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The Gentle Artist: Empowering Warrior-Scholars through the Physical Feminism of Jiu-Jitsu

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The Gentle Art: Empowering Warrior-Scholars
through the Physical Feminism of Jiu-Jitsu

by

E. Emily Mahoney

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction
with a concentration in Educational Psychology and Exercise Science
Department of Educational Psychological Studies
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Keywords: evocative autoethnography, physical feminism, interview problems, power dynamics,
sexual violence, #metoo, jiu-jitsu

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DEDICATION

To my major professors, Dr. Jenni Wolgemuth and Dr. Tony Tan, for their unwavering support throughout the years. To Dr. Darlene DeMarie, for her bravery in inquiry and sincerity in friendship. To Dr. Keith Berry for his spinning wisdom on the final leg of the journey.

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To my entire jiu-jitsu training network, my family of gentle artists.

To my mom for everything. To my dad for finding mom. (I miss you so much...)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	iii
List of Figures	iv
Abstract	v
Part I: Entering the Autoethnography	1
Chapter One Foreword: Understanding the Story	1
Chapter One: Understanding the Story	2
“The Problem” – Women in Research	3
When Story Withholding Becomes the Story	13
A Silent Civil War	20
#MeToo	31
The Gentle Art of Jiu-Jitsu	39
Part II: The Story	51
Chapter Two Foreword: The Art of Questioning	51
Chapter Two: The Art of Questioning	51
Scene I: Becoming a Researcher	51
Scene II: Pre-Interview	59
Scene III: The Interview	65
Scene IV: Ground Zero	79
Chapter Three Foreword: Processing Trauma	83
Chapter Three: Processing Trauma	84
Researcher Identity Crisis: On the Run	86
Informant I	91
Informant II	92
Informant III	94
Informant IV	95
Nowhere to Run: Living with Fear	100
Part III: Becoming a Warrior	104
Chapter Four Foreword: The Gentle Art of Becoming a Warrior	104
Chapter Four: The Gentle Art of Becoming a Warrior	105
A Case for Jiu-Jitsu	109
Exploring My Body	112
Injury	117
Ego—The Gentle Art of Saying “No”	120
Undoing Gender on the Mat	126

The “Test”	134
Final Thoughts and Implications: Awakening the Warrior-Scholar	141
Who is Really in ‘Control’?	146
Leaving the Garden to Enter the War	149
Warrior-Scholar: The Empowered Researcher	150
Future	154
References	158
Appendix	174
Chapter Foreword: Methodology	174
Chapter: Methodology	174
What is Autoethnography?	176
When to Use Autoethnography	182
Living Out Autoethnography	187

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Six Phases of the Primary Qualitative Interview	14
Table 2: Sociolinguistic Utterance and Hypothesized Effect in Interviews	17
Table 3: Power Structures for Researchers in the Qualitative Interview	155

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A Spectrum of Soul Loss: Psychospiritual Impacts of Sexual Abuse27

Figure 2A: A Continuum of Autoethnographic Research178

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an autoethnography about the socialization of people in various cultural contexts, in particular, women in the embodied role of the academic researcher. Being a researcher and enduring an experience of sexual assault right in the middle of my first research interview left me in a state of shock and survival. One out of every six American women will survive attempted or completed rape during her lifetime, with college-aged women being three to four times at increased risk compared to all women,¹ yet the odds that this would take place during a project which had major implications for my academic career, not to mention my personal wellness, seemed negligible. When I was *actually* assaulted, not just processing a statistic or abstractly discussed scenario in a violence prevention program, I completely froze, unable to react. I later learned this bodily response was common or even “normal” in the threat of danger. While the university offered its traditional victim advocacy and crisis-response resources ad hoc, these modalities seemed incomplete and ‘too late’. I felt compelled to independently seek out a continuous practice separate of the academy to equip myself defensively, physically, to be more practically readied for the future, as a stronger person, scholar, and woman.

Alongside my educational psychology graduate studies, I began training in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, discovering a new facet of physical feminism through embodied martial art. I engaged the training site to reconstruct a different ‘story’ for my body to live in, rather than remain stuck,

¹ *Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics*. RAINN. Publicly accessed online 2019. <www.rainn.org>

psychically immobilized, and physically disempowered, as it was in the interview. Jiu-jitsu being an art allows room for unique interpretations. In my case, the open training site provided a safe space to reconstruct trusting relationships with men, and far more importantly, to forge a confident relationship with myself, where I could trust in me to protect myself. Through the physical collaborative work with my training partners, I continually re-constructed new meanings about research interviews, relationship structures, power, gender, femininity, masculinity, sexual violence, aggression, and vulnerability.

This dissertation tells the story of that research interview turned assault, and my journey of survival thereafter. What began as a personal coping skill with jiu-jitsu soon practice became an embodied component of my living methodology. Using autoethnographic approach, I share my experience drawing upon current literature on feminist research, sexual assault survival, and qualitative interviewing. I situate my experience at the politicized intersection of two congruent but contradictory bodies of literature informing sexual violence and the ways women's bodies are engaged in qualitative research.

My dilemma was especially problematic, as by institutional guidelines, there are practical 'grey areas' around what is intended to simply be a methods exercise for a class project, but instead could manifest as an actual research study by data production, as it did in my case. My erroneously interpreting and approaching the project as a study could have been shaped by the perceived pressure I felt to produce strong research very early, even as a new graduate student, as several of my peers were already pursuing publications, even some which I was assisting them with in data analysis, therefore I mistakenly believed similar research procedures and structures would apply to the project. Further solidifying the strong inquiry-led culture, faculty were constantly conducting and publishing studies, thus I believed this 'started' as early as possible.

At the time, I had a very unclear interpretation about the blurred line between voluntary exchanges intended for class projects, and how these are structured and handled much differently from true studies. A major implication of this work is for every new graduate student to clearly understand and have room to discuss the nuanced differences that are expected for class projects that are intended to provide educational experience about the research or methods process, compared to ‘true’ studies.

Despite this cryptic factor, it is yet the case that women in research undergo similar problems in the field, even with the structural support of institutional review boards (IRBs). As IRBs are pragmatically unable to extend protections to shield researchers from the threat of sexual harassment or assault in their inquiry practices, and as literature on (feminist) qualitative interviewing currently situates power largely with the researcher, it is quite critical for the field to reconsider new approaches to inquiry practices and inquiry relationships that, rather than undermine, instead *empower* feminist scholars.

The field of qualitative interviewing—particularly as sexual assault in research is increasingly discussed during the current political climate—must evolve to embrace new conceptualizations of a discerning, decisive, empowered researcher who navigates the many shifting gendered power relations while conducting research and interviews. In light of my experience of the assault, survival, and mind-body transformation through jiu-jitsu, I introduce the *warrior-scholar paradigm* as ‘theoretical permission’ for academics to practice *being* empowered researchers who *can* claim power over their own bodies, their research, and how their bodies are engaged in research.

Keywords: evocative autoethnography, physical feminism, interview problems, power dynamics, sexual violence, #metoo, jiu-jitsu

PART I: ENTERING THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Chapter One Foreword: Understanding the Story

~*~

“It is better to be a warrior in a garden than a gardener in a war.”

Chinese Proverb

~*~

The events of this story take place between 2014 and 2019, with one significant traumatic incident of central focus to this study which occurred at the end of the summer 2015. During and after the traumatic incident, I was not even certain myself how to describe the confusing sequence of actions that had disturbingly interjected themselves into what was supposed to be a “normal” research interview project. But really...what is “normal”? Through putting the matter into words, it became clear that a sexual violation, an act of sexual violence, had indeed happened to my body...had happened to me. As I carried my “problem project” around with me on my shoulders, I felt so alone with the issue, especially at the university, where everyone else’s research lines appeared so clearly drawn and professional, simpler to discuss, far less complicated than my cobweb of chaos that I wished I wouldn’t have to explain out loud to a class of my graduate peers...over and over again.

As I experienced a sense of wavering faith in the referred systems to “protect and serve” me, I was instead determined to learn how to protect my own self, preventatively. Any future incidents would realistically require me to defend myself, but while a situation is occurring, not afterward, like every intervention that was offered to me, and in every case—too little, and way

too late—ad hoc intervention, far after the incident had already occurred, when the violator is not even present, no longer accountable. The interview project turned assault and my privately beginning to cope with it all had coincided with the historical #MeToo movement, which began a societally needed avalanche of women’s voices and stories, making public an overwhelming outpouring of private truths, and destroying the shame-driven illusive belief that I was standing alone with this issue.

As embarrassed as I was that it had happened while I was “‘being’ a researcher,” (whatever that means), I hope that my account of these events will contribute helpful information for the academy and to the improvement of qualitative practices moving forward. In a larger aim, the more women that may be moved through (this and other) stories to transform their feminisms from ideological to physical, by way of learning self-defense or other forms of martial arts, the stronger, healthier, and better all of our communities would be for it.

Chapter One: Understanding the Story

I invite readers in, to enter the story of my personal narrative. This autoethnography explores the experiences I lived as an educational psychology doctoral student, mainly, one in which I had conducted a research interview project, and the informant sexually assaulted me during the session. Everything that occurred within those moments and in the years to follow would lead me to face critical social issues about men and women, expected gender embodiment, and with greatest specificity to my own dilemma, the socialization of women researchers in academia.

It is vital to note that these described events were unique to me as their first-person conscious observer, and with their retelling, I do not aim to essentialize genders, especially not to isolate men as ‘predatory’ beings, while scaring women away from knowledge pursuits through

falsely characterizing that they are always potential ‘prey’. I do not intend to generalize that all men will interview the same way, nor that all women will experience these challenges in their inquiry work. This work does not reflect nor qualify other unique cases of intersectionalities, a potentially infinite range of human-to-human ‘chemical’ outcomes, expressed distinctly in any given interview between any two bodies of people. Rather, this work focuses on my particular, peculiar experiences as a graduate student, and as such, is ultimately seeking to inform some of the ways in which people may be compelled to ‘perform’ certain embodiments of various social labels (i.e., man, woman, researcher, soldier, etc.). Not only could these labels and our human tendency to want to live up to them be limiting epistemological processes, but the ways in which people embody such social labels may also unexpectedly contribute to interpersonal political conflicts between them, which could be potentially harm-causing or endangering.

“The Problem” – Women in Research

Not only was the condition of ‘being a woman’ seemingly inseparable from the initial project, it also appeared to ‘interfere’ with another interview I had conducted in the wake of the event, a secondary methods project designed in effort to try and understand the recent wound to my scholarly identity. It became quickly disconcerting to me that the site of a research interview was clearly an open social ground, the rules therein, to be co-negotiated by both persons—the interviewer and the informant. However, the logical assumption that I, who had initiated and organized these very projects, would have had some sense of governing ‘power’ within either site of each physical interview, was deemed illogical by the problematic, dominant behaviors and assertions of control over it...and over me, demonstrated by both relevant informants I had interviewed in-person, who had happened to be men, and that were not demonstrated in nearly

the same ways by other informants who had happened to be women, or by a man via telecommunication with the physical layer of our interaction removed.

What was this saying about “the nature” of men, and of women, respectively? What did it say about social regard for research, or about women agents as the facilitators of research? What, if anything, might it have said about me, from an intersectional perspective, as a young mixed-race Asian-White millennial woman in U.S. society, circa 2015? What institutional or political power did I truly have—or not have—to be asking any questions? What could my findings potentially say about the experiences of other graduate students, researchers, or even former scholars, out there?

Roulston would argue that troubling exchanges which present themselves in the interview site can offer rich social ‘data’ for examination, furthering, that these ‘failed’ interviews are actually plentiful sources of information, to be analyzed by the transactions that made their demise.^{2,3,4} As true and as valuable as that may be in the name of data production, the reality of what potential dangers may actually await the researcher out in the field quickly and increasingly becomes an ethical issue in need of urgent address by institutions, or in the very least, serious consideration.

Several qualitative scholars have reported how their embodiment of “woman” was often leveraged against them in the research interview—not only by men, but even by fellow women counterpart informants—where *age*, *attractiveness*, *class*, and *perceived intellectualism* were

² Roulston, K. (2011a). Interview ‘Problems’ as Topics for Analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 32(1), 77-94. doi: 10.1093/applin/amq036

³ Roulston, K. (2011b). Working through challenges in doing interview research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(4), 348-366.

⁴ Roulston, K. (2014). Interactional problems in research interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 14(3), 277-293. DOI: 10.1177/1468794112473497

identified as relevant factors where their inquiring power was challenged by the women.^{5,6,7,8,9,10} These findings taken together support the critical need to address matters of intersectionality in feminist research, and also point to the complex layers of elemental power that the informant does, indeed, possess within the interview site and throughout the research process.^{11,12,13,14,15,16}

Early works in the 1980s about ethics and ethnographies are highly problematic, but valuable to help reveal the historical underlying attitudes that may currently underpin modern inquiry relationships.^{17,18} Cross-gender interviewing from the perspective of the male researcher to women informants was unprofessionally compared to a romantic pursuit: “a blind date, with its attendant emotional”.¹⁹ Descriptions of women-as-researchers were even worse, the

⁵ Harries, B. (2016). What’s sex got to do with it? When a woman asks questions. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 59, 48-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.10.002>

⁶ Bravo-Moreno, A. (2003). Power games between the researcher and the participant in the social inquiry. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 624-639.

⁷ Campbell, E. (2003). Interviewing men in uniform: a feminist approach? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(4), 285-304.

⁸ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher’s reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

⁹ Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 318–346.

¹⁰ Koivunen, T. (2010). Practicing power and gender in the field: Learning from interview refusals. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 39(6), 682-708.

¹¹ Harries, B. (2016). What’s sex got to do with it? When a woman asks questions. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 59, 48-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.10.002>

¹² Bravo-Moreno, A. (2003). Power games between the researcher and the participant in the social inquiry. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 624-639.

¹³ Campbell, E. (2003). Interviewing men in uniform: a feminist approach? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(4), 285-304.

¹⁴ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher’s reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

¹⁵ Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 318–346.

¹⁶ Koivunen, T. (2010). Practicing power and gender in the field: Learning from interview refusals. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 39(6), 682-708.

¹⁷ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher’s reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

¹⁸ Yow, V. R. (1994). *Recording oral history: A practical guide for social scientists*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

¹⁹ Dingwall, R. (1980). Ethics and ethnography. *The Sociological Review*, 28(4), 871–891.

surrounding tone practically encouraging them as sacrificial sexual offerings in exchange for data extraction from powerful men.²⁰

For instance:

...few investigators have admitted the *libidinal* dimension of fieldwork. Yet, it is quite clear that all certain sorts of data are more readily obtained by personable young women. Much as we may regret this on ideological grounds, it is always a temptation to engage such a person, particularly in studies of powerful older men where they may perceive less of a threat and be drawn into discretion more readily than by a male investigator.²¹

A decade later, women researchers of the 1990s used their own scientific voices to discuss their experiences in conducting fieldwork with men informants. One scholar, Golombisky, who hailed from the same university as I, only decades prior, noted that her interviews with men were longer in duration, and that these men did not hesitate to make "bold" assessments about her appearance.²² Her findings were interpreted, however, as the men's sense of powerlessness during the interview context with a woman interviewer.²³ Another researcher conducting fieldwork of interviews with Santiago pilgrims shared a similar impression of men's powerlessness, through the realization that over 90% of her participants were men, when the ratio of male-to-female pilgrims was more evenly distributed than her sample, at 55%:45%.²⁴ She reflected: "Why have I mainly been interviewing males? Should I start interviewing more female pilgrims? How is the fieldwork process affected by the researcher's gender? How big a

²⁰ Dingwall, R. (1980). Ethics and ethnography. *The Sociological Review*, 28(4), 871–891.

²¹ Dingwall, R. (1980). Ethics and ethnography. *The Sociological Review*, 28(4), 871–891.

²² Golombisky, K. (2006). Gendering the Interview: Feminist Reflections on Gender Performance in Research. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 29(2), 165-192.

²³ Spitzack, C. (1998). On masculinity: The production of masculinity in interpersonal communication. *Communication Theory*, 8(2), 143-164.

²⁴ Sepp, T. (2012). Interview as an Art of Seduction: Analyzing problems I have met during my fieldwork on the Camino de Santiago and in Glastonbury. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 6(2), 29-48.

role do emotions play in fieldwork and how can this influence the outcome? How much would my ‘charm’ contribute towards making someone a willing participant? Is it wrong to use this ‘charm’? If my intuition tells me that my informant might be falling in love with me, should I stop working with them or should I carry on, pretending not to notice? Do I subconsciously believe that it is men who hold the key to important matters?”²⁵

On the other hand, another scholar, Lee, argued that a woman interviewing a man presents a stereotypically asymmetrical gender relationship, one in which, the woman finds herself having to listen without being able to challenge his view for logic, which may or may not reflect her natural dispositions outside the context of the interview.²⁶ Oral historian, Yow, also acknowledged and even advised acceptance of these asymmetrical dynamics, explaining that a "male narrator may tend to talk down to a female interviewer," as something "we women may just have to tolerate".²⁷

More recently, in 2016, one researcher, Harries, from University of Manchester recalled her interviewing experiences, mainly marked by her informants’ social presumptions that it was appropriate for them to demonstrate the following boundary-pushing behaviors, even ‘out-in-the-open’, in the context of a research interview: sexually provocative mannerisms, flirtation, making references to assumed researcher sexuality and private life, propositioning, touching, using terms of endearment, and behaving with overfamiliarity.²⁸ Because of the specific ways in which women’s bodies are engaged as unique ‘instruments’ in research by informants, the topic of *embodiment* frequently accompanies feminist studies. An ethnographer who interviewed

²⁵ Sepp, T. (2012). Interview as an Art of Seduction: Analyzing problems I have met during my fieldwork on the Camino de Santiago and in Glastonbury. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 6(2), 29-48.

²⁶ Lee, D. (1997). Interviewing men: Vulnerabilities and dilemmas. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20(4), 553-564.

²⁷ Yow, V. R. (1994). *Recording oral history: A practical guide for social scientists*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

²⁸ Harries, B. (2016). What’s sex got to do with it? When a woman asks questions. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 59, 48-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.10.002>

South African Muslim women about sexual dynamics of the culture came to understand the multiple ways in which women doing research is a heavily embodied practice, accelerated by engaging with notions of intimacy, vulnerability, and affect, with narratives fragmented by tears, silences, and embraces; arguing that research encounters forge important, primary human relationalities that are characterized by unique moments of convergence, conflict, and despondency.²⁹ One study by Piran analyzed girls' and women's daily living experiences to characterize embodiment, identifying five central dimensions: body-self connection, agency, desire, self-attunement, and resisting objectification.³⁰

Resisting objectification...

I have come to see that *resistance* is an inseparable component of *power*.

If resistance is an inseparable component of power, could it mean, then, that objectification is a counterforce, an assertion of power?

Researchers have observed that when power is 'entangled with emotionally difficult reflexive processes', it can become 'much looser, messier, and multidirectional', further noting that informants' power is not 'fixed', but rather, deployed and renegotiated constantly.³¹ Others have cautioned against rigid views of 'researchers *or* informants' having power, which would rely on structural notions of power that have been critiqued for not considering differences within groups, nor the ways in which research encounters depend on context.³² Lancaster has suggested that power dynamics between researchers and informants are highly fluid and context

²⁹ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher's reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

³⁰ Piran, N. (2016). Embodied possibilities and disruptions: The emergence of the Experience of Embodiment construct from qualitative studies with girls and women. *Body Image*, 18, 43-60.

³¹ Neal, S. & McLaughlin, E. (2009). Researching up? Interviews, emotionality and policy-making elites. *Journal of Social Policy*, 38, 689-707.

³² Smith, K. E. (2006). Problematizing power relations in 'elite' interviews. *Geoforum*, 37, 643-653.

dependent.³³ Being such a nuanced construct, power seems to interact distinctly with gender, as power has been disrupted in interviews far more commonly among women researchers, however, men researchers by and large have generally cited that their men informants are actually, just the *opposite* during their qualitative interviews with them—“emotionally *inexpressive*,” when interviewed by other men.³⁴

Why would men essentially be saving all of their emotions, all of their anger, all of their dominant ‘natures’ to unleash privately on women when they are alone with them, and most vulnerably practicing empathic listening, asking the men to be vulnerable? Who is the ‘masculine’ demonstration really for? What purpose is the subjugating behavior against women investigators really striving to achieve? How is it impacting the produced research? How is it impacting the field of research? What dangers may it be creating for graduate students?

Researchers have long observed that men’s social status shields them from having to perform emotional labor as frequently as women do, a dynamic which appears to also extend its reach into the site of the interview as well.³⁵ Meaning-making is always informed and shaped by the subjective interaction of bodies in context, guided by the notion that embodying the research relationship considers the ways in which bodies (researcher and researched) are respective epistemological sites that each facilitate possibilities for communication and understanding.³⁶ It has frequently been demonstrated that informants could try to present an alternative view

³³ Lancaster, K. (2017). Confidentiality, anonymity and power relations in elite interviewing: conducting qualitative policy research in a politicized domain. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(1), 93-103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1123555>

³⁴ Affleck, W. & Macdonald, M. E. (2012). The limitations of language: male participants, stoicism, and the qualitative research interview. *American Journal of Men’s Health*, 7(2), 155-162.

³⁵ Cottingham, M. D., Erickson, R. J., & Diefendorff, J. M. (2015). Examining Men’s Status Shield and Status Bonus: How Gender Frames the Emotional Labor and Job Satisfaction of Nurses. *Sex Roles*, 72, 377-389. doi: 10.1007/s11199-014-0419-z

³⁶ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher’s reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

entirely, as they may have apprehensions about the interviewer carrying a stereotyped view of their community, and thus, may seize control of the narrative to represent the community in completely different or atypical terms to the interviewer.³⁷

I wonder if that's what he did...

During the five years of my enrollment in the program, from 2014 to 2019, I have both objectively observed and subjectively experienced a dramatic politicization of the academic occupation and culture. Seemingly and suddenly in a new wave in my adult life, the pursuit of knowledge carries increasingly negative connotations associated with intellectual elitism, being radically liberal in values, and representing a far left-wing political identity, simply with the reluctant statement of occupation. For the fact that I have been a member of the academy during the Information Age when human voices have never been more connected and yet distanced, I have stunningly felt the bitter sting of judgment via cultural schematizing many times in person as well as on digital platforms.

One inquirer, Giampapa, heavily problematizes this aspect of political representation embodiment through the *becoming* of a researcher, elaborating that researcher identities are assigned and constructed through discourses within disciplines, with processes and procedures imposed on researchers throughout institutional discourses.³⁸ She described her own embodied political representation as “the master narratives of the academy in which I as a young, female, doctoral researcher was working through, with, and against”.³⁹

³⁷ Jacobsson, K. & Åkerström, M. (2012). Interviewees with an agenda: learning from a ‘failed’ interview. *Qualitative Research, 13*(6), 717–734.

³⁸ Giampapa, F. (2011). The Politics of “Being and Becoming” a Researcher: Identity, Power, and Negotiating the Field. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 10*, 132-144.

³⁹ Giampapa, F. (2011). The Politics of “Being and Becoming” a Researcher: Identity, Power, and Negotiating the Field. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 10*, 132-144.

I share similar sentiments, as especially in the case of my first project, I had seemed to become “a representative” to carry the stereotypical schemas associated with “psychology” as constructed by the way the informant had interacted with and addressed me throughout. Like some, when I might state my discipline of “educational psychology,” the informant also seemed to mostly contextually identify me with the latter, with the *psychology* part. He even stated (after the disrupted interview): “I’m surprised you didn’t ask me more about my past, or why I used (illicit substances)”. It was as if he had believed that my objective was to successfully excavate his deepest darkest secrets, which it was not at all. I was not there to ask him about why he had used, to uncover his dark past, his troubling secrets. I did not expect him to introduce that information. Those were elements he brought into the interview site on his own terms. It was almost as if the word “psychology” was enough to evoke connotative images of Freudian, primal confessions and catharsis. The more I attempted to ask him about recovery, surviving, living a better life, the more he seemed to insistently double down on themes of violence, drugs, and sex. However, in my efforts then to go along with these organic directions of data production, asking meaningful questions about the war or military culture, the more evasive and patronizing he became, until he disrupted the session entirely. Perhaps, my questions were restricting him into telling a story that he didn’t want to tell; for he had his own story to tell.

At the time, I was a twenty-nine-year-old mixed race Asian and White American woman pursuing my graduate degree in educational psychology, conducting what I had thought/planned/hoped would be a narrative case study project about resiliency and limb loss. He was a twenty-(x)-year-old White American man, a young Marine combat veteran, and a major limb amputee. He had agreed to participate in an interview via digital communication, and he seemed agreeable during all instances of digital communication about the project prior to

its occurrence. But once actually face-to-face, he appeared agitated by my youth, my words, my questions, my being a woman who was asking him questions...seemingly, everything about me, the whole situation, and most of all, my committed seriousness about the interview project. His apparent agitation with me eventually resulted in sexual violence, the details of which I defer to a later chapter, in the full story.

Culture wars have been observed in recent years as “converging around the messier aspects of interpersonal relationships and corresponding identity issues that are complex, sensitive, and contested”.⁴⁰ The concept of modern identity politics is marked by “the psychological burdens of discrimination, prejudice, disrespect or simple invisibility (remaining) ingrained in social consciousness”.⁴¹ Researchers have noted the ways in which manifestations of a focus on identity politics are “increasingly apparent in conflicts between the (new) left and the (alt) right, and are amplified in (and by) social media”.⁴² Additionally, culture wars are played out in physical sites of universities, as well as epistemologically.⁴³ My experience brings to the fore that these politically represented ‘battles’ between embodied identities do not extend exemption to graduate students simply by characterizing a research process as ‘practice’ because they are a part of a course. To the facilitator and their informants, the inquiry process is very much ‘real,’ despite being intended as ‘practice’.

Considering what had occurred upon the surprise battleground of my body, an unexpected power struggle over the interview, I do not know for certain if elements of body

⁴⁰ Fenton, J. & Smith, M. (2019). ‘You Can’t Say That!’: Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy. *Societies*, 9(71), 1-14.

⁴¹ Fukuyama, F. (2018). *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition*. Profile Books: London, UK.

⁴² Fenton, J. & Smith, M. (2019). ‘You Can’t Say That!’: Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy. *Societies*, 9(71), 1-14.

⁴³ Fenton, J. & Smith, M. (2019). ‘You Can’t Say That!’: Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy. *Societies*, 9(71), 1-14.

politic were at play. Yet, with the echoing voice of the informant in my head, mockingly calling me “doctor” repeatedly throughout, and especially his antisocial disruption of it by aggressively violating my physical boundaries, I am unable to rule out the possibility that perhaps I *did* represent something more to him, something political. After all, I was a woman scholar, trying to ask questions about his life, his limb loss, and the war.

When Story-Withholding Becomes the Story

After analyzing many cases of critical interviews—*critical*, as characterized by the interviewer and the informant experiencing a conflicting “clash” between their two life-worlds—Roer-Strier and Sands presented a model of the various phases of a critical primary interview (see Table 1).⁴⁴ It is compelling that the model was developed out of interview work with *non-hegemonic* groups as informants (i.e., Muslim women). Therefore it is relevant: within the site of the interview, *all* informants operated to increase their power—*they all became more powerful*—by using *counter-control* methods throughout the interview.⁴⁵ This may suggest that people will find a way to create power, and essentially, assert the inherent values of their own life world, even if this is done at the cost of disempowering the researcher.

Six phases were identified in their analysis of the critical interviews: on guard, the “official story” story, expert position, confrontation, looking for common grounds, moving beyond the “official story” (see Table 1).⁴⁶ These various phases of story-telling, story-protecting, and story-withholding are more likely to present themselves in interviews where there is a tension or power conflict (a *critical* dynamic) between the researcher and the informant, as

⁴⁴ Roer-Strier, D. & Sands, R. G. (2014). Moving beyond the ‘official story’: when ‘others’ meet in a qualitative interview. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 251-268. doi: 10.1177/1468794114548944

⁴⁵ Roer-Strier, D. & Sands, R. G. (2014). Moving beyond the ‘official story’: when ‘others’ meet in a qualitative interview. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 251-268. doi: 10.1177/1468794114548944

⁴⁶ Roer-Strier, D. & Sands, R. G. (2014). Moving beyond the ‘official story’: when ‘others’ meet in a qualitative interview. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 251-268. doi: 10.1177/1468794114548944

there was in the site of my problematic interview(s).⁴⁷ These phases can be significantly useful for graduate students (or even seasoned inquirers) to more adequately inform the unique context-bound process of conducting a research interview with a new informant, particularly wherein a conflict may present itself, either as an anticipated component of the design, or where one could unexpectedly emerge.

As I reflect back upon the ‘failed’ project, I can see so many elements from these six phases, up until the “looking for common grounds” phase. In an odd thought, I suppose it is perhaps theoretically plausible that when the informant had violated the physical boundaries of the interview site, aggressively imposing a sexual nature onto me, he may have (in his mind) believed this to be a context upon which to more comfortably find “common grounds” in a way that made better sense to him, more easily accessible than what could have potentially been a vulnerable, honest, emotionally open conversation, had he legitimately cooperated in answering the questions. Perhaps, even, the interjected ‘data’ of sexual violence *was* a form of ‘moving beyond “the official” story’.

(Insert Table 1)

Table 1. Six Phases of the (Primary) Critical Qualitative Interview⁴⁸

<i>Interview Phase</i>	<i>Interviewer and Informant</i>
On guard	<i>Interviewer</i> – appears rigid and ill at ease. Sticks to questions, sometimes reading them, and does not probe for more extensive responses.

⁴⁷ Roer-Strier, D. & Sands, R. G. (2014). Moving beyond the ‘official story’: when ‘others’ meet in a qualitative interview. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 251-268. doi: 10.1177/1468794114548944

⁴⁸ Roer-Strier, D. & Sands, R. G. (2014). Moving beyond the ‘official story’: when ‘others’ meet in a qualitative interview. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 251-268. doi: 10.1177/1468794114548944

Table 1. (Continued)

<p>The “official story” story</p>	<p><i>Informant</i> – appears to be uncomfortable as well, seems to mistrust the interviewer but does not express this directly. Avoids answering some questions or replies with brief answers. Asks interviewer to repeat questions.</p> <p><i>Informant</i> – presents self as member of a group that is often misunderstood or stereotyped by people outside of this group and defends the group by portraying it in a positive light.</p>
<p>Expert position</p>	<p><i>Interviewer</i> – reports being anxious, frustrated and worried about the direction in which the interview was going.</p> <p><i>Interviewer</i> – changes approach and invites the interviewee to take the teacher or expert position and to enlighten about the context and the uniqueness of interviewee’s group membership and personal experience.</p>
<p>Confrontation</p>	<p><i>Informant</i> – moves away from defending the ‘formal’ story, provides additional information, shows more trust, and displays a sense of humor.</p> <p><i>Informant</i> – confronts the interviewer, raises the issue of being the ‘other’, and openly discusses the barriers.</p>
<p>Looking for common grounds</p>	<p><i>Interviewer</i> – responds to interviewee’s challenge openly without getting defensive. Acknowledges the pain, distress, or anger raised by the interviewee.</p> <p><i>Informant</i> – searches for areas of similarities where they can connect.</p>

Table 1. (Continued)

<p>Moving beyond the “official story”</p>	<p><i>Interviewer</i> – departs from the research protocol and collaborates with the interviewee on topics initiated by either party that interest.</p> <p><i>Informant</i> – initiates revisiting questions which were not answered earlier and shares personal views which diverge from the ‘official story’ presented in phase 2.</p> <p><i>Interviewer</i> – appreciative of the interviewee’s attempts to provide missing information and expresses satisfaction.</p>
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Some interactional problems in interviews can include disfluencies in talk, with informants asking questions of the interviewer, declining invitations to elaborate on questions posed, or providing minimal responses.⁴⁹ Interactional problems have all been suggested to provide valuable insights for *how* informants are managing topics of difficulty, and/or to identify trouble sources for further exploration.⁵⁰ One theoretical approach is to examine the two stark worlds that both the researcher and informant are respectively discussing.⁵¹ It is suggested that the “conversational action of describing and evaluating objects is a delicate affair, in which speakers ‘must respect the parties’ information territories and their associated epistemic rights concerning the matter being assessed”.⁵²

This brings up unsettling grey areas in regard to “respecting information territories”:

⁴⁹ Roulston, K. (2014). Interactional problems in research interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 14(3), 277-293. doi: 10.1177/1468794112473497

⁵⁰ Roulston, K. (2014). Interactional problems in research interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 14(3), 277-293. doi: 10.1177/1468794112473497

⁵¹ Roulston, K. (2014). Interactional problems in research interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 14(3), 277-293. doi: 10.1177/1468794112473497

⁵² Roulston, K. (2018). Qualitative interviewing and epistemics. *Qualitative Research*, 18(3), 322-341. doi: 10.1177/1468794117721738

What then, does it mean, if, in the informant’s world, *I am* the object, and in the territory of his world, I am decidedly purposed within the interview as *sexual*? Whose territorial realm ought to supersede whose, in the name of research(?), where is the line, and why? Where is the concern for the researcher as the human conduit through which she must come to take compassion for, figure out how to disentangle herself out of, and finally, achieve scientific understanding around, his problematic actions that may have implicated or even damaged her within the interview site and research process? At that point, and at the intersection of ethics meeting epistemics, is it even worth the ‘reward’ of discovery?

Boucher developed a sociolinguistic framework to help identify powerful or powerless forms of language.⁵³ The framework was designed out of a need to better understand interviews with executives, or elites, to more effectively analyze their instances of powerful language (e.g., interruptions, commands, silences), powerless language (e.g., being interrupted, back channeling, facilitative phrases), and to operationalize their measurable forms of usage (see Table 2).

(Insert Table 2)

Table 2. Sociolinguistic Utterance and Hypothesized Effect in (*Elite*) Interviews.⁵⁴

<i>Powerful language</i>	<i>Form</i>
Silences	Silences measured according to 2, 3, and 4+ pause increments.
Interruptions	Interruption before the speaker is more than two syllables away from the end of the turn-transition space.

⁵³ Boucher, A. (2017). Power in elite interviewing: Lessons from feminist studies for political science. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 62, 99-106. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.05.003>

⁵⁴ Boucher, A. (2017). Power in elite interviewing: Lessons from feminist studies for political science. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 62, 99-106. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.05.003>

Table 2. (Continued)

Lengthy monologues	Number of monologues of nine sentences or more without interruption (back channeling permitted).
Commands	Total number of verbal commands or re-directs.
<i>Powerless language</i>	<i>Form</i>
Being interrupted	Interrupted before more than two syllables away from the end of the turn.
Facilitative phrases	Total number of uncertain uses of “you know” or other hang phrasing.
Attention beginnings and disclaimers	Total number of justifiers offered to validate phrases before saying them.
Back channeling	Total number of facilitating phrases offered to promote/encourage the conversation.

Having foresight to identify and understand demonstrations of power or absence of power in linguistic exchanges (i.e., silences, interruptions, lengthy monologues, or commands) could support a more balanced and informed qualitative research process. For me, it would have been especially useful to learn, given my newness to the practicing ‘being’ of a researcher, and with the apparent potential issue of women researchers’ powers commonly being challenged during their interviews of men informants. Applied to my failed project, every listed expression of powerful language was used by the informant, including exaggerated instances of each, increasing in intensity and aggression, and repeating forms of each, prior to the beginning of the sexual assault.

In fact, once it started happening, I actually had to fight my first impulse to laugh, for it was my visceral reaction to him audaciously believing he could kiss me out of nowhere after he

had been so consistently mean, rude, and vile toward me while asserting the demonstrations of powerful language beforehand. Some insights about the complexities and risks of these dynamics prior to the project could have at least enabled me to theoretically consider that there is a tipping point in the balance between undermining one's "power" as a researcher, and having it taken away entirely, through a manner that is violating, wrong, and traumatic. Turns out, there is such a thing as diminishing 'authority' to dangerously low levels.

It is widely recommended in qualitative research paradigms to purposefully and deliberately undermine one's own 'assumed' power as the researcher during an interview, also frequently promoting a *constructionist* methodological approach, of working with the informant collaboratively, even in the study design.⁵⁵ The constructionist view posits that the researcher-as-interviewer works to co-create a small cultural universe between interviewer and informant, as well as the content of moral assumptions, which exist within that universe.⁵⁶ I tried to do this, but perhaps something not addressed enough is that the constructionist approach relies on an open-minded inquirer, yes—but it also relies upon the informant's willingness to *co-construct with us*, cooperatively. While we may endeavor to "take a constructionist approach," the efforts can unfortunately fail.

As advised by my major professor while preparing interview questions for the project, I had attempted the constructionist approach by emailing the interview guide to the informant weeks prior to the scheduled session. This went a step beyond briefly describing what the interview would be about, by inviting him to review the questions, and offering him the opportunity to shape them differently, or any other content around the project. The fact that he

⁵⁵ Roulston, K. (2011b). Working through challenges in doing interview research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(4), 348-366.

⁵⁶ Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text, and Interaction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

did reply, but in response, he did not acknowledge the questions, could have been an indication of his lack of seriousness about or general regard for the project (of course, a hindsight 20/20 insight). However, at the time, I simply figured that he must have been busy, or did not have a chance to review them in that moment. Never would I have thought that things could have resulted the way that it did; otherwise, had I known, I would not have gone.

Another hindsight realization is that I had made such a disproportionate investment by traveling inter-state to conduct this interview for a project, a feeble decision influenced by a cultural idea that research participants are a scarce commodity, that we ought be indebted to those who agree to take part in our endeavors, for it is rare to find those who will agree. When I had asked the informant to take part in this research, I did not consider that he would even respond, let alone agree, and very readily/positively, to where it seemed like he was just as invested in the project as I was. When I presented the “good news” to my co-major professors...I wasn’t really *asking* them for guidance, so much as I was telling them what I was planning to do. Since this time, I have grown to realize when I can be idealistic or dumbfounded by optimism when excited about an idea. At times, I am so focused on the big picture that I miss the details, while in others, I can get so over-consumed on the features of the trees, that I can no longer see the forest or even remember it is there. In this case, I was so fixated on what I thought would be a rich interview exchange, that I did not consider any of the things that could go wrong.

A Silent Civil War

What had occurred during the session felt like it must have been merely one private battle amidst countless others in *A Silent Civil War* of the sexes. Such a thought makes me wonder how to even quantify that conflict. Would there be a distinct beginning, or ever an end?

Power fuels the human sciences, just as chi energy fuels the physical sciences. *Conflict*, at its roots, is a quest for *power*.⁵⁷ As Ohm's Law states relative to physics and electronic power:

$$P = R \times I^2$$

Where, power (P) is resistance (R), multiplied by its current (I), squared.⁵⁸ In its most basic of ionic expressions, power and resistance appear inseparable of one another. Relative to the human sciences, it is not very differently expressed in our nature. Even something as seemingly neutral with plenty of footing for "common ground" as the open site of a research interview can unassumingly be wrought with conflicts, ridden with turbulence, the aims between actor agents mismatched, realizing that perhaps they do not have cooperative, collaborative goals that they are trying to achieve together; they are instead enacting out complex issues of *power...and of resistance...*

Who owns this interview?

Who owns this story?

Who decides what will ultimately happen over the course of this project?

Does the one who asks the questions, or the one who has to answer, get to have more contextual power? Do the questions matter? Do the answers matter? Do words, even matter?

Whose story, and whose version of this story, will get to be told?

What actions, and whose actions, contributed to the making of the story into the version that it is now?

⁵⁷ Sitkin, R. A., Lee, B. X., & Lee, G. (2019). To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, article in press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.01.013>

⁵⁸ *Ohm Law: Learn all about Ohm's law; Ohm's Law formulas*. Publicly accessed online 2019. <www.ohmlaw.com>

Are imbalances of human power and resistance just as inevitable, predictable, and formulaically measurable to our experiences, like electricity is? Why is human power not taught or discussed more concretely in the sciences, just as it is, like a *law* that runs through the social vein of human physics? Why not come to know this construct with as much intellectual certainty and tangibility as collectively agreed upon ideas about physical gravity? Ultimately, human power rules each and all of us in some way, just as surely as we are weighted to the earth. Perhaps, it may rule each of us differently, thus, making it difficult to discuss, let alone to agree upon its universalized properties and potential “laws”. Among qualitative researchers, power relations within the site of the interview are just as inevitable to observe, and have been ambivalently argued from both perspectives of the interviewer and the informant.^{59,60,61,62} For example, the interviewer traditionally selects and asks the questions, creating an asymmetry, a hierarchical relation.^{63,64} Further, interviewing has been described as unidirectional and instrumental, suggesting that the interviewer tends to have a monopoly over the situation.⁶⁵

Conversely however, informants have power in possessing knowledge that interviewers wish to acquire, and can assert their power by refusing to be interviewed, or by withholding information when asked.⁶⁶ Some may diminish their roles of interest relative to the inquiry, or as relevant interviewees, conveying practically no information, only providing brief responses,

⁵⁹ Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 318–346.

⁶⁰ Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480–500.

⁶¹ Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁶² Jacobsson, K. & Åkerström, M. (2012). Interviewees with an agenda: learning from a ‘failed’ interview. *Qualitative Research*, 13(6), 717–734.

⁶³ Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 318–346.

⁶⁴ Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480–500.

⁶⁵ Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁶⁶ Hall, R.A. (2004). Inside out: some notes on carrying out feminist research in cross-cultural interviews with South Asian women immigration applicants. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(2), 147–141.

postponing the interview, and some even asserting power over time monopolization by continuing to tell their stories after researchers have indicated that the interview is already over.⁶⁷ Even interview refusals have served as the point of analysis for how power and gender are enacted in inquiry exchanges between researchers and informants.⁶⁸

Armstrong discussed similar constructions of power in her experiences of interviewing sex workers, demonstrated by their challenging of her questions.⁶⁹

She explained:

...it soon became clear that most of these women would, in any case, not allow themselves to be disempowered. In some situations, the women took control of the interview by letting me know their thoughts on the sorts of questions being asked. Some of the ways in which these women managed the power relationship in interviews perhaps in part reflected the skills they used in their sex work to establish control in encounters with clients.⁷⁰

Like Armstrong, I too wonder if what occurred during my failed project may, perhaps, reflect something broader about the informant's behavior, and about our current culture. The ongoing quest for power has changed its form over time. Historically, in terms of warfare, conflict has traditionally targeted all members of society, the balance recently shifted during WWII with the targeting of non-combatants as a means of war, plus the modernization of mass

⁶⁷ Koivunen, T. (2010). Practicing power and gender in the field: Learning from interview refusals. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 39(6), 682-708.

⁶⁸ Koivunen, T. (2010). Practicing power and gender in the field: Learning from interview refusals. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 39(6), 682-708.

⁶⁹ Armstrong, L. (2012). Reflections on a research process: Exploring violence against sex workers from a feminist perspective. *Women's Studies Journal*, 26(1), 2-10.

⁷⁰ Armstrong, L. (2012). Reflections on a research process: Exploring violence against sex workers from a feminist perspective. *Women's Studies Journal*, 26(1), 2-10.

killings during the Holocaust.^{71,72} Despite the number of treaties signed to prevent the targeting of non-combatants, there has been a recent return to targeting civilians, especially and disturbingly with the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.^{73,74} Researchers have theorized that the centrality of sexuality in human life can make the impacting effects of sexual violence especially damaging, as acts of sexual violence will destroy not only the victims themselves, but also the communities to which they belong.^{75,76} Thus, when the intent of the actual and symbolic destruction of the surrounding group is achieved through the victims of organized sexual violence, it should therefore be seen as *genocide*, by definition.^{77,78}

Investigators have come to understand rape as a violation against an individual's sexual safety autonomy, while genocide is the intended destruction or violation of a group of people, but in both, the central motivator is to leave 'wounded survivors'.⁷⁹ Early feminist theories of rape have suggested power assertion as the main objective underlying every sexual assault,

71 Carroll, K. K., Lofgreen, A. M., Weaver, D. C., Held, P., Klassen, B. J., Smith, D. L., Cerretti, J. (2016). Rape as a weapon of war(riors): The militarization of sexual violence in the United States, 1990-2000. *Gender & History*, 28(3), 794-812.

72 Sitkin, R. A., Lee, B. X., & Lee, G. (2019). To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, article in press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.01.013>

73 Carroll, K. K., Lofgreen, A. M., Weaver, D. C., Held, P., Klassen, B. J., Smith, D. L., Cerretti, J. (2016). Rape as a weapon of war(riors): The militarization of sexual violence in the United States, 1990-2000. *Gender & History*, 28(3), 794-812.

74 Sitkin, R. A., Lee, B. X., & Lee, G. (2019). To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, article in press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.01.013>

75 Carroll, K. K., Lofgreen, A. M., Weaver, D. C., Held, P., Klassen, B. J., Smith, D. L., Cerretti, J. (2016). Rape as a weapon of war(riors): The militarization of sexual violence in the United States, 1990-2000. *Gender & History*, 28(3), 794-812.

76 Sitkin, R. A., Lee, B. X., & Lee, G. (2019). To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, article in press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.01.013>

77 Carroll, K. K., Lofgreen, A. M., Weaver, D. C., Held, P., Klassen, B. J., Smith, D. L., Cerretti, J. (2016). Rape as a weapon of war(riors): The militarization of sexual violence in the United States, 1990-2000. *Gender & History*, 28(3), 794-812.

78 Sitkin, R. A., Lee, B. X., & Lee, G. (2019). To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, article in press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.01.013>

79 de Vito, D., Gill, A. & Short, D. (2009). Rape characterized as genocide. *International Journal on Human Rights*, 10(6), 29-52.

debunking the stance that these events have anything to do with healthy attraction or sexual interest, as “all rape is an exercise of power”.⁸⁰ More recently, researchers have criticized modern views that have only held definitions of rape strictly at an individual level, which ignore the broader socio-political aims of all forms of sexual violence against women, including rape in war.⁸¹ Some have even theorized rape as an economic crime, as survivors’ employment is often disrupted in several ways, including a need for time off, diminished performance, job loss, and/or inability to work as a result of the trauma.⁸² It was further found that by disrupting income or reducing earning power, all of the mentioned employment consequences had implications for survivors’ economic well-being in the months or years following the assault, potentially changing their lifelong financial trajectories entirely.⁸³

An attack on the collective...

How long has it even been going on?

What is it trying to do...?

...what is its reach?

My mind continually returns to questioning what part about the collision of his and mine had compelled him to so abruptly go from abrasive, uncooperative Q&A, to suddenly leaning forward and kissing me, then, not listening multiple times when I expressively did not consent, and continuing to attempt sexual coercion several times. To me, this all seemed so far outside the realm of what was appropriate or even possible for the situation, not even “an option” that

⁸⁰ Brownmiller, S. (1975). *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. London: Penguin.

⁸¹ Giles, W. & Hyndman, J. (2004). *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflicts Zones*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁸² Loya, R. M. (2015). Rape as an Economic Crime: The Impact of Sexual Violence on Survivors’ Employment and Economic Well-Being. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(16), 2793-2813. doi: 10.1177/0886260514554291.

⁸³ Loya, R. M. (2015). Rape as an Economic Crime: The Impact of Sexual Violence on Survivors’ Employment and Economic Well-Being. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(16), 2793-2813. doi: 10.1177/0886260514554291.

could occur in the time and space of a research project. After all, I had all of his identifying information. Hell, I even had his signature on a form, stating that he consented to me interviewing him. Yet, it all still happened. He shut me up, appearing confident and satisfied while doing it, and after, as if victorious in the exchange.

Even once I was out of the situation, when I tried to discuss what had happened with other people, some seemed to dismissively regard it as something normal that women just (have to) go through, encouraging me to move on from the event and not think about it. Others asked me if I had reported him. That thought had never even crossed my mind. I have observed far too many times among those who have experienced far worse offenses than I, and the survivors of more damaging sexually violent crimes had more concrete evidence, but still did not see any justice, but instead were only met with unhelpful stigma and shame by incredulous members of their own communities.

Plus, this situation was “different,” and so damn complicated—convoluted...because of the interview project...the confidentiality...my assumed ethical responsibilities to him...and admittedly, my confusion about it all, plus my sympathies for the fact that I was the one asking him emotionally difficult questions which seemed to aggravate his defensive reactions (enacted as offensive actions upon me) to protect himself. Another common reaction from some who heard me discuss the events of the interview project was remarking how *unbelievable* it actually was, even to the point of their laughter, or reacting with surprise, “What?!” With my dismal announcement, “He kissed me...” I would mostly see looks of absolute shock and surprise, having one young undergraduate even ask for clarification in a horrified whisper, “...on the lips?!”

Disbelief.

Denial.

...grief.

What then, was lost?

What *is* lost every time a soul is reminded that it must stay trapped inside the same, unchangeable body, left with a reel of memories that it will never be able to erase or escape, its fate, predetermined as sexually sacrificial to the world?

One researcher, Linder, out of a trauma institute in Canada, explored the psychospiritual impacts of sexual abuse (in the study, among childhood survivors).⁸⁴ With relative compassion to her patients' experiences, she artfully identified "a spectrum of soul loss," ranging from soul wounding, to soul withering, soul shattering, soul flight, soul theft, and to the eventual finite state of soul murder. In my personal case of what had occurred, I position the particular experience of violation somewhere between soul wounding and soul shattering, with brief moments of soul flight that I try to leave outside of me—for they do not feel like they are 'supposed to be' my moments or memories, but yet they are.

(Insert Figure 1)

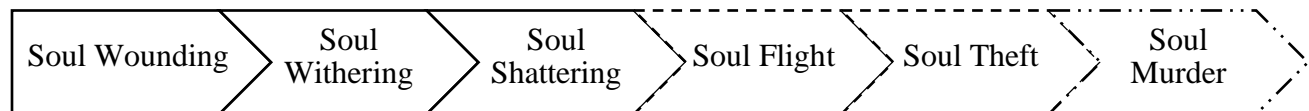


Figure 1. A Spectrum of Soul Loss: Psychospiritual Impacts of Sexual Abuses⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Linder, J. (2015). Exploring Soul Loss Through Arts-Based Research. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 34(1-2), 143-150.

⁸⁵ Linder, J. (2015). Exploring Soul Loss Through Arts-Based Research. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 34(1-2), 143-150.

Sexual trauma is unique from other types, as indicated by the model, in that each state of experience carries an aggressing impact, along with a need to escape the damaging conditions, even to the point of death from them.⁸⁶ It is further notable how the model deliberately makes conscious a clear distinction between the body as a physical entity from which to escape, and the person-being who is a soul, bound within a physical body. Another scholar, Minge, also out of University of South Florida, used embodied art combining painting, autoethnography, and poetry to understand the ways in which the body stores the memory of rape.⁸⁷

In her work, Minge penned:

I am a stained body. I have been stained by rape and confined in this body. My body is disconnected. My body is cut, bruised, and complicated. In the same moment, I am fluid and mobile. Like water, I have no grounding and my feet do not have a platform to rest on. I float, move my limbs, and try to keep my head in the air so I can breathe. As water moves, it forms itself to the shape of the container that traps it. I am contained water. My soul, my spirit, knows its potential, and it aches to seep into different structures. It yearns to freeze, to evaporate, and to float above the body into which it has molded. But the memories hold and contain me. Memories of rape spite my body, spite my spirit. These memories, like oil, cut into the water. This body is disconnected. I yearn for connection and wholeness with my sexual body.⁸⁸

Both Minge's survivor poem and Linder's theoretical model illustrate in different ways (1) the embodied experience of entrapment, and an articulated need to escape, and (2) the

⁸⁶ Linder, J. (2015). Exploring Soul Loss Through Arts-Based Research. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 34(1-2), 143-150.

⁸⁷ Minge, J. M. (2007). The Stained Body: A Fusion of Embodied Art on Rape and Love. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 252-280.

⁸⁸ Minge, J. M. (2007). The Stained Body: A Fusion of Embodied Art on Rape and Love. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 252-280.

spiritual impacts associated with sexual violence on a person, pointing to the mind-body connection as a central facet of ‘injury’.^{89,90} Particularly with consideration to understanding how sexual assault may be leveraged as a form of ‘domestic genocide’ at broad societal levels, it is imperative to underscore the act of bodily violence as holistically detrimental and in need of address.

Despite the United States government’s presentation of its military as global protectors against sexual violence, the stark contrast of commission of sexual assault by military members against fellow service members and civilians cannot be ignored, particularly for the way it illuminates major conflicts of value interests.⁹¹ If men in patriarchal societies have been going to war in defense of “their” women throughout history, what does it mean when and once that warfare is turned inward? What does it mean when military, and even civilian, men, wage war against “their own” women? What does it mean that, even when a civilian woman becomes a soldier, she is (still...) more readily seen by her own brothers, not as an equal, but as an enemy to be dehumanized and destroyed with sexual violence as the main mode of weaponry?

A Silent Civil War...waging against its own...what is it for?

Maybe...some do not see ‘us’ as being of the same, as I seek to see us.

What is it, exactly, that some seem to seek from others to submit to them? What is it for?

What would ‘utopia’ actually look like to the majority?

The function of power in sexual violence, especially as a weapon of war, is used to (1) affirm constructions of women as male property, (2) de-masculinize conquered male enemies,

⁸⁹ Linder, J. (2015). Exploring Soul Loss Through Arts-Based Research. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 34(1-2), 143-150.

⁹⁰ Minge, J. M. (2007). The Stained Body: A Fusion of Embodied Art on Rape and Love. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 252-280.

⁹¹ Carroll, K. K., Lofgreen, A. M., Weaver, D. C., Held, P., Klassen, B. J., Smith, D. L., Cerretti, J. (2016). Rape as a weapon of war(riors): The militarization of sexual violence in the United States, 1990-2000. *Gender & History*, 28(3), 794-812.

(3) form deep male bonds of misogyny that strengthen the solidarity need for battle, (4) precondition soldiers to dehumanize the enemy, and (5) carry out ethnic cleansing and genocide strategically.⁹² The intents of intersectional feminism become imperative here, for the critical areas of sex and race are pertinent, as the foundation to perceiving an ‘unequal view of the other group’ is the core driver to identifying “an enemy”.^{93,94}

With an equal view of all, there would be no enemies.

Weaponry via sexualization as a method of human dominance has remained a continuing social problem throughout history. Previously, the issue of sexualization specifically in research practices had only emerged between inquiry dyads of women researchers and male informants (1) who had demonstrated a history of violence against women, (2) who held elite positions of power, or (3) who were participating in research focused principally upon the examination of gender dynamics.⁹⁵ Researchers also have asserted that conducting fieldwork research on and around conditions of wartime rape demonstrate the researcher’s profile and positionality, directly affecting the dialogical process to be structured by researcher and informant, impacted by wider political processes within the country or research site.⁹⁶ It is also acknowledged that there has been little discussion to address what occurs in traditional research settings (i.e., fieldwork in communities, in informants’ homes, in public spaces), and in other contexts when the defined

⁹² de Vito, D., Gill, A. & Short, D. (2009). Rape characterized as genocide. *International Journal on Human Rights*, 10(6), 29-52.

⁹³ Carroll, K. K., Lofgreen, A. M., Weaver, D. C., Held, P., Klassen, B. J., Smith, D. L., Cerretti, J. (2016). Rape as a weapon of war(riors): The militarization of sexual violence in the United States, 1990-2000. *Gender & History*, 28(3), 794-812.

⁹⁴ de Vito, D., Gill, A. & Short, D. (2009). Rape characterized as genocide. *International Journal on Human Rights*, 10(6), 29-52.

⁹⁵ Harries, B. (2016). What’s sex got to do with it? When a woman asks questions. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 59, 48-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.10.002>

⁹⁶ Simic, O. (2015). Feminist Research in Transitional Justice Studies: Navigating Silences and Disruptions in the Field. *Human Rights Review*, 17, 95-113.

intent of inquiry is not to elicit understandings of issues related to sex or gender as its primary interview purpose, but rather are themes informants simply interject at their own free will.⁹⁷

Recent advances in research on sexual aggression have more concretely considered the motivating factors in the perpetration of sexual violence against women. Investigators identified thirteen different motives for sex, grouped into four domains: (1) *physical motives* – stress reduction, pleasure, physical desirability, and experience seeking, (2) *goal attainment* – resources, social status, revenge, and utilitarian motives, (3) *insecurity* – boosting self-esteem, having sex out of duty or pressure, and “mate guarding” (to prevent a partner from leaving the relationship), and (4) *emotional factors* – love, commitment, and expression.^{98,99}

Troublingly, a key difference to characterize sexual aggressors from non-sexual aggressors appears to be the pursuit of sex in the absence of consent, circumstantially attaining the goal of achieving sexual encounters through use of reckless, defiant, deviant, covert, or overt antisocial tactics.¹⁰⁰ As much as I did not want to face these important elements of sexual deviance surrounding the assault, I would soon learn that women’s burden of having to navigate men’s sexually antisocial behavior was not only my private issue, but one shared with many other women, too; women far outside of the academy, even some of the ones that I had believed to represent iconographic images of “powerful women” in media—yes...them, too.

#MeToo

When I first became aware of the #MeToo movement, it was so much clearer to me that incidences like mine were not unique or occurring in isolation. The disturbingly difficult to

⁹⁷ Simic, O. (2015). Feminist Research in Transitional Justice Studies: Navigating Silences and Disruptions in the Field. *Human Rights Review*, 17, 95-113.

⁹⁸ Hill, C. A. & Preston, L. K. (1996). Individual differences in the experience of sexual motivation: Theory and measurement of dispositional sexual motives. *Journal of Sex Research*, 33, 27-45.

⁹⁹ Meston, C. M. & Buss, D. M. (2007). Why humans have sex. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 36, 477-507.

¹⁰⁰ Lussier, P. & Cale, J. (2016). Understanding the origins and the development of rape and sexual aggression against women: Four generations of research and theorizing. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 31, 66-81.

count rising number of men in the public eye who have been accused of sexual misconduct, assault, and rape, with many stepping down from their positions of power, or who have been convicted and now incarcerated, are as follows (to be succinct): Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, R. Kelly, Kevin Spacey, Matt Lauer, Bill O'Reilly, Al Franken, Louis C. K., Former Judge Ray Moore, Richard Meier, and far too many more to list without overtaking this current writing.¹⁰¹

Contrary to common belief, and unbeknownst to me at the time, the movement originally began over a decade ago, shortly after the start of the current millennium. In 2006, Tarana Burke was the original creator of #MeToo.¹⁰² She recalled an experience working for a youth development organization in Selma, Alabama nine years earlier.¹⁰³ In 1997, a 13-year-old-girl disclosed to Burke that she had been sexually abused. Burke found herself disturbed over the fact that in her responsiveness, with all her empathy and desire to help, she actually did not have any words, plans, or resources to provide.

“I didn't have a response or a way to help her in that moment, and I couldn't even say, 'me too'. It really bothered me, and it sat in my spirit for a long time,” said Burke.^{104,105} As time went on in her work, dozens of young black girls in the community confided their similar stories in her. Nine years later, she created Justbe Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to survivors of sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. In structuring the community resource, she sought to provide the very help that would have supported that 13-year-old-girl a near decade prior. She named the movement, “Me Too”.^{106,107}

¹⁰¹ Gilbert, S. M. (2018). In the Labyrinth of #MeToo: Addressing sexual aggression and power in contemporary society also means questioning what the feminist movement has really been about. *The American Scholar*, Summer 2018.

¹⁰² Garcia, S. E. (2017). The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags. *The New York Times*.

¹⁰³ TED Speaker: Tarana Burke. *Civil rights activist*. Speaker description accessed online 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Garcia, S. E. (2017). The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags. *The New York Times*.

¹⁰⁵ TED Speaker: Tarana Burke. *Civil rights activist*. Speaker description accessed online 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Garcia, S. E. (2017). The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags. *The New York Times*.

¹⁰⁷ TED Speaker: Tarana Burke. *Civil rights activist*. Speaker description accessed online 2019.

In the years to follow, the digitization of the human world would create new technologies and platforms, enabling more communication globally and cross-culturally. As a result, these new forms of widespread digital communication have caught the attention of public relations and media scholars, as power imbalances between traditionally well-resourced corporations and nonprofit activist groups appeared leveled, with everyone's voice now more visible, and expressed more collectively, when engaged online.¹⁰⁸

Social movement organizations like #MeToo are successful by their ability to connect actors and motivate them toward action.¹⁰⁹ Virtual networks have accelerated the free exchange of ideas and movement rapidity, helping participants establish priorities, and identify the issues and concerns most central to activism. While novel technology-bound constructs like social listening and hashtag activism are relevant to the success of social movement organizations, what appears most central to the progress of #MeToo has been its core driver: a widespread *participatory culture*.¹¹⁰ Participatory culture is defined as the converging site of production, consumption, and content.¹¹¹ In an open digital world, the freedom for *anyone* to participate, occupy, or curate has seemed to turn the tide, gradually advancing a newfound sense of individual and collective empowerment among the people, even if only among a perceived 'minority'.

Around the same time, modern feminists of the third millennium began to question who truly were the beneficiaries of the "sexual revolution," ponderings made in reactionary response

¹⁰⁸ Tombleson, B. & Wolf, K. (2017). Rethinking the circuit of culture: How participatory culture has transformed cross-cultural communication. *Public Relations Review*, 43, 14-25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.10.017>

¹⁰⁹ Xiong, Y., Cho, M. & Boatwright, B. (2018). Hashtag activism and message frames along social movement organizations: Semantic network analysis and thematic analysis of Twitter during the #MeToo movement. *Public Relations Review*, (*in press*). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.10.014>

¹¹⁰ Tombleson, B. & Wolf, K. (2017). Rethinking the circuit of culture: How participatory culture has transformed cross-cultural communication. *Public Relations Review*, 43, 14-25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.10.017>

¹¹¹ Tombleson, B. & Wolf, K. (2017). Rethinking the circuit of culture: How participatory culture has transformed cross-cultural communication. *Public Relations Review*, 43, 14-25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.10.017>

to their own personally lived experiences, of *expectations* to engage in sex, rather than actually having their own *liberation* to do so *or not*.¹¹² Everything about the resulting popular culture on this side of the new era appeared to reinforce a, somehow, mutated and advanced variety of blatant sexualization, which was anything but “liberating” for women. “Sexual pressure isn’t something a girl can fight off, boy by boy, because the whole cultural gorilla squeezes her brain: she’s a ‘bitch’ if she turns down sex and a ‘ho’ if she consents—and not just in rap songs, but in real-life college settings”.¹¹³ Contrary to the “free” cultural connotations of peace and love associated with the sexual liberation era of the sixties, seventies, eighties, and beyond, many women still somehow had found their sexualities beginning with reported themes of *grief*, as well as other disturbingly familiar constructs which appear to persistently recur throughout time and culture, including body image, ignorance, fears, coercion, and sexual violence.^{114,115}

As a political, social, and cultural matter, sexual violence is a problem the United States cannot ignore. Every 73 seconds, an American person is sexually assaulted, resulting in millions of people affected each year, with young people under the age of 30 most susceptible, young women and girls in particular.¹¹⁶ According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, one in three women (33%) and one in four men (25%) have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact during their lifetimes.¹¹⁷

Additionally, a reported figure of nearly one in every five women (20%) and one in thirty-eight

¹¹² Gullette, M. M. (2008). Then and now: What have the “sexual revolutions” wrought? *Women’s Review of Books*, 25(1), January/February.

¹¹³ Gullette, M. M. (2008). Then and now: What have the “sexual revolutions” wrought? *Women’s Review of Books*, 25(1), January/February.

¹¹⁴ Bruley, S. & Forster, L. (2016). Historicising the Women’s Liberation Movement. *Women’s History Review*, 25(5), 697-700.

¹¹⁵ Gullette, M. M. (2008). Then and now: What have the “sexual revolutions” wrought? *Women’s Review of Books*, 25(1), January/February.

¹¹⁶ *Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics*. RAINN. Publicly accessed online 2019. <www.rainn.org>

¹¹⁷ Preventing Sexual Violence: How Big is the Problem? *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention*. Last reviewed March 12, 2019.

men (0.026%) has experienced completed or attempted rape.¹¹⁸ Findings show that the violence can begin early in the lifespan, as one in three (33%) young women victims of rape will experience it for the first time between 11 and 17 years of age, while one in eight girls (13%) will experience the trauma before reaching age 10.¹¹⁹ Perhaps these problematic findings help to explain why a consistent, significant disparity exists across rates of major depression in genders, alarmingly higher among adolescent girls (20%), especially compared to much lower rates observed in adolescent boys (6.8%) of the same age range (i.e., 12 - 17).¹²⁰

In 1992, Dean Kilpatrick, a psychologist and sexual violence researcher at the Medical University of South Carolina, released the study *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation*, and while the work has been widely cited, and used to inform some policies at the state level, researchers were expecting to see more movement to widespread change as a result of the important findings.¹²¹ The report mainly focused on the forcible rape of women, excluding other forms of sexual assault that do not involve force, threat of force, or penetration.¹²² There were alarming, disturbing statistics contained in the report, including estimated rates of 1.3 forcible rapes per minute, 78 per hour, 1,871 per day, 56,916 per month, and 683,000 per year...next to the troubling fact that all of these were reportedly happening in “the land of ‘*the free*’” and “the home of ‘*the brave*’”.¹²³ Among the findings that troubled Kilpatrick the most: (1) “about 80%

¹¹⁸ Preventing Sexual Violence: How Big is the Problem? *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention.* Last reviewed March 12, 2019.

¹¹⁹ Preventing Sexual Violence: How Big is the Problem? *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention.* Last reviewed March 12, 2019.

¹²⁰ *Past Year Prevalence of Major Depressive Episode Among U.S. Adolescents* (2017). Data courtesy of SAMHSA; National Institute of Mental Health. Accessed online 2019.

¹²¹ Wildeman, M. K. (2018). MUSC researcher of rape in America says it's time to capitalize on the #MeToo movement. *Post and Courier*, May 29, 2018.

¹²² *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation.* (1992). National Victim Center; Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center. April 23, 1992.

¹²³ *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation.* (1992). National Victim Center; Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center. April 23, 1992.

of women who had been raped were attacked by someone they knew,” and (2) “the number of women who said they had been raped when they were 11 years old or younger was nearly 30% of all victims”.¹²⁴

While the researchers were hoping people would take more notice, Kilpatrick was not as optimistic. “Lightning has to strike in a particular way that’s really predictable. I don’t have a magic wand to do this. If somebody told me going into it, ‘you’re going to still be dealing with a lot of the same issues 40 years later,’ I’m not sure exactly how I would have dealt with that.”¹²⁵ Now, with the #MeToo movement, he seems to have optimism again, as “Anybody who’s really interested in doing something about this problem is looking for reasons to think that maybe we’ve turned a corner, and that maybe things will be different. We’ve also seen times where we thought that was happening before, and it didn’t.”¹²⁶

Despite the fact that the U.S. Department of Justice suggests that the rate of women raped has been slowly decreasing over time, they do not pragmatically consider nor discuss the cited reasons why victims have chosen not to report sex crimes, as within the same report, “most important reason for not reporting,” was quantified by the statement “police would not do anything to help,” and was the only survey item to significantly increase over time, actually more than doubling over a 16-year period.¹²⁷ The findings of such studies may be approached too partially in effort to ‘prove out’ efficacy of the department’s ‘productivity’ rather than address the complex, socially rooted issues that underlie sex crimes.

¹²⁴ Wildeman, M. K. (2018). MUSC researcher of rape in America says it’s time to capitalize on the #MeToo movement. *Post and Courier*, May 29, 2018.

¹²⁵ Wildeman, M. K. (2018). MUSC researcher of rape in America says it’s time to capitalize on the #MeToo movement. *Post and Courier*, May 29, 2018.

¹²⁶ Wildeman, M. K. (2018). MUSC researcher of rape in America says it’s time to capitalize on the #MeToo movement. *Post and Courier*, May 29, 2018.

¹²⁷ Planty, M., Langston, L., Krebs, C., Berzofsky, M. & Smiley-McDonald, H. (2013). *Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report, NCJ 240655. March 2013, Revised May 2016.

Just as today's Black Lives Matter activism is oft branded as "the new Civil Rights movement," there implies a suggestion that the roots of these critical issues—like #MeToo, with its paralleling social comparison as a revival of Women's Liberation Movement—were never truly resolved to begin with.^{128,129} Their core causes still remain a pervasive, integrated part of our global social world, as women remain generally dissatisfied with their unequal role and position in society, resulting in disadvantaged economic and social implications.^{130,131} The truths of the most marginalized voices tend to stay buried... or shouted over, by majority narratives.

On October 15, 2017, Hollywood actress turned activist, Alyssa Milano, disrupted the status quo when she shared the following tweet on Twitter:

"If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet."

With her accompanying re-tweet:

"Me too.

Suggested by a friend: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."¹³²

In the war of voices, there has long been a brewing need for a robust, bellowing cry from the grandest, unrealized army of all: the silent women's collective. At the heart of the cathartic movement: a beating network of women, engaging in battle, all in one resistance, with one heartbeat, one unbreakable pulse. Milano's infamous post was re-shared over half a million times within its first twenty-four hours, and with the impressive reach of a modern digital world,

¹²⁸ Jackson, S. J. (2016). (Re)Imagining Intersectional Democracy from Black Feminism to Hashtag Activism. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39(4), 375-379. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2016.1226654>

¹²⁹ Bruley, S. & Forster, L. (2016). Historicising the Women's Liberation Movement. *Women's History Review*, 25(5), 697-700.

¹³⁰ Jackson, S. J. (2016). (Re)Imagining Intersectional Democracy from Black Feminism to Hashtag Activism. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39(4), 375-379. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2016.1226654>

¹³¹ Bruley, S. & Forster, L. (2016). Historicising the Women's Liberation Movement. *Women's History Review*, 25(5), 697-700.

¹³² Alyssa Milano on Twitter. Twitter.com; October 15, 2017. Publicly accessed online 2019.

the phenomenon was not only bound to have influence in the U.S. but other countries, like Sweden, India, and Japan, going on to launch a viral, global social movement.¹³³

A sonic boom of truth across the universe.

There was no shouting over—no interrupting—such a brave sound...

...it is all a part of the same Silent Civil War...

...and women just realized the might and size of our silent army.

Critics have pointed to the disparity in social attention paid to this more recent wave of the #MeToo movement, compared to Burke's efforts in 2006, as a standing feature of the continued need for intersectional feminism, by suggesting that the marginalization of women of color's voices and experiences was the driving difference for why the second wave of the movement caught on, and the first did not (re: Milano's 'whiteness').¹³⁴ Others instead argue the recent advancement as mostly a political reaction, that "(the current president)'s impunity serves as a trigger provoking at the heart of #MeToo," and that while there are many reasons to find fault with 45, it is distinctly galling during the current accountability era that he faced zero consequence after open admission to sexual predation.¹³⁵ In the labyrinth of #MeToo, with new vocabularies made to accessibly describe familiar experiences of violation across contexts, many scholars are left asking the troubling question, "Are every woman's ambiguous sexual traumas really what the previously unidentified core of feminism has actually been about?"¹³⁶

Despite these unknowns, what is clear is that women of today's era are shifting the tides in new ways. Women are resisting. Women are fighting back.

¹³³ Tambe, A. (2018). Reckoning with the Silences of #MeToo. *Feminist Studies*, 44(1), 197-203.

¹³⁴ Tambe, A. (2018). Reckoning with the Silences of #MeToo. *Feminist Studies*, 44(1), 197-203.

¹³⁵ Tambe, A. (2018). Reckoning with the Silences of #MeToo. *Feminist Studies*, 44(1), 197-203.

¹³⁶ Gilbert, S. M. (2018). In the Labyrinth of #MeToo: Addressing sexual aggression and power in contemporary society also means questioning what the feminist movement has really been about. *The American Scholar*, Summer 2018.

The Gentle Art of Jiu-Jitsu

Given the rise in public attention paid to sexual assault over the past decade, traditional prevention models may be in urgent need of evolution. Early “prevention models” instructed women to employ restrictive behaviors, like altering their appearance or not going to certain spaces at certain times, as well as other “safety strategies,” none of which were evidence-based.^{137,138} Evidence has shown that strategies focused on the role of bystanders look promising; however, studies centered on perpetrator-focused approaches have unfortunately not demonstrated any effectiveness for preventing violence, reducing perpetration, nor reducing victimization.^{139,140,141,142,143,144,145,146} Aside from perpetrator- or bystander-focused prevention models, women’s self-defense training is the *only* sexual violence prevention strategy which has

¹³⁷ Hollander, J. A. (2018). Women’s self-defense and sexual assault resistance: The state of the field. *Sociology Compass*, 12, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12597>

¹³⁸ Stanko, E. A. (1997). Safety talk: Conceptualizing women's risk assessment as a “technology of the soul”. *Theoretical Criminology*, 1, 479–499.

¹³⁹ Hollander, J. A. (2018). Women’s self-defense and sexual assault resistance: The state of the field. *Sociology Compass*, 12, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12597>

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, L. A. & Whiston, S. C. (2005). Sexual assault education programs: A meta-analytic examination of their effectiveness. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 29(4), 374–388. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2005.00237.x>

¹⁴¹ DeGue, S., Valle, L. A., Holt, M. K., Massetti, G. M., Matjasko, J. L. & Tharp, A. T. (2014). A systematic review of primary prevention strategies for sexual violence perpetration. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19(4), 346–362. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2014.05.004>

¹⁴² Lonsway, K. A., Banyard, V. L., Berkowitz, A. D., Gidycz, C. A., Katz, J. T., Koss, M. P. & Ullman, S. E. (2009). Rape prevention and risk reduction: Review of the research literature for practitioners. Harrisburg, PA: VAWNet, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence/Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Retrieved from <http://www.vawnet.org>

¹⁴³ Orchowski, L. M., Gidycz, C. A. & Murphy, M. J. (2010). Preventing campus-based sexual violence. In K. L. Kaufman (Ed.), *The prevention of sexual violence: A practitioner's sourcebook*, 415–447. Holyoke, MA: NEARI Press.

¹⁴⁴ Coker, A. L., Bush, H. M., Cook-Craig, P. G., DeGue, S. A., Clear, E. R., Brancato, C. J. & Recktenwald, E. A. (2017). RCT testing bystander effectiveness to reduce violence. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 52(5), 566–578.

¹⁴⁵ Jouriles, E. N., Krauss, A., Vu, N. L., Banyard, V. L. & McDonald, R. (2018). Bystander programs addressing sexual violence on college campuses: A systematic review and meta-analysis of program outcomes and delivery methods. *Journal of American College Health*. <https://doi.org/1080/07448481.2018.1431906>

¹⁴⁶ Edwards, K. M., Orchowski, L. M., Hollander, J. A., Banyard, V. L., Senn, C. Y. & Gidycz, C. A. (2018). *Integrating sexual assault resistance, bystander and men's social norms strategies to prevent sexual violence on college campuses: An idea whose time has come*. Unpublished manuscript.

actually demonstrated effectiveness for reducing rates of *victimization*.¹⁴⁷ Studies from Canada, Kenya, and the U.S. found that women are much less likely to be assaulted after taking an empowerment-based self-defense class.^{148,149,150,151} Despite these findings, The White House Task Force’s recommendations for preventing sexual assault on college campuses ignored women’s self-defense training, citing the CDC’s analysis of existing programs, which only currently focus on perpetrator prevention methods, despite their demonstrated *ineffectiveness*.^{152,153,154} This is certainly a troubling policy decision, as one study of sociology undergraduates found that female students were already significantly less likely to take a self-defense class than their male counterparts were, even though the young women arguably could have benefitted more from the curriculum given its useful applications to address the targeted problem of sexual violence waged specifically against college-aged women.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁷ Hollander, J. A. (2018). Women’s self-defense and sexual assault resistance: The state of the field. *Sociology Compass*, 12, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12597>

¹⁴⁸ Hollander, J. A. (2014). Does self-defense training prevent sexual violence against women? *Violence Against Women*, 20(3), 252–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801214526046>

¹⁴⁹ Sarnquist, C., Omondi, B., Sinclair, J., Gitau, C., Paiva, L., Mulinge, M. & Maldonado, Y. (2014). Rape prevention through empowerment of adolescent girls. *Pediatrics*, 133(5), e1226–e1232. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-3414>

¹⁵⁰ Senn, C. Y., Eliasziw, M., Barata, P. C., Thurston, W. E., Newby-Clark, I. R., Radtke, H. L. & Hobden, K. L. (2015). Efficacy of a sexual assault resistance program for university women. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 372(24), 2326–2335.

¹⁵¹ Sinclair, J., Sinclair, L., Otieno, E., Mulinge, M., Kapphahn, C. & Golden, N. H. (2013). A self-defense program reduces the incidence of sexual assault in Kenyan adolescent girls. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 53(3), 374–380. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.04.008>

¹⁵² Hollander, J. A. (2018). Women’s self-defense and sexual assault resistance: The state of the field. *Sociology Compass*, 12, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12597>

¹⁵³ Office of the Vice President and the White House Council on Women and Girls. (2014). *Not alone: The first report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault*. Washington, D.C.

¹⁵⁴ DeGue, S., Valle, L. A., Holt, M. K., Massetti, G. M., Matjasko, J. L. & Tharp, A. T. (2014). A systematic review of primary prevention strategies for sexual violence perpetration. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 19(4), 346–362. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2014.05.004>

¹⁵⁵ Asencio, E.K., Merrill, M. & Steiner, M. (2014). Self-esteem, the fear of crime, and the decision to protect oneself from victimization. *Sociological Forum*, 29(3), 587-606. doi: 10.1111/socf.12105

Why would the government not invest in nor promote the only evidence-based measures that demonstrated reduced rates of victimization, plus the improvement of cultural attitudes and bias toward women as equal persons?

Despite U.S. society's continuous cultural insistence to systemically and institutionally reinforce myths about the alleged weakness of women's bodies by preventing or undermining their displays of physical power, an increasing number of female athletes continue to challenge this status quo, which could ultimately work to increase women's confidence, power, respect, wealth, enjoyment of physicality, and escape from instances of sexual violence and the fear of sexual violence in society, at individual, communal, and collective levels.¹⁵⁶ Only somewhat recently in media, the iconic image of the "warrior woman" was introduced to cinematic depictions through martial arts films, impacting broader macro-culture. With this new portrayal, audiences witnessed female characters fighting male opponents as equals, and thus, challenging the traditionally accepted gender binary, particularly as it separates men and women by physical strength, illogically assuming her at a disadvantage, and automatically deeming her weaker or inferior by the assumption.¹⁵⁷ In terms of feminism and women's rights, the visual turn of the warrior woman appeared to result in a large sweeping cultural movement for women viewers to garner a newfound sense of empowerment, even when observed vicariously through a representative character.¹⁵⁸

Soon enough, postmodern American films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*; *Charlie's Angels*; and *Kill Bill* were depicting women in leading roles who fought their own

¹⁵⁶ Roth, A. & Basow, S. A. (2004). Femininity, Sports, and Feminism: Developing a theory of physical liberation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 28(3), 245-265. doi: 10.1177/0193723504266990

¹⁵⁷ Roth, A. & Basow, S. A. (2004). Femininity, Sports, and Feminism: Developing a theory of physical liberation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 28(3), 245-265. doi: 10.1177/0193723504266990

¹⁵⁸ Follo, G. (2012). A literature review of women and the martial arts: Where are we right now? *Sociology Compass*, 6(9), 707-717. doi: 10.1111/j.1751-9020.2012.00487.x

physical battles, subtly acknowledging the realities of their private life worlds in which they often had to fight, even against ‘their own men,’ all worked to gradually widen the social cultural acceptance for all women to pursue martial arts.^{159,160} This has been especially true as observed by the recent wave of a diverse range of representation for women combat fighters in mixed martial arts (MMA), like Holly Holm, Amanda Nunes, Cris Cyborg, Joanna Jedrzejczyk, Valentina Shevchenko, Ronda Rousey, and Miesha Tate, to name a few. In modern practice, MMA is a full contact sport which involves the use of various martial arts disciplines at once, allowing athletes to chain together freeform combinations of grappling, striking, take-downs, or submissions to defeat an opponent.¹⁶¹ As a spectator, one of the fighting styles frequently employed effectively by many of the women fighters had always fascinated and stood out to me more than any of the others as a spectator of the sport: the element of ground fighting—Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Jiu-jitsu, or its direct translation, “gentle art,” originated as a Japanese style of submission grappling. The combat style does not engage the use of weapons, but only the bare hands, used for throwing an opponent, applying joint manipulations (e.g., arm bar, leg lock, wrist lock), or restricting airways, circulation to arteries, or the esophagus (e.g., triangle choke, guillotine choke).^{162,163} Despite its potentially devastating, even potentially lethal physical impacts, it is ironically named ‘the gentle art’ for its slow, smooth, controlled nature, yet marked by deceptive

¹⁵⁹ Yip, M. F. (2013). The difficulty of difference: Rethinking the woman warrior figure in Hong Kong martial arts cinema. *Chinese Literature Today*, 3(1,2), 82-87.

¹⁶⁰ Green, K. (2015). Tales from the mat: Narrating men and making meaning in the martial arts gym. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 45(4), 419-450. doi: 10.1177/0891241615573786

¹⁶¹ Cunningham, R. & Turner, M.J. (2016). Using rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) with mixed martial arts (MMA) athletes to reduce irrational beliefs and increase unconditional self-acceptance. *Journal of Rational-Emotive Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy*, 34, 289-309.

¹⁶² Issitt, M. L. (2016). *Martial Arts*. Salem Press Encyclopedia.

¹⁶³ Kirby, G. (2019). Gentle Spirit of Jujitsu: The origin and benefits of ju-shin. *Black Belt*. February/March.

efficacy in requiring little energy to subdue a much larger, stronger opponent, made by the usage of leveraging techniques and strategy, as well as harnessing spirit, or chi energy (ju-shin).¹⁶⁴

In my quest to establish a firmer sense of safety in the world, jiu-jitsu seemed to deliver the solution I needed at the time, which was a controlled setting where I could practice feeling unsafe in order to eventually figure out how to feel safe in the face of challenging conditions. The particular martial art discipline put me right back into the physical combat situation of fighting on the ground, being underneath a person, and needing to understand how to feel calm and in control, to be able to think when endangered—unlike with most striking disciplines, which assume an upright standing stance from the feet, for example. The decision to train jiu-jitsu specifically was because of some of the techniques indicated for women’s resistance against sexual assault, like the triangle choke, an attack from defensive position on the back which employs the legs to restrict an assailant’s airways, which appeared demonstrably more effective and ‘natural’ to the realities of sexual assault situations, especially compared to some of the impractical applications of self-defense, like heel-stomping the top of an attacker’s foot if attacked while walking in stilettos, for example—an actual technique I had learned as an undergraduate in an elective women’s self-defense class.

First wave feminists of the Progressive Era (1890s-1920s) also found ways to create political power with their physical bodies by partaking in self-defense training, and one of their preferred styles was jiu-jitsu.¹⁶⁵

According to historians:

¹⁶⁴ Kirby, G. (2019). Gentle Spirit of Jujitsu: The origin and benefits of ju-shin. *Black Belt*. February/March.

¹⁶⁵ Rouse, W. & Slutsky, B. (2014). Empowering the physical and political self: Women and the practice of self-defense, 1890-1920. *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 13(4), 470-499.

Militant suffragettes used their bodies to convey discontent and resist oppression through marches, pickets, and hunger strikes. Yet, and perhaps more importantly, even average women, with no direct association with suffrage organizations, expressed a newfound sense of empowerment through physical training in boxing, wrestling, and jiu-jitsu.¹⁶⁶

By the 1920s, the association between physically strong women and politically capable women was clear.¹⁶⁷ Entry of women into the world of “manly arts” and male-dominated training spaces symbolized the success of women penetrating the world in a way that was highly political.¹⁶⁸ Former cultural narratives of women as “the weaker sex,” “the pampered sex,” or “the fairer sex” were directly challenged as women demonstrated physical strength with men who treated them as equals in training situations.¹⁶⁹ It is also relevant that jiu-jitsu training sites, specifically, were already early, complex cultural and political battlegrounds, for jiu-jitsu was initially perceived to be a threat in the U.S.¹⁷⁰ This irrational belief was ultimately subjugated by the war conflict between U.S. and Japan at the time.¹⁷¹ The cultural conflict was materialized by exoticizing, feminizing, and appropriating aspects of the art, in effort to—“keep” it, but—reassert the dominant features of western martial arts, the white race, and American masculinity around it (i.e., the cultural appropriation of jiu-jitsu).¹⁷²

To further exemplify this cultural, nationalist conflict in one early viewpoint:

¹⁶⁶ Rouse, W. & Slutsky, B. (2014). Empowering the physical and political self: Women and the practice of self-defense, 1890-1920. *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 13(4), 470-499.

¹⁶⁷ Rouse, W. & Slutsky, B. (2014). Empowering the physical and political self: Women and the practice of self-defense, 1890-1920. *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 13(4), 470-499.

¹⁶⁸ Rouse, W. & Slutsky, B. (2014). Empowering the physical and political self: Women and the practice of self-defense, 1890-1920. *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 13(4), 470-499.

¹⁶⁹ Rouse, W. (2015). Jiu-Jitsu Uncle Sam: The unmanly art of jiu-jitsu and the Yellow Peril threat in the Progressive Era United States. *Pacific Historical Review*, 84(4), 448-477.

¹⁷⁰ Rouse, W. (2015). Jiu-Jitsu Uncle Sam: The unmanly art of jiu-jitsu and the Yellow Peril threat in the Progressive Era United States. *Pacific Historical Review*, 84(4), 448-477.

¹⁷¹ Rouse, W. (2015). Jiu-Jitsu Uncle Sam: The unmanly art of jiu-jitsu and the Yellow Peril threat in the Progressive Era United States. *Pacific Historical Review*, 84(4), 448-477.

¹⁷² Rouse, W. (2015). Jiu-Jitsu Uncle Sam: The unmanly art of jiu-jitsu and the Yellow Peril threat in the Progressive Era United States. *Pacific Historical Review*, 84(4), 448-477.

A letter written by President Theodore Roosevelt to one of his children on February 24, 1905 demonstrated some of these attitudes of supremacy, as Roosevelt described a match between champion middleweight wrestler, Joseph Grant, and Japanese judo instructor, Yoshiaki (Yoshitsugu) Yamashita.¹⁷³ Rather than admit Yamashita as the superior grappler, Roosevelt instead faulted their forms of training, arguing, “wrestling was a sport with rules while jiu-jitsu was intended to kill or disable an opponent,” and “while Grant did not know what to do except put his opponent on his back, Yamashita was comfortable with fighting from this position.” Roosevelt also noted that within two minutes, “Yamashita had a submission hold on Grant that would have enabled him to break the big wrestler’s arm”.¹⁷⁴

Despite clear disparity in grappler abilities, Roosevelt continued to discredit Yamashita: With a little practice in the art I am sure that one of our big wrestlers or boxers, simply because of his greatly superior strength, would be able to kill any of those Japanese, who though very good men for their inches and pounds are altogether too small to hold their own against big, powerful, quick men who are as well trained.¹⁷⁵

In the final chapter of this work, I elaborate on similarly felt ways in which I, too, have experienced my own personal trials of verbal discrediting or disempowerment, despite my physical demonstrations of effective grappling on the mat.

Martha McCaughey advocates for the power of women resisting systemic issues of oppression through taking up their own physically embodied practices in her ethnographic work,

¹⁷³ Rouse, W. (2015). Jiu-Jitsuing Uncle Sam: The unmanly art of jiu-jitsu and the Yellow Peril threat in the Progressive Era United States. *Pacific Historical Review*, 84(4), 448-477.

¹⁷⁴ Rouse, W. (2015). Jiu-Jitsuing Uncle Sam: The unmanly art of jiu-jitsu and the Yellow Peril threat in the Progressive Era United States. *Pacific Historical Review*, 84(4), 448-477.

¹⁷⁵ Rouse, W. (2015). Jiu-Jitsuing Uncle Sam: The unmanly art of jiu-jitsu and the Yellow Peril threat in the Progressive Era United States. *Pacific Historical Review*, 84(4), 448-477.

Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense.¹⁷⁶ Physical feminism moves a step beyond corporeal feminism. While corporeal feminism understands the body as a part of the being of agency, consciousness, and reflection, physical feminism seeks to examine the ways that sexist ideologies, or gendered norms, have been inscribed and contested at the bodily level.¹⁷⁷ Physical feminism illustrates this process by “re-scripting” the female body, not only highlighting women’s ability to redefine their own bodies, but also the significance of corporeal change for consciousness.¹⁷⁸

Martha McCaughey, explains:

Self-defense culture challenges feminism to elaborate on the ways women can resist their subordination in a culture that demands specific kinds of bodies. It demands that feminism take seriously the corporeality and pleasure of that resistance. It demands that feminism get physical.¹⁷⁹

As gender is an ideology scribed to bodies and lived out through specific bodily practices, thereby producing social differences as rigidly ‘assigned’ by sex, then the practicing of self-defense, especially through the immersive format of mixed-sex martial arts, is one such way to re-construct, or “undo” what has already been materialized as habit and taken for granted as ‘second nature’ between the falsely separated dichotomy of feminine and masculine

¹⁷⁶ McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense*. New York University Press: New York and London.

¹⁷⁷ McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense*. New York University Press: New York and London.

¹⁷⁸ McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense*. New York University Press: New York and London.

¹⁷⁹ McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense*. New York University Press: New York and London.

behavior.^{180,181} While traditional paradigms of women’s self-defense training remain relevant for empowering women as active agents of their own bodies, and preparing them to be unafraid and willing to fight back with physical violence in response to the threat of sexual violence, I suggest that women’s truly integrated immersion in male-dominated martial arts communities may afford them to have more real social opportunities to engage in numerous training partnerships with male acquaintances, which offers great potentials to organically resist and re-structure compulsory norms of heterosexuality and male domination.¹⁸²

In a post-#MeToo era, several retaliatory actions from conservative lawmakers have sought restriction and reversal of women’s rights, having journalists and colloquialisms deem this camp of politicians “new authoritarians” who are “waging a war on women”.¹⁸³

Researchers have characterized trauma in the context of war by the following:

No one leaves the war with the same sense of living in the world in which they entered combat. Soldiers experience radical changes in their sense of time, identity and place. War is world changing. Much of the discourse on the human experience of war focuses on the ‘inner wars’ of the soldier, as if the soldier’s inner experience is radically separate from their immersion in the same real world that brought them to war and to which they are returning.¹⁸⁴

What if the war is already here?

¹⁸⁰ McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women’s Self-Defense*. New York University Press: New York and London.

¹⁸¹ Noel, H. (2009). Un-doing Gendered Power Relations Through Martial Arts? *International Journal of Social Inquiry*, 2(2), 17-37.

¹⁸² McCaughey, M. (1997). *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women’s Self-Defense*. New York University Press: New York and London.

¹⁸³ Beinart, P. (2019). *The New Authoritarians are Waging War on Women. Donald Trump’s ideological cousins around the world want to reverse the feminist gains of recent decades*. The Atlantic, January/February.

¹⁸⁴ Benner, P., Halpern, J., Gordon, D. R., Long Popell, C., & Kelly, P. W. (2018). Beyond Pathologizing Harm: Understanding PTSD in the Context of War Experience. *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 39, 45-72.

What if it is waged in ways that are quieter than bombs?

During this time of my life, I could increasingly feel my place solidifying within the war on women.

I simply needed to fight back.

To my pleasant discovery, there was a local MMA training facility nearby the university. When I researched it compared to other competitor gyms in the area, there was an image on the website at the time of a young woman with her hand raised as victor in a match, and she looked so confident and free. It was a significant reason I decided to go there and learn more about the school. One day, as the balmy Florida summer of 2015 melted into fall, I finally gathered enough courage to go and enter the building of the gym, unearthing a large room, its floor mostly covered by long cushioned mats, covering much of the center area of the open, sacred space. The first time I went inside, there was a class already in session. There were no women present. My nose was overwhelmed with the humid aroma of men sweating. But they all moved so gracefully, swiftly and adeptly on the mat, some leaping through the air, seeming to move about as if weightless, despite their large forms. There was a quiet undercurrent of energetic peace between each working pair, despite their efforts to essentially “submit” the other. The way they all moved flowed like a dance. There was a sense of control, but it appeared oriented as control over the self rather than control over the other. At the heart of everything, I could feel the most magnificent sense of peace in the air.

I knew I needed to be a part of this peace.

Making the decision to begin training there has been lifechanging, far beyond the scope of this inquiry. What began as a personal coping skill and form of escapism from the pressures and problems of my academic ‘self’ and world soon grew to become an integrated part of it, for

how it re-shaped my thinking, about everything. It has afforded me a completely new and safe physical space, contextually open to me doing the personal work I needed in order to re-define my shattered sense of safety and identity, particularly as it related to the intersection of my gendered body and my early attempts of practicing ‘being’ a researcher, in ways I had never been able to access before, even before the trauma. Here, *I* had anonymity and healthy distance from the imposed pressures of my academic self.

The physical training process eventually provided an additional layer of embodied analysis to what had occurred in the failed project(s). Though I felt somewhat removed from my ‘normal life’ and academy-bound identity, I still grappled with all of the same research questions on the mat as I did in the classroom, and then some. Most importantly to my own coping and recovery, being able to share meaningful goals with a large community of mostly men not only allowed me to learn how to trust in the collective again, but my belonging also provided me with many real opportunities to practice my own re-negotiation of verbal, physical, or situational boundaries, especially practicing assertiveness via ‘the gentle art of saying “no”.’

The recipients of my “no” were my comrades, real acquaintances and even friends of mine. This dynamic could point to a critical element currently lacking from other self-defense curriculums wherein ‘mock situations’ are created for women to shout and resist against an acting attacker, which does not realistically mimic the nature of how most sexual assault cases may really occur, most commonly through the violation of boundaries by someone the survivor knows. The applied practice of setting verbal boundaries against or saying “no” to a real friend or acquaintance can evoke a completely different sense of capability, particularly if one has not trained well for the precise situation, in contrast to one where the boundary violation is staged. Immersing in male dominated communities, martial arts training sites in particular, could afford

these very opportunities for women to practically apply saying “no” and firmly set boundaries with real acquaintances in safe settings, where the ultimate communal goal *is* physical safety.

Various physically assertive disciplines like jiu-jitsu or other mixed martial arts may be particularly beneficial for new graduate students, or any academics...*anyone*, to think about different forms of learning or “knowing” other than traditional education, how this may relate to knowledge production and inquiries, also to hone their individual capacities for discernment, self-confidence, trust in instinctive feelings, practice of ego diffusion, and continuing negotiation of power dynamics. Realizing that not every scholar will be willing or invested in ‘taking up their sword and shield,’ I therefore go on to present some insights, ultimately recommending agents of the academy to deploy more power structures into their qualitative research when it is necessary. (And sometimes, it *is* necessary.)

But first, I should really explain the story of why...

PART II: THE STORY

Chapter Two Foreword: The Art of Questioning

This chapter describes my beginning journey in the graduate program, introducing influential figures in the academy who would impact the trajectory of the story, shaping with me my ideas about research, collaborating productions of knowledge, culture, and social discovery. First, I describe the experience of coming to the academy and constructing my scholarly identity, influenced by both internal and institutional pressures. Then, I define my plans around the interview, and how the project had come to be, it now being a cracked artifact of my former career specialization and subsequent research area: military veterans support. Finally, I go on to describe the informant's inappropriate, sexually violent actions interjected into the research interview project gone awry.

Chapter Two: The Art of Questioning

Scene I: Becoming a Researcher

Fall 2014

First semester

In my first year of coursework in the program, I spent much time learning about the various methodologies, theoretical approaches, and philosophies in educational research. By the end of the year, I had even managed to survive both of my statistical analysis courses, which felt like a feat all on its own. What I thoroughly enjoyed most was the openness for discourse about important matters in education surrounding such subjects like human psychology, and social justice issues, that I was able to find within certain circles of the academy. My assigned peer

mentor and fellow graduate student in the program, Travis, was one of the first people I met on the initial day that I came to the campus learn more about the doctoral endeavor.

Travis was the type of scholar who was exemplary to all of us for his impressive number of publications and ongoing works in several areas of research, but his main focus examined the construct of biracialism—or, more specifically, Black-White biracialism in postmodern America. Being Asian-White biracial myself, his and my respective racial compositions only seemed like one additional point of relatedness that we were able to share, and to continue to build our budding friendship upon.

“These very identities that we are made to socially construct begin to corrode once magnified under the critical lens of the post-structural new materialist,” he would casually say while subtly adjusting his glasses, unwittingly intimidating the hell out of everyone. He was only thinking out loud, and, in a most artful way, he always managed to converse with everyone in a dignified manner that was non-pretentious, but nonetheless mind-blowing. It was clear to me he was explaining something not to be discrediting, only educative. Free dialogue with him always seemed to inform new insights, for me, at least. I can say with great certainty that he is one of the smartest people I will ever know in my lifetime. As this story continues to unfold, Travis would only go on to prove himself a great friend to me as well.

Our discussions on identity were both intriguing and helpful, as I found my role assimilation from veterans’ advisor at the local community college to graduate student who is expected to know how to teach undergraduates and conduct research...*abrupt*, to say the least. One day, Travis invited me to join him at a meeting on campus, hosted by a reading group of like-minded qualitative scholars. They were digesting and discussing the complex works of post-structuralist French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze. Even though the invitation was

spontaneous to the moment and I had not completed the reading to be discussed in the group, *Body Without Organs*, I decided I would attend as a productive way to learn more. Besides, I had already—in my “characteristically (un)graceful” entry into the program—encountered several minor challenges in the process of navigating through my first year, which had taught me two very important things by that point: (1) I could go to Travis with any situation I was facing, and (2) he would never steer me wrong.

We entered the meeting space, and both quietly took a seat at the long conference table. A soft-spoken young man with thin round glasses, dark hair, milk chocolatey brown skin, and a messenger bag slung around his shoulder was in attendance from the school psychology program. He entered the room and made his way into a large leather chair on the opposite side of the table. The three of us graduate students briefly exchanged pleasantries, and then sat together in a deafening cloud of the unspoken silent stress of our lives while we awaited the faculty, the sound of the buzzing lights above dominating the atmosphere. Several professors began to trickle in to join the meeting, but the one who was most remarkable to me was Dr. Jennifer Wolgemuth, who had insisted on everyone—including us students—to call her “Jenni”.

The first thing that struck me when she entered the room was her human aesthetic not being what I had expected to see for a tenured professor. Jenni had a small section of vibrant purple in the front of her short, naturally light brown hair, which all was peeking out from underneath a relaxed crocheted hat. She also adorned a small ring in the apex her eyebrow’s arch. Before the meeting officially began, she made references to things that I was not expecting to hear. As she spoke generally about the bizarre nature of the reading, she jested about “acid trips” and “penis jokes,” á la a deconstructed Deleuzean body without organs.

I immediately liked her.

Once the meeting commenced, she did not fully disengage from this informal style of semantic choices and dialogical exchanges amongst the mixture of graduate students and faculty in the same space, as the hegemonic traditions of academic culture would never condone. I would come to learn that this component of her teaching (and living) philosophy intentionally sought to undermine the assumed power differential between graduate students and their professors. Even in her mere existence, she indirectly challenged me to deal with the fact that I did, indeed, have assumptions about what I believed a tenured professor *should* look or act like. She continued on in this relaxed approach, marrying four letter words with a sophisticated and obvious qualitative expertise, plunging us deeply into the realm of methodological pondering that even her colleagues appeared to admire and wish to understand just as well.

I did my best as I tried to wrap my mind around the complicated notions of objects or forms having material agency in the world, how we as humans assign these objects with a sense of agency, but how it changes fluidly, thus pointing us back to the idea that the objects really must not then truly have agency... But then, they do...they must, for we assign it...

As I left the reading group with disproportionately more questions than answers, I graciously thanked them for allowing me to join. My spinning mind had a class to attend, but my curiosity had only just been piqued. I was full of intrigue, and I wanted to learn more about just how much I did not know.

At the end of my first year of classes—during which, I also had unexpectedly begun my new role as an instructor to undergraduates for the college of education, only in my second semester, much sooner than I had anticipated—I decided to thrive off my momentum of being fresh to the program. I elected to take another course over the summer semester. Even though this was optional, it just so happened that Jenni was teaching a qualitative methods course, and I

would be crazy not to capitalize on the opportunity to learn as much as I could from her. In addition to Jenni's instruction of the class, a fellow doctoral student and person whom I admired greatly within the college—Csaba Osvath (phonetically pronounced like “CHA-bah”)—would be her teaching assistant for the class.

I first met Csaba when he came in as a guest lecturer for my philosophies of inquiry course. The class acquainted us with the various perspectives in research, ranging from positivism, post-positivism, pragmatism, constructivism, and so on, all the way through to more modern research philosophies, like post-structuralism. In the discussion of the arts-based research perspective, our professor was admittedly not the most well-versed in this particular area of inquiry. Thus, he enlisted the assistance of Csaba, who practiced and promoted the use of arts-based methodology in his own work—and encouraged its engagement amongst his peers. He, fascinatingly, did not actually discover his natural talent for art until adulthood. Like the greatest of great artists, Csaba himself did not discover his own artistry until grown, and the world presented him with experiences where his voice was unheard. During the lecture, he displayed his works, discussing his artistic process, which involved the manipulation of offbeat mediums, like glass deconstruction and reconstruction, or origami paper folding.

Csaba was originally from Budapest in Hungary, which gently perfumed his softly spoken voice with the sound of his native home. While the sound of his voice was always but a soft presentation of words, the ideas often carried a stark contrast—the dark, saddening, inevitable realities; the harsh truths of our lived human existence. He often philosophized about love, death, birth...purpose...these ideas were life's inevitabilities of which we were all aware. But there was something about Csaba's unsettled curiosity that was much braver to sit with these ideas for longer. He seemed to sit with these ideas for the great majority of the time.

Because the nature of his inquisition prodded at the most difficult questions for people to only attempt answer, he had a rather polarizing effect on others in the same way that a strongly charged magnet would have. People seemed to draw themselves in closer toward him at the sheer intrigue of his thoughts, professing in agreement at the casual mention of his name, a shared affinity for his profound uniqueness: “I *love* Csaba!” Meanwhile, others seemed to repel themselves away from the grim truths of the universe he so often reminded us. I never thought his intention was to continually point to these difficulties as an evocative tool, recklessly generating uneasiness in others; I truly think that these were the concepts which he himself felt uneasy about not understanding, and simply, wanted to. I was happy to sit in my uneasiness with him at the pinnacle of this universal “not knowing,” a summit that many scholars often seemed to arrive after heavy hammering sessions of the mind. A large part of why I believe I was open to the digestion of his ideas was with the discovery that he is a fellow artist, and I always felt that there was something incredibly honest about his art. It made it easy for me to trust in him and his open process.

The qualitative methods course took ahold of the summer, launching one large group of doctoral scholars into a mystifying world of human thoughts, feelings, emotions, inconsistencies, asymmetries...and a messy world it was, indeed. Remaining true to the cultural norms of social order upheld by the academy on the first day of any class, we made our way around the room, each taking turns to introduce ourselves to the rest of the group. We were to state our names, program affiliation, and a brief description of our research interests, with this last point being what we all knew we were always evaluated most heavily upon. While this practice of “academically branding” ourselves was benevolently meant to prepare us as scholars, it always

seemed to create tensions in the air for all of us—tensions of status, worthiness, and an establishment of order, deeming whom among us is “most interesting”.

During that first year, I had no problem reciting the marketable pitch I had developed to describe my own academic brand:

“My name is Emily Mahoney. I just finished my first year of the Ed Psych program, and I want to research the societal reintegration of military veterans after they return from combat.”

Throughout the year, this idea for a research concept was always met with a symphony of varied “*ooh’s*” and “*hum’s*,” with the occasional cymbal clang of “*fascinating*” or “*interesting*,” which reinforced that this idea of mine had some kind of value to the field of inquiry. These harmonic sounds of collective approval from the body of the academy were an indication that my professional identity—being “the veterans’ girl”—still meant something here, as much as it did in my previous role, and as much as it did to my father.

As Jenni and Csaba co-constructed the culture and norms of our qualitative inquiry class, I was thrilled to learn that we would be doing arts-based activities facilitated by Csaba during lecture. Introducing this novel way to engage with our data encouraged an entirely new paradigm of thinking about “what our data is trying to tell us”. Knowing that not everyone had the same levels of comfort in producing art, we were provided with several different approaches to the art-making practice.

For example, one day we were given construction paper, old magazines containing an array of different images, adhesive, and scissors, then tasked to create a mini-book, complete with the cover describing and “selling” qualitative inquiry, with our imaginary author depicted on the inside. Another day, we were indirectly directed to challenge the bounded space of the classroom by *leaving* it, going outside, and entering nature. We were to use pieces of nature

(e.g., leaves, twigs, rocks, moss) and reconstruct them into a form of art. The only catch was, we were not to deconstruct or destroy pieces of nature that were not already free-standing forms on their own; in other words, plucking leaves or flowers from plants, or breaking branches off trees was not encouraged, for these are still living beings. After we made something from nature into art, we took a picture to share with the class in an online forum, and just discuss the *process*.

On what I think may have been one of the most insightful days of the class for me, each student was given a different lime fruit to spend time with it...studying it, appreciating its uniqueness. We were to write down as many descriptive details about it as we could. This seemed so silly during the dissemination of instructions. How well could you really know a piece of fruit? To our discovery, after collecting all of the limes and regrouping them back together, each person was somehow able to look amidst the herd of green citrus, and quickly find their lime, reuniting in joy, like parent and child.

Every single one of us.

We had only looked a little bit closer, and only for a little bit longer.

Qualitative research was just that way: we think we already know, but it turns out, we are not actually looking from an informed perspective, not as much as we believe we are. This is not meant to invalidate the researcher's already lived experiences and discovered truths for the self (for these are incredibly valuable and ought to be respected). But certainly, this *is* meant to validate the "other's" perspectives and lived experiences. We ought not believe we already know what these are (even if they have already provided other public accounts of their experiences, as in the example of the informant). The difficult reality about dealing with our own personal assumptions is, we only come to discover what our biases even are during the very moments that we are encountered with other people, notions, ideas, or stories that challenge us.

Discrepancies.

Inconsistencies.

Expectations that we did not even realize we have, until they encounter something else that challenges and defies them.

A lesson learned more easily with fruit would resound a deafening echo in my ears, scarring me in a way that I would not be able to soon forget, when I would learn this same lesson again, but with a wild human being.

Scene II: Pre-Interview

End of summer, 2015

By the end of the semester, after learning about the various methods in qualitative inquiry, I decided I wanted to pilot an interview for my first research project. I imagined this as a narrative case study of sorts, for I had a particular informant in mind who had agreed to participate in the process of telling me his unique story. His story had less to do with my initial research interest in veterans' academic pursuits as a form of "healing". His experiences were more representative of a growing segment in the current generation of military veterans: *amputees*. During the prior semester, as part of a different class assignment, I had conducted an observation one day at the James Haley VA Hospital. I remarkably noticed and really "saw" the injury of limb amputation in a way that I just had never seen it before. I never really *looked* at it before. Many veterans...many people...were living with their physical bodies without limbs.

Frankly, I believe that we are socialized *not* to look, ("*Don't stare!*") when we see something that exists outside of our assumptions about what human norms are. When young children are growing in their moral development, parents just do their best to re-teach them the right social rules. ...but...I looked. What I saw was only what I would describe as impressive

adaptability, and in some cases, there was a silent social dynamic of complex dense energy. This energy was created between the person with the missing limb(s) and another person whom often appeared to be a care-giver—sometimes occupational, adorning a uniform, and the helping role was clear—while others appeared to be spouses or family members. My thoughts about these being family were shaped by the display of a more effortlessly helpful demeanor, usually involving more physical contact, and visible signs of generosity, affection.

A giving energy.

I became fascinated with this notion of limb loss, not in a way that was meant to glamorize, fetishize, or otherwise marginalize, but in an earnest way that I wanted to understand the phenomenon more. From an embodied perspective, I could not imagine what it was like to lose a limb and carry on without a considerably large part of the physical body, no longer attached anymore. Does a person *miss* that flesh? How does it—or does it—change the relationship with the body? Does it enhance the mind-body connection? What about the experience of phantom limb sensations? I was highly interested in learning more about the psychological adaptation to limb loss, especially in the informant's case, where I had the impression that he might be open to discussing it with me.

He was somewhat of an inspirational figure on the scene of advocating and rallying support for the current generation of returning veterans. He was a United States Infantry Marine who, during his deployment, had detonated an improvised explosive device, or IED. The accident left him in a coma, with traumatic brain injury, multiple physical injuries, and the amputation of one leg. This type of injury set has become quite common among returning veterans of the OEF/OIF/OND war conflicts. It is unique from the types of injuries commonly seen in previous war eras especially in more recent U.S. history. The advances of modern

medicine have enabled advanced prosthetics to allow increased functionality and adaptation, as limb amputation currently is prevalent, with 857 individuals who were U.S. military personnel with major limb loss combat injuries between 2001 and 2008 in Afghanistan or Iraq conflicts.¹⁸⁵

The soldiers' injuries are a reflection of the enemies' warfare...

A Turkish study summarizes one interpretation of the issue: ¹⁸⁶

“Amputee veterans are typically young, physically fit, and have an optimistic prognosis for a normal life expectancy and returning to pre-injury levels of physical activity.¹⁸⁷ Although patients may recover physically from a traumatic amputation, full recovery includes a psychological shift in which the individual incorporates body changes, physical adjustments, and strategies to cope with the amputation and psychosocial adaptation.¹⁸⁸ Limb amputation confronts individuals with a multitude of evolving physical and psychosocial challenges, such as impairments in physical functioning, prosthesis use, pain, changes in family/peer relations, changes in employment status or occupation, and alterations in body image and self-concept.¹⁸⁹ Such stressors challenge the individual's ability to maintain emotional well-being and may engender maladaptive reactions that lead to poor psychosocial adaptation.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Melcer, T., et al. (2014). Glasgow Coma Scale scores, early opioids, and 4-year psychological outcomes among combat amputees. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development*, 51(5), 697-710. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1682/JRRD.2013.06.0143>

¹⁸⁶ Tuncay, T. & Musabak, I. (2015). Problem-focused coping strategies predict posttraumatic growth in veterans with lower-limb amputations. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 41, 466-483. DOI: 10.1080/01488376.2015.1033584

¹⁸⁷ In their inquiry: ($Age = 23.40 \pm 2.62$ years)

¹⁸⁸ Tuncay, T. & Musabak, I. (2015). Problem-focused coping strategies predict posttraumatic growth in veterans with lower-limb amputations. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 41, 466-483. DOI: 10.1080/01488376.2015.1033584

¹⁸⁹ Tuncay, T. & Musabak, I. (2015). Problem-focused coping strategies predict posttraumatic growth in veterans with lower-limb amputations. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 41, 466-483. DOI: 10.1080/01488376.2015.1033584

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I believed that phenomenological discussion of these mentioned factors would be central to the interview. I had thought there was an untold tale of resilience to be discovered. In the informant's case, his physical resilience managed to defy death, ultimately surviving the attack and making his recovery. Through various other reports, he corroborated the same narrative: 'shortly after his release from the hospital, he fell into a depression and was coping with alcohol. His drinking persisted for years until he finally made the decision to get sober. One day, he was discovered as an artist, which turned out to be a successful endeavor, and the informant began to live a life under the semi-watchful eye of the digital public domain in a connected world.'

As I move forward, I must become rather vague in the level of description that I am able to depict the informant. In a way that is somewhat confounding and disturbing, I have always perceived that I am bound to protect the identifying details about him and his story—because of the convoluted nature of *my story* involving research about *him*. My work has generated much discussion with my committee about the “terms and conditions” of these given rights of the researched, and when their right to confidentiality might need to be superseded or breached if they do exhibit the threat of physical harm. However, there currently is no statement of condition to surround the rights of the researched, even if they do demonstrate, for example, intent to harm their self or intent to harm others. This is concerning when considering the many other contexts where these basic duties to uphold safety are already a core part of professions, roles, structures, and processes. As it has otherwise stood, I have always perceived that it is still within the expectations of my professional responsibility to uphold confidentiality here, despite what had occurred in the case of this particular interview. This is difficult from the perspective of knowledge production, as the more I have explained to fellow scholars within the academy of

what occurred, the more people seem to wish to know more specific details...about *him, his nature*.

However, it is my ethical position that his anonymity must be maintained.

Certain details...things that I know—secrets of his that he implicitly asked me to keep for him—things that would help me to explain it to others more...must die with me.

Long beforehand, I had discussed my ideas with Jenni about how to design the pilot questions, to which she was most encouraging. She supported this style of taking a phenomenological approach toward understanding the incidence of limb loss among veterans, along with possibility unearthing any social impacts that this could help to inform. She even suggested taking a less structured approach with it, being conversational, and allowing his narrative to drive the course of the interview, as it sounded like so much was potentially there.

It was only after I discussed the concept and research questions with my major professor, Dr. Tan, that I even entertained the notion of my expectations being challenged. I was incredibly fortunate to have the guiding sight of Dr. Tan. He originally was from mainland China, then moved to the U.S. to attend Harvard University in pursuit of his Ed.D. in Educational Psychology. In many ways, he reminded me of my mother, culturally. They both were originally born into the traditional values of the East, and then abruptly transplanted into an entirely new realm of drastically different customs, attitudes, and social intricacies to disentangle in the West. Now, they have each, respectively, been here for longer than they lived in their native countries. Such a unique shifting of broad cultural norms seemed to manifest as similar traits in both of them. Dr. Tan—very much like my mother—had a direct and honest approach, could find a way to always articulate his words most poetically and with a sense of concern.

“I want to know exactly what was most helpful to him in his recovery,” I explained my idea to him idealistically, not even hearing my own assumption. “What was it exactly that helped him heal the most?”

“Ahh—It will be very interesting to see if he actually *has* healed,” he said.

I did not even consider it a possibility, because it did not align with my ideal...my hopes for the interview. Now, looking back, I really hear how much I was stuck on my own vision, rather than simply seeing things as they were. It is critical for qualitative researchers to air out loud their project initiatives and ideas outside of themselves. Air them out loud in many different spaces for others to hear what is going on in your private thought process. Even if lacking in development or completeness, would it not be better to discover this with a colleague or mentor than with an informant, once knee-deep in the messiness of research?

~*~

I finalized arrangements with the informant, officially scheduling the interview. I further explained the nature of my study in even greater detail, sent him a copy of the interview guide including the prepared questions, asking for feedback or input (with minimal response), and waited for the day of the interview to arrive. He was out-of-state, and while, of course in hindsight, I could have (and perhaps *should* have) conducted the interview via a digital telecommunication format, I wholeheartedly believed that this would adversely alter the dynamic of the interview if not conducted in-person. I somehow believed that I would learn less, and that it would be less authentic. I pressed onward in booking an odd-hour-cheap-flight and even cheaper lodging within a modest commute from the informant’s residence, as I was funding the initiative on my own. After I arrived, I relied on formal public transportation and a public

operated transportation service to make my way from the airport to the hotel, and then the next day, from the hotel to the informant's residence.^{191,192}

Scene III: The Interview

Late summer, 2015

Location undisclosed

On the day of the interview, things just did not feel quite right. It is difficult to describe precisely what I mean, especially in an “objective and measurable” way that is appreciated, especially in research. There was something eerily different about that day—an unsettled feeling that I had not encountered in any of my days spent in preparation, nor during any of my previous interactions with the informant to organize the meeting.

Despite this feeling, I forged ahead. After all, I had already invested so much of my time, energy, resource, and optimistic promise into what this project could potentially be. The competitive environment and maddening pressure of the “publish-or-perish” motto of academic culture made me feel like I really would be out of my mind to turn back now, after all my effort and investment, no matter what weird feeling I was suddenly having. A disservice to myself, I simply dismissed my instinctual guttural reactions, attributing the feelings to what must have just been nervousness about conducting my first pilot interview project.

¹⁹¹ Uber is a network-based transportation company, offering peer-to-peer ride sharing. Sadly, even this institution has proven unsafe for women, with little executive insight offered to resolve the issue. Uber and its main competitor Lyft have caught criticism for not adequately vetting their drivers, or doing enough to ensure passenger safety, even having led to temporary service bans or restrictions in some cities. A CNN report in 2018 found that 103 Uber drivers and 18 Lyft drivers were accused of sexual assault or abuse. While the companies conduct background checks and say passenger safety is their top priority, Uber has worked with law enforcement since 2017 to teach riders how to avoid impostors. Last year, it added a panic button that lets riders tap their screens and dial 911 directly from the app. Critics, however, appear troubled that these methods still place burden on the rider.

¹⁹² Healy, J. (2019). “They Thought it Was Their Uber. But Their Driver Was a Predator.” *The New York Times*.

Once ready, I requested my transportation and gathered my belongings to wait. I notified the informant that I would be on my way shortly via text message. He replied affirmatively.

When I saw the vehicle arrive from the window of my room, I grabbed my bag and made my way down the stairs of the hotel and outside toward the car. The driver was a middle-aged married man with glasses, dark skin, and—in a style that was almost costume-like—he adorned a cabbie hat. He kindly greeted me by name, as this information was available through the use of the app-based service. Then, like a true chauffeur, opened the door to the backseat of his car. After I got in, he returned to the driver's seat, spinning around charismatically with a small bag of a few individually wrapped mints and candies to hand to me.

I thanked him graciously, as it was a kind gesture that certainly rose beyond the call of the typical transportation experience than I'd had through the service before.

As I told him the destination and he started off in that direction, he asked me what I was headed there for, and for other additional details about me and the nature of my staying in from out of town. I only now realized that this would be *obvious* to the person who would pick me up from the hotel. But I honestly just didn't consider that I would be asked so much about it. He asked me several personal questions, and I—sort of thinking about reciprocity and the wishes I had for my informant to openly participate in my own interview—was answering them.

I spoke about my purpose of being there for business, and informed my professional identity as a scholar, and supporter of military veterans. I talked about my father's life, and my passion to seek understanding to better help the current generation of war veterans, because I grew up watching just how difficult it was for him, and how I believed there was still so much more to learn.

I told him I was there to conduct an interview.

“Wow,” he exclaimed, “it sounds like somebody should be interviewing you!”

~*~

When I finally arrived at the informant’s residence, I took in my surroundings. It was a small community of nice condominiums surrounded by lush green grass and full trees. A tall black gate enclosed the property.

Just as I had communicated my arrival to the informant with a text message, sort of awaiting further instructions on where to go, a man passed by on a bicycle.

“It’s unlocked,” he shouted at me abruptly while zooming past.

“Oh,” I said a bit awkwardly, “thanks...” I would have actually preferred to just wait outside the gate to hear back from the informant, but I sort of felt pressured to open it, as the man continued to watch me as I walked through, he disappeared again, down the street on his bike.

I looked up across the courtyard to see the informant standing in his open doorway. To my surprise, he appeared disheveled, flat in affect, lethargic, and agitated. I greeted him verbally with warmth and positivity as I headed in his direction.

“Hello, I’m Emily. It’s very nice to meet you.” I had hoped that this could begin to diffuse the visible tension in the air that surrounded him. But instead, he appeared to only grow more and more perturbed by my intrinsically warm nature of relating to others, which my father had always described as “effervescente”.

His coldness was troublingly different from the body positivity figure that was always depicted as in the public eye. He let me in to his home.

A quick glance around revealed a modestly decorated place with the kitchen off to the left side of the entrance, and the adjacent living room to the right. It housed a typical set up of a

couch, coffee table, and television set, along with a guitar, some other small furnishings, and a bicycle near the back door. Amidst unopened letters and magazines, I happened to also notice a pack of cigarettes on his kitchen counter. I found it an odd item to belong to him, as part of his public persona was one largely associated with health and fitness.

Discrepancy.

However, I did not mention this. I tried not to look at these inconsistencies as “red flags” to respond to in the same manner that I might have if I was not occupying a researcher role. But as a researcher, it felt as if these mysterious things that “did not fit” were very much a part of the data.

Instead, I began to go through my bag to gather the materials for the interview. I made my way into the living room, which was the only area that had a communal sitting space, and I sat down, more easily allowing me to continue digging through my bag. As I shuffled through the consent forms and got out the audio recorder, he asked me flatly, with what felt like an air of equal parts skepticism and disdain, “How *old* are you?”

Right away, I was a little caught off guard by this questioning and the tone surrounding it. In my professional experiences as a counselor, I had had dozens of clients ask me about my age. After committing a couple of rookie mistakes early on, I quickly learned that sometimes, there was no “right answer” when divulging information about the self, especially whilst occupying the counselor role. Sometimes, clients will ask counselors questions solely to challenge the imbalance of the therapeutic client-counselor relationship. With time and experience, I came to avert the common question most artfully, sometimes redirecting it back to the client in a productive manner.

But in this case, I was not the informant’s counselor.

I was not the informant's advisor.

I was a graduate researcher, and I had come here in the hopes of obtaining the informant's story.

And we both knew it.

"I am 29...I'm going to be 30 soon," I stated with a bit of a self-effacing cringe, as it was one of those milestones that officially and inarguably punctuates one's youth.

"You look pretty young to be a doctor," he said, unamused.

"Oh, doctoral student. Not medical doctor," I continued to try and diffuse the power imbalances that I could feel arising, even in our very early interactions. It was almost like a subtle social tango to decide who we would be in this interview, and what roles we would each play. We seemed to be negotiating our roles before "it" even began...but even this notion assumes that the qualitative interview only begins with the asking of the first question.

Despite my efforts to foster any comfort or rapport—as I continuously tried repelling myself down from the social status totem pole he seemed to keep hurling me high upon—he adamantly resisted, seeming to want to keep me in a "clinician" box, "othered" far away from him. As the interview unfolded, it frequently felt as though he was holding his story hostage from me. Rather than using the site of the interview to tell his story, he instead used this site to play games of power, portraying to me a very different version of himself than the one which existed to the public domain. I think a part of him relished in the fact that—upon my thorough explanation of his rights and my duties to him—he knew I was bound to keep his anonymity, and within this secret social vacuum, he could be whoever he wanted, even if that person was actually cold, angry, and hurtful.

The audio recording of the session begins abruptly, as I did not realize he was already beginning to offer his narrative so promptly upon completing the paperwork. He appeared to have a dilemma already prepared to present to me that had nothing to do with my original research questions. He led into the interview by reporting that he had purchased a pack of cigarettes—*coincidentally, why today?*—and was contemplating picking up smoking again.

As a “good researcher,” should I have allowed this to unfold organically and obtain whatever data the informant presented? Wasn’t this simply the way of the constructivist?

As a “good researcher,” should I have found a way to shut down the diversion and get back to the pre-written questions? Can a diversion only be considered a true diversion when it is intended to be one?

As a “good researcher,” should I have stumbled upon some perfectly balanced solution that somehow achieved both of the aforementioned outcomes?

Maybe there was no right answer. But his dilemmatic diversion created a situation where, right away—even before the interview began—he was “performing” a recovered person who was contemplating his return to using a former substance. The dilemma informed the course of the interview. It almost felt as though he was actually testing me to see how I might respond to it. But this was not why I actually had come at all. I did not come as a clinician. One interpretation is that he assumed this of me and my role, and thusly invited me to join him in this portrayal.

Was it all a cry for help? Where did the boundaries blur between counselor and researcher in a muddy situation like this, especially since “counselor” actually *was* a role I have played throughout my career, many times before? Was I to interpret that the interview itself was in fact triggering the informant? Was I to decide on his behalf that forging ahead with the

interview was not worth it if it was evoking this need to regress in recovery, even with cigarettes? From an ethical standpoint, was I still—even now—supposed to regard the informant's wellbeing and best interest above all else? What about my own? For here, I now found myself sitting across from a person who did not at all seem to fit the individual that I had imagined I would be interviewing, and now my questions seemed...like the ones that I would not ask *him*, a person who appeared closed, challenging, and agitated.

How much of this incongruence was the result of any legitimate deception?

How much of it was a direct result of my own faulty assumptions?

That is the thing about it: It is in our very human condition to—against all logic and theory—believe that we will be the one individual who can find a way to enter their research, completely free from bias or assumptions. The unfortunate reality is, *none* of us humans are truly capable of this ideal. As mentioned before, we only really encounter and truly learn what are our biases and assumptions actually are as they erupt from deep within us during our messy research process. Before this, we may be no more aware to what they are than we are conscious of the very air that we breathe.

It is possible that—to his awareness or not—the informant orchestrated an elaborate (and effective) wave of the magician's hand so that I would have to look at it, rather than the actual story he knew I had come for. In true constructivist fashion, I followed the hand.

He was often dismissive and argumentative in responding to questions. Despite my interest in getting at the phenomenological value of his story of resilience, he kept interrupting himself whenever he seemed to begin.

“I—my casualty—the way that I— my truck ran over a bomb. And uh, that’s it. I’m trying not to get too far ahead of myself. I could dive right into the whole story but…” he trailed off into silence.

“You could,” I encouraged, “if you’d like. You can talk about whatever you wa—”

“Well I’m trying to stick to your questions,” he interjected sharply.

“It can be conversational,” I stated calmly. “You can talk about whatever comes up.”

“Okay.” He sat silently, staring me down with a look of contempt.

Yet, whenever I would ask him questions directly, he would talk in circles around them, not really answering anything at all:

“Would you say that your perception of the military changed after you went through what you went through…would you say that you feel differently about it all now?”

“About what?”

“The military…I guess, as an organization, the process that it is?”

“No,” he scoffed.

“No?” I queried gently.

“I don’t know. I don’t—I don’t know. I mean, what it—what’s your question?”

“If you feel differently about it,” I attempted to clarify, “if you perceive it differently than you did before.”

“I don’t know—I don’t know. I don’t have a feeling,” he insisted.

“Okay,” I accepted.

“Neutral.”

He claimed a neutral stance frequently, which did not align with his anger.

There were several instances throughout which this style of asserting control, his aggressive influence, over the direction of the discussion as the informant would even interrupt himself, then demand the “next question” throughout:

“So that’s why they pop our feet off. You know. And uh, because they blow our feet up. They don’t—I mean, they don’t really intend to, they intend to, but... It’s more effective if they hurt us. Hurt one of us. And then the whole unit has to stop. If they—I don’t know. The next question.”

There were many instances throughout where he would make flatulent vocalization sounds, degrading statements about others, and was even being rude toward me, scoffing, mocking, and cursing. Knowing that he was not regarding the interview with respect I’m sure did visibly affect me and the way I was engaging in it in my response, probably contributing to a cycling of this behavior.

Even though my interest was in his life after he had decided upon sobriety, he frequently re-focused his responses back upon the discussion of his drinking days, almost glorifying them in the way that he spoke. He also discussed sexuality quite a lot, but the decision to focus on this topic could have been influenced by the way I stated the question on the demographic form as I read it to him, “You identify as male?” He was angered by this question. He was angered by many things I said. Still, he frequently made crude sexual references during the course of the interview.

It was in the tide turning moment when he picked up my audio recording device, that I could feel whatever little control over the situation that I still might have had totally crumble away from me. I believe that this action stated volumes about the sense of ownership he must

have felt over the interview and the level of control that he perceived he had, especially compared to me, the owner of the device.

It happened when I broke eye contact with him for a mere moment to look at the recorder. I merely had wanted to make sure it was indeed recording, but I could tell how bothered he was by my momentary lapse of what he must have interpreted as me no longer attending or listening to him.

“For a second I thought it wasn’t recording,” I offered as an apology, “please go on.”

“Are we hot?” he jested as he picked up the recording device. “Mic check!” he said as he spoke into it playfully.

“It’s recording,” my voice can be heard faintly in the background, attempting to reestablish a sense of order over whatever was happening.

“Mic check. Yo. Alright. Yo DJ!”

It was in this moment, and unbeknownst to me, that he turned the recording device off, stopping the capture of the interview. In what suddenly felt like a bizarre turn of events, he grabbed my face with both hands, leaned forward, and kissed me. At first, I actually almost laughed audibly because I thought that he must have been joking based on the way he had been behaving toward me so far, as if he *despised* me, and I had *repulsed* him.

It was only when I realized that he was actually attempting to engage in intimate behavior with me that I told him to stop, and that was not what I had come there for, and that I needed to be professional. He almost seemed to interpret the last set of word choices as a way of saying that “*I could not*,” rather than actually “*I did not want to*”.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ My experience supports recent discussions about conceptions of sexual consent. The idea of affirmative consent should be considered, rather than the traditionally expected norm of needing to say *no* in order to indicate *no sex*. The traditional paradigm of thinking about consent wrongfully implies that a default state is a baseline openness to

Even though I was somehow able to verbally re-direct the interview back to my questions and actually resume the recording, I knew that this—*whatever it was*—was already corrupted. The interaction had become so much a part of the interview that the interview no longer seemed to be about his bullshit story, nor my bullshit questions. Nothing that I had initially sought out to—or even wanted to—find, was here. As the questions and answers continued, he once again, resorted to the same tactic. It had not even been long enough for me to have thought of a way to get out of his place.

He turned off the recording device and actually attempted to kiss me again.

It was during this second time that I felt the absolute most powerless.

Everything became so befuddled and confounded. He had kissed me again, only this time, more forcefully. He moved his weight on top of me, grabbing both of my arms and pinning them down with one hand, and put the other around my throat. To be “fair” and to portray it most accurately, he was more so placing his hand around my throat, rather than necessarily firmly gripping or squeezing it with an application of violent pressure; but the fact that it was there...it felt intentionally threatening. I did not like that it was there. I hated that he put his hand there, around my neck, so freely. All of this... I felt very uncomfortable, violated, and nothing about my words nor actions suggested that I wanted nor consented for this to be happening. Nothing about my demeanor expressed pleasure nor enjoyment. I wondered how he seemed so able to experience both, despite my clearly visible and vocal discomfort.

I lied there flatly, like a stiff board, my body full of both a sense of conceding—“*freeze and comply*”—but also a sense of tension, of resistance, just there, underneath the weight of him.

sex, and that *no* would indicate an atypical response. In a world where affirmative consent would be the norm, the default assumption would be that a person does not want to (and, *is not obligated to*) have sex; thus, an affirmative response would indicate agreement to engage in the atypical event of sex.

I kept my knees tightly pinned together for dear life, praying that he would not separate them, as I had worn a dress that day. I refuse to consider it a mistake or a poor wardrobe choice on my part, for this sort of thinking erroneously places blame upon myself, and wrongfully supports the unfortunate rape cultural attitudes of our society. I will only consider my choice to wear a dress that day as a horrible circumstance to discover oneself in as the direct result of existing in a gendered world, being born into the world as one soldier of the minority gender, and daring to have the mind for a job where a woman asks questions.

I have never been raped before. Is this how it is going to happen to me right now?

He undid the buttons that ran down the top center of my dress, and groped my chest with his hands. I felt so uncomfortable, incredibly violated, unsafe, powerless...and could only keep asking myself, "How the hell did I end up here?"

The complete and utter embarrassment of the situation was that I had put myself there. In addition to the unwanted touching, he attempted multiple coercive tactics, repeatedly and continually telling me that we should go to his room.

I insistently declined each of his many efforts to persuade me.

"I can't," I said continually, "This isn't what I came here for. I need to be professional."

I don't know why I kept saying that, as if I thought it would actually bring him to have mercy, that I really wanted him to respect that, and how I hoped he would just see that and...respect me.

He never did.

After making these various attempts at physical and verbal coercion to try and get me to commit to going to his bedroom, and my consistent declining, to the point where I was beyond humiliated now, he had the audacity to ironically state to me, "I'm not pressuring you" despite

my clearly expressed discomfort. The buttons along the top of my dress were still undone, how he left them. My thighs were beginning to burn with the energy of desperation that had kept my knees clenched together like magnets this whole time.

...not pressuring me?

Was it almost as if—if we just say the opposite—then this reality is not even really happening right now? Is this even really happening to me?

When he finally realized that I was just not going to submit myself to his coercive efforts and ultimately engage in sexual acts with him, he terminated the interview, shutting down his dialogic participation even further. He moved off me, sitting upright on the couch, slowly and sternly replacing his prosthesis onto his leg, and letting out a big sigh as he got up.

“That’s okay, I’ve got somewhere to be anyway,” he announced, as he began to move about his place as if in preparation to leave. First, he was certain to guilt me.

“You’re not the only girl who doesn’t want to have sex,” he said.

Twenty-nine years, still just a girl (...just for sex, at that).

I do not remember much of the dialogue that occurred while I remained on the couch, quietly fixing my clothing, as he moved in between busily going through his items about the apartment, and making his way back over to me on the couch, standing over me with his lips puckered, looking down, signaling me to kiss him again, now, a continuing norm demanded for the rest of the exchange.

Freeze and comply.

I do remember asking him if he had ever done that before, in any other interview.

He squinted while looking down and away from me, “No,” he answered.

I knew not to push.

He turned the questions back around on me one last time, asking me *what else* I had planned to do while there during my visit.

Numb, emotionless, and embarrassed, I shrugged.

“This *was* the plan,” I managed to say, my voice small.

Something about that turn of awareness for him seemed to produce a moment of clarity, perhaps, a brief moment of guilt. He seemed to quickly realize the incongruence in levels of seriousness and commitment we both had (un)matched each other with in the interview.

To add even further to my discomfort and unease, he grabbed at his wallet, now, offering me transportation fare: two twenty-dollar bills.

Forty dollars.

I refused to accept the offering of money, but he did not want to accept my refusal. Another conflict. One more disagreement that would go his way during this exchange.

Forty dollars.

He threw it at me insistently, in a way that made me feel like a non-consenting whore.

Assigned by him.

Forty dollars.

As if some cheap token of retribution.

He kept becoming more and more hostile in how he was throwing the money at me, especially with the stubborn way I kept refusing it (an Asian cultural trademark). He was growing...*angrier* each time he threw it. I still hate myself today for picking it up and taking it with me. I just wanted it to stop.

Forty dollars.

A state of compliance.

How much is congruency between the human body and soul really worth?

A dignified existence.

A civilized world.

Shortly after that exchange, he kicked me out of his place so he could finish getting ready to leave, wherever it was he was going to go. Confused, embarrassed, and my head left in a foggy cloud of bewilderment over what had just happened, I put the recorder and some papers back into my bag, making my way to leave with the shattered dignity I had left. As I tried to maneuver my way past him to walk out the front door, he made me kiss him one final time before letting me leave, hauntingly saying to me with an air of smugness, “Let me know how it goes,” before throwing a closed door in my face.

Scene IV: Ground Zero

I stood in stillness of the blue day, as I stared back at the closed door behind me before I could even move for a moment.

How had I just ruined my first project so very badly?

What had just happened?

How had this all gone so horribly wrong?

I requested transportation to get me out of there and take me back to the hotel.

I began walking away from the place and toward where the driver would be arriving just to get away from it sooner.

Finally, the driver arrived. A slender woman with olive skin and dark hair pulled back into a ponytail motioned me toward her car. I got in.

She introduced herself and asked questions about me, attempting to engage in friendly dialogue. Even though my mind was in no state to be social, I complied with this interaction.

More questions.

Questions for me.

Questions are for me to answer.

Freeze and comply.

Just get through it...

Just answer.

I must answer to the world...

...it is not, never the other way around...

I managed my way through our social interaction until I could not bear it anymore. We were driving through a downtown area of shops, restaurants, and bars, when I asked her to let me out right there. I found the first bar I could that seemed not to have too many patrons inside. Even though I am an occasional social drinker, I ordered a beer in the middle of the day. It didn't even taste like anything. I texted Travis immediately. I really didn't know how to enter the conversation about what had just occurred...

“Have you ever had a participant really surprise you with their data?” I texted enigmatically. I didn't feel like I could come right out and explain what had happened, as I didn't even know what actually had. I just knew that I did not want it to, but it did, and I did not feel right.

“Participants surprising us with their data is the only thing we can count on in our studies.” He texted back. “Why, what was surprising? How did the interview go?”

I felt like I couldn't even really get into talking about it until I was safe and secure back at the hotel, and it was too much to explain to type it all. But I knew he was there...*Travis was there.* I told him I'd call him when I got to where I could talk. I finished up, paid my bill, and

requested another transport back to the hotel. When I finally got in and got settled to speak with Travis, I explained everything, but I still don't think I actually had even processed the personal violation yet. I was operating only out of my mind space, not feeling anything but numbness and unexplainable shame...so much shame...and deep failure. All I could go on about was my *data*.

He reminded me that this was wrong on the informant's part to use his power in the way that he did. He spoke about his own personal experiences in conducting qualitative interviews, and that he would never abuse his power in that way, nor would he be able to imagine a young woman informant working to offset the power imbalance during an interview with the same tactics and level of physical control like the informant did in the other direction.

I did not even hear.

I ruminated and was fixated on *my data*.

I think I was too afraid to let myself realize what I had really lost that day.

After I talked with Travis, I felt better—but then, immediately worse, when I discovered a message from my mom informing me that my parents wanted to talk with me on a video chat. My parents knew I was traveling; they just wanted to check in with me. I agreed to take the call.

As soon they saw my face, they could tell I wasn't okay. I wanted them to understand what had happened. I, myself, wanted to understand what had happened.

But at that time, I really didn't know how to articulate all of the complicated context-bound notions about the site of the qualitative interview, especially to my parents. Therefore, I saved on all the gory details that pointed to the magnitude of what this really was, simply stating: "He kissed me." I could not hold back my tears.

"Well," my mother spoke first, "you did go over there. That wasn't very smart."

"I know..." I joined in blaming me.

My father chimed in with a single-minded male perspective that completely neglected his daughter's crushed spirit: "A good lookin' gal shows up, after all of what he has been through, and wants to hear all about his life...I mean, could you blame him??" he said in near laughter.

He almost sounded *proud* of me, as he seemed to assign some meaning to all this as me being *desirable*.

I felt ill. They didn't understand, and I didn't have the right thoughts nor words to articulate anything helpful that could get them to understand.

I got off the call and just wanted to be left alone with all my thoughts.

Suddenly, there was a knock at my door.

Edgy, I jumped up at the sound, looking out the peephole and asking who it was.

"Front Desk," the familiar face and voice bellowed lowly.

I opened the door. He handed something to me, sort of shrugging about it, saying, "This is for you".

I closed and locked the door behind me before examining the object.

It was a small stuffed animal: Fozzie Bear from the Muppets. There was also an envelope with my name on the front, and a card inside. I opened it up to discover that it was from the man I had met earlier that same day, the married, middle-aged chauffeur—

He must have come back to the hotel after taking me to my destination...

The card went on to express how special he thought I was, included his phone number, and suggested that we keep in touch with each other. I felt very unnerved by the fact that he had come back to where I was staying while "off-duty," the fact that he was clearly married...and all of it.

At the same time, I received an incoming message from the informant. He asked me if I was sure that I didn't want him to come to my hotel that night.

I didn't respond.

An uninvited symphony of voices outside my hotel room and slamming doors ensued.

I didn't sleep very much that night.

Still in darkness, I arose early in the morning to leave that place, and I returned home to sort through the awful messiness of my first qualitative project.

Chapter Three Foreword: Processing Trauma

This chapter describes the “frantic” part of my journey in the aftermath, where my mind was finally able to begin unpacking and processing everything that my body had experienced, once I was home and I knew I was safe. In the 1920s, Walter B. Cannon coined a term to describe the body’s physiological function in response to threat or danger, resulting from stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system: fight-or-flight.^{194,195,196} More recently, in 2002, Barlow presented an adaptive alarm model, which suggested that a third, freeze response, may occur in some threatening situations.¹⁹⁷ Freezing, tonic immobility, or “playing dead” has been theorized to be the best possible survival option when an animal perceives little immediate chance of escaping or winning a fight.^{198,199,200} My own experience had me viscerally realize

¹⁹⁴ Cannon, W. B. (1927). The James-Lange theory of emotions: a critical examination and an alternate theory. *American Journal of Psychology*, 1987, Fall-Winter, 100(3-4): 567-86.

¹⁹⁵ Cannon, W. B. (1929). *Bodily changes in pain, hunger, fear and rage*. 2. New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts.

¹⁹⁶ Schmidt, N. B., Richey, J. A., Zvolensky, M. J., Maner, J. K. (2008). Exploring human freeze responses to a threat stressor. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, Sep; 39(3): 292-304. doi: 10.1016/j.jbtep.2007.08.002

¹⁹⁷ Barlow, D. H. (2002). *Anxiety and its disorders*. 2. New York: Guilford Press.

¹⁹⁸ Gallup, G. G. (1977). Tonic immobility: The role of fear and predation. *Psychological Record*, 27:41–61.

¹⁹⁹ Arduino, P. J. & Gould, J. L. (1984). Is tonic immobility adaptive? *Animal Behavior*, 32: 921–923.

²⁰⁰ Korte, S.M., Koolhaas, J. M., Wingfield, J. C. & McEwen, B. S. (2005). Review of: The Darwinian concept of stress: benefits of allostasis and costs of allostatic load and the trade-offs in health and disease. *Neuroscience Biobehavior Review*, February, 29(1):3-38.

this, the human body's disturbing survival response: freeze and comply. Apparently, a relatively high number of sexual assault survivors also reportedly experience a sense of paralysis and inability to act during the event of the assault, despite having no loss of consciousness. 201,202,203,204,205,206,207

I tried several different things to heal my soul. I painted my heart out, with one of the works even characterizing the described feeling of powerlessness and paralysis I felt in my body during the interview—a voodoo doll with a missing leg of her own, and long pins pushed through the heart and into her head. I tried researching other topics, even though all of my attempts to rebuild my shattered identity as a scholar seemed to confront me with the same inescapable research questions. I tried to pursue counseling, but it felt...passive. The interview was still haunting me at every turn. Even worse, I was...scared. I was persistently scared, and it was not just bound to one event. I was living in a state of constant fear.

Chapter Three: Processing Trauma

As I made my way home, I felt a vast flood of so many different emotions surrounding the outcome of the project washing over me all at once. Foremost, I felt as though I had failed myself *professionally*, and I beat myself up over this aspect more than anything else. My

201 Galliano, G., Noble, L. M., Travis, L. A., Puechl, C. (1993). Victim reactions during rape/sexual assault: A preliminary study of the immobility response and its correlates. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 8:109–114.

202 Mezey, G. C. & Taylor, P. J. (1988). Psychological reactions of women who have been raped. A descriptive and comparative study. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. Mar; (152):330-9.

203 Scaer, R. C. (2001). Review of: The neurophysiology of dissociation and chronic disease. *Applied Psychophysiology Biofeedback*, Mar; 26(1):73-91.

204 Suarez, S. D. & Gallup, G. G. (1979). Tonic immobility as a response to rape in humans: A theoretical note. *The Psychological Record*, 29:315–320.

205 Burgess, A. W. & Holmstrom, L. L. (1976). Coping behavior of the rape victim. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Apr; 133(4):413-8.

206 Heidt, J. M., Marx, B. P., & Forsyth, J. P. (2005). Tonic immobility and childhood sexual abuse: a preliminary report evaluating the sequela of rape-induced paralysis. *Behavioral Research Therapy*, Sep; 43(9):1157-71.

207 Schmidt, N. B., Richey, J. A., Zvolensky, M. J., Maner, J. K. (2008). Exploring human freeze responses to a threat stressor. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, Sep; 39(3): 292-304.

doi: 10.1016/j.jbtep.2007.08.002

professional identity was, for me, vitally important to the core of who I am *by my own definition*. It was one of the few areas in my life where I believed I was the maker of my own destiny. It really felt like the one area of my life that I had been “allowed” to be “the decider,” in *control* of my own career path, growing in any direction I choose. For me to have lost control as poorly as I did...over something that was supposed to have been *my project*. I was just devastated.

How did he take such command of it?

How did he take it to such a dark place?

...how did it get there?

I was most disappointed in myself for the fact that I had allowed for my *data* to become rendered unusable. It was corrupted now. I kept madly obsessing over this loss of my *data*. You see, I had invested so much already to pilot the project. Aside from my resources I had independently allocated to travel to the interview location, I also created a social expectation by announcing the project to my peers in the academy, not to mention, to my professors, whom we students come to view as our essential academic “bosses”. Now, I was certain there would be no actual return to report on this costly investment of only my word. Such high expectation for so little nothing now...only my failure to show for it. The story I thought I would find was just not there. Instead, I was presented with something else entirely...

I still did not even quite *understand* exactly what *it* was, other than to know that it just did not feel right, and it was very clear that I had been violated. Based on some of his behaviors following the interview, I believe deep down he knows that he had violated me, too.

The underlying message of what happened had really hurt me. The underlying message of the exchange really said, “Stop talking. Your purpose is for sex.” I did not know how to

interpret its meaning in any other way. If the body could talk, that is how the culmination of events ultimately felt to me, as the interrupted party.

I looked back, long across my lifetime of illusory child-rearing, cushioned by the safety of fairy tales and positive, empowering messages.... Were they all only empty words? Was it all an artificial farce to make me believe things are better than they actually are? Why do this to young girls, but to jolt them into an ill prepared for reality once they are finally ripe enough for men to ‘pick’ once they are finally deemed as *women*?

When is it decided that a girl is a woman and now ready to be sexualized by society?

Who decides?

...I do not belong underneath you.

Researcher Identity Crisis: On the Run

Fall, 2015

Start of second year

Can't even remember the first

I don't even want to try

In a desperate effort to redefine my scholarly identity and continue onward in my program, I grasped at any new idea I could, trying to pursue a new line of research in somewhat of a mad dash with the start of the semester under way...because I *had* to. I could not stay with that interview. I needed to move onto something else...*anything* else. I was functioning from an autopilot haze of shock, stumbling into my second year, even though I really just wanted to crawl into a dark hole and never come back out of it, ever again. I did the best I could for where I was at the time, trying to “spin-off” the tragedy into a new concept that could be framed much more broadly, open-ended, and inclusive—not entering the project with any expectations or

assumptions—just asking the same macro-level questions consistently of four new, different informants.

A swinging pendulum of pure human intention, simply trying to learn from her most recent mistakes; sometimes I swing too far in the opposing direction, out of *fear* to re-experience the very same bad thing that had happened before, or worse. I was admittedly scared of this new realized range of possibilities in behavior making its way into my inquiry work, and I did not want to get burned again by it. I deliberately cast out massive nets of questions that mattered nothing conditional of the person to answer, nor assumed anything of the responses. I sought to hide behind the anonymity of openness, no apparent leading theoretical agenda to give me away...I was on the ideological run....

My life duties continued in academia: earning a surviving wage by teaching for the college of education, trying to cope with what I had just experienced that summer, and anxiously working to find other people who might inform different perspectives which could help me understand what had happened, but indirectly and from variant lenses. I also hoped this process could permit me more time to figure out which meaningful direction to move in with my “real” line of inquiry next. I was really not ready to return that semester—everything felt so fast—but everything within my sentient spirit also told me not to take the semester off...for, I feared I would not have returned, and I did not want this trauma to “win”.

I naively believed that my new, “broad, open-ended” line of inquiry would somehow provide a solace from the inherent messiness of qualitative research. I was simply not done yet bitterly learning how human assumptions truly cannot be separated apart from any human interactivity. We can only become aware of our own biases as we encounter and experience them in real time, which is also the only way we can come to realize our own selves as the

subject of *others'* biases, attitudes, and opinions about us, as well. Being an “objective researcher” does not immunize a person from experiencing the blinding impairment of having human biases toward others; conversely, being a “subjective researcher” does not immunize from being the subject of biases cast upon us by others—like informants—which could potentially be damaging to epistemics, process, or persons, in either direction, especially if this potential phenomenon in inquiry is left unacknowledged or unexamined.

The following individuals were identified via snowball and had agreed to take part in a 30-minute interview project designed to investigate issues of gender, race, and society:

Informant 1: A young adult Asian man via digital telecommunication

Informant 2: A middle-aged Black woman in her home

Informant 3: A middle-aged White woman in public library

Informant 4: A middle-aged Black man in public library

I asked them all the same set of big, broad sweeping questions that were meant to be wide open and interpretive, allowing them to infuse as much (or as little) of their decided, selected truths into their narrative responses. I tried to structure this interview guide to be open and unassuming, no matter the demographic details of the respondent, asking wide expository questions like, “What does it mean to be someone of your gender?” and “What does it mean to be someone of your race?”

My questions were all still so...*disruptive*...

...*disruptive* to the social order.

Then again, *I* had been disrupted.

Despite being afraid...I was still *questioning* this disruption.

Now, I was only even more curious.

...and I was even a bit angry.

I was seeking to understand it.

The only thing I wish I had known then, that I have since learned astutely now—and am adamant to effortfully “pass on,” to more openly expose as valuable information to other researchers—is that the issue of sexualization in research practices has only emerged in three different “conditions”: (1) in dyads of women researchers and male informants who had demonstrated a history of violence against women, (2) in dyads of women researchers and male informants who held elite positions of power, and (3) in dyads of women researchers and male informants who were participating in research focused principally on the examination of *gender dynamics*.²⁰⁸ I wish I had not asked those questions—*more* questions—about gender...about human bodies living in the world. However, with the function of safely questioning seeming to slip away from me as a generally expected practice for *any* researcher to be able to do, I was growing concerned in what that may have meant for the field as a whole. Are these not purely a researcher’s aims: to question, to realize misunderstanding, to analyze information until new understanding has been achieved, and then to offer newly understood insights back to the collective for consideration? If the woman-as-researcher asking questions is potentially perceived as a ‘threat,’ then what are some of the other ways in which women’s findings have been implicated or impacted by their informants’ reactions to their gender, rather than to the actual research questions being asked in studies?

No matter how much I tried to control for my condition of ‘being a woman’, it appeared to be emerging as an inseparable construct from my being a graduate researcher, which is potentially troubling, given women’s position in society, and that the function of a researcher is,

²⁰⁸ Harries, B. (2016). What’s sex got to do with it? When a woman asks questions. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 59, 48-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.10.002>

ultimately, to be trusted enough as a capable, competent producer of knowledge. However, my expected embodiment woman conflicted with this function heavily; the most predominantly “demanded” social identity of me by my informants was to be agreeable and unchallenging, *submissive*, even. My academic role, interviewer function, and stated objectives of the respective inquiries seemed intentionally disregarded, ignored, even actively undermined, almost as if the ‘researcher’ was perceived only as an ‘accessory,’ like a mascot construction when held next to my being a woman.

Ethnographers have theorized this role, the “mascot researcher”, as common to emerge when a woman researcher approaches a male-dominated context or community.²⁰⁹ On the one hand, “a mascot researcher may feel honored to have been granted guest access, however on the other hand, she may feel that she has lost a sense of control over her own identity, as she is forced to perform tricks that may be beyond her capabilities or comfort, and must show gratitude for her belonging by always being a booster”.^{210,211} The mascot researcher has often been characterized as a woman researcher struggling for control over her research and identity in a male-dominated field site, characterized as being “treated with friendly affection but little

²⁰⁹ Adams, L. L. (1999). The Mascot Researcher: Identity, Power, and Knowledge in Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(4), 331-363.

²¹⁰ Adams, L. L. (1999). The Mascot Researcher: Identity, Power, and Knowledge in Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(4), 331-363.

²¹¹ MacIntyre, M. (1993). Fictive kinship or mistaken identity? Fieldwork on Tubetube Island, Papua New Guinea. In *Gendered fields: Women, men, and ethnography*, edited by D. Bell, P. Caplan, and W.J. Karim, 44-62. London: Routledge.

respect” by her informants.^{212,213,214,215,216,217} Usually, the mascot role is grudgingly adopted out of necessity when a field-worker realizes that she can achieve her research goals more easily, but at the cost of abandoning her feminist identity.^{218,219,220} For in the field, the desire to ‘question’ or to ultimately speak one’s mind often comes into conflict with the fear of alienating one’s informants.^{221,222,223,224}

Informant 1

For the first session of this new project, I began with *Informant 1*, conducting an interview via a digital telecommunication platform that—in hindsight, of course—would have alleviated so much of the physical, proximal messiness which had presented itself in the initial problem session. Arguably, if digital interviewing must be pointed to as the most viable solution for women researchers to approach working in the field, what *does* that say about the true state of society, if women are rendered unable to participate in physical forms of communication or methods of knowledge production, especially, in the same established freedom which men

²¹² Adams, L. L. (1999). The Mascot Researcher: Identity, Power, and Knowledge in Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(4), 331-363.

²¹³ Daniels, A. K. (1967). The low-caste stranger in social research. In *Ethics, politics, and social research*, edited by G. Sjöberg, 267-296. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

²¹⁴ Easterday, L., Papademas, D., Schorr, L., & Valentine, C. (1977). The making of a female researcher: Role problems in field work. *Urban Life*, 6(3), 333-348.

²¹⁵ Bolak, H. C. (1996). Studying one’s own in the Middle East: Negotiating gender and self-other dynamics in the field. *Qualitative Sociology*, 12(1), 107-130.

²¹⁶ Hsiung, P. (1996). Between bosses and workers: The dilemma of a keen observer and a vocal feminist. In *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork*, edited by D. Wolf, 122-137. Boulder, CO: Westview.

²¹⁷ Warren, C. A. B. (1982). *The court of last resort: Mental illness and the law*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²¹⁸ Adams, L. L. (1999). The Mascot Researcher: Identity, Power, and Knowledge in Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(4), 331-363.

²¹⁹ Daniels, A. K. (1967). The low-caste stranger in social research. In *Ethics, politics, and social research*, edited by G. Sjöberg, 267-296. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

²²⁰ Warren, C. A. B. (1988). *Gender issues in field research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

²²¹ Adams, L. L. (1999). The Mascot Researcher: Identity, Power, and Knowledge in Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(4), 331-363.

²²² Gordon, D. (1987). Getting close by staying distant: Fieldwork with proselytizing groups. *Qualitative Sociology*, 10(3), 267-287.

²²³ Punch, M. (1986). *The politics and ethics of fieldwork*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

²²⁴ Warren, C. A. B. (1988). *Gender issues in field research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

researchers presumably *can* without issue? Further, would society be prepared for or willing to acknowledge that the cause for such a restrictive compromise would be the result of men's "libidinal" responses to women's physical presences?²²⁵ What does this difference mean about the nature and priorities of women and men, along with respective perceptions about living, learning, and surviving?

While *Informant 1* did not attempt to co-construct my 'requested' embodiment in ways that were sexualizing, it may be of interest that he, instead, discussed several emotional experiences which seemed to naturally 'demand' me to deploy a deeply compassionate, empathic approach. He made with several "requests" for me to facilitate his emotional convergence, echoing the same common themes identified by Hoel discussing how women researchers' embodiment is enacted in the field.²²⁶ This dynamic was much unlike what would be presented by *Informant 2* and *Informant 3*, both women, whom I would describe as emotionally self-reliant, and in moments throughout their respective interviews, emotionally strong, resilient, even. Neither of them appeared to even approach exploration of a relational construction in which they needed me, especially for my deep emotional care of them.

Informant 2

On a different day, I went to conduct a field interview with *Informant 2* in her home, as most convenient to her. As ludicrous as it may sound to enter the same situation, this is a highly common practice to accommodate persons and support the completion of inquiries when study participation can already be notoriously challenging. This is often the case, not only for educational researchers, but also in similar related helping professions, like social work or

²²⁵ Dingwall, R. (1980). Ethics and ethnography. *The Sociological Review*, 28(4), 871–891.

²²⁶ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher's reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

behavioral care.²²⁷ I also believed it important to the integrity of study design to re-insert myself into the same situation, only with the condition of gender and relative performativity now being rendered meaningless (or at least, less probable to the outcome of sexual violence), as I sat with an elder heterosexual, married woman informant in *her* home. Arguments of “she shouldn’t have gone over there,” now would seem rendered obsolete, as she and I defended our fragile life-worlds with our silences and words, never breaching physical boundaries or disrupting each other’s space, nor even challenging the sensitively defined rules of our two respective life worlds. I never felt unsafe nor even remarkably vulnerable during my time with her; I would even venture to say that she might say I was the one who was ‘in control’ during the interview, had I asked. The thought raises a fascinating pondering: is it necessary for one person to be “in charge”? In the context of a dyadic interview, is it beneficial—does it produce a “better” outcome—if the researcher actually does...“take charge”?

The session with *Informant 2* was cooperative in co-producing data, as I was most interested in hearing what she had to say, letting her lead the way, as power nor control had appeared to be a relevant factor in our exchange (at least, from my perspective). She spoke as we sat in her living room, while she spent the entire time seeming to play an unusual ‘game’ of diverted attention throughout, or maybe more simply, to bring a sense of ease to the atypical experience of being interviewed. She had the television on, but muted, throughout our entire ‘interview-interaction’. The visual content on the screen, in this case, the news, had managed to infuse its way into our exchange, contextualizing her monologue with the relevant politics, with her take on these politics. Yet, in a funny manner, I had only realized it was even happening, through its dialogic presence in her answers, as I was not watching the screen along with her, but

²²⁷ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher’s reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

it was an occurring reality that only she was watching, but then, I too, was experiencing with her, through her *words*. Coyly, she deliberately maintained an intense gaze with her deep-set eyes upon the screen the entire time, despite the fact that she had clearly demonstrated an openness and cooperative attitude to our interview throughout. Hers was the perfect example of behavior which characterized an informant demonstrating a form of power throughout and resistance to the interview process, but without becoming dangerous and damaging to the researcher by employing sexually violent behavior to disrupt it.

I will never dare to disrespect another informant by looking away...ever again...

I intently watched her and listened as she stayed committed to evading eye contact with me, hanging on her every word, living with her in her unique life story, filtered through the secondhand lens of her take on these muted news stories. They stimulated her interjection of political content and opinion, making the way for her to discuss her own life experiences in her native country of Jamaica, prior to immigrating to the United States. As I deeply listened, I realized how she had many of her own fears, too. Perhaps we all simply manage our fears and vulnerabilities differently.

Informant 3

Then, on another separate and what would be the last day of interview sessions for this project, I first met with *Informant 3*, a middle-aged White woman and military veteran, at the local public library. We sat in an enclosed patio area, adjacent to the main building structure of the library, but in a way that felt ‘removed’ from the minor noises of the overall quiet setting. While sitting together in the enclosed patio area, *Informant 3* freely discussed her experiences, her views; she spoke about her family, her daughter, and her career. She acknowledged her impression about gender roles in the military, and how she found the associated expectations to

frequently limit her and the majority of her women comrades' professional opportunities to advance. She lamented the ways in which women soldiers were generally default-assigned to be bound to desks, stuck in secretarial roles to do paperwork, meanwhile feeling disconnected from the inclusive culture of contributing to the cause and being part of 'the brotherhood'. She spoke about generations, and the slow crawl of social movements. She sought to find common ground with me around our careers and professional identities. It was a comfortable meeting, which produced 'comfortable' data. Perhaps, it was made 'comfortable' by the fact that we were not necessarily disagreeing or bumping into any critical tensions. This particular session, however, brought interest that 'military culture' may present itself incredibly diversely across persons, pointing to the wide range of diverse expectations that individuals may feel pressured to live out or embody within the military institution, as determined by their bodies. Another thing I wish I had done differently was to have scheduled this session and the following in inverse order.

Informant 4

This final informant, *Informant 4*, was a middle-aged, married Black man who had known me previously by my former professional role as advisor at the community college (like *Informant 3* did as well), a "condition" of interest for the fact that he had known me most predominantly by my identity as a professional person representing the academy. I naively believed he would have respected this when he had agreed to participate in an interview session at the public library that day. While the academic aspect of my identity is somewhat relevant here, it was still not as significant a factor to the gendered expectations he appeared to imbue upon my demanded embodiment as *his* researcher for *his* interview. It should be noted that all other *Informants*, 1, 2, and 3, also held a previous social construction of my identity that was separate from my 'new,' 'open-to-definition' graduate researcher identity, understood as

contextually bound to the interview site. What each informant chose to co-construct with and imbue upon my researcher identity, particularly given the variable conditions, is of considerable interest for analysis.

My instincts already had told me to approach the session with *Informant 4* as differently from *Informant 3*. I relocated to a more common area of the same public library, to a locale that was more open, with multiple tables about the space, many rows of tall bookshelves lining the area, and a few lone readers relatively close by within hearing range (for purposes of illustrating proximity, if it had been me, I would have been massively distracted to be sitting anywhere nearby the conversation). However, I did not feel comfortable nor believe it logistically wise at all to conduct the interview with him in the same “private space” as I did with *Informant 3*. No way was that going to happen, regardless of arguments for ethical integrity for confidentiality, disruption of the quiet public space—*no way*; particularly given all of this unnecessary mess that I had just gone through. I really thought I had covered my bases.

When the interview commenced, it was not long before *Informant 4* began to demonstrate instances of powerful language, and continued throughout (see Table 2), as he used multiple forms of interruptions, and what I call, not necessarily, “lengthy monologues,” rather, dramatic or “*powerful monologues*”. For example, in quite a theatrical nature (especially for a setting renowned and respected for its peace and quiet, such as a library), he, at one point, was describing his frustration during dining experiences when servers approach him to ask if he needs any additional service once his food has arrived. Given his unexpected cathartic performance and rapid escalation, transferring intense feelings onto me as facilitator of the exchange, I argue that the site of the qualitative interview demands more scientific attention, specifically in exploring its qualities which may emulate psychodrama, a therapeutic

intervention.²²⁸ Considering that informants may suddenly launch into spontaneous performative ‘scenes’ of psychodrama during qualitative interviews, academics might not even be fully aware of, nor currently prepared to accommodate for advanced, discipline-specific ways in which researchers may need more adequate preparations or training techniques, even for pilot projects.

“Just...*let me...enjoy...my...meal!*” he elevated his voice at me more emphatically with each word, pointing at his imaginary place setting, expressing agitation directly toward me, as if I were the interrupting waitress, casted here, in this—in *his* skit.

What audience was this for?

What exactly was this performance requesting me to meet it with, as a co-actor?

What was this conflict actually doing?

Throughout the session, I was very careful not to question nor challenge, but to just, allow this powerful language to flow. When he spoke about his race, he expressed passive aggressive laughter at some of his experiences. When he spoke about gender privilege (not asked with the assumption that he possessed any), he asserted, “Women can just...get whatever they want by batting their eyelashes a little”.

Would he have answered this question the same exact way if it had been any other interviewer asking him that? How would he have answered it, had it been a man interviewer asking? Would it simply have been an exchange of mutuality, a symphony of respect-laden inclusive relational utterances, like “bro,” “man,” or “boss,” either agreeing together upon several different areas of ease in their life worlds, or perhaps, commiserating together about the

²²⁸ Orkibi, H. & Feniger-Schaal, R. (2019). Integrative systematic review of psychodrama psychotherapy research: Trends and methodological implications. *PLoS ONE 14*(2), e0212575. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0212575>

necessity of men's rights movements for society over the ways in which they might feel disparaged?

Would it just have produced 'comfortable' data?

Are men fearful of one another's possible range of 'real' behaviors?

Do men ever actually dare to ask each other such boldly honest questions, or produce real answers? Or, do they just reinforce and share their structural power together? Is it all part of a performance of 'being' men—by 'being' powerful, even at the expense of another's subjugation, even if the other is imaginary?

Just...get through it.

Freeze and comply.

Just get through this.

One out of four.

Finally, once the session ended and I was parting ways with the informant, waiting at the entrance so I could excuse myself to the restroom, and not be “caught” by my car, then awkwardly trying to drive out of the parking lot, overthinking ahead to reduce any likelihood of giving him an opportunity to be following me, etc. (I had tried so hard to cover all the bases). He absolutely stunned me instead, right there in the library lobby.

As I thanked him for his time and participation, bid him farewell, and I just could not believe what he stated to me next:

“...I love you”.

My initial reaction to this was disbelief, surprise. A big part of my delayed reaction to this was anger. How could he do something like that, so carefree and fun for him, but now, throwing a second major disruption right into the center of what was quickly growing into a

fragile line of my flawed projects...? Do men ever really stop to consider the weight of their actions when they operate from their impulses? Or, was *this* part of the act; a “manly” performance? What *is* this?! Now, for sure, people would think that *I* am the one doing something wrong...even after this one, this time, it really had left me wondering if the real problem truly was me, and what *I must have* done wrong...or been doing wrong, again, to evoke such a result.

Instead, in that moment, almost as if anticipated and primed by the way I had not challenged any of his degrading interview responses...I stammered, stumbling over my words, thanking him again for his participation, and telling him that sometimes sharing these exchanges of honesty in an interview can lead to more than normal feelings of emotional closeness.

He backpedaled, pseudo-explaining himself, although I cannot remember exactly what he said to account for his inappropriate, boundary-breaking slip up. What I do distinctly remember is the continuing inappropriate, boundary-pushing behavior he demonstrated in the weeks to follow. These behaviors included his contacting me multiple times endeavoring to spend more time together. In these communications, he had extended several invitations for me to come and “break bread” with him. He also randomly sent me a fitness video of a woman doing squats, the camera angle focused on her backside, with no accompanying context or message. I did not respond to nor confront any of these behaviors. Instead, I blocked all forms of contact with him. I did not inform his wife of his behavior, for in a most disconcerting way, it was all still “protected” inside of the tricky, messy conditions of inquiry.

Nowhere to Run: Living with Fear

Despite my disgust and confusion with the multiple fractures to my identity, the feeling that was most jarring to me was a primal sentiment that I realized I had not truly experienced in this unique way until after the initial situation occurred: *I felt fear*.

Do not get me wrong. I knew what it was like to *feel fear*...

However, not like this...

The way that fear functions is, typically, normally, it operates as a rational response to what is perceived as threatening, and I think this part is very important to inform. My mind began to interpret very many common, everyday situations as potentially threatening, in a way that I had never even thought about before. For example, walking around on campus in a crowd of people, even in broad daylight, began to cause me horrible distress when it never had before, after years of schooling and being social. My fear stemmed from the fact that the probability was so high that there would be a sexual assailant walking about in any given crowd on campus, but that I would have no way to identify them or sooner know it. As I walked amongst each crowd, I could not help but think about the troubling statistics:

“One in five college women reported being sexually assaulted during their time of enrollment,” according to a Washington-Post Kaiser Family Foundation poll.²²⁹ Additionally, a systematic review of missing survey data between 2010 and 2016 magnified the problematic state of sexual violence on college campuses. In the prevalence of individuals who reported sexual assault during the time, unexamined data revealed the following victimization rates across student groups (assumptive ranges): female undergraduate, 22.0% (12.0–24.7%), male

²²⁹ Anderson, N. & Clement, S. (2015). College sexual assault: 1 in 5 college women say they were violated. *The Washington Post*. June 12, 2015. The Washington Post and Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation nationwide poll.

undergraduate, 5.3% (3.0–6.4%), female graduate, 8.0% (4.2–9.9%), male graduate, 1.9% (1.0–2.5%).²³⁰

Without the depth of my story...I am only “8%”.

With this data on the assaulted...

Who are the assailants?

This creeping thought made every crowd torturous to walk within.

In every crowd of walking bodies, this was all I could think of.

The day-to-day campus activity of just being a student soon felt like living a nightmare.

It was little things, *normal* things, everyday things, that made me realize just how truly afflicted I was by something that many members of society would otherwise deny, say should be dismissed or forgotten, or encourage to “get over” or move past without a second thought (as it was recommended to me multiple times). I even felt this fear apart from the campus, as I started to see the dangerous possibility in everything.

One night, I had simply ordered food delivery to my apartment. The busy combination of cramming and writing had put my empty stomach in the mood for a pizza. At the time, I lived by myself in a ground unit nearby the campus. It was when I answered the door to greet the delivery driver and make the transaction for my food, that I mindlessly turned away to grab my money, and when I returned back around to face the heavy door, I saw the young man had thrown his hand up abruptly to catch it as it came back, swinging closed (*I was planning on, and completely okay with, letting it remain ajar, or even to allow it to close for a brief moment during the exchange*). It so unnerved me, the way that he, a young man who was practically just

²³⁰ Rosenberg, M., Townes, A., Taylor, S., Luetke, M., & Herbenik, D. (2019). Quantifying the magnitude and potential influence of missing data in campus sexual assault surveys: A systematic review of surveys, 2010-2016. *Journal of American College Health, 67*(1), 42-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1462817>

a boy, seemed to feel so inclined, so comfortable, to *claim*—and change the course of physical action around—*my door. My dwelling.* It caused me such great and unexplainable distress, the way that he appeared so permitted to take command of my home, the sound of his palm thudding against the door, the look on his face, as if he had so much confidence and control to audaciously interact with *my* home. How could he exude such a confidence and sense of ownership, even over a grown woman at first meeting, as he was standing outside the edge of her territory, despite being uniformed and on the job?

What world are we all living in when a young pizza delivery man believes he has power and authority over a grown academic who is “just” a woman? What kind of world are we all living in that he might unfortunately be right?

I was so angry to see that I was not going to be able to escape this life issue nor the havoc it was unleashing inside my mind. It was *my* issue. *I* was not comfortable. It was not happening to anybody else. It seemed to be happening to and around me so much, that I knew it did not even sound believable. I could tell they were “normal” things that were triggering me everywhere, and that the problem was within me. I had already attended some sessions at the university’s victim advocacy center, but the problem felt bigger than that...

Where in the academy is the space for open discussion among women scholars about the potentials for the well-known risks they may encounter during studies?

When in our training would we ever stop to have that discussion?

Are we purposely avoiding the topic because it is uncomfortable—'uncomfortable data'?

Or do we simply not realize how commonly these issues may arise in inquiry practices?

In either case, perhaps it truly *is* up to scholars to illuminate the realities of these ugly experiences, so that they do indeed have somewhere to matter. Perhaps, it is up to the

researchers to bring forward their messy renditions of interviews and experiences gone horribly “wrong” that never seem to “make sense” under the lens of traditional qualitative analyses.

Perhaps, it is also up to scholars themselves to transform into the very warriors *they need*...into warriors of wisdom, warriors of truth, warriors of their own physical bodies. As inquiry practice apparently demands to support their quests of knowledge production, which will be conducted by themselves, as the agents of their own research, out there in the unpredictable wild world, of which, they are only striving to make sense of in the first place, through inquiry.

PART III: BECOMING A WARRIOR

Chapter Four Foreword: The Gentle Art of Becoming a Warrior

Fear only comes from not knowing, not understanding.

Fear is only an illusion. I knew that it was only signaling me toward my next unknown, my next need for evolutionary self-discovery. I simply needed to have greater certainty that if something like that were to ever happen to me again, I would be more able to think through it, and to survive it, without feeling like I had lost such a major part of myself (ever again).

Self-defense education originated in the U.S. out of the antirape movement in the 1970s and 1980s as central to early second wave radical feminists' violence prevention efforts in teaching women specific skills to avoid, interrupt, and resist assault.²³¹ Martial arts techniques were adapted to include the addition of verbal, psychological, and emotional exercises into the curriculum, bringing a critical gender consciousness to the practice.²³² There are criticisms about the effectiveness of women's self-defense, mainly suggesting that the practice instills a false confidence in women, and further claiming that even with training, women would not be able to resist men's violence; however, this defeatist view only reifies the false archetypal dichotomy of strong man vs. weak woman.^{233,234} Despite what critics have to say, the evidence tells a different story: a growing body of literature states that women commonly resist violence,

²³¹ Hollander, J. A. (2016). The importance of self-defense training for sexual violence prevention. *Feminism & Psychology, 26*(2), 207-226. doi: 10.1177/0959353516637393

²³² Hollander, J. A. (2016). The importance of self-defense training for sexual violence prevention. *Feminism & Psychology, 26*(2), 207-226. doi: 10.1177/0959353516637393

²³³ Hollander, J. A. (2016). The importance of self-defense training for sexual violence prevention. *Feminism & Psychology, 26*(2), 207-226. doi: 10.1177/0959353516637393

²³⁴ Webster, K. (2012, August 28). *Self-defense: A false sense of confidence?* Retrieved from www.girlsfightback.com/2012/08/self-defense-a-false-sense-of-confidence/

and that when they do, even without self-defense training, their resistance is frequently successful.^{235,236,237} *One study indicated that active resistance (e.g., running away, yelling, or physically resisting) decreased the risk of rape completion about 80-86% compared with non-resistance.*^{238,239}

I needed to put myself right back into my discomfort zone, for it was the one space that I actually knew the best in life, I had just never been this uncomfortable before. My discomfort zone is the space that the world has kept seemingly shoving me into, the one I keep figuring out how to grow out of each time, into my next evolved self. Like so many empowered women before me, and as an apparently necessary measure to survive my environment, I too, would need to learn how to become a warrior.

Chapter Four: The Gentle Art of Becoming a Warrior

Fall/Spring, 2019-2020

Now, during my fifth year in the program, I look back upon my storied experiences and recognize just how much I have transformed since that first fateful summer, about four years ago. Ever since, I have been impacted by the painful events of that day, and have been working through various attempts to make meaning of them, all throughout a myriad of additional major stressors (just like most are in the academy): (a) continuing to attend my graduate courses, (b) learning and conducting a new (underestimated) practice of teaching undergraduates for the

²³⁵ Clay-Warner, J. (2002). Avoiding rape: The effects of protective actions and situational factors on rape outcome. *Violence and Victims, 17*, 691–705.

²³⁶ Tark, J., & Kleck, G. (2014). Resisting rape: The effects of victim self-protection on rape completion and injury. *Violence Against Women, 20*, 270–292.

²³⁷ Ullman, S. E. (2007). A 10-year update of “Review and critique of empirical studies of rape avoidance.” *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 34*, 1–19.

²³⁸ Tark, J., & Kleck, G. (2014). Resisting rape: The effects of victim self-protection on rape completion and injury. *Violence Against Women, 20*, 270–292.

²³⁹ Hollander, J. A. (2016). The importance of self-defense training for sexual violence prevention. *Feminism & Psychology, 26*(2), 207-226. doi: 10.1177/0959353516637393

college, (c) attempting to research other fields of inquiry as a passive way to try and “move on,” to “rebrand” myself within the academy, and of course, (d) privately pursuing my own personal counseling in effort to begin coping.

During a few different graduate sessions, I had actually attempted to ‘bring in’ my failed project, endeavoring to discuss the difficult issue with my peers. It quickly became clear to me that the matter was far too ‘raw’ for the fragility of traditional “education”. My problem was isolating, polarizing. I noticed how it seemed too uncomfortable for some of my classmates to hear about, some withdrawing entirely. Others fixated on a solution-oriented approach, but there was nothing that could be ‘solved’ ad hoc of the situation. More problematically, inquiring minds (basically, all of us) wanted to understand the problem more, and I realized how I was opening myself up to be *questioned* about something that I did not even understand myself:

“That was really heavy...”

“Well, those were some *risky questions*—”

“I can’t believe you’re actually going to *study* that—I mean, good for you...”

“How did you get out of there?”

“Did you report him?”

“How did you *not* see that he stopped the recording? I don’t understand that.”

“I’m really curious about him... I mean, the fact that he would do that *makes* me want to know more about *him*. You can’t tell us *anything* about this guy? Well, yeah, I guess not...not with the whole confidentiality thing—”

“You guys—I just felt really uncomfortable for a second there, the way that everybody was asking her things all at once.... *I* felt uncomfortable, and we are doing this to *understand*,” cut in one of my peers, rescuing me from the rapid onslaught of unexpected interrogation that,

ironically would help lead to understanding. Even the ways in which people reacted were ultimately informative to how we all deal with this social problem as a collective society.

Still, as a result of these early overshares, I had learned to become quite vague in describing whatever ‘my research’ was for a period of time. Unhelpfully, there was not much in the existing research about this issue then (pre- #MeToo). All the studies I seemed to find practically glorified problems in interviews for the ways they made good data, but I felt like those writers did not realize the level of conflict that I truly had on my hands. The decision to be vague about my projects came with its disadvantages too, for we graduate scholars are ultimately evaluated by the strength and rigor of our developing research. I could feel myself shrinking away from some of my professor’s once bright expectations of me, and also from my own, of myself.

During the same time, I was attending counseling sessions at the university’s victim advocacy center as advised by my major professor. Depression and anxiety were most difficult to manage during this time in the grand juggle of my life. The counselor there helped me to understand certain nuanced details of the event with more meaning; it was beneficial. Still, there was a limit to how helpful these talk sessions were, given that what had occurred was ultimately a full-bodied multisensorial experience of unsafety and violation, involving all the physical and psychic senses. The available method of coping through talking did not feel like enough, because I knew that I still *embodied* fear.

Teaching undergraduates was absolutely one of the most challenging tasks to carry out during this same time. Despite the ways in which ‘the teaching hat’ seems downplayed as a demanding role from us graduate students, in my experience, it was perhaps the most complex and time-consumptive practice to learn, hone, and effectively implement throughout my time in

the program; as traditional teaching was not a previously known part of my skillset, and structural support felt somewhat lacking for us ‘independent facilitators’ in the making. In the classroom, students expected me to be an expert, to have all the answers, and yet, I did not. I was barely holding it together. How could I *not* reject the illusory, fantasy notion of “expertise” applied to any area of my life, at this point? I felt that claiming any sense of “power” after what had happened was like, living a *lie*. My reality had just been overturned, I could not really be sure of anything anymore, but most especially, of my own “authority” in the classroom. How would I suddenly have instructional authority simply by being assigned to teach a class? Did I have authority in an interview simply by designing it and being the interviewer? *No*—this operational logic did not translate based on my observations, not at all. I did not want to be looked to as someone who had all the answers, for I didn’t have any—I feared this, too. All I had were interrupted questions.

The one place where I unexpectedly found solace from all these pressing issues of my own life world was somewhere completely separate from the realm of academia. Despite the fact that the university actually has its own jiu-jitsu club, I bypassed the option entirely and instead pursued training at a private gym nearby the campus. I was so ready to learn. When I began immersing in the new space, nobody knew who I was, nor had any expectations of me at all. It was *perfect*.

Anonymity.

When a person can essentially recreate themselves within an open context, who will they choose to be?

What can that tell us about who they already are?

I am not sure that I would have even believed it myself that I would still be training there today. It has certainly not been an easy process to learn such a notoriously damaging combat sport, especially as I have grappled with both ‘injury’ as well as ‘ego & expectations,’ two of the most common contributing factors as to why practitioners may quit their training.²⁴⁰ Given the devastating nature of jiu-jitsu, *physical injuries* and *bruised egos* are quite an inherent part of learning the sport. I would say these are the two constructs which have afforded me some of the greatest opportunities to deeply learn, to personally transform, and to look at what had transpired in my ‘failed’ projects differently, in more adaptive ways.

A Case for Jiu-Jitsu

In its earliest forms, jiu-jitsu was practiced by samurais in feudal Japan to enact a secondary layer of defense if ever a warrior were disarmed on the battlefield.²⁴¹ Because the samurai wore thick padded metal armor, unarmed strikes were mostly ineffective, which thusly led to adaptations of technically evolved methods to inflict damage against an opponent during combat, resulting in the development of jiu-jitsu.²⁴² In its ironic translation, “the gentle art” is a branch of martial arts renowned for subduing or disabling an opponent using as little energy (strength or force) as possible, but rather, with the application of trained techniques requiring insight of physics and precision, such as specific grips, throws, chokes and joint locks, which can be powerful enough to render unconsciousness or break the limbs of an opponent.²⁴³ As such, it remains relevant today in the modern sport of mixed-martial arts (MMA), as jiu-jitsu has become an integral core fighting style commonly engaged by athletes who enter the cage, and is

²⁴⁰ *Top Reasons Why 99% of People That Start Jiu-Jitsu Will Never Reach Black Belt.* (2019). BJJ Eastern Europe, July 8, 2019.

²⁴¹ Biscontini, T. (2019). *Brazilian jiu-jitsu.* Salem Encyclopedia Press.

²⁴² Biscontini, T. (2019). *Brazilian jiu-jitsu.* Salem Encyclopedia Press.

²⁴³ Biscontini, T. (2019). *Brazilian jiu-jitsu.* Salem Encyclopedia Press.

frequently utilized by smaller or differently experienced fighters, often demonstrating its great leveraging power through being able to submit larger, stronger, or more seasoned opponents with the art.

For the application of women's self-defense against sexual violence, knowledge of basic jiu-jitsu foundations is critical. When I initially had researched the various forms of martial arts to determine which branch to study, jiu-jitsu was simply the most "real" or practical for my needed intents and purposes, in that it assumed an unarmed state of the body, one which may be "smaller" or "weaker" than its attacker, or opponent. In my mind, the objective was not necessarily to obtain an external weapon, but rather, to essentially become one. After all, my corporeal body was the very entity that was under such apparent and constant stream of 'attack', albeit a confusing form of 'sexual combat'. However, my 'basic woman training' had never before explicitly given me permission to—or instruction of how to—resist this combat, how to fight back against it. Instead, cultural messages seemed to promote that I should show a gratefulness for any male attention, and if anything, to constrict my own behaviors in order to avoid situations where I should have known better than to have endangered myself. It is almost as if girls are born into the world, expected to be forever soldiers, enlisted in this 'fight,' and to cope with all of the private 'post-sexual-combat' trauma on their own time and terms, with no reverence, recognition, or respect for their 'service' in such a senseless, ongoing war.

Considerably appropriate to my needed context, much of the conceptual "game" of jiu-jitsu is played upon the ground (i.e., ground-fighting), and one's legs (or "hooks"), are thusly understood as the jiujitierra's first line of defense in a fight. The legs are critical to maintaining "guard," or defensive position, as they are used to establish control and create distance, being a strong extension of the hip line. Up until I had begun my jiu-jitsu training, the only words of any

actual, practical advice I had ever gotten about my legs before were to simply, “Keep them closed! Keep them closed at all times!” (i.e., for the sake of politeness, morality, and yes, for the hopeful preservation of my sexual safety not to be violated). Nobody else in any other life sector I ever had exposure to prior to jiu-jitsu really seemed able to even discuss the plausibility of what *actually* happens when someone else *physically* opens up our legs against our own will, which, in the average woman’s life experience, might be far more common than society would care to admit or address.

What do we do?

My training put me right back into that same threatening situation...

...on the bottom...

...trapped underneath the weight of someone...

...feeling overcome with a loss of control...

...strong physical force attempting to separate my legs...

...an inability to breathe, suffocating, stifling my thoughts...

...hands clasp around my throat...

...over and over again.

“Shoulder jump!”

“Catch the diamond!”

“Triangle choke!”

“Arm bar!”

“Wrist lock!”

It was exactly what I needed: *certainty*. I needed to be sure that if it ever happened again, I’d be ready...at least, more ready than I was on that day.

Exploring My Body

Prior to this new training endeavor, my relationship with my own body had always been somewhat superficial. During my childhood of the 1980s and 90s, a macro-cultural focus had always seemed to *obsess* over my body and the ways that it *looked*, mostly, whether it was an acceptably “small” enough size, the quality of its future *reproductive* potential, and how closely it represented an ideal feminine image, *aesthetically*. At least in my own life, there was comparatively little emphasis made around my body’s physical *health*, what it could do *structurally*, or how it performed *functionally*. Had there been, perhaps it could have been detected earlier in my lifespan that I was developing a moderate S-curve in my spine, presumably onset by idiopathic scoliosis in adolescence, during the time when society seemed least encouraging of my agentic functionality, and most concerned about my ‘ripeness’ as a fresh new woman who was *going to* be picked by the world, whether I wanted to be or not.

Now, being fully grown and only beginning to learn how to fight for myself, I could not help but immediately develop a more realistic, objective perspective on just how physically unconditioned my body was to engage in any type of combat. Based on condition, it was as if my body’s entire lifetime had thus far been focused on achieving just the opposite, of being *fight-not-ready*, of “not working too hard,” or “not doing too much,” and most certainly of “not looking too strong,” never being “too manly”! The focal aims were all so fixated upon image, yet unconcerned with ability. My family’s cultural ideas of embodied femininity coupled with an upbringing during the pre-Internet era influenced me to understand a narrow standard of beauty, of *woman*, mainly depicted by the tall, slender top models with porcelain skin that graced my mother’s *Vogue* magazines, the ones that I looked nothing alike—and she didn’t, either. On the insides of those same magazines were pages upon pages of articles and advertising for

different fitness products, programs, cosmetics, and social messages that I seemed to effectively internalize as unhealthy ideologies about my own bodily vessel. So much of my ‘being a woman’ was lived out by disliking my body, and going along on a long rollercoaster ride of yo-yo dieting, crashing, regaining, losing weight again, piling it back on, and so on, for years...

...until I had finally found myself here...

...on the mat...

...learning to fight for...*me*...

huff huff huff huff gasp huff huff huff huff

Here I was, not even able to catch my breath while we were all only starting to get warmed up, *before* drills. At five-foot-five in height, weighing nearly 190 pounds, I found it difficult to move myself in artful ways like the athletes were, and I didn’t know if it was going to ever be possible. It was as if my tired body had become a big anchor of resistance to the world itself. What’s more, this mortifying physical epiphany took place during my performance in a controlled training environment, let alone in an emergency situation when self-defense would need to be engaged on the body’s immediate reactionary whim.

I had such a long way to go...

For (embarrassing, albeit clinically helpful) comparative purposes, the gym setting enabled me to frequently train alongside aspiring and seasoned MMA athletes, the upper echelon of elite grapplers, actual world champions on the mat and in the cage. My poor cardiovascular health was made highly visible on the mat, inescapably obvious by the unique demanding nature of grappling strong, athletic, trained, resistant bodies for five-to-seven-minute rounds, for multiple rounds, in any given training session. The live rounds, or ‘open mat,’ would commence after a forty-minute instructional session of drilling movements, all of which felt incredibly

foreign to my body. Even the forms of verbal language offered by “the native grapplers” in their efforts to help direct my body to move in the correct ways, felt as if they were being commanded to an alien, for I just did not have the right vocabulary of words nor bodily connection to understand how to move myself to execute their instructions:

“Shoot in!”

“Double unders!”

“Get your harness!”

“Take top!”

Everyone around me seemed to be stronger, so much more durable, *resilient*. I, on the other hand, seemed like such a *marshmallow*. I was not athletic, and since my body composition consisted mostly of adipose tissue, I easily acquired and constantly adorned bruises, like a soft ripe fruit. Every day, it was as if I was trying to fight back against my inevitable fate of getting eaten by wild primates who already knew where all of my best possible hiding places were. During this initial conditioning phase, about the first two years of training, the shapes of my opponents’ fingerprints were most frequently marked all over my wrists and forearms, while my shins and legs were also often covered in black, blue, green, yellowish spots from ‘guarding’ or striking. The soft, fatty part of the back of my tricep, and sometimes, even very prominently on my face or across my neck, purplish-black bruises would stain my sensitive skin for days. During that time especially, I *always* seemed to be covered head to toe in bruises and small scrapes, surely keeping both the ibuprofen and Epsom salt markets thriving. Looking as beat up as I was for so long, it became commonplace for me to find the sorrowful eyes of society glaring back at me with raised eyebrows, expressions of concern or pity, sometimes even having loved ones or strangers ‘casually’ strike up conversations to ask me questions about it, or to make

jokes, seemingly suggesting that people believed I might have been a *victim* of domestic violence who potentially needed public assistance, who, maybe, *now*, needed their saving...

My bruises only make the invisible war visible.

My body is a battleground...

They were already too late.

This is just a different part of the same ongoing war.

This is just the part where I am actually fighting back.

My bruises are marks of the resistance.

During that poignant phase, it was most interesting to me to consider how society would not necessarily think the same thing of a man with bruised body or face. A man with a black eye would likely be perceived as a fighter, or perhaps, even be described as “a tough guy”. Why did people not look at me and think, “She must be grappler,” as I actually was? Why did the narrative suddenly change when it was bound to my body, that if the body is mine, it must therefore be characterized as *victim* in the imagined narrative, rather than as a *fighter*?

Over time, I continued to train, grappling with all of these questions, feeling them melt away from consciousness during the hustle of avoiding death by choke. Mat-time was the only time I was ever fully freed from my endless thoughts, while forging my body into the fortified vessel that it needed to be to survive. Martial arts anthropologists have begun to investigate the sport psychology phenomenon of flow theory in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, which can positively affect the quality of an athlete’s performance.^{244,245,246,247} A person experiencing flow state is

²⁴⁴ Stavrou, N. A., Jackson, S. A., Zervas, Y. & Karteroliotis, K. (2007). Flow Experience and Athletes’ Performance with Reference to the Orthogonal Model of Flow. *The Sport Psychologist*, 21(4), 438-457.

²⁴⁵ Shaffer, O. (2013). *Crafting Fun User Experiences: A Method to Facilitate Flow*. Human Factors International.

²⁴⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper & Row, New York.

²⁴⁷ Kohoutkova, J., Masaryk, P. & Reguli, Z. (2018). The Experience of the State of Flow in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Ido Movement for Culture. *Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology*, 18(3), 1-6. doi: 10.14589/ido.18.3.1

immersed in absolute focus on an activity which is just performing, detached from ego and oneself, and has been associated with an intrinsic motivation.²⁴⁸ Flow state can occur when one is so occupied by an activity that worries or anxieties about the past or future may dissipate from consciousness, researchers also noting increased potentials for feelings of happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction.^{249,250} While research on flow theory in martial arts is scarce, this analysis hopes to support these unexplored areas of training in the sport for its several cognitive, emotional, and spiritual benefits (i.e., merging of action and awareness, clear goals, immediate and unambiguous feedback, paradox of control, loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time, autotelic experience).^{251,252,253,254}

Gradually with time and intent efforts, my body had adapted through its natural tendency to *resist*, and through the enduring of aggressive attacking conditions, with the steady pressure of my training partners' bodies crashing into it, they had helped me develop my defenses, forging me into something stronger, hardened, like a diamond. Coupled with my high expectations for myself and by following a rigorous fitness and nutrition plan, I had eventually reduced my weight by fifty pounds, significantly increasing lean muscle mass and decreasing fat percentage, and transforming my body composition and athleticism. The changes were a result of eating clean foods to a daily caloric deficit consistently for several months, employing nutrient timing

²⁴⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper & Row, New York.

²⁴⁹ Shaffer, O. (2013). *Crafting Fun User Experiences: A Method to Facilitate Flow*. Human Factors International.

²⁵⁰ Kohoutkova, J., Masaryk, P. & Reguli, Z. (2018). The Experience of the State of Flow in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Ido Movement for Culture. *Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology*, 18(3), 1-6. doi: 10.14589/ido.18.3.1

²⁵¹ Stavrou, N. A., Jackson, S. A., Zervas, Y. & Karteroliotis, K. (2007). Flow Experience and Athletes' Performance with Reference to the Orthogonal Model of Flow. *The Sport Psychologist*, 21(4), 438-457.

²⁵² Shaffer, O. (2013). *Crafting Fun User Experiences: A Method to Facilitate Flow*. Human Factors International.

²⁵³ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper & Row, New York.

²⁵⁴ Kohoutkova, J., Masaryk, P. & Reguli, Z. (2018). The Experience of the State of Flow in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Ido Movement for Culture. *Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology*, 18(3), 1-6. doi: 10.14589/ido.18.3.1

around workout sessions of lifting heavy weights, running or other cardio, and near daily sessions of grappling or Muay Thai. I was stronger, leaner, and felt great.

Injury

Despite my personal “victory” of bodily transformation and journeying physical feminism, I still cannot help but think about how ironic it is that even all these years later, I am yet left with so many haunting questions, only now, they are all turned inward.

Inward—the only place that it is truly safe to ask any questions...

I reflect upon the forward, “aggressive” ways in which I had asked the informant practical questions about his body, changed by traumatic injuries. I think about how much my own body has actually changed since then, and not just as a better athlete, but also the damage it has endured via multiple physical traumas as acquired through training in the sport. In most martial arts, but particularly in a combat sport as potentially damaging as jiu-jitsu, injuries are an incredibly common (and practically inevitable) part of the training experience, with studies reporting that the vast majority of jiu-jitsu practitioners have sustained injuries, mostly orthopedic in nature, frequently afflicting the fingers, neck, elbow, knee, and shoulder.^{255,256} Too many times, I have seen newcomers try their hand at the discipline only to attain bad injuries, and some will never return to the mat.

Personally, since training, I have experienced many of my own ‘casualties,’ including sprained joints, especially my ankles and elbows, as people are frequently trying to break them as fair game, along with the plentiful ‘common’ minor injuries that come to be expected as a given part of practicing the sport: bruises, cuts, and scrapes, frequently attained through hand-

²⁵⁵ Scoggin, J. F., Brusovanik, G., Izuka, B. H., Zandee van Rilland, E., Geling, O., & Tokumura, S. (2014). Assessment of injuries during Brazilian jiu-jitsu competition. *Orthopedic Journal of Sports Medicine*, 2.

²⁵⁶ Petrisor, B. A., del Fabbro, G., Madden, K., Khan, M., Joslin, J., & Bhandari, M. (2019). Injury in Brazilian jiu-jitsu training. *Sports Health*, 11(5), 432-439. DOI: 10.1177/1941738119849112

fighting (i.e., using the hands to establish positions or grips). In one class, I was expected to be pad-holding for a Muay Thai instructor who did not realize that I had lowered my hands at the same moment that he ended up kicking me full-contact in the face, his heavy leg accidentally striking my face with enough force to cut through my “superior labial frenum,” the apparent name of the thin flap of membrane inside the mouth which can be felt by running the tongue over the front teeth—that soft, stretch of flesh connecting the upper lip to the face—where I can still feel a big ‘split’, healed into mine.

On a different day—what had turned out to be ‘a bad day’ for me—my right eyelid got cut open when my face was hit with the flying knee of a heavyweight man as he passed my guard with a bit of haste. I began pouring blood from my head and felt ‘woozy’ from the impact. I had never bled so much in my life, I wasn’t even sure if it was stoppable. The cut gaped open wide enough to require two stitches, due to its awkward location just above my eyelid. It also received horrified looks from several persons at the pharmacy when I was in denial about how bad it was, thinking I could fix it myself with some skin adhesive; then again, at a clinic, where they ultimately recommended me to go visit the emergency room instead. The scar is mostly undetectable now, but the wound and my first ever black eye made for the most interesting social exchanges out in the wild social world during the long weeks afterward as it slowly healed.

Another day during drills, a knee compression technique demonstration on me went wrong (or really, it was *too* damn effective), and had resulted in my hinge joint cleanly dislocating, my tendons and ligaments doing their job well enough to pull the kneecap back into its rightful place, but releasing with it an audible symphony of crunching and popping. Deep underneath the patella bone had gotten bruised on the bone and damaged during the dislocation, hurting like absolute hell, and benching me off the mat for months.

The most recent and a more traumatic training injury I have yet experienced occurred while I was on the receiving end of an ‘aggressive’ arm bar submission, resulting from a competitive attitude taken a bit too far (i.e., ego), committed by a different heavyweight man. As he fell back with his weight (and my arm), my left floating rib got forcibly pulled from its place, detaching away from the sternum with a loud nefarious *pop*, its new settled place within my body, certainly not helping the already crooked alignment in my spine. My interoceptive senses are hyperaware of the difference it creates in my body, my ribcage shifted, with the apex of my S-curve exaggerated, slightly ‘opened’ in a way that it wasn’t before, and the opposite side of my ribcage now having less room for my lung to expand than it did, my concavity even smaller than it was, prior to the injury.

Still, I cannot help but wonder to what degree my injuries had occurred, not by chance, but by the result of the existing imbalances that were already naturally in my body. What did this say about the nature of injuries? What are injuries trying to say? How do they express themselves on behalf of the body? How do injuries express imbalances of nature? What words would they choose to use if they could demand us to consider the physical body? When our physical bodies do communicate their messages to us, do we *listen*? Regardless of the varying damages inflicted, in every and in all cases of injuries, my body has healed...my body is healing. I am wounded, but I am healing.

Was it rude of me to ask him about his body, his injuries?

Maybe it was rude to ask, when now I know, the answer—at least, now, my answer—is so obvious: “Of course we all wish that physical damage had never happened to our bodies, but after it has, we just have to figure out how to best heal, and keep moving forward...”

But then, why inflict more of the same upon someone else?

Why inflict more damage when we all instead can heal?

In my efforts to 'do good research', how did I seemingly inflict so much damage?

Did he even realize he caused so much damage?

...did I?

Ego—The Gentle Art of Saying “No”

Even in injury, I have learned that there is a lesson, a wisdom, or a truth to be gained through every part of the journey. On the mat, every exchange that occurs ultimately carries with it a lesson, a metaphor, which also applies to the practitioner's world view and approach to life 'off the mat'. When benched by injury and forced off the mat, there is only time to process, to think back upon the layers of meaning surrounding the exchange which had resulted in bodily damage. In both of the instances when I obtained the aggressed injuries during a live roll with the respective heavyweight men, there were two relevant moments: (1) my hesitantly agreeing to the matches when I ignored *my instincts* which said not to roll them, but *they* had insisted, and (2) my visceral read on their energy and lack of control during the match, just prior to the critical moment of physical injury. I felt the same sense of “spiritual knowing,” of something being amiss, wrong or off, both times—it was the same cognizance I also sensed on the day of the interview. Despite it, each time, I ignored the feeling, and forged ahead.

I realized that the core 'reason' it kept happening was essentially the same: I felt burdened by a self-imposed pressure to prove myself, to prove that I am someone worthy of belonging in this space, in this community, that I am doing enough to be here, and to occupy. Unfortunately, this pressure at times outweighed my discernable ability to trust in myself and have confidence in my own instincts and sound judgment, but instead being overly concerned with others' perceptions of 'me,' my belonging, and accepting my authenticity as a 'grappler,'

(or in prior context, as a ‘researcher’). Each time, at the core of every decision to go against my own instincts, I was trying to prove myself as strong enough, brave enough, smart enough, scholarly enough, tough enough, open-minded enough, adaptable enough, etc. In doing so, I had ignored my own voice, an important guttural, animal intuition as it arose from my belly; I pushed it down as it was trying to tell me not to engage in these situations.

How do we know if impulse is operating from a place of ego, instinct, or irrational fear?

Is there a difference?

When are we taught not to listen to our inner animal?

How much of our primal instincts are we taught to ignore?

In the particular cases of most of my injuries, I could detect myself ignoring my own inner voice, as I believe I was operating from a place of my own *ego*, which was driven by protecting this new, fragile ‘warrior’ image of me I had constructed on the mat—the image of me that I was hiding behind in my efforts to feel ‘safe’ and ‘legitimated’ through my embodiment of being a ‘strong woman’, which felt more secure than my embodiment of being a ‘researcher’.

It is important to distinguish here that the ego itself is not negative nor bad. In one work discussing a transpersonal theory of human development, the ego is described as “the center of consciousness,” “a singular perspective from which psychosensory data are experienced and organized,” as well as “a psychic agency” and “not only an ongoing focal perspective from which experience is witnessed but also a subject that acts upon experience”.²⁵⁷ It is further described as “an active subject...the executer of the so-called ego functions: synthesis, reality testing, discursive cognition, impulse control, and intentional action”.²⁵⁸ For “it is the ego that

²⁵⁷ Washburn, M. (2003). *Embodied Spirituality in a Sacred World. The Ego: Ontological Considerations*. State University of New York Press.

²⁵⁸ Washburn, M. (2003). *Embodied Spirituality in a Sacred World. The Ego: Ontological Considerations*. State University of New York Press.

ties together disconnected or opposing elements of experience, that distinguishes between reality and imagination, that classifies, that correlates, and makes inferences, that controls urges and feelings, and that engages in purposive activity”.²⁵⁹ Stated thusly, my conceptions of how to perform ‘being’ a researcher may have been heavily bound to ego, or the facet of my identity that I felt like I *had to be*, that I *had to* get “right”.

I put so much pressure on myself to physically demonstrate content knowledge of jiu-jitsu and ‘prove’ my community belonging in the space to everyone who invited me to a physical match, that I overlooked the ways in which these situations were also presenting themselves as opportunities for me to practice firmly and absolutely saying “no” when I wanted to say “no”. It turned out that this intricate negotiation of inviting, accepting, and declining physical matches with others on the mat was really a practice heavily centered around *bodily consent*. It was ultimately a matter of boundaries, and of not betraying myself, especially for the obligated sake of fulfilling another’s wishes for how they would prefer to interact with me physically.

Traditional self-defense classes explicitly teach women verbal assertiveness skills, practicing boundary setting and reinforcement, as well as communicating to mock attackers that they will protect themselves.²⁶⁰ Here, I propose that while jiu-jitsu differs from traditional self-defense formats in that it does not specifically cater to teaching these techniques explicitly, I have *had to* organically pursue my own independent learning paradigms of assertiveness and boundary-setting through practicing the sport, simply by being a jiu-jitiera within the community, and over time, learning that it is necessary to practice assertion of boundaries in order to protect oneself and *resist injury*. Now, I have learned to say “no,” and will even in rare cases terminate

²⁵⁹ Washburn, M. (2003). *Embodied Spirituality in a Sacred World. The Ego: Ontological Considerations*. State University of New York Press.

²⁶⁰ Hollander, J. A. (2016). The importance of self-defense training for sexual violence prevention. *Feminism & Psychology*, 26(2), 207-226. doi: 10.1177/0959353516637393

an agreed to match in the middle of the roll if I am not comfortable with the other person's orientation of physical energy or perceived lack of control.

Even though this does not seem like such a major feat, to me, it absolutely has been pivotal to explore. Saying “no” to people we know is a relevant matter, as one of the most important components unearthed about sexual violence is how situations are frequently ambiguous, most often initiated by an acquaintance (39% of assailants) or by a current or former partner (33% of assailants), basically, someone the victim *knows*.²⁶¹ Learning and practicing exactly how to set firm boundaries—physical boundaries—with people that I know I will see again within the community has been the one of most helpful and educative ‘mat-lessons’ I am learning, and it continues to richly inform the rest of my lived experience. Some of this “no”-ing practice has been learned vicariously by watching men grapplers model behavior when they decline invitations to roll an opponent. During times of injury, I even took vows of silence and continued attending classes to watch how people approach their rolls, observing the different ways words were used to structure power on the mat. However, I must note that men grapplers’ “no” appears to be accepted far more comfortably, outright, and at actual face value than my “no,” whereas mine can seem at times to serve as the starting point for a *negotiation*. I wonder: if more women practice saying “no” to men in public spaces and open communities, perhaps men’s expectations could also gradually shift away from their current expectation of her giving into coercive efforts when alone in private settings. Perhaps more women may feel ‘permitted’ to say “no” to men if they observe other women actively and unapologetically doing it in public spaces. Additionally, perhaps more men could benefit from their practice of *accepting* “no” from women.

²⁶¹ *Perpetrators of Sexual Violence Often Know the Victim: 8 out of 10 rapes are committed by someone known to the victim.* Perpetrators of Sexual Violence: Statistics. RAINN. Publicly accessed 2019, <www.rainn.org>.

I believe some of these turning points in training may be somewhat common for women grapplers to eventually face as different, dangerous realities that men don't necessarily have to navigate in quite the same context along their journeys as jiu-jitsu practitioners. Several women in the community have personally (privately) expressed to me some of their frustrations with what could be described as 'the male ego' presenting itself in a roll that could be predictably physically endangering. One local black belt organizes inter-academy open mat sessions for women grapplers to meet each other in order to have more equitable training opportunities, which is especially useful in preparation for competitions. It is important to 'not feel like the only woman on the mat'. She had further explained her rationale for the training design: "Guys are allowed to attend and observe, but *only* the women can roll. If you don't like it? Tough! The guys get to a point where they take it too seriously and get too rough...and then they hurt me. Then I can't train anymore," The more I quietly conferred with other women in the sport, the more it seemed as if I was not the only one who noticed it: some men approached rolls with women grapplers under their own sense of false confidence, as if they would automatically be assured an easy win, regardless of her size, strength, training experience, technique, mental capacity, creativity, or anything else; and if met by the surprise with her resistance, or the demoralizing qualities of her skills, he could resort to using force, rather than risk *learning* from her, even to the point of risking injury to her body, in order to declare a hasty "win".

I have even had men verbally express variations of their own overconfidence to me directly in our exchanges on the mat, from ranked practitioners:

"Yeah, I was thinking to myself, okay I'll just pass and submit a few times to work my attacks. But then...I couldn't pass your guard!"

...to brand new men on their first day of class:

“I mean, I feel like this is really unfair and I’m going to win. I just don’t know the rules or what exactly to do for the sport part of it, but I feel like I’m going to beat you.”

Though some critics suggest that self-defense training instills a false confidence in women, I would say that women’s lack of participation in these important physical practices only allows for the reification of men’s own false confidence in their sex as artificially superior, built upon overinflated beliefs that they are significantly more capable than women are to learn and effectively demonstrate embodied physical power.²⁶² To directly argue against the claim of women developing a “false confidence” as a result of training, I personally have only grown more aware of what it truly feels like to grapple with ‘the large male body archetype’ especially across the diverse range of physical bodies on the mat; and rather than over-believing in myself, I instead more deeply respect their grandly amassed sentient qualities of body size, strength, and physical power. If anything, grappling with stronger, larger bodied men has made me pray that if I ever have to engage in another endangering situation against a man, I would hope he is relatively smaller or moderately sized in order for me to have better odds at survival.

I have safely rolled with other heavyweight men since these injuries. What appears more predictive than body size or weight class to ensuring physical safety in any exchange is actually a balance between one’s own *self-awareness* and *control*, as well as the other’s *self-awareness* and *control*. Reckless, spastic, or excessive use of force and strength rather than skill and technique is a cultural faux pas in jiu-jitsu, particularly with the added variable of a significant size and strength difference (in the respective cases of my two aggressed injuries, my opponents were upwards of 100 pounds heavier). Not only is self-awareness and control important for the large man asking and expecting me to engage with him on his terms, it is even more imperative for me

²⁶² Webster, K. (2012, August 28). *Self-defense: A false sense of confidence?* Retrieved from www.girlsfightback.com/2012/08/self-defense-a-false-sense-of-confidence/

as the primary jiu-jitiera to know my own self, and to develop a sense of control, an ability to say “no” on my own terms. Otherwise, how else could they practice accepting it?

Undoing Gender on the Mat

Judith Butler has theorized gender as a construct that is behaviorally performed; *gender* is defined by what someone *does*.²⁶³ Not only is gender performed individually, it is also co-constructed between performing actors. She elaborates, “Moreover, one does not ‘do’ one’s gender alone. One is always ‘doing’ with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary”.²⁶⁴ Vulnerability to violence characterizes one dimension of gender.²⁶⁵ In the same manner then, addressing vulnerability to violence could make it theoretically plausible to ‘undo’ gender, or at least to do gender differently, challenging traditional norms or assumptions through divergent performances, like martial arts, which is essentially a physical game of chess between all types of bodies upon the great universalizing power of the grappling mat.

Because all of my training partners encompassed such a diverse ‘range’ of physical bodies, our engagement through the combat sport seemed to highlight other qualities of much greater significance to the exchange, other than gender, for example: body size, body strength, athleticism, flexibility, martial arts experience, strategy/creativity, learning potential, openness to listening, and ego diffusion. This was most promising to me, for it allowed different paradigms of evaluation for my body to partake in other than “gender,” where I have always seemed disadvantaged, and uncomfortable with the automatically assumed implications for women compared to men. After being immersed in the training community for a few years, people began recognizing and encouraging me for my thinking, explaining to me how, “Smart people

²⁶³ Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

²⁶⁴ Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

²⁶⁵ Hollander, J. A. (2002). Resisting Vulnerability: The Social Construction of Gender in Interaction. *Social Problems*, 49(4), 474-496.

get good at jits”. Once I was finally able to observe the movements of the game through the strategic lens of a cognitive chess match, I seemed to grow more comfortably into my practice as a physical grappler.

Now that I have practiced in the sport for about four years, it has allowed me plenty of time to notice various social phenomena on the mat. One of the things I have observed is the ways in which, rather than using their physical bodies to create legitimate power in the physical jiu-jitsu exchange, sometimes people will instead interject words to create deliberate power structures, asserting instructional power, even using other forms of ‘physical distractions’ to influence the match (e.g., tickling my feet, playfully snapping their fingers to get my eye gaze to break deep focus, ‘making’ me look them in the eye, trying to evoke my laughter to undermine the seriousness of the match, disrupt my concentration, etc.). While I have not observed other persons’ matches well enough to confidently say whether instances like these may happen more to women than they do to men, I can say that they seemed to begin happening to me more frequently as my game started to advance, and as I began to challenge the men, making it less ‘easy’ for them to evidently demonstrate themselves as clearly superior to me with more jiu-jitsu acumen, and thus, comfortably claim me as ‘their learner’ in a partnered exchange. Even the linguistic ways in which some training partners have described my body and performative movements seemed to reflect heavily gendered perspectives about my game.

For example:

“You move like a deliberate ballerina”

“Your back take was like, a killer koala”

“No fair, you’re too flexible!”

“Oh wow, a guy would have tapped to that way sooner.”

“You have a higher pain tolerance because you’re a girl..., it’s unfair!”

“You sure are feisty today!”

If one considers the measurable behaviors that are being collectively described as “feisty” in this context (i.e., focused, serious, intentional, effective, aggressive), only taken and applied to a male grappler, I imagine *he* would simply just be described as... perhaps, “good”?

What made *me* “feisty”?

Along with other conditional statements, like:

“You’re pretty strong, for a girl”

“That’s pretty good, for a girl”

Or, once stated in a way that I preferred:

“You are really strong for someone your size...”

One notoriously outspoken man even remarked the following regarding my ‘unexpected’ physical strength during our first roll:

“I’m going to start a rumor that you used to be a guy! There’s no way...”

As a young man even ‘announced’ that he was about to apply some ‘man-strength’ on me to try for a submission, he compared me to other (untrained) women to justify his decision:

“Yeah, but you’re not common...”

As he pressured me, all I could think to myself was how I’d wished that every woman would train and give this young man just as difficult a time of physical dissonance, only evoked by my agential power displays on the mat.

There is also the frustrating dilemma of some people seeming so easily impressed that I know any jiu-jitsu at all. Their expressive shock over my technical demonstrations conveying that they had imagined my participation in the community as ornamental, only a mat mascot,

limited to just hanging about, but not necessarily there to participate in the taking of the sport seriously, nor to acquire or retain any content knowledge, let alone endeavoring to become high-ranked or competitive with the other athletes... not like how it seemed to be *assumed* for the others:

“Whoa, that was good! But I mean, like, it felt like you really worked for that!”

“Damn, you really got a death grip on my arm!”

“Wow! You are really technical!”

“Hey guys, she isn’t fucking around over here!”

“Oh my god, you are legit!”

It neared patronizing, almost as if one could stick the phrase “after all” behind any statement to make the sentiment more complete.

I also tended to hear the numerous ways in which women grapplers’ skills and successes were often attributed externally, to any other possible sources than her, and usually to the community’s men:

“She’s got a great coach”

“She’s got some great training partners to really help her”

“Her boyfriend has a sick guillotine—that’s where she gets it!”

I have even noticed the ways in which some women can speak about other women grapplers, sometimes from a place of unhealthy competitiveness, or envy of her social position as proximal to high-ranking men in the community, rather than giving credence to *her* technical jiu-jitsu knowledge:

“Well, they are married. She has a black belt at home, what do you expect?”

Being that so much of the game is measured in physical demonstrations, it has been difficult not to take notice to all of these words, how they are quite commonly used, mainly, the various ways in which these words have frequently been used to create structural power, without which, the dynamics might not be so obvious nor one-sided if evaluating the grappling solely by silent, physical performances on the mat alone. All of the various physical distractions and linguistically created power structures served to cast distractions and diminished expectations over my performance. They also suggested that conventional standards of athletic performance were not being held the same for me if such active measures were being used to disrupt my natural advancement. As soon as I seemed to advance, it felt like my progress would be recast, often creating an unequal dynamic founded on the undermining of my rank, size, skill, or gender, where it wasn't necessarily happening the same with my male counterparts who had been training there for less time. I wanted to be taken seriously, and I wanted my training time to be seen as serious. It was almost as if my progressions in the sport were so frequently detracted from, that I have always struggled with knowing whether I am authentically doing well, or whether I am experiencing what critics would call an "overconfidence in (my) abilities," fearing that perhaps my training partners really are just being overly cooperative in our matches. Furthermore, other grapplers, men grapplers, who expressed finding inspiration from my movements or technique were often short-changed by my own socialized discomfort in 'being the teacher', as I frequently struggled with my own inability to feel confident enough to take *myself* seriously as a grappler (but perhaps, because it was challenged so aggressively, so much). Especially when first establishing myself within the community, it was troubling that my sole purpose for being there was to learn jiu-jitsu in order to protect myself, however, it appeared that

my agential presence and embodiment was far more frequently being evaluated on something else, other than my jiu-jitsu acquisition or demonstrations of performance.

The matter of my sexuality and my intimate relational availability has been raised numerous times throughout the four years of my immersion in the community. Especially when I was new, it felt as though I was sometimes being evaluated more as a potential “girlfriend” to people rather than as a new grappler who was there, just trying to learn the sport, like everyone. It was even questioned what my sexual orientation was, as after a time of staying there to train, some presumed that I must not be heterosexual for my committed participation in the sport, or perhaps, for my focused interest in the grappling sport itself rather than in the grappler men. Additionally, during training exchanges, a sexual lens was frequently applied to my body, where it wasn’t necessarily to the men’s, even for doing the exact same physical behaviors and techniques as them. Some have even sexualized my verbal descriptions of bodily experience in the sport, in ways that men did not seem to do to each other’s discourses when they were simply talking about the physical nature of grappling. This would even sometimes consist of ‘assigning’ my body as belonging to an imaginary man, for perhaps it was too dissenting to see me truly representing myself there, ensuring my safety on my own, without the sponsorship or presence of an associated man.

For example, in practicing one technical maneuver of essentially going “crotch-to-crotch” against an opponent in order to pass a large man’s guard:

“Oh my god! Good thing she doesn’t have a boyfriend! He’d be so mad at that!”

Another time, in attempting to add my ‘clinical’ perspective to a discussion about the significance of “man-strength” in grappling matches, I referred to one young practitioner who

had recently experienced a significant growth spurt of his pubertal adolescence, becoming substantially stronger and much more difficult to manage on the mat:

“I felt him become a man—”

—and before I could even explain the meaning of my vantage point—

“Whoa-oh! That really doesn’t sound right with you saying it!”

Why were these uniquely applied implications always so *sexually-oriented* whenever a physical exchange had anything to do with *my* body, even when it had nothing to do with sex?

Unsurprisingly, mixed-sex training relationships have received contrasting reviews. In studies about Brazilian jiu-jitsu mixed-sex training relationships, several practitioners have described a fear of improper touch sometimes even preoccupying them from focusing on training (among women *and* men).²⁶⁶ Some practitioners also reported the issue of heterosexual relationships forming in training environments, and how these may undermine the sanctity of training, or affect the social status of the female artist, specifically.²⁶⁷ Perhaps due to the frequency and intensity of touch being uniquely situated in mixed-sex martial arts, not mimicking other normative social practices in intersex interactions, the art may promote an accelerated sense of intimacy between practitioners.²⁶⁸ One MMA instructor reported that it is quite a common occurrence to see romantic relationships interfere with training:

“I’ve got girls who are coming up in the game, and you know, it’s not that they’re skanks, (but) they might meet a guy here and they’re creating close bonds through training... (they) get really close, like you are in training, physical contact, sweating on each other...”

²⁶⁶ Channon, A. & Jennings, G. (2013). The rules of engagement: Negotiating painful and “intimate” touch in mixed-sex martial arts. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 30, 487-503.

²⁶⁷ Channon, A. & Jennings, G. (2013). The rules of engagement: Negotiating painful and “intimate” touch in mixed-sex martial arts. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 30, 487-503.

²⁶⁸ Channon, A. & Jennings, G. (2013). The rules of engagement: Negotiating painful and “intimate” touch in mixed-sex martial arts. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 30, 487-503.

I wish I could make a rule against it, ban them from sleeping with each other... It's always ended badly, always. Usually they split up and the girl leaves, or they'll have a one-nighter and the girl will be too embarrassed to come down again.”²⁶⁹

Alternatively, one female practitioner reported her displeasure with these matters, suggesting how it may threaten to compromise their group membership, sense of respect, and sense of belonging for the collective:

“There's a lot of those women who come into it thinking “I can meet fighters that way”, and then they go “oh look, I'm a fighter too”, and they get to meet the guy, do (sexual) stuff, and they move on to the next guy, and it's all a bit gross. . . What does it say to the guys? It might make them think we're all just there to get laid.”²⁷⁰

At their core, all these qualitative accounts indirectly echo the training space as men's territory, and women as 'guests'. Despite concerns, other studies indicate that mixed-sex martial arts practices can situate men and women in mutually respectful, cherished relationships which actually diverge from the conventional sexualized, unequal manner in which gender is typically enacted in male-female relationships.²⁷¹ Personally, I have found the majority of my training partnerships to be positive, and several have developed into outstanding, meaningful friendships. Admittedly, my friendships with women grapplers are 'easier' and marked more concretely by mutuality, equity, and respect, lined by a shared knowing of the additional difficulties we may face. Even the training partnerships that have been wrought with conflict have often revealed important learning lessons to me, whether the other has chosen to employ a similar philosophy in

²⁶⁹ Channon, A. & Jennings, G. (2013). The rules of engagement: Negotiating painful and “intimate” touch in mixed-sex martial arts. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 30, 487-503.

²⁷⁰ Channon, A. & Jennings, G. (2013). The rules of engagement: Negotiating painful and “intimate” touch in mixed-sex martial arts. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 30, 487-503.

²⁷¹ Maclean, C. (2016). Friendships worth fighting for: Bonds between women and men karate practitioners as sites for deconstructing gender inequality. *Sport in Society*, 19(8-9), 1374-1384. doi: 10.1080/17430437.2015.1096249.

learning ‘from’ me and our differences, or not, has never changed my growth. Still, it cannot be overlooked that even in the effortful, conscious ‘undoing’ of my femininity, an underlying element of significance surrounding my being a woman in the training space continually appears to be my gender, my sexuality, and my “secret reason” of sexual trauma being a major driver to train, as the following two experiences would go on to confirm.

The “Test”

Circa early 2017

Practice Exam

While I have not been sexually assaulted ‘as traumatically’ since the interview, I can recall one reminiscent incident after I had already been training for a couple of years. One grappler, a heterosexual man, had romantic interest in me, and asked me out on a date. I agreed. We met for a drink and conversation, having one beer each. Then, I was very disappointed by his presumptive and aggressive behavior at the end of the date when he walked me to my car, then unexpectedly put his hands on my body, and in one motion, lifted me up into the air to bring my face closer to his face...to kiss me. Only as a result of my training, I instinctively and immediately wrapped my legs around his waist as to establish a form of control to create a safe distance. This move is called “jumping closed guard,” a physical maneuver that would not have been instinctive for me prior to learning jiu-jitsu. Prior to learning jiu-jitsu, iconic images from romantic films like *The Notebook* would have led me to believe that this leaping move could only be a type of embrace, “consenting,” even. However, when this was happening (...again), it was the only “advantage” I really had, especially against such a large (trained) man who made it clear that he would abruptly breach my physical boundaries to assume control so adamantly and confidently during our first personal meeting. From my perspective, I had not even approached

our date in a way that conveyed I was interested in him—especially *this* interested—and unfortunately, I was not. This was just one more kiss that I did not want, but felt I had to endure...to *survive*. I realized that he knew more jiu-jitsu; additionally, he had a considerable size and strength advantage over me as well.

He even audaciously remarked about my resistance as he reached back to actually try and break my guard, to open my legs, to disrupt my control over the situation he was forcibly creating: “Your legs are pretty strong...” he stated, with a detectable tone of frustration, yet attempt at playfulness, in his voice.

“You are requiring me to use them,” I replied sternly.

After he realized my commitment to my own physical boundaries, I left and never saw him again. Though he is not a member of the same gym or network I attend, I know he is still part of the same community that had provided me so much solace from the very issue which he did not appear aware of, nor remotely sensitive to, as he was re-perpetuating it against me, without my agency or any say, but according to his imposed will upon my body. Sexually aggressive or violent behavior exists everywhere that people do, for it is a pervasive societal issue. Granted, had he known of my ‘grand reason’ to train in the first place, perhaps he would have been on “better behavior,” but then, it would have been only a mere performance.

Since that time, I have only become even firmer in my personal convictions, after having learned to more astutely read behavioral indicators and establish firmer boundaries, far before entering precarious situations or opening social doors that remain better off closed. At least according to my vantage point, even the way someone may approach a dialogic exchange absolutely appears to predict the way they might engage in a physical exchange. This ‘style of conduct’ even appeared to ring true in the context of being on the mat as well (i.e., “shit-talking”

one's opponent, interjecting words to derail a critical point in the match, etc., and congruence with a forceful or uncontrolled fighting style). Any elements of linguistic expressions to control, boundary-push, or "offend" appeared to be key indicators or "the first warning signs" of potential subjugation or abuse. After three decades of smiling, nodding, agreeing, and complying, I was finally beginning to learn all of the most important lessons that I needed in my life. It took getting hurt several times until I realized that I do not need to try and "prove myself" in this way anymore. I was learning to say *no*. I was learning to *resist*.

A troubling thought: when did only having capacity to say "yes," and not fighting back become two inseparable components of "being a woman"? How, and why, did I learn to be like this? What would it mean for my survival if I wasn't? Why has it all been so damn hard to unlearn?

~*~

Last days of 2019

Final Exam

More recently, I had another significant experience, this time, on the mat. Of all the new guys that could walk in off the street and into the gym, the two 'archetypes' that even seasoned men grapplers seem to find naturally threatening in jiu-jitsu are (1) *the big guy*, and (2) *the wrestler*. One day during open mat, I was catching my breath after rolling several rounds. I noticed a larger framed man who moved like a wrestler walking up to approach me:

The big wrestler guy.

He was new to the gym and had asked me to roll. With a bit of hesitation, I agreed. Right away with my acceptance of his invitation, he stated almost patronizingly:

"I'm bigger than you..."

—as if I hadn't noticed.

Was the observation a disclaimer for himself? For me?

Why wait to state something 'belittling' only once I have committed to the exchange?

As we rolled, I quickly got into my head space, lost in my thoughts, and was feeling very insecure. In my view, as well as among other women who train for self-defense, these exchanges with certain men are critical for benchmarking our *real* progress. These interactions more than any other can provide some of the most practical 'tests' of self-defense training against an 'attacker' who is not necessarily assumed to be a cooperative practitioner-partner, but one who is moving much differently, with less control, more force, and lots of ego to protect.

How would this really measure up, if I really *had to* use it?

I was so frustrated with myself. Even though I was defending well and maintaining a controlled distance on my terms, I was not committing any attacks. I often saw his arm freely left out in the open, waiting to get caught in a clean razor arm bar, I was visually breaking the elbow, but I never did it. At one point, I stood up to my feet.

"Oh," he chuckled at me, assuming a low wrestler stance, "*You* wanna wrestle?"

His patronizing of me felt frustrating, because it was almost as if he did not even realize that is what he was doing. At their core, the different belittling ways in which men seem to use words to construct power over women on the mat is centralized around forms of *ableism*. It is hard to think with, for the many ways in which I wonder if I might have erred and possibly done the exact same thing to the informant, maybe without even realizing.

Did I use my words to create power over him, perhaps even in ways that I cannot see or did not realize were happening, but to his consciousness? Did he use his words, or his absence

of words, to try and reclaim that power? Did he then decide to assert a different form of physical power, of ability, when his words were not doing it enough?

I kept trying to take the big wrestler's back, which he was able to evade more than once. At one point when I attempted it, he flipped me over his shoulder and smash-landed me on my face. I was feeling absolutely defeated. Then...

...whether it was real...

...or a result of my trauma...

...perhaps a faulty perception...

...I may never be sure...

...I could feel his arm as he pressed it deliberately against my crotch.

Now, granted, controlling the crotch is a legitimate technique especially focal to the wrestler's grappling practice, for the crotch is basically used as 'a handle' of the body. However...there was something about the application of this particular move...

...how it felt...

...in this match...

...in this moment...

...in the rhythm of the roll...

...the amount of time it was applied...

...and...

...whether anything was intended...

...or perhaps I truly am just a person who has just known *too much* trauma...

...this seemed to be the final straw...

...and my body did not accept this.

I escaped from his bottom side control and went to take his back again. This time, I had a physical fuel provided by the threat of endangerment. I was also angry—no, I was *furious*. I was *infuriated* that he had touched me there, and not just anywhere, but within the sacred territory of *my* healing grounds, audaciously, during *his* first roll with *me*, where I was the seasoned member. I felt the same awful feeling again creep in, like I had after the interview: something important, sacred, had just been taken away *from my body...from me*.

In a rare moment, something between flow state and a hyperclear break in the space time continuum, I was able to do everything I had envisioned in my mind, first securing a harness, leaping back with him as if he was weightless, pulling him into my control, and punching the choke into his neck mid-leap. I even heard him begin to try and say more words as I did this, but his vocal chords quickly became compromised as I began to apply the choke. Time seemed to stand still while I sunk in the attack, and I realized a few things:

- (1) Under a ‘true perceived threat’ of bodily endangerment and violation, now I knew for sure, I really *would* be able to protect myself...
- (2) The idea of sexual violation was what seemed to ignite this fury, *far more* than the physical, as getting dropped on my face did not effectively send me into “kill-mode” quite like it did to have my crotch touched in a way that felt questionable.
- (3) I felt like I had quite a bit more critical space left to tighten up my arms, and more pressure to apply inside this choke. All I was thinking about was still diligently working to just get those couple extra notches I could feel remaining in there...
- (4) ...but, despite this minimal space I could detect as I endeavored to tighten the choke, he tapped...
...he tapped once.

...then he tapped twice.

Here, I must admit something I had never done before: I felt him tap the first time, but there was something conscious within me that did not want to acknowledge this most important rule of the sport, of honoring the tap...

There was a cool, calm, collected, yet dark part of me that wanted to sink it in even deeper, that wanted *him* to know what it was like to feel distressing fear, to panic, to not have any certainty whether I was ever going to let him breathe again or not.

The reason I decided to let him go when I did was because of two spectators whom I realized were specifically watching our match.

- (5) Knowing this darkness exists as a part of me helps me understand that it is a part of *everyone*. It is only a natural human response to protect the self when the self is threatened, and in the name of self-preservation, persons will employ whatever weaponry that has been learned to defend their fragile egos from threat.

Given these insights, what are we saying the 'male ego' or the 'female ego' has to be or has to do in order to survive safely in the world? How might some of these expectations make their ways in to muddy the nature of research relationship structures? Additionally, what different forms of 'weaponization' are being taught, to whom are they being taught, and why? What are the true impacts of teaching people that their physical bodies make them somehow different from other humans, either as falsely superior or inferior?

How is the illusion of 'difference' reinforcing structures of danger?

What are some ways that the illusion of 'difference' may be keeping us all from social enlightenment and evolution?

Final Thoughts and Implications: Awakening the Warrior-Scholar

Despite mine and other researchers' similar experiences of troubling or problematic interviews wherein they have been sexualized or have had their physical boundaries breached—ranging from inappropriate touching, to molestation, to sexual assault committed by informants or even bystanders in field studies—there yet remains an overarching, institutionally upheld belief that researchers are the *power agents* of qualitative interviews and of their research productions.^{272,273,274,275,276,277,278,279,280,281,282,283,284,285} Perhaps this belief could be more understandable if there were more demonstrations of the researcher role being misused in the academy's modern social science practices.

History matters, here, as the erroneous belief that researchers would have baseline dispositions of malevolence may be historically-driven out of the origins of ethics in research practices, and may inadvertently run through every vein of today's institutional review board

²⁷² Harries, B. (2016). What's sex got to do with it? When a woman asks questions. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 59, 48-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.10.002>

²⁷³ Bravo-Moreno, A. (2003). Power games between the researcher and the participant in the social inquiry. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 624-639.

²⁷⁴ Campbell, E. (2003). Interviewing men in uniform: a feminist approach? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(4), 285-304.

²⁷⁵ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher's reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

²⁷⁶ Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 318-346.

²⁷⁷ Koivunen, T. (2010). Practicing power and gender in the field: Learning from interview refusals. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 39(6), 682-708.

²⁷⁸ The gang-rape of a Japanese researcher has sent shockwaves through Sudder Street. (2015). *The Times of India*, January 3, 2015. Publisher: Bennett, Coleman & Co., Ltd. Accessed 2019.

²⁷⁹ Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 318-346.

²⁸⁰ Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480-500.

²⁸¹ Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

²⁸² Jacobsson, K. & Åkerström, M. (2012). Interviewees with an agenda: learning from a 'failed' interview. *Qualitative Research*, 13(6), 717-734.

²⁸³ Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 318-346.

²⁸⁴ Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480-500.

²⁸⁵ Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

(IRB) trainings. Calls for ethics in research first resulted from the widespread misuse of the inhumane experimentation conducted by Nazi doctors in World War II, with practices so appalling, they led to the development of ethical codes of conduct for biomedical research, also later applied to behavioral research: the Nuremberg Code (1947), the Declaration of Helsinki (1964), and finally in the U.S., The Belmont Principles (1976).^{286,287} Due to these historical roots combined with institutions' interests in protecting their own liabilities, today's IRB trainings are designed to educate researchers on ethical inquiry practices, but may be improperly biasing the content from a perspective that seeks to assure its own institutional liabilities, rather than by pragmatically focusing upon what is most informationally relevant for new researchers to learn about their own new independent practices.

For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Research Protections still grounds its training content mainly around *The Belmont Report* original document from 1976. While these ethical codes applied to social science inquiries tend to focus on the three areas of 'informed consent', 'the right to privacy and confidentiality', and 'protection from harm', they are founded upon improper beliefs that researchers have ultimate power over 'the researched,' which fail to consider modern nuances surrounding who conducts

²⁸⁶ Childress, J. (2000). Nuremberg's Legacy: Some Ethical Reflections. *Perspective in Biology and Medicine*, 43(3), 347-361.

²⁸⁷ Alcadipani, R. & Hodgson, D. (2009). By Any Means Necessary? Ethnographic Access, Ethics and the Critical Researcher. *Tamara Journal*, 7(4), 127-146.

research, and how this may shift assumptions of researcher power.^{288,289,290,291,292,293} Moreover, in reviewing some of the ‘decision tree’ resources offered for inquirers, it is clear that the IRB’s concerns are more angled from a perspective that is far more aligned with the protections of the institution’s, and quite removed from many of the practical concerns and dilemmatic areas of research processes, informants’ emotional and embodied experiences, let alone the researchers’:
294,295

“Is an Activity Research involving Human Subjects?”

“Is the Human Subjects Research Eligible for Exemption?”

“Does Exemption x Apply?”

“May the IRB Continuing Review Be Done by Expedited Procedures?”

Contained within these questions, the main concerns of focus are whether or not the inquiries are regarded as considerable research, and taken a step further, whether that research then is exempt or non-exempt from attaining IRB approval, pursuant in the study of human subjects.²⁹⁶ The IRB’s “mismatched” liabilities and interests may unrealistically reflect broader design concerns which do not accurately characterize the researcher’s practical dilemmas faced

²⁸⁸ Van Maanen, J. (1983). *The Moral fix: On the ethics of fieldwork*. In Emerson, R. *Contemporary Field Research*. Boston: Little Brown.

²⁸⁹ Punch, M. (1986). *The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork*. London: Sage.

²⁹⁰ Taylor, S. (1987). Observing abuse: Professional ethics and personal morality in field research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 10, 288-302.

²⁹¹ Cassell, K. & Jacobs, S. (1987). *Handbook on ethical issues in anthropology*. Special publication of the AAA, No. 23. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association.

²⁹² Fontana, A. & Frey, J. (1994). *Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context* in: Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.

²⁹³ Alcadipani, R. & Hodgson, D. (2009). *By Any Means Necessary? Ethnographic Access, Ethics and the Critical Researcher*. *Tamara Journal*, 7(4), 127-146.

²⁹⁴ *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research*. (2016). Office for Human Research Protections. March 15, 2016. Regulations and Policy, www.hhs.gov.

²⁹⁵ *Human Subject Regulations Decision Charts*. (2016). U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections. February 16, 2016. Regulations and Policy, www.hhs.gov.

²⁹⁶ *Human Subject Regulations Decision Charts*. (2016). U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections. February 16, 2016. Regulations and Policy, www.hhs.gov.

in the actual *process* of conducting research. This mismatch in ethical interests becomes especially problematic when the IRB's 'disconnected' concerns of design and form are compared with researchers' realized dilemmas as they are 'embodied' out in the field.^{297,298,299,300,301,302,303,304,305,306}

Further, these specific criteria outlined by the IRB presented as the 'most ethically important' may inorganically impact what is objectively expected from the research, and therefore may impact what is produced into the data, also contributing to false ideations that (a) one of the most relevant things a researcher must do is to "prove" their inquiry as legitimate research, and (b) the only humans who could potentially be brought risk or harm in and throughout the research process are informants, as the current ways in which the IRB's liable concerns are presented practically eliminate the presence of the researcher-being as an agential figure in the inquiry process, let alone one who is potentially vulnerable in the site of research. There is not so much as even a mention to entertain the inverted possibility of chance that an informant might potentially mean harm or cause harm to an inquirer, and therefore no guidance

²⁹⁷ Harries, B. (2016). What's sex got to do with it? When a woman asks questions. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 59, 48-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.10.002>

²⁹⁸ Bravo-Moreno, A. (2003). Power games between the researcher and the participant in the social inquiry. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 624-639.

²⁹⁹ Campbell, E. (2003). Interviewing men in uniform: a feminist approach? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(4), 285-304.

³⁰⁰ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher's reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

³⁰¹ Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), 318-346.

³⁰² Koivunen, T. (2010). Practicing power and gender in the field: Learning from interview refusals. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 39(6), 682-708.

³⁰³ The gang-rape of a Japanese researcher has sent shockwaves through Sudder Street. (2015). *The Times of India*, January 3, 2015. Publisher: Bennett, Coleman & Co., Ltd. Accessed 2019.

³⁰⁴ Slovin, L. & Semenc, P. (2019). Thinking/writing within and outside the IRB box: Ethical disruptions of data in qualitative research. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, 10(1), 14-27.

³⁰⁵ Swauger, M. (2009). No kids allowed!!!: How IRB ethics undermine qualitative researchers from achieving socially responsible ethical standards. *Race, Gender & Class*, 16(1/2), 63-81.

³⁰⁶ Droogsma Musoba, G., Jacob, S. A. & Robinson, L. J. (2014). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Faculty: Does the IRB Challenge Faculty Professionalism in the Social Sciences? *The Qualitative Report*, 19(51), Article 101, 1-14.

on what to do in the event of something going wrong in this direction; and this is even lacking in the consideration of working with prisoners, as they are described to be a vulnerable population (policy driven by the early biomedical experimentation of prisoners, but not necessarily reflecting potential risks in social research).³⁰⁷

Others have also problematized what they described as two ‘tensions’ between the aims of the IRB and the aims of the researcher: (1) “the pervasive assumptions about research objectives and participants that are ensconced within the structure of the application and the wording of the questions” which restricts the complexities of the investigators’ onto-epistemologies, and “imposes discursive positionings onto our participants that we are actively working to resist through our studies,” and (2) “the ways in which the positivist lens of IRB applications stultifies the animacy of data by requiring scholars to explicate their research as if data were a knowable, consumable entity,” elaborating that interview guides may become a rigid form of contract, of sorts, thus limiting the room for flexibility or adaptation, particularly in the event of a ‘surprise’ critical interview.^{308,309} Other scholars have also critiqued the troubling ways in which the IRB may currently be overstepping its functional bounds through challenging the researcher’s independence and professionalism, particularly in misunderstanding or mistrusting the nature of qualitative work, and by over-focusing on form rather than content, restricting methodological design, insisting chilling/legal language versus accessible language,

³⁰⁷ *Prisoner Research FAQs*. (2020). Office for Human Research Protections. Regulations and Policy, Guidance, FAQs, www.hhs.gov.

³⁰⁸ Slovin, L. & Semeneć, P. (2019). Thinking/writing within and outside the IRB box: Ethical disruptions of data in qualitative research. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, 10(1), 14-27.

³⁰⁹ Swauger, M. (2009). No kids allowed!!!: How IRB ethics undermine qualitative researchers from achieving socially responsible ethical standards. *Race, Gender & Class*, 16(1/2), 63-81.

and over-valuing institutional reputation.³¹⁰ Perhaps, these norms also impacted *my* focus on form over content.

In my particular case, the projects were included as a part of my graduate studies, and therefore exempted from the IRB approval process. However, it raises additional ethical concerns here, by which I question the degree to which it would have or could have made of a difference had I gone through the IRB approval format. Would it have changed the outcome of what had occurred at the physical site of the interview? Would it have actually restricted me more? Would it have just created more bureaucratic obstacles to require explanations of my research problems? What could researchers do to find a better balance between these dark matters which underlie the original need of ethics in research, or risk being potentially victimized as a result of them? It ought to be, in the very least, the institution's duty to warn, to *educate* about all of these possibilities, and not only of the institution's accountabilities, but also of the practicing inquirer's challenging experiences encountered in process. The full range of possibilities abound notoriously messy qualitative research sites must be made more clearly visible, for the fair and equitable protection of the human rights of researchers, as well as for the persons with whom they facilitate studies.

Who is Really in 'Control'?

Theories about qualitative research frequently situate power as something that the researcher already has and must actively work to undermine in order to generate comfort to support their informants' participation, to essentially, help informants feel more powerful within

³¹⁰ Droogsma Musoba, G., Jacob, S. A. & Robinson, L. J. (2014). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Faculty: Does the IRB Challenge Faculty Professionalism in the Social Sciences? *The Qualitative Report*, 19(51), Article 101, 1-14.

and throughout the research process.^{311,312,313,314,315,316} This widely accepted and promoted approach may erroneously over-assume too much structural power on the part of the researcher where there might not necessarily be, or, where that capacity for structural power could be nuanced, or interdependent upon a number of other context-bound factors, not necessarily contained within ‘the researcher’ by agential role and function alone. The “power” to organize an interview does not necessarily shield one from the possibility of being physically disempowered during the interview once it is occurring. The “power” of being someone who must handle the aftermath packaging process of converting messy co-created “data” into something tidy enough to be called “research,” assuredly does not supersede the power that someone else potentially has to disrupt or corrupt that data co-creation process, especially while the other is protected under a veil of confidentiality, anonymized, with low or no stakes in successful outcome of the inquiry.

What good is having “power” over one’s research if that power is only imaginary, if it is only ideological, or if it only exists in the utopian scenario? Especially given the known ways in which men informants respond quite differently to men and women interviewers, perhaps it truly might matter moving forward in determining *whom* is conducting research, to help predict: (1) the natural range or course of dialogic content that might shape the contours of the particular interview, (2) whether there will be an assumed layer of mutuality and respect embedded within

³¹¹ Au, A. (2019). Thinking about Cross-Cultural Differences in Qualitative Interviewing: Practices for More Responsive and Trusting Encounters. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(1), 58-77.

³¹² Boydell, K. M., Hodgins, M., Gladstone, B. M., Stasiulus, E., Belliveau, G., Cheu, H. & Parsons, J. (2016). Arts-based health research and academic legitimacy: Transcending hegemonic conventions. *Qualitative Research*, 16(6), 681-700.

³¹³ Burawoy, M. (1998). The extended case method. *Sociological Theory*, 16(1), 4-33.

³¹⁴ Roulston, K. (2011). Interview ‘problems’ as topics for analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 32(1), 77-94.

³¹⁵ Roulston, K. (2011). Working through challenges in doing interview research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(4), 348-366.

³¹⁶ Roulston, K., DeMarrais, K. & Lewis, J. B. (2003). Learning to interview in the social sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(4), 643-668.

and throughout the research process, (3) whether the interjection/assertion of sexuality might be introduced, and (4) whether the bounds of the research site and all its incumbent wild data might enter physical territories, even to the escalated level of sexual violence.^{317,318}

Title IX was initially created in 1972 to address sex discrimination in federal funding unequally distributed to sports programs, and has since expanded in its scope over the years to now include a variety of conduct which occurs on college campuses, including sexual assault and harassment allegations from universities.³¹⁹ In April 2011, the Obama Administration issued a “Dear Colleague Letter” to formally implicate Title IX in universities sexual misconduct policies to reduce incidences on college campuses, “explaining the requirements of Title IX pertaining to sexual-harassment also cover sexual violence, and lays out the specific Title IX requirements applicable to sexual violence”.^{320,321} Critics argued that under the purported new authority of Title IX, “the government had concocted a right to micromanage schools’ disciplinary procedures” by creating binding law under the guise of guidelines, adding that the Office of Civil Rights (OCR)—part of the U.S. Department of Education, tasked with ensuring university compliance of Title IX—were alleged to be unfairly biased in their investigations of reported

³¹⁷ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher’s reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

³¹⁸ Affleck, W. & Macdonald, M. E. (2012). The limitations of language: male participants, stoicism, and the qualitative research interview. *American Journal of Men’s Health*, 7(2), 155-162.

³¹⁹ Goldman, R. A. (2019). When is Due Process Due? The Impact of Title IX Sexual Assault Adjudication on the Rights of University Students. *Pepperdine Law Review*, 47, 185-225.

³²⁰ Goldman, R. A. (2019). When is Due Process Due? The Impact of Title IX Sexual Assault Adjudication on the Rights of University Students. *Pepperdine Law Review*, 47, 185-225.

³²¹ Newberry, J. (2018). After the Dear Colleague Letter: Developing Enhanced Due Process Protections for Title IX Sexual Assault Cases at Public Institutions. *Journal of College & University Law*, 44(1), 78-94.

violations, seeking to “find the schools guilty rather than determine whether a violation had occurred”.^{322,323} In 2017, the sitting president rescinded the “Dear Colleague Letter”.^{324,325}

Personally, as a graduate student, I did feel like the university’s victim advocacy services were *not* ‘meant for’ me, even though they were extremely helpful and practical to my dilemma. Additionally, while critics of Title IX may accuse the efforted measures as “*micromanaging*,” I then wonder which governing bodies are doing any official managing of the situation? There was a disillusioned part of me which had lost a sense of faith and trust in the institution as a protective organization, especially with so many different hands around the issue, changing the way it was addressed, coupled with the realization that I was really so *powerless* and *endangered* in what would have otherwise been considered a typical structure of research (apart from the assault). This *powerless* and *endangered* part of me felt so confronted, so challenged, by what had occurred inside the interview(s), and then, what could potentially occur at any time. I viscerally did not trust that my answers or solutions to these new questions could be found within the walls of the very same institutions which had co-created these problematic *expectations* and *sites* for my powerlessness and endangerment.

Leaving the Garden to Enter the War

One of the most famous philosophies to underpin Brazilian jiu-jitsu as a disciplinary practice is encompassed in a quote by one of its main founders, Carlos Gracie: “*There is no losing in jiu-jitsu. You either win or you learn.*”³²⁶ As the statement suggests, knowledge or

³²² Goldman, R. A. (2019). When is Due Process Due? The Impact of Title IX Sexual Assault Adjudication on the Rights of University Students. *Pepperdine Law Review*, 47, 185-225.

³²³ Newberry, J. (2018). After the Dear Colleague Letter: Developing Enhanced Due Process Protections for Title IX Sexual Assault Cases at Public Institutions. *Journal of College & University Law*, 44(1), 78-94.

³²⁴ Goldman, R. A. (2019). When is Due Process Due? The Impact of Title IX Sexual Assault Adjudication on the Rights of University Students. *Pepperdine Law Review*, 47, 185-225.

³²⁵ Newberry, J. (2018). After the Dear Colleague Letter: Developing Enhanced Due Process Protections for Title IX Sexual Assault Cases at Public Institutions. *Journal of College & University Law*, 44(1), 78-94.

³²⁶ Raftery, H. (2017). *Top 10 BJJ Quotes of All Time*. Fighters Market: We Know Jiu Jitsu; Fighter.

wisdom attained through the bitter defeat of loss is just as valuable and educative as the demonstration of a proper set of techniques that is required to secure a victory. Logically, it could even be argued that ‘winning’ does not actually entail any learning at all, but is rather, only the effective application of what is already known. However, “victory” on the other hand, is not necessarily always an indicator that a practitioner *knew* more than their opponent, rather, that they had applied what was necessary in order to achieve a win. While a loss never feels as rewarding as a win, defeat is the condition that seems to fuel the rapid acceleration of learning, growth, development, and evolution in the jujitiero.

But I wonder, how does perceptual “defeat” impact us, as scholars? Many times, I have observed *failure* be the key driver to fuel the advance of technical acumens among the best practitioners in the jiu-jitsu community (for they still routinely experience loss and defeat as an inherent part of their practicing journeys, even as champions). Those who appear most able to surrender to this ‘losing’ part of the learning process seem to be the same individuals who most deeply respect and learn the art, who become true artists embodied. The most respected practitioners are those most able to not just ‘admit’ what they do not yet know, but even take it a step further of comfortably living within that space of the unknown, as the only rational way to discover all the intricacies of the art, without forcing, but through enduring the unknown until it becomes known. The more that practitioners can seem to embrace this idea of self-surrender to defeat being *the* necessary pathway to growth, the more quickly and effectively they appear to learn the gentle art.

Warrior-Scholar: The Empowered Researcher

With consideration to the Chinese Proverb, “*It is better to be a warrior in a garden than a gardener in a war,*” the warrior-scholar identity would represent a balanced ideal who can

rightly discern and artfully adapt during times when it might be necessary to move from one paradigm to the other, between the garden and the war, so to speak.³²⁷ Gardening, in many ways, is a harmonious act of diligent work between person and earth, harnessing the creative power of the universe, working in tandem with nature, honoring timing and temporality, and having faith in process. An interesting parallel, research often demands all of these same elements, with its great capacities for creative *ideological* power. Qualities like trust, patience, a deep nurturing belief in the other, the self, and the process, as well as the mindful investment of time and effort are all paramount to ever someday seeing a successful harvest. Contrarily, the nature of war is quite the opposite: it is a concentrated energy of the destructive power of the universe, nature fighting against itself, marked by conflict and tension, ignited by misunderstanding variances; more than anything else, war is characterized by inequity and violence.

The warrior-scholar would strike a fine balance here, accepting that their baseline disposition is gentle, tending to their research as if tending to a garden—delicately, honorably, and with care. However, in cases where trust in the other, faith in the inquiry, and power over the situation are challenged or jeopardized in the research process, then perhaps traditional academics and institutions truly should stop to reconsider the natures of violence, war, as well as the various under-discussed ways in which war might be waged privately or quietly against scholars. The adaptation of a warrior identity may now be culturally relevant for widespread consideration, particularly in light of the #MeToo movement, the researcher's over-politicized

³²⁷ Michler, R. (2016). *A Warrior in the Garden*. Order of Man, Blog: Leadership. October 7, 2016.

representation of the academy, and how women researchers are embodied in the field.^{328,329,330}

While there are plentiful works on “self-care,” there is currently not enough discussion around practical concerns for modern researchers’ physical safety and wellbeing in research.³³¹

Affording “permission” to adopt a hybridized warrior-scholar identity would inscribe more effective inquiry practices overall if researchers are safer, more confident facilitators, who perceive a sense of physical governing power over their own research, and are comfortably discerning—even if it may mean “missing out” on inquiry opportunities. Studies have recently begun to establish important links between “researchers enduring undue emotional distress” and a publish-or-perish culture, which currently may unrealistically demand a need to be published in journals that are too narrow in specialization or oversaturated with entries, in order to advance a professional career in academia.³³²

While this work does not necessarily instruct all researchers to seek out jiu-jitsu or take up other martial arts training practices to support their inquiries, it does challenge scholars to think about our own comfort zones, to examine where these zones truly may end and begin, and why their lines are drawn where they are. Who is your ego-self? Who is your researcher-self? Does your researcher-self have *power*? Is that power created through interactivity with others? Does it require the use of words to create structures of power? What does the power look like? How might that relate to the research relationship? Or the inquiry process?

³²⁸ Gilbert, S. M. (2018). In the Labyrinth of #MeToo: Addressing sexual aggression and power in contemporary society also means questioning what the feminist movement has really been about. *The American Scholar*, Summer 2018.

³²⁹ Giampapa, F. (2011). The Politics of “Being and Becoming” a Researcher: Identity, Power, and Negotiating the Field. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 10, 132-144.

³³⁰ Hoel, N. (2013). Embodying the field: A researcher’s reflections on power dynamics, positionality, and the nature of research relationships. *Fieldwork in Religion*, 8(1), 27-49. doi: 10.1558/fiel.v8i1.27

³³¹ Vincett, J. (2017). Researcher self-care in organizational ethnography. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 7(1), 44-58. doi: 10.1108/JOE-09-2017-0041

³³² Génova, G. & de la Vara, J. L. (2017). The Problem Is Not Professional Publishing, But the Publish-Or-Perish Culture. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 25, 617-619. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-017-0015-z>

Intellectual debates about subjective righteousness quickly melt away to the concrete reality of having a limb artfully near-broken by a masterful black belt, demonstrating embodied answers to new questions which are only revealed by feeling these answers, for these answers illuminate new experiences of practitioner ‘not knowing’ the questions. On the mat, power is created and discovered exactly there, in the sacred space of the unknown. While some of us may be comfortable to relinquish ourselves to this unknown in mystifying physical practices, would we be as ready to admit or accept our “white belt rank” in matters of the mind?

It is no coincidence that earning a Doctor of Philosophy degree will average three to five years *less* time than it will take the average person to earn a black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. In jiu-jitsu, the constant experience of technical loss or physical “wrongness” ever normalizes the reality of not possibly knowing the answer to every question. Confronting ego and working to reduce or diffuse the ego is a critical philosophical and practical component of the art. This is the only way of truly coming to learn what the answers are, by acknowledging that they are not currently known. As investigators, a great deal could be learned from this practice of ego confrontation and ego reduction in the art, especially to ask ourselves who “the researcher-self” truly is. What is the “researcher-self” ultimately striving to do with this research? How would the “researcher-self” manage a challenging situation if the inquiry does not go as expected or planned?

In the academy, perhaps we have lost our way a bit, often gathering in classrooms with the overhanging cultural expectation of practically outright competing to assert and display what we believe to be known truths, often missing out on all of the potential to explore the unknown; and meanwhile, fearing possibilities of any horrific occurrences to be revealed as not having

known, of visible embarrassment by our own inescapable wrongness, witnessed by our peers, mentors, others who look to us for mentorship...or by anyone.

Fear is powerful and central to many academic discourses, yet under-addressed in education literature.³³³ One study revealed that the current university model of scientific production is defined by changes in institutional operation and the appearance of new structures, the need to generate economic resources, intensive participation in networking, and an enormous pressure for scientific productivity, especially regarding the publication of scientific results in high-impact journals, which leads to changes in the role of academics, including the assumptions of new functions in an environment with reduced autonomy, and more internal and external control systems.³³⁴ Functioning under the drivers of fear and pressure, however, are not sustainable. I therefore propose new ways in which researchers may wish to re-design academic thinking about inquiry relationship structures, and their (limited) governing power over inquiries.

Future

Moving forward, investigators could benefit by taking an empowered approach to their studies, by adopting a paradigm shift which regards “researcher power” as a construct that is *allowed* in the inquiry process. Particularly in the site of the qualitative research interview, warrior-scholars *should be* the commanders of their inquiry processes, unafraid of failure, and not to be thought of as being “at the mercy” of their informants to generate valuable data for them through direct or cooperative interactivity alone. Below, I offer a variety of power structures for the empowered warrior-scholar to review and consider for future inquiries, particularly when critical elements may present themselves in qualitative interviews.

³³³ Jackson, C. (2010). Fear in education. *Educational Review*, 62(1), 39-52. doi: 10.1080/00131910903469544

³³⁴ Castro-Ceacero, D. (2018). Changes in the University Research Approach: Challenges for Academics’ Scientific Productivity. *Higher Education Policy*, 32, 681-699.

(Insert Table 3)

Table 3. Power Structures for the Qualitative Interview

<i>Power Structure</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>When to Use</i>	<i>Example</i>
<i>Power Formulation</i>	A technique used to establish the researcher as a powerful agent in the production of and to outcome of inquiry	To be used during study design, in early communications with informant(s), and during pre-interview/early interview phase	<i>“While your answers will be confidential, my supervisor and our research team will work together to analyze this data.”</i>
<i>Power Assertion</i>	A technique used to assert the researcher’s agential power over the interview and inquiry procedures	To be used if the researcher perceives the inquiry situation may be potentially risky or endangering	<i>“Just contacting my research team so they know I’ve made it to the site; I have two more after this.”</i>
<i>Power Reversal</i>	A technique used to re-establish the researcher as a powerful agent in the inquiry process	To be used in the event of researcher disempowerment or challenge, usually to occur during the active interview	<i>“This study is not about me. It would be helpful to answer cooperatively. You also have the right not to participate.”</i>
<i>Power Reclamation</i>	A technique used to reclaim the researcher’s power if it has been disrupted	To be used in the event that the researcher’s power has been ‘lost’	<i>“Unfortunately, this data is unusable. Your participation will not be included in the study.”</i>
<i>Decision to Alter Inquiry (not to informant)</i>	The researcher decides to adapt their original inquiry, re-purposing the data that was produced	A possible decision when the informant presents unexpected data, but still may be of use or value	<i>“I wanted to learn about my informant’s views on Marxism, but instead he spoke about his identity.”</i>
<i>Decision to Abandon Inquiry (not to informant)</i>	The researcher decides not to continue with the inquiry or make use of the produced data	A possible decision when the researcher determines collection or analysis may not be worth the risk	<i>“Even though I am interested in studying grief, I am not sure if I can cope with the topic heaviness.”</i>

While these techniques must be approached and applied delicately—for they could still be critiqued as introducing risk into the interview—it is important to remember that if a power imbalance is detected to warrant the use of these techniques, risk is very likely present in the

particular exchange already (hypothetically, there is always the presence of risk in research). The first two power structures, power formulation and power assertion, work by framing the researcher as an agent of the inquiry who is collectively included under the umbrella of the institution's protections, and is not alone, even if presenting physically alone to the interview site. Words are used to deliberately construct the researcher as one individual who possesses a share of composite power, through referring to "my supervisor" and "our research team," also bringing an air of visibility to the elusive research process, as something that will continue after the interview, with the support of colleagues. More than anything, the aim is to emphasize a sense of collective belonging or sponsorship, of being 'surrounded' by the institution as a broader protective power, a community.

The third and fourth structures, power reversal and power reclamation, get quite interesting—for they directly confront the risk of "compromising" the study, challenging the outcome of not including the informant in the study—as the way of the warrior-scholar is not to be fearful that there will be no research if there is no informant. Such a belief is illusory and fear-driven, which could contribute to making less rational decisions with and about informants in studies. By openly and fearlessly acknowledging the informant's participation as voluntary, this restores power to the researcher as the inquiring agent who ultimately has final say over design integrity and participant inclusion. Through addressing that the study could change at any time on the researcher's terms, and that this informant is not the only individual around whom the research project is centered, the researcher's 'professional authority' is re-asserted, and the informant's 'power over story' may experience a sense of challenge.

Finally, the latter power structures should be regarded as the most liberating, for they are *choices*, and the researcher should absolutely be the ultimate decider of their own studies'

directions. While the trying decision to abandon an inquiry may seem like ‘a failure,’ the warrior-scholar will be able to transcend their personal/social ego image of the “researcher-self” and release all the “should-have’s” attached to their original quests. The warrior-scholar is able to think more openly about the bounds of what research can be. Meaning, if an informant problematizes an interview through making sarcastic responses rather than answering questions legitimately, the warrior-scholar could decide to study sarcasm or humor defense mechanisms, in one example. Or, the warrior-scholar could have conflicted feelings about the data that was produced, ultimately deciding to discard the study and all associated data, entirely. Either way, the warrior-scholar’s choices are sound, and correct. The main takeaway is that the researcher is an empowered agent with final decision-making power over their own interviews and inquiries.

In the academy, I challenge us all to think about the different ways in which we might be so afraid to ‘lose’ or ‘fail’ in front of each other, to ‘fail’ with one another, in intellectual debates with fellow colleagues, in the classroom with our own students, and perhaps most importantly, in our own lines of research. *How* do we save face? *Why* do we save face? Are we collectively creating a sacred learning space with one another where it is truly safe to bring in our messy, botched projects, our ruined ego on display for all to see? Do we trust that we will be able to sit in the discomfort of our own unknowing to try and come to find the answers? Do we rescue and aid each other during these broken times, for it is too difficult to see our fallen comrades go through something that we hope will never stain us? Do we see one another as competitors, and where one crumbling, it is just an opportunity to advance our own success? What kind of atmospheric pressure fills the air of your particular academy? The warrior-scholar would find fascination in these questions, knowing that the only way to answer, is to sit with the questions.

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APPENDIX

Chapter Foreward: Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology I used to approach this work. Evocative autoethnography brings a central focus to the pervasive, unresolved issue of sexual assault in modern society. Specifically, my evocative autoethnography is intended to connect with readers, some who may be graduate students or practitioners of qualitative research themselves, in efforts to ‘warn’ about some of the potential risks surrounding the open site of the qualitative interview.

Chapter: Methodology

I tell my story, my situated truth, to bring the theoretical (and political) to bear on the personal, and vice versa. “Personal problems are political problems,” a phrase introduced by second-wave feminists in 1969, which still resonates today, for how it makes clear the connectedness of truth as constituted by culture, theory, and every day human life.³³⁵ Constitutions of truth like mine often may be easily overlooked, lost among what are deemed more relevant quantitative statistics, or other more traditional forms of research. Truth that is unsituated in culture, politics, and experience, however, is anemic, lacking in potential to fully inform institutions or societies. As “women’s health problems cannot be separated from the larger social, cultural, economic, and political forces that shape and sometimes constrain women’s lives,” and “examining macrostructures—from patriarchy to globalization to the ‘structural violence’ of poverty and political despotism—have become necessary to include for

³³⁵ Gupta, R. (2015). The personal is political: The journey of a feminist slogan. *Open Democracy: Thinking for the World*. Accessed January 2020 via <www.opendemocracy.net>.

consideration across anthropological studies in recent years”; and thusly, my story speaks to the (shared yet commonly untold) experiences of women doing qualitative research.³³⁶

The issue of sexual violence is a particularly critical issue to address in today in the U.S., given the many ways in which the traumatic, detrimental experience of assault remains pervasive, yet is frequently minimized, denied, or unaddressed. Given the especially politicized nature of women in academia, coupled with the body politics of ways in which women’s inquiries tend to be more embodied practices than men’s, qualitative researchers may be potentially exposed to risks that are not fully known nor understood.

A historical time in the inquiry field, the ‘crisis of representation’ period (mid-1980s), enabled autoethnography to emerge in response to “the calls to place greater emphasis on the ways in which the ethnographer interacts with the culture being researched”.³³⁷ One underlying ontological assumption of qualitative research is that reality and truth are constructed and shaped through the interaction between people and their environment.^{338,339,340} According to Denzin, research that is embedded in bringing life issues or events to the surface through examination and analysis is autoethnographic research.³⁴¹

Claims of absolute “truth” are infrequently made or desired through autoethnographic works, rather, autoethnographers instead work to acknowledge and understand the fragile subjectivities that fabricate our unique human life worlds.³⁴² Autoethnographer Muncey writes,

³³⁶ Inhorn, M. C. (2006). Defining Women’s Health: A Dozen Messages from more than 150 Ethnographies. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 20(3), 345-378.

³³⁷ Holt, N. L. (2003). Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2, 18-28.

³³⁸ Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. London: Sage.

³³⁹ Freebody, P. (2003). *Qualitative research in education*. London: Sage.

³⁴⁰ Méndez, M. (2013). Autoethnography as a research method: Advantages, limitations, and criticisms. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 15(2), 279-287.

³⁴¹ Denzin, N. (1989). *Sociological methods: A sourcebook*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

³⁴² Andrew, M. B. & Le Rossignol, R. (2017). Autoethnographic writing inside and outside the academy and ethics. *Writing & Pedagogy*, 9(2), 225-249. <https://doi.org/10.1558/wap.27739>

“If postmodernism has taught us anything, it’s that there’s a thin line between fact and fiction”.³⁴³ Goodall agrees, stating that ‘all stories are “partial, partisan, and problematic,” in other words, stories are incomplete, a matter of perspective, and open to dialogue and debate’.³⁴⁴ Still, it is argued that “what is imagined often begins with what is experienced, observed in natural life, overheard, overseen”.³⁴⁵ Reed-Danahay states, “Autoethnography can be both ‘a method and a text’.”³⁴⁶ It is the individual’s experience of the world, their unique ways of seeing, being, expressing, and telling that led to a knowledge claim, and there is not necessarily the assumed scientific claim about applicability to other cultural members, or presumed generalizability.³⁴⁷ In autoethnography, there is no objective outsider.³⁴⁸ The researcher’s subjective positioning and truth are precisely what deliver a rich cultural analysis.

What is Autoethnography?

Autoethnography has been defined in several different ways, but the concepts of *personal experience* and *culture* are central to its varying definitions.³⁴⁹ The methodology has been defined as: (1) a systematic analysis of personal experiences, the aim of which is to understand cultural expression, (2) a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social, political, economic, and cultural context, (3) a cultural analysis and interpretation of researchers’

³⁴³ Muncey, T. (2010). *Creating Autoethnographies*. London: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446268339>

³⁴⁴ Goodall, H. L. (2000). *Writing the new ethnography*. Lanham, MA: AltaMira Press.

³⁴⁵ Le Roux, C. S. (2017). Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 195-207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1140965>

³⁴⁶ Reed-Danahay, D. (1997). *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. Oxford: Berg.

³⁴⁷ Le Roux, C. S. (2017). Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 195-207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1140965>

³⁴⁸ Denzin, N. (1989). *Sociological methods: A sourcebook*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

³⁴⁹ Le Roux, C. S. (2017). Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 195-207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1140965>

behaviors, thoughts, and experiences in relation to others in society, and (4) a way in which the researcher interacts with the culture being researched.^{350,351,352,353,354}

As a result of their often ‘emergent’ nature, autoethnographies tend to integrate the researcher as a personal, emotional, experiential part of the studies to capture their unique viewpoints, bringing enhanced meaning through the deliberate connecting of personal, theoretical, and cultural contexts.³⁵⁵ While diverse as a field, it has recently been advanced that autoethnography can be recognized by two different genres: *evocative autoethnography* and *analytic autoethnography* (see Figure 2A).³⁵⁶ The shared main goal across these two genres aim primarily to document personal experience.³⁵⁷ On one end of ‘the continuum,’ evocative autoethnography is used to evoke emotional resonance, through ‘artfully braided evocative text,’ using ‘thick description, a value of aesthetics, and evocative and vulnerable stories with little concern about objectivity and researcher neutrality’.^{358,359,360} Autoethnographers, essentially, use story to make knowledge that others can use.³⁶¹

³⁵⁰ Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2010). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 12(1), Art. 10. Retrieved from <http://nbnresolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>

³⁵¹ Spry, T. (2001). Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7, 706–732.

³⁵² Chang, H. V. (2008). *Autoethnography as method: Raising cultural conscious of self and others*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

³⁵³ Holt, N. L. (2003). Representation, legitimation and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2, 18–28.

³⁵⁴ Le Roux, C. S. (2017). Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 195–207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1140965>

³⁵⁵ Le Roux, C. S. (2017). Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 195–207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1140965>

³⁵⁶ Pace, S. (2012). *Writing the self into research: Using grounded theory analytic strategies in autoethnography*. Retrieved from <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue13/Pace.pdf>

³⁵⁷ Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 373–395.

³⁵⁸ Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 373–395.

³⁵⁹ Tedlock, B. (2013). Braiding evocative with analytic autoethnography. In S. H. Holman Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 358–362). Walnut Creek, CA: West Coast Press.

³⁶⁰ Manning, J. & Adams, T. E. (2015). Popular culture studies and autoethnography: An essay on method. *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*, 3, 187–222.

³⁶¹ Bochner, A. & Ellis, C. (2016). *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories*. Routledge: New York.

(Insert Figure 2A)


<i>Evocative</i>			<i>Analytic</i>
Creative-artistic	↔	Critical	↔ Interpretive-humanistic
<i>Key goal:</i> Emotional resonance			<i>Key goal:</i> Analytical reflexivity
Experience specific			Self-conscious introspection
Constructionist, subjective orientation			Realist, objective orientation
Descriptive, literary approach			Rooted in traditional symbolic interactionism

Figure 2A. A Continuum of Autoethnographic Research

Evocative autoethnography, especially, demands the lens of “a vulnerable observer”, often situating people in predicaments in which they must overcome some hurdle or obstacle, endure dramatic tensions, and arrive at a gained truth or ‘moral’ on the other side.³⁶² Taking an evocative autoethnographic approach to inquiry is often broadly underpinned by postmodern, poststructuralist, and feminist insights about the natures of truth and subjectivity.³⁶³ Analytic autoethnography, on the other hand, uses empirical data—which may involve a combination of fieldwork, interpretive qualitative data, systemic data analysis, and personal experience—to gain insight into and develop a theoretical understanding of a broader set of social phenomena, or to inform uniquely situated perspectives and experiences of being part of a community.^{364,365}

³⁶² Bochner, A. & Ellis, C. (2016). *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories*. Routledge: New York.

³⁶³ Andrew, M. B. & Le Rossignol, R. (2017). Autoethnographic writing inside and outside the academy and ethics. *Writing & Pedagogy*, 9(2), 225-249. <https://doi.org/10.1558/wap.27739>

³⁶⁴ Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 373–395.

³⁶⁵ Manning, J. & Adams, T. E. (2015). Popular culture studies and autoethnography: An essay on method. *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*, 3, 187–222.

Analytic autoethnography, therefore, is more oriented toward objective writing and analysis, while evocative ethnography engages more researcher introspection, from which, readers are invited to connect with the researcher's emotions and experiences.³⁶⁶

Ellis has argued that 'narrative text refuses the impulse to abstract and explain,' that if the story were to be analyzed, it would essentially be translated into another language, 'the language of generalization and analysis,' suggesting that this process would 'lose the very qualities that make a story a story'.^{367,368} Others agree, stating that autoethnography is an example of reflexivity based on introspective reflection, often drawing from the researcher's poems, artwork, diaries, autobiographical logs, and other personal documents to recreate the lived experience in a full and complete way.^{369,370} As reflexive 'variants' can tend to blend into one another, autoethnography allows for all approaches.^{371,372} Ultimately, the researcher is 'the most important inquiry tool, becoming a worthy subject of research'.^{373,374} Theorizers caution, however, that effective autoethnographic studies are guided less by adhering to rigidly specified techniques of data collection, and more by moving organically along a *continuum*, guided by 'a

³⁶⁶ Le Roux, C. S. (2017). Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 195-207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1140965>

³⁶⁷ Ellis, C. (2000). Creating criteria: An ethnographic short story. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6, 273-277.

³⁶⁸ Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. P. (2006). Analyzing analytic autoethnography: An autopsy. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 429-449.

³⁶⁹ Finlay, L., & Gough, B. (2003). *Reflexivity: A practical guide*. London, United Kingdom: Blackwell.

³⁷⁰ Bager-Charleson, S. & Kasap, Z. (2017). Embodied situatedness and emotional entanglement in research – An autoethnographic hybrid inquiry into the experience of doing data analysis. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 17(3), 190-200.

³⁷¹ Spry, T. (2001). Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 706-732.

³⁷² Bager-Charleson, S. & Kasap, Z. (2017). Embodied situatedness and emotional entanglement in research – An autoethnographic hybrid inquiry into the experience of doing data analysis. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 17(3), 190-200.

³⁷³ Barber, P. (2006). *Becoming a practitioner researcher: A gestalt approach to holistic inquiry*. London: Middlesex University Press.

³⁷⁴ Bager-Charleson, S. & Kasap, Z. (2017). Embodied situatedness and emotional entanglement in research – An autoethnographic hybrid inquiry into the experience of doing data analysis. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 17(3), 190-200.

set of ethical, aesthetic, and relational sensitivities incorporated into a wide variety of autoethnographic modes of inquiry’ (see Figure 2A).³⁷⁵

Others have also advised taking a hybridized approach to autoethnography, one that is ‘inductive, data-driven theorizing...(with) insights and themes that are helpful to people in conceptually comparable, but different, situations’.³⁷⁶ Due to its unique style and nature, researchers have suggested that autoethnography be evaluated as science and as art, proposing five criteria by which to evaluate any autoethnography: substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, the impact the narrative causes the reader, and how much the narrative expresses a reality.³⁷⁷ One author suggests a highly linear, step-based approach to composing any autoethnography: (1) selecting an approach, (2) ensuring ethical responsibility, (3) deciding theoretical underpinnings, (4) assembling and gathering data, (5) reflecting and analyzing, and (6) disseminating work with supporting drawings, photography, and other evocative formats.³⁷⁸ I personally find this latter approach slightly problematic, or perhaps a bit unrealistic, at least applied to my case, as step two, “ensuring ethical responsibility” was a major facet of my research that had presented so many issues itself, somewhat engulfing the entirety of this inquiry all on its own, and demanding the use of methodology in the first place.

To guide ‘objective’ evaluation of this subjective style, another researcher analyzed the qualities of various evocative and analytic works, proposing the following five markers for excellence in autoethnographic studies:³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ Anderson, L. & Glass-Coffin, B. (2013). I learn by going: Autoethnographic modes of enquiry. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 57–83). Walnut Creek, CA. Left Coast Press.

³⁷⁶ Stanley, P. (2013). Writing the PhD journey(s): An autoethnography of zine-writing, angst, embodiment, and backpacker travels. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 44(2), 143–168.

³⁷⁷ Richardson, L. (2000). Evaluating ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6, 253-255.

³⁷⁸ O’Hara, S. (2018). Autoethnography: The science of writing your lived experience. *Health Environments Research & Design Journal*, 11(4), 14-17.

³⁷⁹ Le Roux, C. S. (2017). Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 195-207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1140965>

- (1) Subjectivity: The self is primarily visible in the research. The researcher re-enacts or re-tells a noteworthy or critical personal relational or institutional experience—generally in search of self-understanding. The researcher is self-consciously involved in the construction of the narrative which constitutes the research.
- (2) Self-reflexivity: There is evidence of the researcher's intense awareness of his or her role in and relationship to the research which is situated within a historical and cultural context. Reflexivity points to self-awareness, self-exposure, and self-conscious introspection.
- (3) Resonance: Resonance requires that the audience is able to enter into, engage with, experience or connect with the writer's story on an intellectual and emotional level. There is a sense of commonality between the researcher and the audience; an intertwining of lives.
- (4) Credibility: There should be evidence of verisimilitude, plausibility and trustworthiness in the research. The research process and reporting should be permeated by honesty.
- (5) Contribution: The study should generate knowledge, extend ongoing research, liberate, empower, improve practice, or make a contribution to social change. Autoethnography teaches, informs, and inspires.

My hopes are that I have captured the subjective-*I* in this work, bringing the reader with me into the academy, into the interview, and onto the mat. I have worked toward self-reflexivity throughout the inquiry process, practicing self-awareness, self-exposure, and self-conscious introspection to consume most of my energy and time. In various draft versions, I continually let

myself crumble upon the page, only to have the generous help of my committee pragmatically reflect back to me their impressions of my crumbling, and encouraging re-construction.

When to Use Autoethnography

Simone de Bouvier stated, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” in distinguishing sex from gender, and suggesting that gender is an aspect of identity which is not inherent, but gradually acquired.³⁸⁰ Butler elaborated, “We never experience or know ourselves as a body pure and simple, because we never know our sex outside its representation of gender,” for gender is a “non-natural, culturally contingent aspect of experience”.³⁸¹ Similar sentiments resonate in regard to this unique methodology, in that one does not necessarily choose the call of evocative autoethnography, rather, it is presented to the inquirer through what they evoke—through what their body may evoke—of and from the surrounding cultures they attempt to set out and study. The way a culture interacts with a researcher is *the* driver for autoethnographies.

In my case, the turning point of realizing my alignment with the methodology was after I had attempted to move forward to a different line of inquiry entirely, trying to forget about the interview, but then I actually re-experienced more troubling behaviors from a different informant. Then, I believed it might be important for me as an investigator to remain strong, commit to this line of research, and try to make sense of whatever these findings were, as well as why they seemed to be finding me, a meaning-making process which required the specific use of autoethnography. While ethical concerns of risk and harm could be raised, the doing of the work often seemed more important than its impacts on me. Four types of harm that the researcher may face out in the field were identified as physical, emotional, ethical, and professional; yet, what

³⁸⁰ Butler, J. (1986). Sex and Gender in Simone de Bouvier’s *Second Sex*. *Yale French Studies*, 72, 35-49.

³⁸¹ Butler, J. (1986). Sex and Gender in Simone de Bouvier’s *Second Sex*. *Yale French Studies*, 72, 35-49.

had occurred via interview disruption encompassed *all* of these harms, which therefore seemed ‘worth the risk’ to proceed in continuing its analysis.³⁸²

Narrative inquiry methods like autoethnography enable researchers to present relevant experiences from their own unique perspectives, while considering the broader macro-cultural layers which impacted the time, space, and contexts of events described within the narrative.³⁸³ One of the main advantages of these personal narratives is that they provide access into private life worlds and can reveal rich data about some of the ‘taboos’ of the human experience, without necessarily having to re-experience troubling events in order to learn from them.^{384,385} Personal experience methods can offer unique vantage points from which to make contributions to social science, by considering “macro and micro linkages, structure, agency and their intersection, as well as social reproduction and social change”.^{386,387}

Autoethnography is ‘a particular form of writing that seeks to unite ethnographic and autobiographical intentions (looking outward at a world beyond one’s own, and gazing inward for a story of oneself)’.³⁸⁸ As a research method, it is considered somewhat unique or unorthodox since its primary warrant is a quest for self-understanding.³⁸⁹ It is explained, however, that this functional aim of autoethnographic research is purposive to ‘require self-exploration, introspection, and interpretation to assist researchers in locating and situating

³⁸² Lee-Treweek, G. & Linkogle, S. (2000). *Danger in the Field. Risk and Ethics in Social Research*. Routledge, London.

³⁸³ Ellis, C. & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: researcher as a subject. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd edn.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp. 733-68.

³⁸⁴ Pavlenko, A. (2002). Narrative study: whose story is it anyway? *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 213- 218

³⁸⁵ Pavlenko, A. (2007). Autobiographic narratives as data in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 28, 63-188.

³⁸⁶ Stahlke Wall, S. (2016). Toward a Moderate Autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, January-December 2016, 1-9.

³⁸⁷ Laslett, B. (1999). Personal narratives as sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 28, 391–401.

³⁸⁸ Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

³⁸⁹ Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 373–395.

themselves within their own history and culture, thus allowing them to broaden their understanding of their own values in relation to others'.³⁹⁰ In other words, the purpose of deeply understanding the researcher-self is to deeply understand the theoretical complexities of the cultural world that surrounds the researcher-self. Additionally, the methodological commitment to autoethnography could be argued as another form of establishing and structuring 'researcher power'. As I have theorized in this work, it may benefit academics to imbed their agential empowerment into and throughout studies with this methodological 'reclamation' of using their inquiring voices and power—through autoethnographies.

While there are studies which explore women researchers' embodiments in their inquiries, few investigations use autoethnography to deeply address issues of challenged power and sexual violence in research. Much can be learned through the study of embodiment and what is thusly revealed about our human experiences and life worlds. Csordas argued, "The body should not be considered as an object, but as a subject—the existential ground—of culture and that the latter should be studied by focusing on embodiment."³⁹¹ Csordas later added, "embodiment is situated on the level of experience and not on that of discourse," and as such, it collapses the space of uncertainty between the objective and the subjective.³⁹² Culbertson also drew attention to experiences of embodiment for the researcher, reminding, "We lose sight of the body's own recall of its response to threat and pain and of the ways in which it speaks this pain, because the wordless language is unintelligible to one whose body is not similarly affected and because without words, the experience has a certain shadowy quality, a paradoxical unreality".³⁹³

³⁹⁰ Starr, L. J. (2010). The use of autoethnography in educational research: Locating who we are in what we do. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 3(1), 1–9.

³⁹¹ Csordas, T. J. (1990). Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology. *Ethos*, 18, 5-47.

³⁹² Csordas, T. J. (1994). *The Sacred Self. A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

³⁹³ Culbertson, R. (1995). Embodied memory, transcendence, and telling: Re-counting trauma, re-establishing the self. *New Literary History*, 26(1), 169-195.

One researcher even used autoethnography to analyze ‘the *disembodiment* experiences’ she had after conducting 49 qualitative interviews of cancer research with patients who lived alone, and then avoided her research for 6 months, reporting disembodiment linked with suppression of emotions, disembodiment linked with distal traumatization, and disembodiment linked with overidentification with the participant.³⁹⁴ As a result, she ultimately concluded that writing about qualitative experiences in embodied and reflexive ways can protect the wellbeing of the researcher, and produce a better quality of research.³⁹⁵

Others investigators have used autoethnography to capture “the bodily and dirty in day-to-day organizing,” moving beyond traditional structures to “foster personal, fragile, reflexive narratives,” particularly as described in one study on miscarriage in society, “the need to explore silenced topics connected to the body, the senses, and emotions” in organizational settings like universities.^{396,397,398} Another scholar used autoethnography to describe his own experiences of sexual and gender based violence in South Africa as a pre-teen and young man, endeavoring to “unpack the silence in South African literature and studies of men and masculinities on the serious issue of the rape of men”.³⁹⁹ This case illustrates a perfect example of the distinct features of autoethnographic inquiry work, in that one study could resonate significantly more with readers who may personally relate to the perspective of the male author’s positionality in

³⁹⁴ Benoot, C. & Johan, B. (2016). An Auto-Ethnographic Study of the Disembodied Experience of a Novice Researcher Doing Qualitative Cancer Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(4), 482-489.

³⁹⁵ Benoot, C. & Johan, B. (2016). An Auto-Ethnographic Study of the Disembodied Experience of a Novice Researcher Doing Qualitative Cancer Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(4), 482-489.

³⁹⁶ Boncori, I. & Smith, C. (2019). I lost my baby today: Embodied writing and learning in organizations. *Management Learning*, 50(1), 74-86.

³⁹⁷ Porschitz, E. & Siler, E. (2017). Miscarriage in the workplace: An autoethnography. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 24(6), 565-578.

³⁹⁸ Weaver-Hightower, M. (2012). Waltzing Matilda: An autoethnography of a father’s stillbirth. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 41(4), 462-491.

³⁹⁹ Qambela, G. (2016). “When they found out I was a man, they became even more violent”: Autoethnography and the rape of men. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, 12(3), 179-205.

ways that perhaps they cannot with mine, even though he and I are ultimately working to address the same issues. Faulkner even recommends that autoethnographies be used to ‘make people feel shame’ with means to compel ‘those in power to act’ to address issues of sexual assault in university settings.⁴⁰⁰

While my optimism falls short on convincing governing bodies, I instead believe in researchers—warrior-scholars—as the independent agents of their own inquiries and of their own empowered, mind-connected-bodies to consume and assimilate the findings of this work, then choose to adapt their practices accordingly, if suitable. Locating subjectivity in the body is critical for challenging certain ‘embodied’ dichotomies, like mind-vs.-body, thought-vs.-action, or reason-vs.-emotion, which destabilize theories of agency.⁴⁰¹ In other words, the human body can be used to ‘undo’ such Cartesian forms of dichotomous thinking.⁴⁰² Habit and activity can be re-designed to take on new creative roles, overturning these and other dichotomous assumptions (i.e., man-vs.-woman), to “help reveal how contingent relations of power are durably produced”.⁴⁰³

Ethnographic participation and autoethnography can “highlight changes in affective capacity and particular routines and skills,” especially in the study of certain embodied practices, for example jiu-jitsu.⁴⁰⁴ To research the art, one needs to be on the mat, as it takes places in

⁴⁰⁰ Faulkner, S. L. (2019). Shaming as a Form of Social Activism: Autoethnographic Stories. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(6), 555-558.

⁴⁰¹ Lesure, R. G. (2005). Linking Theory and Evidence in an Archaeology of Human Agency: Iconography, Style, and Theories of Embodiment. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 12(3), 237-255.

⁴⁰² Lesure, R. G. (2005). Linking Theory and Evidence in an Archaeology of Human Agency: Iconography, Style, and Theories of Embodiment. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 12(3), 237-255.

⁴⁰³ Lesure, R. G. (2005). Linking Theory and Evidence in an Archaeology of Human Agency: Iconography, Style, and Theories of Embodiment. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 12(3), 237-255.

⁴⁰⁴ Larsen, J. (2014). (Auto)Ethnography and cycling. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 17(1), 59-71.

training settings, while and when it is performed.⁴⁰⁵ “Through the mobile, co-present, participatory immersion in the rhythms and flows of movement, researchers can examine the sociality and multi-sensoriality of movement”.⁴⁰⁶ Taking a ‘sensuous turn’ within ethnography ‘attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds, and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment’.⁴⁰⁷ Applied to autoethnography, the researcher’s own embodied participation comprises the material, featuring as the main protagonist in the text.⁴⁰⁸ It embraces and foregrounds the researcher’s embodiment and subjectivity, rather than limit it.⁴⁰⁹ Its common objectives are to write accounts that foreground deeply-felt bodily responses, emotions and feelings that might have lingered in the body for a long time (such as unresolved traumas) or as one endeavors to learn something new (like martial arts).⁴¹⁰

Living Out Autoethnography

To produce this work, I engaged evocative autoethnography to uniquely examine my own experience of being sexualized, harassed, and violated as a core part of the events which transpired in the qualitative interview site of my ‘failed’ project. Because the events of the exchange became physical, researcher embodiment was such an integral part of “the problem,” or really, the trauma, and therefore, also of the subsequent analysis. When I first pursued jiu-jitsu, I actually did not realize nor intend for the experience to become an active part of the inquiry, or a continued part of my life today. However, the more insights I attained through my

⁴⁰⁵ Larsen, J. (2014). (Auto)Ethnography and cycling. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 17(1), 59-71.

⁴⁰⁶ Larsen, J. (2014). (Auto)Ethnography and cycling. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 17(1), 59-71.

⁴⁰⁷ Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. London: Sage.

⁴⁰⁸ Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. London: Sage.

⁴⁰⁹ Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. London: Sage.

⁴¹⁰ Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. London: Sage.

physically embodied work of deconstructing and reconstructing gendered ideas about my body and its agential purpose, the more helpful it was to me as a ‘closeted survivor’ in the academy, and the richer this inquiry consequently became with its inclusion and guiding focus. It was not easy to ‘create’ the autoethnography, and admittedly during most times, quite *difficult*—for I was attempting to write about something that I was concurrently living out, living through, processing, and working against. For most of the inquiry process until more recently, I was unable to separate what was relevant to the specific story and study, apart from everything else that was happening in my life, as according to my perspective, everything and all of it *felt* “relevant” to me.

The gradual shaping of this work occurred through several distinct phases. My process was often times disorganized and chaotic, marked by grief, depression, and escapism. Preparing myself to take on the task of transcription felt impossible, where most days, just getting out of bed was a major feat. I took courses outside the department in effort to find new voices to cast back fresh reflections to me that I knew I needed to hear in order to try and understand what I could not see with my own eyes, and I did not want to face the people I already knew within the department who might see the change in me, the one that I did not even know how to explain. I tried talking about it in a few classes before I learned that it was too risky to do. There was a phase my soul really needed where I created three art pieces to characterize different depictions of me as the researcher working throughout the inquiry process, how I had changed in each image, and the implicated meaning of the changes in the study. While this was healing for me, it was disconnected for readers, which is absolutely a sign of ‘poorly placed art’. Being artifacts of my own grief, the art was important to me as the autoethnographer, but it was not necessarily

benefitting the autoethnography itself by adding meaning-driven value, which is a good guiding rule to operate under when composing autoethnographic work.

In earlier versions of this story, I had even included the tragically timed event of my father's passing away months after the interview had occurred, and the way this had impacted me in the sense that my father's ideas and views about women, gender, and me, would now be...fixed in time, unchangeable forever. However interesting, I eventually realized that the inclusion of this additional trauma was "too much" and invariably detracted away from the work, each separate trauma really deserving of its own fully dedicated story and analysis. Insisting on 'keeping him alive' so centrally in this story would have been selfish, and not productive to the inquiry at hand. In reviewing the continuum model (see Figure 2A), I stand in agreement with the many ways I found myself moving across and throughout all of the different identified areas—reaching through the emotional, trying to find my grounded footing in the theoretical, frequently returning back to the creative-artistic, moving through my tears while writing the most difficult parts of the story, and then re-emerging again through analytic reflexivity about what those difficult events could really *mean*, more broadly, and culturally. I moved through *all* of these. In those earlier phases, my sentimentality often clouded the view of what was meaningful to the research, and what was best maintained separately as meaningful to me (the latter were mostly artifacts of my own *self-care*, and not necessarily for the inquiry).

At other times, I was overintellectualizing and being too analytical, detached and removed from the painful issue, broadly and haphazardly discussing too many tangential topics that were not experience-specific enough, for the central content was too emotional for me to describe in close detail at first...and then, continually, for some time. It took quite a bit of time, actually, to work through all the different 'phases' of this delicate inquiry, only as I was

emotionally ready to approach each, and for which, there was no guidebook, as my unique inquiry seemed to be ever-shifting and changing in tide, just as I was. Despite it being incredibly daunting to watch peer after peer graduate before me, often being left with the feeling that I was ‘starting over’ or that my inquiry had completely changed in major ways each semester, it was so important to take my time and recognize that I was still living out my inquiry, and yet unearthing important insights that I needed to learn in their due time to shape the entirety of findings.

Honoring time and temporality were not only respectful to the story and study, it was respectful to me. Having patience with and compassion for myself was *everything* to facilitate the gradual completion of this study. For example, the eventual decision to listen to the audio recording and transcribe as much of the interview as I could was approached quite differently than it would have been in traditional studies wherein such a critical conflict did not incur during an interview: with patience and forgiveness for how long it was taking me to even pick up the recorder and begin listening to the tape, along with having self-compassion for the transcription not reflecting the full recording. The eventual decisions to remove the three art pieces and the main-storied part of my father’s ‘character’ and his death were all made on my own time and terms, which was vital to have ‘power’ over this part of the ‘research’. Of course, the patient reflections of my esteemed committee were the healthiest dose of realism I needed to see that nobody else lived inside my mind, that my ideas were not well articulated and would need to be framed far more structurally and soundly. Ultimately and overall, I have learned to demonstrate more patience with myself, to listen to my own nature, as I frequently oscillated between strength and insecurity, curiously diving in and fearfully withdrawing, living and telling, deeply listening, expressing, growing and sharing. Learning to listen to myself and to my own instincts had

become a critical takeaway of this autoethnography because of how pertinent it was over multiple points within and throughout the study, when I actually had failed to listen to myself.

Having others engage with my autoethnographic work helped me understand whether my abstract thoughts made any objective sense or not, and quite frequently, I was disheartened to learn that they, in fact, did not. I often would lose the inquiry to processing through the extraneous matters I was grieving through. As a result, I must agree with the importance of the third listed quality of excellence, 'resonance' as vital, but not only to observe if audiences are able to enter into, engage with, or experience the story; it is also imperative to have the researcher exit out of, disengage from, and decompress what they are living in order to rightly evaluate their developing theoretical work. As much as I hope that this writing reads as credible and permeated with honesty, I believe much of the impression around this particular subject area of sexual violence may have more to do with readers' existing orientations to and potential biases around the original issue; with which, I invite readers to make their own interpretations about the presumed credibility of my work. One of my admitted fears moving forward is that the informant could possibly discover his anonymized 'presence' in this work, along with the surrounding 'accusations', and may decide to identify himself, or present an alternative version of events, maybe in effort to undermine my credibility. It has been a lingering fear; but ultimately is something I have no control over.

In terms of contribution, I have already seen this work teach, inform, and inspire scholars to re-visit problems in their own research and even in their own personal worlds, re-examining matters with new vocabularies and ways of thinking about these critical incidences. Even through my describing and discussing this work, I seemed to become associated with its content, which has earned me many 'a confession' from people who have engaged with it in some way

and found it resonate with them personally, from young women undergraduates to men outside the academy. I hope to see much more of the same ‘blurring of lines’ across life worlds, of warriors and scholars alike, as this work may disseminate and begin to facilitate important flowing discussions that endeavor to inform and heal.