented initial research findings at Rhodes University Gender Imbizo
October 2013	Presented research findings at Rhodes University's Academic Leadership Forum; as a result, ongoing institutional support was pledged for the Silent Protest
October 2013	Approached to take responsibility for organisation of 2014 Silent Protest as primary organiser was leaving. I agreed because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had come to know and understand the full history and ethos behind the Protest, how each aspect and ritual had developed, and what each represented for the participants; • I was convinced that the Protest benefitted victim-survivors who participated, in a range of different ways; its predictable, regular annual occurrence was a key aspect of this benefit; • My background in Pastoral Therapy equipped me with the necessary skills to respond appropriately to disclosures and expressions of psychological distress; • Organising the Protest offered a unique opportunity to implement and evaluate changes suggested by my research contributors in a participatory action research cycle
January – August 2014	Established and chaired organising committee for Silent Protest Implemented changes agreed to by the committee Advocated for participation in numerous presentations and documents (including pamphlets, posters, emails and articles for student newspapers) Offered support to victim-survivors before, during, and after Silent Protest Overall responsibility for logistics and all events of the Silent Protest day Facilitated 'Breaking the Silence' debriefing event

	Instituted review process regarding changes to the Protest
September– November 2014	Prepared a report for Gender Action Forum (sub-committee of University Senate) on Silent Protest and feedback received from participants and observers Prepared a manual for future organisers of the Silent Protest
2015	Continued as a member of the Silent Protest organising committee and was involved in the Protest in 2015 in a supportive role but no longer chaired the Committee

Table 1: Summary of research activities

5.3 Telling the story of a research journey

5.3.1 Exploring the possibility of research on participation in the Silent Protest

In Chapter 1: Introduction, I described my first encounter with the Silent Protest and the curiosity which it evoked. I captured my thoughts and questions in writing the following day, sharing them with colleagues, and beginning a series of conversations about the Protest. In June 2011, I met with Larissa Klazinga, the primary Silent Protest organiser since its inception in 2007. In the course of a richly instructive conversation, I raised the possibility of conducting research about participation in the Silent Protest. Her response was warm and positive, and she immediately gave me access to publicly available archival material from all the Silent Protests that had taken place to date – photographs, posters, e-mails, sign-up data, and so on; she also included me as an observer-contributor in all meetings related to the Silent Protest from that point onward. I soon discovered that, as a regular annual event, the Silent Protest had evolved and changed year-on-year in response to feedback and reflection from participants and could be described as a long-term participatory action research project whose format and ethos had been informed largely by the input of those for whom it primarily existed at that point: women who had experienced sexual violence.

My research journey continued with in-depth interviews with two organisers (one current, one past) of the Protest³. The interview with the primary organiser followed an “outsider witness practice” developed by Michael White (1995, 1997, 2002), and focused on the organiser’s intentions and hopes in organising the Protest. This process allowed a group of women who had participated in the Protest to listen in (as it were) on the interview and

³ These interviews were conducted as part of a separate research project with Dr Elmarie Kotze as lead researcher. Ethical approval was granted through Waikato University, New Zealand. Publication in preparation.

respond with their own reflections, to which the organiser could then in turn respond – a cyclical process which contributes to thickened and nuanced story construction.

Stories told during this process strengthened my sense that participating in the Protest offered something to at least some women who had experienced sexual violence that they experienced as beneficial and supportive of moving forward. I was curious as to what it was about the process that facilitated this and chose to make this investigation the focus of more extensive research; I therefore began the process of registering for doctoral studies.

During January to July the following year, I was engaged in preparing my research proposal; a pivotal event during that time was however the 2012 Silent Protest. As my proposal had not yet been submitted, I could not undertake any formal research activities and therefore opted to participate in the Protest as a silent protestor. This afforded me an embodied experience of the silencing, the wearing of the Protest t-shirt and the offering of solidarity as a social-justice ally. My mouth was taped shut at 06h50, by a young woman who identified as a rape survivor. I wore the black tape until the debrief began at about 17h30, removing it only once for several seconds in the afternoon to swallow some paracetamol when I could no longer tolerate a pounding headache – the cumulative effects of hunger, thirst and emotion had taken their toll. I participated in all the activities of the day, followed all the news articles and social media feeds, and kept extensive field notes about my observations as well as my own thoughts and responses. It is difficult to convey in academic prose the felt sense of participation in the Silent Protest. During the course of this chapter, I offer short vignettes of moments which stood out for me, with the intention of evoking in the reader some trace of that felt sense.

Vignettes from the 2012 Silent Protest⁴

Vignette One: Silencing and connection

The Hall is huge and packed with students in purple t-shirts. It is hard to believe that it's only a little after 06h30 – students just don't get up this early. Larissa [Klazinga] has just spoken, re-focusing us on our intentions for the day, warning us that this Protest will be tough. We are living, breathing placards for the day. The message of the Protest is displayed on our bodies through the t-shirts and the stark strip of black tape. We are now

⁴ These vignettes are based on entries in my research journal.

shuffling along in messy queues to get our mouths taped. Many young people have an arm draped around someone else, some hold hands. The chatter that has filled the Hall since we stood up to move to the taping stations gradually quietens and a sombre silence slides into its place as more and more people get taped. As I get to the front of the queue, a young woman cuts a strip of tape. I know her. We have spoken about her rape. She is struggling with emotion. She looks into my eyes as her hands gently press the tape down over my mouth. I don't remember what she says, but this is a moment I go back to in my mind throughout the day.

Vignette Two: Why is your mouth taped up, Mommy?

I fetch my ten-year-old daughter from school, the tape still covering my mouth. I had discussed the Protest and my participation with my daughters but clearly this was not what she had expected. She looks at me directly: "Why is your mouth taped up, Mommy? You can't talk. Take it off!" I write her a note to explain and reassure. I use hand signals and smile with my eyes, but her distress is evident. Her response to this silenced mother is visceral – fear and anger flash in her eyes.

Vignette Three: My supervisor has my back

At lunchtime, I walk across to where the die-in is taking place in the road in front of the main administration building. Most students come in groups or pairs and find a spot together and lie down, heads resting on others' bellies or bags. I make my way to an empty area and lie down rather awkwardly. Larissa instructs us to lie "as if you have been violated or murdered, not as if you are at a picnic!". I turn on my side and feel the sun warming my back, even as a cool breeze lifts my hair. An hour is a long time to lie in silence, with others but entirely alone in your thoughts. More than half the time has passed when I feel someone step in and lie down beside me. She also lies on her side and moves in closer to my back, before putting a hand on my shoulder. I turn. It is my supervisor. I smile with my eyes and turn my head back. Now the tears come. I feel in my body what it means for someone to 'have my back'. The intimacy and care of her actions produces a shift in perspective on my research that I will not be able to articulate for months to come. I can no longer remain detached at any level. I am fully inside and present, living and experiencing this research journey.

5.3.2 Stepping fully into researcher mode

Following my participation in the Protest, I prepared and submitted my research proposal. It was my intention (and this is what actually happened) to interview women who had previously experienced sexual violence and who chose to participate in the Silent Protest three times: once before, and once immediately after participating in the Protest, and again six months after participating in the Protest. My intention was to analyse their narrated experiences of participation and its impact, using a narrative-discursive approach in order to better understand how they made sense of the impact of participating in the Protest. I would then write up my 'findings', offering back to the Protest organisers for their consideration, as well as writing an academic thesis. At this stage, my research was not intended to be interventionist in any sense.

Before I even submitted my research proposal, however, I came to realise that rather than me deciding upon an ethical approach, my research was calling me to account as an ethical being. I only understood later that I had already become a witness: "By witness is meant a mode of responding to the other's plight that ... becomes an ethical involvement. One must not only utter a truth *about* a victim but also remain true *to* her or him" (Hatley, 2000, p. 3).

In the role of witness, I faced a dilemma: I could take a more active role in responding to the expressed needs of victim-survivors who participated in the Silent Protest, or I could simply observe, take notes, and make recommendations.

One element that I had felt was missing in the Silent Protest planning was a space for participants to reflect upon and process the experience of participating in the Protest. During the post-event evaluation meetings, others also raised concerns about the lack of formalised follow-up support after the Protest for victim-survivors who had spoken out and had worn the Rape Survivor t-shirt. We were aware that each of the various events making up the Protest – and particularly the 'Breaking the Silence' event – were intense and emotionally charged, potentially eliciting distress in various forms as participants connected with memories of their experience(s) of violation (Mason & Lodrick, 2013; Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016; Weingarten, 2012).

Whilst there was fairly extensive support and care available and enacted on the day of the Silent Protest by both peers and organisers, as well through an open door policy at the

University Counselling Centre on that day, once the Silent Protest ended, the only support available was a 24 hour crisis line which would allow a caller to access a University Counselling Centre staff member. The available follow-up care was therefore individualised and pathologising – one could choose to access it if one was not coping. There was no context provided in which participants’ responses to the challenges of participating in the Silent Protest – and in particular, to witnessing the stories told by victim-survivors at the ‘Breaking the Silence’ event – could be normalised and contextualised, or where they could even process and reflect upon those responses. As trauma expert Kaethe Weingarten (2012, personal communication) puts it: “nobody would be okay after listening to those stories”. She suggests that every participant would have needed to withdraw from the immediacy of the pain on some level, whether through a conscious decision to leave or a less conscious “dissociative numbing-out”. A further challenge, particularly for South African women listening to the stories, is that they would have no defense against the story, no option of soothing themselves by thinking ‘it will never happen to me’ as sexual violence remains a very real and present threat in the South African context.

My own dilemma at this point centred on the fact that although there was general consensus regarding the importance of providing an alternative, safe, post-Protest space in which to process the experience of participating, no-one within the University community was coming forward to offer this. I had not yet submitted my research proposal so was not yet officially a researcher in this context, yet I already felt constrained by my perceptions of this anticipated role. Should I not simply be observing and trying to make sense of things as they were? Although my approach was both qualitative and feminist, I had lingering positivist ideas about the importance of some level of detachment to ensure the academic rigour of the research.

Weingarten’s (2000, 2003, 2010, 2016) Witnessing Model helped me to understand and respond to this first ethical challenge of my research process: the responsibility that witnessing calls forth. Weingarten (2000) proposes a simple two by two grid similar to the one below, to unpack the implications of different witness positions:

	Aware	Unaware
Empowered	1	2
Disempowered	4	3

Figure 5: Witness positions according to Weingarten’s (2000) Witnessing Model

The Witnessing Model depicts four positions one might occupy when witnessing and possibly responding to a traumatic event, or to the narration of a traumatic event. The four quadrants or positions arise from at the intersection of awareness and empowerment: “One’s position as a witness is influenced by whether or not one is aware and whether or not one feels empowered in relation to any aspect of what one is witnessing” (Weingarten, 2003, p. 27).

A person who occupies Position 1, when witnessing violence or a violation, is both aware of what they have witnessed and empowered in the sense of being clear about what action to take in response and having the skills to take effective action. A person occupying Position 2 is unaware of the nature or meaning of what they are witnessing and yet takes action in response. This position is potentially the most dangerous to others as “their actions will be ineffective at best and harmful at worst” (Weingarten, 2016, p. 203) and if they are in a position associated with power or influence, these effects will be exacerbated. In Position 3, one is unaware and disempowered, which seems innocuous at first glance; this position can however also have significant negative effects if the witness fails to recognise the nature of what they are witnessing, what is needed, and how to respond effectively. Position 4 is one that Weingarten (2016) suggests a person occupies when they are aware of what is happening and what is needed but are either uncertain of how to respond or do not have access to the internal or external resources needed to respond.

Each witness position has consequences for an individual, with ripples out to family, community and broader society. However, the witness positions are not fixed, and one may shift from unawareness to awareness, or from disempowerment to empowerment, and vice versa.

If, for example, if we apply the Witnessing Model to general participation in the Silent Protest: most students who sign up for the Silent Protest are fairly unaware of and disempowered in relation to the totality of experiencing sexual violence (there is also the possibility that they are unaware and empowered: unaware of the nature and implications of sexual violence but in a position to perpetrate it). Indeed, due to the Protest's reputation and the sheer numbers participating it can create the perception that it is a 'cool' (interesting or trendy) thing to do, particularly for first year students. If, however, students participate in all the events of the day and are open to bearing witness, it is likely that they will shift into a position of greater awareness regarding the extent and implications of sexual violence in South Africa. They may fluctuate between feeling empowered and disempowered as the Protest day progresses: they are taking action ('doing something') through their participation in the marches and events, but they may feel disempowered to alleviate the suffering of those who have been violated, or to stop the sexual violence from re-occurring. In particular, the experience of bearing witness to the testimonies at the Breaking the Silence event can leave Protestors feeling not only aware but horrified and distressed, and still disempowered. The 'Take Back the Night' march is intended to shift the mood back to being loud, empowered and activist, but does not always succeed in this – Protestors are tired and emotionally distressed, with many having already "numbed out" (Weingarten, 2012, personal communication) as a way of protecting themselves from the intense emotion of the experience.

It is therefore necessary to provide Protestors with an opportunity to respond consciously and with agentic purpose to that to which they have borne witness. The question was how to facilitate and achieve this.

The Silent Protest organisers and reviewers seemed to find themselves in the fourth quadrant of the Witnessing Model: aware that there were unmet needs but uncertain about how to meet those. I realised, however, that I occupied a different position – I was aware. I was also empowered, in the sense that although I had not previously organised or facilitated an event like this, I had sufficient training, skills and experience (as well as access to the creativity of other skilled people) to plan and develop an appropriate response.

Being aware and empowered implies a responsibility to act in some way, in response to a painful situation. I was a human being with particular resources, faced with a clear need that

I could meet, and this constituted an ethical and value-based choice. Would I, to recall Hatley's (2000) words, remain in the detached researcher position, uttering so-called truths *about* the protestors, or would I choose to *be true to* them? Whilst it seemed to transgress the boundaries of the researcher role I had envisaged, I chose what seemed to me to be an ethical response.

In consultation with Protest organisers, survivor participants and therapists, I proposed and offered to organise what we came to call the 'Debrief Café' which was intended to be a welcoming and creative space set up for the day after the Silent Protest and open to any students or staff who had participated. One could spend time quietly processing and reflecting through a range of creative activities or continue the conversations which the Protest had evoked. We would use a large hall with several breakaway rooms and set up various stations including: spaces for creative expression using paints, crayons and pastels, collage materials and clay; a space for jigsaw puzzles; spaces for writing reflections in prose or poetry; a quiet space for prayer or meditation; and comfortable spaces where refreshments were on offer, for simply hanging out and chatting. At various intervals, group movement activities such as circle dancing and yoga would be offered, and Counselling Psychology interns would be on hand for conversation, if needed, all day. People could come and go as they felt comfortable doing, and all participation would be entirely voluntary.

Offering to organise the Debrief Café was congruent with a feminist research paradigm which should "embody an ethic of caring" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 778) and in which the process of research is as important as the outcome. It was hoped that the process of this research intervention would in itself be somehow transformative, in that it would offer participants an opportunity to connect self-care with political action, and to critically reflect on their own experiences whilst firmly locating them within a broader socio-political context. I accounted for my involvement in this intervention by referring to it as an ethical response, a 'giving back', or an 'add-on'. It was not an unusual step, given the cyclical evolution of the Protest that had taken place since its inception.

The Debrief Café proposal was accepted and supported by the primary organiser of the Silent Protest and the Head of the Student Counselling Centre at Rhodes University, who offered

her staff and interns to assist with facilitating the Debrief Café. This became part of my research proposal as submitted to and approved by the Higher Degrees Committee.

5.3.2.1 Initial research proposal: an ethical starting point⁵

My research proposal included a detailed ethics proposal, necessitated by the fact that I would be researching a so-called vulnerable population. By virtue of the trauma they have suffered, women who have been sexually violated are constructed within research contexts as a “damaged” and therefore “vulnerable” population (Sharratt, 2011). As I discussed in Chapter 4, this discursive construction of those who have experienced rape is problematic, for the way in which it positions women. I will discuss this further in Chapter 8. In terms of accounting for research ethics, however, this remains the status quo.

Conducting research with a ‘vulnerable population’ had several important implications for the conceptualisation and planning of my research. The first was that I needed to consciously and continuously reflect on the potential impacts of all my interactions with my research contributors and to make careful and considered choices in relation to my research practices. A second implication was that I had to account for these to the University Ethics Review Committee in a way that satisfied the exacting requirements of the University ethics code. I needed to signal my intention to implement various additional cautionary measures designed to protect both those who chose to participate in the research and myself as researcher.

I was aware that when those who have been sexually violated revisit their experiences of sexual violence, even when they choose to do so, they may have strong responses of fear, sadness or anger, and that speaking of the experience may trigger flashbacks and/or nightmares (Draucker, 1999). It was therefore made clear to my research contributors during the informed consent process that the research was not about their experience of sexual violation itself, and that they would not be asked to talk about it (see Appendix A and B for documents sent to prospective research participants).

⁵ I drew on an earlier version of this section, when writing a chapter which was subsequently published: Barker, K. & Macleod, C. I. (2018). Bearing Witness to ‘Irreparable Harm’: Incorporating Affective Activity as Practice into Ethics. In C.I. Macleod, J. Marx, P. Mnyaka & G. Treharne (Eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethics in Critical Research* (pp. 179-194). Palgrave Macmillan. My thinking has moved on somewhat since writing the chapter, but some of this section strongly resembles content in the chapter. I have indicated where I quote directly from the chapter.

I was also very clear in my own mind about my own identity and positioning: in this context I was researcher rather than therapist. I had been practicing as a pastoral therapist for seven years and had facilitated retreats and workshops for much longer, working primarily with women. I was therefore able to recognise and respond appropriately to signs of distress and traumatisation. However, I was approaching my interactions with research contributors with the intention of listening, learning and understanding rather than attempting to facilitate change (Stetler, 2010).

In preparing this ethics protocol and addressing the concerns of the University Ethics Review Committee, I positioned both myself and my research contributors as rational, intentional beings who could and would work within the boundaries specified in the detailed informed consent document. From this position, one could assume that the researcher was in control of the interaction, and that engaging in ethical research would be straightforward; I took responsibility for ensuring that this was so. There were however several factors which both I and the Ethics Review Committee which approved my ethics protocol failed to take into account.

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 3, a poststructuralist account of subjectivity is that it is fluid, changing and relational, in that we position others and are positioned ourselves in moment-by-moment interactions. Secondly, contrary to positivist commitments to objectivity, it is clear that our encounters with human contributors – and, many have argued, with any subject of research, be it living or non-living – are never purely rational or cognitive. Affect, embodied sensing, and intuition – that ineffable gut-level knowing which often defies logic – profoundly influence our research practices and our responses to our human contributors and their responses to us and to the research process itself, in ways that are not always fully conscious (see, for example, Chadwick, 2021). These dimensions are, however, seldom considered relevant in constructing ethical research practice, apart from demonstrating that one can respond appropriately to any distress which may arise.

Thirdly, and crucially, our research contributors encounter us and position us in ways that we could never have anticipated when writing an ethics proposal. What they choose to share with us and how they choose to engage with the research process, positions us in particular ways, or rather, invites us into subject positions which we can then accept, refuse or re-

negotiate, each choice having an impact on the contributor, the researcher, and their relationship. Events beyond both researcher and research contributors' control, within the research context, can also position contributors and researchers in ways that require choices and responses that cannot be anticipated.

The researcher is therefore not ultimately in control of research ethics, beyond putting the basic requirements in place. It is a relational and dialogical encounter in which ethical ways of being and responses require moment by moment, real-time decision-making.

Whilst I value the role of an ethics protocol in holding researchers accountable to the relevant standards and practices, having such protocols approved can lull us into believing that once all the necessary boxes are ticked – such as getting signed informed consent forms and password protecting the data – the ethical requirements have been adequately met. It can also leave us unprepared for the ethically important decisions: what Paul Komesaroff (1995) calls “micro-ethical” choices. Every stage of the research process and beyond poses these unexpected ethical challenges and dilemmas. In my own experience, my responses to these challenges arose directly from my relationships with the research contributor(s), and were informed by affect, embodied sensing and intuition, as much as thought.

Initially, my overwhelming sense was that I was getting things wrong – I was not being a good and effective researcher, but I was unable to do otherwise. I kept responding to unanticipated situations that arose in ways that seemed to transgress traditional researcher identity boundaries. I highlight some of these dilemmas and responses as the narrative of the research journey unfolds below.

5.3.2.2 Encountering the face of the Other

My research proposal was duly submitted and approved. Research contributor recruitment took place via the online sign-up process for the 2013 Silent Protest. I sent individual e-mails to every Protestor who expressed interest in receiving information about research regarding the Silent Protest (see Appendix A). The e-mail provided details about the project and the criteria for participation (female; had experienced sexual violation; and intended to participate in the 2013 Silent Protest). I requested a return e-mail confirming their willingness to participate.

I then began my research interviews, conducting face to face interviews, prefaced by securing informed consent for participation and audio recording (see Appendix B for informed consent form). Interviews were semi-structured in that they were guided by an interview question schedule (see Appendix C). The interview conversations were however often wide-ranging, and often contributors shared far more than was asked. Most contributors shared their experience of sexual violation, even though they were assured this was not necessary. Each interview set up a relationship between human beings (however temporary) and, whatever may have been agreed when the informed consent was signed, it was in the moment-by-moment negotiation of these interactions that my ethical integrity as researcher was really tested.

I believed that my biggest ethical challenge would be to avoid evoking a traumatic response in my research contributors whilst at the same time not crossing the boundary between research and therapy. What I had not anticipated however was that the danger did not arise at the boundary between researcher and therapist: it was rather at the boundary between researcher and fellow human being that I was challenged and needed to make unanticipated ethical decisions. I reflected on this in a chapter co-authored with my research supervisor at the time (Barker & Macleod, 2018):

In the research interviews, I met with real women in real bodies that had been violated. Each contributor had her own unique story, most often intensely painful, told through those very bodies that had suffered and/or were still suffering. Most of the women chose to tell more than was asked of them. Many chose to share the story of what had happened to them, and for some, it was the first time they had done so: this was what they needed and/or expected from the research encounter. It may be that, due to the focus of the research being participation in the Silent Protest where the emphasis is on breaking silences and speaking out, some of the research participants chose the medium of the research interview as an opportunity to do just that. However, whether or not they narrated the violation, each participant invited me into a relationship in which they asked me to see them, hear them, attend to them and acknowledge them as fellow human beings rather than as research participants whose only value existed in the responses they offered to pre-defined research questions (p. 183-184)

My research contributors therefore constructed the relationship through the nature of their interactions with me and their sharing. They invited me into the role of witness: one who stands with, who listens and hears, who seeks to understand, who is changed in the listening, and who cannot help but respond. A witness has different ethical obligations to those of a researcher. As for Arthur Frank (2000, p. 359), it seemed very clear to me that I had to *enter* a relationship before I could analyse it or anything that emerged from it: in other words, ethics came before methodology, and shaped methodology in an ongoing way.

Research ethics also required me to acknowledge, with Frank (2005, p.968), that speaking about one's life within a research setting does more than simply produce an account or report of 'what happened to me' or 'what I know'; it sets processes in motion which can change the trajectory of one's life. What we ask of our contributors, how we ask, and how we respond to what is told, are all therefore of crucial importance.

My contributors' positioning of me in our early interviews and the nature of what they shared influenced how I approached subsequent interviews. I began to ask questions that deviated from the interview schedule but were informed by the narrative therapy approach that I draw on as a pastoral therapist. When someone has experienced trauma, the line of questioning and listening have a dual focus – we ask about and listen for both what happened to the person *and* what they did in response. The assumption is that every person experiencing a traumatic event (such as sexual violence) will make choices to act in ways which may not have even been noticed, such as lying extremely still or smiling at the perpetrator, in an attempt to stay safe and/or minimise the impact of the trauma. As I wrote previously: "Such questions help the person to recount the narrative from an agentic position and to recognise themselves as having been active and responsive even when they felt most powerless" (Barker & Macleod, 2018, p. 184).

My supervisor at the time agreed that such a line of questioning was both ethical and appropriate, and to refrain from doing this, when I believed the approach to be beneficial in supporting the construction of narratives that emphasised agency, would indeed be unethical:

In addition, hearing the stories of violation evoked a helplessness and despair in me which echoed the helplessness and despair expressed by many of the women in the

telling of their stories. Thus, both my own and the women's well-being was enhanced by pursuing a line of questioning which emphasised survival and resilience (Barker & Macleod, p. 184).

We did agree, however, that when a research contributor had shared details of sexual violation during an interview, I would explain the limitations of the research relationship, discuss the possibility of counselling, and offer to make a referral if they so wished, making it clear that I could not take on a counselling role. Later events, however, suggested that the lines between researcher and therapist were still blurred. Whilst a research interview is not therapy, Campbell and Wasco (2000) suggest that simply sharing your story in a safe space with an attentive and compassionate listener can be therapeutic. It seemed that some contributors responded more to their felt sense of the interview rather than to what I said about the research relationship.

5.3.3 Silent Protest 2013

My first round of interviews took place in the two weeks preceding the 2013 Silent Protest. I was involved in the events leading up to the Silent Protest, including the Survivor briefing held two days before the Protest. This was an opportunity for victim-survivors to collect their Rape Survivor t-shirts if this was what the shirt they were choosing to wear, and for those who had worn the t-shirt in previous years to share their experiences. Victim-survivors were cautioned about possible responses within themselves and from others and were provided with information about where and how to access support on the day of the Silent Protest and beyond.

I participated on the day as a Solidarity protestor, which meant that my mouth was untaped. I wanted to be available to talk with any of my research contributors on the day, should they wish to do so. Several of them made brief contact with me at various points in the day.

In 2013, three significant changes were implemented: two were structural changes in response to feedback and discussion after previous Protests, and the third was a new initiative led by alumni who had participated in the Protest. The first change meant that men could choose to sign up in any category of participation. Whilst there were a number of men who signed up as Silent Protesters, none chose to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt. In all, 1100 Protestors signed up and participated in the Rhodes University Silent Protest that year.

The second change was the addition of the Debrief Café, and the final significant development was that the Protest took place in other universities and city centres. Around Valentine's Day in 2013, the University of Stellenbosch held a Silent Protest against sexual violence, using red gaffer tape for the silencing, inspired by the Rhodes University Silent Protest. Then, on the same day as the Rhodes Silent Protest on 19 April, both the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) staged similar protests, with another held in the centre of Cape Town. In total, around 3000 people around the country participated in a Silent Protest on the same day.

Vignettes from the 2013 Silent Protest

Vignette 1: The impossibility of speaking

I had seen numerous young people around town in their purple t-shirts. In one store, I watched intrigued, as a young woman with her mouth taped up tried to communicate with a friend using signs and grunts. He was trying hard to understand: guessing, commenting, trying to find the words she was looking for, but without success. She kept shaking her head, frustrated that he wasn't getting it. I was struck by the power of the analogy. How many women have experienced sexual violence and have tried to tell their story, only to find that they do not even have language for describing what was done to them. What words are adequate to convey all that has been violated? And when they manage to scrape the words together and speak, most are ignored, silenced, misunderstood or misrepresented.

Vignette 2: Witnessing a choice

The day before the Silent Protest, I had sat with one of my research contributors for more than an hour whilst she grappled with deciding whether or not to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt. I saw her soon after I arrived at the Hall the next morning, and she opened her arms for a hug. She still was not sure. Half an hour later, whilst we were walking in silence in the rain during the morning march, she spotted me and ran over. She was wearing a hoodie which zipped up in the front. It was unzipped and her hands were thrust deep into its pockets. As she approached me, she opened the hoodie so I could see the Rape Survivor shirt underneath. She looked deeply into my eyes in silence and then we both smiled through tears.

Vignette 3: Living the research

At lunchtime, I was walking towards the main administration building where the die-in was to be held when I was joined by my supervisor and another colleague. The corridors inside the building were already full and we picked our way over prone bodies and positioned ourselves in the doorway of a side corridor. We lay down near to one another but not touching. Music began to play, and I heard the sound of sobbing. Turning my head, I saw that it was my supervisor who had supported my back during the die-in the previous year. Unsure at first of how to respond, I put out my hand to rest it on her arm. The wracking sobs continued, and I gradually shifted my body until I could put my arms around her and hold her.

5.3.3.1 The Debrief Café

On the Saturday morning, my family and I arrived early to set up the Debrief Café space. It was another cold and rainy day. People started arriving at around 09h00, coming and going as they wished. Between 150 and 200 students passed through the Debrief Café that day, some coming for a brief time to participate in a yoga class or have a cup of coffee, others staying for hours and producing artworks in a variety of media. The art materials were particularly popular, as were the doughnuts. Music, conversation, laughter and connection characterised the space, with students taking the opportunity to use the art materials to respond compassionately and consciously to what they had witnessed, in themselves or in others.

Most students left their artworks up on the walls of the venue, to become part of the Silent Protest archive. Some simply expressed refusal of or resistance to the violence they had experienced (see, for example, Image 3 below), whilst others began to construct alternative stories (for example, Images 1, 2 and 4 below).



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4

Figure 6: Photographs of artwork from the Debrief Café (photographs: Kim Barker)

5.3.4 The months following the 2013 Silent Protest

Within a week after the Protest, I began my post-Protest interviews with my research contributors. I also conducted once-off interviews with several of the organisers and some staff members who had been involved with the Silent Protest over a number of years. I was transcribing the interviews at the same time, feeling emotionally very close to the narrated experiences of my research contributors. I also facilitated a monthly research discussion group for those of my contributors who wished to join. The focus of each conversation was left up to those present and unfolded organically. I was struck by the range of emotions and opinions which populated the discussions, which took place within the group space, where my contributors could shift from hilarious laughter to anger to sadness, in one conversation. It was around this time that I was required to make another ethical decision:

About a month after the Silent Protest and just after the second round of interviews, I received a call from a University residence warden. One of my research contributors was having a panic attack and had been rushed to the Casualty Department of the local hospital. She had begged the warden to call “her therapist” (me) and ask her to come. On receiving the call, I stopped long enough to wonder which ethical boundary I was crossing. But I went (Barker & Macleod, 2018, p. 185).

This young woman continued to meet with me on a regular basis and the relationship shifted to one of mentorship and then friendship. Years later, I was invited to this contributor’s wedding.

Other contributors sent text messages or popped in to chat about events or issues in their lives entirely unrelated to the Silent Protest; each time I emphasised that I was happy to have a conversation but that it did not constitute therapy.

My contributors taught me that irrespective of how I as researcher chose to position myself in relation to them, they encountered and positioned me in ways that I had not anticipated when I was writing my ethics protocol. I could then accept, refuse or re-negotiate this positioning – and in doing so, I was positioning them. Each choice had an impact on the contributor, on me, and on the research relationship. They also resisted my positioning of them, particularly as vulnerable. I discuss this further in Chapter 8.

5.3.4.1 Summary of demographic data, interviews and group sessions⁶

In total, I interviewed 31 women as research contributors in 2013. All interviews were audio-recorded, with permission, and transcribed.

Sixteen women were interviewed 3 times: before the 2013 Silent Protest, within 2 weeks after the Protest and again 6 months after the Protest. The average duration of each interview was an hour and a half, although most initial interviews and one-off interviews were longer.

Seven women were interviewed twice. 5 were not available for the final interview after 6 months, and 2 joined the research project after the Protest and so, did not participate in the pre-Protest interview.

⁶ This section was added at the request of one of my examiners

One woman withdrew from the research after the Silent Protest and so was only interviewed once. The remaining 7 participants were only interviewed once as they had participated in the Silent Protest on multiple occasions, and most had been involved in some way in the organising.

Five of my research contributors were staff members and the rest were students, across a range of years and faculties. 15 contributors were people of colour and 16 were Caucasian. All identified as women at the time of the interviews.

All three voluntary discussion groups were audio-recorded, transcribed and included in the data to be analysed.

Posts on social media and articles published in print and online media, as well as radio articles and television news clips were also considered during data analysis. I kept extensive handwritten and typed field notes and drew on these when constructing the story of the research journey.

5.3.5 Threat to the continued existence of the Silent Protest

The primary organiser of the Protest, who had organised and led it over the seven years in which it had taken place, asked me to present my initial findings at a University Gender Imbizo organised by the Gender Action Forum (GenAct), a sub-committee of the University Senate tasked with promoting gender awareness and gender equity. By this time, we were aware that the organiser would be leaving the University at the end of 2013, a departure which was not voluntary, and which had been the outcome of a dispute with the University. In the same week in which the Imbizo took place, the proposed University calendar for 2014 was publicised and the Silent Protest had been assigned a date, with the following wording: "Provisional – if students wish to organise it". I had been closely observing the planning and implementation of the Protest for two years, and it was clear to me that the task was beyond anything a student could manage in their spare time. Far more than that, however, this represented an utter dismissal on the part of the University management of the significance of the Protest both for victim-survivors and the University community as a whole.

This was not entirely surprising, given that earlier in the year, less than a month after the Silent Protest, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor had organised an academic protest march against

rape and gender-based violence in response to the brutal gang rape and murder of a teenager in the Western Cape. The call for participation in this particular march had gone out to the entire Rhodes University community:

In recognition of the need for communities to reject gender-based interpersonal violence, the academy is tasked with leading by example and encouraging the communities in which they exist to take a stand against violence against women.

This notice entirely failed to acknowledge the Silent Protest which had taken place only weeks before. When the above notice came out, I was both angry and uncertain. What was an appropriate response? Did I have any business saying anything? My outrage won however and I sent a letter to the Vice Chancellor and Rhodes' senior management (see Appendix D). I raised a number of points; of most importance to me was the following:

I find it surprising that no acknowledgement is made of the ways in which the student body at [this university] has been taking a very clear stand against gender-based violence over at least the past seven years, in particular through the annual Silent Protest. In this respect, the student body at [this university] has, in fact, led the way nationally as this challenging and unique protest has grown to be the largest protest action against gender-based violence in the country with more than 1500 students participating on 19 April 2013, a little over two weeks ago.

...

However, what concerns me even more is that there is no acknowledgement at all of the women and men right here on campus who have experienced gender-based/sexual violence. Two weeks ago they were courageously wearing rape survivor t-shirts and telling their stories. What message does it send to them that few academics came out in support of them during that protest but are quite willing to march for a disembodied and abstracted 'cause'? Having conducted more than 40 interviews over recent weeks with survivors of sexual violence who have participated in the Silent Protest, it is clear to me that the (perhaps unintended) insensitivity and disrespect inherent in this contradiction will be noticed and felt.

My letter went unanswered until after the academic protest, a lack of response which prompted me to take further action. I sent out the following notice to the student body of the University:

On Tuesday 21 May 'the academy' at [this university] is holding a march against gender-based violence. ... Staff and students have been asked to participate in full academic regalia. Unfortunately, most of us students do not own or have access to academic regalia. But we do have our Silent Protest t-shirts. We encourage all students who own a Silent Protest t-shirt (all categories) to put it on at lunchtime on Tuesday and gather at the admin building end of the lawns. Our presence will welcome the academic marchers as they arrive and express our solidarity and ongoing resistance to gender-based violence in all its forms.

Our 'welcoming' of the academic march was intended both to be a show of solidarity and a refusal to have the Silent Protest ignored by the University management. I was invited to meet with the Vice-Chancellor after the academic protest, and what was clear in that meeting was that the devaluing of the Silent Protest was due, in some degree, to the devaluing of the primary organiser's work due to the ongoing dispute she was engaged in with the University.

In taking this action, I had again consciously chosen activism over passive observation. I did not realise that speaking at the Gender Imbizo would catalyse further difficult decisions about the extent and limitations of my commitment to the Protest.

By the time the Gender Imbizo began, the other attendees had seen the proposed year calendar and it was also clear to them that the intention of its compilers was for the Silent Protest to quietly disappear. The presentation of my initial findings showed the significance of the Protest for the majority of my research contributors. What was particularly important was the predictability of the Protest taking place year after year. A number of my contributors had participated over several years, with a growing sense of choice, agency and empowerment. I argued that it was important for the Protest to continue – and to continue without interruption once the primary organiser had left.

The other attendees at the Gender Imbizo took this up and asked if I would repeat my presentation at the Academic Leadership Forum, a space where I could address the Deans of all faculties. I did so, and a decision was taken on that occasion that the Silent Protest should continue – and receive institutional support.

Shortly after the meeting, I was approached to consider taking up a leadership and organisational role, in terms of practical arrangements for the 2014 Silent Protest, which

placed me in an extremely conflicted position. I knew what was involved in organising the Protest and I was entering the third and supposedly final year of my doctoral studies. However, it seemed no-one else at the University had the capacity at that stage to organise the Protest, given their other job commitments. It also became clear to me that this would be a unique opportunity to implement some of the changes to the Protest that my research contributors had suggested in our various conversations. If I did not take the opportunity, it was possible that the Protest might shift in other directions, depending upon who took over – or it may no longer take place at all.

I decided to take it on, and to embrace and acknowledge a feminist-inspired methodological shift to incorporate a participatory action research cycle. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research methodology having the express intention of bringing about beneficial change or transformation in attitudes, practices and/or ways of relating. Definitions of this approach (Brabeck, 2004; Brydon-Miller, Maguire & McIntyre, 2004; Hall, 2001; McTaggart, 1997; Walker, 1998; Williams & Cervin, 2004; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996) emphasise the following key elements of successful PAR:

- a group of people identify a problem or a concern within their own practice(s)
- they assume joint responsibility for solving the problem/improving the situation, and commit themselves to taking action to bring about positive changes
- they work with engaged researchers in the same co-generative process (Greenwood & Levin, 2007)
- issues of ownership, agency and power are acknowledged and negotiated in an ongoing way
- the group engages in a cyclical process of planning, action, observation, evaluation and critical reflection (Zuber-Skerritt 1996, p. 3)
- the action research process allows them to learn from their own experience and to make their experience available as a resource for others (McTaggart 1997, p. 27).

Thus, according to Brabeck (2004) “...the research process begins with real-life problems and ends (we hope) with real-life changes” (p. 44). In fact, according to Brydon-Miller (2004) the validity of PAR is determined by the extent to which it impacts on the community involved: “...PAR is founded in the notion that action and collective reflection on that action in themselves constitute a valid form of knowledge generation and that the legitimacy of the

research endeavour can be judged in part on its success in addressing community concerns”(p. 14).

However, PAR is not simply a methodology for conducting research. It is a “political statement” and “theory of knowledge” which “affirms people’s right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them” (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. 10) and to actively participate in any actions taken to effect change and in the reflective knowledge generation process which follows.

This approach resonated with what I had already learnt about the Protest: in a sense, each research contributor that I had interviewed was involved in her own action research. The cycle of action and reflection resulting in changes in attitudes, thinking and behaviour and leading into further cycles of action and reflection is offered to all who participate, largely due to the consistent, annual occurrence of the Protest. Certainly, for many of my research contributors, this was a key element in their narratives of participation (I discuss this further in Chapter 7). The Protest organiser had also been committed to reflection and change, year after year, since the Protest’s inception, so the introduction of further change fitted with the ethos of previous years.

It could be argued, however, that this was not PAR in its purest form. The reflections on previous Protests had emerged from a wide range of conversations that I had engaged in during the two years of my research journey to date. Most striking though, were the reflections of the organisers and my research contributors, although they were not necessarily the ones who would be involved in implementing the changes.


5.3.6 Organising the 2014 Silent Protest

The first step, after I had agreed to co-ordinate the Silent Protest, was to invite participation in conceptualising and planning the 2014 Protest, by establishing an organising committee. Although, as a woman, my life was fundamentally shaped by the insidious reality of sexual violence, I had not experienced the impacts of a specific incident of sexual violation myself, and I did not want to make decisions on behalf of, or in any way speak for, those who had. I also wanted to ensure that there was a structure in place that would support the sustainability of the Silent Protest rather than have its continued existence depend upon one person. I

extended the invitation to all staff and students at the University, with particular focus on those who had previously participated in the Silent Protest and my own research contributors.

This committee was established in February 2014, meeting on a regular basis. I chaired the committee but the meeting format was informal and democratic. Based upon members' experiences of previous Silent Protests, feedback gleaned from the wider University community, input from academics in a range of disciplines, and feedback from women who had experienced sexual violence via my research interviews and direct input, a number of changes were implemented in 2014.

Table 2: Changes made to the Silent Protest 2014: Clarifying messages and disrupting constructions of sexual violence

Change implemented	Reasoning behind the change
<p>1. The wording and images on the Silent Protestor and Solidarity t-shirts were changed from 'Sexual Violence = Silence' to a cyclical image, with the emphasis on 'Breaking the Cycle' of silence and sexual violence. The wording on the back of the t-shirts was also changed.</p>  <p>Old logo</p>	<p>Feedback from numerous sources had suggested that many people found the messaging on the t-shirts ambiguous: did they mean that sexual violence should or should not equal silence? Statistics were updated on the t-shirts to include statistics for male rape.</p>  <p>New logo</p>
<p>2. A new t-shirt was introduced, which read Survivor as another option, in addition to the Rape Survivor t-shirt</p>	<p>The Survivor t-shirt was introduced so that participants who had experienced a sexual violation which they would not call rape could still publicly acknowledge the violation.</p>

Change implemented	Reasoning behind the change
<p>3. On both the Rape Survivor and Survivor t-shirts we added the word 'AND' together with a block of white space under 'Rape Survivor' or 'Survivor'. Those who wore the t-shirts were invited to write descriptions or statements of their own choice into the white space.</p>	<p>We were aware that public disclosure by wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt invited an essentialised identity claim; it was all that those seeing the t-shirt would know about the wearer. We wanted to resist and disrupt the discursive construction of 'rape survivors' as having an identity dominated or obliterated by the violation. It was an important disruptive addition, both politically and personally, for those who had experienced and acknowledged being raped.</p>

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<p>4. In our communications, the committee was intentional about emphasising the impact of sexual violence on both women and men. We invited both a male and female rape survivor to speak at the pre-Protest event, and the man who spoke also participated in the Silent Protest</p>	<p>Although there was concern that acknowledging male rape would shift the politics and dynamics of the Protest, the organising committee felt it was unethical not to do so, given the prevalence of child abuse and male rape in South Africa.</p>
<p>5. The committee specifically invited University staff to participate in the Protest, by issuing a variety of communications and making presentations to a number of staff groupings, in order to inform staff about the Protest.</p>	<p>In my second research discussion group, contributors spoke at length about the non-participation of University staff in the Silent Protest. We were also aware that there would be a proportion of staff in all divisions who would have experienced sexual violence themselves, and the support of their colleagues</p>

	could be significant in their own healing journeys, even if they did not disclose their experiences.
5. In 2013, the Debrief Cafe was held the day after the Silent Protest. In 2014, the University Counselling Centre offered a debrief space both on the day of the Protest and the day after.	Due to the positive feedback about the Debrief Café and the sense that it offered a helpful space for containment and processing of difficult emotions, the University Counselling Centre staff undertook to facilitate the space both on the day of the Protest and the following day.

In 2014, 1735 Protestors ordered and collected t-shirts. There were other Protestors who wore their t-shirts from previous years and joined in the events of the day.

My involvement in the period leading up to and beyond the Silent Protest was intense and full-time. I made presentations regarding the Protest to any University grouping that would have me, particularly where staff were involved. I met with women who had experienced rape, activists, and the Vice Chancellor as well as Housekeeping and Maintenance staff.

On the day of the Silent Protest, I took final responsibility for all arrangements and logistics, although the organising committee and a range of committed staff and student activists managed many of the details. I ran from the back to the front of marches to ensure all were safe and road traffic was being managed. I hugged and laughed and cried my way through the day. At the end of the day, I facilitated the Breaking the Silence debriefing event at the local Cathedral.

Vignettes from the 2014 Silent Protest

Vignette 1: The biggest, noisiest, 'purplest' Silent Protestor

Three weeks before the SP I get a call from a young man I don't know. "I support the Silent Protest," he says. "I have a sister. Things have got to change. I won't be here on the day of the Protest, but I have an old Landrover. Do you want it for the day? You can do whatever you want with it. Put posters on it, paint it. I am having it resprayed when I get back".

The Saturday before the Protest, some of the organising committee members and I get to work with purple spraypaint. It takes hours, but the effect is beautiful. We get branding applied and when I see it drive onto campus the day before the Protest, I am overcome.

Vignette 2: Holding the space

It is nearly 18h00 and I stand at the front of the Cathedral. Students are still arriving and every space is packed. Tapes have been removed from mouths to rousing chants, and food has been distributed. There is the hum of chatter as Protestors break their fast. The day has drained me, but I am now energised and alert as adrenaline floods my body. This is the moment I have been most afraid of. I look out at more than a thousand faces, recognising within the crowd friends, colleagues, research contributors, women and men whose stories have been shared with me over the days, months and years preceding this moment. I wonder if I have the strength to hold all that this space contains. Voices chatter in my head. I breathe a prayer, deeply, consciously, slowly – and walk towards the microphone.

5.3.7 After the Silent Protest: reflections, feedback and reports

After the Silent Protest, the organising committee invited written and/or verbal feedback from the University community, particularly those who had participated, regarding the changes made and any other feedback concerning the Protest. I monitored press articles and social media posts for feedback. In response to one particularly scathing *Letter to the Editor* in a local newspaper, I wrote a piece outlining the thinking behind the Silent Protest, which was published in the same newspaper, as an opinion piece (see Appendix E). I also sent a questionnaire to all my research contributors to elicit their feedback about changes made (see Appendix F) as well as to the Silent Protest organising committee members (Appendix G). A post-Protest reflection and evaluation meeting was also held, which was open to anyone who wished to attend.

The feedback on the changes made was overwhelmingly positive, and I discuss some of this feedback in more detail in Chapter 9. Suggestions were made for further changes, and these were discussed by the organising committee for incorporation into the 2015 Silent Protest. I also reported back to GenAct regarding the feedback and reflections, and suggested future changes, thus extending the action research ethos into a further cycle of action and reflection (see Appendix H). I produced a manual on organising the Protest, including logistical planning,

timelines, and so on, for the benefit of future organisers (see Appendix I). This was submitted to the Director of the Department of Student Affairs (under whose auspices the organising committee had worked in 2014) and to the Director of the Department of Institutional Culture as it had been proposed at the Gender Imbizo (and senior management at Rhodes University later agreed) that the Silent Protest would, in future, be organised under the auspices of that office.

5.3.8 'Practical' and 'Academic' analysis

In making sense of the PAR journey and its relationship to my doctoral thesis, I found it helpful to distinguish between what PAR scholar Natasha Klockers (2012) calls “practical analysis” and “academic analysis” (p. 159). The practical analysis comprises all the work that is done to identify key issues and proposals that contribute towards developing an “agenda for change” (p. 159), and evaluating the changes implemented. It includes the documents and other artefacts that are developed during the planning, action and reflection cycles, such as the reports and manuals that I produced. The academic analysis is required to meet the criteria for academic study but does not necessarily impact on the participatory project. The academic analysis can be carried out independently by the researcher.

As other researchers have discovered, however, navigating these two worlds can be complex. One complexity, I have realised, is quite universal for researchers involved in ‘engaged’ research – what Paphitis and Kelland (2018) call “activism-tainted research and research-tainted activism” (p. 197). It is the tension between immersion in the field and the withdrawal (possibly) necessary for critical reflection. I discuss this in the section which follows. This was part of my struggle as my journey with the 2014 Silent Protest came to an end, and I needed to return to academic analysis. The other complexity was more visceral and arose for me in response to hearing and bearing witness to my research contributors’ stories. I address that complexity in the next chapter.

5.3.8.1 The ocean, the beach and the waves in between: critically engaged activist research

As a seasoned PAR scholar, Morton Levin (2012) draws upon the metaphor of the ‘Janus face’ to unpack what he sees as the central issue faced by action researchers striving for academic integrity:

One face represents the strength of having lived the field through involvement in a long-term, ongoing change activity, work characterised most often by deep empathic and political involvement while the mirrored face attends the striving for critical, reflective distance and rigorous analysis which requires the researcher to treat her own experiences at 'arms length'. [Participatory Action] Researchers have to serve both masters at the same time (p. 139).

The Janus metaphor above characterises the tension arising between being fully immersed in the experiential world of the PAR project and positioning oneself as a rigorous, critical researcher – walking a fine line between positions that are usually seen as contradictory in academic research. Levin's (2012) proposed solutions to this tension have a positivist leaning, in that they emphasise creating "critical distance" (p. 139), with the intention of maintaining rigour and managing one's own biases. His argument also suggests that this can be a purely rational process.

Theresa Petray (2012), on the other hand, writing specifically about participatory research with social movements, argues that by bringing together cultural analysis and critique with political action within the research process, the knowledges which emerge will not only have academic merit but can also contribute in practical ways to furthering the struggle for social justice. She seems to abandon any notion of critical distance and suggests that, in order to engage in research in this way, fully "inside" the research context, it is necessary to abandon the notion that a researcher can or should somehow remain objective, detached or distanced, and to welcome the nuance and richness that comes from active engagement and embodied solidarity. When researchers do become actively involved in the research context, "the boundaries between research, advocacy and everyday life are blurred" (Petray, 2012, p. 555). Petray refers to this approach as "critically engaged activist research", a term which I feel best captures the nature of my research journey.

Critically engaged activist research blends a theoretical approach towards power and resistance with a practical methodology for ethnographies of social movements. However, when undertaking this sort of research it can be easy to lose sight of critical analysis because of the political emotions that researchers share with activist contributors (Petray, 2012, p. 554).

Petray (2012) points out that there has been a bias in research undertaken to date – both in Psychology and other disciplines studying social movements – to focus upon the words, the actions, the expressed thoughts of protestors: the ideas that they cognitively give assent to. More recently, scholars have also begun to consider the significant role played by affect and emotion in political activism. What remains largely overlooked, however, is the role of emotion and affect for researchers working within the context of social movements and political activism (Petray, 2012).

As mentioned previously, my own experience of the research journey I undertook was that affect played a pivotal role: in what caught and held my attention; in my relationship to the research context and the people within that context; in what sustained and obstructed my engagement with the research context; and in the way that I responded to various challenges. Whilst I could not have done it any other way, I did continually feel that my emotional responses somehow compromised the validity and/or reliability of the research journey – emotions can feel so chaotic, messy and un-academic.

Petray (2012), however, emphasises and embraces the role that emotions play in both the establishment and continuity of social movements, affecting both participants and researchers. She points out that “[p]rotest demonstrations are sites of embodied political emotion – adrenalin rushes, chills and gut feelings are all common physical responses in protest settings” (p. 556). These visceral responses inform the positions taken up by protestors in relation to the ‘other’ which is being resisted. When a researcher shares such “embodied political emotion” with protestors, it allows for the deepening of rapport and a strengthening of the bond between a researcher and [their] participants (p. 557).

The challenging question which arises is whether or not a researcher’s embeddedness in the research setting necessarily translates into better research. Petray (2012) suggests that it may be more complex than this question suggests and may require some careful and conscious ‘moves’ on the part of the researcher. In relation to ethnographic research on social movements, Petray (2012, p. 556) draws on Hage’s (2009) concept of “ethnographic vacillation” described through the use of the following image: the ethnographer is like a ping pong ball riding the waves breaking on a beach, where the beach is the context or culture being studied (the political realm), the ocean represents the research discipline

(Anthropology, Psychology etc.) or analytical realm, and the waves represent emotions, particularly “political emotions” which develop through active engagement in the research context and which carry us into closer contact with the ‘beach’, or research context.

Whilst this image captures some of the complexity in terms of what the “ping pong ball” ethnographer experiences in the field as well as some of the ebb and flow of engagement and subsequent withdrawal to reflect on that engagement, it suggests very little control or agency on the part of the researcher. To some extent, this may be true. Petray (2012) points out that when we work in a context where people are actively resisting some form of injustice or oppression, it is likely that we will empathise with their struggle and develop negative emotions which mirror theirs in relation to those identified as the “oppressor”. The shared, outwardly directed anger shapes the way activists feel towards one another as well, and thus shared and reciprocal emotions are one aspect of the construction of collective identities within social movements. The researcher may, however, not be consciously aware of the effects of this shared political emotion. Petray (2012) argues that the emphasis on rational processes in research may serve to disguise the ways in which our emotional responses may differ from, and/or influence our intellectual meaning-making.

My engagement with the Silent Protest as research site/context emerged from an entirely affective response to attending the ‘Breaking the Silence’ event at the end of the 2012 Silent Protest (see Chapter 1: Introduction). From then onwards, in terms of my engagement with the organisers and protestors, I was positioned in solidarity. In 2013, I participated in the Protest as a Silent Protestor, my mouth taped shut and thus embodying my solidarity. I participated in meetings, workshops and regular informal conversations with the principal organiser, and we became friends as well as fellow activists. I was, however, very aware throughout of my insider-outsider status. When I agreed to organise the Silent Protest in 2014, I became a more deeply embedded ‘insider’ alongside the other activists; I shared the political sentiments and emotion, the activist identity, and the political action. In addition, like Petray (2012), I conducted the research in the place where I lived and where I would continue living once my research was complete. I encountered research contributors and fellow protestors in the supermarkets, on campus, and whilst out walking my dogs. I felt like I was living my research, as it were, rather than simply conducting it, and I felt a strong connection with and responsibility towards my research contributors.

This embodied sense had particular implications for the meanings I ascribed to various processes and actions, but these implications, being largely unconscious, were most often not apparent to me. Just as for Petray (2012), for me, critical moments in the research journey raised the impacts of affect to conscious awareness:

[My response to the situation] led me to remember the importance of the critical focus that is necessary for productive research. I realized just how embedded I had become in the movement – something that I had purposely set out for – and decided that I needed to extract my political emotions from those of my research contributors, at least temporarily, to see the bigger picture (p. 560).

The critical moment in my case arrived when I was approached to organise the Silent Protest for a second consecutive year. My intuitive and visceral response was “no”, but I found myself saying that I would consider it. I was very aware that I had made minimal progress in writing my thesis during the process of organising the Protest. I thought that my “no” was simply about the time that the organising took and the ensuing tiredness that made intelligent thought elusive – and writing almost impossible. I came to realise, however, that organising the Silent Protest and thesis writing required a different focus and energy. My research journal entry became a letter in which I declined the organising role:

...As I have refined my approach to ‘data analysis’ I have realised more clearly how complex and nuanced and rich the narratives are that I am working with and the ethical challenges of adequately representing that complexity. It requires that I open myself to listening deeply and gradually weaving together the threads of understanding. This stands in contrast to what is needed when organising the Protest which is to simplify and distil, to take a clear activist stand and to advocate for participation in/support for the Protest. It requires quick formulations and decisions and a lot of persuasive speaking.

I realise now that I cannot manage both processes at the same time with integrity. This is the primary reason why I couldn’t begin my analysis last year and I can see that my thesis-writing will take a back seat again should I take up the role of organiser. However, I have obligations to my supervisor, my funders and, perhaps most importantly, to my research contributors to finish the process that I have begun.

What is interesting to me, in retrospect, was how I couched what was ultimately a visceral, affective response in very rational sounding rhetoric. At the time, I thought that, given the complexity and messiness of the research journey, I was quite unique in facing this kind of challenge. However, when reading Petray (2012), I realised that, like her, I had reached a point where I needed to “extract my political emotions” from their embeddedness in the Silent Protest to gain sufficient perspective for critical engagement and productivity. Complete embeddedness and critical reflection seemed incompatible: I couldn’t be ‘on the beach’ and ‘in the ocean’ at the same time.

Petray (2012) later tweaks Hage’s seaside analogy for “ethnographic vacillation” in helpful ways. Most importantly, she argues that researchers have more agency than is suggested by Hage’s (2009) ping pong ball in the waves: “...we are more like small intertidal animals such as a crab. We can walk on the sand, swim in the ocean, and most importantly, we have the ability to move freely between the two realms” (p. 561). Petray (ibid.) acknowledges that the “waves of emotion” could toss us around a little in the movements between sand and ocean, but that we have a choice over where we choose to spend time:

Activist researchers make a point to spend time on the beach by purposefully embedding themselves within the movement they study – after all, it is hard to work in solidarity with people when you are floating in the distance. When this happens, we get a really close-up look at what is happening around us. We share political emotions with participants and have embodied similarities with them. The trouble is, without scurrying back off of the sand, we will not know where that localized bit of beach fits within broader contexts. This ability to step back is really what makes a successful activist researcher [...] moving back out to a distant position from which we can look at things from another perspective” (p. 561)

Petray (2012) describes the ongoing movement between positions as a state of being or a researcher position in itself, which is necessary in order to both engage in and critically reflect on activist work. She argues that this critical focus is what makes our work worthwhile: “ ... Without a deep ethnographic analysis, we are just another supporter of the social movement” (p. 561).

Petray's (2012) detailed conceptualisation of the ebb and flow of critically engaged activist research as well as her acknowledgement of the present (although limited) navigational abilities, or agency, of the researcher granted me the permission that I needed to retreat to a more distanced position in order to gain the broader perspective needed for "academic analysis" (Klockers, 2012, p. 159) without feeling that I was abandoning or betraying my research contributors or the cause we were fighting for.

5.4 In conclusion: drawing together the threads of a responsive research journey

In this chapter I have intentionally used personal narrative to describe how my research process shifted from a researcher-driven, research question-focused qualitative approach, to a 'critically engaged, activist ethnography' in which both my research contributors and I were actively engaged in participatory action research. These shifts, initially experienced as transgressive, occurred in response to the ways in which my research contributors positioned me as researcher, as well as to dynamics within researcher-contributor relationships and processes. Affect, embodied sensing and intuition played a far greater role than I could have anticipated and seemed at odds with my prior conceptualisation of research as a primarily intellectual pursuit. I was invited to take up a position as witness to women's suffering and their responses to that suffering, and the witness position invited a different mode of engaging in the research journey. It was not about formulating and uttering academic "truth *about*" my research contributors, but about finding ways to "remain true to [them]" (Hatley, 2000, p. 3).

One aspect of remaining true to my research contributors was to embrace the opportunity to implement their reflections and suggestions regarding the Silent Protest, and to take on an organisational role for the 2014 Protest. This choice gave rise to unanticipated tension between the different ways of being required in activist and academic roles, particularly regarding ongoing involvement in organising the Protest and developing an approach to 'analysing' and accounting for the 'data' which the research journey had generated.

Having described the process of the research journey in the current chapter, in Chapter 6 I discuss my discomfort with various approaches to "academic analysis" and the approach which I forged in order to listen to and think with my research contributors' narratives. Not

finding an approach to data analysis that entirely resonated with my ethical and affective commitments to my research contributors, as described above, I drew on elements of three different approaches in order to formulate an analytic practice which felt congruent with my purposes.

CHAPTER 6

~~DATA ANALYSIS~~

6.1 Data analysis, interpretive practices and the construction of knowledge

Whilst the purpose of this chapter is to outline my approach to data analysis, drawing upon a practice first employed by poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida, I am putting my heading for this section ‘under erasure’. This means that the words are present and legible, but deleted to signify that, although they are necessary, they are inaccurate or inadequate (Derrida, 1976). Whilst I need the term in order to alert academic readers to what I am accounting for in this section of my thesis, the practice of ~~analysing data~~ is a contested legacy of modernist-positivist research practices and one that I find difficult to embrace. ~~Data analysis~~ seems far removed from the interpretive practices I finally adopted in relation to the stories I was entrusted with.

In the previous chapter, I related my story of the research journey – accounting for my responses to the ongoing ethical-methodological challenges of conducting an ethnography of a particular protest from participant-observer-contributor as well as an insider-outsider position. In this chapter, I consider my responses to the ethical-interpretive challenges I faced when contemplating how to respond to my research contributors and the stories they had shared with me, with the express intention of contributing to knowledge and practice in response to sexual violence. However, the many readily available approaches to engaging with their stories as research data in order to ‘code’ and ‘analyse’ evoked significant discomfort for me. The nature of their stories and the nature of our engagement seemed to require a different mode of responding although it was initially difficult to articulate either the discomfort or the alternative modes of responding which called to me.

I will explore this discomfort in more detail in section 6.2.2 below, but my first challenge was where to begin to ‘analyse’ or ‘interpret’ the record of a rich and complex research journey that took unexpected twists and turns – and that, on a concrete level, yielded hundreds of pages of transcripts and numerous other documents, to say nothing of relationships, memories, thoughts, ideas and so on. In addition, how could I express the complexity and fluidity encountered in the field in terms of text and argument, without taking up an authoritative position, claiming some

kind of truth status for my version of the research, and appropriating or muting the voices of my research contributors within my own version?

6.1.1 Poststructuralism, ~~analysis~~ and meaning

Umberto Eco (1990) suggests, as a starting point, that “The problem is not to challenge the old idea that the world is a text which can be interpreted, but rather to decide whether it has a fixed meaning, many possible meanings, or none at all” (p. 23). As the paradigm within which I choose to work, poststructuralism insists that all texts have many possible meanings. Derrida (1976) invites us to view the meaning of a text as an endless free-play between central and marginal understandings, all of which are equally possible. Our attempts to pin down meaning through analysis or interpretation will inevitably “selectively highlight certain claims as to how conditions and processes – experiences, situations, relations – can be understood, thus suppressing alternative interpretations” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 6). This pinning down of meanings happens continuously, in everyday interactions, but researchers occupy a particular position of authority and power in knowledge construction processes. When researchers present an “academic version of truth”, claiming to have discovered or identified a “code underlying some social order” by applying a particular methodology to a particular ~~data~~ set, they are claiming the privilege of their interpretation over others, asserting themselves as “masters” of that code and order, without having to assume responsibility in terms of how that knowledge will be “insinuated in relations of power” (Frank, 2000, p. 361).

Whether or not we recognise it as researchers, how we approach the ~~data~~ contained in the research record is unavoidably a matter of both politics and ethics. When we “put ideas into play” (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007, p. xi) through the construction of academic texts (‘truths’), we participate in organising and sustaining particular versions of social reality. Taking a reflexive and anti-oppressive stand requires us to examine the often taken-for-granted dominant stories/discourses which prevail within the ‘relations of ruling’ inherent in our particular research context, and to consciously ‘trouble’ or disrupt those discourses by paying attention to the hidden, suppressed or alternative stories which support ways of being and relating that are preferred by our research participants. Not doing so is a political choice in itself, in that it leaves the prevailing power relations intact.

We therefore need to be clear about our own positioning – “how the fate and choices in your life have positioned you in the world and with whom you have been positioned” (Frank, 2000, p. 356) – and make a conscious, reflexive choice as to the standpoints¹ we will take up in relation to our research participants and their narratives. Such standpoints depend on the values and intentions with which we align ourselves and involve “taking responsibility for the ethical effects of your behavior” as well as “seeking to affect the world [presumably in a positive sense] through that behaviour” (Frank, 2000, p. 356). Frank (2000) goes on to point out that “How we judge things is not so much about the facts as about the values we invoke in order to make sense of the facts” (p. 363).

Influenced therefore by poststructuralist feminism and critical theory, Levinasian ethics, the values which underpin narrative therapy practices, and the scholarship of Arthur Frank, Megan Blumenreich and Carolyn Nordstrom (amongst others), I chose to adopt an advocacy stance in favour of my research contributors. Whilst Atkinson (1997, p. 325) argues that “purposes of advocacy” are illegitimate in the context of “principled investigations”, it is clear that whether we acknowledge it or not, as researchers we will inevitably end up advocating for or promoting certain ideas over others, which will potentially have “real effects” (White, 1995, p. 84) upon the lives of our contributors and the communities to which they belong. I therefore chose to consciously align myself with the needs and interests of my research contributors, as expressed in our conversations, with the pragmatic intention of improving services, interventions, and society in some way that is beneficial to my contributors and those who come after them. In particular, I chose to listen for “oppositional picture[s]” (Blumenreich, 2004, p. 85) in their narratives, which resist and challenge the dominant discourses through which South African communities construct, position and understand women who have been subjected to sexual violence. Frank (2000) refers to this as “writing across the line of fault that separates lived experiences of [trauma] from academic and professional analyses of these experiences” (p. 357). This oppositional picture destabilises fixed ways of seeing, allows us to see something familiar in a new way and allows new images to take up a place in our awareness (Frank, 2000).

¹ Frank (2000, p. 356-357) points out, firstly that our standpoints are multiple, shifting and intersecting depending on our experiences and context and secondly, that standpoints are not optional. We are all inevitably positioned and make ethical choices even when we make no choice at all.

6.2 Facing the complexities of analytic practice

At the time that I was preparing my research proposal for submission, the approach to ~~data~~ ~~analysis~~ which seemed to fit with my poststructuralist epistemology, my chosen standpoint and my purposes drew on narrative and discursive analytical tools. I imagined that it would be fairly straightforward to conduct and transcribe the interviews and apply my selected methods.

However, as I outlined in the previous chapter, once in the research field I found that relationship considerations preceded and superseded methodology. Having met my contributors and engaged them in conversation, having looked into their eyes, listened to their stories, and shared both their tears and laughter, having stood alongside them in solidarity to protest against a moral (or rather immoral) order which condoned and supported sexual violence, I found myself unable to detach from the relationships in order to treat the interview transcripts as disembodied texts to code and ~~analyse~~. This was an uncomfortable position in which to find myself: I realised that this is the very nature of research and felt shame at my unease and inability to behave like a researcher.

Solace and guidance came from two very different sources – the first was philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who offered me language and a theoretical frame for what I had experienced as an embodied and affective response in my encounters with my research contributors (and still experience now, in memory). The second came from other scholars and researchers who expressed similar sentiments and suggested a range of alternative practices.

6.2.1 Emmanuel Levinas and the face of the Other

At the core of Levinas' philosophy (Levinas & Robbins, 2001) is an insistence that all humans are ethically responsible for one another. Levinas suggests that it is the face of the Other which calls me into responsibility – when I see your face, a response is required, even demanded. However, as James Hatley (2000) emphasises, this is not a demand stemming from arrogance, hostility or entitlement. It is a recognition of vulnerability which evokes a response in me – the nakedness of a face in which I see a fellow being whom I have the capacity to harm or to love. This is what I experienced with almost every one of my research contributors. I had been a pastoral therapist for a number of years, and my response to my research contributors was tangibly different to the empathic connection during a therapy conversation. My research contributors were

simultaneously vulnerable and fierce in their commitment to contributing to knowledge construction. They were determined that their suffering should mean something.

That suffering was evident, whether communicated in emotional terms or not. According to Hatley (2000), what completely undoes us is when we encounter the face of one who suffers or has suffered, and whose violation is undoable or “irreparable” (p. 3); then our compulsion to respond is thwarted and we are left helpless in the face of their suffering. We are helpless to undo and helpless to repair or restore things to the way they were, and we feel shame at our own helplessness. This in turn connects us with our own vulnerability.

Erinn Gilson (2014) defines vulnerability as being “open to being affected and affecting in ways that one cannot control” (p. 2): if we recognise the vulnerability of another, we cannot deny or defend against our own. Vulnerability therefore opens up awareness of human interconnectedness, interdependence, and the possibility of intimacy. In theory, this sounds like a good and wonderful thing, but in reality, particularly when juxtaposed with academic discourse and expectations, it can be really frightening.

The affective response that Hatley (2000) describes, and which resonated with my experience at every turn during this research journey, is intensely uncomfortable and, as Hatley points out, we therefore devise strategies and tactics for avoiding the face of the Other, and its demands upon us. We can retreat into abstractions, generalisations, statistics and theories *about* the Other; we can avoid *seeing* them or *listening to* them in our urgency to *talk or write about* them (p. 3).

Resisting this compulsion to turn away, suggests Gilson (2014, p. 2), is a matter of ethics, and the conscious choice needed to hold a space of “intersubjective vulnerability” is a matter of practice:

It is far from given and, indeed, is often quite rare. ... vulnerability is a basis for learning, and for empathy, connection and community, and ... only by being vulnerable can one extend oneself beyond oneself. The practices by which one extends oneself, relinquishes barriers, or summons the wherewithal to expose oneself are myriad”.

I would suggest that one of these practices is to hear the Other’s story from a position of deep and open listening. It then becomes impossible not to see their face, see them in their vulnerable and fierce humanity, and recognise both our connectedness and my obligation of care towards them. Whilst I fully agree with Levinas that it is the face that calls us to an ethical response, I

would suggest that it is a story that opens our eyes to really *see* the face from which we would much rather turn away.

As researchers guided by our ethics protocols, however, we often place more emphasis upon invulnerability and maintaining ‘appropriate’ barriers; a stance which has its place and produces a particular type of knowledge. However, if we lower those barriers and allow the vulnerability of shared humanity to connect us more closely to those with whom we conduct research, there is the possibility of constructing a different type of knowledge. My own experience also suggests that this is not an ‘either-or’ situation – between vulnerability and invulnerability lies a continuum, with innumerable possible places to position oneself.

I had not expected that I would be required to be vulnerable. I thought my strength as a researcher lay in remaining self-contained and in control. I was expecting to listen to what my contributors’ stories would reveal *about* the embodied experiences of each woman, constrained as those stories would be by the “cultural conditions of possibility” (Gavey, 2005, 2012). I had not anticipated the impact of listening to stories told *through* wounded and suffering bodies (Frank, 1995, p. 2). Like Frank (1995), I found that the only response which seemed appropriate when hearing the women speak of their suffering was not “What do you have to tell me?”, but rather “Let me be with you” (p. 144) and “Let me stay with you for as long as you need”.

It was encouraging to discover that I was not alone in the discomfort I had felt, and that it was not necessarily a bad thing. I felt a resonance with Nancy Bell’s (2014) description of the struggle that Carl Rogers grappled with more than 50 years ago, between two conflicting desires: one “striving to be empathetically ‘with’ another person, and the other seeking abstract, theoretical insights ‘about’ the person” (p. 1). These struggles came out of the commitments and values he held in relation to his clinical work on the one hand, and his research on the other. His desire to be fully present in an “I-Thou” relationship with his clients and research participants seemed at odds with the so-called objectivity of scientific procedure.

Working within the context of sexual violence, Jane Bennett (2007) describes similar struggles during a time when she worked as a gender-based violence activist and hotline counsellor at a rape crisis centre by day whilst working on her thesis each night, focusing on the politics of representing rape. When responding to a hotline call, the guiding principle was to prioritise the “‘survivor’s’ right to her or his own story” (p. 50). However, her work as a researcher was

different: “It involved the integration of stories of rape into theory and required me to become the ‘architect’ of the representations’ prominent features” (p. 51). Writing years after this experience, Bennett (2007) still felt anger at being required to follow the ‘rules’ of the researcher role when her response to the stories she was working with resisted the abstractions of academic analysis; she too felt an ethical pull to simply ‘being with’ her research participants.

With the benefit of hindsight, and after much reflection and reading, it is possible to articulate and make sense of this struggle, rather inaccurately making it seem as if I was consciously aware of these dynamics at the time. I was not and, to be honest, my responses were instinctual, with apparently no other options available. For example, it was this felt sense that informed my decision to commit to organising the Silent Protest at Rhodes University in 2014, in order to ensure that it continued, as I have described in the previous chapter. Levinas – and others who drew upon his philosophy in their own scholarly endeavours, such as Frank (1995), Nordstrom (1997), Henderson (2011) and Chadwick (2021) – offered me the encouragement I needed to acknowledge my affective, gut level responses as integral to the research journey rather than deflecting from ‘real’ academic work.

6.2.2 Embracing discomfort as a ‘sweaty’ resource for research praxis

Much has been written about the contemporary (re)turn to affect, embodiment and materiality in the social sciences (see for example, Ahmed, 2013, 2017; Gorton, 2007; Wetherell, 2015). This interest represents a significant shift away from exclusive reliance on logic and rationality, towards an acknowledgement of the role played by affect – the felt sense, emotion and ineffable promptings that are experienced as somehow outside of the realm of thought and language. Researchers have considered the role played by affect for both researchers and their contributors at every stage of a research process, and it seems clear that whilst affect has been ignored in positivist and even in much post-positivist research, its impacts cannot be escaped.

Rachelle Chadwick (2020), a South African sociologist-research psychologist, has added to this body of work with her nuanced reflections upon experiences of discomfort within the context of research-related interactions. Rather than seeing affect, in general, and discomfort, in particular, as a purely individual response on the part of the researcher, and a hindrance to be managed, avoided or overcome, Chadwick (2020) has come to theorise discomfort as being an “epistemic and interpretive resource” which can “do” things in and for one’s research praxis – such as

mobilising “actions, representations, decisions, meanings and interpretation” (p. 2). Thus, following Ahmed (2017), Chadwick (2020, p. 1, 15) argues for an understanding of discomfort as an embodied, sensed, “sweaty” and “lively actant” which can open up possibilities for thinking and knowing differently.

Drawing also upon the scholarship of Claire Hemmings (2012), Chadwick (2020) suggests that the affective dissonance caused by “experiences of discomfort” can become a “critical impetus” (p. 5) for feminist political awareness and activism, moving a researcher towards new ways of thinking about and responding to research contributors and research ‘~~data~~’. Uncomfortable emotions can therefore provoke “moments of rupture” which destabilise and challenge our thinking and thus our responding (Chadwick, 2020, p. 6).

Privileging our gut feelings and both paying attention and responding to affect can be a particularly rich and helpful resource as we move towards “affective solidarity” with those who will be impacted by our work. Chadwick (2020, p. 12) therefore advocates both “starting and staying” with feelings of discomfort, as difficult as this may be, as a form of “political labour” (citing Ahmed, 2017, p. 32), as we grapple with their methodological and interpretive implications for our research.

Chadwick (2020, p. 14) suggests that staying with discomfort will challenge us to avoid producing simplistic, comfortable analyses which reiterate what we already thought we knew, and instead to adopt a more humble stance characterised by “interpretive hesitancy” and “epistemic uncertainty” which embraces contradiction and ambivalence and seeks to disrupt colonialist representations and appropriations of research participants’ voices. Doing so may require us to experiment with alternative representational strategies, which complicate easy and simplistic narratives and refuse to have the final say, as it were, about any research contributor. In drawing these conclusions, Chadwick finds a resonance with Arthur Frank (who draws upon the Bakhtinian notion of unfinalisability) and scholars such as Henderson (2011), Blumenreich (2004) and Farrant (2014).

“Interpretive hesitancy” and “epistemic uncertainty” are concepts to which I will return, as well as discussing the alternative representational strategies which I drew upon and developed in this research process. However, I first wish to briefly reflect upon research and ~~data analysis~~ in the context of suffering.

6.2.3 Research in the context of suffering

Suffering involves experiencing yourself on the other side of life as it should be, and no thing, no material resource, can bridge that separation. Suffering is what lies beyond such help. Suffering is the unspeakable, as opposed to what can be spoken; it is what remains concealed, impossible to reveal; it remains in darkness, eluding illumination ... Suffering is loss, present or anticipated, and loss is another instance of no thing, an absence. We suffer the absence of what was missed and now is no longer recoverable and the absence of what we fear will never be. At the core of suffering is the sense that something is irreparably wrong with our lives, and wrong is the negation of what could have been right.

(Frank, 2001, p. 355)

Suffering [is] a form of solitude, of being cut off and shut up within the self.

(Henderson, 2011, p. 25)

Our task as researchers is to “render suffering meaningful”.

(Das, 1997, p. 563)

As I read about different research methodologies and approaches to analysis, I realised that those which most resonated with me were methodologies developed and/or adapted by researchers who specifically worked with people who were suffering or had suffered. Research in the context of suffering foregrounds the ethical relationship and demands more considered, creative and humane methodologies. It has a different felt sense however, to the protectionist practices that working with so-called ‘vulnerable’ communities seems to invite. Applying the term ‘vulnerable’ to a person or group seems to imply an inherent deficit or weakness, that the person or group is somehow less than ‘normal’. The concept of suffering on the other hand, invites less pity and more outrage at circumstances beyond the control of the person or group which have disrupted their expected life trajectory without implying that person who suffers is inherently ‘less than’ others in any particular way.

Medical sociologist/bioethicist Arthur Frank’s work on ill people’s stories (which I draw upon extensively later in this chapter), anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom’s (1997) ethnography of war in Mozambique, Patricia Henderson’s (2011) ethnography of the impact of HIV/AIDS in the Okahlamba district of KZN in the 1990s, education researcher Megan Blumenreich’s (2004) approach to the analysis of stories of children living with HIV, criminologist Finola Farrant’s work with men who had been in prison, and Nicola Gavey’s (2011, 2018) extensive work around sex and violation all shaped my thinking about research in the context of suffering. The following

were some of the threads of inspiration and guidance that I drew from these examples of research conducted in a range of different fields.

6.2.3.1 Listening deeply to the stories of my research contributors

The first guiding thread is that listening deeply to the stories of those who suffer and the particularities of those stories, allows us to hear and acknowledge the impacts of suffering, and to recognise the ways in which our research contributors are constructed or positioned within “swarming” discourses (Guilfoyle, 2014, p. 17). It also allows us to hear how they are responding both to that positioning and the context of suffering itself.

Henderson (2011) wrote a moving ethnographic account of the experiences of people living in a rural district of KwaZulu-Natal, during a time when the suffering due to HIV/AIDS was “particularly acute” and “death was inevitable” (p. 17) prior to the provision of anti-retroviral drugs. Drawing on her approach, I wish to hold the tension of the way in which individual stories may disrupt our search for generalities. Henderson argues that particular details rather than statistics make possible a recognition of suffering and challenge the “distancing” into which we otherwise so easily slip (Henderson, 2011, p. 65). It is the details which allow us to bear witness to the tenacity and perseverance with which people confront suffering.

Like Blumenrich (2004), Henderson (2011) seeks to tell stories that disrupt dominant discourses about people who suffer. She is unafraid to bear witness to and stay present with the reality of suffering, whilst at the same time being open to noticing counter-stories such as the “repertoires of care” which emerge even in the most dire circumstances, and insisting that her research contributors’ worlds not be defined “in terms of unmitigated deficiencies” (p. 30).

In her book, which curates her ethnography of war zones in Mozambique, anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) advocates an “anthropology of listening”. Drawing upon Barthes (1985), she recognises the primary plea (or demand) of those who suffer is “*listen to me*”, which means “*touch me, know that I exist*” (Nordstrom, 1997, p. 80). Barthes (1985, p. 251, cited by Nordstrom, 1997, p. 80) focuses upon the voice, in the same way that Levinas highlights the trope of the face. Within the context of suffering, however, so much remains incomprehensible and unsayable, and listening needs to extend beyond the boundaries of that which is spoken and, in doing so, expands what is possible. Nordstrom, citing Brenda Ueland (1992, p. 104): “Listening is

a magnetic and strange thing, [a] creative force... When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand”.

6.2.3.2 Evoking a felt sense of my research contributors in my readers

My second thread of inspiration and guidance is that our work needs to evoke in the reader a felt sense of our research contributors rather than simply generating ideas about them, on the understanding that this is most effective in evoking compassion and solicitude in our readers.

In her narrative research with children living with HIV, Megan Blumenreich (2004) grapples with post-structuralist critiques of so-called ‘traditional’ narrative approaches and concerns related to representation and ethics. Her emerging approach consciously challenges dominant discourses around HIV by aspiring to provide a “complex representation of persons ‘in process’ through evocation rather than direct representation” (p. 80). Wishing to invite readers into a “vicarious experience” of her participants, she cites Le Compté’s (1993, p. 37) assertion that: “the reader should come away from such texts with a heightened sensitivity to the lives being depicted and with some flavour of the kinds of events, characters and social circumstances which circumscribe those lives” (pp. 78-79).

6.2.3.3 Prioritising relationship with my research contributors

The third and arguably most important thread of inspiration and guidance is to prioritise relationship with our research contributors in which care is foregrounded, understanding that this enriches rather than contaminating the knowledges we are co-constructing.

Finola Farrant (2014, p. 461) writes about “unconcealment” or “what happens when we tell stories”. Her life story research, particularly focusing on the experience of incarceration, raises questions about the impact of “contamination” (p. 465) in research – what happens when a researcher develops a more “human” relationship with research participants rather than viewing them simply as “informants”. This has traditionally been viewed as an impediment to or contaminant of good research. Farrant (2014, p. 461) argues, however, that contamination can reveal or “unconceal” new kinds of knowledge and new ways of conducting research.

6.2.3.4 Embracing theoretical impurity

My research question focused on my research contributors’ narratives of participation in the Silent Protest and their accounts of the impacts of doing so. Their responses are important, at

face value, to inform the ethics and practices of the Silent Protest and to contribute to its ongoing evolution and development. However, I could no longer subscribe to the idea that various accounts of experience offered unproblematic access to 'truth'; my poststructuralist lens would not allow me to ignore the socio-cultural influences which shape even the experience of experience, never mind the narrating of it within an interview context. At the same time, my activist-therapist lens would not allow me to simply engage in 'clever' analysis which would have me objectifying or 'textifying' the hard-told stories of my contributors in ways that might never translate back into actual changes in practice. Having met each research participant, having seen their faces and listened to their stories, I felt uncomfortable and even unethical in failing to honour the 'reality' of their stories for them. Particularly in relation to sexual violence, this seems essential. The experience of many survivors of sexual violence is that they either were not believed when they spoke out, or they did not speak out because they were afraid of not being believed or not having their experience validated.

How was I to reconcile these competing challenges? I needed to acknowledge the psychosocial complexity and the constituted nature of experiencing selves, whilst at the same time accounting for the experiences described by my participants in some kind of 'real' (but not 'realist') way. I needed to engage in research that took seriously the perspectives of those whose stories were its focus, whilst also taking a broader view of the ways in which those perspectives had been discursively shaped.

Gavey (2011), who has written extensively about understandings of sex, coercion and sexual violence, offers guidance and direction in this regard: she speaks of "embracing theoretical impurity — in an informed and sensitive way" (p. 187) as we work with language and narratives. She argues that if we are "bound by theoretical and methodological purity" in how we approach and understand our research contributors' accounts, "then it is difficult to engage with questions to do with politics and ethics — where the material and relational conditions of people's lives matter" (p. 187). If we are concerned with effecting meaningful impacts upon those material and relational conditions then, she believes, "we have to rely on taking realistic accounts of that world at least somewhat at face value in order to be able to discuss the working idea of what those conditions are" (p. 187). Gavey therefore suggests that:

we have to be pragmatic and acknowledge that *feminist* poststructuralist scholarship requires (careful and wise) theoretical impurity; it requires us to work simultaneously

with two theoretically contradictory understandings of language — is descriptive on one hand and constitutive on the other.

Gavey's (2011) guidance allowed me to think creatively about how to approach my contributors' narratives with this dual focus. In Chapter 7, I offer a more descriptive account of my research contributors' narratives, whilst in Chapters 8 and 9, I consider those narratives in relation to the cultural conditions of possibility (Gavey, 2011) within which they arose.

6.3 Forging an analytic practice

The challenge which remained was how to operationalise these insights in constructing an account of my interviews with my research contributors. In order to do so, I developed a process which drew on and adapted two approaches to listening to and thinking with stories, namely the Listening Guide developed by Carol Gilligan and her colleagues (Gilligan et al. 2003), and Arthur Frank's (2012) Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA). I also incorporated aspects of the reflexive stance highlighted in Michael White's *Outsider Witness Practice* (1995). In presenting or representing the narratives of my contributors in this thesis, I also make use of poetic texts. In the sections which follow, I outline the key features and commitments of these approaches and then describe how I adapted and integrated them.

6.3.1 Listening to the record of the journey: the Listening Guide

The Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003, 2006; Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008) is an innovative, voice-centred and relational qualitative method for the analysis of research interviews which draws upon feminist, literary and clinical theory and which resonates with my own commitment to 'deep' listening. The Listening Guide engages researchers in multiple interpretive 'listenings' to their research interviews (most often these are readings of the interview transcript, although some researchers may listen again to the audio-recording). Through these 'listenings' the researcher is given the opportunity to listen to and account for complexity and nuance in the data, in a way that coding schemes seldom permit. Each listening is documented through notes in the text and summaries, which assist the researcher to stay close to the text and keep track of their own thoughts and responses. The Listening Guide maintains the integrity of an interview as a whole and allows the researcher to consider the participant's statements and narratives within the relational context of the interview, within the physical environment and the broader socio-

political and cultural context. It is also an approach which resonates with Frank's (1995, 2012) recommendation that we 'think with' stories.

The Listening Guide was developed by researchers at the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development. Gilligan and her colleagues realised that the available approaches to coding and categorising interview data failed to capture the complexities of women's lived experience: "The coding process 'disappeared' much of what was most compelling in narratives, the unanticipated, undertheorised aspects of lives and tended to simplify complex social and emotional experiences" (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008, p. 496). The researchers also shared more widespread concerns regarding how research participants were represented, and how their narratives or 'voices' could be misrepresented or overridden by the researcher.

Gilligan et al. (2003) therefore developed this narrative research method which was based upon a careful listening to the first-person narratives of women. Their theoretical perspective saw the women who told their stories as narrators rather than reporters of experience (Tolman, 2012).

The Listening Guide brings researchers back to the primacy of attentive listening in an interview process and the importance of 'tuning in' to the 'voice', or to be more precise the 'voices' of the Other. The Listening Guide acknowledges the multiplicity of distinct narrative 'voices' that is present when we speak, and the variety of factors giving rise to and shaping those voices, including the nature of the receiving context.

In its initial formulation the Listening Guide drew upon psychoanalytic theory with its emphasis on the 'layered' nature of the psyche and the unconscious dynamics at play, to account for the different 'voices' that are identified and tracked through a transcript (Gilligan et al., 2006). More recently, however, Burns, Futch and Tolman's (2011, p. 243) description of the Listening Guide reflects a more poststructuralist understanding, which characterises 'voice' as the way in which discourse is "operationalised"; they suggest that 'voice' in the Listening Guide refers to "a person-based instantiation of a larger social discourse" (Burns, Futch, & Tolman, 2011, p. 243).

The notion of 'voice' in the Listening Guide therefore reflects a more complex and dynamic relationship with discourse and subjectivities. The multiple voices which we listen for can also be understood as a reflection of the multiple subject positions made available within the discursive

context, and the ways in which each person takes up, resists or refuses these in fluid and dynamic ways. For this reason, Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) suggest that the Listening Guide is particularly useful when one is researching “marginalised experiences, including those involving social stigma, shame or secrecy” (p. 495), such as sexual violence. They suggest that “it is often in regard to experiences that are the most complicated, taboo, or awkward to share with others that this method’s goal of tuning in to the rhythms, harmonies, and disjunctures present in research interviews can be most illuminating” (p. 498).

The Listening Guide acknowledges that research participants may have difficulty putting certain experiences into words and may also resist talking about experiences. This can result in complicated and unexpected ways of talking about events, reminiscent of the ‘tightrope talk’ metaphor introduced by McKenzie-Mohr and LaFrance (2011). Traumatic experiences can be particularly difficult to narrate and may be offered as disjointed fragments rather than as a cohesive whole (Sorsoli, 2012); the Listening Guide accommodates such complexities.

As a feminist practice, the Listening Guide requires that research participants are invited to tell their stories on their own terms and reflect on the meanings they hold (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008, p. 511). It also requires that those who listen to the narratives be “resisting listeners” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) who listen with an awareness of how social forces constrain how we articulate a story – and therefore listen “with an ear tuned to how marginalised and oppressed people negotiate their lives on the flip side of power” (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008, p. 495).

The Listening Guide also allows us to listen to the dynamics of interaction within a research interview. Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) acknowledge that “at certain points in our interviews, participants’ desires to speak and to be in the research relationship with us may shift” (p. 511). These shifts may be subtle and only detected during close ‘listening’ to the transcripts.

6.3.1.2 How does the Listening Guide work?

The researcher ‘listens to’ the texts (reads the interview transcripts) multiple times and on each listening, focuses on a particular aspect of the narrative or a particular ‘voice’ in the narrative. Multiple listenings are necessary because the assumption is that voices are fluid and changing, and that multiple voices co-occur simultaneously: “these voices may be in tension with one another, with the self, with the voices of others with whom the person is in relationship, and the cultural context within which the person lives” (Burns, Futch & Tolman, 2011, p. 257). The

researcher makes notes relating to each listening and gradually constructs a complex understanding and representation of the participant's meaning-making – no single listening stands on its own.

I incorporated the following steps of the Listening Guide into my approach to analysis (see Gilligan et al., 2006 for detailed descriptions of the full process)

Step 1: Listening for the plot

'Plot' refers to what is happening in the narrative, how the stories unfold within their particular social and cultural contexts. One takes note of unfolding storylines, repeated or unusual images, metaphors and themes as well as contradictions and absences – what one might expect to be said that is not said. At the same time, one remains aware of and documents one's own thought and felt responses to both what is said and to the person speaking.

Step 2: Creating I-poems

This step is also referred to as listening for the 'self' or the voice of the 'I'. It allows a researcher to listen to a participant's distinctive first-person voice, with a particular focus upon what they say or know about themselves. The method operationalises this step through the creation of I-poems.

Firstly, one underlines or highlights each portion of the account that is "narrated in the first person" (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008, p. 501), including the 'I', the verb and any other words that seem important for meaning. One then copies and pastes the selected I-phrases in the same sequence as they appear in the text. Each phrase should be copied onto a new line, as in a poem.

Gilligan et al. (2006) suggest that one can create I-poems using only selected passages from the interview text, and then attend to variations between these selections. All other listenings would involve listening to the entire interview transcript. One can also listen for the voice of the self as one voice amongst others, without creating the I-poems.

Step 3: Listening for alternative voices

The Listening Guide draws upon metaphors from musical harmony and counterpoint to account for the multiple voices one can identify in a narrative, and the relationship between those voices. I prefer to simply listen for voices which express alternative perspectives. In order to identify shifts in voices, this approach focuses upon ways of speaking as well as on what is being said.

Therefore linguistic shift-markers, pauses, tone of voice, new metaphors and so on can signal variations.

Step 4: Composing an 'analysis'

Based upon their notes, highlightings and summaries, the researcher now composes an account of all they have learnt about and from that participant, in relation to their research questions.

The Listening Guide has been used in different ways and with different emphases, and Gilligan et al. (2003) insist that it is intended to be a guide rather than a prescriptive set of rules. What is essential is that the researcher be actively engaged in the process, make decisions about how each step will be implemented, and then be rigorous in applying each step and documenting the process. The practices that I drew upon from the Listening Guide were enriched by the questions that Arthur Frank articulates in his approach to Dialogical Narrative Analysis.

6.3.2 Arthur Frank: Dialogical Narrative Analysis and Thinking with Stories

Arthur Frank has published extensively over a number of years about his understanding of storytelling and story-listening in the context of illness, and his approach to 'thinking with' stories in order to inform ethical practices of care. More recently, he formalised his approach into a methodology which he calls 'Dialogical Narrative Analysis' (DNA). I have referred to his work previously, particularly in relation to my ethical stance in *vis-a-vis* my research contributors and the research context. Here, I draw more specifically upon his approach to the stories shared in research spaces. These informed my own approach to listening to and thinking with stories.

There are a range of challenges which Frank poses to researchers thinking of analysis and representation, in his various published works. Drawing upon Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy, Frank's (1995) overriding challenge to researchers in the context of suffering is: Do we help people to recognise suffering or avoid suffering? The suffering he speaks of is not just the visible or expected suffering associated with trauma or illness, but the suffering we hear about when we listen deeply and are present with our research contributors. Clearly, we can only account for that suffering if we ourselves have been able to recognise it and stay with it.

Frank (1995, p. 158) advocates thinking *with* stories as the basis of narrative ethics and analysis in research. This commitment is operationalised in Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) (Frank, 2012) As Frank (2012, p. 33) explains, DNA approaches stories as active and 'artful'

representations which *do* things such as revising one's sense of the past and one's sense of self, locating oneself within particular groups and imaginatively projecting a particular future.

Central to the DNA approach is the belief that stories are always told in the context of a dialogue, whether real or imagined, and anticipate the responses of a dialogical partner, both immediately and in the future. Thus, any single voice "always comprises multiple voices" (Frank, 2012, p. 34). This resonates with the Listening Guide, but Frank (2012) draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) notion of dialogicality – and specifically the concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia to further illuminate the multiplicity and fluidity of voice in stories. According to Frank (2012), all stories are polyphonous in the sense that they are composed with a listener or listeners in mind and anticipate the responses of those listeners in such a way that the speaker's voice resonates with the voices of those particular others. Heteroglossia refers to the notion that stories are never entirely original but are pieced together from fragments of stories, genres and ways of speaking (discourses) available in one's speech community. This echoes Burns, Futch and Tolman's (2011, p. 243) account of 'voice' being the operationalisation of the discourses available to us as speaking subjects. Frank (2012) believes that human narrative expression and thus, one's sense of self, are constrained by the "resources we have available to tell our own story, as well as by the stories that are told about people like us" (p. 36).

DNA's second commitment relates to Bakhtin's (1984) understanding of the unfinalisable nature of persons. This refers to each person's capacity to outgrow and thus render untrue any "finalizing definition" of them: "As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 58–59; cited in Frank, 2012, p. 37). In terms of research, this commitment prohibits any researcher from attempting to offer a final word about any person's experience or identity. The researcher needs to respect the capacity of each person (including themselves) to engage in ongoing change and to therefore hold their research 'findings' lightly: as a story in themselves which may be revised in any number of subsequent stories.

Thus the final commitment of DNA is not to summarise *findings* — an undialogical word, with its implication of ending the conversation and taking a position apart from and above it — but rather to open continuing possibilities of listening and of responding to what is heard. Analysis aims at increasing people's possibilities for hearing themselves and others. Frank (1995, p. 351)

advocates using the opportunities of academic publication to gather and amplify the voices of those who suffer, allowing them to connect their voices so that they can hear one another and establish a sense of not-aloneness and community (Frank, 1995, p. 361).

In the same way, we need to make the stories of those who suffer available to others – laypersons and professionals – in order to expand their capacity to imagine (think reflexively about) those who suffer and recognise their obligations to them. The stories and discourses in circulation about marginal experiences of life such as deep illness, disability and – I would argue – trauma (and particularly sexual violation) determine what is and is not ‘narratable’ and whether or not suffering is recognised: “not everything that everybody does [or experiences] is seen by others as worthy of a story” (Frank, 2004, p. 63). This goes to the heart of the complex tensions of narrative identity; whilst people are always actively engaged in identity work, this work is constrained by the stories already in circulation and the subject positions these make available:

Stories provide an imaginative space in which people can claim identities, reject identities, and experiment with identities ... Stories are always already there enabling people to take up identities and delimiting their identity possibilities (Frank, 2012, p. 45).

6.3.2.1 Constructing a Dialogical Narrative Analysis

It should be noted that Frank (2012), like Gilligan et al. (2006), characterises analysis as an iterative process where one moves between writing and listening and regularly revisits the original research interest. Thus, the research report is composed in the process of analysis, not after the fact.

He also acknowledges that any ‘analysis’ only offers one of many possible ways of engaging with the stories that have been gathered. Frank (2012, p. 44) therefore does not prescribe a formula or rules for analysis but suggests several sets of possible questions which can “open up” our thinking with the stories that we hear. This resonates with Gavey’s (2011 p. 187) preference for approaching research “as a process of asking theoretically informed questions”.

The questions which seemed most relevant to my purposes were:

Resource questions

Recognising that “the primary resources for telling a new story are the stories that are already circulating in the setting” (Frank, 2012, p. 44) he asks:

- What resources shape how the story is being told?
- What resources shape how listeners comprehend the story?
- What other narrative resources, if available, might lead to different stories and change people's sense of possibility in such settings?
- What might be preventing those alternative narrative resources from being mobilized?

Identity questions

Like the Listening Guide, DNA listens for the complexity of multiple voices in a narrative (Frank, 2012, p. 44):

- How does the story teach people who they are, and how do people tell stories to explore whom they might become?
- What multiple voices can be heard in any single speaker's voice; how do these voices merge, and when do they contest each other?

Questions about what is at stake

- How is the storyteller holding his or her own in the act of storytelling? By *holding one's own*, I mean seeking to sustain the value of one's self or identity in response to whatever threatens to diminish that self or identity. Or put the other way, how do the stories that some people have available convince them of what they have to do and to be in order to hold their own?²
- In what conditions of living do people hold their own by telling stories like these?
(Frank, 2012, p. 46)

6.3.3 Michael White's Outsider Witness Practice

One of Michael White's (1995, 1997) innovative contributions to family therapy and community practice was to extend reflecting team work in therapy with the concept of 'outsider witness practices' whereby 'outsiders' to a conversation are permitted to listen in on (witness) the conversation and then reflect on the conversation in the presence of those who were engaged in it. The usual focus of such reflections is the preferred identity claims of the person or

² "DNA imagines life as primarily a condition of vulnerability. Holding one's own is a response to vulnerability; sometimes this response is spontaneous, other times it can be strategic and reflective. Storytelling is an act in which people hold their own, but also, the stories that people know set the parameters of what they can imagine as their own to hold." (Frank, 2012, p. 47)

community at the centre of the conversation. These practices are founded upon an understanding of our self-stories as a social achievement. The outsider witnesses therefore become a 'community of acknowledgement'.

Outsider witness practice follows a fairly structured framework of questions and responses. The particular element of the practice that I wish to draw upon in my analytic process invites a particular reflexive stance on the part of the researcher: "In order to ensure that the person at the centre of the conversation does not experience the curiosity as academic, or as imposing of 'truths', team members are carefully invited to de-construct or situate their comments in their own personal experience" (Carey & Russell, 2003, p. 10). The questions they might reflect upon out loud are something like this:

- What stood out for me as I listened to this story?
- What in my own life (reading/theoretical positioning/personal experience) prepared me to notice that?
- What do I become in listening to this story? Where am I transported to or how am I moved in a way I would not otherwise have been had I not listened to this story? How do I anticipate this will impact my life and/or practice going forward?

These are questions that assist the researcher in avoiding taking up a quasi-objective, expert position.

6.3.4 Constructing an analytic process: listening to and thinking with stories

I am aware, especially in retrospect that adopting a simpler approach to analytic practice would have made the process of constructing an account of my research contributors' narratives easier and quicker and would have shortened this chapter considerably. I can however only account for the process that I did follow. I draw comfort from Gavey (2011) who suggests that:

Understanding as many approaches to research as possible and the assumptions that underpin them allows (or may even be necessary for) the possibility of creative, careful, and innovative scholarship, including possibilities for transgressing the borders of distinct approaches through adaptation and combination (p. 187).

Drawing together aspects from each of the approaches I have described, and the insights of scholars whose work resonated with the values and intentions that I discussed earlier in this

chapter, I developed the following process, which I followed in listening to and thinking with the interviews that I had conducted with my research contributors.

6.3.4.1 Listening steps

Listening reflexively to the stories of participation in the Silent Protest

The first listening focuses on the structure of the story itself: the chronology of events, the central plots and storylines and the characters, as well as beginning to track the sub-plots and emerging alternative storylines. I listen for recurring words, metaphors and ideas, as well as that which is unexpected and surprising, either in its presence or absence – unique outcomes or sparkling moments which stand against or outside of the dominant storyline and which point towards possible alternative storylines.

What comes up in this listening is recorded on the left side of a page, divided by a line down the centre. On the right side of the page, I record the responses which the narrative evokes in me.

Listen for the narrated 'I' / the voice of 'self'

In a second reading, I underline all statements beginning with 'I'. I cut and copy instances of 'I' with the verb and any other words needed for sense-making. I paste these, one to a line, to construct an I-poem. This step comes from the Listening Guide but relates to Frank's (2012) question: "How are people telling stories to discover who they are (in that moment of telling) and to explore who they might become?", as well as to an outsider witness question: What images of the storyteller come to mind as I am listening to her story?

Listen for alternative voices and storylines

Listening a third time, I focus on these questions:

- What are the other voices and storylines that I can hear in the story?
- How do they relate to each other?

6.3.4.2 Thinking steps

The researcher now steps back from the immediacy of the narrated stories to think with them. The following questions guide the thinking process and the researcher may re-listen to individual stories as they think.

What enables/constrains the stories told?

What are the narrative resources that the person is drawing upon? What frames the narratives – for example, dynamic power relations, dominant ideologies, stories already in circulation in the discursive milieu and so on?

What stood out for me as I listened to this story? What in my own life (reading/theoretical positioning/experience) prepared me to notice that?

How is the narrator holding her own under difficult/challenging conditions by telling this story?

How is she seeking to sustain the value of herself/her own identity in response to whatever threatens to diminish that self or identity? What has compelled her to hold her own by telling this particular story? How well is the storyteller served by telling this story?

What do I become in listening to this story?

Where am I transported to, or how am I moved in a way I would not otherwise have been had I not listened to this story? How do I anticipate this will impact my life and/or practice going forward?

Interwoven throughout this process is the question: What would the narrator think of how I am imagining her as I reflect upon what she has said?

In writing up and presenting my responses to the listening-thinking process, one strategy that I adopted was to construct poetic texts from the words and narratives of my research contributors. In the next section I account for this approach.

6.3.5 Constructing poetic texts as an ~~analytic~~ practice

Whilst creating poems with contributors' words is a fairly recent development in qualitative research methodology, it has been recognised as a way to “emotionally engage” readers and to “resist the urge to turn a participant’s complex story into a single linear narrative” (Koelsch, 2015, p. 96).

As I have mentioned previously, poststructuralist representations of research contributors creatively resist the claim that a researcher’s interpretation offers a single accurate version, a ‘truth’ about a person. Following Foucault (1984, p. 118), poststructuralist researchers see their contributors’ narratives and self-understandings as “a variable and complex function of discourse” shaped by their context and that particular moment of interaction. Whilst narratives

that are shared may seem to constitute a complete unit of meaning, that meaning arises as much in the mind of the researcher, in that particular moment, as it does in the mind of the contributor and is open, shifting and unfinalisable. Various poststructuralist theorists appeal to poetry as a genre which resists singular understandings, and troubles that which is accepted and known. For example, Kristeva (1974) describes poetic language as an “act of resistance to established assumptions and social constraints”, whilst Cixous (1991, p. 92) proposes that “the performance of our lives outside the confines of that which is (always already) known can perhaps only be done poetically”.

I have already described how one step in the iterative process outlined in the Listening Guide is to construct I-poems from our research contributors’ I-statements. Although not specifically used in research analysis, narrative therapist Christopher Behan (2003, p. 1) found that constructing “rescued speech poems” from his written record of his clients’ words in therapy – the “shards of their conversations” – and offering these back to his clients after a session “extend[ed] the story between sessions”. He had previously written letters, but found prose too limiting:

I am constantly frustrated attempting to express in prose the tangled profundity of my clients’ lives. ... Poems evoke association, reverie and contradiction. Poetry has “space between” to describe multiplicity, tentativeness and ambiguity and is perhaps better suited to render visible the subtle stories ... (ibid.)

This description resonated with my listenings to my contributors’ stories and the challenges of representing the complexities I heard. Behan (2003) emphasises that the focus is not to write great poetry but to ‘rescue’ and highlight poetic speech – images, phrases, pauses and expressions that express so much more than the words in which they are wrapped.

Whilst creating poems with contributors’ words is hardly mainstream practice in qualitative research, there are a number of researchers who have explored the possibilities of poetic representation in qualitative research methodology. Chris Teman (2010, p. 611) captures the words of some of his participants in a poem as a stand-alone research output, and Cheryl MacNeil (2000) explores the practice of constructing poems with quotations from participants in qualitative research. She calls this “poetic transcription”. Jane Speedy (2003, 2008) has written about using her clients’ words as poetry in a therapeutic context and anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom (1997), writing an ethnography of war zones in Mozambique, starts each of

her book chapters with a poem constructed from the words of her participants. Penwarden and Richardson (2020, p. 58) describe the use of “poetic re-presentation” as a research strategy, whereby a researcher transforms the transcripts of their research contributors’ words into found poetry. They use this strategy to clearly differentiate the contributor’s speaking from the researcher’s later representation of that speaking, ensuring that the contributor is afforded an opportunity to speak for themselves.

I have previously referred to Megan Blumenreich’s (2004, p. 78) suggestion that, particularly for researchers working in the context of suffering (her research focused on the narratives of children living with HIV) we have the responsibility to create texts which invite the reader into a vicarious experience of our research participants, through “evocation rather than direct representation” (p. 82). She wants her readers to come away with a felt sense of the circumstances and lived experiences of her participants. In her work, she aspires to offering a complex representation of persons “in process” (p. 80). Poetic practices offer one means of achieving this.

In the chapters which follow, I regularly use poetic re-presentations of my contributors’ narratives.

6.3.6 Outlining the way forward

Having spent the past two chapters describing the research journey, with all its complexities, and the approaches I developed and adapted in order to manage that complexity, in Chapter 7, I turn to my contributors’ narratives of participation in the Silent Protest. Following the analytic process described in 6.3.4 above, I listened to the narratives and, in this chapter, guided by my original research questions, I focus on my research contributors’ overall sense of participating in the Protest, the benefits that they felt they had experienced due to participating and what the Silent Protest offers that makes these benefits a possibility for victim-survivors. I also consider the costs and challenges that they described regarding participation in the Protest.

The narratives of my research contributors suggest that participation in the Silent Protest seems to stand against at least some of the factors which inhibit acknowledgement and disclosure of sexual violation. In Chapter 8, I take the next step of ‘thinking with’ my research contributors’ stories and consider the ways in which women who have experienced rape are usually positioned by and within society, and what constrains or enables the stories they tell about the violation,

with reference to positioning theory. I then discuss the alternative subject positions which my research contributors felt they were able to take up in the context of the Silent Protest.

In Chapter 9, I focus primarily on the ways in which the women 'hold their own' in the telling of their stories in the research interviews, with a particular focus on the ways in which they engaged with and resisted both 'victim' and 'survivor' discourses.

CHAPTER 7

THE NARRATED IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE SILENT PROTEST

7.1 Constructing a descriptive account of the women's narratives

My original research questions asked how women who have been subjected to sexual violence narrate their experience of participation in the Silent Protest, and the impact(s) that participation in the Protest had on them, both during and after the Protest. I wondered if any particular aspect of the Protest stood out as having the most significant impact, and whether any impacts that the women experienced were sustained over time. I was aware that many women participated in the Protest year after year, and I wondered how they would narrate their choice to do so and the impact of this.

On a superficial level, I did get some answers to these research questions which informed the action research change cycle and the reports I wrote for the university (as described in Chapter 5). For example, as I discuss below, most of my research contributors described participation in the Protest as having been beneficial, as having helped them move towards living well again.

However, the process of conducting the research humbled me, and challenged my pre-fieldwork assumptions as I have described in Chapters 5 and 6. I soon realised that in talking about anything related to sexual violence, my research contributors resisted any responses that pinned own a specific answer or meaning. They resisted subject positions, identity labels and conclusions, their responses were always complex and they danced with words around anything approaching a definitive statement. For example, when I asked the primary organiser when she first suspected that it might be beneficial in some way to victim-survivors to participate in the Silent Protest, she asked if she could answer me "in a roundabout way" and then she told me her own story of her own journey of healing and recovery in relation to the Silent Protest.

I was struck in the telling of the stories, how often words and linguistic structures proved inadequate to the task of adequately conveying a participant's own sense of either harm or benefit. As I listened and observed in the moment by moment 'witness' of each

conversation, I was aware of the emotions, images and sensations that my participants were grappling to pin down, categorise and express. So much was expressed in those moments that was not captured in the audio recording.

I also realised that my research questions constrained my listening in unnecessarily narrow ways and that I wanted to listen deeply and with an open mind to what my participants were seeking to *communicate* during the interviews rather than just trying to fit their answers into my research questions. It was for this reason that I drew on and adapted the Listening Guide and DNA as a way of honouring the complexity and really paying attention to what was shared.

However, the kind of argument that emerges from ‘listening to and thinking with stories’ can feel somewhat removed from the immediacy of the contributors’ narratives for those reading the analysis. It seemed necessary to first offer a descriptive account (Gavey 2011) in order to develop a “working idea” (p. 187) of what was most significant to my research contributors. Therefore, in this chapter I specifically address my research questions whilst also offering “poetic re-presentations” (Penwarden & Richardson, 2020, p. 58) of aspects of my contributors’ narratives to allow their words to be heard in their own right. My primary intention in this chapter, drawing on the approaches to ~~analysis~~ I described in Chapter 6, is to evoke in the reader a sense of the complexity of my contributors’ narratives and to allow my contributors to be heard in their own words. My listenings to the narratives informed how I have curated their words according to the plots and sub-plots which structured their narratives, the metaphors and images which they drew on, and the unique outcomes or sparkling moments which stood against or outside of the dominant storylines and which pointed towards possible alternative storylines (counter-stories).

This chapter therefore focuses on the stories that women told about the impacts of participating in the Silent Protest with an emphasis on what they felt participation had offered them (or not) that was different to what they had encountered or been offered elsewhere. Drawing on the extensive listening process I undertook with every interview transcript, as described in Chapter 6, my challenge is to structure the chapter and curate the words of my contributors in a way that I feel does best justice to their collective contributions in conveying their sense of their participation in the Silent Protest. I deliberately do not providing extensive backstories of my contributors, partly because the research was not about the experience of

violation itself, and partly to retain a sense of anonymity for my contributors, some of whom had not shared their stories with family or friends. I also, deliberately (as per the ethical argument I developed in Chapter 6) do not undertake a close analysis of the words and narratives of my contributors, as my approach was to listen to and think with the stories as a connected whole, rather than analysing specific aspects or utterances.

7.2 Factors which drew women to participate in the Silent Protest

Each woman that I interviewed had her own unique reasons for participating. Those in organising roles had complex stories of violation and resistance, which led to activism in the hope of preventing others experiencing the same, and/or healing if they did. Some participated with a clearly political intent of raising awareness and breaking silences.

Lake:

*I was immediately drawn to it as a rape survivor
I think
it's something that would be important to take part in
I suppose
to like raise awareness
I suppose
to get people to actually start talking about it*

Two of participants participated initially because, as feminists they supported the cause. A year or two later they participated because they themselves had experienced sexual violence in the interim.

Naomi:

*In my first year
I was very excited about everything
I think
I was quickly drawn to [participate in the Silent Protest]
issues of sexual violence make me very very angry
they always have
In my first year
I hadn't yet personally experienced anything like that
from an outsider perspective
I was interested
last year
I took part after having had such experiences
that changed it for me*

One woman spoke about being drawn to the Silent Protest by curiosity. She had never spoken out about her violation and wondered how it would be addressed in this space. She was also aware of the Rape Survivor t-shirts and wanted to see what rape survivors looked like. She was convinced that she could be identified as someone who had been raped herself, even without wearing the t-shirt.

The staff members who participated, did so for their own healing, but also intentionally, to stand in solidarity with their students. For most of my contributors however, their narrated motivations were complex and multi-layered and some were not sure why they participated; they had simply felt drawn to it, as steel to a magnet. In Jaclyn's narrative we hear this multiplicity and the voices which compete as she takes up and resists and re-negotiates subject positions in her unfolding narrative.

Jaclyn:

*I'm not doing it to show other people
this is where I stand on anything
but more for myself
I would like to show people
I am supportive of rape survivors
I understand the difficulties
and definitely the ...
the confinement
the having to keep quiet about it
I'd like there to be a change in that
I think I've got closure with my own past
I don't want this to be a huge emotional leap
from one state to another
for me
I think I've gone through most of the steps already
I never talk about it to anyone
I might want to share this with someone
afterwards
I don't know
I want to see how it goes
and be open to it
I don't want to set myself a definite outcome
and then expect that to happen.
[I'm] scared I burst into tears
halfway through the day or something*

*but ... um
if I don't do it I won't know
so ...
I do hope that it will give me
a different perspective
a helpful perspective
on anything really
just communicating with other people
understanding where other people are coming from
with their pain
or whatever they're feeling
I'd just like to be aware
that's ... that's what I'd like to get
from the day*

7.3 Costs and beneficial impacts of participating in the Silent Protest

Of my 31 research contributors, one was the primary organiser who had been involved since the first protest. Three others had performed key organisational roles on multiple occasions. Seven others had participated on multiple occasions. Each of these women opted for a once-off in-depth interview. All were positive about the impact on them of participating in the Protest, although it was always hard and painful.

The remaining 19 informants were interviewed prior to the 2013 Protest, within a month after the Protest and again, six months later. In the interview immediately following their participation in the Protest, 18 were positive about having participated. One had withdrawn from the Protest after attending the morning gathering and chose not to participate further on the day. 16 women were available to attend a third interview six months post the Protest and of those 14 were still positive about the impact of having participated, two were either negative or uncertain.

I do not offer these numbers as any kind of quantitative evidence, but simply to convey the sense that my contributors were, for the most part, positive about having participated in the Protest. However, as with everything that my contributors shared, there was nuance, struggle and complexity even in their endorsement of the Protest.

Boipelo:

*I felt very very down on Wednesday [before the Protest]
I did not feel good at all*

*I said
I don't think
I'm gonna do it this year
I got what I needed from last year
I don't need to do it this year.
But I sort of sat down
thought to myself
I don't owe it to nobody to do this protest
I owe it to myself to do it
I know what I get out of this
I strongly strongly believe in this
I strongly believe in this
never mind what happened to me
do I want to speak?
or do I not wanna have a voice?
can I tape myself up for those that haven't spoken before?
I thought, "Yes!"
"I'm absolutely willing to do that".*

Abongile:

*The Silent Protest
I think (.)
wrote my story
because it's how I became aware of my feelings
you know, [about] my rape
and how I worked though it*

**Researcher: So the story that the silent protest wrote (.)
– you said the silent protest wrote your story –
what title would you give to that story?**

*Abongile: it would have something to do with 'it's possible'
it would also have something to do with
'it's not about other people,
it's about you'
'There is life after rape'
maybe
but I won't really commit to that
but it would have something to do with all of that.
This protest is something that is huge
It really touches people
I'm talking from personal experience
it really touches people*

*I think there is a lot of change
where after the Silent Protest
people see things differently
Whether they were taking part
or just observers
I'd like to see it grow.*

In sections 7.4 and 7.5 below, I examine more closely some of the benefits of participating that my contributors described and possible reasons for this sense of benefit which were either directly expressed in what my contributors said or that I witnessed or heard in my role as ethnographic participant-observer-contributor and action researcher-organiser over the three years that I was involved with the Protest.

7.4 Narrated benefits of participating in the Silent Protest

7.4.1 Being (re)connected to a community

All but one of my contributors mentioned connectedness, community, solidarity or being a part of a larger collective as being significant to their experience of the Protest. This stood against the alienation and disconnection that many victim-survivors experienced following the experience of sexual violation, as well as the sense that were alone in their suffering. The sense of shared purpose, shared experience and of mutual care and support that they experienced during the Protest were described as being significant for the benefit that they derived. I explore this further in Chapter 8.

7.4.1.1 Experiencing connection

Cara:

*I don't know these people
I can't even remember their faces now
I could barely see their faces
when they stood up and spoke
but I feel connected to them
just because we shared that experience.
I have no idea who they are
I am not going to go and seek out that person
with that name and that face
it's just that there are people in the world
and it's that feeling of
I don't wanna say
'that feeling of not being alone'
that's not quite it*

*but it is that
but it's more
it's real
everything that happens*

7.4.1.2 Standing together in solidarity

Researcher:

Knowing what you know and having experienced it, if someone were to come to you who has experienced [sexual violence] and is thinking about participating [in the Silent Protest] what do you think you would say to them?

Lake:

*It's gonna be hard
but it's worth it
just the sense of being part of a movement
that's trying to make a difference
speaking out together
and that sense of solidarity with people
and that support that you get.
That's where the healing is
So, like, while it is very difficult
it's also, you know, the benefit
it's really beneficial*

This palpable sense of solidarity and community is the quality which drew me to the Silent Protest in the first place and continues to fascinate me. On the scale in which it is enacted in the Protest, it is unique. It is fairly unique in a South African context to experience such solidarity across gender, race and age divides. Solidarity is also central to the organisers' intentions and vision for the Protest, as both a means and an end. The primary organiser expressed this vision and how she witnessed it being enacted in the Silent Protest as being fundamental to her politics and activism.

Primary organiser:

*[Solidarity in anti-rape activism]
The tag line for the campaign is
'solidarity with woman who speak out'
the concept of solidarity
activism not being necessarily
about what you share in terms of politics
but about personal connections
between people.
You know, in order to fight for something
you have to love the people you're fighting with*

*otherwise ... there's no point
you just give up
you stop caring ...
particularly when you're doing this kind of work...
kind of its not (.) its not (.) its not brave.
It's messy and unpleasant
there's not a lot of hope to it
everyday people come to you
disclose the most harrowing terrible truths about their lives ...
You only show up because you know
other people are going to be showing up
people that you care about and that you wanna show up for.*

*[Solidarity in the Silent Protest]
happens because friends wake each other up
everybody sets their alarms
they all agree that this is the thing they're going to do
they walk together from their residences
they go together into the hall
they stand in the queues together
they get their t-shirts and they help each other put their t shirts on
they check each other's tape
they support each other through the course of the day
men and women
black and white
South African, Zimbabwean Ethiopian
older students, staff members ...
and that's the only thing that unifies people
... this is how change happens
it's that simple.
It's about recognising you don't have to agree on everything
or share the same people,
but that sacrifice ...
bonds people in an interesting way:
'Ok were going to give up our sleep
give up our food
inconvenience ourselves
all together
for this one thing
it builds relationships between people.
So people that have never spoken to each other before
seem to gravitate towards each other.

I don't believe in fairy tale change any more
but on that day ...*

*on that day
when you look around
you're in a hall full of people
who are all dressed the same
all there for the same purpose
and even if it is just for that day,
we all want the same thing ...
kind of gives you this vision of what the world might be like ...
which I think is what changes things for people.
It's that kind of concrete experience of what solidarity feels like ...
when progressive people gather together ...
to make a simple statement in a complex way.
That's what allows the change to happen
People that have never spoken
about sexual violence in their own lives
or in the lives of people that they're close to
suddenly can speak about it,
because you get this glimpse of what might be possible.
So that's why I keep doing it.
I keep doing it because on that one day
it allows me to imagine a world
that I might actually want to live in and fight for.*

7.4.2 Acknowledging my story to myself and naming the violation

For a number of my contributors, the Silent Protest offered a space where, for the first time they were able to identify and name what happened to them as sexual violence and to feel that their experience had validity in the world. Some were also able to integrate the experience into their life narrative, to acknowledge that it had happened to them. For one, it was a space in which, for the first time, she remembered her own experience of violation which had happened as a child. This can have both costs and benefits, as such an experience can be overwhelming and retraumatising. However, for this young woman and for a number of my other contributors, participating in the Silent Protest initiated a process of therapy and healing which they experienced as allowing them to come to live well again on their own terms. If they had not encountered the Silent Protest, one cannot predict when in their lives a similar process may have been initiated.

Lake:

*...It's really beneficial
I think that
I think almost that
I can't find the right word in my mind,*

*I'll just use owning,
I think owning,
participating in that kind of way
[in the Silent Protest]
you are owning the experience.
Because this is part of my life's narrative
this did happen to me.
for years and years,
it was almost like ...
that happened to a different person,
I'm not that person*

Naomi:

*It's hard to identify exactly what
/sigh/
it was a bit like pushing
the experiences within myself out to the world
and then feeling more validated
in those experiences
feeling that they were a little bit more shared
Uhm, like they uhm (.) ja
I mean it ja
/laughs/
I don't know how to explain it
/laughs/
It was no longer just something that ...
it became real maybe
that's what I'm trying to say
it became a little bit more real
in the outer world
it had been very real within me
of course
but it had more reality, validity
as an experience in the world
that others could see
maybe I did feel a little bit validated
like it was
it was out there in the world
and that it existed*

7.4.2.1 The impact of naming the violation: shifting blame for rape

One of my participants expressed how coming to name the violation as rape enabled her to shift the sense of responsibility for what had happened from herself to the perpetrator and to focus the anger she felt on him rather than on herself. This is significant as internalised

guilt and shame have a significantly negative impact on women's sense of themselves and well-being after rape.

Boipelo:

*the thing is
I actually didn't know that it was rape
for a long time actually
what had happened
I didn't actually ...
constitute it as rape
because (.) I kinda
it was only when people started speaking
about their experiences
I was like
'oh wait a minute
oh wait wait wait
this is what actually happened'
I think, in the beginning
but I mean when I
when I finally sort of
not that,
I think I always knew that,
I mean not I think,
I always knew what he'd done was wrong,
I always did know that you know
But in my head it was never in the sexual violence category,
it was in the 'he did something I didn't want' category.
I know it's two different places in my head
one makes me more angry than the other one
you know what I mean.*

Researcher: which one makes you angry?

Lake: *The sexual violence
it makes me more angry
or should I say the sexual violence one
is what makes me angry at him
The other one makes me angry at myself
you know what I mean
because I sort of think I could have done something
so it makes me angry at him and at me*

7.4.2.2 The impact of remembering the violation

Just before she came to university, Boiketlo's best friend told her that her sister had been raped by a policeman. This horrified her and she participated in the Silent Protest in her first year as a gesture of solidarity with her friend's sister and others who had experienced rape.

It was only on the day of the Silent Protest that she remembered what had happened to her when she was 5 or 6 years old.

Boiketlo:

*I personally
I blocked my experience out
I totally forgot about it
when [my friend] told me about [her sister]
I was like 'that's the first time I heard
about anybody that I know
who's been raped'
it didn't click anything for me at all
until last year's Silent Protest
I don't know what happened
I was walking around
all of a sudden I just started crying
and all of it just came rushing to me,
I didn't finish the silent protest last year
I was just in such a state
it was after the die-in
I couldn't do the rest of the day
I spent it with a friend of mine
she was just trying to calm me down
Up until the die-in last year,
nothing at all had ever clicked in my mind
it was really really really hard for me
I didn't speak to anybody about it
for months and months afterwards
it was only my friend
who was there
who knew about it
But as time went by
you know once I started feeling really really comfortable with it
and accepting that this is what happened,
you need to confront it to move on,
that's when I started speaking about it a little bit
I have a psychologist that I speak to*

This was an overwhelming and painful experience for Boiketlo at the time, and it is important to acknowledge that the Silent Protest can precipitate this kind of traumatic response for those who have experienced sexual violence and to put measures in place to offer support and containment where that is needed. It is also important to recognise that watching a news bulletin or a movie, reading about rape, smelling or tasting something, or hearing a particular

song can also trigger traumatic responses. For those who have experienced trauma, the possibility of remembering and of that remembering being traumatic, is ever present. For Boiketlo however, it proved beneficial in the longer term in that it catalysed a process which included acknowledging what had been done to her, sharing the experience and accessing therapy when she felt she needed it. It is for this reason that the organisers remain available in accessible spaces throughout the day and the university Counselling Centre releases at least two of its counsellors to be available for students who seek assistance during the day. It was found however, that fewer students dropped in at the Counselling Centre on the day of the Silent Protest when the Debrief Café was offered. It seemed that some students simply needed a quiet, safe space where they were not alone but did not have to interact and could process what they were thinking and feeling through art or writing.

Even for those who still choose not to speak at all about their own experiences, there can be a vicarious sense of acknowledgement through hearing the acknowledgement of others' stories. However, this too can be complex and difficult. For Nomalanga she had never spoken about her violation, which happened when she was a young child. She was both repelled by and drawn to the Silent Protest.

Nomalanga:

*For me it just brings the pain
that I have been trying to put away for a long time
It is also helpful to know
that you are not alone who went through this
and to see other people
really brave enough to talk about it in public
because it takes courage to do that
so its helpful
but again
when you tell (.)
like society nowadays
you tell them 'I'm a victim'
the next thing when you pass:
'You see that girl?'
'Ya'
'She's a rape survivor'
I don't want to be distinguished
or seen different from other people*

7.4.3 Disclosure: having the opportunity to tell my story

7.4.3.1 Navigating the silence-disclosure tightrope

As I have discussed, by its name and nature, the Silent Protest highlights the fundamental dialectic of trauma which is the tension between silence and disclosure (Herman, 1992/2015). In Chapter 4 I discussed some of the factors which serve to silence those who have experienced sexual trauma and I will come back to this central struggle in Chapter 8. Here, I will focus on what my contributor's narratives highlighted about the role that the Silent Protest played in their own grappling with this dilemma.

It is a small percentage of victim-survivors participating in the Protest who either wear the Rape Survivor t-shirts or speak at the Breaking the Silence event. However, one of the significant beneficial effects of the Silent Protest, mentioned by every one of my contributors, is its provision of a context for conversations about experiences of sexual violence amongst friends and peers. Silent Protest participants have the opportunity to bear witness to one another's stories, even if the only story told is the wearing of a t-shirt, or tears or a gaze held for longer than usual. In this way it stands against the taboos and silences around sexual violence. Every one of my contributors spoke of being able to tell at least one more person about their experience of sexual violence in the context of the protest. These included friends, partners, lecturers or wardens, and in some cases, family members. The opportunity to recover one's sense of agency and voice and tell one's story to even one other person, who will listen and receive the story is an important step in having one's experience of violation acknowledged and validated.

Many were surprised to discover others in their peer group who had had similar experiences and this facilitated their own sharing. Hlengiwe commented that: *"I noticed that most of my close friends are rape survivors"*. In most cases, in the context of the protest this disclosure was received with openness and care. It is important to note though, that even with a sense of safety established, many women express ambivalence and a complex approach-retreat struggle around disclosure. The emphasis for most contributors was on their own choice and agency regarding when and to whom they disclose. This is explored further in Chapter 9.

7.4.3.2 Disclosing to friends and partners

Abongile:

Being able to sit in a group of friends

and share our experiences
you realise
'oh my gosh, I didn't know about this about you'
it's that personal form of healing
with your friends
so that's that's what [the Silent Protest has] allowed
without the Silent Protest
I most likely would not know
the number of people in my friendship circle
that have been raped
without that I would not be comfortable
because of that
I can trust them with my healing
I'm not the only one who's gone through it
that's what it [the Silent Protest] facilitates
and that was the next step
I guess
for me
creating a space
with people I trust
people I know won't judge me
people I know understand
I don't want anyone else outside of [this university]
outside of this friendship circle
to know about it
in my own time
I'll be fine
when I feel like I need to
I'll talk about it
and if I don't wanna talk about it
that's fine
I'll just uhm close it up
and then I get to control the healing
it's not in someone else's hands
it's not in the rapist's hand
or whatever
I get to control the rest of my life.

Cara: [In the context of conversations about the Silent Protest in her residence]
And then another girl who was also a first year
we kind of hit it off from day 1.
A::nd she is also a survivor
that kind of came up in the conversation [about the Silent Protest]
and I was like, 'so am I'
I hadn't really spoken about it before
to anyone
never acknowledged it
nothing

So it was
it was a first sort of time
but it was an amazing safe space
So it was
ja it felt fine.

Naomi:

*It [the Silent Protest] gave me a space to speak about it again
which was very nice
I hadn't spoken about
almost since
oh no I had spoken about it since it happened
but not much
that whole [Silent Protest] day actually
was very much about that as well
I mean leading up to it
and then afterwards
it allowed me to speak about it
particularly with my friend
my digs mate
who had a similar experience
We spoke about it a lot
it was a real release actually
to have that space
which was created in the protest
it's almost like people expect you
to get over something like that
and you don't
you're not freely allowed to speak
about it
I mean you're allowed
but you're not
/laughs/*

For many of my contributors, disclosure to even one other person was associated with a sense of relief, liberation and confidence: As Ayla said: *I don't feel like I need to hide anymore.*

7.4.3.3 Disclosing to family members

Several contributors mentioned that they couldn't believe that sexual violence was talked about openly at this university because in their homes and communities this was not the case. There is a unique opportunity in the university setting because most of the students who participate are not in their hometown, and there is a sense of anonymity. Some wore the Rape Survivor t-shirt despite the fact that people at home did not know about their experience and they would never put on a t-shirt like that in their own home community. One

contributor who had worn the Rape Survivor t-shirt for three years but had not yet told her family what happened to her, was half hoping that she would be on television in her t-shirt and her family would see and it would open up a conversation. She was disappointed when this did not happen. Conversations about sexual violence are difficult to initiate and conduct, particularly with family and the Silent Protest can serve as an opening or catalyst for these.

Cara told her father about her rape for the first time on the day before her first Silent Protest. She had not told anyone about it in the four years since it occurred. She had chosen to push it aside and ignore it because there were other traumas in her life and in her family's life which she felt took emotional precedence. His response at the time was limited and he seemed unable to offer the support she needed: *He doesn't deal well with the emotional thing ... like bringing that up with him was very cut and dried kind of thing.*

Her first Silent Protest was difficult and escalated a struggle with depression that had been developing during her first year. She took time off from her studies and accessed the support and therapy she needed. From the next year she took up a supportive organising role for the Protest and was participating in the Silent Protest for the sixth time in the year I conducted my interviews. It was her final year at the university and this time her father participated in the protest with her.

*My dad finally got to that point
I mean he was amazing this year
you know he was there.
Dad hates people way more than I do
hates crowds and hates gatherings and things
so he kind of hid at the back
but he was there
sent me messages in between
that sort of stuff
The rest of the night got a bit much
and he was like, that's enough now
but you were wonderful
congratulations
I'm so proud of you
and I'm off*

7.4.3.4 Speaking publicly about an experience of sexual violation

Several of my research contributors had shared their story at the Breaking the Silence event at some point. For some it was a spontaneous decision in the moment. For others it was a

culmination of their process of engaging with the Silent Protest, something that they anticipated and planned for.

Nomvula felt that speaking out publicly relieved her of a burden: *You can always go to a counsellor or whatever, but nothing compares with that [speaking at the Cathedral], so I can recommend it. [Afterwards] it was off my chest, and it was a huge relief.*

For Cara it was carefully planned and long-anticipated:

Researcher: What did it mean for you to stand up and speak?

*It was sort of the final
like, yes I've spoken about it
yes I'm very candid about it
people ask me
I'll happily tell you what happened
But it was a final sort of
this is the last obstacle
you've got to just get up and talk
it feels like being a hypocrite
to tell other people to go and do it
and I haven't done it.
So I needed to just get over that
It was, it was a very positive step
I think
I must have even rewritten that thing about 5 times
I know it was horrible to start getting into it again
I always just ended up with a very short (...)
it was about 10 lines
that's all I need to say
My message has sort of formed for the last sort of 3 years or so.
The rape is not everything
it's not who you are
there's more to you
don't let it consume you
it's sort of what I feel the survivors need to understand now
yes, grieve and be in that space
but move past it
there's more to you*

Naomi had chosen to speak at the previous year's Silent Protest but had found it did not have quite the impact she had hoped for:

*I did decide
that I wanted to speak
and I did speak*

*but I didn't find it as much of a release
as I thought I would
I hadn't written anything down beforehand
I was just kind of speaking straight from my heart
I wish I had
I wish I had written something down
so I might write something before this year's protest
I found
when I was standing up there
there was so much that I could say
I didn't know how to put it into a package
for others to understand
I also felt a little bit
I was comparing myself with others that had spoken.
I'm sure it's not right
but my personal experience
I don't think it's as nearly as bad
as what a lot of people were speaking about
I'm on a completely different scale
So I kind of felt a little bit
I had a right to be speaking
but I didn't
like I was comparing myself
or other people were comparing me
to those experiences.
I mean I'm glad that I did it
but I would like to do it again
having written something down
working out,
worked out what it all means to me
And how I can package it
that's what was important for me
because I might know
how it is with me
but you need to package these things
in a certain way
if it's going to be understood by others
I often find.
It was a bit like
like I had to please the crowd
give them the story that they were expecting
wanting to hear
that was unexpected
I felt very much
like it was going to be just me and my personal*

*would be a personal move for me
I just feel like preparing better
I could divorce myself a little bit more from the crowd
and just concentrate
on what I want to put out there*

This contributor's story raises several important issues. The one is something that struck me in almost every interview and conversation I had with women who had experienced sexual violence. Almost without exception they described what had happened to them as 'not as bad' as what had happened to someone else whose story they knew. When considering the other stories that she had heard during previous Silent Protests, Naomi wondered if her experience even counted in that space. There are many possible reasons for this sense of a hierarchy of suffering when it comes to sexual violence. I discuss this further in Chapter 9.

The other issues that Naomi raises include how very difficult it is to capture or express an experience of sexual violence in language that others will not only understand, but that will allow them to grasp the full meaning and impact of that experience. A further issue is that 'speaking out' about sexual violence has been hailed as essential, or at least an important and necessary step for 'healing'. By its name and nature even the Silent Protest seems to support this ideal, which is why some participants consciously move towards taking this step. The question of speaking out is discursively dense. While it can be seen as transgressive and troubling of dominant discourses it can also be reinscribed within those discourses as an obligation or necessary step. It is important to acknowledge that while having your story heard and witnessed can indeed connect you to care and support, it can also leave you feeling vulnerable and exposed as those who know can now position you in ways you cannot control. Speaking out is certainly not an easy answer for the suffering that trauma causes. This is also explored further in Chapter 9.

Despite the complexity of her experience of speaking publicly, Naomi still felt that it had been beneficial to her to do so. Only one of my contributors, Bella later regretted her public disclosure at the Breaking the Silence event. She was the only one of my contributors who had been raped by a woman, and after the Silent Protest she became extremely fearful that the woman would somehow find out that she had spoken and that she would target her or her family. The Protest t-shirt in her cupboard triggered anxiety responses and Bella

expressed the wish to burn it. We discussed this and I arranged for her to come to my home and burn the t-shirt in my outdoor braai. This ritualistic act brought her relief from the anxiety.

7.4.3.5 Choosing to wear a Rape Survivor t-shirt

I discuss participants' active and creative engagement with the Rape Survivor t-shirts in more detail in Chapter 9 but wanted to highlight here the benefits and complexities that my contributors spoke of in relation to their choice to wear the t-shirt. For some it was an important step in acknowledging that sexual violation was a part of their story. Several of my contributors participated as Silent Protestors for a year or several years, before deciding to wear a Rape Survivor t-shirt.

Amara:

*I was still quite nervous
I think I only took
I think I only took on the survivor shirt
I don't think it was the next year
I think it was
I think I did 2 years with my mouth taped shut
it was a process
it was an absolute process
because really
I hardly even admitted to myself
that that had happened to me*

However, what seemed significant was that for many women who chose to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt, they did so, not primarily for their own process, but for other victim-survivors who might see the t-shirt. This awareness of providing hope and support for others was a thread that ran through many of my contributors' narratives, particularly those who had participated more than once.

Lake:

*[I want other women to know]
that you will be ok
it's gonna be ok
it takes a lot of time
to believe that you're gonna be ok
you're never the same person that you were before
I suppose
I mean it's a
a certain kind of
you know*

*for women who've never spoken out
I can't imagine the strength it takes
to just hold that in
for that long
some people would think that might be weak
but I think that takes so much strength
to not just be like
'somebody help me
this is what has happened'
And then even more strength
to now go and be like
'ok I'm now ready'
and if wearing that shirt on that day helps someone to be ready
then that's it for me*

7.4.4 Revising my story: narrative (re)construction and political resistance

The Silent Protest seems to offer participants opportunities for telling stories that have not yet been told or have been told to very few, as well as for narrative (re-)construction: the revision of limiting/limited self-narratives and the enactment/performance of different/preferred identity claims and having these witnessed and affirmed.

As we saw in Chapter 4 the literature on recovery from sexual violence speaks about importance of (re-)constructing a narrative about what happened to you, however fragmented and partial, and having that narrative compassionately witnessed by at least one other person (Herman, 1992/2015, Brison, 2002, Weingarten, 2003). Narrative therapy approaches take this one step further to say that not all narratives are equal. We are shaped by the narratives we tell. Thus, the nature of the narrative we tell about trauma positions us and the experience of trauma in our lives in particular ways. I discuss this further in relation to the subject positions that the Silent Protest makes available in Chapter 8.

Many women who experienced sexual violence have been recruited into stories which ascribe responsibility for the assault to the victim-survivor. Internalising these as self-blame can severely inhibit their well-being and their coming to live well again after rape. However, there are not many opportunities available to construct different stories, apart from therapy to which the majority of victim-survivors, certainly in South Africa, have no access. The Silent Protest offers a space that stands against generally accepted stories about sexual violence and offers alternative interpretations. This allows participants either to re-story their original experience or simply to participate in an event that invites them to experience themselves in

a new or different way, doing differently, speaking differently, engaging differently with sexual violence as a concept. The Silent Protest offers a both a platform and a receiving space for the telling of a range of narratives, but by its very nature, many of these narratives are interwoven with or connected to activism and resistance.

7.4.4.1 Collectively resisting guilt and shame

For several of my contributors and for many of the women who spoke out at the Breaking the Silence events over the years, participating in the protest allowed them to begin to refuse or resist the sense of guilt and shame that had claimed them since their violation. In Chapter 4, I discussed the literature which shows that most women who have experienced sexual violence experience some level of guilt after the incident. This could be guilt about all the things that societies blame victims for (where they were, what they were wearing, what they were doing, how much alcohol they had consumed and so on), guilt at the way in which they interacted with the perpetrator prior to the incident and/or after the incident, guilt at their own physical or verbal responses or lack of response, and shame at being the kind of person to whom such a thing could happen.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, rape is constructed as an assault on the honour and/or the 'essence' of a woman. Women therefore experience rape as defiling and shaming and speak of feeling disconnected and isolated from those they care about and the broader community. In acknowledging or telling your story publicly in the context of the Silent Protest you acknowledge your dishonoured identity but claim a space within a separate system of honour alongside those who have experienced a similar violation. Gavey (2005, p. 63) notes how in a group therapy context, victim-survivors often come to have greater empathy for themselves by empathising with others who have experienced similar traumas. A similar dynamic seems to be at play in the Silent Protest. Participation in the Silent Protest did seem to help women shift narratives of self-blame or shame and locate the 'blame' or responsibility for their violation with the perpetrator.

Amara:

*So really for the very first time
[after participating in the Silent Protest]
I started to:: be more gentle with myself
and realize that the shame
is a natural way to deal with the rape.*

*And to begin to see that that was my story
and that I could own it.*

Lake:

*In the debriefing sessions [Break the Silence events]
it comes up so often
that women think they are to blame
I suppose hearing that it's quite a common response
among women
made me feel
it actually wasn't your fault
Cause I mean
for years and years
I mean
I not only spent years afterwards thinking
what was it?
did he actually rape me?
because you know I have kissed him
before
And I think hearing in the Silent Protest
that a lot of women have that experience
is positive
in a sense
It means, ok
I'm not the only one who's trying to deal with that
with feeling guilty
or worrying that I'm responsible
or that I should have done things differently
And certainly when someone else is talking
I'm like 'that's obviously not your fault'
'you're obviously not responsible for what happened'
And maybe thinking that about them
it doesn't immediately translate into
'well ok that wasn't
it can't be my fault'
But I suppose it does make you...
there is a, a kind of mapping on to it
thinking 'why then do I still blame myself?'
'Why do I blame myself
if I'm not gonna blame her?'
you know
I don't know*

Hlengiwe:

*Looking at the rape survivors standing up there
[in the front at the breaking the silence event]
I knew for the first time
that it wasn't my fault
what happened to me'
was not my fault
I'm not to blame
the other person is to blame*

7.4.5 Mutuality: receiving and expressing care

The Silent Protest offers opportunities to receive care and acceptance in various small and bigger ways and to offer similar care to others as they share their stories in whichever way they choose. Being positioned as one who can both give and receive care and support was significant for many of my contributors as in most other contexts, as a victim-survivor of sexual violence they are positioned as those who only need and receive intervention and care.

Cara:

*I felt that it was really important
[for those participating in the Silent Protest]
to have someone who's been through this
walked this thing
and it's been a massive breakdown point for her
to kind of be like
'look it's ok
it can get better'
So my involvement is not really
ja sure sort of the activism stuff
but it's more about the silence
it's more about being there
saying 'look it's ok'
like 'look if I can do it
you can do it too'
I wanted to be there
like 'look she's ok
you can get there'
I so desperately needed that
In my first year
and it wasn't really there*

7.4.6 Seeing others in new ways

Several participants spoke about the fresh insights the Silent Protest offered into friends, peers and lecturer's attitudes towards sexual violence and issues of gender, depending on how they responded to the Silent Protest and to the participant in whichever t-shirt she chose to wear. This allowed them to feel safer with some friends but also caused some to revise relationships with friends and even end relationships with friends.

Amara:

*I became quite angry
with people who avoided me
so colleagues you know
the high up deputy vice chancellor
looking at me
you could just see him freezing
and pained
but not knowing how to deal with it
and then in fact
[being] so moved by people who didn't [avoid it]
There's one old man who works in this building
[in a cleaning/maintenance role]
when he saw [the Rape Survivor t-shirt]
he said, "I'm so sorry I didn't know"
and came up and gave me a hug.
And I just thought
"yay, that's a real reaction
that's not reacting to an idea of something
that then gets tainted in particular ways, you know.*

7.4.7 Seeking out the support I need

Whilst participation in the Silent Protest was hard for all of my contributors, and for two it had previously precipitated a breakdown which led to them withdrawing from university for at least a while, it became a catalyst for most of my contributors to seek out the help they felt they needed. Some sought the support of a therapist, others took up a more activist role in the university, some chose to focus on sexual violence in their academic work. Even the two who had to withdraw for a period felt it had been beneficial because it allowed them to acknowledge what had happened and moved them closer to living well again after the rape.

Lake:

*[Speaking about a friend who had been raped and then participated in the Silent Protest]
I mean she's now*

*she's finally in therapy
I'm not sure whether participating
maybe participating in the silent protest helped that
in some way*

7.5 What the Silent Protest offers which supports beneficial impacts

7.5.1 The Silent Protest offers choices

The Silent Protest offers the whole university community, and particularly those who have experienced sexual violence, the freedom to choose how they will engage with the protest and to revise the nature of their engagement with the Protest, during the course of one Silent Protest or across several Silent Protests. This freedom to engage or disengage and to have control over how they position themselves in relation to the protest is significant, firstly in that it offers a sense of agency and control, which was denied them when they were violated. It is also quite unique as victim-survivors most often do not have this freedom of choice when they disclose in other contexts such as to their families or the criminal justice system. Matters may be taken out of their hands and they may find that they simply have to go along with processes that have been put in motion, whether or not they experience those processes as contributing to their well-being.

In reflecting on the choices that the Silent Protest offers, I realised that my research question focussed too narrowly on the act of participation. I had asked about the impact of participating in the Silent Protest on victim-survivors, unaware of how significant the *choice* to participate was, in and of itself. Every decision that participants made in relation to the protest had its own impact as well.

The following are some of the choices that the Silent Protest offers.

7.5.1.1 Choosing to participate in, observe or avoid the Protest

Due to the fact that the Protest is advertised for some time in advance, victim-survivors can decide if they wish to participate, observe from a distance or to avoid the protest altogether. Some victim-survivors who do wish to avoid the protest as it triggers a traumatic response for them, have complained on social media that due to the magnitude of the protest, it is very difficult to avoid it altogether if they are on campus on the day. This is a challenge that the protest organisers grappled with, eventually deciding that the potential benefits outweighed the risks and advocated for a gender programme co-ordinator role to be established at the

University to ensure that both support and events were ongoing rather than focusing on one annual event¹. They also reached out directly to the person who had posted the complaint.

7.5.1.2 Choosing to participate in all events of the day, or some, or none

Signing up for the Protest does not oblige any person to participate in every event of the day or even to wear their chosen t-shirt all day. Participants can participate and withdraw according to their own needs.

7.5.1.3 Choosing how to identify oneself in relation to the Protest

Victim-survivors can choose to wear a silent protestor t-shirts (with taped mouth), a solidarity protestor t-shirt, or a Rape Survivor t-shirt, and since 2014 there has been the additional option of a Survivor t-shirt. No questions are asked of anyone who signs up for any of these t-shirts. There are always participants who change t-shirts during the day. Most often those who change are women who were wearing the silent protestor t-shirt but have experienced rape and choose to put on a Rape Survivor t-shirt. Women have expressed a range of different motivations for doing so. This is discussed further in Chapter 9.

Researcher: I know some women choose to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt and some choose not to. What has been your process?

Meira: *I'm wearing the Solidarity shirt*

In first year

I would see people with Survivor t-shirts

I'm like, I can't get that out of my mind.

Like it really does

like there was this one girl in my res

like the whole year I was just like

she was raped

she was raped

That's all I could think of

I was like

don't

cause that was the first thing I really knew about her

Researcher: So you don't want that to be kind of the defining feature of your identity, almost?

Meira: *Ja*

because it happened to me

and I didn't make myself that

¹ In 2014, after chairing the review conducted by the organising committee of that year's Silent Protest, I drew up a proposal for a Gender Programming Co-ordinator post to be created at the university for a person who would co-ordinate ongoing campaigns, events, groups and programmes related to gender, sexuality and violence. Finances and priorities at the University did not allow for the creation of such a post.

*so that's not something I claim as my identity
it was an incident
so ja*

7.5.1.4 Choosing to be taped or to speak

Victim-survivors who choose to wear a Rape Survivor t-shirt may also choose to have their mouths taped. Although this was not the original intention – wearing the Rape Survivor t-shirt implied that you were no longer silent and were speaking out – a number of victim-survivors wanted to honour the complexity of their own process of disclosure and silence by keeping their mouths taped, even when wearing the t-shirt. Some chose to have their mouths taped simply because they anticipated that their friends would want to ask them questions that they did not feel they wanted or needed to answer.

7.5.1.5 Choosing disclosure or silence

As we have heard from my contributors, the Silent Protest offers a range of opportunities for disclosure that are not normally available. Victim-survivors may choose to take these up or they may choose to remain silent. As I have mentioned, silence can be a considered, agentic choice rather than something that has been imposed.

7.5.1.6 Choosing public disclosure

The Silent Protest is fairly unique in its creation of a space in which public disclosure of a sexual violation is possible, by speaking at the Breaking the Silence event, or by wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt, without the victim-survivor having to be interrogated or provide evidence for the claim as they would if they disclosed in the context of the justice system. Victim-survivors may take up this opportunity or may make their experience more public by disclosing to friends, family members or another victim-survivor.

7.5.1.7 Choosing to access offered support

In the context of the Silent Protest victim-survivors are constructed as activists collectively resisting sexual violence, rather than as victims in need of help. However, the organisers are very aware of the potentially lasting impacts of trauma and victim-survivors are offered access to support before, during and after the Silent Protest through briefings and meetings, access to the organisers, access to the university Counselling Centre and through the Debrief Café space. Victim-survivors choose to take up this offer, or not, as needed.

Having someone on the organising team who was a designated go-to person for emotional support on the day of the protest was particularly important for Cara. She volunteered for this role over four Silent Protests. She was not a psychologist or counsellor, but a victim-survivor herself. She was able to listen, soothe and direct people to the appropriate counselling services. It seemed significant for my contributors that the first port of call was not an expert/professional but someone who had walked a similar journey and who would not pathologise their emotional response.

It must also be noted that the absence of therapeutic discourse in the Protest events was welcomed by my contributors. It was also noted during post-protest reviews that after the Silent Protest victim-survivors were drawn to opportunities where it was made clear that they had something to offer, such as a journal sharing group or research discussion group whilst they avoided situations which positioned them as 'in need' of some form of assistance, such as group therapy.

Lake:

*I would encourage participating
on some level
but I would never, never advise on what level
It's gonna be a hard day anyway
and if you doing something that you are not ready to do
it's gonna be worse*

7.5.2 The Silent Protest offers a regular, sustained and dependable process

A further impact of the protest resides in the fact that it happens year after year. It offers a predictable and sustained feminist response to sexual violence in all its manifestations. I learned from my research contributors how many women use the repeated rhythm and structure of the protest as reference points or landmarks for their own recovery journey. One year they may watch from afar and ask a few questions. They may then choose to participate as a Silent Protestor for one or many years, and then some choose to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt or to speak at the debriefing for a variety of reasons. This process of active sustained engagement was described as having a positive, healing trajectory.

Cara:

*It's not about me anymore.
I feel like my healing's been done
this year was the final sort of obstacle*

*that I had to overcome
to stand up
and actually speak at the cathedral
which I haven't done before.
So that was kind of my last little thing
that I needed to kind of get past
and I did it this year.
And I really feel that my healing process
from the silent protest
and everything
is completed,
it's done now
I'm doing it not for me anymore now
I'm doing it for the other survivors
that's where I'm at.*

In its sustained, annual presence on campus, the Silent Protest also offers something different to the periodic outbursts of reactive outrage which punctuate the national discourse around sexual violence. These flare up and burn out equally quickly and most often accomplish nothing. The Silent Protest may not significantly impact the culture of violence in South Africa, but the fact that it happens regularly offers victim-survivors the sense that the issues that are important to them remain on the agenda and are not forgotten.

The fact that the Silent Protest only happens once a year has both costs and benefits. The benefit is that it serves as a type of landmark in a healing process and my research contributors shared how they journey intentionally knowing that it will only happen once a year. However, this also elevates the Silent Protest to a very unusual or exceptional event and this could heighten both the internal pressure for victim-survivors to participate and intensify the hopes and expectations for healing that go with this.

Many of my contributors said that they wished there was ongoing work around sexual violence on the university campus, rather than an intense focus once a year through the Silent Protest. By this they did not mean therapy. They meant the same kind of acknowledgement, activism, and collective resistance but in an ongoing way. Societal discourses are powerful and insidious and bombard us continually. It seems it would be helpful to have ongoing intentional engagement with anti-rape discourse in order to resist them and sustain the impact of the Silent Protest's counter-cultural ideas on one's own personal resistance – once a year is not enough.

7.5.3 The Silent Protest offers a (carefully constructed) non-pathologising, supportive receiving space for disclosure

The events and practices associated with the Silent Protest are very intentionally 'choreographed' (to quote the primary organiser) in order to shape a cohort of students and staff members who are conscientised/made aware. The talks, the events leading up to the protest, the wording on t-shirts, the stories they hear, discussions between friends and so on all assist the protestors to receive and respond to the stories they will hear with respect and care. The silent protestors spend the day in silence, embodying the protest, foregoing food and speech and having an unusual amount of time in their own thoughts to process what they are witnessing and experiencing. Many speak of getting a glimpse of what it might be like to feel cut off and alienated, an experience that is common after sexual violation. Individually, the protest offers the possibility of a personal journey into greater awareness, and collectively the experience helps to gather the protestors as a community of compassionate listeners; a "community of acknowledgement" as Michael White (2007) would call them who stand in solidarity with and bear witness to those who speak out. Many return year after year, for this very reason - wearing a purple t-shirt on that day affords them an opportunity to 'be' solidarity in action.

The stories that protestors hear during the pre-protest events and during the protest day, whether on social media or in person, also offer an opportunity for re-evaluation of the discourses they may have subscribed to prior to the protest about rape and sexual violence. Arthur Frank (2000, p. 361-362) explains it like this: "[S]tories give listeners access, albeit limited in time and complexity and nuance, to the world of the storyteller, or at least, the world of the story. Whilst they will return almost immediately to their own world of experience, knowledge and understanding, the story remains always as a background, a possibility which did not previously exist".

Cara:

*you're never ever gonna change anything
if you just keep quiet about it
you can't
as a survivor
if you have an environment like this [the Silent Protest]
it's probably the best place
for you to ever deal with this*

*because it's so safe here
you're so, you're believed
you're not judged
You're accepted
you have people who look at you
and go like, my word, look what you've done
It's this incredible
sort of empowering
sort of flip
from this horrendous, demoralizing experience.
And now you are, almost a beacon of
you know,
it's incredible
it's an amazing environment.*

Amara:

*The sense of solidarity that is created
is really important.
And this is something that I'm still making sense of,
but I think the silence is a crucial part of that.
The fact that people are
their mouths are taped,
and that the protest happens through silence
rather than noise.
I think that's an important aspect
of what creates the environment of solidarity and care.
For the protesters who tape their mouths,
it's not an easy protest.
It's costly.
They are embodying the protest.
The t-shirt and the tape are the placards for the protest.
And they embody the protest,
they wear it,
they live it,
for the day.
And I think that offers an opportunity
for greater compassion or empathy to develop.
[It's a] clarifying, whole enlightenment moment
You hear stats
you hear numbers
you know on the back of the t-shirts
so many people would read that t-shirt and be 'oh okay. Wow'.
You hear it or read it
in the news and stuff
and be like 'shit'*

you notice a lot of people on the day of the Silent Protest,
on that day,
reading the t-shirt
and being like 'holy shit, that number'
So just seeing it more clearly
in terms of people you know
or people you share a university with
it's just like a change in perspective,
in your overall view of the world
It's not foreign anymore
It's not a thing that you hear about on the news
It's real and immediate.

Primary organiser:

It was amplified after the 2009 protest
when we reached that critical mass
it stopped being just politics
and it became that interplay
between being testimony and witness
standing up and telling your story
without being cross-examined
standing up and telling your story
your own, personal truth
and having that be heard by people
accepted by people
acknowledged
and then
after those three things happen
being embraced by them
and supported by them
and held up by them
it shifts things
changes things for people
for want of a better term
we'll call active solidarity
visible solidarity
solidarity in action
solidarity not in the political lexicon
But in a psychological sense
making the act of solidarity
a psychologically healing act
and I think that it helps
everybody else
even if you're not a rape survivor
you don't have personal experience of rape

*rape makes us feel powerless
because you can't stop it
and because we are raised in a world
where we believe change is possible
you know, if you really want something
badly enough
work for it and it will happen
'cept it won't
not in this context
it actually really won't
no matter how hard we try
men will still rape women
and what's even worse
they won't really think that they're doing it
they'll think that's what sex is
This is what sex looks like
so: (..) you need to find a way
to help women live in that world
and so for people acting in solidarity
there's an empowerment to that
for that moment
you're actually doing something
to make the world better
even if it's just in that space
you have agency
you are able to affect real change
and for the person standing up and telling their story
even though in the moment of telling it can be incredibly painful
that (..) taking charge
making a decision to tell your story
is an act of agency
and it is reciprocated
you're met in the process
and that's powerful*

7.5.4 Change in perspective: a political account of a personal experience

The opportunity to recover one's agency and voice and tell your story to even one other person is an important step in having one's experience of violation acknowledged. However, such a narrative remains an individual's account of a personal experience. Participating in the Silent Protest helps to shift the discourse on sexual violence from a 'private' event to a broader political issue and provides a platform for the expression of collective outrage at multiple intersecting injustices. When we hear story after story we begin to recognise as Lake

did, that sexual violence is not simply a personal attack but a widely used means of wielding power and exercising control. Recognising this can offer women a more agentic discursive position which can help to shift the sense of shame and guilt that the majority of survivors of sexual violence carry. Michael White (1995) suggests that assisting people to “establish an account of the politics of their experience helps to undermine the self-blame and the shame that is so often experienced in relation to abuse [or sexual violence]” (p. 88). Participation in the Silent Protest also inspires many survivors to get involved in activism themselves – another factor that research has linked to improved recovery outcomes.

Lake:

*The protest offers a kind of collective movement sense
I think that is so important for being able to see
that this individual experience
actually fits in to this massive problem
that faces women
I remember one story
that was really hard to deal with at the debrief
this was girl saying
she always knew she was gonna be raped
because her mother was a rape survivor
and her grandmother was a rape survivor
and it was just a part of life
And just, just to have that you know
cause a lot of people think
this happens not to people like me
but other people you know*

7.5.5 The Silent Protest offers alternative ways of enacting politics

While the Silent Protest does offer a space for expression of collective outrage and for calling the government to account in relation to policing, justice and support for survivors, it enacts its politics in a different way to most protests, which seemed to be important to my contributors. Every aspect of the Protest is framed to consider the individual within the collective. And the focus and message of the Silent Protest are directed as much inward, towards the protestors, as outward, towards the broader society.

Primary organiser:

*The more I've been involved in the protest
the more it's become clear
it has very little to do with politics with a big P
it has everything to do with individual change*

and how that then translates into social change

Cara:

But the protest

I feel it's about the survivors

and that's where I feel the focus needs to be

it's a different protest

it takes the shift away from the act and the rape

and the perpetrators

to the people that have been through this

I think that's where the unique quality of this protest comes in

7.5.5.1 Silence as a form of resistance

Protests are usually very noisy, sometimes violent spaces. Many words are spoken in an effort to convince others and effect change. The Silent Protest deliberately chooses an alternative route. The silence is chosen, it is resistant and it is provocative. The tape which silences the protestors is an uncomfortable visual image and it leads to awkwardness in a university where words and ideas are the basic elements of the academic project.

Naomi:

[Speaking about the early morning march which takes place in silence]

there was this multitude of purple

and it was very supportive

I found my friends

and we walked along with linked hands

it seemed to me just a pocket of (.) of (.) of (.) of quiet

It almost seemed like time sort of stood still

while we were walking

it seemed to take a long time

we were walking slowly

but it didn't drag at all.

It was just in that space

it was suddenly

it was a very safe space

And it was just

it was a pocket of safety and silence

and of support

there were all these lines

these veins of people going towards

from all over

it was very very nice

and then we converged there

I saw people that I knew

*we were all still silent
then I would go and I would hug them
then we would stand together
and that was enough
that connection
somehow without saying anything
that was so much stronger
I feel like sometimes words cloud things
you say things just because there's an expectation
you fill silences
But now you couldn't
it was just all silent
And the physical hug or the physical signs
that we did have between one another
those were so much*

7.5.5.2 Mourning/lament as a form of resistance

Modern and postmodern societies offer few socially sanctioned spaces for mourning, and lament as collective practice belongs almost exclusively to a pre-modern era. Mourning at a funeral is acceptable, but even after a death there are socially acceptable ways for expressing grief and time frames within which grief is expected to be processed. Whilst a chronic trauma response (post-traumatic stress disorder) has been named and described and therefore rendered narratable as an understandable response following trauma, grief and mourning have not been afforded the same privilege. The Silent Protest offers a space for a range of emotions to be felt and accepted without the need for explanation or apology. Some of my contributors spoke of experiencing profound sadness and weeping at various moments during the Silent Protest, but in the context of the day, these were accepted and 'held' by the broader collective. Somehow the silence and the sombre nature of the day make possible such expressions of individual and communal mourning and lament, and for sadness and vulnerability to be present alongside anger. This makes possible the intimacy of community and solidarity. In this space the expression of painful emotions is an enactment of political resistance rather than weakness. It challenges a neoliberal insistence on recovery, progress and 'okayness'.

Amara:

*I was overwhelmed with sorrow.
I took it all in
I felt their sadness*

*when I watch –
I was thinking about it
if I see (.) [a news bulletin about sexual violence]
I get, like (.) angry,
I usually am,
I want to,
I'm defensive
I want to do something about it or work through it or whatever,
In the Cathedral I just sat there crying
I didn't even mind
I was just listening
I think
I stared at the ground*

Amara was surprised that she had been able to just stay with the sadness she was feeling. She describes it as being an 'open space' where emotion was welcome, it felt safe to cry and it did not feel like anyone was watching, evaluating or judging. Anger was also there, but the prevailing emotion was sadness. It being an 'open space' was significant for her.

Lake:

*There's a completely different atmosphere
to the silent protest
Which is very solemn and almost (.)
but I think that, that atmosphere
was actually,
the one of intense,
might actually help women to come forward
the atmosphere is,
I don't know
reverent
I'm not sure.
But you know when you're in awe of something,
it's exceptionally powerful
but like completely different
kind of contains,
I mean that kind of holy feeling
like this is a, you know, like confessional space
And being able to let go of
and not let go as in, 'I'm letting this go now I'm gonna be fine'
But for women who have been just like this is mine
I mean I've been through stages where I was like possessive of my pain
I was like this is my pain
it is not yours
I had a partner at the time that I was raped*

*and he wrote a song about it
and I was furious.
He was like crying
and I was like it's not your pain
this is mine not yours.
it's great to have a space that enables you to just be like
ok I can share this
for a moment
and not hold on to it so tightly*

7.5.5.3 Anger and outrage as a form of resistance

The Silent Protest also offered its participants an opportunity to express outrage and protest, both against what had happened to them personally and what had been inflicted on others. For some of my contributors, they experienced a rare upwelling of anger for the first time at various points in the Silent Protest.

Protest is an agentic subject position not usually available to victims of sexual violence unless they affiliate themselves with a particular movement or event. And until recently, as I discussed in Chapter 2 such movements were rare, especially in South Africa.

7.5.5.4 Solidarity and mutual care as a form of resistance

As the primary organiser mentioned, The Silent Protest's primary goal is solidarity with victim-survivors of sexual violence. The protest therefore embodies and enacts a politics of care – resisting violence through mutual care. The care that is expressed is a caring 'with' where victim-survivors can both offer and receive care, rather than a caring 'for' where one who is perceived as strong and resourced enacts care for one who is perceived as weak and in need. The concept of mutual care in the context of the protest is explored further in Chapter 8.

7.5.5.5 Self-care as a form of resistance (Debrief Café)

The Debrief Cafe has been described previously (in Chapter 5). It was an intervention which I designed in consultation with protest organisers, survivor participants and therapists, in order to address concerns about the lack of post-protest support for participants, both those who have publicly shared their testimonies of violation and survival and those who have not. The Debrief Cafe offered a safe and creative space to students who participated in the Silent Protest and want to continue the conversations which it evoked. Participation was entirely voluntary and flexible. It was hoped that the Debrief Café would in itself be transformative in that it offers participants an opportunity to engage in self-care as an act of resistance to

violence and its effects, as a political action in and of itself and to use the space to critically reflect on their own experiences while firmly locating them within a broader socio-political context.

7.5.6 Summary of narrated benefits of participation in the Silent Protest

As previous sections have described, my research contributors narrated a range of benefits of participating in the Silent Protest. By way of summary, the list below highlights the categories of benefit described.

- Being (re)connected to a community
- Owning my story and naming the violation
- Telling my story
- Revising my story: narrative (re)construction
- Receiving and expressing care
- Seeing others in new ways
- Seeking out the support I need

When speaking about what the Silent Protest offers to those who have experienced sexual violation that supports or makes possible these benefits, my research contributors mentioned the following:

- It offers choices
- It offers a regular, sustained and dependable platform/process/space
- It offers s a (carefully constructed) non-pathologising supportive receiving space for stories
- It offers political account of a personal experience
- It offers alternative ways of enacting a politics of resistance

7.6 Costs and challenges of participating in the Silent Protest

Most of my research contributors found the day of the Silent Protest difficult or challenging in some way. However, they had anticipated this and had still chosen to participate. Most sought out the support of a friend or partner when the day was difficult. One contributor was overwhelmed by emotion after the morning briefing and chose to withdraw from participating in the protest. However, she met with her friends who did participate after the

protest in order to hear about their experiences. Some of the challenging aspects my contributors mentioned included:

- How some people look at you and respond to you, as a silent protestor or wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt
- Hearing other peoples' stories
- Limiting categories represented by the t-shirts (this was before the survivor t-shirt was added): *Naomi: Not knowing where I fit in*
- Experiencing intense emotions: anger, despair, sadness, fear
- First time acknowledgement of an experience of sexual violation, either through remembering experiences they had previously forgotten or avoided thinking about or realising that what had happened to them was actually a sexual assault.
- Exhaustion
- A sense of vulnerability or exposure
- Hopes or expectations for the day not being fully met
- The lack of follow-up after the protest. What is clear is that more support and ongoing activism in-between protest times would be beneficial to participants. My research group which met four times over the six months following the protest was felt by all participants to have been a useful space for reflection and mutual support.

However, despite the limitations, and suggestions for changes, some of which were implemented the following year, most participants still felt that it had been beneficial to them to participate.

Amara:

*There's nothing like it
there's nothing else like it going on
so the answer would not be to stop it
but to refine the bits of it that we're not happiest with, you know.
Because it's definitely not perfect
nothing is.*

7.7 Limitations of this analysis

This chapter is based upon the stories shared with me by my research contributors and responds to my original research questions. I interviewed women who had experienced sexual violence and who chose to participate in the Protest. I am very aware of the stories

that have not yet been told about the impacts of the Silent Protest. For example, what about the many women on campus who have experienced sexual violence and choose not to participate? What about those who avoid encountering the Protest or protestors altogether and hide out in their accommodation until it is over² ? What about those who are unsure or ambivalent about what has happened to them and have never acknowledged it even to themselves. What kind of impact does the Protest have for them?

My contributors were all women who both participated and responded to my call to participate in research. This narrows the focus considerably and impacts the nature and range of stories told. It is unlikely that women who experienced the Protest as traumatic or simply unhelpful, who feel significantly negative about the protest, or who have had negative experiences and have now chosen not to participate again would come forward to participate in research.

I therefore acknowledge the limitations both in what I heard and how I heard and interpreted. My research interviews were supported by three years of ethnographic immersion in the world of the protest, and my ~~analysis~~ analysis is therefore also shaped and informed by my own reflections on what I witnessed and experienced, as well as on my listening to and thinking with the narratives of my participants.

In Chapter 8, using this more descriptive ~~analysis~~ analysis as a reference, I specifically focus on the ways in which women who have experienced rape are usually positioned by and within society. I consider the alternative subject positions which the Silent Protest makes available to them. I offer my contributors' reflections on the impacts of occupying these alternative subject positions.

Chapter 9 focuses specifically on victim and survivor subject positions, which are particularly salient in the context of the Silent Protest. In this chapter I explore the choice to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt as a resistant and transgressive political action and consider the agentic and creative responses of victim-survivors even to something as apparently fixed and stable as the identifier 'Rape Survivor' on a t-shirt.

² Anecdotal and from social media posts on the day before, during and after the Protest

CHAPTER 8

THINKING WITH WOMEN'S STORIES

ABOUT THE IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE SILENT PROTEST: IDENTITY WORK, RESISTANCE AND POSITIONING

Who must I become in order to [live on]?

(Frank, 1997, p. 132)

8.1 The Silent Protest, identity work and the 'positioning dance'

In Chapter 7, I curated the words of my research contributors as they narrated what it had meant for them to participate in the Silent Protest, the impacts of participating in the Silent Protest and what it was about the Silent Protest that had brought about those impacts. We heard in the narratives of my research contributors how participation in the Silent Protest seems to stand against at least some of the factors which inhibit acknowledgement and disclosure to create the "conditions of possibility" (Gavey, 2011) for many women who participate to tell their story and access care and support.

The Silent Protest clearly does not offer any quick fixes, either to the reality of sexual violence in our country, or to the healing trajectory of those who participated. There are complexities and challenges as with anything associated with sexual violence. However, for at least some who participated, they described participation as having been beneficial, as having helped them move towards living well again.

In this chapter, I want to think more deeply *with* my contributors' stories about the impacts of participating in the Silent Protest with reference to positioning theory (as outlined in Chapter 3). I will argue that the limited and limiting subject positions available to those who have experienced sexual violation if they choose to acknowledge, disclose and/or access support or services are a significant factor inhibiting acknowledgement, disclosure and the accessing of support and services.

Much has been written about the significant trauma of rape and various interventions have been developed to address that trauma. However, what was most striking in the narratives shared by my research contributors was not the trauma and its effects, but the complex identity work – the image which comes to mind is a 'positioning dance' – engaged in by victim-

survivors of sexual violence on an ongoing basis. Both the perpetrator and society position victim-survivors of sexual violence in ways that they are constantly resisting, avoiding and re-negotiating. This is vividly expressed in Abongile's story where she both acknowledges and resists the impact of rape, and continually redefines its meaning for her on her own terms:

Abongile:

*[rape] just messed up my life actually
but ... it was ok
it still didn't define my relationships
well not completely
it didn't change anything about me
how dedicated I am
I didn't pity myself
I still don't
you wouldn't be able to tell unless I told you
and if I can do that
if you can be raped and get through that
why can't you carry on with life, you know
yes, rape is not the worst to happen
but still it's a very (.)
it's a violation of your person
and a whole lot of trust
but people still carry on
so whether you've been raped or haven't been raped
there's life beyond that
so that's my statement I think
for next week [when she would participate in the Silent Protest]
it's [that rape is] part of my life story
but again it doesn't define me
not in the way that people expect it to define me
where I'm supposed to be meek
or maybe hate men
it's part of my story
it doesn't have any value
should I put it like that?
in the past it has
cause I felt like it defined me
like it's gonna like
'oh my gosh
are you gonna think about me differently
oh my gosh'
like I'm not entertaining those [thoughts] anymore*

Abongile's story exemplifies the 'tightrope talk'-style (McKenzie-Mohr & LaFrance, 2011) active positioning dance in which most of my research contributors were engaged. Despite being constrained by the available discourses about rape and rape survivors, victim-survivors continually 'trouble' and redefine or refuse the positions they are invited to take up.

8.2 How are victim-survivors of sexual violence usually positioned?

Victim-survivors of sexual violence are most often positioned in fairly narrow and circumscribed, albeit different ways by their broader culture, society or community, their loved ones, the justice system, the medical profession, the recovery movement (and other movements) as well as by therapy/counselling practitioners of various persuasions. Drawing on the literature, the stories of my contributors, and the conversations shared amongst them, as well as my witnessing, experiencing and organising of the Silent Protest, I describe some of the subject positions made available to victim-survivors when they try to access care, support or services in the table on the next page.

What the table tries to demonstrate is that if, for example, a rape victim-survivor discloses the rape to a friend or family member they will be positioned as a victim. The person to whom they disclose may position the victim-survivor as irreparably damaged and respond with shock, pity, grief and anxiety. They may encourage the person to access specialised care. It is also possible that they will position them as somehow responsible for the assault and respond with judgement and blame. Alternatively, they may not believe the disclosure, and may position the victim-survivor as dishonest, responding with anger or dismissal.

Some systems seem to require victim-survivors to take up particular positions in favour of others. For example, the legal system requires that a victim-survivor take up or at least perform the subject position of victim, with an emphasis on the damage inflicted by the perpetrator in order to be recognised as a credible witness. The medical and psychological professions require you to take up the subject position of patient and client respectively, as one who is in need of expert, professional help and is ready to comply with the requirements of the help offered. Neoliberal discourse and the recovery movement favour the subject position of survivor.

Source of care, support or service	Subject position invited or required to take up	How that subject position may be perceived	What the subject position evokes, allows or disallows in others
No disclosure and therefore no accessing of support or services	Chosen silence (electively mute); or Silenced (by perceptions, circumstances, threats, beliefs etc.)	Others are not aware of the violation, person is not recognised or responded to as someone who has experienced sexual violence	Needs are unexpressed and unseen – others do not respond
Friends, family	victim (or non-victim, trouble maker or liar if disclosure is not accepted or believed)	Damaged or broken Defiled Traumatised Pitiable Dishonest Trouble-causing	in need of pity, specialised care, surveillance, advice or remonstrance; OR in need of care, support, help; OR (if not believed) in need of correction and silencing
Criminal justice system	Victim/complainant	Credible, reliable Dishonest, unreliable	in need of justice/help
Medical services	victim/patient	Hurt, wounded Violated	in need of assessment/ diagnosis/treatment/help
Psychological services	victim/client	Traumatised Damaged Non-coping Pathological	in need of assessment/diagnosis /treatment (therapy)/ intervention/care/help
Recovery movement	survivor	Strong Brave Resilient Activist	not in need to be admired

Table 3: Currently available sources of support/services and the subject positions made available to those who choose to access them

8.2.1 Problems with these subject positions and associated discursive resources

- a. These subject positions reduce the complexity of victim-survivors' experiences, responses and needs to limited and limiting categories or understandings. They therefore constrain the possibilities for action and care available to both victim-survivors and those offering support or services.
- b. Apart from 'survivor' these subject positions are passive and vulnerable rather than agentic. 'Survivor' is also problematic in that it suggests a fixed state already achieved rather than an ongoing work-in-progress. A post-structuralist understanding of

subjectivity assumes a fluidity and responsiveness to circumstances and people rather than a fixed identity or state. Victim-survivors affirm this, as I explore in Chapter 9.

- c. Due to the fact that the fluidity and contestedness of these subject positions are not acknowledged, they invite enduring assumptions about the impact of sexual violence and victim-survivor identity.
- d. My research contributors strongly resisted taking up or inhabiting any of these subject positions to the extent that non-disclosure was preferable. They spoke very strongly and clearly about not wanting to be pitied or looked at and treated differently.

The risk for any victim-survivor of acknowledging and disclosing a sexual assault in order to access support or services is that they will be positioned in these limiting ways. However, there are other discourses in circulation which also impact the receiving context for disclosure. Even if victim-survivors do not acknowledge or disclose a sexual assault, these discourses inform their own ongoing meaning-making in relation to the violation.

8.3 Discourses which influence the positioning of those who have been raped

Much work has been done to disrupt the morally responsible or 'somehow at fault' subject position through challenging victim-blaming discourses, as I discussed in Chapter 4. However, many victim-survivors are still discursively positioned (and may position themselves) as either having an inherent character flaw which made them at best vulnerable and at worst responsible for the assault, or as having made questionable choices which put themselves at risk. However, the alternative is also problematic: when we emphasise innocence and the absence of culpability, this can position victim-survivors as passive, helpless victims of an overwhelming experience.

These discourses relate to the experience of sexual violence itself and a victim-survivor's responsibility or blameworthiness. Other discourses which impact on the positioning of victim-survivors relate to the perceived impact of the sexual violation. As discussed in Chapter 4, the dominant discourse regarding impact is that of irreparable harm, whether it is expressed through a 'damaged goods' metaphor implying diminished inherent worth, or a psychiatric diagnosis implying long-term traumatic response, pathology and instability. The irreparable harm discourse positions victim-survivors as pitiable, inherently vulnerable and

'other' to 'ordinary' people and even 'other' to those who have experienced different traumas.

When embarking on this research journey, I too was influenced by this discourse. University research ethics committees pre-position certain groups of research participants, including women who have experienced sexual violence, as 'vulnerable populations'. Their resulting 'code red' status requires researchers to also see them in a particular way, through the lens of this descriptor and devise various means of protecting them in their 'vulnerability'. This characterisation shaped the way in which I initially approached my research contributors, positioned them in our conversations, worded my questions and the knowledges I invited or disqualified through those questions.

8.3.1 Women resisting positioning

In my early interviews with my research contributors, all my interactions with them were informed by these ideas. I treated my contributors as vulnerable and proceeded with great caution and gravity. This was most evident in the kinds of questions I asked. A narrative approach to therapy and to research is constantly listening for the discourses which underpin and inform a narrative and asks questions which try to make sense of the discursive assumptions. In my initial interviews I stuck to very superficial questions and asked nothing which would extend the narrative in potentially uncomfortable directions or unpack any statements at greater depth. At the time I was satisfied that I was engaging in ethical research practice. But was I?

It was my contributors themselves who had challenged this notion of inherent vulnerability by resisting my positioning of them, by telling stories that spoke of agency, resilience, active and ongoing engagement in identity work, humour and relational connectedness as well as or alongside pain, suffering and trauma. This stood out most starkly for me during a focus group discussion with five of my research contributors – all of whom had experienced rape. One contributor spoke about having seen a student in town wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt and she had been both shocked and in awe. The conversation which had been quite controlled and subdued until that point, erupted with energy. Others spoke of respect for the woman wearing the t-shirt, how they wouldn't wear it outside of the Silent Protest and one contributor relayed, to much laughter, the story of how she has two Silent Protest t-shirts,

one silent protestor and one Rape Survivor and how she always double checks before going to gym that she has not inadvertently put on the Rape Survivor shirt.

The conversation then moved to the responses of people in the context of the Silent Protest, to the knowledge that they had been raped. One contributor spoke of hating the way people either assume you are not okay or keep asking if you are okay once they know you have been raped. A flurry of comments and stories followed. Whilst expressing understanding that people say these things because they “don’t know what to say” they spoke of being irritated by pity, by people feeling they need to console them, and telling them “I’m here for you” especially when it is not someone they know well. One said she wished she could tell them “I didn’t ask you to be here for me”.

One contributor remembered how, on the day of the Silent Protest she was walking with her earphones in. She was dancing a little to her music as she walked, and she suddenly noticed that others were looking at her. She remembers wondering, “Why the hell is everyone looking at me?”

And I look at my reflection [passing a window] and I see Rape Survivor. I had forgotten I was wearing the shirt. So I’m thinking - they’re not associating being happy with being a rape survivor. I’m normal, there’s nothing, I’m okay.

The other contributors laughed, agreed and the conversation continued flowing. Both the contributors and I came to the conclusion by the end of the focus group that by participating as rape survivors in the Silent Protest, they were, simply by being who they were in the space, challenging the myths about what a rape survivor would look like or how they would act and ‘the’ impact that rape is assumed to have. In the language of this analysis, they were expanding the repertoire of discursive resources accessible to rape victim-survivors and making a wider range of subject positions available. This pleased them as it fitted with their hopes and intentions in participating in the protest.

It was during this conversation that I was confronted with my positioning of my research contributors as inherently vulnerable. I began to question what ‘vulnerable’ means. I also recognised how limiting it was to see vulnerability as a defining characteristic. It obscured other aspects of who they are, such as their activism and their resilience. For each one, coming to meet with me was a significant act of resistance in itself. They were defying powerful

taboos and, for many, breaking silences. Simply by turning up at my office they were identifying themselves, at least to me, as women who had experienced sexual violence. Experience had told them that such a step was risky. Each one either planned to participate in the Silent Protest or had participated.

When I acknowledged my contributors' activism and asked questions about its history and meaning for them, I became far more aware of resilience than vulnerability and I engaged with them differently. Positioning them in other new ways (as choice-makers, as constant responders, as resisters, as agents) allowed me to notice different things and ask different kinds of questions. Those questions in turn positioned my contributors as experienced knowers and influential informants. They became co-researchers whose input shaped the changes implemented during an action research cycle. It was thus my research contributors who challenged and guided me into seeing them in ways that supported more ethical, and ironically, more beneficial-to-them research practices than those implied by the 'code red' status of my research proposal.

8.3.2 Grappling with the 'irreparable harm' discourse

In recognising the 'not-vulnerability' of my research contributors, I wanted to be sure that I did not minimise in any way what they had endured. I had concluded an earlier conference presentation on my research by saying that the challenge of my ~~data analysis~~ was how to 'bear witness to irreparable harm without constructing those who tell the stories as irreparably harmed'.

There was no doubt in my mind that my research contributors' experiences were awful and abhorrent and the term 'irreparable harm' seemed to capture this. 'Irreparable harm' is a legal concept which points to a type of harm that cannot be corrected through monetary compensation or any other form of amends, conditions cannot be put back to the way they were, and it seemed to be appropriate to sexual violation. I came across the term in the title of a book by James Hatley (2000) called *'Suffering Witness: The quandary of responsibility after the irreparable'*. I was drawn to the title of the book as, having listened to the stories of women who had experienced sexual violence, the title resonated with where I found myself and my uncertainty about what to do with what I had heard; the stories that the women had entrusted me with in our interviews.

However, as I have listened to my research interviews again and again, deeply and closely, I have realised that the ‘irreparable harm’ discourse, whilst sympathetic and well-intentioned in its characterisation of rape, still supports a particular discursive master narrative about rape that has ‘real effects’. And every single one of my contributors referred to, engaged with, resisted, challenged or contradicted both the master narrative and the ways in which it positioned them.

One of my research contributors turned out not to have experienced sexual violence herself, nor had anyone close to her. She wore a rape survivor t-shirt as a gesture of solidarity (and pity as I came to realise) much the same as people had worn the Treatment Action Campaign’s¹ ‘HIV positive’ t-shirts to challenge stigma and prejudice. As I was interviewing her my heart sank because I felt like I was wasting my time with an interview I would not be able to use. However, whilst it does not address my research questions directly, she offered such a spontaneous and unfiltered description of the ‘rape as irreparable harm’ discourse that it seemed to pop it out into clear view:

Researcher: And (...) did [participating in the SP] have any impact on you, personally at that time?

Sindisiwe: It did. I think (..) for me rape has never been something that I’ve thought of, and I’d always had like (..) I dunno, in my mind, a rape victim was someone who just, I dunno, would be (..) different, you’d be able to spot them and it would be so obvious.

R: So for you, that image that you had of rape survivors before: how would you describe that, what had you expected rape survivors to be like?

Sindisiwe: [...] almost (..) broken I think, and just living somewhere else (..) and not people I come into contact with on a daily basis, like (..) I dunno, I think (..) [...] they weren’t a part of society, they weren’t functioning as people, they were just (..) those people that had been

¹ The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) was founded in December 1998 with the intention of campaigning for access to AIDS treatment for all who needed it. In order to reduce the significant stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS, the TAC produced and distributed a range of t-shirts with the message ‘HIV positive’. The play on the word positive made the meaning ambiguous and both those who had tested positive for HIV and those who supported people living with HIV were encouraged to wear them. The TAC achieved significant legal victories which ultimately led to the South African government establishing a nationwide AIDS treatment programme. [Source: <https://www.tac.org.za/category/about/> ; accessed 01/02/2022]

raped and then it was almost as if they were branded and then that was it (..) with them. ... I always just thought of like (...) ha, it sounds very ignorant, but like only poor people got raped and like I was just like (.) poor people living (..) in a squatter camp somewhere and (..) that's (..) then they just continued and they were there and I didn't have to come into contact with them (.) it was almost kind of like rape, well rape is your problem, it's like, it's not your fault but it's your problem..

R: It won't touch my world?

Sindisiwe: *Like completely, like it's not in my world at all, and then when I heard the stories and also like, especially that one girl in my class, I was like 'Wow!' like I've been very ignorant (..) and I've (..) like I really have no idea what's going on in the world (..) almost, like you think you do ... I was completely (.) blown away, I dunno, it completely shattered anything and everything I'd ever thought about rape survivors.... Cause I think, (..) I think that after hearing their stories, for me like I was the stereotype that I was thinking about in my mind, where I would just be broken and never want to do anything and just (..) I don't know, not kill myself, but probably just (.) never be a functioning member of society ever again, just (.) let it define me.*

Many of my research contributors spoke about these superficially sympathetic but fundamentally diminishing, pitying and 'othering' characterisations of rape and rape victim-survivors being as silencing as victim-blaming and rape-minimising discourses. They also seem to be what the term 'rape' evokes first in people's minds and may be what Anthony Collins (2014) is referring to when he says "rape is a very emotional word, there is an emotional energy attached to it. It evokes an idea of what rape is. But what does the word blank out? Perhaps a more complex and inclusive notion of sexual violence?"

Steven Sabat (2003, p. 87) introduced the concept of "malignant positioning" to describe the way in which the apparent cognitive decline of adults with Alzheimer's disease and their resulting limitations were emphasised or exaggerated, thereby positioning them in a way that diminished their rights, such as to be heard or to have their input respected. Malignant positioning set in motion a demeaning storyline which permitted or validated ways of interacting with those living with Alzheimer's that constrained the ways of being available to them. I would suggest that the ways in which rape victim-survivors are discursively positioned could also be considered 'malignant'.

Through life experience prior to or after a sexual violation, victim-survivors are very aware of at least some of these discourses and that one of the costs of disclosure may be being positioned in these limiting ways. The anticipated impact of this may outweigh the benefits of reporting or sharing the experience. I would therefore like to consider not the truth or otherwise of these ideas, but what these ideas, discourses and metaphors about rape victim-survivors do: what 'real effects' or impacts they have on women's lived experience.

8.3.3 Impacts of malignant positioning of victim-survivors of sexual violence

I suggest the following as some of the impacts of discourses which construct rape as irreparable damage or harm and position victim-survivors in ways that might be considered 'malignant'.

8.3.3.1 Malignant positioning inhibits acknowledgement

These discourses make it difficult for many women to identify what has happened to them as rape or sexual violation because they resist the ways in which these discourses would position them.

One of the striking features of almost every story of sexual violation that I heard during this research journey, whether it was an incident of incest or acquaintance rape or gang-rape, is that victim-survivors would say something like "Other people have experienced much worse" or "It wasn't nearly as bad as what other people go through". The characterisation of rape as 'the worst possible thing that can happen to a woman' seems to blank out (or 'invisibilise' to use Naomi's word – see below) the validity of what actually happens and how women make sense of it and respond to it.

Victim-survivors' own responses to the incident may not fit with the responses anticipated by these discourses and they may therefore fail to recognise what happened to them as rape, or a rape worthy of reporting. Alternatively, they may be aware that what happened was rape, but choose not to disclose it in order to avoid being positioned by these discourses in ways that they would not prefer.

For Amara her awareness of how rape victim-survivors are positioned prevented her from consciously acknowledging or disclosing the rape:

One of the reasons I never spoke about my rape was because then, oh my God, I am then going to become “that person who was raped”, I’m not going to be all the other things that I am. So I didn’t even admit it to myself.

Joanna, who was sexually assaulted by her step-brother, felt that to call what she experienced rape would be “an insult to rape survivors”, whilst Naomi tried to find an alternative way of expressing what had happened to her and found language inadequate:

I might call it something like (.) ‘pushing my boundaries’... I find it hard to call it something like sexual assault or sexual violence because (.) because I suppose in society these things seem, well they are so horrible and they are terms that I’ve heard throughout my life attached to very very terrible things. And then to try and identify myself as part of that is difficult because I personally don’t know whether my experience is as bad as that. ... there isn’t a grey scale. Uhm whereas experiences like this I think happen on a huge grey scale Uhm and, and ... it kind of, it invisibilises the others. It makes other people I think, that haven’t had experiences that are as bad, it makes them feel like those aren’t validated at all, like they can’t ... like they can’t even speak.

8.3.3.2 Malignant positioning prevents women from accessing safety, care and justice

Anticipated malignant positioning prevents women from telling their families about a sexual violation because they anticipate that the pain that their loved ones will experience at the spoiled identity/disrupted life trajectory of the victim-survivor will be so intense “they won’t cope” (Nobantu). These discourses prevent them from telling friends because they expect that they will see them and treat them differently. They do not want to be seen as tainted or broken and they do not want to be pitied. In so doing, women remain cut off from the care of those closest to them and often feel separated and isolated by the secret they feel they must carry alone. Most of my contributors did not tell their mothers what had happened to them (at least for a period of time, some never told their mothers) in order to protect them.

***Amara:** /sigh/ it just does (.) you know like HIV, it’s something thing just complicates it (.) because of how society views that it must have been your fault in some way, you must have asked for it in some way. The way, it feels as though it taints your body because u::hm because how some men will then feel argh someone else has taken you (..) you know. There’s*

that, there's all these and and how (.) I mean I still have not told my mother for exactly that reason that to her, you might as well kill yourself already. Because rape is such a terrible thing you know, if that happens to you she just wouldn't know what she would do if something like this happened to anyone she loved you know. So there's that and it it, it just it silences ways to talk about it

Some told their mothers who advised them not to tell fathers or brothers for the same reason. Victim-survivors may also feel that they cannot manage others' anticipated intense emotional responses to a disclosure. When they are told, some parents respond in a way that fulfils the victim-survivor's expectations (denial, guilt, feeling completely overwhelmed and emotional or vengeful) because they are caught up in the same discourses. They might also feel disempowered to offer support and help to their child because of the belief that they require specialist care. These types of responses are highlighted in Ayla's narrative.

[My parents] didn't really take it too well [crying] so (..) like my mum didn't really know what to do ... she felt really guilty about not being there like straight afterwards and like all that kind of stuff and she wasn't (..) like (...) we still haven't actually spoken about it. Like they know I have been raped and they know who the charges were against and they know everything that happened in court but other than that it's nothing, like it doesn't get spoken about or anything like that so (.) and like if I get down and stuff like my mum just goes and she books an appointment for me to go see a psychologist, so she's like "okay here, this is what's gonna happen, you're going" you know.

My dad couldn't touch me for like two years, [crying] like he just didn't know what to do [crying, long pause] and then like (..) I think he just felt guilty because he was meant to protect me and stuff like that which he kept saying, but he couldn't protect me because he wasn't there, so he felt bad because he wasn't there but he couldn't have been there, so I don't blame him for not being there but he blames himself (...) so he's like very...like we still have quite a strained relationship , like (..) he's very (.) he immediately jumps to the worst possible result for like everything like if I'm really quiet at home then he's like [sharp intake of breath] "Are you thinking about it?" And he like doesn't know what to do, then he starts smothering me and I'm just like, "no, I just had a bad day at school", you know (.) So I don't think they know how to handle it or support me properly.

What causes family members to respond in this way? I would suggest that it is because they are seeing the victim-survivor through the lens of the 'irreparably harmed' and/or 'rape as trauma' discourses and the guilt and helplessness at their inability to have prevented this terrible event are overwhelming. This seems to disempower and immobilise their usual ways of expressing care and support. These discourses also seem to get in the way of friends' offerings of support.

Henderson (2011, p. 25) working in the context of HIV/AIDS describes how often ill people are not recognised within the context of their illness which can lead to particular forms of alienation and even 'social death': "A person who is ill may come to know what it is to remain unseen within a space of relatedness that in other circumstances would offer a degree of recognition". This resonates with what I heard from my some of my contributors about their experiences of disclosing to family members - alienation and a lack of recognition within the space where you most expected to be acknowledged and validated.

After agonising about the decision for a long time, Nomvula wrote a letter to her mother to tell her about longstanding and ongoing sexual abuse at the hands of her older brother. Her mother never acknowledged or referred to the letter but shortly after her brother quite unexpectedly moved out and went to live with relatives who lived a block away. The abuse never happened again. Nomvula was devastated by her mother's silence and non-acknowledgement, even though at some level it seemed that her mother did believe her and took action.

8.3.3.3 Malignant positioning shapes subjectivity

Victim-survivors internalise these discourses which, in turn, shape their identity construction or 'subjectification'. They therefore influence how they see and understand themselves and their own reactions and constrain their ability to imagine or realise living well again after rape. When Nomalanga spoke about observing the Silent Protest from a distance, she was primarily curious to see what other rape victim-survivors looked like and how they were forging a life for themselves:

I wanted to see whether they went through what I had to go through because it teared me emotionally and it made me to be this other lady that I don't think if I had to go through the same thing, if like if I was another child who didn't go through the same thing I went through I could be different, but because of that it just changed everything about me. I don't trust in

men, I don't believe in relationships. Yes, I don't want to have kids, like those kind of things. So I wanted to see how they deal with it, but I couldn't go [myself] because I feel like people can see when you are a victim.

8.3.3.4 Malignant positioning requires those who have experienced sexual violence to actively resist and renegotiate subject positions

In listening to my research contributors' narratives about acknowledgement and disclosure, I was expecting to hear about the thought processes which preceded and led up to speaking out – how they made sense of everything, pieced the story together and then came to articulate it. However, even the possibility of speaking was constrained by the nature and quality of the receiving context. Introspection was less about self and trauma response and coping than it was about others: How will my story be received and what will be heard? How will I be perceived and positioned afterwards? How will the person respond to me?

It seems significant that a number of my contributors used the term 'coming out' to describe the process of deciding and disclosing their sexual assault to those close to them. We know that this is the term usually used to refer to the disclosure of a non-normative sexual orientation. What does this imply about how victim-survivors understand the impact of rape or sexual violation on identity construction? Perhaps that it is something that is not chosen or wanted but shapes your entire identity; that it is a marginal and stigmatised identity which will invite unpredictable but probably negative reactions from others. In the current discursive milieu, to say that you have been raped is to step into an identity – to say something about who you are or have become as a person, not simply to speak about an event that happened. It takes courage to 'come out' but for my contributors it was a political and agentic choice to do so, although it was not without its challenges and contradictions.

Thobile's story clearly illustrates this. In the year that I interviewed her, Thobile was participating in the Silent Protest for the fourth time and had decided to wear the rape survivor t-shirt for the first time. In her narrative she speaks first about her intention to wear it – this was a few days before the Silent Protest – and then speaks about the experience of wearing it, or, as she describes it, of 'coming out' as a rape survivor. Her story poignantly highlights the ways in which rape victim-survivors are positioned, expect to be positioned, resist being positioned and actively take up positions. Her poem is too long to be included in the body of the thesis, but is included, in full as Appendix J.

8.4 Changing the conditions which cause suffering

Drawing on Levinasian ethics, Arthur Frank (2001, p. 359) argues that “task of research is to specify the conditions that cause suffering so that these conditions can be changed to lessen suffering”. Clearly conditions that cause suffering for those who are subjected to sexual violence include: that it happens at all; that its happening is condoned within a hetero-patriarchal society; that it happens with such frequency and impunity; that the ideas which sustain it are seldom challenged; and so on. Efforts to change these conditions would be largely preventative.

However, I would argue, drawing on my listenings to my research contributors’ narratives, and the arguments I have outlined above, that there is another condition which causes suffering and that is the way in which survivors are discursively constructed and positioned. Frank (1997, p. 133) argues in the context of illness, and it seems to apply equally to sexual violation: “The potential consciousness of illness [sexual violation] is constrained by the limit of the cultural imagination regarding who the ill person [victim-survivor] might rise to the occasion to become”.

The currently available discursive constructions of rape and rape victim-survivors compound the suffering of those who have experienced sexual violation as they are forced to confront and weigh up both the violation that they experienced and the potential implications of disclosure for their sense of identity (self-positioning) and their potential positioning by family, friends and the broader community. Victim-survivors are forced into decision making in the aftermath of a sexual assault about what the best or right thing is to do; seeking to do the ‘right thing’ “but no single right thing is usually available” (Frank, 1997, p. 132). They are faced with the question of “Who must I become in order to [manage this experience]?” (adapted from Frank, 1997, p. 132).

This active and ongoing positioning work is something that those who have experienced sexual violence engage in over and above the usual ‘identity work’ engaged in by others, even those who have experienced other traumas. This additional positioning work seems to be necessary, whether or not one has disclosed the trauma to others. It seems that if the discursive positioning of victim-survivors were not as complex and ‘malignant’, this aspect of victim-survivors’ distress and suffering would be diminished. Harre (2004) suggests that it is

possible to reverse the impacts of malignant positioning a person or group of persons is repositioned by restoring their rights and, sometimes, by their taking up of duties and responsibilities. I would like to consider this statement in relation to the impacts of participation in the Silent Protest.

8.5 The Silent Protest offers a wider range of subject positions

How does the prior discussion relate to participation in the Silent Protest? By its very nature, the Silent Protest challenges the dominant discursive constructions of rape and rape victim-survivors, both for women who have experienced sexual violence and for other protest contributors by expanding their repertoires of listening and of speaking and thereby opening up possibilities for being. Frank (2000, pp. 361-362) gives an account of how this happens:

The stories give the listeners access, albeit it limited in time and complexity and nuance, to the world of the storyteller, or at least the world of the story. Whilst they will return almost immediately to their own world of experience, knowledge and understanding, the story remains always as a background, a possibility which did not previously exist.

In the context of the Silent Protest these are the stories, both visual and spoken that are shared during the Silent Protest, whether publicly or with one other person.

I would therefore argue that many of the benefits that my contributors attributed to participating in the Silent Protest are due to the fact that it uncovers and makes available a range of different and often preferred subject positions for victim-survivors. In doing so it offers a fairly unique and countercultural space.

The alternative subject positions that the Silent Protest offers seem to include:

- a. Standing up to or standing against or standing for ... (enacting active resistance (activism)/working towards change);
- b. Caring with others: giving and receiving care (mutual care/reciprocity);
- c. Being angry and expressing or enacting generalised outrage or directed anger;
- d. Being silent with others (rather than being silenced alone);
- e. Being one who is heard, acknowledged, validated and believed, even if vicariously through the stories of others;

- f. Mourning, expressing grief and sadness with others (rather than defending, denying, pretending or avoiding alone);
- g. Standing with others (solidarity);
- h. Being recognised as one who has unique knowledges about surviving (resilience) ;
and
- i. 'Doing hope' with others (imagining a different future).

Stepping into/taking up/trying out new subject positions opens up new possibilities for being that might not have previously been visible or accessible to victim-survivors. In particular, through the choices and options it offers, the Silent Protest invites each participant into an active, agentic engagement with their own journey. This, in turn, allows them to begin to renegotiate their own self-positioning from one to whom things were done that they could not prevent, to one who can actively choose the steps she takes on her way forward.

This is not a quick or simple process. There is complexity and contradiction and it is an active dance of positioning; a constructing, deconstructing, reconstructing, evading, resisting, embracing, taking up and turning down. During the course of my research journey, I repeatedly witnessed how those who have experienced sexual violence, given the opportunity, will tell stories that refuse any fixed positions, particularly those that have been offered to them by perpetrators, parents, society, the justice system, the healthcare system and so on. Whilst the available discursive resources are limited, they engage with these actively and creatively. I will demonstrate this in relation to 'victim' and 'survivor' identities and particularly in relation to the wearing of the Rape Survivor t-shirt in Chapter 9.

Both the Rape Survivor t-shirts (with the blank space for adding their own expressions of identity) and the stories shared during the Breaking the Silence event were significant catalysts for this process of deconstructing and reconstructing what it means to be a rape victim-survivor for many of my contributors. Seeing other women that they respected and admired, who seemed strong and capable, who seemed to be happy and thriving, disclose their own violation whether by wearing a t-shirt or speaking was significant for each of my research contributors. These enacted expressions of survivorship that spoke more powerfully than any words.

The Debrief Café day after the Silent Protest was also a countercultural space in that each person who turned up could engage with the space and activities available in their own time and their own way. There was no need to disclose or perform suffering or distress. They were not expected to speak and could come and go as they wished. Many chose to create art, often remarking how long it was since they had used crayons or paints or glue. Some chose clay and spent hours sculpting and resculpting. Jigsaw puzzles were popular, as were the doughnuts and the circle dancing. Some chose to mark their own violation on a memorial sheet, with a handprint and a date.

Counsellors were available but they ended up creating with the art materials as well, as only one person requested a counselling-type conversation. This seems to resonate with my observation after the Silent Protest when only one person turned up to attend a therapy group offered by the counselling centre for victim-survivors, while nearly twenty people turned up for a journal sharing event focused on the Silent Protest, hosted by the English Department. Many who shared their journal entries that evening were victim-survivors. However, in that space they were positioned as writers sharing their work, rather than as victim-survivors in need of therapy or help as choosing to attend the therapy group would have positioned them.

Participation in the events of the Silent Protest (and even witnessing the Silent Protest from a distance), offers victim-survivors an alternative place to stand (alternative subject positions), however briefly, when reflecting on their own and others' experiences of sexual violence, which seems to assist many participants in resolving some of this positioning work in a way that they prefer, a way that offers them a greater sense of peace, confidence and well-being. As Boipelo put it, "The Silent Protest reminds us that we are stronger than we think we are".

8.5.1 What is the narrated effect of occupying these different subject positions?

Drawing on my research contributors' stories and poems as discussed in the previous chapter, I would like to highlight the following impacts of taking up different subject positions offered to them, both by their decision to participate in the Silent Protest and by their actual participation in the Protest. I also noted that sustained participation over several years seems

to increase the benefit experienced, as does active involvement, even in a small way in the organising of the protest.

- a. Participation can facilitate acknowledgement and re-integration of the experience (trauma) of sexual violation into one's life narrative.
- b. Participation can reduce a widely felt sense of alienation/isolation/exceptionalism (I am the only one).
- c. Participation can reconnect victim-survivors to a community of care and support.
- d. Participation can catalyse a sense of active engagement with a 'healing' journey and ongoing practices of 'survivorship' as well as reconnecting victim-survivors to their own unique knowledges and resilience.
- e. Participation can reconnect victim-survivors to values of justice, care and mutuality.
- f. Participation allows victim-survivors to imagine different possibilities for themselves and others.
- g. Participation in the protest allows victim-survivors to experience themselves as agentic and resistant.
- h. Participation in the Silent Protest offers opportunities for ideas/discourses to be challenged:
 - i. intellectually by speakers, slogans, actions, conversations;
 - ii. narratively by others' stories and embodied presence; and
 - iii. affectively by mutual care, connection, and solidarity.

Whilst each of the alternative subject positions offered by the Silent Protest were referred to and each seemed significant to my contributors, I wish to further explore two particular positions which are particularly prominent during the Silent Protest and which are seldom accessible to victim-survivors in other contexts. There are 'caring with' (mutual care) and 'standing up against' (resistance).

8.5.2 Mutual Care

What then does one seek? Not a hidden power, but a source of kinship for mature persons. And also the assurance that it is not totally absurd to have suffered.

(Levinas, 2001, p. 198)

Mutual or reciprocal care is a concept that has received little attention in the field of psychology, apart from sparse mentions in relation to community work where it is generally espoused as a romantic ideal. As a concept, it does not feature in literature on group therapy or self-help groups, where 'support' is the preferred term. However, in practice, in both mental health in-patient settings, and self-help or support groups this kind of care is enacted, often very successfully.

Coming from a Pastoral Therapy background, where mutual care *is* a concept that is drawn on and espoused (although to be honest, it still quite often remains a romantic ideal) primed me to hear it in my research contributors' narratives and to see it in the interactions I witnessed during my years of involvement with the Silent Protest. However, for me it was one of the most striking features of the impact of the Silent Protest and invited victim-survivors into subject positions not usually accessible to them in the context of their experience of violation. Every one of my research contributors referenced experiences of mutual care in relation to the Silent Protest.

'Care' is a word that has many possible meanings and has also been loaded with a great deal of discursive baggage. In this context, I use 'care' as a verb referring to an action taken to meet a need (to the extent that you are able) of a person that you feel concern or interest for and value or deem worthy. When I refer to mutual care, I mean that this interest and action is reciprocal, shared between people who find themselves in a similar space and on an equal footing – there is no power differential. In this shared space people recognise both their mutual needs and vulnerability and their own resourced-ness or ability, however limited, to meet an Other's need. This resonates with Frank's (2004, p. 4) definition of care: "By this overused word care, I mean an occasion when people discover what each can be in relationship with the other".

As I discussed in 8.2, rape victim-survivors are most often positioned as in need of (particular and specialised) care (as well as pity and so on). This can be profoundly disempowering, positioning victim-survivors as dependent, needy and incapable of overcoming on their own. When positioned, as is the case in the Silent Protest, as one who can both receive and offer care, the possibilities for being shift and, as Frank (2004, p. 4) suggests people can (re)discover who or how it is possible to be "in relationship with the other". One is positioned as having

hard-won knowledge about how you would like to be responded to as a victim-survivor and then offering that to others.

One profound experience of mutual care and connection was described by Boipelo. She started by telling me, with great warmth and delight, about a close friend in her residence. They had somehow clicked from the moment they met and had become close friends, despite the fact that Boipelo was two years older than her. Boipelo had known that her friend was participating in the Silent Protest but did not know in which capacity. On the day of the Silent Protest Boipelo was in the early morning briefing when one of the speakers invited all rape survivors who wished to do so, to stand.

I was sitting up on the grandstand at the back [...] And I remember, I even remember exactly where she was sitting [...] And she stood up and in my heart just, I don't even know, I was like (.) holy cow. You know, I thought, here is this person, this human being that I admire so much (.) and she's brave enough to be doing this you know. I didn't know this about her just yet (..) and I think she didn't know about me either (.) I mean it hadn't, we just hadn't touched on it (..) I mean now we talk about it all the time (.) but I mean we didn't before. I can't even tell you to this day how that made me feel but I've never felt so moved by someone in my entire life [...] here is somebody that I love so much and that happened to her, that just, I (.) I (.) I was sad but I was proud at the same time because she (.) because she was embracing it and sort of saying this happened to me you know. And she was wearing the Rape Survivor shirt and she's a first year I mean (.) You know it's the first time you hear this and people don't know you and I know I shouldn't have, but I felt a little bit ashamed [...] here I was concerned that people that know me are gonna speak about me and (.) she's doing it. I was just so inspired by that, I thought that was amazing (.) So when we finally did the taping, cause I chose to be taped, I went specifically to her, I just I (..) I found her. And I gave her a hug and she started crying and she just said, "I know" and I said, "Ok, I'll talk to you later". She said, "Ok" and she just started crying (..) and I just thought I must let her. [...] I know. When I looked at her I was thinking, "I know what's going on with you right now" and she just seemed to understand exactly (...) I did not need to say anything. She just said, "I know" and then I said, "Ok".

This unspoken understanding and care were the most significant aspects of the Silent Protest for this contributor and this friendship continues to be mutually supportive to both parties.

Unfortunately, mutual care, as we can see from the dearth of literature, is something that has not received a great deal of attention in the field of mental health care. Support groups and group therapy are sometimes framed as somehow less impactful than individual therapy and are used primarily in contexts where resources are limited and individual therapy services are not available on the scale needed. Alternatively, they are employed as an adjunct to individual therapy. However, in the millennia prior to the advent of professionalised 'care' and therapeutic services, mutual care between persons was the primary way in which people managed problems, traumas and losses.

Guilfoyle (2014, p. 25-26), in his discussion about the ways in which power works to disqualify, downgrade and conceal certain knowledges, describes the ways in which "common sense wisdoms", local or folk knowledges and traditional caring practices have been undermined and displaced with the growing influence of specialised, professional, therapeutic expertise:

"...this has led to the undermining of trust within local communities, prompting people increasingly to turn away from the experienced, wise advisers who they once might have consulted within their own communities, and instead to seek out the designated psychological truth tellers, such as psychologists and psychotherapists. Worryingly, it seems that such deferral to the experts is on the increase ... This carries the implication that more and more people will be beyond the reach of common sense knowers and helpers".

Fuertes (2004) similarly draws attention to the lack of research interest in local traditions, meaning-making systems, healing practices and ways in which people try to respond to trauma and manage its effects. He describes how "Western" [his term] medicalised conceptualisations of distress (such as posttraumatic stress disorder) and the therapeutic modalities to relieve that distress are often uncritically applied in non-Western contexts such as South Africa. While I agree with his argument, it is important to point out that it is not only communities in the global South which have local traditions, meaning-making systems and healing practices. Every faith community, local community, family and gathering of people develops these, in whichever context they find themselves. However, these may be more invisibilised in Western contexts where the biomedical model has dominated for longer and

people construct the notion of 'culture' and 'tradition' as something which belongs only to peoples considered to be 'less advanced'.

Fuertes (2004) emphasises that there is nothing wrong with weaving different knowledges together (for example, biomedical and local knowledges) when this happens in the context of deep and respectful listening, analysis and care focused on the local meanings and effects of distress. However, he points out (drawing on Summerfield, 1999) that particular conceptions of distress such as "posttraumatic stress" can function as a superficial "pseudocondition" (Fuertes, 2004, p. 492), that is, a frame which renders suffering a comprehensible and manageable technical problem which requires a technical intervention such as a particular therapy modality. Such an approach requires and elevates expert knowledges and skills without reference to the complex (individual or collective) local meanings and impacts of suffering. Such an approach invisibilises and diminishes the understandings, responses and coping practices of those who are suffering. It can also impede healing if spiritual and cultural understandings of suffering are not taken into account in healing practices.

This is a situation that we can ill-afford in South Africa where a recommendation such as the following made by Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2016, p. 827) is unhelpful at best, in that most victim-survivors in South Africa simply would not have access to the therapeutic services to which they refer: "[W]e recommend that organisers make clear that, in many cases², for healing to occur participation in the *Silent Protest needs* to be complemented by individual psychotherapy provided by trained professionals" [emphasis mine] and they go on to emphasise twice more in the same paragraph the importance of "specialised knowledge and training" and "specialised care". Whilst I am not suggesting that therapy is unhelpful or that the Silent Protest or mutual care, in and of themselves, will bring about healing for victim-survivors of sexual violence, they do offer victim-survivors accessible, alternative avenues for aspects of their healing journeys which should not be disqualified or undermined, but rather explored, drawn on and developed.

² There exists no research evidence for this statement, as what the research does show (discussed in Chapter 4) is that the majority (around 60%) of women who have experienced sexual violation do not acknowledge it, even to themselves. We therefore cannot be sure how this population of victim-survivors heal from or manage the aftermath of the experience.

It was this quality of the protest which stood out for Nomvula. She spoke particularly about her experience of the Breaking the Silence event. Her sense of it is quite remarkable, given that it took place in a cavernous stone cathedral, with more than five hundred students filling every space.

Researcher: What captured your interest?

Nomvula: Uhm yho I don't (.) I just felt like everyone was just huddled around (.) it felt like a very (.) like a homely vibe if I can say that? I don't know but like it made me think of when we were at school (.) when we were told about how oral traditions are passed down from generation to generation (.) and I just got this feeling of, you know, all mothers huddle around the fire and then talking about things because like (.) it's not like we were complaining or anything (.) we were talking about what has happened to us and everyone was sitting there like eager to listen and I mean everyone was eager to listen, like I said, and not (..) no one was there to like be angry with us or say that they disagree with what we were saying they were just there to listen (.) which felt very good [...] Very much like a community (.) it felt like you know like nothing could happen to us because there were so many people there. That's what it felt like (.) like we were protected and we were being supported and everything.

Designing and facilitating more opportunities for mutual care is not primarily about efficiency in the use of resources, although there is that consideration, and it would be an extremely positive benefit if more women were reached. It is more about the quality of acknowledgement and witnessing that an experience of community and mutual care offers women who have experienced rape. It also makes room for shared spiritual and cultural understandings to infuse the care between victim-survivors. This validation of the values which underpin and sustain their living, and the practices of living which they have taken up, allows them to tell slightly different stories or to tell their stories in slightly different ways, ways that are more supportive of their own choices and actions in coming to live well again after rape.

Only someone who has also experienced sexual violation can really grasp the limitations of the culturally available stories or appreciate what it takes to forge a life again despite or in the face of those limitations (drawing on Frank, 2008). Carolyn Nordstrom (1997, p. 11) writes about a “shared culture of survival” amongst people affected by war in Mozambique and I

speak more about this in Chapter 9, but there is a sense in which, although each experience of sexual violation is individual and unique, it initiates one into such a “shared culture of survival’. The problem is that because rape survivors constitute a ‘hidden community’, with its members anonymous and isolated by shame and stigma, there are very few opportunities to recognise and acknowledge one another and to share the “information necessary to sustain life in life-threatening conditions” (Nordstrom, 1997, p. 21). Thus, under normal circumstances, each has to forge their own way.

Opportunities for connection, the sharing of stories and mutual care also involve the “affirmation of identities that no-one wants but which are nonetheless affirmed as honorable in their consequences for self-discovery and service” (Frank, 2000, p. 137). Frank (2000, p. 137) suggests that our work as researchers is to help create the conditions in which the (diverse and varied) identity claims or preferred subject positions of those who, for example, have experienced sexual violence can be more widely credited and honoured (Frank, 2000, p. 137). That is one of my intentions in this thesis, but I would also argue that this responsibility falls on practitioners too and all those involved in any way in working with victim-survivors.

8.5.3 Resistance

Resistance is another topic which has received relatively little attention in the literature on recovery, or moving forward again, after sexual violence. Notable exceptions are Naples (2003), Burstow (2003) and McKenzie-Mohr (2014). However, they focus primarily on resistance in talk – narrative resistance rather than enacted resistance.

As a protestor in the Silent Protest, one is standing up to/against a social injustice along with the rest of the protest community. In taking up a resistant subject position one is embodying an agentic response to sexual violence that is performed or enacted and recognised in a public space. For some victim-survivors this makes it possible to recognise and honour the ways in which they have been resisting both the violation itself and its impacts all along.

If one reflects on the responses of victim-survivors, some of those responses which are understood or framed as passive and problematic, such as non-disclosure, could in fact be understood as forms of resistance. For example, having recognised the ways in which victim-survivors of rape are positioned, it is possible to suggest that in not acknowledging or disclosing a sexual violation, victim-survivors could be:

- Resisting being positioned as either a victim or a survivor;
- Resisting individualisation, isolation and shame;
- Resisting blame;
- Resisting the complexity of their experience being reduced to a single story;
- Resisting potential backlash and silencing;
- Resisting being positioned as defiled, dishonoured or damaged.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Guilfoyle (2014) points to the refusal or resistance enacted by human babies from the earliest age as the extra-discursive foundation of agency. Even in their apparent helplessness and dependency, babies refuse and resist. When one is subjected to sexual violence one's agency and control are obstructed and one is again apparently rendered helpless, both by the perpetrator and one's physiological response to the trauma. However, as White (1997) argues and Guilfoyle (2014) supports, victim-survivors always resist, in small or big ways, visible or unseen and the acknowledgement of these resistances offers the victim-survivor a different place to stand (subject position) in relation to the assault. This in turn allows them to understand new things about themselves and possibilities for moving forward.

It is therefore important to offer victim-survivors opportunities, whether in symbolic actions such a protest or simply in conversations to position themselves as resisting and to have that resistance recognised, acknowledged and nurtured through its incorporation into a storyline (Guilfoyle, 2014).

Although initially mutual care and resistance might seem like quite disparate responses to sexual violence, Carol Gilligan (2013, p. 175) sees them as political, interdependent and necessary in the struggle for women's freedom:

Our exploration of these questions has led us to see the ethic of care, grounded in voice and relationship, as an ethic of resistance both to injustice and to self-silencing. It is a human ethic, integral to the practice of democracy and to the functioning of a global society. More controversially, it is a feminist ethic, an ethic that guides the historic struggle to free democracy from patriarchy.

To conclude this section, I draw on Guilfoyle's (2014) reminder that "we should not imagine that there is some perfect power-free discursive formation out there that we should find with

and for our clients” (p. 39) or in this case our fellow Silent Protestors. Such a thing, if it is a thing, does not exist. The goal is not to find the ‘right’ discourse but to uncover or co-construct alternative discourses and to have the freedom to “move between different discursive possibilities” (p. 40). Both mutual care and resistance, alongside the other subject positions which participation in the Silent Protest makes accessible, seem to offer possibilities for facilitating greater freedom of movement.

8.6 Reflections on the Silent Protest and subject positioning

The women’s movement has done much to expose and challenge victim-blaming discourses and the power dynamics which support sexual violence. This has contributed to a more compassionate and respectful receiving context for stories. It therefore seems counter-intuitive to challenge discourses that emphasise how bad rape is. However, those ideas do not seem to be decreasing the incidence of sexual violence, whilst they do serve to further undermine or ‘spoil’ the identities of those who acknowledge they have been raped. To once again borrow McKenzie-Mohr and LaFrance’s (2011) term, it seems that we who think, write and speak about sexual violence also need to engage in ‘tightrope talk’ and think carefully about how we position victim-survivors through what we say and how we say it.

Amara expressed it as follows:

I don’t know what the pat answer is to rape stories [laughs] we need to move beyond the prescribed ways of telling and ways of listening into new spaces that we don’t know what they are yet, because we haven’t been there. ...

It just feels like there’s a hype about rape that inhibits the telling and the listening. And I don’t know how we go beyond that except to go into that space of vulnerability: “I don’t really know how to react to you. I’m so sorry. I wish I could (...) and I can see it’s hard for you to say this and, and I don’t want (...)” You know? You know what I mean? I can’t even say what it needs to be except that it’s vulnerable.

Professionals are not trained in expressing vulnerability and not-knowing. They too are discursively constructed and positioned as ‘expert’ and ‘knowing’. Ironically, it may be that in acknowledging our not-knowing and remaining with the discomfort of that and in being open to listening more deeply to the stories of victim-survivors and to our own responses that we may respond in more beneficial and supportive ways. I explore this idea further in Chapter 9.

We need to resist an understanding of acknowledgement and disclosure that foregrounds either the trauma itself or the nature of the trauma, or the victim as the primary source of inhibition to disclosure. As we have seen in my contributors' narratives, the receiving context plays at least an equal, but possibly a greater role. We as a society need to take responsibility for what we do or do not do that inhibits disclosure. Lack of faith in the criminal justice system inhibits reporting, not disclosure – it is therefore a separate issue.

We are all caught up in this web of discourses about sexuality, sexual violence and rape, even though their influence will differ from person to person, depending on our unique life experiences. These discourses will, however, inevitably shape our own beliefs and the subject positions available to us and, in turn, will determine how we position those who have experienced sexual violence. As researchers, therapists, parents, teachers, friends or simply fellow citizens, how we position victim-survivors has profound ethical implications. As I have argued, the anticipation and experience of being positioned in negative ways can inhibit victim-survivors from disclosing a violation and accessing both care and justice. It also influences self-positioning and identity work in relation to the violation.

Victim-survivors are very clear that there is more to who they are and to their lives, dreams, intentions and purposes than the impact of a sexual violation. In varied and creative ways, they resist the story of rape becoming the dominant story of their lives. The Silent Protest seems to support them in doing so. In Chapter 9, I want to highlight the creative ways in which victim-survivors engaged and journeyed with the subject positions of 'victim' and 'survivor' with particular reference to their engagement with the Rape Survivor t-shirts.

CHAPTER 9

VICTIMHOOD AND SURVIVORSHIP: WORKING THE HYPHEN¹



At that time, I was victimised. A survivor is not the end of the road. You become a survivor. But survivor is not the end of the road. A survivor is what you are until something better comes along and then you move on to something better. But we don't have a name for that.

– Research participant “June” (Young & Maguire, 2003, p. 48)

9.1 Engaging with victimhood and survivorship

In this thesis thus far, I have discussed how acknowledgement and disclosure are central challenges for someone who has experienced sexual violence and the range of different reasons why this is so. I have argued that one factor which inhibits acknowledgement and disclosure is the way in which victim-survivors will inevitably be discursively positioned if they do acknowledge to themselves or disclose to others that they have been sexually violated. I then considered the positioning of victim-survivors in the context of the Silent Protest and what it is that participation in the Silent Protest offers that is different to what women who have experienced sexual violence would usually encounter or experience in their everyday lives.

¹ Drawing on Michelle Fine's (1994) scholarship

I suggested that the Silent Protest offers a greater range of subject positions – places to stand, ways of understanding oneself and one’s responses – that are not usually accessible to victim-survivors, including (collective) resistance and mutual care. What is significant in the context of the Silent Protest is that victim-survivors themselves have imagined and constructed the symbolic acts and processes which comprise the Silent Protest and which make these alternative subject positions available. It is also victim-survivors themselves who engage with these acts and processes in agentic and creative ways so that they support their own trajectories towards decreased distress and greater well-being.

In this chapter I want to focus on some of the agentic and creative responses of victim-survivors to the subject positions that they are invited to take up in the context of the Silent Protest. I am particularly interested in the ways in which my research contributors engaged with concepts of victimhood and survivorship, and what we can learn from their engagement. I will relate this to the literature on victim and survivor identities as reviewed in Chapter 4.

The concept of survivorship and specifically the term ‘rape survivor’ are particularly salient features of the Silent Protest because there is the option for participants not to be taped and instead to choose to wear a t-shirt which identifies them as a rape survivor. The Rape Survivor t-shirt is one element of the Silent Protest that seems to allow for no negotiation, subtlety or nuance. Wearing the t-shirt constitutes an unambiguous public disclosure and makes a very specific and, as we have seen, culturally devalued, identity claim. However, in the context of the protest it is an act of resistance, a political act with transgressive intent. I will discuss this further in 9.3 below, but I will begin with the story of how the Rape Survivor t-shirts came to be included in the Silent Protest and the narratives of two of my research contributors regarding their engagement with the t-shirt.

9.2 Rape Survivor t-shirts and the Silent Protest

The Rape Survivor t-shirts were first introduced in 2009, the third year of the Silent Protest. A student, herself a rape victim-survivor, suggested this option to the primary organiser. She was inspired by the concept of the ‘HIV positive’ t-shirts referred to in Chapter 8, with their goal of reducing stigma and shame, but these would be different in that only those who had experienced sexual violation would wear them. This was her own creative vision; a way of publicly acknowledging both the harm done to her and her active and ongoing resistance. The

student believed that this would make a powerful political statement as well as contributing to the rebuilding and reclaiming of her own world after rape.

However, the primary organiser thought it was a terrible idea:

I said: 'No-one will wear them [...] I really, I can't imagine anybody that would want to do that.' And part of that was my own experience as an incest survivor. I was like 'I don't think I want to wear that t-shirt ever. I don't want that to be the first thing people know about me [...]'

[...] the stigma around being a rape survivor is more intense than the stigma around being HIV positive. The politics are different. I don't see anyone wearing them. And [the student who suggested it and another student] both said 'Well, we'll wear them. We'll wear them, so let's make them available and see'.

That year four hundred protestors signed up and, of those, more than forty signed up for Rape Survivor t-shirts. The t-shirts have been a feature of the protest ever since and every year a group of around fifty women sign up for the shirts.

However, a statement like that makes it seem like it is a simple or straightforward choice for victim-survivors: "Yes, I will wear the shirt" or "No, I will not." This is not the case. The women in my study engaged with the t-shirts in complex and nuanced ways, characterised by 'advance-retreat' movements, as well as ongoing reflection and re-negotiation. I will start with the narrative of the primary organiser.

9.2.1 The primary organiser's story

2009

I have already mentioned that the organiser did not think that the t-shirts were a good idea. She was, in her own words, "blown away" by the number of women who signed up for the Rape Survivor shirt in that first year. However, while many Silent Protest participants apparently embraced the introduction of the Rape Survivor t-shirt, it proved to be personally very difficult for her.

[...] now these girls all want to wear Rape Survivor t-shirts and I am their leader, you know I'm organising this thing and I have to wear the shirt, 'cause they can't (.) I mean [the student

who suggested the Rape Survivor shirts] (.) *is small and (.) damaged and (.) she's going to wear the shirt and she's (.) I don't know (.) she's in my res and she's (.) family to me and I can't let her do it without doing it, like I also have to wear the shirt (...) and I really don't want to wear the shirt . (.) I really don't want to wear the shirt. I don't want to at all wear the shirt. (.) So (.) I take the shirt and I put the shirt in my bag and I can't wear the shirt (.) I just, I just can't (.)*

The organiser spent that day feeling increasingly guilty that she could not wear the shirt.

[...] I felt really guilty about it because I felt like I wasn't standing in solidarity with, you know, rape survivors, women who spoke out. I felt like I wasn't speaking out when I should have because I was (...) certainly a lot more (..) enfranchised in a way, I had, I had more power to speak (.) you know, as a staff member, because of my age, etcetera etcetera, than some 18 year old girl child that was gang raped by taxi drivers six months before and she's walking around wearing the t-shirt.

2010

The following year the organiser chose to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt, but she had not cleared her diary (something she learnt to do in subsequent years). This meant that she had to attend various meetings with academics and senior management wearing the t-shirt:

I had meetings to go to that day, [...] I think maybe it was just my (..) being oversensitive (.) maybe or (..) but it was very (..) difficult to not feel like everybody was looking at me, going "Oh that explains what's wrong with you". That's what it felt like. It felt like (..) people would get that (.) not even "Ag shame" just like "Oh, that's what's wrong with you" [...] and I'm sure I was just projecting. I'm sure that wasn't what was going on at all ... but it kind of felt like it was, and it was very difficult to (.) you know (.) make useful points about IT policy while wearing the shirt. (..) I just struggled.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, claiming victimhood or survivorship is not an individual choice but a social achievement. Every person who wears the Rape Survivor t-shirt may be choosing to position themselves in a particular way, but they will in turn be positioned by the people who read the t-shirt. The receiving environment inevitably co-constructs the victim-survivor identity. While the primary organiser was wearing the t-shirt as a political statement

and an expression of solidarity and care, her perception was that those who saw the shirt responded not even from pity (“Ag shame”) but with a sense of aversion to the inevitable pathology that being a rape survivor implied “Oh, that’s what’s wrong with you” – under the influence of the ‘trauma of rape’ discourse. Of course, it is impossible to know what those she interacted with were in fact thinking, but their evident discomfort and careful avoidance of the identifying words on the t-shirt gave rise to a sense of ‘anticipatory stigma’ for the primary organiser.

By the end of the day, when we did the Debrief [Breaking the Silence event] ... there are parts of that night that I can’t remember at all ... I do remember (..) a lot of people coming up over the course of that debrief to talk about their experiences and then (..) many of them saying (..) how proud they were of the people wearing the Rape Survivor shirts [yah] and (..) you know, how strong we were and how (..) inspiring we were and I (..) recall (..) saying like I was one of the last people to speak ... and I was cold and I was tired ... I was wearing the t-shirt and I couldn’t get out of it and I had been wearing the t-shirt all day and I was (..) leading the protest, so there was no space for me to be broken, like there was no time to fall apart when you need to manage the logistics of these sorts of things, no time, but at the end I just got up and I said, “Well, ok so (..) you know (..) what I want to understand is, it’s great and we’ve (..) you know, people are really proud of us and (..) we should be proud of ourselves and (..) this is an amazing thing we’re doing, and I want to know if I can give the t-shirt back. I don’t feel brave or proud or ... I feel like (..) I want to undo this, like I don’t wanna be a brave example for anyone. I want my life back and I don’t want this for me (..)

The organiser regretted having spoken in this way as she felt that it had undermined the safety of the space for other participants. I would suggest that she was resisting ‘survivor discourse’ and making visible a more honest and complex engagement with survivorship. This would have created a discursive space in which others could acknowledge that wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt does not mean that one cannot be vulnerable or wounded or simply tired of surviving.

2011

Following her significant struggle the previous year with wearing the Rape Survivor t-shirt, in 2011 the primary organiser had a special t-shirt made for herself in black (rather than purple)

which had *Rape Survivor Defying Patriarchy* in white print on the front – another creative response. This allowed her to stand out as the primary organiser, but it also positioned her as agentic and resistant:

[It] still said 'rape survivor' but now was active, so 'defying patriarchy'. I wasn't just being a rape survivor. I was doing something.

This linguistic expression of agency (alternative positioning) proved crucial and enabling for the organiser who felt better prepared for the challenges of the protest and reported struggling less than she had the previous year:

[...] I suppose also it's my own personal process but in the briefing at the beginning that year I was able to say 'as an incest survivor' publicly for the first time and I didn't feel quite so traumatised and it was okay (.) and I don't know if that's because I was wearing a different t-shirt or because a lot has happened during the course of the year and things have shifted (..) It just felt a little easier (...).

2013

After two years wearing the special black shirt with personalised wording, in 2013 the organiser decided to wear the standard Rape Survivor t-shirt again, as a sign of solidarity with the others who were wearing them². At the Breaking the Silence debriefing a woman spoke who was wearing a Solidarity shirt. She said she was wearing the wrong shirt. She had been raped but had been unable to acknowledge or disclose it until that day. The organiser took off her own Rape Survivor t-shirt and gave it to her. The organiser was wearing the *Rape Survivor Defying Patriarchy* shirt underneath. She had been wearing it, hidden but present all day, a reminder of a resistant and agentic self-positioning which made it possible for her to get through the day.

The primary organiser's narrative highlights the complexity and constant renegotiation of how one positions oneself and is positioned when wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt. A second contributor's story also demonstrates a complex and nuanced engagement with shirt choices.

² It seems that the possibility of other protest participants having the option of wearing a t-shirt like the primary organisers saying 'Rape Survivor Defying Patriarchy' was never opened up for discussion. It was never mentioned in my conversations with organisers and participants.

9.2.2 Nobantu's story

Nobantu was raped at age 13 and had never told anyone about it prior to coming to university. In the year in which I interviewed her it was the fourth time that she had participated in the Silent Protest. She signed up for the protest in her first year because her sister was involved in organising it. She did not initially make any connection between the focus and message of the protest and her own experience. Despite her sister's activism and engagement in these issues, she still had not told her sister or anyone else in her family about what happened to her. She remembered thinking about the t-shirt choices when she signed up:

I remember ... on the sign-up sheets there was like, tick which t-shirt (..) uhm Silent, Rape survivor or Solidarity. I was like, 'Why would I wear a Rape Survivor t-shirt? I mean who does that? Why would you do that?' you know, so I just ticked the other option. (..) Like I didn't make the connection. I was like, 'Why are people wearing these t-shirts? I don't understand'.

It was only during the morning briefing of her first Silent Protest that she made a connection between what she had experienced and what the Protest was all about and acknowledged to herself her own victimhood. Her first Silent Protest was therefore extremely emotional and difficult, and in the afternoon she ended up at the university counselling centre. This was the first time she told anyone about the rape.

Uhm s::o (..) it was very emotional for me. Like I mean it was very emotional. A::nd I remember thinking to myself, 'Oh my goodness like I'm such a coward. Why am not wearing a [Rape Survivor] t-shirt you know. I feel like such a fake now. These people are so strong. Why can't I be as strong as them and wear the t-shirt.' But I felt supported because like, it's really amazing the support you feel on the day, like each purple person even if they don't know you, you feel so supported. Whether or not you're wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt, you feel so supported.

Although there are various reasons for the support that Nobantu experienced, she specifically mentions 'each purple person' which is a reference to the purple t-shirts that protestors wore on the day. Other research contributors also remarked on the impact of seeing others on campus wearing the t-shirt, seeing a lecturer wearing the t-shirt, witnessing a "sea of purple" at the events of the day which brought protestors together. Petray (2012, p. 558) considers the role played by protest clothing, such as t-shirts in constructing the sense of solidarity one

might feel with other protestors. She suggests that it “indicates to fellow protestors that we are likely to share the political emotions of the social movements and encourages positive reciprocal emotions, even between strangers”.

It is also important to note the guilt/shame that Nobantu felt at not having chosen to wear the t-shirt. While, as we shall hear later this related to her own background and positioning within in a family of women activists, the pressure that women might feel to wear the t-shirt is discussed further in 9.3.1 below.

In her second year participating in the Silent Protest, Nobantu decided to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt.

I think I was in therapy when I decided actually (.) you know what, I'm gonna wear this t-shirt because I feel it's so empowering because of the survivor part of it. Because even though I hadn't thought about it before, but like talking about it in therapy, like I have felt like a victim right. And I was like, I choose not to be a victim, I survived this. I'm a survivor. So I want to wear that shirt because that's part of who I am. And then that's when I decided ok, I'm gonna wear it next year [laughs]

It was not at all easy to follow through on her decision when the protest came around, but she did wear the t-shirt in the second year. Her experience of others' responses was very positive.

It was hard for me to put the t-shirt on, it was really hard. But I did put it on eventually a::nd, I haven't had a bad experience since that protest. Like people haven't been weird or anything like that to me. I actually received a lot of support ... And I felt accepted and like ok this is ok, this is normal for me to wear the t-shirt, like nothing out of the ordinary you know. For the first five seconds people look at you they'd be shocked but then they act normally. And I didn't feel like they were pretending or anything they were just being genuine. S::o, it was hard but it was easier than I thought it would be 'cause I had so much support.

These positive responses to her disclosure, via the t-shirt, of her violation, allowed Nobantu to revise some of the fears she had regarding disclosure and how people would position her. These responses also suggest that participation in the Protest facilitates a more positive response to disclosure. However, when the next year's protest came around, Nobantu was

not sure that she wanted to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt again. In the end, she chose to wear a Silent Protestor shirt and have her mouth taped.

I was feeling anxious because I didn't know if I should wear it or not. U::hm I was not sure like (..) on the one side I felt I should wear it because people know I've worn it. And now if all of a sudden I don't wear it people are now probably gonna wonder why am I not wearing it. [But] ... on the other hand I was like, I'm not sure if I want to wear it again.

This speaks to the challenge or cost of being positioned as 'rape survivor' with all its discursive baggage by those who see the t-shirt. Frank (2004) suggests that our stories about ourselves are reconfiguring all the time and are more like collage or a "mobile assemblage" than a coherent whole. We resist when we feel that our story is being reconfigured in a way that is likely to become binding. Therefore, if one does not have a clear personal purpose, it can be difficult to maintain this very public acknowledgement for the day.

In the year that I interviewed Nobantu, it was her fourth year participating. This time she was sure that she wanted to wear the t-shirt again, with a particular goal in mind:

I'm hoping that I will be bold enough a::nd (.) you know be ok with being photographed a::nd have my picture out there. Uhm, because I want my family to know but I don't want to be the one to tell them.

On the day of the Silent Protest, wearing the Rape Survivor t-shirt, Nobantu had a very strange interaction with a lecturer which speaks to the awkwardness and impact of the receiving space and the active and ongoing positioning work required when one discloses sexual violation. It also highlights how certain relationships and spaces can render a story unnarratable.

I walked into [my lecturer's] office and I had my Wellness Leader badge on my jacket and my Rape Survivor t-shirt underneath. A::nd she was shocked, I could see she was shocked and the first thing she said to me (.) like she was speaking very fast and I could see she was anxious. And she said to me, 'Oh wow, what's that, what's that on your jacket, the badge?' And I was like, 'Oh I'm a Wellness Leader,' and then she said, 'Oh, what does it say?' And then she came close and then she read it [the badge]. My jacket was open, but I could see she didn't want to, you know, even go to [refer to] my t-shirt or anything like that. I said 'Ja,

we have to wear them because of the Silent Protest today'. And then she said, 'Oh because of the whole Rape Survivor shirt thing?' and I didn't know what to say. I was like, 'Err, ya' and then she rushed off and went to the library and left me in her office. S::o that was a bit, ya I didn't expect it from her, but I think maybe she felt a bit uncomfortable. I don't know. And then I tweeted 'There's more to me than what is written on this t-shirt. Don't label me and don't define who I am based on just two words'.

Although this interaction had been extremely uncomfortable, Nobantu's own creative journey with the 'Rape Survivor' shirt allowed her resist the lecturer's positioning of her as somehow troubling the academic space by wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt. She was able to express her resistance and reclaim a preferred position for herself through the tweet which she sent out immediately afterwards. It also raises questions about how the lecturer was positioned in the moment of being confronted by the t-shirt, perhaps in relation to her own life experiences or academic 'knowledges' which left her unable to recognise or acknowledge Nobantu's disclosure.

When I asked Nobantu, six months afterwards about her sense of the impact that participating in the Silent Protest had on her, she was positive, but it came with a caveat.

It's been a good experience, but also at the same time I feel, I felt pressure in the sense that uhm feeling like (.) /sigh/ I don't know how to explain it (,) Uhm like feeling like, ok, this is how I should be acting. I should be participating, I should be crying, I should be going up at the debriefing session and speaking about my story. You know, this is what people are expecting me to act like. So I sort of felt pressured. Even when I think, "Ok maybe I don't want to participate now" and then I feel (.) well people are expecting you to, so you should do it ya. So ya I felt very pressured and I don't think I would have felt the same pressure if I was just wearing the silent t-shirt.

R: Where do you think those expectations came from, that pressure that, as a survivor you should act in a particular way and do these particular things?

I actually have no idea [laughs] I don't know. Uhm this actually came by last year when I was wearing the silent t-shirt. And I thought ok, (...) I didn't think that was an expectation from other people, but it was an expectation from myself. That I should be wearing this t-shirt, I should be strong, I should be standing in solidarity. Uhm and then in terms of expectations

in general from other people not necessarily saying that it's rape survivors who should do this /mhh/ but as a woman you should be doing this. I think, because I've grown up in a family of activists /ok/ and u::hm ja from my gran, they're activists, they work in women's organizations. Organisations focused on women empowerment, working with women who have been abused etcetera. So I think I've also taken up that role, that I should be you know, be an activist, I should be going out there.

Nobantu's conflictedness shows how a transgressive and liberatory statement or action can be reinscribed into discursive norms and expectations for how one 'should' behave and how one can be recruited into self-surveillance regarding your performance in relation to these expectations. However, expectations and pressure, whether external or internal, did not have the last word.

But I think also there was a change this year 'cause I didn't participate the full day. Uhm, it came to a point in the afternoon where I was like, actually I'm not feeling this, I don't want to be here. I want to be at home, I want to go sleep. A::nd I don't have to be there if I don't want to, it's about me. So ya I think then that was the change this year, where I did not just go through the motions because I'm about to do something that I should do /ok/. But I did what I felt was best for me.

The pressure that Nobantu felt to continue enacting or embodying a 'survivor' identity, highlights one of the problems with feeling one can only identify with one pole of the victim-survivor binary. A fixed position does not allow for the expression or acknowledgement of the fluid and complex engagement with victimhood and survivorship that victim-survivors experience, as Nobantu describes above. It also does not capture the creative daily practice of survival that is required.

Nobantu was not alone in her push-pull relationship with the Rape Survivor t-shirt and 'survivor' identity claims. Each of my research contributors spoke about the t-shirt and their choices in relation to wearing it, whether or not they had ever worn it:

- Some wore the t-shirt once and then never chose to do so again
- Some wore it the first year of participating and every year after that

- Some participated as silent protestors for a year or several years before choosing to wear the t-shirt (which some referred to as “coming out”)
- Some never chose to wear the t-shirt and never spoke publicly, whilst others did not wear the shirt but spoke at the Breaking the Silence event
- Some chose to wear a different t-shirt and then changed shirts on the day
- For some, their annual decision-making regarding engagement with the Rape Survivor t-shirt became like landmarks on their journey in moving forward after rape.

Nobantu’s story also inspired creativity, in that it was one of the stories that informed changes to the t-shirts the following year. The one significant change was to add ‘and’ and a blank space beneath Rape Survivor on the t-shirts. Participants then had the option to write whatever they chose to about themselves which expressed something of who they were outside of, or in addition to, being a person who has experienced rape, referring back to Nobantu’s insistence that “these two words do not define me”.



Figure 7: Image showing ‘AND’ and white block added to Rape Survivor t-shirt

The organising committee came to agree that the ‘and’ on the Survivor t-shirts offered a very important perspective, although some felt it might detract from the political impact of the words. The block reminded victim-survivors and all who would see their t-shirts that rape or sexual violence are never the whole story about a person. They are so much more. They are also more than a ‘survivor’. It also allowed protestors to make visible in words that survival

looks different for different people. These all are political statements or actions in themselves which serve to trouble and destabilise hegemonic constructions of rape survivors.

The other change was in the text on the back of the t-shirt. Each of my research contributors who were still at the university completed a questionnaire to give their feedback regarding the changes after the 2014 Silent Protest. Nobantu wrote:

I think that this [the changes to the Rape Survivor t-shirt] was powerful. Especially the words at the back. The first sentence 'Rape does not define me' really shook me (in a good way). I felt as though there was now a deep understanding of how I feel and what I have gone through as a rape survivor.

In response to the question that asked about her thoughts regarding the block of white space we added on the Rape Survivor and Survivor shirts, Nobantu wrote:

This was important for me especially, as even though I wore the Rape Survivor t-shirt, I do not see myself as one – as in that is not how I choose to define myself.

In this statement, we can hear Nobantu's careful 'tightrope talk' as she renegotiates her positioning even in relation to something as stable as words on a t-shirt and resists any fixed identity conclusions.

9.2.3 Responses to changes made to the t-shirts in 2014

Whilst the organising committee had been clear about the intent behind the 'and' and the block of white space on the Survivor and Rape Survivor t-shirts we were not sure how they would be taken up. The feedback that we received in response to a brief survey (which I also sent to my research contributors) after the 2014 Silent Protest about the changes made to the t-shirts suggested that it had presented those who chose to wear the t-shirts both a challenge and an opportunity for reflection. It offered them choices about how they would like to position themselves in relation to both their experience of sexual violation and the people who would view their t-shirts. Some used humour such as this from a Harry Potter fan: "Rape Survivor AND Hogwarts would still accept me". Each protestor approached it in their own creative, considered way and each both troubled and expanded the possible meaning of 'Rape Survivor' as a social construct as they did so. Below are several responses from the survey:

Response 1:

I think having the space underneath the words 'Rape Survivor' was the most meaningful for me. It took me a long time to decide what to write and it was perhaps this process (more than what I chose to write) that was most meaningful as it prompted me to think about how I think about myself and the way that my rape has impacted on my life. This is a difficult thing to do but is really important in terms of recovery.

Response 2:

Mmmm – I liked the idea but found it hard to write something. It felt as though I would have to live up to what I wrote in a way – which was: Living life to the full. So while I liked the idea in principle, it was harder than I thought to do it.

It is significant to note here how even anticipating writing these words brought forth a sense of obligation and self-surveillance in this victim-survivor. It is an important reminder that whatever the liberatory intent of an action, it can easily be reinscribed in the terms of dominant discourses.

Response 3:

I was heartened to see all the things that different people wrote [on their t-shirts]. One protestor who has participated wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt for years had written "And it does not define me". Some described other important and beautiful aspects of their lives: e.g. "mother", "poet", "brother", "friend", "cook", "writer" or wrote of how they aspired to future goals: "And your next president". In my view this has been an excellent and very important change. Many people I spoke to had given a great deal of thought to what they would write in the space, some did small rituals or involved others in decorating their t-shirts. I think this change has had a fundamental and very positive impact: affecting how the protestors are able to present and view themselves and also how others see them. The definitions belong to the protestors – this is a very important principle that should be retained in all future protests.



Image 1



Image 2

Figure 8: Images of Silent Protest T-shirts

9.3 Reflections on the political intent and perceived impacts of the Rape Survivor t-shirts

The student who suggested the introduction of the Rape Survivor t-shirts had both a political and personal goal in doing so. Although she may not have articulated it like this at the time, some of the potential impacts of introducing the Rape Survivor t-shirts that she may have anticipated include the following:

1. Rape Survivor and Survivor t-shirts refuse to allow rape and sexual violence to be invisibilised – it doesn't happen – and challenge the 'othering' of rape victim-survivors – rape happens but only to certain 'other' kinds of people. Those wearing the t-shirts are saying "rape survivors look like me and they can look like you. They are 'us' and not 'other'". Thus, in wearing the t-shirts, protestors destabilise or 'trouble' dominant discourses and rape myths.
2. In wearing Rape Survivor t-shirts, victim-survivors are resisting taboos and refusing (and hopefully thereby reducing) the shame and stigma that so easily and automatically 'attach' to those who have been raped as they are positioned within available discourses.
3. Wearing the t-shirt offers a concrete opportunity to symbolically enact a chosen transition in subject position. Through this very public act of reclaiming or "acting on our own behalf" (Alcoff & Gray, 1993, p. 261) those who wear the t-shirt are reclaiming

their right to assert a preferred identity claim and to resist an imposed 'victim' status. For example, one of my research contributors, Sinalo chose to wear both the dress she had been wearing on the day when she was raped, and a Rape Survivor t-shirt. She said: "I wanted it to be as authentic a reclaiming as I could make it". However, although this symbolic assertion is framed as a movement from victimhood to survivorship by the very words on the t-shirt, we have seen how victim-survivors resist such a simplistic characterisation of the shift.

4. Wearing the t-shirt provides a concrete way of disclosing a sexual violation and opening up conversations, which was a central strategy of the early women's movement and remains significant today, although the platform may be different, such as social media posts aligned with the #MeToo movement. Speaking out is seen in and of itself to be a political statement, challenging taboos and exposing "the continued, unacknowledged presence" (McNaron & Morgan, 1982, p. 15) of sexual violence. One person speaking out or wearing the t-shirt also seems to facilitate disclosure for others:

Amara:

I think one of the strongest things was that when I wore the Survivor t-shirt ... other people who couldn't come out (.) suddenly found they could talk about it.

... One of the students in my class a couple of years back she, she asked, she knew, she'd seen me the previous year. Uhm she'd seen the photographs and she'd seen that I'd worn the Rape Survivor shirt (.) so she came to see me. She said can I talk to the class because I'm gonna wear a Survivor t-shirt and I wanna talk to them beforehand (...) so that they know and not have them looking at me and not talking (...) Oh sweet Lord, and she told us about her experiences and that was just too awful (...) I mean it never felt, I mean every protest I never fail to learn something truly amazing (.) you know. Something incredibly precious about how people deal with stuff like this.

5. Shifting the focus of victim-survivors' sense-making regarding their experience of sexual violation from the intensely personal (it only happened to me) to the collective

social sphere (seeing all the others wearing Rape Survivor t-shirts - it has happened to so many).

The narratives of my research contributors suggest that seeing other women - peers, friends, lecturers and members of support staff - who wear the Rape Survivor t-shirts may be the singular most significant element of the Silent Protest in troubling the dominant discourses about rape and rape victim-survivors. They offer an important visual counterstory³. I agree with Delgado (2000, p.61) that "...stories and counterstories can serve an equally important destructive [and deconstructive] function. They can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it is time to reallocate power".

Frank (2000, p. 138) notes that while people usually tell stories that fit within the existing or dominant "systems of honour" of a particular time and place, some individuals:

exhibit sufficient agency to push those horizons toward inclusion of new claims. Their sense of themselves as ill [or as one who has been subjected to sexual violence] is not the normal, social identity-by-default. Rather they put together performances that claim different selves and thus make available to others the systems of honour within which those selves are creditable.

His sentiments are echoed by Kim Chernin (1987) who suggests that "[i]t is a highly radical and subversive act to tell a familiar story in a new way" (p. 59) because both you and others realise that all stories are just stories and could be told differently. I would argue that both the primary organiser who conceptualised the Silent Protest and the young student who suggested the Rape Survivor t-shirts chose to tell a familiar story in a new way and were instrumental in constructing an alternative "system of honour" within which a 'rape survivor' identity could be linked to courage, resistance and survival rather than passivity and helplessness. The entire protest was designed to support and sustain this alternative system of honour.

³ Critical race theorists use personal narrative, or what they call 'counterstorytelling' to give voice to the lived experience of oppressed minorities (Brydon-Miller 2004:7).

Lake: [At one of the Breaking the Silence events there was] *a girl who told her story and [...]the statement was really stuck with me. Uhm she came forward and she'd never told her story before and she said that, you know, it was actually seeing other women, the women wearing the Rape Survivor shirts (.) and looking at those women and thinking well (.) you know, if even women like that can be raped kind of thing. And she said that seeing women wearing those shirts, kind of gave her the courage or something like that (.) but to kind of stand up and acknowledge it.*

However, wearing the t-shirt can be costly and requires courage, not necessarily because of what happened to you, but because of how you will be seen, imagined, constructed and positioned as soon as you put it on. Outside of the Silent Protest community, the prevailing “systems of honour” still inform people’s responses to victim-survivors. What seems significant though is that women continue to choose to wear the t-shirt, despite these risks:

Cara: *... the run up to me has been the hardest part, every year (.) that like, sort of month-long sort of run up ... that's when I start getting terrified, I get so scared and (..) ja it's horrible at first. Afterwards it's not nearly as bad for me as getting prepared (.) and getting ready to put that t-shirt on. So every year it's a bit of a thing u::hm =*

Those who choose wear the t-shirt offer a visual representation of the fact that rape does not destroy you, and that rape happens to ordinary women; women you know, respect and care for. There are few available role models or storylines for victim-survivors who wish to challenge or shift their positioning within victim or survivor discourse, never mind supporting a complex and multidimensional characterisation of women who have been raped. However, women wearing the Rape Survivor t-shirts offer other victim-survivors a sense that more is possible than they may have thought. One of my contributors expressed this after participating in the Silent Protest:

Naomi: *... I remember seeing uhm a rape survivor ... wearing the shirt and, and just being amazed at how, how she was just another person ... noticing how, how normal she was ... and even how she was smiling. And how there were so many people that you know have these secrets and these horrible things that have happened to them and they just carry them around and they need to, they need to be normal. And they can be normal for the most part*

... but I think society doesn't allow for them to show all the things that maybe they want to or could be shown.

The awareness of this potential impact and the desire to 'thicken' peoples' narratives about rape and rape survivors informs the choices that victim-survivors make, as we see in the powerful statement below:

Amara: *... so I wear it really seeing it as an opportunity to show people who can't speak out yet (.) to show them that it is ok to speak out and that you do survive and to show those who, who haven't been raped or who think that being raped is the end of the world that it really isn't (.) and you can go on to live a very interesting and normal life.*

Carolyn Nordstrom (1997, p. 11) writing in the context of war, suggests that when stories of survival are told and retold, they begin to give shape to a "culture of survival". This is a powerful counterstory to the utter devastation with which we most often associate war. In the same way, when women who have been raped firstly identify as survivors and then tell their stories of survival in the context of the Silent Protest, either in one-on-one conversations or at a Breaking the Silence debriefing they contribute to constructing "culture of survival" for other rape victim-survivors. Nelson (2001, p.8) argues that such stories told "for the express purpose of resisting and undermining an oppressive master narrative" can be considered "narrative acts of insubordination". I would suggest that wearing a Rape Survivor t-shirt offers an embodied insubordinate and provocative narrative.

Some protestors only realised the disruptive impact of wearing the t-shirt once it was on:

Amara: *Only on the day, did I realise the full impact of what it would mean for me you know (.) because of how people would look at the Survivor [on my shirt] and look at me and not quite know what to do you know (..) kind of look away and I wanted to keep saying, "I'm still the same person I was yesterday"(.) you know really you know don't do that to me (.) So then it made me think no fuck that really (..) actually, people must stop doing this you know. People must stop thinking of rape as this terrible (..) thing that happens to people in back streets you know and (..) and start seeing it's part of the fabric of our existence and start owning it in a way.*

9.3.1 Unanticipated impacts of Rape Survivor t-shirts

We have seen in the narratives above that the very existence of the Rape Survivor t-shirts can precipitate a crisis of varying proportions and with varying implications for those who engage with the protest and who have experienced sexual violence. It can be a crisis of confrontation with memories of an experience that may not have been acknowledged, and then a crisis of decision-making regarding disclosure, performance of identity claims and expressions of activism. This can precipitate a process which either immediately or in retrospect may be experienced as transgressive and liberatory and bringing about positive growth and greater well-being. For most of my research participants, as for the primary organiser and Nobantu, this was the case.

However, as Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray (1993) point out, drawing on Foucauldian scholarship, there exists a danger that the dominant discourses may subsume/co-opt/recuperate a disruptive survivor discourse, disempowering it so that it is no longer a threat to the status quo. It is therefore important to acknowledge the ways in which the liberatory or transgressive political potential of the Rape Survivor t-shirts has in some ways, and to some extent, been 'recuperated' by the dominant patriarchal discourse.

I want to highlight here, that in their seminal paper where they speak both as victim-survivors of sexual violence and as academics, Alcoff and Gray (1993) present their own form of disruptive survivor discourse. Laura Gray Rosendale (2013), reflecting later on the paper describes how in the paper they claimed subject positions which were almost non-existent up until that point for rape victim-survivors in academia, as experts of their own experiences, able to interpret them and then offer suggestions for how other survivors might do the same. They were therefore all too aware of the potential for their words to be reinscribed and robbed of their transgressive potential.

9.3.1.1 The emergence of a 'hierarchy of suffering'

A number of my contributors questioned whether or not they 'qualified' to wear a Rape Survivor t-shirt. They felt that what had happened to them simply was not violent or serious or 'bad' enough to warrant such a claim. As I discussed in Chapter 4, dominant discourses around sexual violence both minimise its impacts and blame women for being harmed. Women internalise these discourses and try to make sense of their own experiences within

the socially available narratives and constructions. They anticipate how they will be positioned by others and moderate their own narratives accordingly. A metaphor which Naomi explicitly introduced, but others also seemed to reference was the notion of a 'hierarchy of suffering' which has victim-survivors evaluating their own violation in terms of how it compares to others' experiences, rather than on its own terms. Such a hierarchy disallows a sense of authority and naming rights to those who have been violated, without clearly specifying the criteria for what qualifies as 'raped enough'.

Naomi spoke very strongly about not knowing where she 'fit' in the Silent Protest because she would not call what happened to her rape and yet it was a sexual assault. She felt it would constitute "a mockery" of rape victim-survivors to wear the t-shirt and so she chose not to. However, at that stage there was no other way of making a public disclosure about her violation, except by speaking at the Breaking the Silence event, which she did.

***Naomi:** [...] I knew, logically I knew that it was a silly thing to be thinking ... there wasn't really a hierarchy (.) But at the same time I knew that those experiences were terrible and mine (.) I didn't feel like was so bad (.) Uhm and so (..) and I felt like people watching uhm would, not rank things, maybe just rank things (..) or compare (.) We all compare things (.) when we hear them [...] cause personally it feels like a horrible horrible thing (.) and you are aware of that. At the same time you are aware that it might not be allowed to be a horrible, horrible thing or it might not be as bad or it might not (...) uhm, others might not see it as being so horrible (..) Or it, you know it's a sort dual feeling (.) you know, it's =*

Naomi's struggle is evident as she attempts to articulate her internal resistance to discrediting her embodied experience of the horribleness of what she endured, whilst feeling that the Silent Protest community might not validate that experience as worthy within the 'hierarchy of suffering'. This echoes the sense that most victim-survivors speak of in relation to disclosure. Most often the fear is not that one will not be believed. It is a fear that your experience of violation will not be recognised, acknowledged and validated for what it was and for its profoundly disruptive impacts.

Naomi's was one of the stories which prompted the introduction of the Survivor t-shirts. However, while this was done with the intent of making a wider range of subject positions available within the Silent Protest space, we ran the risk of the Survivor t-shirt being re-

inscribed into a 'hierarchy' of suffering – the sense that what happened to those wearing Survivor t-shirts was not as bad as those wearing Rape Survivor t-shirts.

9.3.1.2 The elevation of particular ways of positioning oneself post-rape over other ways of being

The importance, both politically and personally, of speaking out about sexual violence and reporting rape were strong messages conveyed during the Silent Protest, particularly in its early years and the Rape Survivor t-shirts became a concrete means of doing so. This left some victim-survivors feeling that speaking out was inherently 'better' than choosing silence and that someone who has disclosed and reported their violation is further along on a metaphorical journey towards 'recovery'. This could also result in an internal pressure to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt and a sense of guilt when one did not, as we saw in the primary organiser and Nobantu's stories, and which other victim-survivors also mentioned.

9.3.1.3 The essentialising of an identity claim

To wear a Rape Survivor t-shirt is to essentialise an identity claim. Even if it is only for the duration of the Silent Protest, 'rape survivor' is the sum total of who one is; it is the first and only thing that strangers know about you, unless you choose to engage in conversation and tell them more. The Rape Survivor t-shirt could therefore be seen as further limiting the subject positions available to women whose subjectivity has already been constrained by the violation inflicted upon them. This was what the organising committee was resisting in adding the 'AND' and the block of white space to both the Rape Survivor and Survivor t-shirts. However, even this can become a prescription/obligation to write something 'good enough' or inspiring, or somehow in line with a 'survivor' identity.

9.3.1.4 Constructions/connotations of what it means to be a (good) survivor

I heard several victim-survivors speak about choosing not to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt because they felt they had not yet achieved 'survivor' status. They seemed to feel that there exist certain emotional and behavioural criteria and achieving these would demonstrate that you have overcome the impacts of the assault and have achieved the status of 'survivor'. Until you do so you should not wear the t-shirt. This perspective can cause victim-survivors to discredit their own ongoing process of surviving and overcoming.

Even once victim-survivors have chosen to wear the t-shirt these ‘survivor’ discourses can recruit protestors into self-surveillance around being a ‘good’ survivor. One expression of this would be to wear the t-shirt again the following year if you have worn it before. One of my contributors anticipated that if she did not wear the t-shirt a second time others might think, firstly, that she had lied when she wore it previously (referencing a common rape myth that women lie about sexual violation) or that she was no longer coping or ‘surviving’ as well as she had been the previous year.

9.3.1.5 Individualising and de-politicising the responsibility for becoming a ‘survivor’

Whilst the Rape Survivor t-shirts were introduced with the political intent of disrupting dominant discourses, there is the risk that in the minds of those who see it, the political statement of wearing the shirt could be read or interpreted as an expression of individual achievement, reflecting the personal effort and attributes of the wearer without reference to the context of their survival. This could in turn suggest that victim-survivors *can* and *should* take responsibility for healing themselves and that it is possible for any victim-survivor to do so, irrespective of “politics and material inequalities” (Bourke, 2012, p. xii), “social power asymmetries” (Naples, 2003, p. 1156) or the myriad ways in which race, gender, class, culture, religious belief and so on, impact on the resources and choices available to them.

9.3.2 Responses to discursive co-option of Rape Survivor t-shirts

Despite the complexities and risks, every year women continue to choose to wear the Rape Survivor and Survivor t-shirts. It therefore seems to be important to consider in what ways we can resist this process by which dominant discourses co-opt resistant or disruptive speech and maximise the transgressive potential of survivor discourse so that the autonomy and empowerment of the victim-survivor who is speaking, as well as of survivors elsewhere, will be enhanced rather than undermined.

Some of the ways in which the Silent Protest organisers attempted to do this over the years are as follows:

- a. The introduction of survivor briefings where the political thinking and intent behind the protest could be articulated and the complexity of victim-survivor responses could be acknowledged. Speakers at the events of the Silent Protest also did this work of positioning the message and politics of the protest.

- b. The introduction of the Debrief Café which offered a space for reflection and processing, where one was positioned as a protestor reflecting on one's experience of participation, without having to claim any status as victim, survivor or anything else.
- c. The introduction of the Survivor t-shirt in order to offer protestors more options in terms of how they chose to position themselves in the protest.
- d. Making a deliberate decision to invite men to wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt if they chose to do so. Although the gendered dynamics and politics of male rape are different to the violence inflicted on women and girls, having men wear the t-shirt acknowledged their experiences of violation and further disrupted dominant discursive constructions of 'rape survivors'.

9.4 'Working the hyphen' of the victim-survivor binary: reflections and recommendations

9.4.1 Take seriously the role of language in constructing reality

Rape is a non-permanent, past event, even when it has occurred on multiple occasions. It is not an identity claim; it is a time-limited experience which evokes responses. Those responses vary from person to person and within each person, over time and in different contexts, and responses may be multiple at any one time. The responses are constrained by context which encompasses a range of intersecting factors and positionings including socioeconomic, gendered, cultural, religious, and family positionings, practices and values.

However, when we language the experience, or try to pin it down with a label, we turn what was done to us into a permanent feature of our identity. The label positions a person in a fixed and seemingly immovable way: "She *is* a rape victim/rape survivor". The only shift which seems possible is from victim to survivor, or vice versa. Thus, through language, a past experience becomes a present, ongoing reality, an essentialised aspect of identity. This contradicts the narratives of my research contributors. For them, responses to sexual violence occur in the present and they are multiple, complex, fluid, ever-changing and can even appear to be contradictory. No single term will ever capture or characterise them.

What seems necessary is a more creative engagement with language. Some possibilities include:

- a. Listen to the ways in which victim-survivors themselves articulate the impact of the assault on their identity (i.e. what they call both the violation itself and themselves in the aftermath), and use the words and metaphors which they have chosen. However, we should also be aware that victim-survivors will draw on the linguistic resources available to them and that it may be helpful to engage in deconstructive conversations about what the terms and descriptions they use mean to them and to others in their context.
- b. Avoiding labels or signifiers which make essentialised identity claims. This can be difficult in the absence of alternatives, so if we need to use a label or signifier, perhaps we need to 'trouble' or 'complicate' our use of them. In my doctoral proposal, drawing on feminist scholarship, I used the term 'survivor' but put it under Derridean erasure (~~survivor~~) in order to highlight both its inadequacy and necessity, and the complexity of meaning-making in relation to sexual violence. A highly irritated reviewer's response was 'Seriously?' underlined and with an exclamation mark. He was not willing to endure the discomfort of recalibrating meaning each time he read the word. In this thesis I have chosen to use the rather clumsy term victim-survivor to trouble the binary. I fully acknowledge that this term is also inadequate and it could be argued that it reinforces the very binary I am trying to disrupt. The search continues for language that better serves those who have experienced sexual violence and live on.
- c. Linguistically separate the subjectivity/identity of a person from the event of rape. For example: the brilliant dancer who was raped, I was sexually assaulted and so on.
- b. Speak about enacting survival, characterising survival as an action or process rather than a state of being. For example: I survive; I am surviving, I will survive. Thus, rather than focussing on an identity claim, speak about the agentic processes by which someone aims to shift whatever position they find themselves in now, in a direction of their preference (and it doesn't have to be towards 'survivorship') as and when they choose to do so.

9.4.2 Take seriously the role of context in shaping responses to sexual violence

It is critical to acknowledge that a person's responses to the experience of sexual violence are constrained and shaped by one's context and one's context consists of a range of intersecting factors which include gender, class, race and sexual orientation as well as other political, cultural, social, and interpersonal factors as well as religious and family values, practices and beliefs. This renders any fixed concept of survivorship fairly meaningless as it can look entirely different in different contexts.

9.4.3 Affirm a range of responses to sexual violence

We need to continue to identify and challenge the range of hegemonic assumptions that are embedded in survivor discourse and language (Naples, 2003). One of these is our society's intolerance for victimhood and in fact for anything seen as ambivalence or weakness. How do we acknowledge and affirm a range of responses to sexual violence as equally valid and equally deserving of support? It is this question that I wish to respond to in the final section of this chapter, guided by the wisdom of the late Maya Angelou (1969, p. 212): "At fifteen, life had taught me undeniably that surrender, in its place, was as honorable as resistance, especially if one had no choice".

9.5 Moving beyond the binary: Acknowledging vulnerability

Both research (as discussed in Chapter 4) and experience tell us that certainly Western cultures prefer survivors to victims⁴. In Emi Koyama's (2011, n.p.) analysis, speaking as a victim-survivor herself who chose to reclaim the label 'victim', we are discursively captured by the "cult of compulsory hopefulness and optimism in the 'trauma recovery industry'".

Survivors are less challenging to our collective denial of vulnerability and the precarity of our lives. 'Survivor' implies that one who has been 'other' due to their woundedness can be 'one of us' again – strong, invulnerable and powerful. Survivors fulfil the neoliberal requirements

⁴ However, while little research has focused specifically on perceptions of 'victims' and 'survivors' outside of the global north where these concepts may not be as salient, the influence of almost universal patriarchal 'relations of ruling', constructions of rape as 'damage' and the increasing accessibility of Western thinking through digital media mean that perceptions are unlikely to differ significantly elsewhere. Rape victim-survivors are 'othered', shunned and marginalised wherever they find themselves.

of good and responsible citizenship and actively contribute to the capitalist project. Therefore, for the most part victims would prefer to be survivors too (or to have never been harmed at all, which relates to non-acknowledgement). They are aware that, as victims, they will be seen as vulnerable and 'damaged' and people will turn away. Their very vulnerability disrupts our illusions – the illusion of invulnerability, the illusion of exceptionalism (humans as non-animal and non-mortal), and the illusion of control and progress. Certainly, Western societies need victims to step back into subject positions which assert power, agency and acceptability.

We find it difficult, if not impossible, to allow the wounded to be wounded and then to heal without pathologising or judging and feeling we need to intervene in some way to repair (implying that they would not be able to do so for themselves). This often says more about our own insecurities and need to be in control than the needs of the so-called vulnerable.

Perhaps the reality that we wish to avoid is that there is nothing that can heal the violation of rape or abuse, if heal means to undo or remove the event and its effects, to leave it behind and to move on. However, it can be borne. It can be shared. It is possible to be drawn into relationships of care and belonging, where we are seen and heard and acknowledged. In order to construct these relationships and communities of care though, we need to disrupt and dismantle the discursive constructions of rape-victim survivors that have people turning away when sexual violence is mentioned.

The Silent Protest provides an opportunity for us acknowledge our common vulnerability – both those who have experienced sexual violation and those who have not. Uncomfortable as it is, for that day we stay with the vulnerability. For that day we are associated with a taboo; we stand with those who are usually silent or, when they do speak, are turned away from. We acknowledge that the only reason that we are not standing up there too, or wearing the t-shirt, is because we have been lucky. It is in acknowledging mutual vulnerability that connection is made possible and community, however fleeting or temporary, is constructed. It is countercultural but strangely invigorating and liberating when we get a taste of what is possible when vulnerabilities connect.

Perhaps the answer lies not in the victim-survivor binary and where we end up positioning ourselves or others. It is in working the hyphen - acknowledging our common vulnerability as

well as our common will to survive, overcome and heal. As a society we need to forego the discursive binaries and certainties and acknowledge a more complex lived reality, that is quite often not under our control.

War is another experience of living which is beyond the ordinary citizen's control. Carolyn Nordstrom's (1997) commitment to listening deeply to people and their contexts in constructing an ethnography of war zones in Southern Africa, led her to surprising realisations. What stood out for her more vividly than the devastation and horror of war was the creativity that people drew on and brought to the fore in order to rebuild their worlds (p. xviii and p. 4). She noted how "people on the frontlines generate their own solutions" (p. xviii) and how creativity almost seemed a necessary prerequisite for survival (p. 15). We would not naturally or easily link responses to war or violence with creativity, but it seems that war offered a context which both required and evoked creativity – people stepped up to what was required of them.

This is not about glamourising the suffering – both war and sexual violence should not happen. It is also not about finding meaning or purpose in the event or circumstances that caused suffering, but in our responses to those circumstances and events, whatever those may have been.

This aligns with what captured my attention in the stories that my research contributors told and with what I witnessed as a participant-activist-observer. The story of the primary organiser is one clear example: the unique concept of the Silent Protest with all its moments and rituals of resistance and reclaiming, its careful planning and choregraphing as it grew and changed over time was a powerful and creative response to the primary organiser's own experience of sexual violation. Her narrative of the year-on-year process of organising and developing the protest is inextricably linked with her own healing journey. She created for others the space she needed for herself as she resisted and refused her positioning as an incest victim and reconstituted a subjectivity that aligned with her hopes and intentions for her life, whilst resisting the label survivor. The Silent Protest space and the organising role facilitated her own restorying of her narrative as she found alternative places to stand in relation to her story. She was joined in this by others who added to and shaped the Protest. And her journey with the Rape Survivor t-shirt played a key role in that re-storying.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study offers insights into the potential contribution of activism and collective protest in responding to and healing from sexual violation. The findings and outcomes of this study suggest that carefully planned and enacted collective protest holds promise as a community-building, discourse-disrupting social practice. Contributors to this study narrated a range of positive meanings and impacts that they attributed to their own participation in the Silent Protest, as women who had experienced sexual violence. Participation in the Silent Protest seems to stand against at least some of the factors which inhibit acknowledgement and disclosure and participation in the Silent Protest created a range of opportunities for women to tell their story to at least one other person, and to access care and support. Most of my research contributors described participation as having been beneficial, as having helped them move towards living well again.

The Protest seems to operate both as a preventative intervention which helps to shift the discursive construction of those who have been raped as well as a rape-supporting culture, whilst also offering a process and constructing a receiving context which supports movement in the direction of healing.

10.1 Contributions of this Study

10.1.1 Documenting the history of anti-rape activism in South Africa and of the Silent Protest at Rhodes University

The Silent Protest, as the central hub around which all aspects of this study revolved, is a unique phenomenon with its dual focus on justice and care for women who have experienced sexual violence within the frame of carefully choreographed and ritualised, collective, in-person protest action. There is nothing else quite like it in South Africa, or internationally¹ and this exploratory ethnography offered the opportunity to document its history, the vision and intentions of its organisers, and the ways in which these were realised, and evolved.

¹ The Silent Protest has been organised in other Universities and urban contexts by alumni of Rhodes University, who experienced/participated in the Protest themselves while they were students. Larissa Klazinga, who originally conceptualised and organised the Protest at Rhodes University, has gone on to organise similar protests in several other contexts through her subsequent activist work.

This thesis also locates the Silent Protest within the broader landscape of anti-rape activism in South Africa, and, to some extent, internationally. Anti-rape activism has a particular history in South Africa that is somewhat out of sync with the rest of the world, as gender activism was relegated to some extent due to the anti-apartheid struggle.

10.1.2 A responsive research practice creating 'conditions of possibility'

The relationship between a researcher's theoretical and personal positioning and the process of knowledge construction are taken seriously in this study and informed the unfolding research process. The implications of feminist and constructionist epistemologies for research practice, as well as an embodied, affective and intuitive ethical engagement are drawn on and developed in order to account for a research journey that does not follow a usual qualitative research trajectory.

One central feature of the research journey was the importance of a care-full responsiveness to both my research contributors and the research context in which the process of research became as important as its outcome. I was challenged by my research contributors to respond to them as a witness first (Hatley, 2000, p. 3), acknowledging an ethical involvement which did not permit me to simply construct and utter analytical 'truths' *about* my research contributors, but also to remain true *to* them. This ethical involvement led first to the development of the Debrief Café, and later to a shift in research approach which had me taking up a critically engaged activist role in organising the Protest and incorporating a participatory action research cycle into my ethnographic study. Many of the outcomes of that aspect of the research were changes enacted and accounted during the 2014 Silent Protest and which shifted the tone and direction of the Silent Protest in significant ways.

Prior to 2014, the Silent Protest had enacted a more traditional second generation feminist rage against Patriarchy and had emphasised speaking out about sexual violence as both political action and personal reclaiming. With the addition of the Debrief Café and more complex, nuanced and inclusive ways of participating in the Protest, space was opened up for a wider range of emotions, responses (both individual and collective) and identities to be validated and acknowledged. This opening up created 'conditions of possibility' for emergent subjectivities and social formations that might otherwise never have existed.

The research journey also opened up 'conditions of possibility' for emerging researcher subjectivities and practices. I recognised whilst we may position ourselves in particular ways as researchers, we are always already positioned by our research contributors, and we position them in ways that are shaped by our own discursive context. This mutual 'positioning dance' is co-constructed, fluid and ongoing and requires moment-by-moment choices that cannot be accounted for in an ethics proposal. If we are open to seeing the face of the Other and listening deeply to their story, both our discursive constructions and our positioning of them will be challenged and disrupted, in ways that open up new conditions of possibility for us both.

10.1.3 Understanding the impacts of 'malignant' positioning on women who have been raped – and their active, creative resistance to this positioning

As one aspect of my approach to 'analysis', I engaged in a process of thinking with the stories of my research contributors, guided by theoretically informed questions particularly around the positioning of victim-survivors. Both the narratives of my contributors and the available literature suggest that women who have experienced sexual violence are most often positioned in fairly narrow and constrained, albeit different ways by society, the criminal justice system, the medical profession, the recovery movement (and other movements) as well as by therapy or counselling practitioners of various persuasions. Women are always already aware of at least some of these subject positions and that one of the costs of disclosure of a sexual assault will be being positioned in these limiting ways. I argue that awareness of what could be considered 'malignant positioning' of those who have been sexually violated, is one of the factors which inhibits disclosure and the accessing of services after a sexual assault.

There are various discourses related to sexual violence that position women who have been raped in limited and limiting ways. Much work has been done by feminist academics and activists to expose and disrupt myths about rape and victim-blaming discourses and this has been somewhat successful in some contexts. However, discourses which characterise rape as the worst thing that could happen to a woman and which position women who have been raped as inevitably broken or damaged and irreparably harmed are still prevalent although in more subtle ways than they may have been historically. The 'trauma of rape' discourse functions as a variation of the 'irreparable harm' discourse but with the endorsement and

authoritative backing of medical and therapeutic professions. These discourses are evident in the ways in which rape and rape 'victims' are most often spoken about in everyday conversation, depicted in news articles, movies, series and literature. Women are as aware of these discourses as they are about rape myths and victim blaming, and they are aware that if they do speak out, and they are believed, people will position them in the ways suggested by these discourses. The important struggle in which feminist activists have actively engaged for decades is to ensure that rape is acknowledged as a crime, as a violation of human rights, and as harmful to women. This labour has shifted perceptions of rape and those who are subjected to rape somewhat and has been strategically employed to leverage resources and access to services for victim-survivors that were needed and welcomed. However, this discursive re-construction has also had other inadvertent effects. It has led to protectionist responses and an emphasis on the vulnerability of victim-survivors and their need for external interventions.

What my research contributors conveyed is that these discourses position them in ways that they strongly and actively resist. They resist being positioned in ways which fail to capture both the impacts of the assault and their own responses to them. The victim/survivor binary which is offered to women who have been raped as an either-or option is also strongly resisted. This resistance plays a significant role in non-acknowledgement and non-disclosure, which can therefore be argued to be agentic and strategic responses to sexual violence.

My contributor's narratives attested to the active and ongoing identity work that malignant positioning requires of those who have been subjected to sexual violence – evading, resisting and re-negotiating their positioning – over and above the usual identity work engaged in by those who have not experienced such a trauma. This additional 'positioning dance' seems to be necessary, whether or not one has disclosed the trauma to others, with different challenges, struggles and/or dilemmas to manage in each scenario.

Participation in the Silent Protest (and even witnessing the Silent Protest from a distance), seems to assist some women who have experienced sexual violence in resolving some of the challenges of this identity work in a way that they prefer, a way that offers them a greater sense of peace, confidence and well-being. One of the benefits of participation in the Silent Protest that my contributors' narratives highlighted was the fact that it offered multiple and

flexible subject positioning as well as opening up subject positions, or 'conditions of possibility' that women who have been raped are not often offered in everyday life.

What I witness and heard is that the range of subject positions available to participants in the Silent Protest is wider than those usually accessible to women who have experienced sexual violence and these subject positions are fluid and changeable over the course of the protest, or can be engaged with creatively, the Rape Survivor t-shirts being one example. In fact, the only struggles that some participants expressed with aspects of the Silent Protest related to moments or practices in which they felt that subject positions were being imposed or restricted, such as when others reacted to the Rape Survivor t-shirts with discomfort, avoidance or hostility.

The experiences and stories of contributors to this study suggest that our current responses as a society to those who have experienced sexual violence are limited and limiting. It is important to acknowledge that we are all inevitably and unavoidably caught up in a web of discourses around sex, sexuality and sexual violence which shape our beliefs and subject positions and in turn determine how we position those who have experienced sexual violence. These discourses influence our research agendas as well as service provision and can become a self-sustaining loop. As a result, the way in which victim-survivors are positioned can make them reluctant to access the services that do exist to offer support, and the possibility of justice. I would argue that it is necessary to rethink those services both in the light of available resources and the subject positions they invite those who access the services to take up. I would suggest that greater flexibility and creativity are called for, particularly in initiating collective practices which offer opportunities for mutual care and witnessing as well as a range of forms of activism and protest. Collective practices could also constitute a more efficient deployment of available resources and a broadening of the therapeutic services power base.

10.1.4 Disrupting dominant discourses around sexual violence

This study troubles and disrupts prevailing discourses around sexual violence in four significant ways:

1. It situates sexual violence within a political rather than a personal sphere. In identifying sexual violence as a socio-political rather than personal concern, as a

common experience for women, it disrupts our construction of those who have experienced sexual violence as somehow uniquely unfortunate, inherently flawed or blameworthy. It also highlights the way in which sexual violence, both threatened and enacted, operates to enforce and maintain the gendered social order.

2. It suggests that only offering professionalised, individualised and necessarily exclusive (due to limited resources) responses to those who have experienced sexual violence may in fact reinforce malignant positioning and disempower everyday caring responses. This can contribute to non-acknowledgement and disclosure. Collective responses to sexual violence offer an opportunity for more women to engage in potentially healing practices as a resource to each other, participating on their own terms, and positioned in ways that are congruent with their own experience of themselves.
3. It foregrounds resistance as a response to sexual violence (rather than resilience). I use resistance in the sense suggested by Guilfoyle (2014) in which our most basic developmental response to that which offends or repels us is refusal; a 'no' expressed in a range of different ways from an inner turning away, freezing or shutting down, to a verbalised negative, to active physical resistance. Resistance is an agentic response which positions us in particular ways towards that which we are resisting. Collective protest enacts that resistance and invites participants to recognise and validate the ways in which they resisted and continue to resist. This again opens up alternative subject positions and 'conditions of possibility'. Resistance is different to resilience which, although it is a useful concept highlighting the possibility of 'bounce back' to more desired levels of functioning after trauma, can also be co-opted into neo-liberal discourse as an expectation or measure of success for those who have experienced trauma.
4. It focuses on processes of coming to live well again (healing) after sexual violence rather than emphasising damage or pathology.

10.2 Limitations

- a. This study focused on one anti-rape protest in a small university town in South Africa over a three year period. The findings can therefore not be considered generalisable to other contexts. The time period ended seven years ago and there have been many

developments in anti-rape activism, both at the university where the Silent Protest takes place and in online activism, the most notable being the #MeToo movement. However, neither the prevalence of sexual violence nor the prevailing discursive constructions of rape and of victim-survivors have changed substantially over this time and the learnings from this ethnographic study are still highly relevant.

- b. I am aware that the Silent Protest itself is constructed and re-constructed within a swirl of discourses. From both a critical and feminist post-structuralist perspective, there is much to be examined and critiqued and the assumptions informing aspects of its enactment deserve further attention. The emphasis on survivorship and speaking out, the 'hierarchy of suffering' that this emphasis produces, the confessional nature of the open mic offered at the Breaking the Silence event, and so on, all warrant further discursive analysis. Within the space limitations of this thesis and grappling as I was with 'theoretical impurity' (Gavey, 2011) in attempting to offer an account of my contributor's narratives as both descriptive and constituted, I chose to focus on description and making sense of the narrated impacts of the Silent Protest and there is further critical analysis waiting to be done.
- c. I am very aware of the implications of my "ethnographic vacillation" in navigating the sometimes turbulent waters between activist engagement and academic reflection. As an organiser of the Silent Protest for a year, I took up an advocacy role as I actively recruited participation in the protest. It has not been a simple thing to step out of that role and I have tried to remain reflexively aware of its influence in my sense-making and balance this with critical reflection. However, I am certain that a bias towards identifying what was positive and beneficial in the protest will be evident in my accounting for it.

10.3 Recommendations

10.3.1 General Recommendations

- a. We need to acknowledge that the receiving context may be the primary inhibiting factor for acknowledgement and disclosure of sexual violence. This acknowledgement will focus our efforts on disrupting prevailing discourses around

sexual violence in order to increase openness to listening and hearing victim-survivor's stories on their own terms and responding with care.

- b. At a discursive level, there is still work to be done in terms of the political nature of sexual violence, where responsibility for rape lies and in increasing awareness that rape harms people and is a crime. This work needs to be balanced with making widely available the stories of those who have experienced rape which acknowledge the complexity and multiplicity of responses to rape and ways of moving forward after rape. Resistance, resilience, creativity and resourcefulness need to be heard alongside many other narratives of response.
- c. It is also necessary to address stigmatised notions of victims and victimhood and increase our collective tolerance for vulnerability. At the same time essentialised notions of what it means to be a survivor also need to be troubled, with more emphasis on survivorship as a craft that one forges as you go, or to simply speak of survival or surviving as a legitimate ongoing practice which includes advances and retreats. This should improve empathy and understanding, as well as openness in those to whom stories are disclosed.
- d. We need to open up conversations with parents, caregivers and teachers as a start, about rape and disclosure, and then develop and make available resources about how one could respond well to disclosure. It is important to equip and empower people so that they are able to respond out of care and compassion rather than out of fear of doing further harm. We should engage in deconstructive conversations around the ways in which rape is constructed and co-construct alternative perspectives and metaphors for viewing rape and the impacts of rape so that parents, caregivers and teachers are not immobilised by a disclosure and unable to respond to the victim-survivor's needs. Similar conversations and resources could be offered to professionals who encounter victim-survivors in their work such as nurses, doctors, police personnel, counsellors, therapists and so on.
- e. It is essential that we create opportunities for women to hear each other's stories so that they have access to a range of images and narratives of surviving. Places where women usually gather already, such as faith communities, co-operatives, adult

literacy classes, craft groups, and 'stokvels'² can intentionally create such spaces. If the discursive construction of rape survivors were to shift it would be easier to speak out, we could normalise the sharing of such stories without the risk of an identity being 'spoiled'.

10.3.2 Recommendations for practitioners

10.3.2.1 Working collectively

- a. My contributors' narratives suggest that it would be helpful to set up and facilitate opportunities for those who have experienced sexual violence to take up different subject positions/enact different identity claims. One example could be opportunities for mutual, reciprocal, even circular caring with others (I care and am cared for) in favour of a setting where an 'expert' takes on the role of 'caring for' (I who am resourced and 'well' will impart specialised care to you, who are in need). The way the gathering is framed should also position victim-survivors as experts on their own lives and knowledges of survival, such as a journaling group, discussion group, co-research group, and so on rather than a therapy group.
- b. When we view psychological or emotional healing as an individual activity or responsibility, we foreclose the creativity and collaborative reflection it would take to find or develop alternative collective practices. Working exclusively with individuals also creates the perception that healing is possible only for the privileged few who can afford access. Whilst I am not suggesting that collective practices should replace therapy, as we have seen, they do offer victim-survivors something which individual therapy does not. It is important to acknowledge that in the context of sexual violence collective approaches may be even more beneficial than individual work, as Bass et al. (2013) demonstrated in their work with victim-survivors in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Collective practices also offer opportunities for awareness raising and social transformation for others who are involved who have not experienced sexual violence – family members, peers and so on.
- c. It is widely acknowledged that services for 'survivors' of sexual violence are inadequate in most contexts around the world at least in part because there are

² A 'stokvel' is a uniquely South African collective savings practice where a small (usually no more than 12) group of invited members make regular monetary contributions to a shared savings fund. Each month one member will receive the money in the fund collected during that period.

insufficient service providers to deliver current models of intervention. It is no different in South Africa. This study suggests that the design of events/gatherings/interventions which de-emphasise the role of the professional mental health practitioner and mobilise both political critique or resistance and mutual care hold promise for the provision of services to those affected by sexual violence.

- d. One challenge in recommending the design and facilitation of collective spaces for victim-survivors and/or for social transformation work is the question of who will do this work. Developing facilitation skills and process design and planning should be included in the training of all mental health practitioners and, I would argue also educators and leaders in faith communities as these are other spaces where collective work may be beneficial. This may be an avenue for critical community psychology to consider going forward which resonates with Hook's (2004) challenge to South African critical psychology to go beyond ideological critique and "to consider ways of refashioning itself so as to serve an emancipatory and socially transformative agenda that is properly responsive to the demands of a developing society" (p. 20).

10.3.2.2 Constructions of those who have experienced sexual violation

- a. Along with Guilfoyle (2014), Sharratt (2011), Thompson (2000), White (1997), Yuen, (2009), I would recommend initiating conversations which position victim-survivors as resistant, and as multiply resourced, with a range of strengths and abilities rather than as psychologically wounded or damaged and in need of protection or intervention. We need to hold our professional understandings lightly, as only one story amongst many possible stories about the distress or struggles that someone is facing. We can intentionally look for and ask: What are the processes of survival, healing, coming to live well again that are already underway? What are people already doing to resist being defined by sexual violence that can be celebrated and strengthened?
- b. It is also important to acknowledge the range of experiences, responses and meanings that exist in relation to sexual violence. Each victim-survivor's story is unique and the complex circumstances of their lives and other challenges they face

will influence the impacts of sexual violence. We therefore cannot ever assume what a sexual violation will mean for someone.

10.4 Recommendations for further research

1. This study was broad and exploratory. It would be helpful to conduct further studies to investigate the impact on victim-survivors of participating in activities, events or collective practices in which they are positioned as agentic, resistant, resourced and knowledgeable.
2. Closely related to this, research into the resistance and resilience of victim-survivors would also be a productive avenue of investigation, particularly looking at the “factors and processes that promote positive development among individuals exposed to atypically high levels of stress or adversity” (Ungar & Theron, 2020, p. 441). Ungar and Theron (2020) understand the concept of resilience to mean “the process of multiple biological, psychological, social, and ecological systems interacting in ways that help individuals to regain, sustain, or improve their mental wellbeing when challenged by one or more risk factors” (p. 441). It is significant that recent research on resilience has recognised that resilience depends as much on external culturally relevant resources being available to those experiencing stress or distress as it does on a person’s own thoughts, feelings and actions. This echoes what this study has shown about the crucial role that the receiving context plays in inhibiting or facilitating acknowledgement and disclosure of sexual violence.

The findings and outcomes of this study are complex and multiple. They defy simplistic answers, explanations or solutions but, along with Frank (2004), I have tried to invite readers into a deeper “appreciation of how complex things are (when we imagined them to be simple) and the many incongruities” (p. 439). It is my sincere hope that this work continues to open up conversations which broaden our understandings and deepen our listening and care, which increase our willingness to tolerate vulnerability in ourselves and in others and which challenge and disrupt prevailing discourses around sexual violence in a way that is beneficial to us all.

Appendix A: Information Sheet sent to potential research contributors

Information: Research on Participation in the Silent Protest, Rhodes University

I am a PhD student in the Psychology Department, and I am investigating participation in the Silent Protest at Rhodes University. In particular I wish to understand how women who have been subjected to rape/sexual violence experience participation in the Silent Protest. I am interested in how it is that they come to participate, what their experiences are of the protest day itself and what impact their participation has on their ability to live well/thrive again after rape/sexual violence.

I am asking women who have experienced any form of sexual violence and intend to participate in the Silent Protest this year (both those who will be wearing the 'rape survivor' t-shirt AND those who have chosen not to) to consider participating in this study. I want to highlight the fact that I will not require you at any point to talk about your experience of sexual violation – the focus of the research is your experience of participation in the Silent Protest.

If you agree to participate, you would also be free to withdraw at any time if participation is causing you discomfort or distress. Dr Colleen Vasilliou is available to be contacted at the Rhodes Student Counselling Centre for further support on (tel) 0466037070. However, there are a number of studies which have shown that most survivors of sexual violence who participate in research activities related to sexual violence find it to be personally helpful to do so.

If you agree to participate, I would ask that you commit yourself to participating in the Research Process described on the next page. You are also welcome to join one or more of the additional research activities.

I would take every measure to ensure your privacy and the confidentiality of your contributions to the research and will use pseudonyms and change identifying information in my thesis and any publications arising from this research. If you participate in face-to-face group discussions you will however be identifiable to other group members. In these group discussions, we will establish the ground rule that participants should not talk about what is shared by other members in the group outside the group (group confidentiality).

A little about myself: I am a 'mature' student, a mom with daughters of my own and I have practiced as a Pastoral Therapist for seven years. My supervisor is Professor Catriona Macleod.

Please feel free to contact me for further information. I am happy to meet with you to discuss the project.

In solidarity

Kim Barker

(Cell) 084 400 6145

(Email) kimelisebarker@gmail.com

Appendix A: Information Sheet sent to potential research contributors

RESEARCH PROCESS (WHAT YOU WOULD BE SIGNING UP FOR)

<i>Before the Silent Protest</i>	<i>Time required</i>
Meet with Kim for a one-to-one pre-protest conversation	45 – 60 min
<i>On the day of the Silent Protest</i>	
Use a camera or cellphone to take pictures which represent significant moments or events for you during the day. Loan cameras can be provided.	Photographs taken during the Protest day.
Keep a written record (brief notes) of thoughts, reflections, stories, statements, questions, responses during the day	At suitable moments throughout the Protest day
<i>After the Silent Protest</i>	
Meet with Kim for a post-protest conversation. Kim will print your images from the Protest. You will use the images as the basis for telling about your experience of participating in the protest.	60 – 90 mins
Meet with Kim for a final conversation between 4 and 6 months after the Protest	60 – 90 mins

OPTIONAL EXTRA RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

<i>After the Silent Protest</i>	
Participate in one or more activities during the Debrief Café ⁱ and make available images/copies/recordings of any products that you create (artwork, poetry, written reflections) as data for this research project.	For a duration of your choosing
Participate in an ongoing conversation with Kim and/or other research participants for a period of six months after the protest. This could involve: 1. Regular monthly face to face one-on-one conversations with Kim to discuss topics important to you in relation to the Protest, OR 2. Regular monthly face to face group conversations with other research participants to discuss topics that are important to you all, OR 2. Written email correspondence with Kim about topics that are important to you in relation to the Protest. <i>(You would choose 1, 2 or 3)</i>	60 – 90 mins, once a month for six months after the Protest

ⁱ The **Debrief Cafe** will be held on **the Saturday after the Silent Protest**. It will be place for all protesters to gather and hang out and perhaps have conversations about their experiences of the Protest and any thoughts or questions it has raised for them. Protesters will have the option to participate in small group facilitated discussions; do artwork with pastels and crayons, participate in circle dancing or yoga; engage in spiritual practices such as prayer or meditation; write reflections in prose or poetry; engage in small scale gardening with pots, soil and seeds. Coffee, tea and snacks will be available all day. Participation is entirely voluntary and is open to ALL who participated in the Silent Protest to come and go as they wish.

RHODES UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN STUDENT
RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH
PARTICIPANT**

I _____ (participant’s name) agree to participate in the research project of Kim Barker on the experience of participation in the annual Silent Protest at Rhodes University for women who have been subjected to sexual violence.

I understand that:

1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a/an PhD degree at Rhodes University. The researcher may be contacted on 0844006145 (cell phone) or 0466225666 (landline) or kimelisebarker@gmail.com (email). The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s), and is under the supervision of Prof Catriona Macleod in the Psychology Department at Rhodes University, who may be contacted on 0466038500 (office) or c.macleod@ru.ac.za (email).
2. The researcher is interested in how women who have been subjected to sexual violence (both those who self-identify as ‘rape survivors’ and those who do not) experience participation in the Silent Protest and the impact that their participation in the protest has/had on them, both immediately and over time.
3. I am willing to participate in the research process as outlined in the table below. In addition I will/will not participate in one or more optional extra research activities and have selected those that I am comfortable participating in.

RESEARCH PROCESS

<i>Before the Silent Protest</i>	<i>Time required</i>
Meet with Kim for a one-to-one pre-protest conversation	45 – 60 min
<i>On the day of the Silent Protest</i>	
Use a camera or cellphone to take pictures which represent significant moments or events for you during the day. Loan cameras can be provided.	Photographs taken during the Protest day.
Keep a written record (brief notes) of thoughts, reflections, stories, statements, questions, responses during the day	At suitable moments throughout the Protest day
<i>After the Silent Protest</i>	
Meet with Kim for a post-protest conversation. Kim will print your images from the Protest. You will use the images as the basis for telling about your experience of participating in the protest.	60 – 90 mins
Meet with Kim for a final conversation between 4 and 6 months after the Protest	60 – 90 mins

Appendix B: Informed Consent Agreement Form

OPTIONAL EXTRA RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

<i>After the Silent Protest</i>		<i>Select (✓)</i>
Participate in one or more activities during the Debrief Café ⁱ and make available images/copies/recordings of any products that you create (artwork, poetry, written reflections) as data for this research project.	For a duration of your choosing	
Participate in an ongoing conversation with Kim and/or other research participants for a period of six months after the protest. This could involve: 1. Regular monthly face to face one-on-one conversations with Kim to discuss topics important to you in relation to the Protest, OR 2. Regular monthly face to face group conversations with other research participants to discuss topics that are important to you all, OR 3. Written email correspondence with Kim about topics that are important to you in relation to the Protest. <i>(You would choose 1, 2 or 3)</i>	60 – 90 mins, once a month for six months after the Protest	(1) (2) (3)

4. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life which I am not willing to disclose.

5. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences I may experience as a result of my participation, and to have these addressed to my satisfaction. Dr Colleen Vasilliou may be contacted at the Rhodes Student Counselling Centre for further support on 0466037070 (telephone).

6. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.

7. The report on the project may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours, but that the report will be designed in such a way that it will not be possible for me to be identified by the general reader.

Signed on (Date):

Participant: _____ Researcher: _____

ⁱ The **Debrief Cafe** will be held on the **Saturday after the Silent Protest**. It will be place for all protesters to gather and hang out and perhaps have conversations about their experiences of the Protest and any thoughts or questions it has raised for them. Protesters will have the option to participate in small group facilitated discussions; do artwork with pastels and crayons, participate in circle dancing or yoga; engage in spiritual practices such as prayer or meditation; writie reflections in prose or poetry; engage in small scale gardening with pots, soil and seeds. Coffee, tea and snacks will be available all day. Participation is entirely voluntary and is open to ALL who participated in the Silent Protest to come and go as they wish.

Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

First check:

Are you completely happy to go ahead with the interview. Still sure about what you have given consent to, understand what research is about, what you have committed yourself to, entirely voluntary.

Important: not obliged to answer any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

**Where is home for you?*

**How did you come to be at Rhodes?*

**What are you studying? How are your studies going?*

How many years have you been studying/working at Rhodes?

How many times have you participated in the Silent Protest?

How did you first hear about the Silent Protest? Or When did you first become aware of the Silent Protest?

What drew you to participate (the first time)?

What message are you hoping to put across in participating in the Protest?

Some women who are survivors choose to wear the rape survivor t-shirt and some do not. What have you decided? How did you come to the decision you made?

For those who have participated before:

If you have participated before, tell me about it. What was it like? Take me through the day as you remember it. Tell me a story or describe an event/scene in the day that will help me to understand what it was like for you?

Who or what did you draw on for support/strength during the protest day?

'What were your thoughts, feelings or reactions to your participation .. on the actual day....that night...the next day...over the week after....a month after....a year later? (i.e. how did the effects/impact of participating change over time?)

If someone who has experienced sexual violence comes and tells you that they are thinking of participating for the first time this year, how would you respond? What do you think would be important for them to know?

For all:

What are you expecting as you think about participating this year? What are your hopes? Do you have any concerns? Could you tell me about them?

One of the criteria for this research is that I am interviewing women who have experienced sexual violence themselves, who are now participating in the Protest. I'd like to ask a few questions about that, but I won't ask you any details about the experience itself. Is that ok?

How long ago was your experience of sexual violence?

What word or term would you use for what you experienced?

Did you tell anyone, at the time or have you told anyone since then? If so, how did they respond?

Have you had any counselling or therapy?

If so, what was helpful and what was not helpful. (What was your experience of therapy?)

Appendix D: Letter in response to proposed academic march

41 Oatlands Road
Grahamstown
6139

8 May 2013

The Vice-Chancellor
Rhodes University
P.O. Box 94
Grahamstown
6140

Dear Dr Badat

ACADEMIC MARCH AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

I am writing in response to the communication issued on behalf of the Vice-Chancellorate by Thando Njovane yesterday regarding the planned 'Academic march in protest of violence against women'. I am a PhD student in the Psychology Department working within the Critical Studies in Sexualities and Reproduction research programme in the area of gender-based violence.

I am in full support of any initiatives which raise the profile of matters related to gender-based violence and which open up conversations in this regard and I welcome the fact that these matters are considered important enough to warrant a public response from academics. However, there are elements of the communication and the planned march which raise significant concerns for me.

The communication states that the "... academy is tasked with leading by example and encouraging the communities in which they exist to take a stand against violence against women". Whilst I agree with the sentiment, I find it surprising that no acknowledgement is made of the ways in which the student body at Rhodes *has* been taking a very clear stand against gender-based violence over at least the past 7 years, in particular through the annual Silent Protest. In this respect, the student body at Rhodes has, in fact, led the way nationally as this challenging and unique protest has grown to be the largest protest action against gender-based violence in the country with more than 1500 Rhodes students participating on 19 April 2013, a little over two weeks ago. In addition, this year Rhodes alumni who had previously participated in the Silent Protest here, took the protest to Wits where more than 1000 students participated and UKZN where around 300 students participated. What better example of Rhodes' motto 'Where leaders learn'? It therefore surprises and concerns me that the university chooses to ignore or overlook these initiatives. What message does this convey regarding the value that the University places on student activism and agency?

It also surprises me that the one person mentioned by name in the email is Anene Booysen. While her rape and murder were horrific and have certainly put GBV on the national agenda in recent months, I am left wondering why there is no acknowledgement of Thandiswa Qubuda who was gang raped and brutally assaulted right here in Grahamstown earlier this year and subsequently died, or of the young woman lying in Settlers Hospital right now, permanently disabled, following a similar incident. It also raises questions about what level of violence will arouse our activism. 'Low grade' endemic violence is simply tolerated but it takes a gruesome disembowelment to inspire an academic march.

However, what concerns me even more specifically is that there is no acknowledgement at all of the women and men right here on campus who have experienced gender-based/sexual violence. Two weeks ago they were courageously wearing rape survivor t-shirts and telling their stories. What message does it send to them that few academics came out in support of them during that protest but are quite willing to march for a disembodied and abstracted 'cause'? Having conducted more than 40 interviews over recent weeks with survivors of sexual violence who have participated in the Silent Protest, it is clear to me that the (perhaps unintended) insensitivity and disrespect inherent in this contradiction will be noticed and felt.

A further issue is that the statistics quoted in the communication are inaccurate (for example, 'an astonishing 1 in 9 women reports having been raped at some point in their lives'. Current statistics suggest that one out of every three women in South Africa is likely to be sexually violated in her lifetime and it is 1 out of every 9 women *who are raped* who go on to report the rape). This may seem a petty thing to raise but it again suggests a lack of care or sensitivity regarding the reality of gender-based violence and its effects on those who are violated.

I note that both staff and students are encouraged to participate in the march in their academic regalia. As only a tiny percentage of students will own or have access to academic regalia, this effectively excludes students as well as non-academic staff from this march. Again, I am left wondering about the intended and unintended implications of this. At least 1500 students on campus are in possession of purple t-shirts which have become symbolic for them of their own commitment to standing up against gender-based violence. Would it not be possible to welcome and include their participation in their t-shirts?

I respectfully request that these concerns be carefully considered.

Yours faithfully

Kim Barker

cc./ Dr Sizwe Mabizela; Dr Peter Clayton; Adv Tshidi Hashatse; Sue Smailes; Thando Njovane

Appendix E: Article “Protest with a purpose”

DAILY DISPATCH (Final Edition)
07 Aug 2014, p.9

know are nothing but a self-satisfying feel-good exercise. Don't protest. Do something. — Dave Rankin, Cambridge

Pointless protests

THE recent protest by Rhodes University staff and students is sad; not only because it is meaningless symbolism, but because it shows that the alleged cream of our intel-

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ligentsia are actually intellectually bankrupt.

Protests are for those who, like babies, can do nothing except cry out and hope that somebody helps. University staff and students do not qualify. Nobody in South Africa needs to be told about the rape problem. What is lacking is the ability to do enough about this. Surely universities could play a leading role?

What can the law faculty do to help strengthen and enforce the legal structure to protect women? What can engineering do to help physically create a safe and well-lit environment so rapists have less space in which to conceal themselves? What can theology, psychology, sociology do to help learn what makes rapists into rapists and find a way to overcome the root causes?

Every faculty and department, if so minded, can find a way in which its own speciality can positively impact on society and rid us of such evils as rape. To positively impact on society is, after all, the reason that universities exist.

And everybody can be part of the SAPS reserve, or a community policing forum, or a neighbourhood watch. How much effort does it really take to simply look out for your neighbours?

Protests to tell people what they already

Protest with a purpose

As the organiser of this year's Silent Protest at Rhodes University, I read Dave Rankin's letter to the editor published last Monday morning's Daily Dispatch with interest and empathy. I felt empathy because I share his frustration and sense of urgency that more needs to be done in very concrete terms to turn the tide on sexual violence in our country. The statistics translate into overwhelming numbers of individuals, families and communities carrying the impact of sexual violence. And those impacts are significant. The experience of sexual violence can result in posttraumatic stress responses as well as depression, lowered self-esteem and guilt or shame. It can diminish physical, psychological and economic well-being over an entire lifetime. Meaningful change in the patterns of violence evident in our country will require intention and commitment at all levels of society, including the highest office in the land. In the face of this reality, what can a two day-long protest offer?

However, this is where my response diverges from Mr Rankin's. He calls the Silent Protest 'meaningless symbolism' and accuses those of us who organise and participate of being 'intellectually bankrupt'. I disagree, and my disagreement comes both from the findings of my doctoral research in Psychology and the experiences, narratives and responses evoked by Friday's protest.

Appendix E: Article “Protest with a purpose”

The Silent Protest’s primary message is one of solidarity with all survivors of sexual violence. On the day of the protest the protest community has the opportunity to enact care and support for the many women and men who self-identify as survivors, wearing t-shirts that say ‘Rape Survivor’ or ‘Survivor’. Most often in families, communities and the broader society the response to rape survivors speaking out about the violation they have experienced is one of horrified apathy, disbelief or a not-so-subtle blaming: a questioning of where they were, what they were doing, what they were wearing, who they were with, the choices they made and so on. In our country, safe spaces for survivors of sexual violence to tell their stories are extremely rare. It is not surprising then that most survivors either attempt to disclose and then fall silent, or never try in the first place.

The Silent Protest creates a range of safe spaces (pre-protest workshops, *Breaking the Silence* event with an open mic, Debrief cafe’s on the day of the protest and the following day as well as follow-up art therapy and discussion groups, informal discussions with friends and family that open up in response to the protest, one on one conversations and counselling) where survivors have the opportunity to begin to break their silences and share their stories, something that research in Psychology tells us is important for healing/recovery.

The opportunity to recover one’s sense of agency and voice and tell one’s story to even one other person is an important step in having one’s experience of violation acknowledged. However, such a narrative remains an individual’s account of a personal experience. Participation in the Silent Protest helps to shift the narrative from simply a private event to a political issue. When we hear story after story we begin to recognise that sexual violence is not simply a personal attack but a widely used means of wielding power and exercising control. Recognising this can help to shift the sense of shame and guilt that the majority of survivors of sexual violence carry. It also inspires many survivors to join others in social action get involved in activism themselves – another factor that research has linked to improved recovery outcomes.

One aspect of my PhD research was to interview more than thirty survivors of sexual violence who participated in the Silent Protest in 2013. All but two of the survivors described their participation in the protest as being significantly beneficial in a variety of ways. This is important as we think about providing therapeutic services to the vast numbers of women, men and children affected by sexual violence in our country. There will never be enough resources for individual counselling and support for all and we need to find alternative communal practices that offer benefit and healing process for survivors. My research suggests that the Silent Protest offers one such model.

What the stories of survivors participating in this protest have also offered us as researchers is a much clearer sense of where our efforts and resources need to be focussed if we are serious about preventing sexual violence. When you put a human face to the statistics and listen carefully to the experiences of survivors, what becomes clear is that in the vast majority of cases (more than 80% of all sexual assaults) the threat to women, as well as children and men, does not come from an evil stranger in a dark alley, but from people that they know and trust. Perpetrators are much more likely to be fathers, uncles, brothers, trusted adults in authority positions, friends, babysitters, partners or colleagues than strangers. This is something that has been shown time and again by research studies around the world, but it somehow fails to shift our strongly held perceptions of where risk is located. Taking this seriously has huge implications for our research and intervention efforts. The emphasis needs to be less on getting engineers to design safer outside spaces and more on working to shift

Appendix E: Article “Protest with a purpose”

the ideas, beliefs and practices which support the sense of entitlement that allows perpetrators to exploit and violate the vulnerable, in spaces where they believed they were safe.

We also cannot ignore the impact of the Silent Protest on those who participated in solidarity with survivors. For the Silent Protestors, what they experienced on Friday is a key aspect of the education that they receive at Rhodes University. While it may be argued that ‘nobody in South Africa needs to be told about the rape problem’, for those who are not directly affected, rape remains an abstract notion rather than a reality. What is particularly meaningful for those who take part, and for the wider campus community, is seeing classmates, researchers and lecturers wearing rape survivor and survivor t-shirts and then hearing some of their stories. Most protestors have their mouths taped shut with black gaffer tape, as a powerful and provocative symbol of the impact of the silences around sexual violence. This means that they spend nearly ten hours spent in silence in which to reflect on what they are seeing, hearing and experiencing. At the same time, they are not alone. They are aware that they are part of a broader protest community. Michael White, pioneer of a narrative approach to therapy, suggests that when people stand together in solidarity, however briefly and partially, it offers them an opportunity to reflect on their own ‘taken-for-granted’ ways of thinking and behaving and to recognise how they themselves, often unknowingly, contribute to oppressive ideas and practices. The protest therefore offers the possibility of a personal journey into greater awareness for each participant.

However, this is by no means an easy journey.

This protest is no ‘self-satisfying, feel good exercise’. The protest costs each person who participates. In the Grahamstown Cathedral at the culmination of the protest on Friday night, around 700 people gathered to bear witness to the stories of survivors. These are agonising, traumatic stories told with brutal honesty and raw emotion. The care and support for those who share is palpable but it comes at a cost. No-one walks away unmoved. Each witness bears the impact of the trauma for some time after, alongside the awareness that their presence contributed somehow to the safe and healing space for survivors.

The Silent Protest issues a sustained and consistent call to action to each person who participates in or encounters the protest. Over the eight years that the protest has taken place, thousands of students have participated, thousands of leaders (*Rhodes University’s motto: Where leaders learn*) who have gone on to apply the awareness gained through the protest to their research and careers. The Silent Protest continues to inform research projects and intervention strategies and offers a healing process for survivors. So, does the Silent Protest put a stop to sexual violence? No, it does not. Is it a meaningful response to sexual violence, with real impacts and effects? Yes, I believe it is. And I invite Mr Rankin and all readers to join us next year in solidarity.

Kim Barker

Co-ordinator: Rhodes Silent Protest 2014

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<http://www.dispatchlive.co.za/opinion/showing-solidarity-heals/>

Appendix F: Questionnaire for feedback on changes made to Silent Protest (Research Participants)

Questionnaire: Feedback on changes to the Silent Protest in 2014

This year, based on the interviews I conducted with you and other survivors of sexual violence who participated in the Silent Protest in 2013, as well as feedback from the Rhodes University community and ongoing reflection and discussions amongst the organisers, several changes were made to aspects of the Silent Protest. In particular, the changes were made with the intention of enhancing the positive/healing/therapeutic impact of the protest for survivors of sexual violence.

We would now like to review these changes. I am aware that this is beyond what I originally asked of you when you agreed to participate in my research last year. There is therefore no obligation at all for you to respond now. However, if you are willing and if you participated in any way in the Silent Protest this year, I ask that you take some time and respond to the questionnaire. Should you choose to complete the questionnaire, your responses will feed into the planning for next year's protest as well as my PhD research.

If you are happy for your responses to be used in this way, please complete the form below. You can send your questionnaire to silent.protest@ru.ac.za, or, if you would prefer your responses to remain anonymous, please send them to Megan Reuvers at m.reuvers@ru.ac.za, administrator for the Critical Studies in Sexualities and Reproduction research group, who will remove all identifying information before forwarding the questionnaire to me.

I, _____ hereby give permission for my responses to this questionnaire to be used in reviewing the 2014 Silent Protest and to be included in the data for Kim Barker's PhD in Psychology.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F: Questionnaire for feedback on changes made to Silent Protest (Research Participants)

- d. In our communications this year we were intentional about emphasising the impact of sexual violence on both women and men. We also invited both a male and female rape survivor to speak at the pre-protest event.

 - e. We specifically invited Rhodes staff to participate in the protest by issuing a variety of communications and making presentations to a number of staff groupings in order to inform staff about the protest.

 - f. In 2013, the Debrief Cafe was held on the day after the Silent Protest. This year we offered the space both on the day of the protest and the day after.

 - g. Please comment on any other changes that you may have noticed in the Silent Protest this year and the impact, or lack of impact, of those changes.
- 4. Which of the changes stood out for you as being the most meaningful? In what way was it meaningful for you?**
- 5. Which changes do you think might have been beneficial to survivors participating for the first time? What was possibly not so beneficial for them? Can you explain why?**

Appendix F: Questionnaire for feedback on changes made to Silent Protest
(Research Participants)

- 6. Please note any suggestions you have for future changes or improvements to the Silent Protest.**

Appendix G: General Questionnaire for feedback on changes made to Silent Protest

Questionnaire: Feedback on changes to the Silent Protest in 2014

In 2014, based on interviews conducted with survivors of sexual violence who participated in the Silent Protest in 2013, feedback from the Rhodes University community and ongoing reflection and discussions amongst the planning committee, several changes were made to aspects of the Silent Protest. In particular, the changes were made with the intention of enhancing the positive/healing/therapeutic impact of the protest for survivors of sexual violence.

We would now like to review these changes and ask that you take some time and give some thought to answering these questions. Your responses will feed into the planning for next year's protest as well as Kim Barker's PhD research in Psychology. If you are happy for your responses to be used in this way, please complete the form below. You can send your questionnaire to silent.protest@ru.ac.za, or, if you would prefer your responses to remain anonymous, please send them to Megan Reuvers at m.reuvers@ru.ac.za, administrator for the Critical Studies in Sexuality and Reproductive Health research group, who will remove all identifying information before forwarding the questionnaire to Kim Barker.

I, _____ hereby give permission for my responses to this questionnaire to be used in reviewing the 2014 Silent Protest and to be included in the data for Kim Barker's PhD in Psychology.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: General Questionnaire for feedback on changes made to Silent Protest

QUESTIONNAIRE: FEEDBACK ON CHANGES TO THE SILENT PROTEST IN 2014

The following changes were introduced in the Silent Protest this year. What are your thoughts and/or feelings about each of these changes? What suggestions do you have for further changes or improvements?

1. The wording and images on the Silent Protestor and Solidarity t-shirts were changed from 'Sexual Violence = Silence' to the cycle image with the emphasis on 'Break the cycle'. The wording on the back of the t-shirts was also changed.
2. Survivors of a sexual violation other than rape could sign up for a 'Survivor' t-shirt.
3. On both the Rape Survivor and Survivor t-shirts we added 'AND...' and a block of white space under 'Rape Survivor' and 'Survivor'. Those who wore the t-shirts were invited to write descriptions or statements of their own choice into the white space.
4. In our communications this year we were intentional about emphasising the impact of sexual violence on both women and men. We also invited both a male and female rape survivor to speak at the pre-protest event.
5. We specifically invited Rhodes staff to participate in the protest by issuing a variety of communications and making presentations to a number of staff groupings in order to inform staff about the protest.

Appendix H: Feedback on Silent Protest to the Gender Action Forum

Feedback on Silent Protest to GenAct

Reporting on how the Silent Protest went, I have come to realise, is a bit like reporting back on a funeral. It can have been well-attended, well-planned, offered a beautiful space and ritual for remembering, mourning and beginning to heal, as funerals go it could have been really good, but it doesn't change the fact that it was harrowing, painful, hard and we wish it hadn't needed to happen. I feel the same about the Silent Protest.

Student participation, both in numbers and in quality of commitment to the protest was excellent. For the first time that I have been aware of, there was very strong support from the SRC throughout the year and the SRC activism rep played an important role on the planning committee as did the GAP representatives. I was given access to students via meetings with House Comms and Senior Students, Academic Reps meeting, Oppi Forum, Ncedana Mentor training and Wellness Leader training. We had more volunteers than we needed in every area. People wanted to be involved and turned up and did what they needed to do when they needed to do it.

Logistically, apart from a few minor balls that were dropped and caught again, the protest went off smoothly and easily.

I am in the process of gathering feedback and compiling a comprehensive report, but there are a few areas I would like to highlight today.

The first is Institutional Support

This is a question that has been raised over the year and we have wondered what this means and looks like. While there may be more discussions to be had, I want to highlight what institutional support has meant for me and for the viability of the Silent Protest.

Institutional support has meant that a plan was made for me to be contracted to organise the protest. It meant that budget was allocated and made available for the many expenses involved. And that Institutional support was made tangible in the incredible support I received from Dr Colleen Vasilliou – we met almost every week for most of this year – and from the other staff in Student Affairs. Delvene Gelderbloem who is an admin angel and Benita Bobo who both responded to my requests and took initiative in a million ways.

Institutional support also expressed itself through the Counselling Centre. I was so moved when the entire staff of the counselling centre responded to a request for counselling support at the Love and Violence event, Sarah Green volunteered early on to run the Debrief Cafe and counselling staff and wellness leaders were present on both days. I was also given access to the wellness leaders on several occasions and they played various supportive roles along the way.

Staff participation

Another indication of institutional support is reflected in the numbers of staff participating in the protest which went up from less than 20 to over 200 this year. That is largely because I was given access to various fora to provide information and respond to questions and concerns about the Silent Protest. In addition to my initial presentation at ALF, I spoke at the Middle Managers Meeting, at a meeting of Housekeeping staff, to the Finance division, and was scheduled to speak to academic

Appendix H: Feedback on Silent Protest to the Gender Action Forum

staff in the Psychology Department but had to cancel at the last minute. There were also numerous formal and informal one to one chats. The places I was given access to are reflected in the staff sign-ups.

50 members of the Housekeeping staff signed up, largely due to Janine Harris's encouragement and support. She made time for a briefing, facilitated the sign-up and found budget to cover the cost of the t-shirts. Of the 50, 19 signed up for Survivor t-shirts and 4 for Rape Survivor t-shirts. 11 of the 50 wished to attend the early morning gathering and Student Affairs had offered to cover transport costs. However, Janine Harris offered the use of the Oppi bus and driver. I want to specifically express my appreciation of her support and willingness to go more than the extra mile for her staff. I will be meeting with the housekeeping staff who participated on Tuesday morning for a debriefing of their experience of participating.

We had all the health suite staff sign up, ten staff from Finance, all the Psychology Department support staff and all the HIV peer educators, as well as numerous other individual staff members.

Although more than usual, there were still few academics. I want to both celebrate the increased participation and flag it as an area that needs further careful thought and dialogue in the coming year. At no point would I ever want staff to feel pressurised into participating or judged if they do not, but I do want to extend the invitation in a consistent and respectful way.

Communications

Another aspect of institutional support was the involvement of the Communications Division who set up a website for us, designed a pamphlet to hand out on the day and at the last minute offered to print something for us, whatever we felt we needed most. I got them to print copies of the Infographic with the t-shirts. Gave these out with the pamphlets we had printed on the day.

They are keen now to produce two publications for us. One will be a booklet to go in the first year pack. And the other will be a more substantial publication with more academic articles, survivor's stories, staff stories etc. that will come out mid-year next year. Anyone who wishes to contribute to either please let me know.

Their efforts and the response of Rhodes Journalism also resulted in fairly good media coverage with articles in local and regional newspapers, several interviews on RMR, interview with OppiTV, SABC TV news, slots on Algoa FM news, an interview with Radio Grahamstown and an opinion piece in Daily Dispatch last Friday. This is an area that could be developed further.

Debrief Cafe

Organised and managed by Counselling Centre and Careers Centre staff. Again, there was budget and admin support made available as well as the involvement of staff members, interns and wellness leaders.

Well-used, offered a safe holding space. Most telling...The Counselling Centre reports that it was much quieter this Friday of the Silent Protest – so the debrief café seems to have been a good intervention to contain and provide the emotional support needed on the day.

Appendix H: Feedback on Silent Protest to the Gender Action Forum

Also under Institutional Support, I want to acknowledge the involvement of the twenty members of the Silent Protest planning committee, more than half of whom were staff members in varying capacities. The support of the committee, both students and staff has been crucial to the organising and will be essential to ensure the sustainability of the protest. I thank every member who gave many hours of their time and much thought and energy to our discussions and decisions.

I am aware that the SP will now be located within Equity and Institutional Culture and that this was a recommendation made by the Gender Imbizo. The intention behind this recommendation was to ensure ongoing institutional support and to broaden the reach of the protest so that it is no longer a 'student event' only but is seen as a Rhodes University event. I think I have come to realise that the sustainability of the protest is less dependent on where it is located and more dependent on the resources and access made available to the organisers.

I have also realised how crucial to the SP are the links with:

SRC and other societies

Residence system

Oppi students

Can't get away from the fact that it is still predominantly students that participate

As well as with the Wellness network:

Wellness Leaders

Counselling Centre

Health Suite

Whilst the Silent Protest is undoubtedly an expression of political activism and awareness-raising, it is also very importantly a process which was designed and has evolved with solidarity and healing in mind. I cannot recommend strongly enough that whoever organises it be fully convinced and supportive of the healing aspect of the protest, as well as having skills to facilitate it. Any future changes or developments need to be considered first in terms of their impact on those who have experienced sexual violence and participate, whichever t-shirt they wear. The Silent Protest can evoke strong responses and difficult emotions, and can open painful wounds and in the long run that can be healing, but we need to act carefully, ethically and with full awareness of the support and containment that are needed.

In order to extend the healing aspect of the silent protest to all on our campus, it needs to become one event in an ongoing, carefully thought through programme of events which invite a wide range of students and staff into generative conversations around sex and sexuality, relationships, violence, pleasure, consent, ways of being a man, ways of being a woman and so on. We also need to explore creative ways of providing collective support in an ongoing way for those who have experienced sexual violence. For example, Deborah Seddon's journaling group has had a positive response but the art therapy group has not. What does that mean and how do we proceed? I sense that there are links between this discussion and the discussion about a gender studies programme.

Floor opened for discussion

SILENT PROTEST MANUAL

Kim Barker
November 2014

ABOUT THE PROTEST

The RU Silent Protest is the biggest protest against rape and sexual violence in South Africa and it is unique worldwide in its carefully planned, two day programme of events. Over the eight years that the Silent Protest has been held at Rhodes University, it has grown from 80 participants in its first year to 1700 on Rhodes campus in 2014. In 2013 WITS and UKZN held silent protests on the same day and there was a solidarity march in Cape Town, all organised by Rhodes alumni, with a total of around 3000 protestors nationally. In 2014, silent protests were held in Durban city centre and again at WITS University.

The primary purpose of the Silent Protest is to draw attention to and challenge the culture of silence around sexual violence in our country. The vast majority of rapes go unreported even to friends or loved ones. Most survivors choose silence or are silenced when they do speak up. The SAPS estimate that 1 out of every 25 rapes is reported to the police. Some survivors are silenced by fear of the perpetrator; many are afraid of not being believed, of being blamed and shunned, of being interrogated, retraumatised, labelled or pitied. Attitudes and beliefs in societies which judge the victim/survivor more harshly than the perpetrator are powerfully silencing. In addition, survivors are aware that there is little chance of achieving justice even if they do report. State service providers do not always respect the rights of rape survivors and fail to comply with norms and standards set out in national legislation and policy: around 6.5% of reported rapes in SA are successfully prosecuted and less than 0.5% of perpetrators will serve any jail-time. The silence extends even further than the survivors though. Many who are aware of sexual violence happening to others don't speak up either.

Up until 2012 the protest focussed primarily on violence against women but in 2013 men were also invited to sign up for rape survivor t-shirts. None did. We are acutely aware that silence and shame is as much of an issue for male survivors of sexual violence, and this year we are highlighting both statistics: In South Africa, 1 in 3 women will be sexually violated in her lifetime, as will 1 in 6 men. It's hard to comprehend the extent of this problem that cuts across race and socioeconomic status and where the perpetrators are most often known to the victims.

The Silent Protest breaks these silences, raises public awareness about the extent of the problem of sexual violence and offers a space where, in large numbers, protestors can stand in solidarity with all survivors of sexual violence.

WHY DO WE PROTEST?

The protest exists as a way to:

- Raise awareness around the extent of the problem of rape and sexual violence in South Africa
- Resist and challenge the silences around rape and sexual violence
- Express and enact solidarity with all victims/survivors of sexual violence
- Create safe spaces where people can talk about their own experiences of sexual violence

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SILENT PROTEST

2006

In February 2006 a group of like-minded gender activists initiated a series of political actions which they called the 'One in Nine Campaign'. The name of the campaign is derived from the statistic that only one out of every nine women raped will report the rape to the police. [Tagline for the campaign: solidarity with women who speak out] The initial purpose of the Campaign was to express support for the complainant in Jacob Zuma's rape trial, known in the media as 'Khwezi'. Therefore on 24 March 2006, the One in Nine Campaign organised a national day of solidarity with women who speak out about rape and sexual violence, with a particular focus on 'Khwezi'. In Grahamstown, activists at Rhodes University (led by Larissa Klazinga), together with local faith communities, schools and NGOs responded to the call and a march was organised from Rhodes campus to the High Court in Grahamstown. Several gender activists and religious leaders addressed the protest. Significantly, a group of nine women stood at the front of the crowd, eight with their mouths taped shut with clear tape to visually represent the eight out of every nine women who will not report their rape¹.

2007

The following year the One in Nine Campaign, supported by the Dean of Students office, student activists and organisations such as SHARC and GAP, organised the first 'Sexual Violence = Silence' Protest at Rhodes, as one event amongst others during Rape Awareness Week. The Awareness Week was scheduled shortly before Freedom Day and sought to highlight the ways in which women in South Africa are not yet free. It was an overtly political protest with the intention of drawing attention to the silences surrounding sexual violence in South Africa; the underreporting of rape; secondary victimisation at the hands of police, medical personnel and the judicial system; and the widespread lack of access to justice. It was a new approach for the One in Nine Campaign who, previously, had primarily focussed on offering physical presence and support to complainants in specific rape trials.

The eighty women who signed up for the first 'Sexual Violence = Silence' protest had their mouths taped shut with black gaffer tape for the entire day, fasting food, drink and speech, as a powerful and disturbing visual representation of the '1 in 9 women reporting rape' statistic. An article written by the co-ordinator explains: *This protest [is] an attempt to make 'visible' that silence, to force people to note the vibrant woman, the person who was a regular contributor to conversation and debate, now forcibly silenced, her voice taken away while her physical presence remained*². The stark imagery drew responses of shock and aversion, and in some cases, aggression.

The first March to the Cathedral and 'Breaking the Silence' or debriefing event were held in the evening.

¹ This was the accepted statistic at that time.

² From an article written by the Silent Protest Co-ordinator for Women's Net 7/5/2008 [Silent Protest Archives]

Appendix I: Final Silent Protest Report and Manual for future organisers

2008

In 2008, again in the context of a Rape Awareness week with a variety of events organised, the second 'Sexual Violence = Silence' Protest was held.

For the first time, men participated in the protest wearing Solidarity t-shirts and with their mouths untaped. 29 men and 128 women signed up, and while the women were again graphically and symbolically silenced, men were encouraged to speak openly about the issue and begin taking responsibility for ending gender-based violence.

A silencing 'ritual' was introduced which commenced at 07h00 in the Eden Grove building on Rhodes University campus. The intention was for protestors to remain visible on campus as far as possible, and they spent the lunchtime sitting together in the library quad.

The day ended again with the 'Breaking the silence' ritual. The protesters gathered in Eden Grove and all removed their gags at once, breaking the silence with a scream.

2009

The first difference which marked the 2009 protest was the sharp increase in the number of participants: 400 protesters signed up that year. There were a number of other firsts in 2009. It was the first year in which purple t-shirts were worn, but more importantly it was the first year that participants had the option of signing up to wear a rape survivor t-shirt. The idea behind these shirts, which were the suggestion of a rape survivor who had participated in the protest previously, was to challenge and resist the stigma around sexual violence, following the example of the HIV positive t-shirts.

Over the lunch hour, silent protesters were instructed to gather in the library concourse and lie down wherever they found space. This became known as the 'Die-in', offering a further layer of symbolism as the bodies spread across the library concourse became a visual representation of the lives devastated by gender-based violence. The Gender Action Project (GAP), a student organisation which has always had close ties to the Silent Protest, later led the first jubilant 'Take back the night' march which followed the 'Breaking the Silence' ritual and debrief at the end of the day.

2010

By 2010 the Silent Protest was attracting more media interest and was both high profile and overtly political. A delegation from the One in Nine Campaign, including well-known human rights activist Nomboniso Gaba, travelled down from Johannesburg to attend. Once again the number of participants more than doubled - 933 participants signed up that year and over a thousand turned up on the day of the protest.

The increase in numbers participating necessitated certain logistical changes. Participants could now sign up on RUCConnected. On the advice of a rape survivor who had chosen to wear the t-shirt in 2009, the organisers added a briefing for survivors prior to the protest, to prepare them for what they might experience on the day, whichever t-shirt they chose to

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wear. Also due to the increased numbers, both the morning silencing ritual and the 'Breaking the silence' debriefing were shifted to the Alec Mullins Sports Hall. The lunch hour 'Die-in' took place on the road in front of the Rhodes Administration Building.

2011

2011 was a year to consolidate previous planning and focus on logistics – 1541 participants signed up that year – another significant increase in numbers. The early morning collection of t-shirts was moved an hour earlier and held in the Great Hall which was slightly more accessible to the rest of campus, and the march to the steps of the main administration building via Somerset Street and the Drostdy Arch was introduced. Feedback on the 2010 debrief suggested that the Sports Hall was not a suitable venue, so in 2011 the 'Breaking the silence' event and debrief moved back to the Cathedral and the late afternoon march down High Street was reinstated as a feature of the Protest.

2012

2012 was the first year that the Silent Protest was entirely Rhodes run, with the Dean of Students office working with the student organisation, GAP. This resulted in a name change and it has been known simply as the Silent Protest since then.

2013

In 2013 three significant changes were implemented. The first change was that men could choose to sign up in *any* category of participation. While there were a number of men who then signed up as silent protesters, none chose to wear the rape survivor t-shirt.

The second change was the addition of a 'Debrief Cafe' on the day after the silent protest. Concern had been expressed about the absence of follow-up both for participants who had shared their stories during the 'Breaking the silence' debrief and for those who had not. The Debrief Cafe was therefore offered as an open and safe space in which participants could use art, yoga, dance, writing, conversation and doughnuts to process what they had experienced during the course of the Protest. Between 150 and 200 students passed through the Debrief Cafe in 2013, some coming for a brief time, to participate in a yoga class or have a cup of coffee, others staying for hours and producing artworks in a variety of media.

The final significant development in 2013 was that the protest was taken to other universities and centres. On the same day as the Rhodes protest on 19 April, both the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) staged a protest and another was held in the centre of Cape Town. In total around 3000 people around the country participated in a Silent Protest on that day.

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2014

At the end of 2013, Larissa Klazinga, who had organised the Silent Protest since its inception, left Rhodes. This resulted in a situation in which it was uncertain whether the protest would be held in 2014 and if so, who would organise it. Kim Barker, conducting research towards a PhD in Psychology, had interviewed thirty women who had experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives and who had participated in the Silent Protest in 2013 about their experiences of participating. Their responses suggested that most survivors found it beneficial in a healing sense, to participate. GenAct and other attendees at the 2013 Rhodes Gender Imbizo therefore sent a strong recommendation to the University Senior Management that the protest should continue and should receive institutional support. This was agreed to. Due to her understanding of the Silent Protest and how it was run, Kim Barker was asked to be primary organiser of the Silent Protest in 2014. A planning committee was set up drawing together staff and students, academics, activists and survivors. Based on members' experiences of past Silent Protests, feedback gleaned from the wider university community, input from academics in a range of disciplines and, most importantly, feedback from survivors via Kim's research interviews and direct input, a number of changes were implemented in 2014.

1. The wording and images on the Silent Protestor and Solidarity t-shirts were changed from 'Sexual Violence = Silence' to a cycle image with the emphasis on 'Breaking the cycle' of silence and sexual violence. The wording on the back of the t-shirts was also changed.
2. Survivors of a sexual violation other than rape could sign up for a 'Survivor' t-shirt.
3. On both the Rape Survivor and Survivor t-shirts we added 'AND...' and a block of white space under 'Rape Survivor' and 'Survivor'. Those who wore the t-shirts were invited to write descriptions or statements of their own choice into the white space.
4. In their communications the committee was intentional about emphasising the impact of sexual violence on both women and men. They also invited both a male and female rape survivor to speak at the pre-protest event.
5. The committee specifically invited Rhodes staff to participate in the protest by issuing a variety of communications and making presentations to a number of staff groupings in order to inform staff about the protest.
6. In 2013, the Debrief Cafe was held on the day after the Silent Protest. In 2014, the Rhodes Counselling Centre offered the debrief space both on the day of the protest and the day after.

The Committee are currently in a review process to gather feedback on the changes made in 2014.

Over the eight years of its existence, the Silent Protest has grown to be the biggest student event at Rhodes apart from Intervarsity and the biggest protest against gender-based violence in the country. It has served to raise Rhodes' profile both nationally and internationally in print and social media in terms of the University's perceived openness to addressing issues of gender-based violence. For example, on the day of the Silent Protest in 2013 and 2014, the hashtag #rusilent was trending nationally on Twitter for most of the day and in 2012 it trended globally for a few minutes on the day of the protest. Articles have appeared in local and national newspapers, radio stations and news websites and the 2013 and 2014 marches featured briefly on SABC TV evening news.

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WHAT HAPPENS ON THE DAY OF THE SILENT PROTEST?

Silent Protestors gather before dawn on the Friday of the Silent Protest³ to focus on the aims of the protest and then spend all day wearing purple t-shirts, mouths covered with black gaffer tape⁴ and participating in events designed to get people thinking about the realities of sexual violence. They gather again at sundown to break the silence.

The following day, on the Saturday, all protestors are invited to spend some time at the Debrief Cafe: a dedicated space where art materials, clay and informal debriefing conversations are available all day. This commitment to self-care constitutes a different but no less political form of resistance to violence in all its forms.

SILENT PROTEST TYPICAL PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

FRIDAY	
06h00	GATHERING at Alec Mullins Hall
06h00 – 06h50	T-SHIRT DISTRIBUTION & briefing and address by organisers
06h50 – 07h00	SILENCING of silent protestors by rape survivors
07h00 - 07h30	MARCH to Rhodes Main Admin building via African, South, Prince Alfred and Somerset Streets
07h30 – 07h45	PHOTOS in front of Main Admin of ALL
07h45 – 12h30	Lectures, tuts and work as usual. (Debrief Cafe in RA Room, Steve Biko Building from 08h00 – 17h00)
12h30 – 14h00	DIE-IN Library Quad. All protestors gather.
14h00 – 17h00	Lectures , tuts and work as usual.
17h00 – 17h30	GATHERING outside Main Admin; MARCH via Drostdy Arch down High Street to the Cathedral
17h30 – 20h00	BREAKING THE SILENCE EVENT , supper, debriefing, discussion & reflection, in the Cathedral
20h00	'TAKE BACK THE NIGHT' MARCH to campus via Hill, New & Somerset Streets, through Drostdy Arch
SATURDAY	
10h00 - 17h00	DEBRIEF CAFE at the Hangar/RA Room

³³ The Silent Protest always takes place on a Friday to allow for protestors to participate fully without concern for classes or deadlines the next day. It also allows protestors time to process their experience of participation over the weekend, with the Debrief Cafe available on the Saturday.

⁴ Silent Protestors with mouths taped make up the majority of protestors. Solidarity protestors do not tape mouths. Survivors and Rape Survivors can choose if they want to be taped or not.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do Silent Protestors 'stand in solidarity' with survivors?

Protestors have their mouths taped shut from 7am until about 5.30pm with black gaffer tape. This has two purposes. The first is that it offers a very stark and powerful image of the silencing associated with sexual violence which at the same time expresses resistance to the silencing and a willingness to stand with survivors. The second purpose of the taping is that it offers the protestors themselves an experience of being silenced, of sacrificing food, water and speech for a day in service of a greater cause. This doesn't mean at all that they come to understand what rape survivors go through, but their capacity for empathy and understanding is enlarged. The Silent Protestors gather to bear witness to survivors' stories during the Breaking the Silence event in the evening. Their actively listening presence enacts solidarity.

Why do people tape their mouths shut, rather than talk about the issue?

In order to make visible in a clear and powerful way how many people are affected by sexual violence and how many will never report what has happened to them. Silent Protestors embody for one day the silence, isolation and loss that most rape survivors live daily.

Why do some people not have their mouths taped shut?

For various reasons relating to work and health, some people can't tape their mouths shut. They can wear a solidarity t-shirt and will not be taped. We encourage solidarity protestors to talk about and challenge ideas which support rape culture and to support their friends and colleagues who are wearing the silent or survivor shirts.

Who wears the rape survivor shirt?

Any survivor of rape, incest or child sexual abuse can wear the shirt, if they feel ready to self-identify.

Who wears the survivor shirt?

Any person who has experienced sexual violation of any form but would not call it rape and would not feel comfortable wearing a rape survivor t-shirt.

What is a die-in and why do we do it?

The die-in brings all protesters together over lunchtime. Tens of thousands are raped and murdered annually, more often by intimate partners than by strangers, but it is hard to imagine what that looks like, the tragedy gets lost in the numbers. Like the taped mouths, the purpose of a die-in is to create another visual image, allowing people to imagine what the statistics mean.

What is the Debrief Café?

From 08h30 to 17h00 on Friday 1 August in the RA Room, Steve Biko Building and from 10h00 to 17h00 on Saturday 2 August in the Hangar we will be running a Debrief Cafe for all protest participants. This is a space where participants can express themselves through art or conversation and process what they have experienced. Wellness leaders and counsellors will be available on both days.

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Why do staff and students need to sign up if they already have a shirt?

Staff and students need to sign up even if they have a shirt and should indicate on the sign-up form that they will not need a t-shirt. This is in order to ensure that we know how many people to cater for at the Breaking the Silence event and to provide the police and the media with accurate numbers. In this case, staff and students will not be charged for another shirt but res students will have their meals unbooked. See [Why do we unbook meals](#) below for more information on this.

Why do we unbook meals?

Silent protestors who live in res, will have all 3 meals unbooked on the Silent Protest day. All other res students who sign up (as solidarity protestors, survivors or rape survivors) will only have their supper unbooked. This is in order to avoid wastage (silent protestors will have their mouths taped and will therefore not eat breakfast or lunch) and to subsidise supper for everyone at the end of the day. Since the Breaking the Silence event takes place in the evening over supper time, no-one participating can eat supper in the dining hall. The organisers use the money to make sure that all protestors can have one good meal at the end of the day.

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PLANNING TIMELINE

Ongoing

- Update website
- Meet with schools and community organisations to inform about Silent Protest
- Set up opportunities to speak at schools and community organisations

In August

Review

- Review Silent Protest just held. Elicit feedback from all participants, staff and students.

Set date

- Confirm date with Dean of the Cathedral, Andrew Hunter – the date hinges on the availability of the Cathedral.
- Silent Protest is always held on a Friday.
- Feedback suggests that August is a good month for the protest.
- Try to set date when no schools (government or private) will be on holiday.

Budget

- Plan and secure budget for SP based on previous year's costs.

Website

- Upload all articles, links onto website.
- Create Youtube channel with all up-to-date video footage.
- Investigate creating a documentary.

In September/October

- Put date into University calendar as early as possible, before awareness weeks are set and the calendar is finalised and printed.
- Make contact with new SRC activism/transformation and community engagement reps. Invite them to join the Silent Protest Planning Committee.

In January

- Book Alec Mullins Hall through sports admin: m.awu@ru.ac.za from Thursday midday (day before Silent Protest) to Friday midday.
- Ensure that Silent Protest booklets are printed (liaise with Lebogang Hashatse, Communications Division) and included in O-week packs for students
- Organise a 10 minute slot during House Comm training to speak about the Silent Protest, distribute pamphlets and DVD for viewing in reses.
- Liaise with all Deans and HODs to request slots at which to address Faculties and Departments about the Silent Protest (these meetings and those in next two bullets can be scheduled for later in the year, but will need to be requested and scheduled now). Over coming months meet individually with as many Deans and HODs as possible.
- Contact HR to book slot to address middle managers.
- Contact Housekeeping, Grounds and Gardens, Trade Unions to request opportunities to speak to staff about the Silent Protest.

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In February

T-shirt quote

- Get at least two quotes on t-shirts. When ask for quote:
 - Specify Vic Bay t-shirts (185gr) as these are locally made
 - For quote, send approximate numbers (e.g. 500 Silent English, 100 Silent Xhosa...) and designs
 - Specify Rhodes purple, white printing front and back
- Contact Lee-Ann Knowles in Rhodes Print Unit for advice on getting the best quote.
- Get one quote from Joos and Lorraine Vos of X-treme Embroidery. They have supplied t-shirts every year. Service has been very good and price has consistently been the lowest.
- Need quote before sign-up goes live on RUConnected as price needs to be fixed and included in information provided on RUConnected so students know what they are signing up for.

Silent Protest Planning Committee

- Contact new heads of GAP, SHARC and any other relevant student organisations to invite them to send reps to the SP Planning Committee meetings.
- Send out an invitation on Toplist and Studentlist inviting new members to join the Silent Protest Planning Committee.
- Hold the first planning meeting of the year.

Societies Extravaganza and Societies Sign-up – *not convinced that this is necessary with SP only taking place in August*

- Get GAP and SHARC members to help
- Need to ask SRC to be assigned table for Soc Extravaganza + Societies sign-up
- Need briefing sheet for volunteers at the table to work from, explaining all details about SP
- Volunteers wear SP t-shirts
- Manually add those who are interested (i.e. write down email addresses) to mailing list

In March

RUConnected Sign-up

- Liaise with IT (Edtech: edtech@ru.ac.za) to set up the new RUConnected sign-up page. Sign up on RUConnected is essential as by signing up students give permission for meals to be unbooked and for Society membership to be deducted from their student accounts (essential for auditing).
- All dates, times and figures on RUConnected must be updated and information checked for accuracy. Change name of course from 'Sexual Violence = Silence Protest' to 'Silent Protest'.
- Previous year's sign-up must be closed off and new sign-up set up.
- It is essential in new form that:
 - students/staff are able to edit their sign-up form themselves if they realise they have signed up for the wrong t-shirt etc. It causes a LOT of unnecessary admin if they can't as the organiser has to respond to emails, find individual entries and delete them.
 - students/staff cannot submit their sign-up form until all fields are completed.

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Social Media

- Create a facebook event on the Sexual Violence = Silence Group (perhaps change name of group) for the new Silent Protest. Invite all members of the group and encourage them to invite their friends as widely as possible.
- Keep up activity on the event fb page. Advertise all related events and articles, get discussions going etc.
- Just before RUConnected page goes live, start tweeting using #RUSilent (The twitter handle is @RUSilent and the password is saynotosilence). From then until after Silent Protest, tweet all info and pics as well as posting on facebook.
- Investigate other forms of social media.

Posters and flyers

- Choose photographs for posters. No Rape Survivors or Survivors should be foregrounded in posters unless they give specific permission. As far as possible, use photographs from 2014 Silent Protest.
- Work with Bronwyn Maclean in the Design and Printing Unit to design new Silent Protest posters and flyers. You will need 100 A3, full colour posters on card.
- Send posters through internal mail to Hall administrators, send 1 poster for each res requesting that they be displayed prominently. In addition, send 2 posters to each Hall to be displayed in the dining-hall.
- Put up rest of posters around campus in prominent places.
- Design and print 2000 A6 flyers printed on lavender paper in black ink. Must include brief info about why we protest, date of SP, sign-up link on RUConnected and web address for facebook event.
- Ensure 1 flyer in every first year's res room when they return from April vac, in foyer of reses and in dininghalls.
- Plan an event to raise awareness about the Silent Protest. Distribute flyers at this event and at subsequent events during the year.

Community Engagement

- Set up meeting with Di Hornby to explore community involvement in Silent Protest

Logistics

- Request quote from Corinne Cooper (c.cooper@ru.ac.za) and Lunga Heleni (lungaheleni@gmail.com) to organise sound system for Alec Mullins and the Cathedral on the day of the Silent Protest. Book if quote acceptable. Paid R 3500 in 2014.
- Book twenty tables from catering stores (Simon Wright: s.wright@ru.ac.za) to be delivered to Mullins on Thursday afternoon before Silent Protest, collected Friday morning. Check if you need to book janitors to transport the tables: janitors@ru.ac.za. In 2014 Simon Wright organised for them to be delivered.
- Book janitors to transport t-shirts from Main Admin (wherever they have been delivered to) to Mullins, on Thursday afternoon (14h00) before Silent Protest: janitors@ru.ac.za
- Book the RA Room for the Debrief Cafe (Friday of Silent Protest and Saturday directly after) through venue booking system.
- Book portable stage from stores (Anton Kivitts: a.kivitts@ru.ac.za) to be collected Thursday afternoon before SP and returned Friday morning. Book janitors to transport the stage: janitors@ru.ac.za

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Materials and supplies

- Order 20 rolls of black gaffer tape from Waltons (can take time to arrive).

In April

- Ensure Silent Protest posters are up in reses when students return from April vac; flyers in first year res rooms, foyers of reses and dininghalls. .
- Sign-up must go live on RUConnected before students return from vac.
- Post all info re Silent Protest on Student Zone in the first week when students return.
- Arrange an event to raise awareness re the Silent Protest, preferably with a good speaker/panel/movie screening. Share information and distribute flyers.
- Contact SRC transformation, community engagement, oppidan and academic reps. Request slots at student forums to speak about the Silent Protest.
- Invite all house comms and senior students to a briefing meeting to inform them about Silent Protest and request their assistance in supporting sign-up
- Set up opportunities to meet with Wellness leaders, Ncedana mentors, Oppi mentors, student press editors to brief them re plans for SP.
- Meet with Mareli Stolp (m.stolp@ru.ac.za) in the Music Department, to request and discuss Music Departments' involvement in die-in and at the Cathedral.

In May

Catering

- Meet with Simon Wright (Catering) to plan meal packs. Specify:
 - Two rolls per pack, both vegetarian
 - One fruit (banana)
 - One chocolate (Cadbury, fair trade)
 - One bottle of water
 - All packed by Catering into a brown paper bag, i.e. to be delivered already packed.
- For past few years 1000 meals have been ordered. There is consistent wastage of about 100 meals. Depending on sign-up suggest perhaps ordering 900 in 2015.

Candleholders

- Put out a call for plastic bottles to be made into candleholders. Arrange specific pick-up/drop-off places.
- Ask SRC environmental rep and EnviroSoc for help
- Ask catering/housekeeping to collect water bottles from reses during Festival

Six weeks before

T-shirts

- Place t-shirt order with final numbers, to be delivered one week before the SP.

Materials and supplies

- Order 500 candles (to be cut in half)
- Purchase 50 luminous yellow or orange marshall bibs.

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Sound system die-in

- Organise Live Music Society (Darren Wolhuter) to provide sound system for die-in (Library Quad)

Logistics

- Confirm booking of Alec Mullins with sports admin.
- Ensure notice sent out to all Sports clubs who use the facilities on Thursday evening or Friday morning

Media

- Meet with Communications division to discuss media strategy

One month before

Safety and logistics

- If he is still at Rhodes, ask Adrian Ciesielski to help: Adrian.polish@gmail.com
- Get application forms from Makana Municipality to get permission for marches
- Complete and submit forms (to current Acting Municipal Manager, Mr Themba Mnguni: themba.mnguni@makana.gov.za and Mr Etienne Mager: magerettienne@makana.gov.za) follow up regularly until approved.
- Copy Mr Towers Naidu (Rhodes CPU: towers.naidu@ru.ac.za) on all Safety and Logistics matters. Request CPU marshalling support, particularly at intersection of Prince Albert and South Streets for 07h00 march. Also request a presence when students return to campus from the Breaking the Silence at ±20h15.
- Contact police (Captain Mali Govender) and traffic department (Mr Coenraad Hanekom: coenraadhanekom@makana.gov.za or Mr Pierre Kapp: pierrekapp@makana.gov.za) to request support for the marches
- Book St John's ambulance for morning and evening marches and first aiders to be present at die-in.
- Submit safety plan to Safety and Events Committee. Current chair is Dr Ian L'Ange (Email: execdirector.iof@ru.ac.za (official); i.l'ange@ru.ac.za (personal))

Three weeks before

Volunteers

- Send out a call for student volunteers for the following:
 - Two weeks before SP
 - Work party to cut bottles into candleholders and cut candles
 - Thursday afternoon before SP @ 15h00
 - Volunteers to lay out tables and t-shirts
 - Friday morning of SP
 - Students to hand out t-shirts
 - Students to sell t-shirts to cash buyers (staff and Grahamstown Community members)
 - Survivors to do taping
 - Marshalls for morning (07h00), afternoon (17h00) and evening (20h00) marches. Need minimum 50 marshalls, 44 on foot, six in branded vehicles. Require name, address, contact number to submit with application for permission for marches.

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- Survivors to lead march back to Main Admin
- Students to stay in Mullins after march leaves: pack up t-shirts and keep an eye on audio equipment until that is removed
- Throughout SP day
 - Retaping at Kaif, Die-in, just prior to march from Main admin
- Friday afternoon of SP
 - Students to pack meal packs out in pews at the Cathedral (15h00-16h30)
 - Marshalls for 17h00 and 20h00 marches
- Friday evening of SP
 - Students to tidy in the Cathedral after the Breaking the Silence. Cleaning is included in amount paid to Cathedral but meal packs, candles and candleholders and waste should be collected.

Catering

- Confirm contents of meal packs and numbers

Debrief Cafe

- Order art materials and food for Debrief Cafe
- Brief wellness leaders and Counselling Centre staff re Debrief Cafe and set up roster for the two days (Friday of SP and day after).

Media

- Set date for media briefing/seminar prior to Silent Protest (in 2014 it was on Thursday evening before Silent Protest, facilitated by Prof Anthony Collins, was well-attended by journalism students, positive feedback).
- Send out media accreditation form to student press, journalism students, local and regional press. Require responses by one week before.
- Draw up press release. Send to Communications Division for distribution.

Two weeks before

- Draw up draft programme for Breaking the Silence event.
- Meet with Dean of the Cathedral to discuss programme and confirm all arrangements.
- Send programme leaflet to Print Unit for printing: 600 copies.
- Design leaflets for Silent Protestors to hand out on the SP day explaining why they are protesting and how the SP works.
- Send to Print Unit for printings. Numbers to depend on sign-up numbers.
- Hold work party to make candleholders out of collected plastic bottles and cut candles in half.
- Hold Survivor/Rape Survivor briefing. Preferably Saturday morning, over two hours.
- Plan and gather music for morning gathering event in Alec Mullins Hall.
- Contact Mareli Stolp in Music Department to confirm music students' involvement.

Logistics

- Confirm with sports admin (booking of Alec Mullins), catering (tables) and janitors, all bookings made in March for transport of items to and from Alec Mullins.

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One working week before

Catering

- Submit final meals lists to Renette Kleinhans in spreadsheet format. Names on list must be **only** res students (no oppi students or staff).
- Submit two separate spreadsheets
 - one showing students for whom **all meals** must be unbooked (i.e. Silent Protestors)
 - one showing students for whom **only supper** must be unbooked (i.e. Solidarity Protestors, Rape Survivors, Survivors)
- List in format: surname, name, student number (with no 'g' i.e. 12b6908 not g12b6908), email address.

During week before

- Count out and deliver t-shirts to schools.
- Check media accreditation forms, print press passes, deliver to media briefing/seminar to be held Thursday evening prior to SP.
- Print A4 signage for tables in Alec Mullins stating type of t-shirt and size e.g. SILENT SMALL

Tuesday night before Silent Protest

- Survivor/Rape Survivor briefing for those who couldn't make the first one.

Wednesday night before Silent Protest

- Hold pre-protest event with speakers and discussion

Thursday before Silent Protest

- Organise float and cash box for cash sales of t-shirts
- 15h00 -> (in Alec Mullins)
 - Set up tables and lay out t-shirts according to type of t-shirt and size
 - Put up banners and lanyards, place the stage
 - Corinne Cooper to set up sound system in Alec Mullins, do sound check
 - Set up taping stations with rolls of gaffer tape and scissors
- 17h00: Marshall briefing in Alec Mullins
- 18h00: Media briefing/seminar

Friday: Silent Protest day

- Arrive at Alec Mullins at 05h15
- Welcome student volunteers and assign them to tables for distribution of t-shirts
- Assign students to cash sales
- Once all students are gathered and have their t-shirts, brief students on programme and logistics for the day
- Accompany march to Main admin.
- Address protestors briefly, co-ordinate photographs
- Speak to media representatives

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- Return to Mullins to tidy up and collect t-shirts then return them to Main Admin building – central place where students and staff can collect them during the day if they missed the early morning gathering.
- 08h00: Debrief Cafe commences in RA Room.
- 08h00: Set up retaping station at Kaif
- Facilitate die-in (12h30-14h00)
- Afternoon: Retaping at Kaif
- Between 14h45 and 15h00: receive meal packs at Cathedral. Supervise student volunteer team who pack meals and candles out into pews.
- Co-ordinate logistics for 17h00 march. Accompany march to the Cathedral.
- Facilitate Breaking the Silence event.
- Ensure marshalls, police, traffic department, St John's ready to depart with students at 20h00.
- Dismiss protestors and monitor march back to campus.
- Supervise tidying team in the Cathedral.

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NOTES

1. Process

- All elements/events of the Silent Protest day have been carefully designed and planned as contributing to the process of the day. It would be a mistake to leave out elements.

2. Sign-up on RUConnected

- It is normal for sign-up to start very slowly. Over the past two years sign-up has doubled in the last two to three weeks

3. T-shirt numbers

- 2010-2013 ordered ± 1000 t-shirts
 - ± 600 Silent Protestor (of which ± 100 Xhosa wording)
 - ± 350 Solidarity
 - ± 50 Rape Survivor
- In 2014 ordered 1950 t-shirts
- **T-shirts went to:**

Schools	404
Northfield Methodist church	49
Fort Hare Students	30
Assumption Development Centre	28
Staff, EFTs and cash sales	260
Student sign-up on RUConnected requesting t-shirts	964
TOTAL	1735 shirts accounted for

- **Total t-shirts ordered in 2014:**

Silent Protestor (English)	725
Silent Protestor (Xhosa)	85
Solidarity	989
Rape Survivor	53 (+ 59 – overprinted but charged for as I opted to keep them for next year rather than wasting them)
Survivor	74
TOTAL	1950 [1985 were provided and invoiced for due to an error in printing (overprinting of Rape Survivor t-shirts)]

- **T-shirts left over 2014:**

Silent Protestor (English)	86
Silent Protestor (Xhosa)	22
Solidarity	2
Rape Survivor	65 (include 59 overprinted)
Survivor	21
TOTAL	196 (Cost: R 11760)

- **T-shirts unaccounted for 2014: 54** (Cost: R 3240)

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Important considerations

- Supplier supplies t-shirts and printing
- Wording has been tweaked every year. Due to significant changes in 2014, has been recommended that wording does not change in 2015. Do check stats for accuracy however.
- Student Affairs/Equity & Institutional Culture will need to pay for the t-shirts upfront and money gets paid back afterwards once it is deducted from student accounts. Staff pay cash and schools must pay by EFT for shirts ordered.
- Final order must be placed 6 weeks before
- Order MUST be delivered 7 days before

4. Student payment for t-shirts

- During the week after the protest compile a spreadsheet of student participants who ordered t-shirts, in the following format: name, surname, student number (without g i.e. 12b6908 NOT g12b6908). Submit this to finance: Tessa Steele, cc Debbie Wolhuter.
- **NB:** The money must be allocated to student accounts as membership fee for the Silent Protest which is a sub-committee of the Gender Action Project (GAP).
- [It is a University rule that one may not deduct money from student accounts for t-shirts. Therefore, the Silent Protest is a sub-committee of GAP. The amount charged therefore goes on student accounts as a membership fee for the GAP sub-committee. This only goes through AFTER the Silent Protest when participant lists are finalised].
- GAP must then pay the money over to the Student Affairs/Equity & Institutional Culture account. NOT an elegant or simple system, adds hassle, time and effort.
- In 2014, t-shirts cost R 59 and we charged a membership fee of R60. Don't undercharge. In 2014 we had 54 t-shirts unaccounted for (we do not tick names off lists when students collect their t-shirts at Alec Mullins due to logistical issues. This makes it possible for students who have not signed up to take a t-shirt). If you overcharge slightly you will be able to cover any shrinkage costs.

Budget (based on 2014) (excl t-shirts)

Cathedral (Including venue and cleaning after)	R 3500
Sound hire: Corinne Cooper	R 3500
Flights; accommodation and meals (speakers)	R 12 000
Printing of posters and flyers	R 3000
Duct tape (black) (previously came out of DoS stationery budget)	R 2500
Snacks and materials for Survivor briefing	R 500
Candles	R 850
Debrief Cafe	R 6000
Once-off costs 2014	
<i>Banner, magnetic decals for cars and vinyl decals for landrover</i>	<i>R3400</i>
<i>Paint for landrover</i>	<i>R350</i>
Previous expense, not incurred in 2014: Video recording	R 15 000
Recommended expense 2015: Bibs for marshals	Borrowed in 2013 and 2014 but wrong colour: purple on purple t-shirts, need luminous yellow or orange)

Appendix J: Thobile's story

In the year that I interviewed her, Thobile was participating in the Silent Protest for the fourth time and had decided to wear the rape survivor t-shirt for the first time. In her narrative she speaks first about her intention to wear it – this was a few days before the Silent Protest – and then speaks about the experience of wearing it, or, as she describes it, of 'coming out' as a rape survivor.

Thobile:

Before the Silent Protest

I'd started talking to some friends
just telling them that this is what I'm doing
one of the friends
he's like 'no but you can't
they'll now have something,
like some hold over you'
I said but no
it's not about them
it's not about them
this is my journey
this is the decision that I've taken
I wanna talk about it
I didn't feel I was emotionally ready for it
but at the same time (.)
how I feel about my rape is what it has done to me (.)
it might not necessarily be what the next person feels

I didn't speak before
I didn't think (.)
I think I would have broken down
I mean
I'm ok with the fact that it happened
in the sense that it's happened
not yes, it's great that it happened
but it's happened
I have moved past it
but always on the [Silent Protest] day
there's always this emotional thing
I don't (.)
I hate being emotional
I don't like being seen as an emotional person (.)
which I am but not to that extent =

there's an element of strong
how so many people find me
and I like keeping it
I'm not weak for, you know, crying about being raped
I just don't want to cry in front of people
I'm just gonna talk about it
I'm standing with other people that have done it
I'm encouraging other people to come out about it, you know
how I go about it is my own way
just thought you should know
he was like 'ok, I respect you for moving on'
'are you emotionally ready?'
yes actually I am
'I am doing this and I am not going back anymore
cause I've also said
if I didn't [wear the Rape Survivor t-shirt]
I would have most likely always been defined as a rape survivor
and that definition
had I left without doing it
it would have been a negative one
it would have always had a hold over me
I didn't want it to
this was me saying
'hey, you know what, it happened
I'm angry about it
but I've come full circle
I'm ok now'
a lot of people that I have spoken to
there's almost a sense of relief in that
someone else is in it with me, you know
it's not just me
so learning from those stories, you know
hearing 'oh my gosh she's been through this and she's ok'
a lot of people will look at you differently
but this is your journey
it's not someone else's
there were so many other people
saying 'hey we're standing with you'

On the day of the Silent Protest

I somehow decided
you are 100% in this
I went and got my t-shirt
I got my t-shirt
there are people around

that saw me with the t-shirt
just holding it
I was like 'go'
this is it
I'm doing it'
I was like 'oh ok'
there was nothing to it
there was nothing
no change in emotion
no change in anything
and that was great
one forward step

[Later] I cried a lot
the compassion that was coming from people was great
there is obviously the shock from people that didn't know
it shows me different sides to people that you don't see
so I cried quite a lot
'ok this happened a couple of years ago and it's ok
you're coming out about it this day
you're strong for doing it,
cry as much as you want to
do what you need to do
and it's ok'

The taping

that was very significant
that was a very significant part of my day
people have been silenced
so many of us have been silenced
and I'm gonna be silencing you right now
taping you right now
you might be sharing the same story with me
I'm very happy that you're doing it with me
you represent so many other people
I'm happy that you're speaking out for them in your silence
some people came to hug me
while I was doing the silencing
that was great
I know
one of my friends
whom I taped personally
is also a rape survivor
but is not comfortable coming out yet
there was a little bit of pain for that
there was also a little bit of joy

in the people that were 100% behind us
behind our stories
saying we believe you
after the silencing
I think I left

the decision was
do I wanna be the head of the march
and actually have my family know
I decided against that
I'm not ready for the emotional everything that will come with it
I stayed very far away from the cameras

as I left L comes up to me
she just hugged me from behind
that was a good moment
I cried
I was like 'oh my gosh'
I became more aware of the people that were behind me
I received so many messages
that was a great day
I went to lectures
I was taped
I decided to be taped
it was really awkward for people
you're wearing a rape survivor shirt
and you're taped
they can't really ask you any questions, you know
for one day I was left with my own thoughts
they were happy thoughts
I talk so much but I don't get to listen to my voice
it was the first time I actually got to listen to people
it was good that they weren't being any different
a lot of people came up
they just hugged me
a lot of them were like 'we're proud of you'
but it was business as normal
there was nothing (.) different
there was no 'oh now I need to pull out a chair for her'
that was great
It was so normal
I've never laughed as hard as I did that day
it was just because of what I was observing
I observed
I listened

it was a great day
and that told me
'hey, you are actually maybe just about over this'
you've not stopped
and cried
and said 'oh my gosh I was raped'

the die-in

This year it was totally different for me
it was cold /chuckles/
I think
this year
because I was acknowledging it through the t-shirt
I wasn't left with thoughts of 'this is what happened'
last year I think it was more the silence that killed me
I felt like I was being in denial
this year
I don't even remember what I was thinking
there was really nothing to it
there was just some peace
there was a lot of peace to it
no crazy thoughts
no tears
nothing
you're not dying in silence anymore
that's liberating

as much as I had a fun day
and a funny day
I felt alone
my friends weren't really around
I couldn't really latch on to someone else that was doing it
I spoke to so many people
we all have different lives
I was the only rape survivor at [my] faculty
it feels so much better
to have someone walk with you
literally throughout the day
I didn't have that
I was working
There were people encouraging me
people hugging me
but when I left that embrace
I was alone
those were moments of sadness
until that time in the evening

when we came together
we're taking back the streets
we are together in this
yes I was alone when this happened to me
I felt alone for such a long time'
and so many other people have
it happens to you
and you are left in your head
and nobody believes you
and eventually someone walks with you
and says hey 'I'm here and I believe you'
I'm silent for a really long time and then someone comes out
in them coming out more people coming out
being voices and backing them
it was (.) so many stories that were coming together
so as people came up it felt like
'yes I walked through the day alone
but I'm not alone in this
there are so many other people that are there,
so many other voices
so many other people who have been encouraged to speak
because of what we have done today
everyone that was wearing a rape survivor shirt,
that was wearing the silent protest t-shirt
There are so many other people that are here
there are so many other journeys that have been changed
because of what we did today'
so it was a me thing and it was a everyone else thing
and that was great
the power that was in the unity that was there

when we walked to the cathedral
then I was the head of the march
people stopped and turned their heads
it was /sigh/ not a (.)
a spectacle seems like a terrible word
it wasn't like that
it wasn't ha ha moment
it was the shock on people's faces
it was so real
it shouldn't be
it shouldn't be something that we're living with
it was also tears of overcoming
would I ever wear a rape survivor t-shirt and walk around town by myself (.)
most likely not /chuckles/

but I'm doing it
and yes
I'm not by myself
I'm doing it
I wouldn't have done it period
I'm doing it
I don't care about what they think
or how they view me after this I've done it
I'm ending off this day
and I've done it (.)
I haven't had a moment of sobbing about how terrible the experience was
the only other time I cried was when we chanted
'stop the war on women's bodies'
it was a lot of anger with that
it was the one time that I felt angry during the day

I just chanted it
and then you make eye contact with people
and again
'oh my gosh they are looking at me
I actually just came out about this
and now they know
they also support me'
so it was one of those kind of moments
but then the anger comes from (.)
this shouldn't be anyone's reality
I felt
I was shouting at them
'stop it this is not right
it wasn't right when it happened,
it isn't right right now
it will never be right
it needs to stop'
it was me shouting at my own rapist
and shouting at everyone else's
and all those contemplating it I guess
that it's not ok
that was I think my moment of saying
'this is actually not ok'
hence the tears
it's so hard I think
for anyone to face their rapist
and say 'stop it
you're not (inaudible)
stop it

it wasn't alright'
and that moment
I felt like I was faced with mine
and saying 'stop it'
it was I guess my journey
for me to eventually get to the point
I can say to him 'stop it, this is not ok'
and that shouldn't be
why should I feel the need to confront you
and say 'hey you raped me'
it shouldn't be
but that's my reality
that's not ok
that's what it is

During the debrief

I was::
I think
internally celebrating
'I did it,
it doesn't define me anymore,
I didn't break down and cry
I'm so happy
I've accomplished it'
that was a very cool moment for me
I guess
I was like
'hey it seems like I don't care about what people think anymore
and that's fantastic'
I shouldn't have cared all these years
but I did
the fact that I'm here
I mean
I'm over it'
I can openly have a conversation
and bring up my rape
and not worry about the fact that they are going to have a 'oohh' reaction
that that's what I overcame
the fact that it had such a hold on me and now it doesn't
I wouldn't be ashamed to acknowledge to anyone you know
except if maybe I was protecting your feelings like my parents
it's part of my life story
but again it doesn't define me
not in that way
not in the way that people expect it to define me
where I'm supposed to meek

or maybe hate men
it's part of my story
'yeah I was raped ha ha moving on' /
it doesn't have any value

I don't think I've ever been more satisfied about anything
I've learnt to find my own healing
I stopped letting other people define what I should or shouldn't do
we give people so much power over our lives
I think for the most part that was why I didn't wanna come out about it for so long
I wouldn't come out about it [because] I was so worried about everyone else
'what are they gonna think (.)
are they gonna be hurt from me doing this'
[now] I made something about me /mhh/
and it was about me (.)
that was my story to write
no one else should have had a say in how I write it
so no regrets

the silent protest I think (.) wrote my story /mhh/
because it's how I became aware of my feelings (.)
you know my rape
how I worked though it

**So the story that the silent protest wrote
you said the silent protest wrote your story
what title would you give to that story?**

it would have something to do with 'it's possible' (.)
it would also have something to do with 'it's not about other people
it's about you'
'there is life after rape' maybe
but I won't really commit to that
but it would have something to do with all of that

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