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### The Personal Must Always Be Political: A History of Survivors' Narratives in Anti-Sexual Violence Zines

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The Personal Must Always Be Political:

A History of Survivors' Narratives in Anti-Sexual Violence Zines

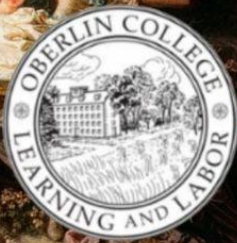
Senior Honors Thesis

Colby Jeannine Fortin

Comparative American Studies Honors Thesis

Advisor Professor Shelley Lee

April 27, 2022





## Acknowledgements



At the beginning of *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, a foundational text in the anti-sexual violence movement, author Susan Brownmiller notes that the most common question she was asked while writing this book was, “Have you ever been raped?” Brownmiller describes this question as “short, direct and irritating.” Fifty years later, this is also the question that is most posed to me about my thesis and other work in the movement.

In this question, there is a violent yet often true assumption that the people who care enough about sexual violence to dedicate large chunks of their lives to the cause are survivors. A few years into my career, I made a choice to refuse to give a reductive or self-centered answer to justify why I do this work. Regardless of my experiences of sexual violence, which is a broad and nuanced term that extends beyond rape, I do this work for the survivors I have cared for and loved.

This thesis is dedicated to my great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mother, and every friend I have held during this epidemic. These loved ones, as well as my crisis counseling clients and the peers I have supported through various collegiate counseling roles, are what motivate my work. This is for every survivor whose story I have had the privilege of holding. Regardless of whether you are a survivor or know a survivor (which you statistically do), in reading this thesis, I am asking you to care for the people I care for, *all* survivors, because they are deserving, and this epidemic demands our attention.

With that said, I would like to thank the survivor zinesters I have witnessed through this research. At the inception of this project, I grappled with the ethics of resharing survivors’ narratives. This ethical issue has been cited as a reason why zines on sexual violence have been left out of most zine studies. I have tried to be cognitive of this power dynamic and allow the survivors’ words to speak for themselves to maintain their autonomy. Their voices are the fabric of this thesis, and I can only hope that I have done them justice in platforming them in this way.

Next, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Shelley Lee, who has taught me not only critical thinking and writing in research but also how to have the fortitude to take on a project of this size. I am also thankful to my committee members, Professor K.J. Cerankowski and Professor Danielle Skeeahan, for their needed, respected, and appreciated insights. A special thanks goes to Professor Wendy Kozol, who spent valuable and significant time working through my early thoughts on this thesis. Mentorship and classes from other faculty have also made this thesis possible, including Professors Jenny Garcia, Greggor Mattson, and Gina Pérez. My writing would not be the same without Nick Petzak’s guidance. This thesis was fiscally made possible by Jere Bruner and Jerome Davis grants. I want to thank Rebecca Mosely and Suzanne Denneen in the Oberlin Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for supporting my passion for anti-sexual violence work since I was a perfervid freshman. Finally, thank you to my friends, especially the girls who have taught me so much about the power of girl solidarity. To all of you and more unenumerated, I am humbled and honored to be shaped by you. Through all of this support, I have grown into the academic and activist I am today.

## Table of Contents

<b>Author’s Notes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
Method	9
Literature Review	13
Conclusion	14
<b>Chapter One: A Brief History of Trauma and Zine Studies</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Rebel Girl</b>	<b>23</b>
DIY Authorship and Aesthetics	26
Survivors’ Narrative Styles Heal and Create Empathy	29
Witnessing: Bringing the Personal to the Political	34
Survivors’ Narratives Valued as Educational Tools	37
Conclusion	39
<b>Chapter Three: Slowly Surely</b>	<b>41</b>
The Birth of Advice Zines	44
Conclusion	50
<b>Chapter Four: Nameless/ Faceless</b>	<b>53</b>
Mainstreaming Authorship and Aesthetics	55
Repurposing Survivors’ Narratives	58
The Padding	58
The Anecdotal Hook	61
The Minimization	63
Advice Zines Take Over	65
Complications: Perpetrators’ Narratives, Trigger Warnings, and Anonymity	69
Conclusion	74
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Zine Archive</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>92</b>

## Author's Notes

**Trigger warning:** This thesis has personal accounts graphically detailing forms of sexual violence, including rape. I also discuss the maltreatment of survivors and there is occasional swearing. This thesis discusses how trigger warnings can give survivors agency during their healing processes and stigmatize other survivors' experiences. Being a survivor is not triggering; perpetrators' behavior can be triggering. Please take care of yourself before, during, and after reading this thesis. If you find yourself dealing with challenging or uncomfortable emotions while reading, I encourage you to practice self-care by taking breaks to talk with a safe person, make and drink a cup of tea (as recommended by one zinester, Marta,) or access professional support resources like a local rape crisis center hotline, a national hotline like RAINN (800.656.HOPE), or a therapist. I also prompt you to consider that most learning happens in a place of discomfort but not danger. Keep your well-being in constant consideration and care for yourself.

**Language:** In this thesis, I use "sexual violence" as a widely encompassing, non-legal term that includes but is not limited to rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and intimate partner violence. The anti-sexual violence movement refers to the sociopolitical movement, often referred to as the anti-rape movement, aiming to combat and dismantle these forms of violence while supporting survivors, who are disproportionately women and other gender marginalized people. Sometimes I shorten "the anti-sexual violence movement" to "the movement" for flow. My goal in moving away from using the term "anti-rape movement" is to acknowledge the various acts of violence this movement addresses and avoid creating a hierarchy of harm in which rape reigns as the most legitimate form of violence. Additionally, I use the word "survivor" to refer to someone who has experienced sexual violence; other terms for survivor include "victim" and the more obscure "thrivor." I use survivor because it is more empowering than "victim" and is more popular than "thrivor." Language is ever-changing, and my goal is to be as inclusive and aware of contemporary concerns and conversations as possible.

**Titles:** The chapter titles of "Rebel Girl," "Slowly Surely," and "Nameless/ Faceless," which represent the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s respectively, are references to feminist anthems and artists of that decade that also speak to the state of the anti-sexual violence zines and movement. This titling pays homage to the historical links of zines to music culture.

**Capitalization:** Some zine titles and excerpts are not conventionally capitalized. To preserve the authenticity of these primary materials, I maintain the original capitalization.

## **Abstract**

This thesis constructs a history of the changing role of survivors' narratives in anti-sexual violence zines from the 1990s to the early 2020s. I argue that zines are a window to the changing politics of the American anti-sexual violence movement. Through this lens, I find that the role of survivors' narratives in zines has complexly changed and ultimately diminished over time. I examine how and posit why this change occurred in zines and the anti-sexual violence movement. Among other reasons, I find that both have followed the traditional arc of social movements, which chronologically involves emergence, coalescence, institutionalization, and decline. There are complicated consequences of zines' transition from helping survivors heal to providing impersonal education and the paralleled progression of the anti-sexual violence movement. Ultimately, I advise that there must always be space for survivors' narratives in anti-sexual violence efforts because of their benefits to survivors' healing and the movement's progress.

*“To experience sexual violence and abuse is to experience silence.” -Angela Sweeney*

## Introduction

Drudgingly, I walk into my weekly Sunday evening meeting for my college's consent educators' group. I am barely unbundled from the always-somehow-surprisingly chilly midwestern Autumn when a coworker announces that she would like to talk about "*the zine*." It only takes me a moment to figure out what she means. *The zine*, a mini-magazine, recently circulated on Oberlin College's campus during the 2021 orientation week. I found my copy in my dorm's trash—likely tossed away by an incoming student who either found the information unhelpful or, more likely, did not bother to look. Composed by the Student Labor Action Coalition (SLAC) at Oberlin College, *Disorientation Zine* features student organizations discussing activist topics from appealing for more financial aid to critiquing the college's recent union-busting. In the middle of the zine is a letter from a new unchartered survivor peer support group and activist club on campus: Survivors of Sexual Harm and Allies (SOSHA).

SOSHA's entry begins with a trigger warning reading "*CW Sexual Assault details, mentions of R\*pe.*"<sup>1</sup> The anonymous author then briefly and vaguely outlines their rape experience, calls for students and administrators to better support survivors, provides some educational information, and explains how SOSHA can help support survivors. I was proud of my fellow organizers for working for change, but this was not how everyone received their letter.

My coworker was upset that the author included a rape narrative that she found "extremely triggering" and therefore thought should not have been included. There was unanimous agreement amongst the group. Some also found the narrative upsetting, and the rest supported our coworkers in expressing their feelings of retraumatization through affirming coos and nods. I listened as my coworkers expressed and condoned frustration at this survivor telling

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<sup>1</sup> "CW" is an abbreviation for content warning, which is another term for a trigger warning.



her story. Although my initial instinct was to support my coworker in her pain, I began to wonder about the implications of this conversation. *Shouldn't we support survivors who speak up?* The *yes* I previously held onto firmly was suddenly elusive.

This conversation about *Disorientation Zine* had me shocked and, well, disoriented. I had read zines with survivors' narratives that were longer and more explicit than that in *Disorientation Zine*. I also knew from previous clinical work and research that witnessing survivors' stories can be difficult. However, I had not fully processed their ability to negatively affect a witness to the extent of wishing the survivor had not spoken up. My respect for everyone involved brought me to recognize that this situation was more complicated than I previously understood. This also brought to light the power of anti-sexual violence literature. I wondered about the history of the anti-sexual violence movement through the lens of these small but powerful books. How have zines functioned in the anti-sexual violence movement? Furthermore, I was curious about the role of survivors' narratives.

This thesis constructs a history of the changing role of survivors' narratives in anti-sexual violence zines from the 1990s to the early 2020s. I argue that zines are a window to the changing politics of the American anti-sexual violence movement. Through this lens, I find that the role of survivors' narratives in zines has complexly changed and ultimately diminished over time. I examine how and posit why this change occurred in zines and the anti-sexual violence movement. Among other reasons, I find that both have followed the traditional arc of social movements, which chronologically involves emergence, coalescence, institutionalization, and decline.<sup>2</sup> There are complicated consequences of zines' transition from helping survivors heal to providing impersonal education and the paralleled progression of the anti-sexual violence

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<sup>2</sup> Christensen, "Four Stages of Social," 20.

movement. Ultimately, I advise that there must always be space for survivors' narratives in anti-sexual violence efforts because of their benefits to survivors' healing and the movement's progress.

This project engages American Studies, a field in which the study of gender, sexuality, and feminism has been critical. I access this field by examining anti-sexual violence zines from the 1990s to the early 2020s. My project is especially informed by scholarship in Trauma Studies and Zine Studies. In Trauma Studies, the work of psychologist Judith Herman has been particularly formative through her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) that provides foundational information about the psychology of trauma and the history of anti-sexual violence efforts. I introduce zines as a relatively new artistic healing tool and extend Herman's history to the present. Other key Trauma Studies scholars are psychologist Dori Laub and literary critic Shoshana Felman whose book *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1991) was the first text to assert the value of witnessing survivors' testimonies as a therapeutic and political tool. My understanding of survivors' testimonies' healing ability and movement-building benefits in and out of zines hinges on this valuing of witnessing.

I am also in dialogue with feminist Zine Studies scholars who have laid the groundwork on the study of riot grrrl zines and zines as a research method.<sup>3</sup> Mimi Thi Nguyen and Lisa Darms worked to document the social importance of riot grrrl zines in the 1990s and create zine archives.<sup>4</sup> My project aims to include zines discussing sexual violence in our understanding of the riot grrrl movement, whereas Darms' work looked at riot grrrl zines broadly and Nguyen has focused on the anti-racist efforts of riot grrrl zines. While my project is not racially specific, I am

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<sup>3</sup> Riot grrrls are a group of young activist punk girls in the 1990s.

<sup>4</sup> Nguyen, "Riot Grrrl, Race;" Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*.

aware of the valuable and distinct voices of marginalized zinesters through Nguyen's work. I go beyond Nguyen's and Darms' work in the riot grrrl era to create an updated archive and I uniquely focus on zines about sexual violence. In addition to studying zines, I am also using zines as a method. Lucy Robinson has done extensive work advocating for zines to be valued as a historical method because of their ability to represent complex fringe cultures.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Oliveira's and Vearey's work with sex worker survivors in South Africa advocates for zines to be used as healing, activist, and academic methods. Oliveira and Vearey have also shown zines' viability as a method to study survivorship.<sup>6</sup> My subject and methodology are a culmination of theirs' because I use the method of zines to study the history of survivors' narratives in zines and these zines' impacts on anti-sexual violence activism.



### Literature Review

There is little work at the crux of Trauma Studies and Zine Studies. In this section, I examine the three studies combining these fields: *Zine Narratives: Subjectivities and Stories of Five Influential Zine Creators* (2009) by Rebekah Joy Buchanan, *Sexual Assault Support Zines as a Pedagogy of Hope: An Exploration of Zines as a Method of Integrating Community Voices into the Research Process* (2012) by JoAnne Gordon, and *Healing Power of Zines for Trauma Survivors: Zines as Practiced Alternative Art Therapy* (2020) by Taylor Burns. I also cover three salient contemporary trauma concepts: secondary trauma, retraumatization, and trauma-informedness. Analyzing these studies of trauma-focused zines and concepts in trauma studies sets the milieu for this project.

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<sup>5</sup> Robinson, "Zines as History."

<sup>6</sup> Oliveira and Vearey, *Sex Worker Zine Project*.

*Zine Narratives and Healing Power of Zines for Trauma Survivors* focus on zines with survivors' narratives. In *Zine Narratives*, English and American Studies scholar Buchanan argues that zines with personal narratives are apt healing tools because they facilitate "a more intimate and analytical understanding of self."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in *Healing Power of Zines for Trauma Survivors*, Gender and Cultural Studies scholar Burns advocates for zines to be used in art therapy because they help individuals "process emotions and experiences that they cannot put into words."<sup>8</sup> Like my thesis, Buchanan's and Burn's work substantiates that creating zines with survivors' narratives can help heal trauma. I further argue that they generate empathy with readers, which helps support social movements.<sup>9</sup>

In *Sexual Assault Support Zines as a Pedagogy of Hope*, Cultural Studies scholar Gordon discusses three anti-sexual violence zines from the 2000s and 2010s with mainly impersonal educational content, one of which lacks survivors' narratives.<sup>10</sup> Gordon does not acknowledge zines' history with survivors' narratives or the relevance of this new style. She claims that these zines boast a "pedagogy of hope." In contrast, I interrogate if the pursuit of positivity leaves behind survivors' narratives to become palatable to the mainstream. Survivorship commonly feels like shame, anger, fear, and numbness. While optimism can be a powerful healing tool, forcing positivity can invalidate others' unpleasant emotions. The denial of survivors' trauma leaves the negative feelings associated with their trauma unprocessed, which hinders survivors'

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<sup>7</sup> Buchanan, "Zine Narratives," 5 & 9.

<sup>8</sup> Burns, "Healing Power," 5 & 8.

<sup>9</sup> I use terms empathy and social empathy interchangeably. Empathy is when one person understands or shares another's feelings.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon looked at *Support, Learning Good Consent*, and *Ask First!*, which are all included in this archive.

healing and increases rates of dysfunctionality when a trigger—a stimulus that elicits a reaction—is evoked.<sup>11</sup>

Understanding trauma terminology's roots and definitions are necessary to contextualize this project. There are three concepts imperative to current understandings of trauma—secondary trauma, retraumatization, and trauma-informed pedagogy—that complicate previously simple understandings of sharing trauma narratives as helpful to healing. While survivors have historically fought for the space to share their narratives, the impacts of hearing their stories can unintentionally cause harm.

First, trauma can permeate beyond the original survivor. The 2000s and 2010s produced significant literature on how witnesses to survivors' retellings experience secondary trauma.

Social worker Amy Hesse anecdotally describes this process, writing:

... somehow the trauma that this woman [a client] had experienced by being in an abusive relationship and the feeling I had that she was in imminent danger had, in effect, traumatized me. This phenomenon—that working with clients who have suffered from trauma can cause therapists to become traumatized themselves—is most often referred to as secondary or vicarious traumatization.<sup>12</sup>

Secondary trauma leads to the need to consider the repercussions of witnessing trauma on the witness.

Second, trauma is not static; it is subject to re-evoking. Retraumatization is when a person with trauma, who therefore has heightened vulnerability to stressful events that follow, experiences another trauma that builds from that original trauma. In a study about women's Truth and Reconciliation testimonies that frequently detail sexual violence, psychologist Karen Brounéus found that giving testimony caused "intense psychological suffering" in all women

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<sup>11</sup> Wibowo, "The Answers," 1; American Psychological Association, "Triggers."

<sup>12</sup> Hesse, "Secondary Trauma," 295; Secondary trauma is also referred to as second hand trauma.



studied.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Brounéus claims that testifying is not inherently cathartic and that retraumatization is likely to occur when there is “short and intensive trauma exposure.”<sup>14</sup> Secondary trauma and retraumatization challenge previous understandings of witnessing or sharing survivors’ narratives as solely positive.

Finally, the pedagogical framework and ideal of trauma-informedness emerged as a response to issues from retraumatization and secondary trauma. While trauma-informedness first arose in the 1970s, it became popular in the late 2000s and the 2010s. Trauma-informed pedagogy considers trauma’s prevalence and effects. Trauma researcher Angela Sweeney claims that trauma-informedness “[sees] through a lens of trauma” and is a systematic change process that:

is grounded in an understanding of, and responsiveness to, the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.<sup>15</sup>

To not reinvolve trauma in educational spaces, trauma-informed pedagogy promotes providing trigger warnings, resources, and after-care. Trauma-informedness does not advocate for banning survivors’ narratives but instead for developing ways to care for those who may experience retraumatization through witnessing. The study of trauma consistently indicates that survivors’ narratives are essential in trauma treatment and activism.



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<sup>13</sup> Brounéus, “Truth-telling,” 57, 60, 62, & 72.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 57, 60, & 62.

<sup>15</sup> Hopper, “Shelter from the Storm,” 82.

## Method

This project constructed a countercultural archive of forty-two anti-sexual violence zines, the largest anti-sexual violence zine archive of any study, from the 1990s to the early 2020s. I used these zines to examine trends and perform a close reading through textual and visual analysis. I then contextualized these findings through historical research. The zines' historical distribution fluctuates because of varying availability. There are ten zines from the 1990s, eleven from the 2000s, nineteen from the 2010s, and two from the 2020s. This uneven distribution is because zines are better preserved now through digital means and most modern zine libraries were not founded until the 2000s. I sourced zines from public and university libraries across the United States, in independent digital archives, and directly from zinesters.

The only criteria for zines to be included in the archive were that they had to discuss sexual violence, be print published, and written in English in North America.<sup>16</sup> I chose to exclusively include English zines because of translation limitations given this project's timeframe. It is essential to acknowledge that English is a colonial language. There are numerous zines from people indigenous to what are now called the Americas that linguistically decolonize zines by writing in native languages, including *Quechualish: An Indigenous Language Zine* by Sandy of QuwichaZines, *ḏḱ k'w: An Indigenous Art Zine* produced by yəhaw, and other global Indigenous peoples' zines which shed light on anti-colonial zine work. I focus on North America instead of only the United States because zines have had similar origins and trajectories in Mexico and Canada and so this research is not bound by colonial borders. I also want to push back on the idea that zines are a solely American or Anglophone phenomenon. Although zines

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<sup>16</sup> This project's zines only come from Canada and the United States, while I looked for qualifying zines from Mexico, I could not get access to any.

originated in the United States, they have taken on new lives abroad. Culture, language, and other identities of survivors affect their experiences of sexual violence and thus the zines they create to tell their stories.

I considered diversity while compiling this archive. From the information available, this archive has majority white and women voices. However, the collection includes zines from zinesters of color, men, LGBTQ+ people, and fat people.<sup>17</sup> Critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw defines intersectionality as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.”<sup>18</sup> She applies intersectionality to sexual violence claiming that “the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class.”<sup>19</sup> Crenshaw also claims that this intersectional violence tends to be ignored by mainstream discourses on feminism or antiracism. Although I attempt to use a lens of intersectionality, marginalized zinesters’ experiences are not the foci of this project. Further research should examine how marginalized zinesters have addressed intersectional sexual violence in their work.



## Conclusion

I begin this thesis with a brief history of Trauma Studies and Zine Studies until the 1990s to situate survivors’ long fight to tell their stories and how anti-sexual violence zines respond to

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<sup>17</sup> My use of non-person first language in the term “fat people” is influenced by fat activists and literature like *Fat Activism (Second Edition): A Radical Social Movement* by Charlotte Cooper and it not intended to be derogatory. Furthermore, I am reflecting the way fat zinesters refer to themselves, namely in the *Spinsterwitch* series (1995, 1995, 1997) and *Evey in Orbit no. 8* (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1242.

<sup>19</sup> Crenshaw, “Kimberlé Crenshaw;” Marine, “Constructing Identity.”

this issue. Then, in “Rebel Girl,” I explore how the 1990s cultivated a distinct anti-sexual violence zine scene and movement. Zines were eclectic and raw from zinesters using the do-it-yourself (DIY) method—an accessible mixed media form—and sharing their intimate experiences. These zines aimed to make the personal political by platforming survivors’ narratives to heal survivors and create social empathy which correlated with a period of rapid social change. Despite this success, zines slowly stopped including survivors’ narratives in the coming decades.

Although this project initially intended to focus on zines with survivors’ narratives, as I moved into the 2000s and the 2010s, it was harder to find these zines. It became essential to note what filled this void. “Advice zines” is a term I coined to describe anti-sexual violence zines without survivors’ narratives that take on an impersonal didactic role. The positive outcomes associated with the 1990s zines, like aiding survivors’ healing and creating social empathy, are deserted or weakened by abandoning survivors’ narratives. “Slowly Surely,” my chapter on the 2000s, charts this slow undercurrent of change. In “Nameless/ Faceless,” I further track changes in 2010s zines with and without survivors’ narratives as survivors’ narratives are repurposed and advice zines dominate. I also posit why these changes may be occurring, exploring the following reasons:

1. Activists sought greater authority as a reaction to the defeating duration of this seemingly chronic epidemic
2. Sharing one’s experience of sexual violence can be exhausting, and each survivor has limited stories to tell
3. The emergence and rise of the internet contributed to a shift away from cut-and-paste DIY zines

4. Survivors could have been telling their stories elsewhere, like on social media
5. The United States reached late stage capitalism which impacted the treatment of sexual violence<sup>20</sup>
6. There were rising concerns about retraumatization, secondary trauma, and a pursuit of a socially nebulous idea of trauma-informedness
7. This was a natural progression of social movements

In the Conclusion, I review how anti-sexual violence zines have acted as interactive windows to the anti-sexual violence movement over these 30 years. I discuss 2020s zines that continue the trends of the 2010s, emerging e-zines, and nostalgia's impact on constructing history. I aim to be understanding of zinesters' move away from survivors' narratives. However, I advise that there should always be space for survivors' narratives because of their healing benefits and social empathy-building, which aids the movement. I hope that by witnessing the testimonies of these zinester survivors, you can feel and value the power of their voices.

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<sup>20</sup> Lowrey, "The Decade in Which."



## **A Brief History of Trauma and Zine Studies**

My work is the product of the long and enduring struggle for the right to speak about sexual violence trauma, which disproportionately impacts women and other marginalized genders. This chapter aims to paint a brief interdisciplinary historical landscape using Trauma Studies to show the misogynistic history of silencing survivors despite consistent proof that survivors retelling their narratives is beneficial for their healing. Then I explore zines' rise and ability to address this problem.

The origins of the study of women's sexual trauma are associated with the ancient Greek belief that uteri migrated through bodies causing an illness called "hysteria," "hysterical suffocation," or "wandering uteri," which was supported by philosopher Plato and other notable historical thinkers.<sup>1</sup> Colloquial versions of this myth were used to invalidate women's suffering until the 1880s when Jean-Martin Charcot introduced the idea of a sex-selective ailment to modern medicine.<sup>2</sup> Charcot illustrated his hysteria findings through live demonstrations where he prodded survivor patients while they convulsed and said they were frightened.<sup>3</sup> His interest in women's sexual trauma and his dehumanizing approach was adopted by his peer, Josef Breuer, and their mentee Sigmund Freud.

Breuer and Freud experimented with and eventually abandoned trauma treatments that valued telling survivors' narratives. Breuer developed "cathartic treatment" or the "talking cure," a method of assisting patients in recalling, speaking, and subsequently alleviating traumatic

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<sup>1</sup> McVean, "The History of Hysteria."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The hospital where Charcot performed these treatments, the Salpêtrière, operates today as a teaching hospital.

memories, while treating Bertha Pappenheim.<sup>4</sup> Pappenheim left Breuer's care due to her frustration with Breuer's misogyny and progress from cathartic treatment. Despite its apparent success, Breuer never used cathartic treatment or worked with hysterical patients again out of a loathing for Pappenheim. This callous choice displays male clinicians' historical disregard for their female patients' well-being.<sup>5</sup> Freud had a similar situation with his last hysteria client, Dora.<sup>6</sup> Breuer and Freud's selfish and misguided abandonment of cathartic treatment led to a century of stagnation in the study of trauma. While history credits Breuer and Freud for their fleeting investment in survivors' narratives, it is vital to pay homage to patients like Pappenheim and Dora, who persevered through oppressive silencing to assert the value of their voices.<sup>7</sup>

The hundred-year-lull in the study of trauma was brought to an end after WWI when there arose a new traumatized population to rally behind: veterans. Herman perceptively claims that the study of trauma "becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the sacrifice of young men in war."<sup>8</sup> Sexist attitudes make men more sympathetic than women because society views women as inherently weak, so professionals invalidate their suffering and bar their access to treatment. The study of trauma was only permitted once men who are perceived as strong suffered from it. Based in part on this dynamic, Herman establishes two characteristics needed to garner public attention to a trauma epidemic: a corresponding social movement and a

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<sup>4</sup> Tietz, "The Cathartic Method."

<sup>5</sup> Sandhu, "Step Aside."

<sup>6</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

sympathetic person to rally behind.<sup>9</sup> Attention toward veterans' trauma opened the door for feminists to draw attention to their gender-based trauma through an anti-sexual violence movement.

The anti-sexual violence movement began in the United States during the 1970s, and from its inception the movement used survivors' narratives to help survivors heal and raise awareness. The burgeoning rape aftercare field rejected sexist ideas of hysteria, validated sexual violence trauma, and advocated for survivors to tell their stories to heal.<sup>10</sup> Anti-sexual violence activists also platformed women's experiences of rape to "[cut] away" at hegemonic "male supremacist myths" and create a countercultural archive of women's experiences of sexual violence.<sup>11</sup> Small underground publications were used to reach these goals.

*Rape Is* (1976) by Suzanne Lacy is a limited-edition forty-six-page artist's book that lists twenty-one anecdotes of rape. The title is a satirical play on the *Happiness Is* self-help book series that lists reasons to be happy. Consistent with the *Happiness Is* format, every other page adorns the term "RAPE IS," and the opposing page offers an example like, "when you are sitting on your grandpa's knee, and he slips his hand into your panties," "when your soldier brother goes into enemy territory and takes everything there, including the women," and "when your boyfriend hears your best friend was raped, and he asks, 'What was she wearing?'" *Rape Is* asserts the power of survivors' narratives, especially in written and artistic forms.

Despite the 1970s' breakthrough in progress for survivors to be able to share their stories, the movement did not have linear growth. The 1980s had a notable decline in momentum.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Serisier, "Speaking Out," 86 & 88.

Political scientist Kristine Coulter argues that the presence and nature of publicized sexual violence trials affect the anti-sexual violence movement's popularity and success at securing policy reform.<sup>12</sup> Using data from news coverage of thirteen high-profile sex crime trials and anti-sexual violence policies from 1970 to 1997, Coulter confirms the widely speculated decline of momentum of the anti-sexual violence movement in the 1980s and attributes it to the lack of high-profile cases in the decade. Coulter's work aligns with Herman's claim that survivors' narratives help propel the movement, and that there needs to be a sympathetic character who can become a martyr to the mainstream.<sup>13</sup> To have this sympathetic character, survivors must be able to tell their stories.

Trauma scholars and activists have long faced the issue of where survivors can tell their stories, and zines present a potential answer. Before understanding how zines become this space, what are these spunky named things? Zines, pronounced "zeens" in American English, are mini-magazines. The word zine, short for "fanzine," was first utilized in 1930s science-fiction fandoms. Four decades later, the countercultural punk movement embraced zines to attack and subvert elitism in the music industry. In the 1990s, zines exploded in the riot grrrl scene, which used them to discuss dismantling rape culture.<sup>14</sup> The 1990s are the birthplace of modern anti-sexual violence zines because of the burst of self-identified zines discussing the topic.

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<sup>12</sup> Coulter, "Agendas and Actionable Agendas," 1 & 12.

<sup>13</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 5; Interrogating who is more likely to be a sympathetic character in the anti-sexual violence movement is a tangential question and outside of the scope of my project but is ripe for further research. Believability and respectability politics play into this dynamic.

<sup>14</sup> A huge credit of the diversification of the riot grrrl zine scene is owed to Mimi Thi Nguyen and Helen Luu who published *Evolution of Race Riot*, *Race Riot 2* and *How to Stage a Coup* that brought together punks of color to discuss racism in the punk scene and societal institutions.

Zines are useful tools in studying histories of countercultural activist movements because they reflect the culture and time in which they are created. Collaborative historian Lucy Robinson argues that zines are rich but messy historical sources. Zines are regularly illegible and undated, making them difficult to understand and contextualize.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, there is confusion about what a zine is. Robinson claims that these characteristics make zines “indefinable and uncatalogable.”<sup>16</sup> She believes that their messiness also creates their synergistic ability to reflect and synthesize copious, complicated, and obscured experiences. Robinson claims that “historians recognize [zines] as an invaluable way into the messy traces left by subcultures, DIY and fan cultures, and the politics of identity” because zines “move across wide varieties of evidence and resources” and often sample and remix other pieces of media.<sup>17</sup> Zines challenge and provide a route for historians to confront who is represented in the canon. Despite zines’ saliency as historical sources, most zine studies do not look after the 1990s, leaving a sizable gap in historical coverage. It is valuable to bring the study of zines to the contemporary as they have only continued to prove their benefits as a research tool and beyond.

Recent research shows zines’ uses outside of academia. The *Sex Worker Zine Project* (*SWZP*) by Elsa Oliveira and Jo Vearey and attests to zines’ viability as a healing, activist, and academic method.<sup>18</sup> *SWZP* is a collection of zines made by sex workers in South Africa detailing

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<sup>15</sup> There were a handful of zines I read that would have otherwise qualified to be included in this study but I could not pinpoint their publication date.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, “Zines as history,” 40-42; As mentioned earlier, for this project I define zines in their simplest form of miniature magazines. I also only include zines found in zine archives or that are self-identified as zines.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 39 & 48.

<sup>18</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Oliveira for having a number of conversations with me about her work with zines, which was foundational in my conceptualization of this project.



their experiences including sexual violence. Oliveira claims that zines are healing because they help express emotions nonverbally and “in an accessible way, to heal past hurt and pain through creativity.”<sup>19</sup> DIY zines increase this freedom by embracing a range of accessible mediums like prose, poetry, collage, drawing, and photography. *SWZP* also helped mobilize sex worker rights activism in South Africa by creating solidarity and increasing awareness. Influenced by Robinson, Oliveira and Vearey’s work, this project recognizes the value of zines in understanding and platforming historical survivors’ experiences and activism.

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<sup>19</sup> Oliveira and Vearey, *Sex Worker Zine Project*, 98.

## Rebel Girl

The 1990s emerged with a cacophony of survivors' narratives that garnered national media attention and propelled the anti-sexual violence movement. One substantial event was Anita Hill's 1991 testimony detailing her experience of workplace sexual harassment from then Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Her testimony was pivotal because innumerable survivors cited it as the first time they saw someone publicly share their experience of sexual harassment.<sup>1</sup> Senate Judiciary Committee members accused Hill of being a "scorned woman" and having a "martyr complex," and they described Thomas's harassment as "not too bad."<sup>2</sup> Although the Committee appointed Thomas, Hill's bravery to undergo "the most difficult experience of [her] life" was not in vain.<sup>3</sup>

Survivors ruptured to the surface in response to the relatability of Hill's story. Hill's testimony led to an inpouring of calls from women who sought legal advice to address their experiences of sexual harassment and contributed to the 1992 "Year of the Woman," where the United States elected a record number of female politicians. Hill's testimony demonstrates that survivors' narratives benefit anti-sexual violence consciousness-raising.<sup>4</sup> Comparative Literature scholar Emily Spiers claims that riot grrrl zinesters "recognised the capacity for constructive and politically efficacious creativity" through survivors' narratives.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, "Why Antia Hill's Testimony;" Pruitt, "How Anita Hill's Testimony."

<sup>2</sup> Vice, "Watch the Most Outrageous."

<sup>3</sup> Pruitt, "How Anita Hill's Testimony."

<sup>4</sup> Greenberger, "What Anita Hill Did;" Hale, "The Impacts," 46.

<sup>5</sup> Spiers, "Killing Ourselves," 15.

The riot grrrl movement began with a group of young punk girls in Olympia, Washington, talking about their experiences of sexual violence to warn each other about known abusers and support survivors. These conversations were the seeds of a widespread movement. Legal scholar Kendra Doty claims that riot grrrls created platforms like zines for survivors to share their stories because they believed survivors' narratives could "take a person's breath away... [and] shake a silent, angry, fedup [sic] mass awake."<sup>6</sup> Doty also argues that riot grrrl zines contributed to an uptick in attention to young women survivors, who comprised the riot grrrl scene. Therefore, the riot grrrls likely achieved their goal of raising awareness of sexual violence in their community.

Reviews of 1990s riot grrrl anti-sexual violence zines hail their honesty, intimacy, and bravery for their empowering impacts:

What [riot grrrl] zine-making taught me...: 1. shock yourself with honesty, 2. the truth is messy, 3. be brave. I use these riot grrrl skills every single day. -Miranda July<sup>7</sup>

[Riot grrrl Cindy Crabb's] *Doris* [zine series that addressed issues of "rape, abuse, and incest"<sup>8</sup>] made me feel like my inner world matters... I am indebted to her for being brave in a time when I didn't know how to be brave. -Asher Pandjiris<sup>9</sup>

Riot grrrl zines embodied the personal as political, which is "a political slogan expressing a common belief among feminists that the personal experiences of women are rooted in their political situation and gender inequality."<sup>10</sup> This message asserts that personal experiences matter

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<sup>6</sup> Doty, "Girl Riot," 45 & 51.

<sup>7</sup> Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, back cover.

<sup>8</sup> Buchanan, "Zine Narratives," 24.

<sup>9</sup> Pandjiris, "Interview with Cindy Crabb."

<sup>10</sup> Britannica, "The Personal is Political."

and that they are reflective of and should inform politics. Lisa Darms describes anti-sexual violence riot grrrl zines as diaries, “but [ones] with witnesses who had perhaps shared your experience and could attest to your sanity.”<sup>11</sup> Through the personal as political ethos, riot grrrl zinesters saw their individual experiences as worthy testimonies implicating a systematic epidemic.

Although riot grrrls were a diverse “conglomeration of dissenting voices,” there are threads that connect and characterize their anti-sexual violence zines. This chapter centers on the *Spinsterwitch* series, which exemplifies numerous aspects of riot grrrl anti-sexual violence zines. *Spinsterwitch #3* (1995) by Jenni Aquilina submerges readers in Jenni’s struggles with sexual violence. *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8* (1995) is a collaborative zine in which Jenni builds upon her rape narrative in *Spinsterwitch #3*. In the last zine of the series, *Spinsterwitch #5* (1997), Jenni discusses the intersection of sexual violence and race and updates readers on her life. Centering on *Spinsterwitch*—the zine series I have the most editions of—is beneficial because it facilitates a closer look at a riot grrrl’s relationship with zines. I supplement my argument with other zines and secondary sources.

I argue that 1990s zines platformed survivors’ stories for them to receive witnessing, which helped survivors heal and cultivated empathy that increased social momentum behind the anti-sexual violence movement. This multifaceted valuing of survivors’ narratives embodied the personal as political ethos of the decade. I discuss the authors and aesthetics of 1990s zines, arguing that the socially fringe authors and DIY aesthetics reinforced the personal as political. Then I discuss common narrative styles in survivors’ narratives—graphic embodied imagery<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> I also refer to graphic embodied imagery as graphic or embodied language.

and nonlinearity—which contribute to survivors’ healing and social empathy building. I end this section by discussing how empathy leads to increased support for social movements. Next, I discuss zines’ facilitation of witnessing, which benefits survivors’ healing and social empathy-building, and how the personal becomes political through this process. Finally, I cover zinesters’ secondary purpose of education through survivors’ narratives as another valuing of the personal. The personal as political ethos connects these diverse and complex zines. In the chapter’s conclusion, I nuance and expand upon 1990s zines’ impacts.



### **DIY Authorship and Aesthetics**

1990s anti-sexual violence zines were predominantly created by riot grrrls who viewed themselves as “underground” and “dissenting.”<sup>13</sup> They affiliated themselves with countercultural punk, anarchist, and feminist communities. Zinesters did not have access to other ways to disseminate their voices and believed that if they did not tell their stories, no one would, so they cheaply self-published their work in small batches of between five and one-hundred copies.<sup>14</sup> This production follows the DIY movement, which works outside of mainstream industries to promote creative expression from those without power. Despite and possibly due to these barriers, 1990s DIY zines were thoughtful and thought-provoking.

Jenni Aquilina uses DIY to explore her post-rape healing process. Throughout *Spinstewitch #3*, Jenni implements a motif of comic book clippings of the main character of *Battle Angel Alita*, a Japanese manga, as an aspirational feminist figure. Jenni first portrays Alita

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<sup>13</sup> Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon, “Sexual Assault Zines,” 16; Robinson, “Zines as History,” 48; Stroeffer, “Read Every Page.”

in a power-pose with a handwritten caption above her head saying, “We Need To HaRness OuR AngeR and feel → use our powerR.”<sup>15</sup> Given the header the reader knows that Alita—who is unnamed at this point—is an aspirational feminist figure. Readers follow Alita battling and being belittled by male-coded villains. In the end, she defeats the villains, is recognized for her strength, and proudly declares her name in triumph. Alita’s character arc offers an example of a girl overcoming violent patriarchal obstacles, reflecting Jenni’s aim to be a strong activist while she is also vulnerably expressing her struggles with sexual trauma.



Figure 1: Battle Angel Alita  
Source: Jenni Aquilina, *Spinsterwitch* #3, July 1995.

Another instance of images enhancing 1990s zinesters’ work is in *Bikini Kill: Girl Power* (1991) by the riot grrrl band Bikini Kill, where an author includes a DIY anti-sexual harassment flyer directed to “women&girls [sic].”<sup>16</sup> The flyer has an American bald eagle spreading its wings in the center of the top of the page and star pattern curtains on either side. The author evokes a sense of nationalism within readers through these American icons. This choice could be an attempt to substantiate anti-sexual violence work by associating it with the perceived righteousness of the state by the mainstream, a rallying cry to unite women and girls through matriotism,<sup>17</sup> or an ironic allusion to the state permitted nature of sexual violence. No matter which of these effects

<sup>15</sup> Aquilina, *Spinsterwitch* #3.

<sup>16</sup> Bikini Kill, *Bikini Kill: Girl Power*.

<sup>17</sup> Matriotism is a gender subversion of patriotism.

the author intended to create, these visual layers enhance the story-telling ability of zinesters beyond what one would see in a conventional book.

In *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8*, Jenni also uses the form flexibility DIY provides to find empowerment through poetry. Jenni feels defeated after retelling her rape narrative in traditional prose, which culminates in the line: “i guess some of you will never believe me and i don’t fucking care... i doubt i can change yr mind anyway.”<sup>18</sup> Jenni’s frustration is visible through her swearing and increased typos. She then suddenly moves into a metaphorical poem deploying the subject of a rag doll described as a “drunken toy” to represent how the rapist dehumanized her. The juxtaposition of a children’s toy and rape symbolizes a loss of childhood innocence. This metaphor also shields Jenni. Her frustration before the poem causes her to discuss her rape through the doll, indicating that her emotions became too much to convey through prose, so she moved to another medium. The poem ends with the line, “rag doll did not consent!!!!!!!!!!!!” A sense of empowerment returns to Jenni’s writing. DIY does not merely permit helpful and enriching alternative forms of expression like poetry; they are promoted by and distinctly common in DIY zines. Through this embraced flexibility, Jenni has autonomy and can step back into her power.

Darms describes the DIY aesthetics of riot grrrl zines as:

[containing] plenty of spelling mistakes, sharpie-marker redactions, gaps, rough edges, and last-minute additions. No one used spell check, but no one cared. There was an urgency to get the message out that superseded perfection. This urgency exemplified both the aesthetics and politics of riot grrrl...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Aquilina, *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8*.

<sup>19</sup> Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, 12.

Riot grrrl zines were an unfettered, exploding brainstorm, but these tangled layers speak volumes. DIY is more than authors' access limitations or aesthetics. Linguistician Ingrid Stockburger defines DIY as a "crucially important sociocultural frame relevant for unpacking, [creating,] and understanding projections of identities."<sup>20</sup> Mimi Thi Nguyen claims that DIY riot grrrl aesthetics were a "form *and* critique."<sup>21</sup> DIY is what you do *and* the change you want to see in the world. DIY provides the space and framework to define and assert the importance of one's experiences, which empowers the individual and aligns with the personal as political. This empowerment is crucial for survivors of sexual violence, in which a perpetrator disrespects a survivor's autonomy and thus attempts to disempower them.



### **Survivors' Narrative Styles Heal and Create Empathy**

Riot grrrl anti-sexual violence zines made space for survivors' narratives with graphic embodied imagery and nonlinearity, which reinforces 1990s zines' value of the personal. Unlike the mainstream public, riot grrrl zinesters embraced these characteristics and recognized that they could help survivors heal and create social empathy which cultivates support for the anti-sexual violence movement. I explore how Jenni used these characteristics for healing and empathy building and I substantiate my claims with secondary literature. Then, I use secondary literature to discuss how empathy leads to increased social momentum, so these characteristics help the individual *and* the correlating sociopolitical movement.

Jenni uses ample graphic embodied imagery, an expression that gives a tangible or visible form to an idea or experience rooted in the body. This language was first identified in the late

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<sup>20</sup> Stockburger, "Making zines, making selves," 15.

<sup>21</sup> Nguyen, "Riot Grrrl, Race," 173.



20th century but has only been studied empirically in the last few decades. In *Bikini Kill: Girl Power*, a guest author explains why embodied language is common in survivors' narratives by claiming that even "the threat of rape permeates every centimeter of our bodies."<sup>22</sup> In *Spinsterwitch #3*, Jenni uses graphic embodied imagery when describing her rape in a DIY comic titled "self-discovery." The comic depicts a "cherry bomb" heart, representing her trauma, ticking progressively louder inside a female-bodied figure representing the artist. The figure decides to

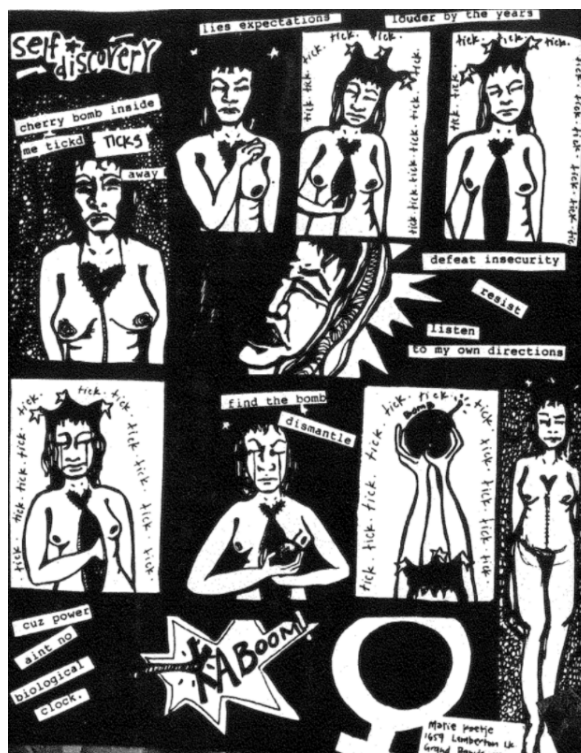


Figure 2: Self-discovery  
Source: Jenni Aquilina, *Spinsterwitch #3*, July 1995.

"listen to [her] own direction" and open herself up through a zipper-like incision from her heart to her uterus.<sup>23</sup> She reaches within herself to find and remove the bomb, which she then cradles in her arms like a baby. In cradling the cherry bomb heart, the figure is caring for her trauma. It is only through discovering, releasing, displaying, and tending to this pain that the figure finds resolution. The artist compares healing from trauma to removing a foreign, destructive entity from her body. By exploring her trauma in *Spinsterwitch*, Jenni is undergoing the healing process that the comic details. She also knows that sharing her story with graphic embodied imagery creates social empathy.

<sup>22</sup> *Bikini Kill, Bikini Kill: Girl Power*.

<sup>23</sup> Aquilina, *Spinsterwitch #3*.

In *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8*, Jenni identifies the power of “gory details” to connect with her audience, saying:

ok um so it has been brought to my attention that some people did not consider what i printed in number three as having happened to me as [being] rape. i guess i did not go into gory details enough.<sup>24</sup>

Jenni then deploys graphic embodied imagery in another retelling of her rape to dispel victim-blaming myths. Her prose is full of corporeal words, like ass, cock, head, mouth, and throat, detailing her victimization through metaphors rooted in her body. In one instance, Jenni describes her rapist inebriating her as a debilitating “gag,” causing her to be unable to defend herself.<sup>25</sup> This metaphor helps the readers understand her experience.

Research substantiates that graphic embodied imagery helps speakers heal and create social empathy. Herman claims that survivors telling the story of their trauma “in depth and in detail” is a principal stage of recovery.<sup>26</sup> Psychologist Mindy Nettifee argues that:

We can use [embodied] language alchemically to become conscious of traumatic experiences and conditioning that disconnects us from our self [sic] and others, to know our emotional truth, to honor and voice our experiences, to integrate agency with empathy and embrace complexity, and ultimately to create new meaning.<sup>27</sup>

Nettifee believes that embodied language helps heal trauma by “[bridging] the conscious/unconscious divide” and that this language can create empathy.<sup>28</sup> Other research has found that empathy is developed by intaking graphic embodied imagery. A listener must undergo an

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<sup>24</sup> Aquilina, *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8*.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

<sup>27</sup> Nettifee, “Voice as Embodied Sense,” 296.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, iii-iv; Again, this is a Freudian psychoanalysis reference.

internal simulation of the described action, meaning they feel a version of what the speaker has felt. Neurologist Manuela Macedonia found that when participants in a functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) scanner read embodied action words like “kick” or “pick,” the motor cortices in the brain that would be activated when doing those actions lit up.<sup>29</sup> Cultural psychiatrist Lawrence Kirmayer concurs and synthesizes that this neurological phenomenon in which expressing or processing embodied language forces one to experience the expressed feelings makes this communication style one of the most effective ways to develop social empathy.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the power of graphic embodied imagery, nonlinearity is a typical characteristic of survivors’ narratives that aids in survivors’ healing. One example of nonlinearity is the ragdoll poem in *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8*. Both the occurrence and the actual text of the poem are non-linear:

RAG DOLL. RAG DOLL. thrown on the bed rag doll.  
 he jammed it up her ass rag doll.  
 she couldn’t fight back.

rag doll had no voice.  
 rag doll had no sight.  
 rag doll doesn’t know what is going on till it’s far too late.  
 rag doll screaming in her head.  
 can’t get the words to form.  
 to scream prove to you  
 that i didn’t want it.  
 that i didn’t consent.  
 rag doll sore throat gagging on big dick.  
 rag doll numb in a daze in shock, what is going on?  
 rag doll ass sore for a week.  
 rag doll drunk.  
 i know what fucking is.

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<sup>29</sup> Macedonia, “Embodied Learning.”

<sup>30</sup> Kirmayer, “Empathy and Alterity,” 457.

rag doll i know what rape is.  
 i know the difference not some naive little girl rag doll.  
 never-asked-me-just-throw-me-around-rag-doll.  
     do what i want rag doll i don't care about you.  
 i don't care what you want you drunken toy.<sup>31</sup>

This excerpt explores the mental and physical trauma of her rape and the subsequent trauma of victim-blaming, shifting between these topics. Jenni also moves between the third and first person, picking up and dropping the ragdoll metaphor. Because 1990s zines accept this nonlinear poetry, Jenni can self-soothe and continue the zine forward by exploring new topics.

Nonlinearity is also captivating to read. Just as Jenni's trauma has stuck her in a loop, the reader becomes stuck too; thus, the reader experiences a glimpse into Jenni's post-rape experience.

Like graphic embodied imagery, nonlinearity is natural in survivors' narratives and can be healing for the speaking survivor. Herman describes survivors' retellings of their trauma as "prenarrative" and she claims that they do not "develop or progress in time" and therefore they may be repetitious.<sup>32</sup> Retelling is a reconstruction that "transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story."<sup>33</sup> In a study, psychologist Edna Foa found that survivors retelling and relistening to their rape narratives as a form of exposure therapy increased thought organization and decreased fragmentation. All participant survivors' symptoms of PTSD were alleviated by the end of the two-week treatment course.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, nonlinearity's induced redundancy likely has healing benefits similar to graphic embodied imagery.

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<sup>31</sup> Aquilina, *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8*.

<sup>32</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Foa, "Change in Rape Narratives," 685.

Riot grrrl zines made space for these natural characteristics that lead to healing and empathy, the latter of which is a crucial tool in creating momentum for social movements. Sociologist Jennifer Dunn builds on Herman’s argument that successful trauma movements need a sympathetic character to rally behind and argues that the public must empathize with the character. She claims that activists strategically use their emotional storytelling to create this empathy.<sup>35</sup> Social Movement Studies scholar Felipe Santos further argues that this empathy increases the likelihood of a successful movement because empathy compels people to act in favor of those being harmed, which creates political solidarity. Zine Studies scholars have noted that riot grrrls understood this effect and were deliberately using it to grow their social movement.<sup>36</sup> These positive outcomes of survivors’ storytelling largely hinge on having their stories read and consumed.



### **Witnessing: Bringing the Personal to the Political**

One riot grrrl described the purpose of zines as “to speak and be heard. To listen, to witness, and to heal.”<sup>37</sup> This section covers survivors asking for and receiving witnessing of their testimonies, research supporting witnessing as a healing tool, the possible adverse outcomes of publicizing one’s story, and authors using their zines to platform other survivors’ stories. I argue that bearing witness—the process of supportively watching or intaking first-hand knowledge of an event—was essential to riot grrrls achieving their goals.

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<sup>35</sup> Dunn, “The Politics of Empathy,” 245 & 248.

<sup>36</sup> Spiers, “Killing Ourselves,” 15.

<sup>37</sup> Doty, “Girl Riot,” 50-51.

In the introduction of *Spinsterwitch #3*, Jenni calls for her readers to witness her trauma to help her heal, writing:

my hope is that you'll Read this and connect/Respond to something and i hope that if you do you'll write to me and ill [sic] write back as promptly as i can, i promise... i'm going thRough a lot of self analysis/ cultuRal analysis at present and trying to deconstruct/ figure things out the best i can, so this zine is an about pRocess and Rationalization and cRitique and everything that i'm strRugling with and more... please wRite to me!

While Laub and Felman assert that witnesses should be supportive of survivors, Jenni knew that she may also receive critique by putting her story into the zine scene. This vulnerability is partly why Herman describes witnessing as an intimidating and challenging process.<sup>38</sup> Taking this risk seems to have paid off for Jenni even before she received supportive feedback because on the last page of *Spinsterwitch #3*, she writes that:

This zine was incRedibly difficult foR me... i Really want to get this out & get some feedback... it's good to know that i'm not alone in driving myself cRazy with thinking all the time. i get up in the night to wRite stuff down becuz [sic] if i don't i'll never sleep...  
bye

Laub and Felman claim that even survivors testifying to an imagined witness can aid their healing. Having her story witnessed, in the imagined and concrete sense, was integral to Jenni's healing and was made possible through her zine.

Psychological research supports Jenni's belief that witnessing helped her heal. Laub and Felman describe witnessing as "a therapeutic process."<sup>39</sup> Herman argues that the process of re-telling one's experience of trauma and having it witnessed plays a crucial role in healing by "transforming the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 176.

<sup>39</sup> Laub and Felman, *Testimony*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

She claims that having a witness's support helps survivors speak "the unspeakable," leading to psychodynamic healing.<sup>41</sup> Witnessing through zines is a powerful healing practice; however, like Jenni foresaw, sharing her story also led to victim-blaming feedback.

In *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8*, Jenni addresses victim-blaming feedback from a reader and local punk scene community member named Jay. While first processing the feedback, she begins to perseverate on her feelings of frustration and helplessness. Jenni stops this pattern by rerooting herself in supportive feedback from a reader named Marie who validates her pain in a written response:

i'm sorry but i re-read your zine and what happened to you IS a form of rape... why can't Jay see that? i guess that means sometimes you've got to talk a little louder, cuz those boys will never understand and are only trying to break you/us down. it's so important for us to be talking about [this]... there are so many girls with similar experiences who were told "you weren't raped" and believed it. It makes me so angry.

Witnessing Jenni's rape narrative compels Marie to empathize and stand in solidarity with her. Jenni feels so connected to Marie, someone she has likely never met in person, that she refers to her as a friend when she thanks her. She can only stop perseverating on her trauma and move the zine forward once a witness enters the conversation. This exchange displays the empathetic connections built from riot grrrl zines to support survivors. In reciprocity for the care Jenni receives from her audience, she tries to help them tell their stories of sexual violence.

Jenni encourages her readers to send her their stories and the names of their abusers so she can publish them in upcoming editions. In *Spinsterwitch #4/ Alien #8* she writes:

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid; Psychodynamic therapy is an iteration of Freudian psychoanalysis therapy which believes healing comes from making the unconscious conscious.

i am totally serious about printing names and stories, i think it is really important. so **please**, find the strength to tell if not for yourself, for others. **chris bonner of product—RAPIST.**<sup>42</sup>

Jenni alludes to two reasons for this choice: to help her readers receive healing witnessing and protect potential future targets. Riot grrrls' gossiping about abusers came from the need to protect each other. Zines were a valuable tool in this mission. Other 1990s zines that platformed readers' testimonies include *A Dry Pocket To Piss In* (1992) by Steve Bones, *Free to Fight!* (1995) by a punk collective, and the *Bikini Kill* (1990, 1991) series by Bikini Kill.

Riot grrrl zines circulating survivors' narratives led to riot grrrl concerts platforming survivors' narratives and contributed to the mainstream's further acceptance and valuing of these stories.<sup>43</sup> Through this process the personal entered the political canon. Zinesters balanced multiple stakes in this pursuit including the needs of author and reader survivors to heal, the need to make the personal political, and the need to garner support for the anti-sexual violence movement. Witnessing survivors' narratives aided all of these goals.



### Survivors' Narratives Valued as Educational Tools

In addition to supporting survivor readers, Jenni educates readers who have internalized victim-blaming by dispelling rape myths through her rape narrative. By using her experience as proof, she implicitly argues that survivors' perspectives are valuable, and she reinforces the personal as political ethos of the era. This section defines "rape myth," lays out an example of Jenni dispelling rape myths with her personal experiences, and discusses how this valuing of survivors' narratives adheres to the personal as political ethos.

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<sup>42</sup> In the original zine, the bolded words of this excerpt are regular but are boxed-in.

<sup>43</sup> Siegfried, "Feeling Collective;" Doty, "Girl Riot," 45 & 51.



Martha Burt, one of the first scholars to identify and define rape myths, claims they are “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rapists, and survivors.”<sup>44</sup> Sociologist Juana Campos expands this definition, claiming rape myths “pardon perpetrators, blame victims, and justify sexual assault.”<sup>45</sup> Rape myths are violent beliefs that are socially instilled through routes like education systems and the media. They are also woven into our institutions, like how police ask survivors what they were wearing and if they were drinking, two common examples of the “asking for it” rape myth. Dismantling these long enduring beliefs takes unquantifiable time, voices, and energy. Still, Jenni embarks on this, perhaps insurmountable, feat.

In one instance where Jenni uses her story as an education tool, she begins by identifying rape myths in Jay’s victim-blaming response and then uses her experience to combat the harmful ideology:

gee, so i guess unless i’m beaten and bloody it isn’t rape in your book? (didn’t i talk about the definitions of rape in that zine... are you totally oblivious?) fuck that. just becuz [sic] i was not gang raped... and i did not report it, just becuz [sic] my experience wasn’t the most sickening cruel thing does not mean it was not rape, does not mean it was not painful or traumatic does not mean that it did not hurt me deeply does not mean that it was not rape.

Jenni identifies the rape myth that rape, or rape worthy of attention, must leave physical scars. She posits that all rape is terrible. Jenni does not cite professional sources because the answers are within her experience as a survivor. By using her experience as a valid source, Jenni asserts that survivors’ perspectives matter and are worthy and apt educational tools, which is in line with the personal as political ethos of the era. *Spinsterwitch* aims to address individual experiences and America’s culture of sexual violence. Jenni knows this issue extends beyond herself as she

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<sup>44</sup> Burt, “Cultural Myths,” 217.

<sup>45</sup> Campos, “Rape Myths,” iv.

later addresses rape myths that have not been thrust onto her but have impacted other survivors. Jenni's assertion of the validity of her trauma in the face of rape myths is for her healing *and* to defend, protect, and empower other survivors to speak up.



### Conclusion

This chapter covered 1990s riot grrrl zines' ability to act as personal healing and sociopolitical activist tools. In each section, I discussed how the respective aspect of riot grrrl zines contributed to the personal as political ethos. This rallying cry for public attention to an issue traditionally relegated to silence within the personal sphere aligns with the social movement stage of emergence. In emergence, there is little to no organization, but people begin to become aware of the issue. Riot grrrls' social organization began as sporadic conversations, zines, and concerts platforming survivors' narratives. Their work within the emergence stage propelled the movement to gain substantial policy wins, which began in the mid-1990s and early 2000s with legislation like the Violence Against Women Act that moved the anti-sexual violence movement forward.<sup>46</sup> However, these zines were not without potential drawbacks.

It is easy to predict potential conflicts from this sensitive artform. Authors, including Jenni, received hateful feedback that could cause retraumatization. Additionally, readers read intimate, graphic experiences they may not have been in a place to consume. When reading the *Spinstewitch* series, I became consumed by Jenni's intimate storytelling. I repeatedly found myself taking on her emotions, especially when she used graphic embodied imagery. I also felt connected to her because of how our lives as girls mirrored each other, transcending boundaries of time and space. When reading Jenni's last zine *Spinstewitch #5*, I wanted her to have found

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<sup>46</sup> Christensen, "Four Stages of Social," 20.

peace from creating *Spinsterwitch*, through which I had become so invested in her. One of the final sentences of *Spinsterwitch #5* obliterates this hope:

i'm sick of being depressed!!! i actually haven't been depressed the past few days but those voices in my head sure have gotten loud... i end up thinking about suicide all the time, even though i know id never do it.

Jenni remains battling severe mental illness related to her sexual violence trauma. A heavily etched phrase follows this concerning excerpt, reading: “guess what? I’M NOT depResseD ANYMORE!” which is eerily unconvincing. Jenni’s fate is unknown as there is no other trace of her existence. She could be dead, living a beautiful life, or anything in-between.

Although her zine was not a magic fix for her sexual violence trauma, it was not pointless. Jenni states throughout her series that telling her story was cathartic and provided her with at least respite. Additionally, *Spinsterwitch #5*'s platforming of readers' stories and positive feedback exemplifies how her series positively impacted audience

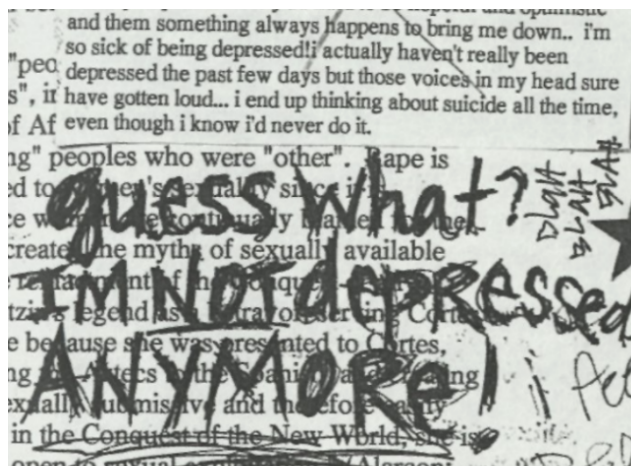


Figure 3: Guess what? I’m NOT depressed ANYMORE!  
Source: Jenni Aquilina, *Spinsterwitch #3*, July 1995.

members. Jenni was also part of something bigger than herself. There are lessons to be learned from Jenni and other riot grrrl zinesters’ personal as political ethos and their aligned commitment to using survivors’ narratives to heal and create empathy leading to social change. In the coming decades, zinesters grapple with an increasingly complicated idea of the role of survivors’ narratives in the anti-sexual violence movement. However, for now, it is worthwhile to relish in 1990s zines’ command of this radical valuing of survivors’ voices.

## Slowly Surely



In the 2000s, the zine scene experienced a slow undercurrent of change which generally involved a departure from the personal as political ethos. Zines with survivors' narratives often stopped using DIY creation methods and aesthetics, used less graphic embodied imagery and nonlinearity, and decentered the importance of witnessing. Most zines continued to value education, and in some zines, education became the primary purpose. A new type of anti-sexual violence zine that was solely meant for educational purposes and lacked survivors' narratives emerged: advice zines. This chapter examines the slowly rising dichotomy between zines with survivors' narratives and advice zines to set the stage for the widespread changes of the 2010s.

The anti-sexual violence movement can contextualize zines' departure from platforming survivors' narratives. The 2000s lacked mass social mobilization spurred by public survivors' testimonies. Testimonies like Anita Hill's were instrumental to the 1990s' ability to politicize this issue the mainstream traditionally relegates to the personal. While there is no research comparing the number of public sexual violence cases in different decades, after a thorough digital search for nationally covered sexual violence cases,<sup>1</sup> I could only find five before 2009 and four during 2009.<sup>2</sup> These cases also yielded fewer pieces of news coverage than Hill's. One significant case that garnered national media attention was the 2003 anonymous public sexual assault allegation

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<sup>1</sup> I googled American "rape," "sexual assault," "sexualized violence," and "sexual violence" cases for each year of the 1990s and 2000s.

<sup>2</sup> Pre-2009 cases named for their perpetrators: Michael Brown, Kobe Bryant, members of the Duke Lacrosse team, Lance Corporal Daniel Smith, and Ben Roethlisberger; 2009 cases named for their perpetrators: Richmond High School students, Andrew Sowell, Mario Andrette McNeill, and Phillip Garrido.

against famous NBA player Kobe Bryant.<sup>3</sup> The case was settled through a civil lawsuit after the anonymous survivor said she would not testify in a criminal court following months of public harassment and threats. Despite the scandal, Bryant went on to have a thriving career. For fans and sports analysts, there was little doubt that his career would persevere.<sup>4</sup> During the trial, sports broadcasters projected that Bryant's sponsorships would return and the NBA would renew his multi-million dollar contract, which both came to fruition.<sup>5</sup> Over the next decade, Bryant's image was so separated from the assault that many people, especially his young fans, only learned of this history during the height of the 2010s #MeToo movement or after he died in 2020.<sup>6</sup>

A significant difference between this scandal and many high-profile 1990s<sup>7</sup> cases is that the survivor did not publicly testify and stayed anonymous, making her harder to rally behind. Many of the survivors of other nationally covered sexual violence cases of the 2000s' were anonymous or dead. How does one support a faceless and thus perhaps more abstracted cause? This lack of publicly rallying survivors' narratives correlates to the 2000s widely recognized failure to generate cultural upsets to invigorate the anti-sexual violence movement to new heights.

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<sup>3</sup> Franiuk, "Prevalence and Effects," 288.

<sup>4</sup> Stern, "Kobe Bryant's Disturbing Rape."

<sup>5</sup> Badenhausen, "Kobe Bryant's Sponsorship."

<sup>6</sup> Hensen, "What Happened with Kobe;" I expand on the evolution of MeToo to the digitized and popularized #MeToo movement in the next chapter; It is imperative to consider how Bryant's identity as a Black man and racism directed at him impacted his treatment during and after this incident. There are a number of articles on this topic.

<sup>7</sup> For example, another famous sexual violence case in 1990s was Katie Koestner's rape narrative featured on *HBO*, *TIME Magazine*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and more.

Still, the 2000s saw gradual progress. From 1995 to 2005, the rate of rape and sexual assault victimization among females older than 12 declined 64% from a peak of 5.0 per 1,000 in 1995 to 1.8 per 1,000 in 2005.<sup>8</sup> There were also qualitative gains including that:

1. The first official National Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) Campaign debuted in 2001
2. *The World Report on Violence and Health* was published in 2002
3. A major exposé on sexual abuse within the Catholic Church was published by *The Boston Globe* in 2002
4. PreventConnect was launched as the first online hub for web conferences and podcasts about preventing domestic and sexual violence in 2004
5. Tori Amos raised awareness of sexual violence as a spokesperson with RAINN
6. Igna Muscio's book *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence* and its associated Cuntfest events fostered conversations about women's bodily autonomy and rape
7. Congress passed the Violence Against Women Acts (VAWA) of 2000 and 2005
8. Tarana Burke founded the MeToo movement in 2006<sup>9</sup>

1990s activists planted the seeds of these successes. For example, many activists have unofficially practiced SAAM since the late 1990s, *The World Report on Violence and Health* was in progress since 1999, there were multiple books published on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church during the 1990s, RAINN was founded in 1994, Muscio's *Cunt* was published in 1998, VAWA began in 1994, and finally, Burke's MeToo movement was developed from intersectional

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<sup>8</sup> Planty & Langton, "Female Victims," 1.

<sup>9</sup> Carroll, Pfeiffer, & Rezendes, "Church Allowed Abuse;" Sullivan & Thomas, "20 Events."

feminism created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 80s and early 90s.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, MeToo would not popularize until the 2000s. This complexity resembles the undercurrent transition within the zine scene where the old overlaps with the new. Because many 2000s zines resemble those of the 1990s, this chapter focuses on the emergence of advice zines. I argue that the 2000s zine scene and larger anti-sexual violence movement were in a period of transformation and coalescence.



### **The Birth of Advice Zines**

The birth of advice zines is gradual. Cindy Crabb is the first author in my archive to move away from survivors' narratives and towards predominantly advice content, but Cindy has riot grrrl roots. From 1991 to the mid-2000s, she ran a popular zine called *Doris*, a collection of informal personal narratives discussing her daily life, including her experiences of sexual violence. As briefly mentioned in "Rebel Girl," readers hailed *Doris*, like many other riot grrrl zines. Readers claimed it was "like nothing [they] had ever read before" and that it felt like Cindy was "confiding in [them]."<sup>11</sup> Fellow zinesters professed that *Doris* exemplified the personal as political.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, Cindy dove into experimenting with zines' form and purpose. Her zine *Support: Feminist Relationship Tools to Heal Yourself and End Rape Culture* (2002) began the move towards primarily impersonal advice content.

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<sup>10</sup> National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, "History of Sexual Assault;" Krug, Mercy, Dahlber, & Zwi, *The World Report*; Perlman, "The Origin;" Wisnouse, "Cuntfest Brings Empowerment;" PreventConnect, "History of the Rape."

<sup>11</sup> Crabb, "Doris Book."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

First, it is crucial to note that *Support* has survivors' narratives, including some that resemble 1990s zines' narratives, because they use graphic embodied imagery and nonlinearity and sought witnessing. For example, the guest author Wyatt begins his narrative by saying, "i can only tell this story in fragments."<sup>13</sup> Then he shares a nonlinear story about his father's domestic abuse. He also uses **embodied graphic language**, including the line, "i failed to save them going lame... paralyzed [sic] as screams permeated the house."<sup>14</sup> Wyatt ends the zine by alluding to his need to have his story witnessed, writing "i won't take any hush money because i need to let someone know."<sup>15</sup> Other survivors' narratives look different than those of the 1990s.

These narratives are forewarned, vague and short, and primarily used as an anecdotal hook to get the readers' attention and substantiate the author's advice. Unlike 1990s zines, some these survivors' narratives are not meant to serve as a healing tool for the survivor. *Support* guest author Chris shares a narrative following this trend. He discloses his struggle to find information on having sex after experiencing sexual violence and then shares the advice he once sought. His story does not use graphic embodied imagery or nonlinearity, and the point is not to receive witnessing. Instead, he uses the narrative to validate his authority to educate on the topic. Like Jenni in *Spinsterwitch*, Chris values his experience as a survivor. However, he is not opening up a peer exchange with the readers; instead, he is bringing prescriptive advice, which changes the primary purpose of the medium. While *Support* does not ditch survivors' narratives, it sets the stage for upcoming zines that do.

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<sup>13</sup> Crabb, *Support*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Chris identifies this shift towards advice content as a reaction to the lack of advice in prior anti-sexual violence zines, writing:

Over the past couple of years, I have read as many zines written by sexual abuse survivors as I knew existed. Not a single one has mentioned any comprehensive information or given any tactical advice about the specific problem we encounter when we are trying to be sexual.<sup>16</sup>

He is calling for anti-sexual violence zinesters to shift their attention to providing educational content. This goal sets the defining premise for advice zines: to prioritize helpfulness for the audience through education instead of the author's healing through witnessing. *Support* has advice segments on topics like active listening skills, power dynamics, and eighty-three self-reflection questions about consent. These segments are usually presented in list format, like the following excerpt:

The fact is, you may never be around when someone you know relives a trauma. But if you are, remember these few things:

- 1) Speak in soothing tones.
- 2) If you touch the person, be gentle as you comfort them, there's a fine line between feeling held and feeling held down.
- 3) Ask them to picture a safe place and to tell you all about it.
- 4) Ask a lot of questions so they really have to inhabit the safe place.

Figure 4: Remember these few things: 1, 2, 3, 4...

Source: Cindy Crabb, *Support*, 2002.

*Support* self-identifies as an educational tool and reads more like a self-help book or awareness poster than its diary-like predecessors. Whereas in the 1990s, anti-sexual violence zinesters framed their advice as peers supporting and protecting peers with subjective information substantiated with personal anecdotes and open to critique, some zinesters in the 2000s viewed their educational content as more prescriptive than conversational.<sup>17</sup> A complication of this

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<sup>16</sup> Crabb, *Support*.

<sup>17</sup> In Crabb's work, these prescriptive pieces of advice are sometimes qualified with statements like "First of all, I have no training or expertise of any of these matters." Other segments are

one-way communication is that advice is fallible. For example, #2 in this list of ways to support a survivor recommends that “If you touch the person, be gentle.”<sup>18</sup> However, the author does not recommend asking for consent to touch the survivor. Contemporary survivor support professionals consider asking for consent best practice because asking for consent gives agency back to the survivor. While 1990s zines may also have dated or incorrect pieces of advice, they most often welcome questioning and are not trying to present as professional sources. Despite these challenges, one featured review on the back cover of *Support* claims that the zine “[t]akes the medium [of zines] and pushes it in a new, desperately needed direction...” showing the cultural significance of Cindy’s alterations.

The shift away from survivors’ narratives escalates in *Learning Good Consent* (2007) by Cindy Crabb, which has even fewer survivors’ narratives.<sup>19</sup> Like *Support*, *Learning Good Consent* includes impersonal educational resources, including sections on definitions of consent, worksheets to practice asking for consent, facilitating a consent workshop, how alcohol and drugs influence consent, communicating about safer sex, and eighty-three self-reflection questions about consent. Some of these sections are pulled from *Support*. The following images are excerpts of *Learning Good Consent* advice segments:

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posed without this disclaimer. After *Support a Survivors of Sexual Assault* (2007) many advice zines lose this disclaimer entirely.

<sup>18</sup> Crabb, *Support*.

<sup>19</sup> Like it is difficult to define what a zine is, it is difficult to define what counts as a survivors’ narrative. Does an allusion to being a survivor count? What about a drawing that has themes of bodily reclamation? In many ways, I would argue yes, but these different types of narratives have different effects. Due to this difficulty in categorization, I do not have specific numbers for how many survivors’ narratives many zines use. I have used a broad definition of survivors’ narratives when categorizing zines as having or not having survivors’ narratives. Regarding the number of survivors’ narratives in *Support* versus *Learning Good Consent*, *Support* uses upwards of eight survivors’ narratives while *Learning Good Consent* uses approximately three.

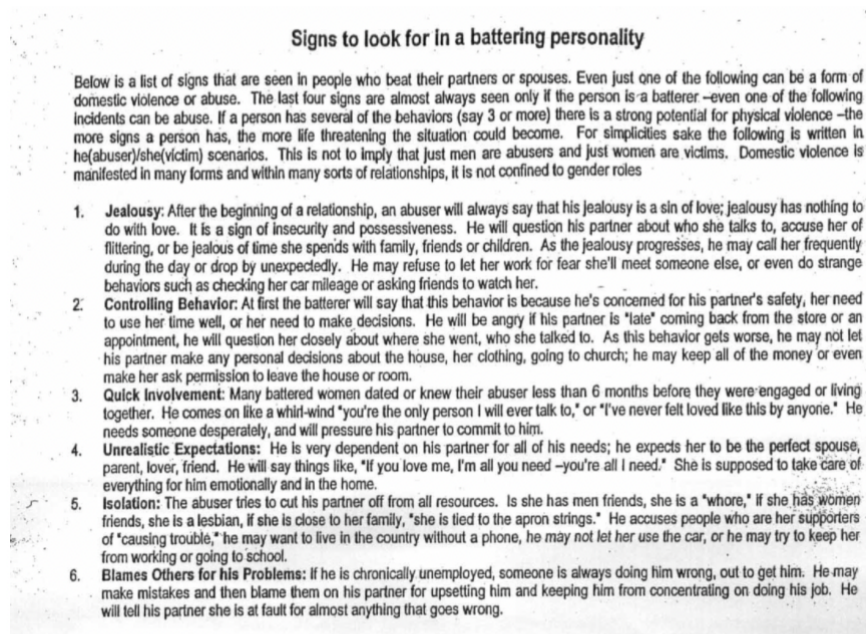


Figure 5: Signs to look for in a battering personality  
Source: Cindy Crabb, *Learning Good Consent*, 2007.

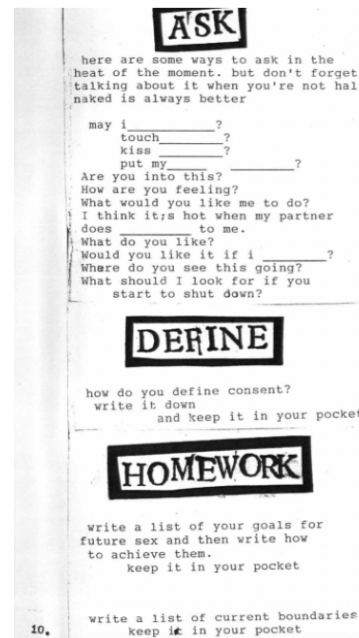


Figure 6: Ask, Define, Homework  
Source: Cindy Crabb, *Learning Good Consent*, 2007.

Alongside *Support's* and *Learning Good Consent's* shift to impersonal advice content, there are other depersonalizing<sup>20</sup> correlating trends, including a move away from DIY aesthetics. Although *Support* and *Learning Good Consent* generally use a cut-and-paste DIY approach, there are fewer layers to the zine than in the past. Many pages of *Learning Good Consent* are simple black typed prose on a white background, but some pages include illustrations. Both zines have professionally digitally designed covers, and *Learning Good Consent* was published as a book by AK Press, an anarchist worker-owned publishing house. However, *Learning Good Consent* departed from anarchist missions because it partnered with retailers like Amazon, Barnes and Nobel, and Walmart, which is ironic given the labor ethics of these corporations and zinesters' original intention to subvert mainstream media sources.

<sup>20</sup> In this thesis, "depersonalizing" means moving away from centering on survivors' experiences and healing and can be likened to moving away from the personal as political ethos.

As Chris in *Support* notes, this move towards impersonal educational content fills a need, but it also correlates to the mainstream adopting or perhaps co-opting zines. This trade-off raises complicated questions, including why does this adoption by the mainstream occur only once zinesters minimize survivors' narratives? Can a zine be DIY if it uses mainstream publishing? Was the neglect of sometimes hard-to-stomach survivors' narratives to conform to mainstream palatability? Are advice zinesters like Cindy Crabb trading survivors' narratives for widespread success? How may Cindy's personal finances impact this choice? Because DIY is an extension of the personal as political ethos central to the first anti-sexual violence zines in the 1990s, these changes alter the medium and its effects. There are also a host of other modifications embodied in *Support* and *Learning Good Consent*, like the inclusion of perpetrators' narratives, trigger warnings, and anonymous authorship. These changes have complicated effects that, in some ways, depart from valuing the personal as political ethos and prioritizing survivors' healing through witnessing.<sup>21</sup>

Following Cindy's slow almost-departure from survivors' narratives, there is the first advice zine in my collection, *Supporting A Survivor of Sexual Assault* (2007) by Men Against Rape Culture (MARC), an "anti-racist organization... committed to ending the epidemic of male violence," and UBUNTU, an organization "led by women of color and survivors." *Supporting A Survivor of Sexual Assault* is a list of advice, including tips like "Make sure that the person you are supporting is not in any serious danger. If they are, figure out how you can help them get out of it. Protecting their lives is your first concern," and "Since non-trans men commit the overwhelming majority (some say over 99%) of sexual assaults, men who are supporting a

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<sup>21</sup> I talk about these complications in the next chapter.

survivor need to be especially conscious of the impact of male violence.”<sup>22</sup> The zine is also fully digitally composed, departing entirely from the cut-and-paste DIY style of the 1990s. *Supporting A Survivor of Sexual Assault* is a culmination of Cindy’s changes.

The changes indicated by *Support*, *Learning Good Consent*, and *Supporting A Survivor of Sexual Assault* are significant, but they are not culturally widespread. *Support* and *Learning Good Consent* also exemplify that even zines with survivors’ narratives can exist along a spectrum of depersonalization wherein survivors healing through receiving witnessing is not the primary purpose of their narratives. Of the eleven zines from the 2000s in my archive, only one, *Supporting A Survivor of Sexual Assault*, is an advice zine. At this point, advice zines were a minority brewing change.



### Conclusion

The 2000s experienced the birth and infancy of advice zines in the anti-sexual violence zine scene. This move away from survivors’ narratives could be interpreted as moving away from valuing the personal as political and supporting survivors’ voices. However, advice zines also intended to support survivors in different ways. This is a complicated tension. It is necessary to acknowledge that *Support* and *Learning Good Consent* are widely popular zines with largely positive reviews. While I am taking a critical approach to advice zines because they decenter survivors’ narratives compared to their predecessors, they still aim to help survivors and address the sexual violence epidemic. As guest author Chris in *Support* insinuates, perhaps there is a balance between the raw afflicting zines with survivors’ narrations of the 1990s and the

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<sup>22</sup> UBUNTU & MARC, *Supporting A Survivor*, 4 & 14.

emerging advice zines. Will the 2010s bring that harmony, or will the diminishment of zines with survivors' narratives persist to a detriment amidst the rise of advice zines?

Recentring on the larger anti-sexual violence movement, while numerous efforts were made, the 2000s lacked famous public survivors' narratives to rally behind in comparison to the 1990s. What was the impact of this lack of an integral sympathetic character? Politics scholar Frances Ryan describes the feminist movement of the 2000s as "the emperor's new clothes era of feminism," and another feminist scholar Erin Matson claims it was "fallow."<sup>23</sup> This fallowness is visible through various routes; for example, in the 2000s, pop stars like Beyonce, Taylor Swift, and Lady Gaga denied being feminists, commonly with an air of disgust, when they would later embrace the label in the 2010s.<sup>24</sup> Feminism, let alone diverse feminism, was not popular in the mainstream during this period, but groundwork like MeToo was being laid to address this problem. This acknowledgment of a lull is not to invalidate the work that was done and the progress that was underway. The 2000s were a time of undercurrent transition, which supports my theory that zines act as windows to their contemporary politics.

One way to frame 2000s anti-sexual violence zines and the movement is through the lens of social movement theory. The 2000s ushered in a period of coalescence where activists began to join together and determine the strategies that they would use. Advice zines had not taken hold, and many projects, like MeToo, had not reached fruition. Coalescence is a *process*; therefore, there was no mainstreaming, unification, or harmony.

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<sup>23</sup> Matson, "Doing Feminist;" Ryan, "From Blair's Babes;" Based on a Danish folktale, "the emperor's new clothes era" refers to logical fallacies where something is widely accepted as true or good due to an unwillingness of the general population to criticize it.

<sup>24</sup> Armstrong, "When Did Feminist Become."

In the midst of this transition, it is pertinent to remember the power of survivors' narratives in zines. In *Support*, Cindy includes two responses she got to her zine *Doris*. Both commend the power of her personal narratives about sexual violence:

Oh, I love the way it is angry and questioning very direct and clear in the anger... I am glad you wrote such a moving piece, it makes me feel ok when I've been questioning lately how I "let" certain situations happen. I have been thinking and writing about all these situations/ stories from my life... it's really making me split wide open... It's exciting... I'm also feeling a big sense of relief and excitement at letting go... love, sarah<sup>25</sup>

I wanted to write and thank you for *Doris* #21... I loved your zine because you reminded me that this is political. I always forget that, or I know it for other people but not for me... Hopefully someday there will be a way to express this stuff out in the open. Thank you for letting in some air.<sup>26</sup> -S

Sarah and S feel the power of Cindy's intimate story-telling, yet Cindy is moving away from using zines to platform survivors' narratives. This dissonance indicates that the move away from survivors' narratives is possibly a fraught choice. The coming decade reveals more about why this shift may be occurring and the fate of survivors' narratives in anti-sexual violence zines and beyond.

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<sup>25</sup> Crabb, *Support*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## Nameless/ Faceless

The mid-2010s saw the explosion of MeToo, which changed the landscape of the American anti-sexual violence movement. While Tarana Burke, a Black woman, founded MeToo in 2006 for other Black women, white women co-opted and lactified the movement.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, white actress Alyssa Milano catapulted the digital popularity of the MeToo movement by asking women on Twitter to “give people a sense of the magnitude of the [sexual violence] problem,” and subsequently created the co-opted #MeToo movement.<sup>2</sup> Milano and the other white actresses who came forward did not credit Burke for the key phrase.<sup>3</sup> While Black celebrities like Gabrielle Union, Thandi Newton, and Terry Crews also came forward, their stories typically got less coverage than their white counterparts.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, Burke acknowledged this lactification of the movement, saying, “If you let mainstream media define who the ‘survivors’ are then we will always only hear about famous, white, women.” Burke held that “[famous, white, women] don’t own the movement.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to wanting to create an inclusive anti-sexual violence movement, Burke wanted to create a movement where survivors were not compelled to tell their stories, claiming, “We don’t believe survivors have to detail their stories all the time. We shouldn’t have to perform our pain over and over again for the sake of your awareness.”<sup>6</sup> In this

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<sup>1</sup> Battaglia, Edley, & Newsom, “Intersectional Feminisms,” 164; Lactification is the whitening of Blackness.

<sup>2</sup> “MeToo” refers to Burke’s movement before its digital blow up by Milano and “#MeToo” refers to the movement after this point.

<sup>3</sup> Milano, “If you’ve been sexually;” Vogue, “Celebrities Share Stories.”

<sup>4</sup> Jones, “When Will MeToo.”

<sup>5</sup> Battaglia, Edley, & Newsom, “Intersectional Feminisms,” 162.

<sup>6</sup> Tietz, “The Cathartic Method.”



statement, she is pushing back on survivors being forced to share their stories to legitimize their pain and their stories being used solely to further a social cause.

This emphasis on healing as separate from retelling trauma relates to the influx of #MeToo posts without survivors' narratives.<sup>7</sup> Many survivors only wrote, "#MeToo." #MeToo Twitter posts with survivors' narratives were often vague, partially because of the 140-character limit.<sup>8</sup> Twitter's conditions made survivors' experiences bite-sized and commodifiable. Other social media platforms offered slightly more yet still restrictive space, like Instagram's 2,200-character limit. Digital platforming also solicited immense victim-blaming feedback. The popular venues for platforming survivors' narratives in the co-opted #MeToo movement were restrictive and intense, the two qualities that make survivors' testifying retraumatizing.<sup>9</sup> In the face of these complications that inhibit survivors' testifying, it is vital to remember that their stories can invigorate the anti-sexual violence movement.

Christine Blasey Ford's 2018 testimony against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh for sexual assault reinforces the continued importance of survivors' narratives in propelling the anti-sexual violence movement. Ford attributed her bravery to come forward to Anita Hill's precedent, saying, "I would never have thought in my mind that I needed to say something if it wasn't for Anita."<sup>10</sup> Their testimonies also created similar social reactions. In both cases, sexual assault counseling hotlines across the United States experienced an inpouring of calls from survivors. There was also a new record high of women elected to office who cited

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<sup>7</sup> Bonos, "Not Everyone."

<sup>8</sup> Twitter increased its limit to 280 characters in 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Brounéus, "Truth-telling," 57, 60, & 62.

<sup>10</sup> Cornish, "In a New Podcast."

these respective testimonies as a primary motivator for them to run.<sup>11</sup> Hill's and Ford's testimonies show that the power of survivors' narratives to create momentum in the anti-sexual violence movement is consistent throughout the history encompassed by this project.

This chapter argues that 2010s zines often depersonalized a form that was once primarily for making the personal political. I move thematically through the remaining zines with survivors' narratives to advice zines. I cover some aspects of zines consistent amongst zines with survivors' narratives and advice zines, namely authorship and aesthetics. Then I move into ways zinesters repurposed survivors' narratives in the early 2010s. Next, I discuss the explosion of advice zines and the implications of abandoning survivors' narratives. Finally, I discuss cover occurrences that complicate 2010s advice zines: the inclusion of perpetrators' narratives, trigger warnings, and anonymous authorship. The conclusion summarizes zines' changes' impacts alongside similar changes in the anti-sexual violence movement, applies social movement theory, and revisits Cindy Crabb, the precursor to anti-sexual violence advice zinesters.



### **Mainstreaming Authorship and Aesthetics**

In the 2010s, zines' authors and aesthetics were mainstreamed. Original 1990s zinesters were typically self-identified anarchists and punks. For example, the *Bikini Kill* series (1990, 1991) was by the self-identified punk anarchist band by the same name and *Free to Fight!* (1995) is by a group of friends in the punk scene. In the 2000s, academically affiliated and activist organizations began creating zines, including, *I have been a victim of violence, violence that is not visible* (2009) by the Berkeley Student Collective and *Queer and Trans Sexual Assault: A Youth Issue* (2007) sponsored by Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center. In the late 2010s,

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<sup>11</sup> Salam, "A Record 117 Women;" Zhou, "The Striking Parallels;" Hale, "The Impacts," 46.

governmental organizations and corporations began making anti-sexual violence advice zines, like *Ascend* (2019), by the state of Colorado and Verizon. There

*This project was supported by a grant from the Verizon Foundation and by grant no. 2016-VW-18-013570-00, awarded by the Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice - administering office for the S.T.O.P. Formula Grant Program. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Verizon Foundation, the state or the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*

*Additionally, we are grateful to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Sexual Violence Prevention Program, for financial assistance with printing.*

Figure 7: Supported by Verizon

Source: Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault, *Ascend*, 2019.

is a shift in anti-sexual violence zines from being part of a fringe punk community to being embraced in left-leaning academic settings and rape crisis centers which straddle the line between activist and bureaucratic organizations. Then, most recently, zines were co-opted by states and corporations. Zines were no longer only used by people without other channels of power. Instead, they were a co-opted medium exploited to virtue signal activist intentions. When corporations make political moves, it is for financial gain, not to save their lives. Through this process, sexual violence, a traditionally confined-to-the-personal-sector issue that riot grrrls fought to make political, is depersonalized in a new way by being used as a financial tool.

As zines' authorship mainstreamed, so did their aesthetics. Some zines were cut-and-paste DIY ventures, but others were digitally designed and more simplistic. 2010s zines were frequently simple pages of black text on a white background, closely resembling academic books instead of 1990s' DIY zines. This distinction is apparent in the juxtaposition between an excerpt from *Bikini Kill: Girl Power* (1991) on the left and *Betrayal* (2013) on the right:

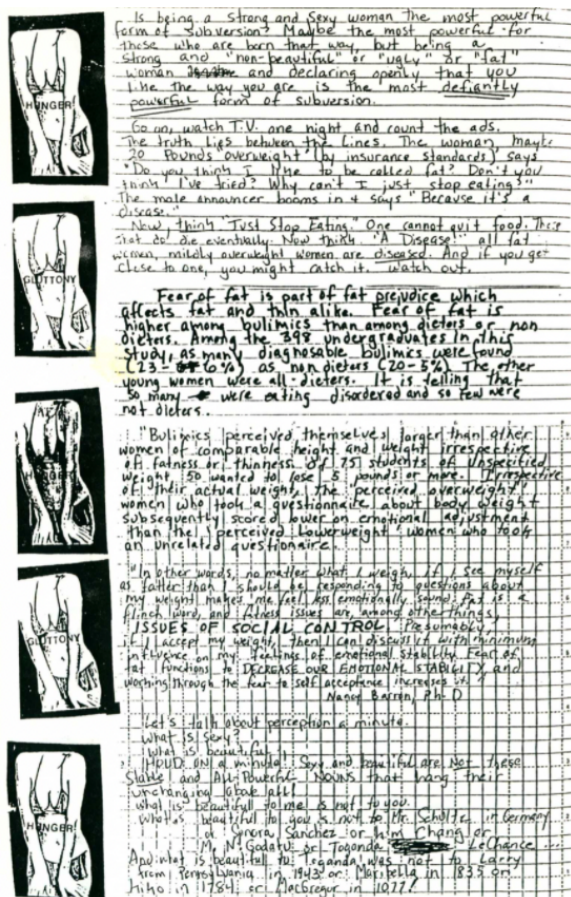


Figure 8: Hunger and Gluttony  
Source: Bikini Kill, *Bikini Kill: Girl Power*, 1991.

**Rape Culture** - A culture which seeks to excuse, condone, normalize and encourage interpersonal violence.

**Interpersonal Violence** - A catch all term commonly used to describe different forms of violence which are inflicted on an interpersonal basis, yet have their roots in expansive systems of power. Rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, as well as sexual, physical and emotional abuse within relationships are all examples of interpersonal violence.

**Survivor** - A person who has experienced or is experiencing interpersonal violence, as defined by the survivor themselves.

**Perpetrator** - A person who has inflicted interpersonal violence onto another person or persons, as defined by the survivor(s).

**Survivor Autonomy** - The theoretical foundation upon which most radical support work is based. Survivor Autonomy is the concept that a survivor should be given the power and autonomy to decide for themselves how to deal with their own trauma, and that the role of supporters is to empower and encourage this autonomy. This stands in contrast to other approaches which do not see the survivor as having the best understanding of their own needs or recognize each survivor's needs as truly unique and different, but instead seek to impose the "proper" way to heal upon them.

**Apologist** - Those who, through action or inaction, seek to uphold either the power of a perpetrator(s) and/or the disempowerment of a survivor(s), thus reproducing Rape Culture.

**Accountability process** - A process through which a perpetrator attempts to be accountable to the people they've hurt, and engages in self reflection with the ultimate goal of making long term changes in behaviour.

Figure 9: Definitions  
Source: Words on Fire Press, *Betrayal*, 2013.

In this excerpt from *Bikini Kill: Girl Power*, DIY aesthetics are apparent through the handwritten text and the series of prints of a female form in a bikini with "HUNGER" and "GLUTTONY" written over her sternum. These prints emphasize the adjacent text, where an author discusses how girls' bodies are endlessly critiqued. While the author does not directly say this, the prints allude to the oppressive dichotomy that women are pushed into where they are either greedy and fat or weak and skinny. In contrast, the excerpt from *Betrayal* is digitally typed, only uses prose and lists, and lacks the visual depth of DIY 1990s zines. *Betrayal's* prose could be in an academic essay or a class PowerPoint. This transition away from DIY is inherently a transition away from the personal. As Mimi Thi Nguyen claims, DIY is an assertion that the

personal—from people without access to mainstream creation methods using raw and messy creation tactics—is worthy of platforming.<sup>12</sup> New mainstream authorship and aesthetics neglect the value of the personal as political ethos.



### **Repurposing Survivors' Narratives**

In addition to shifts in authorship and aesthetics, there was a spectrum of ways zinesters repurposed survivors' narratives, often away from being primarily for the author's healing through witnessing. I have identified three rhetorical strategies of survivors' narratives in the 2010s: the padding, the anecdotal hook, and the minimization. These are some common patterns, but they are not an exhaustive list nor mutually exclusive. This section covers these rhetorical strategies to show that in the 2010s, the authors of zines with survivors' narratives weighed survivors' healing, readers' need to avoid retraumatization, and promoting impersonal educational content leading to various outcomes.

#### **The Padding**

I use the term “padding” to refer to a rhetorical strategy that attempts to contain the potentially retraumatizing effects of sharing and consuming survivors' narratives using trauma-informed tools while maintaining the survivors' right to tell their stories. One zine that uses padding is *Purge #3: Stories From Survivors of Sexual Assault* (2012), a collection of anonymous survivors' narratives compiled by Marta Lapczynski. Marta offers to put readers in contact with the testifying survivor so they can receive supportive feedback while simultaneously

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<sup>12</sup> Nguyen, “Riot Grrrl, Race,” 173.

using anonymity to protect authors from negative feedback. She also attempts to care for the audience by including a trigger warning and prompting readers to practice self-care, writing:<sup>13</sup>

As you can imagine, the content of this zine will almost inevitably be triggering for many people. There are detailed accounts of sexual assault on these pages, & gut-wrenching descriptions of some of the feelings that arise in the aftermath of abuse. Please take every precaution where self-care is concerned as you turn these pages; it's up to you. As I say just the same every time: See if yr friend is home, see if yr pet is awake, see if you have tea in the cabinet & a cozy blanket to snuggle beneath. Remember you're not alone, you are important, & you are loved.<sup>14</sup>

This precautionary act of care towards the audience is meant to mitigate the potential negative impacts of witnessing survivors' testimonies by giving readers autonomy over what they consume and coping mechanisms. However, as trauma-informed pedagogy recommends, these zines reserve the right of survivors to tell their stories how they want.

The survivors' narratives are still raw and afflicting. In this example, a survivor uses poetry to describe the immediate aftermath of her assault:

no  
backed against a wall  
no  
cling to me  
no  
hands never had permission  
my fingers were too weak  
Over and over and...

There's a revolting feeling  
Screaming at me  
From the pit of my stomach—

Outside puking in the alley way  
Shaking it's so cold...

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<sup>13</sup> As previously noted, I discuss the complicated implications of trigger warnings in a coming section.

<sup>14</sup> Lapczynski, *Purge* #3.

Go back inside  
Gotta get the taste out of my mouth<sup>15</sup>

The author uses the common characteristics of survivors' narratives outlined in "Rebel Girl:" nonlinearity and graphic embodied imagery. Nonlinearity is found in the repeated "no." Through semantic satiation, a phenomenon where the repetition of a word leads to the sense that the word has lost its meaning, each repetition reinforces her abuser's disregarding of her boundaries. She also explains the effects of her assault with graphic embodied imagery when writing about how the trauma resonates in her body, making her feel "revolted," which physically manifests in her vomiting in a cold alleyway.<sup>16</sup> The assault leaves her sick and exposed to an unwelcoming world, both in the environmental and social climate. In the end, she simplifies her pain, stating that she needs to "get the taste out of [her] mouth."<sup>17</sup> This statement leads the reader to wonder what taste she is referencing. Is it the vomit, the spit of the perpetrator, or the metaphorical taste of being violated and victimized? Like in riot grrrl zines, *Purge #3's* testifying authors guide readers to intimately witness their pain, which helps their healing and cultivates social empathy.

In addition to providing a trigger warning, in the Epilogue, Marta includes mental health resources to direct readers to professional support if they cannot healthily process this content independently. Offering resources for self-care and activist actions gives readers a way to overcome feelings of helplessness. She also makes space to sit with readers in the discomfort they may feel by acknowledging the difficulty of witnessing, writing that "... after reading each

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

of these stories in my email inbox, each one moving me to tears anew, I still feel alone. [*That's how abuse leaves you.*]<sup>18</sup>

Sexual violence is an epidemic leaving innumerable people traumatized.<sup>19</sup> Altering, muting, or abandoning survivors' stories is not the answer to healing or creating change. It only continues to subjugate and strip agency from survivors and does not address systematic causes of sexual violence. Marta does not tamper with survivors' narratives. Instead, she works around their narrative to care for the audience. Survivors narratives *are* hard to share and hear and should be treated with care. Padding, which involves using trauma-informed tools, does not change 1990s' zines' primary purpose of facilitating the witnessing of survivors' narratives to aid survivors' healing. However, it also considers witnesses' healing journeys.

### **The Anecdotal Hook**

Some 2010s zinesters strategically repurposed survivors' narratives as anecdotal hooks to gain audiences' attention towards activist actions instead of platforming their narratives for witnessing. *Stop Touching Me!: Personal Accounts and Thoughts on Sexual Assault, Rape Culture, and Consent at the Claremont Colleges* (2013) by "four anonymous concerned students of the Claremont Colleges" uses survivors' narratives as anecdotal hooks to substantiate the problem of campus sexual violence and then propel readers to access educational resources and take action. Despite this repurposing, the survivors' narratives resemble those of the 1990s:

I woke up  
I was sweating  
It was hot...  
I hadn't open [sic] my eyes all the way  
I didn't want him to see me

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid; I italicized the bracketed phrase for emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> Blancard & Freeman-Longo, "Sexual Abuse in America."



My body immobilized by fear but  
 Hyper from the adrenaline rushing  
 Through me  
 My insides was [sic] pulsating and I felt nasty  
 Disgusting...  
 I let him touch me until I was numb and didn't mind anymore...  
 I thought a lot  
 The relationship  
 My role  
 HIS  
 HIS HIS HIS  
 Chained and crippled me to sex<sup>20</sup>

The author nonlinearly bounces between her assault and the morning after. She expresses her pain with graphic embodied imagery, explaining that she is “immobilized by fear,” “feeling adrenaline,” and that her “insides” feel “nasty” and “disgusting,” which describes her physical and mental state.<sup>21</sup> The author then explains how her perpetrator “chained and crippled her to sex” by raping her.<sup>22</sup> To be chained and crippled are physical descriptors, but they represent an emotional lack of agency that she continues to feel after the assault. She indicates this power imbalance by repeatedly emphasizing “HIS” when referring to her perpetrator, which is a twisted allusion to how some religions capitalize God’s pronouns. The second half of *Stop Touching Me!* abruptly transitions into a typical advice zine arc, sharing sexual assault statistics, a link to an “8-Minute-Long PSA on Preventing Rape,” and Title IX policy information. The anecdotal hook uses the power of survivors’ narratives to capture the audiences’ attention, create empathy, and then propel them to undertake education and action steps.

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<sup>20</sup> Four concerned students of the Claremont Colleges, *Stop Touching Me!*

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

This method is likely to work because, as previously explained, survivors' narratives induce empathy with their audience. When people feel empathy towards survivors by witnessing their testimonies, they are more likely to support survivor advocacy movements.<sup>23</sup> It is an invigorating setup leading the audience to mobilize instead of leaving them stagnantly in potential retraumatization or secondary trauma. However, this repurposing arguably decenters the survivors' healing and even potentially exploits their pain. Of course, survivors may *want* their stories to be used for educational purposes. Nonetheless, the anecdotal hook method presents the question: what happens when zinesters or people in general turn, with the survivors' consent or not, survivors' narratives into activist tools *before* healing methods? I argue that there is an inadvertent, not inherently malicious, risk of decentering survivors' healing and thus depersonalizing the movement.

### **The Minimization**

Finally, another complicated and potentially depersonalized change is the minimization of survivors' narratives' in zines. Whereas past decades' zines with survivors' narratives typically dedicated at least half of their space to survivors' narratives, many 2010s anti-sexual violence zines with survivors' narratives filled the majority of their pages with advice content. Therefore, even zines with survivors' narratives often had *less* survivors' narratives in terms of the number of narratives and space occupied, like Cindy's *Support and Learning Good Consent*.

*What Are You Afraid Of?: It's just women's studies* (2010) by a Chapman University Women's Studies class is predominantly about sexual violence and yet only has one survivor's narrative that is a brief moment of vulnerability amidst otherwise impersonal educational content. Education segments include profiles on feminist leaders' anti-sexual violence efforts, the

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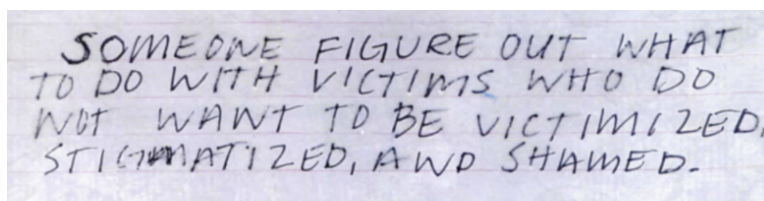
<sup>23</sup> Dunn, "The Politics of Empathy," 245 & 248; Santos, "Social Movements," 1.

ethics of porn, subverting beauty standards imposed on women, and a statistic on how many college-aged women experience rape. The one survivor's narrative is compacted into two pages with large text in which the survivor describes, with graphic embodied imagery and nonlinearity, her rape and its aftermath.

While this is not a definitive measurement, unlike many prior survivors' narratives, this author does not mention that sharing her story has helped her heal. For example, one entry in *Purge #3*, a zine using the padding technique where survivors' narratives are not minimized, ends with:

hopefully it helps you even a fraction of the way it has helped me. Please feel free to share stories, ask questions, raise points or simply contact me for whatever reason. we need a community to combat this issue.<sup>24</sup>

This author has benefited from sharing her story and even gained a sense of calmness that drastically opposes her dismayed and frustrated tone at the start of her entry. The end of the survivor's narrative in *What Are You Afraid Of?* is instead a scrawled plea for "someone" to help:



SOMEONE FIGURE OUT WHAT  
TO DO WITH VICTIMS WHO DO  
NOT WANT TO BE VICTIMIZED,  
STIGMATIZED, AND SHAMED.

Figure 10: Victimized, Stigmatized, and Shamed  
Source: Rebecca Minton, et. al, *What Are You Afriad Of?*, 2010.

It is concerning that the survivor never mentions telling her story as being healing and that the survivors' story is left unacknowledged for the rest of the zine. The total capitalization could represent a sense of empowerment, frustration, or both, making it difficult to discern the author's feelings about sharing her story. There is no direct response to this plea, but the authors may see the advice zine content that follows as a response. Further adding to this narrative's isolation,

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<sup>24</sup> Lapczynski, *Purge #3*, 35.

there is no designated way for readers to contact the author to send their support. In some ways, her story exists in a compressed—intense and short—vacuum, which research shows increases the risk of survivors being retraumatized while testifying.<sup>25</sup> *What Are You Afraid Of?* raises concerns about the evolution of anti-sexual violence zines with survivors' narratives as they collaborate with and are potentially smothered by perhaps more palatable advice zine content. Like with the anecdotal hook, survivors may want their stories to be shared in these conditions, and survivors' autonomy should be respected foremost. This critique is not an indictment of the prevalence of impersonal didactic content or where and how survivors individually choose to share their stories. There is also nothing inherently wrong with circulating educational information. Instead, I am concerned that even in zines with survivors' narratives, survivors' narratives' role was shrinking and moving away from seeking witnessing for the survivors' healing. Many zines with survivors' narratives adopted the same primarily educational goals as advice zines. I want survivors to have access to space to prioritize their healing.



### **Advice Zines Take Over**

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the evolution of zines with survivors' narratives. In the 2010s, zines with survivors' narratives became less common, and advice zines grew rapidly. Of the eleven zines from the 2000s in my archive, there are ten zines with survivors' narratives and one advice zine, making zines with survivors' narratives the significant majority. In contrast, of the nineteen zines from the 2010s in my archive, nine have survivors' narratives, and ten are advice zines. One advice zine, *In Our Hands* (2016), acknowledges the value of survivors' narratives and the detriment of advice zines lacking these perspectives. The first page of *In Our*

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<sup>25</sup> Brounéus, "Truth-telling," 57, 60, & 62.

*Hands* declares that the zine's purpose is to compile helpful educational resources and that they have not covered subjects that they hope to in the future, including helping survivors "break their silence."<sup>26</sup> I was unable to find a later edition with survivors' narratives. This aperture could be because the second edition was never made or because it was less popular than its advice zine foremother. Regardless, why have survivors' narratives been deprioritized when they were once an integral part of the anti-sexual violence zine scene, and what are the implications of this shift?

*Betrayal* (2015) by Words to Fire Press offers a hypothesis about and critique of advice zines' popularization, claiming that "we confer to the advice of specialists partly out of fear of saying the wrong thing. But all we're talking about are our own experiences, a topic on which we are all experts."<sup>27</sup> Over 40 years into the American anti-sexual violence movement, it makes sense that 2010s activists were seeking a heightening of authority. It is natural to want to have the answers, to be able to fix this epidemic, and to have healed survivors and their communities. By some measures, activists do have greater authority on the topic. There are decades of collective knowledge, multidisciplinary research, and progress towards the visibility of sexual violence. However, in this pursuit of authority, the power of the personal is overlooked.

In addition to the push for professionalism, many other forces could be contributing to this change. In the rest of this section, I posit and briefly meditate on other intertwined speculative catalysts and their implications.

1. Survivors sharing their experiences of sexual violence can be exhausting, and there are a limited amount stories each survivor has to tell. Some survivors may be fatigued, do not want to share their story, or have already told it in zines or other venues. However,

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<sup>26</sup> *In Our Hands*, *In Our Hands*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Words to Fire Press, *Betrayal*, 1.

someone in the United States is sexually assaulted every sixty-eight seconds.<sup>28</sup> Given this astonishing number, statistically, other survivors likely want to tell their stories and may benefit from using zines.

2. Traditional DIY zine culture was threatened at the turn of the century when the internet rapidly changed how people communicated. Many zinesters worried that the internet would kill zines because it was killing print journalism outlets and forcing them to go online. Journalist Jenna Wortham claims that print zines survived because they offer a “respite from the scrutiny on the internet.” While zines did not die, many zinesters adopted digital composition and e-zines emerged. Digital zine making may have been less appealing to survivors as a story-telling platform because it limits the art therapy benefits of physical DIY zine making.<sup>29</sup>
3. Survivors began telling their stories on platforms like Twitter and Instagram, primarily through #MeToo, which raises concerns about the volatile retraumatizing effects of social media.
4. In the 2010s, the United States reached late-stage capitalism and woke capitalism was popularized, which impacted the treatment of sexual violence. Journalist Helen Lewis claims that in woke capitalism, corporations cling to social movements for capital gain, and interacting with these “woke” organizations typically does not further social movements. Examples of woke capitalism in the zine scene and larger anti-sexual violence movement include Verizon’s sponsorship of the anti-sexual violence zine *Ascend*

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<sup>28</sup> RAINN, “Statistics.”

<sup>29</sup> Zubala, “Art Therapy;” Digital art’s viability as a form of art therapy and its benefits and limitations are just beginning to be studied.

and Gillette's 2019 #MeToo ad.<sup>30</sup> She claims that capitalism "is actively impeding the cause, siphoning off energy, and deluding us into thinking that change is happening faster and deeper than it really is."<sup>31</sup> Marxist theorist Sandra Bloodworth supports Lewis's claim and argues that "While capitalism completely reordered women and men's lives... it maintained women's oppression."<sup>32</sup> Bloodworth also asserts that capitalism creates a culture that accepts domination and thus condones the subjugation of women, who are disproportionately survivors of sexual violence.

5. Beginning in the late 2000s, there were rising concerns about retraumatization, secondary trauma, and a pursuit of a socially nebulous idea of trauma-informedness. The effects of this agenda can be seen in MeToo's aim to stop survivors from being compelled to share their stories, the adoption of trigger warnings, and the rise in the study of trauma-informedness. Trauma researcher Dr. Angela Sweeney claims that the concept of trauma-informedness has become "fuzzy" to the general public.<sup>33</sup> A misconception about trauma-informedness is that it advocates for stopping survivors from telling their stories because it could retraumatize onlooking survivors. Sweeney argues against this misconception and claims that confusion about trauma-informedness stemmed from the co-optation of this psychological concept by the general public. This co-optation resembles that of zines and the MeToo movement.

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, "Backlash Erupts After Gillette."

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, "How Capitalism Drives."

<sup>32</sup> Bloodworth, "Rape, Sexual Violence."

<sup>33</sup> Sweeney, "(Mis)Understanding Trauma Informed Approaches."

6. Finally, as I have tracked throughout this thesis, these changes follow social movement theory's stages of development. In the 2010s, the anti-sexual violence movement and zines were institutionalized, meaning they began to work with mainstream forces and became more bureaucratic. They also experienced co-optation, an indicator of decline, at the hands of multiple forces. While this may mean the anti-sexual violence movement follows a "typical" trajectory, political scholars Thomas Rochon and Daniel Mazmanian assert that "typical" does not mean successful since social movements generally fail.<sup>34</sup>

Further research and activist action should consider these potential contributors to the move away from anti-sexual violence zines with survivors' narratives, as many will likely remain forces shaping the anti-sexual violence movement and perpetuating the silencing of survivors.



### **Complications: Perpetrators' Narratives, Trigger Warnings, and Anonymity**

As movements grow, they become increasingly complicated. Three complications that arise in 2010s anti-sexual violence zines are perpetrators' narratives, trigger warnings, and anonymous authorship. These characteristics have varying impacts that are too simple to classify as exclusively decentering or centering survivors' narratives. This section parses through their differing implications and illuminates the growing complexity of the anti-sexual violence movement and its zines.

Several 2010s anti-sexual violence advice zines include perpetrators' narratives. At first glance, including perpetrators' narratives contributes to a culture where survivors' voices are undervalued and not believed over perpetrators' voices and in a movement based on survivors' trauma. However, some zinesters see educational value in these stories. In this project's 2010s

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<sup>34</sup> Rochon and Mazmanian, "Social Movements," 75.



archive, there are eight zines with survivors' narratives, three zines with perpetrators' narratives, and one with both. Almost half as many zines exclusively used a perpetrator's narrative as those that exclusively used a survivor's narrative. *Let's Talk About Consent, Baby* (2010) by the Down There Health Collective, which exclusively includes a perpetrator's narrative, uses the narrative as a fable after a list of questions prompting the reader to learn consent language. The perpetrator made her partner uncomfortable when they had sex while intoxicated, but the partner did not define what happened as sexual assault. The essay quickly turns into an academic prescriptive text advocating for people to acknowledge that they can be survivors and cause harm and learn the language to describe these nuanced experiences, an adjacent argument to the preceding advice segment. In this case, the perpetrators' narrative is a learning tool, but that does not excuse the lack of survivors' perspectives to mold this dialogue.

*Betrayal* explains its inclusion of perpetrators' and survivors' narratives in its introduction, stating that "Some of the authors of this piece are survivors, others are reflecting on their own role as people who have been abusive in the past, but they all share a commitment to the struggle against a Culture of Rape."<sup>35</sup> They believe that including "everyone who sees themselves as a part of this struggle [against rape culture]" benefits the anti-sexual violence movement.<sup>36</sup> There are three main benefits of this inclusion:

1. There are scarce pure binaries. Perpetrators are often also survivors due to cycles of harm.<sup>37</sup> While this does not excuse abuse, it does nuance conceptions of perpetrators.

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<sup>35</sup> Words to Fire Press, *Betrayal*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, "Reckoning With Violence."

2. Permanently removing perpetrators from communities is not proven to change their behavior. This is recognized by the transformative justice model that aims to resolve conflicts with non-carceral methods and ensure those who have caused harm can access community support to change their behavior while protecting those they have harmed.<sup>38</sup>
3. Including more people in the anti-sexual violence movement is helpful because most social change takes mass mobilization. A recent study by sociologist Damon Centola found that for social change efforts to be successful, at least 25% of a population must support the movement.<sup>39</sup>

This inclusion of perpetrators' perspectives is a delicate and complicated weighing that reflects the thoughtfulness and nuance 2010s zinesters, like their predecessors, put into their anti-sexual violence work.

Another tricky development in 2010s anti-sexual violence zines is trigger warnings, most frequently used in zines with survivors' narratives. Trigger warnings, which have a long history in post-traumatic stress disorder advocacy and political correctness, warn people of potential trauma triggers so they can choose whether to engage with the trigger.<sup>40</sup> They became a common practice in the 2010s as six out of the twenty-one zines of the decade used trigger warnings.<sup>41</sup> Trigger warnings contribute to creating a culture of consent, which combats rape culture. Their emphasis on consent can also be distinctly helpful to survivors who have had their consent violated, but there are also drawbacks.

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<sup>38</sup> Mingus, "Transformative Justice."

<sup>39</sup> Noonan, "The 25% Revolution."

<sup>40</sup> Heer, "The History of PTSD."

<sup>41</sup> Trigger warnings were especially common in zines with survivors' narratives.

*Betrayal* challenges the common simplistic valorization of trigger warnings, writing:

We're fucking sick of disclaimers. We resent having to provide apologies and justifications for our words before we even speak them. We're bitter about how specialized discussions of rape, sexual assault, and abuse have become... Sure, we appreciate a well placed trigger warning. It's just good etiquette. But when fanatical attempts to avoid triggering each other serve as tools to relegate discussions of interpersonal violence to the margins, to wrap the issue in a neat little box which is only brought out on special occasions, when an illusion of "safety" can't be guaranteed, well... then we start to get pissed.<sup>42</sup>

Words to Fire Press is concerned about trigger warnings leading to over-policing by imposing censoring and self-censoring through spoken and unspoken stigma, especially in spaces that were once carved out for survivors to tell their stories like zines. Mental health journalist and survivor Laura Barton supports but nuances this complaint, writing, "Asking people to hide their reality because it is upsetting can be stigmatizing, but so can berating and shaming people for asking for a trigger warning."<sup>43</sup> Contrasting this narrative, psychology scholar Paul Copoc found that "trigger warnings did not affect students' stigmatization toward individuals with a mental illness or their help-seeking intentions."<sup>44</sup> Another complication with trigger warnings is that people other than survivors avoiding retraumatization are likely to avoid content with survivors' narratives. Oppressors do not want to confront the pain they have caused or are complicit in, but these conversations are integral to dismantling rape culture. Furthermore, there is a distinction between discomfort and retraumatization. Sexual violence is inherently uncomfortable, but it is not dangerous to be uncomfortable. A recent study by neuropsychologist Daeyeol Lee found that

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<sup>42</sup> Words to Fire Press, *Betrayal*, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Barton, "The Links Between."

<sup>44</sup> Copoc, "Trigger warnings," 1.

most learning happens in place of discomfort.<sup>45</sup> In weighing these advantages and disadvantages of trigger warnings, it is imperative to interrogate if they actually prevent retraumatization.

A study by psychologist Richard McNally has shown that trigger warnings do not reduce and may even increase adverse reactions to potentially traumatizing material.<sup>46</sup> *Betrayal* authors agree and therefore claim that trigger warnings attempt to create an unrealistic “illusion of safety” for readers to avoid retraumatization.<sup>47</sup> They encourage readers to work through being triggered while acknowledging that support to do so is sparse, and thus they resign to “take care [and use trigger warnings]... so as to not become inadvertent allies of the forces [they] mean to oppose.”<sup>48</sup> Trigger warnings do not simply decenter survivors’ needs because they aspire to address reader survivors’ needs and are perhaps an imperfect but necessary tool.

Finally, there is the rise in anonymous authorship that began in the 2000s but took hold in the 2010s. Anonymity is a complicated tool that protects survivors from victim-blaming feedback but potentially removes a catalyzing face from the movement. This tool provides routes for moderating feedback—letting in support and filtering out victim-blaming— and thus potentially enhances survivors’ experiences sharing their stories. This change arises from a heightened sensitivity to survivors’ comfort and safety needs while sharing their stories, which is understandable following the public backlash survivors like Anita Hill experienced in the 1990s. Simultaneously, this move implores the question of what it means to remove the face from survivors’ stories. Does anonymity unintentionally make survivors’ narratives less personal and

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<sup>45</sup> Daeyeol Lee, “Volatility Facilitates Value;” Stillman, “Science Has Just Confirmed.”

<sup>46</sup> Suk Gersen, “What if Trigger Warnings.”

<sup>47</sup> Words to Fire Press, *Betrayal*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

thus less empathy-building and beneficial to the anti-sexual violence movement? There is limited research on how anonymity changes the treatment of survivors. Research *has* consistently found that anonymous social media platforms increase rates of user aggressivity, indicating lower levels of empathy towards other users.<sup>49</sup> Weighing the pros and cons of using anonymity presents the conundrum of how agents of change can promote the well-being of survivors sharing their stories while also building a movement in which their stories' circulation is integral to growth. Balancing these impacts is a fraught duty the movement must consider.

These trends further complicate the idea that the decentering of survivors' narratives is clear-cut. Actions that decenter some survivors' needs can respond to other survivors' needs. The sexual violence epidemic lacks unilateral answers. These nuances aside, the primary dilemma in 2010s zines is advice zines' abandonment of survivors' experiences in a movement that exists because of their trauma and in a world that already systematically silences them.



### **Conclusion**

While the zine scene of the 2010s is not a monolith, it is apparent that anti-sexual violence zines whose primary purpose is to facilitate witnessing to help survivors heal are becoming decreasingly common. Because zines intimately reflect the time and culture they are created in, their departure from survivors' narratives provides insight into the 2010s' anti-sexual violence movement's relationship to survivors' narratives. This conclusion examines this culture, discusses how social movement theory's stage of institutionalization may factor into these

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<sup>49</sup> Nakano, Suda, Okaie & Moore, "Analysis of Cyber Aggression," 337; Sticca & Perren. "Is Cyberbullying Worse," 739.

changes in the anti-sexual violence movement and zines, and checks in on Cindy Crabb, the predecessor to advice zinesters.

My goal is not to critique Tarana Burke or the original intention of MeToo to promote survivors not being coerced to tell their stories. Survivors' should share their stories only if, when, and how they want, or else retraumatization can occur.<sup>50</sup> Instead, I am concerned about the co-opted and mainstreamed #MeToo movement's emphasis on using survivors' coming forward to display numbers while shortening and commodifying their unique, complex, and powerful experiences.<sup>51</sup> Milano's emphasis on the epidemic's legitimization through quantitative means and social media's space limitations led to shorter narratives than those of the 1990s' thirty to one-hundred-page zines. Social media also made survivors' voices reach further, increasing exposure and intensifying negative feedback. In contrast, the riot grrrls had a more insular movement primarily contained within the punk scene, mitigating this negative feedback. Social media as a platform for survivors' narratives is concerning because when survivors' testimonies are brief and intense, they are more likely to experience retraumatization.<sup>52</sup> While Burke's original intention was to limit survivor retraumatization, #MeToo uses platforms where survivors sharing their stories is likely to be more retraumatizing than previous decades' platforms.<sup>53</sup>

A study by psychologist Kimberly Schneider and Communications Studies scholar Nathan Carpenter tracked responses to 2,102 #MeToo tweets for 24 hours after their posting and

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<sup>50</sup> Brounéus, "Truth-telling," 57, 60, & 62; This agency is systematically stripped by the legal "justice" system.

<sup>51</sup> Milano, "If you've been sexually."

<sup>52</sup> Doty, "Girl Riot," 45; Brounéus, "Truth-telling," 57, 60, & 62.

<sup>53</sup> This is potentially complicated by the decades of progress towards accepting survivors voices.

found that most responding tweets indicated a negative tone lacking support for the survivor. Social media brought a nearly unprecedented onslaught of negative feedback to non-famous survivors. Did this toll pay off in social change? On the one hand, there were tangible changes from #MeToo through legal and governmental routes, including the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund helping over 3,600 survivors seek justice and Congress reforming its processes for staffers reporting sexual harassment.<sup>54</sup> Another study by psychologist Leanne Atwater found that #MeToo had unintentional consequences. After #MeToo gained momentum, 19% of men claimed they were more reluctant than before to hire attractive women, and 21% said they were more reluctant to hire women for jobs involving close interpersonal interactions with men.<sup>55</sup> This data is one metric indicating that social media is a faulty space that is not habitable to the nuanced and in-depth conversations necessary for sharing survivors' narratives.

In this social climate, the anti-sexual violence movement reached the social movement stage of institutionalization and showed signs of decline. In institutionalization, movements have successfully raised awareness and coordinated strategy amongst organizations. Organizations also have started to rely on staff persons with specialized knowledge to run day-to-day operations and carry out movement goals. MeToo involved extensive coordination with numerous other organizations like Girls for Gender Equity, In6, Know Your IX, and National Alliance to End Sexual Assault.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, MeToo and other anti-sexual violence organizations had paid teams, including communications officers, therapists, and researchers.

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<sup>54</sup> North, "7 Positive Changes."

<sup>55</sup> Harvard Business Review, "The #MeToo Backlash."

<sup>56</sup> MeToo, "Organizations in Actions."

This level of coordination and resources shows extensive growth from the sporadic—yet powerful—1990s movement.

The 2010s also displayed signs of decline, including co-optation and success.<sup>57</sup> Co-optation can be seen in the inception of #MeToo through co-optation by white celebrities and in corporations' co-optation #MeToo for financial gain.<sup>58</sup> In addition to co-optation, success also indicates decline. Philosopher Frederick Miller offers examples of success in movements, including “an area that mobilizes to halt the construction of an airport... [and] the women’s suffrage movement... [which] achieved its goals and thus declined.”<sup>59</sup> As these examples display, movements with specific goals are more likely to succeed. #MeToo had a narrower goal to show people “the magnitude of the [sexual violence] problem,” which was arguably achieved.<sup>60</sup> Once movements achieve their goals, they must reorient towards new goals. This crossroads presented the question of if the followers of the co-opted #MeToo movement, namely white women, would follow the original MeToo movement that prioritizes Black survivors when race has historically divided feminist movements?<sup>61</sup> Between co-optation and success, MeToo, which became synonymous with the larger anti-sexual violence movement to many, was at an in pass. Based on social movement theory, one way to avoid decline and maintain success is for activists to focus on smaller localized movements with specific goals.<sup>62</sup> Zines have historically

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<sup>57</sup> Christensen, “Four Stages of Social,” 19.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, “Backlash Erupts After Gillette.”

<sup>59</sup> Christensen, “Four Stages of Social,” 20.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, 220.

<sup>62</sup> Christensen, “Four Stages of Social,” 37.



shown that they can assist activism in smaller communities and could help local anti-sexual violence efforts. However, the fate of zines is uncertain since they were also institutionalized and co-opted.

Re-rooting in the path and trajectory of the zine scene, when faced with the 2010s' cascade of advice zines predated by *Support* and *Learning Good Consent*, I wondered what Cindy Crabb was up to, but I could not find new anti-sexual violence zines by her. Was that it? Were these majority impersonal educational content zines Cindy's magnum opus? Did she ever entirely depart from survivors' narratives like the rest of the pack? Was she satisfied with the Walmart book deal in trade for side-lining survivors' narratives? It did not make sense that a riot grrrl zinester, a group that felt so strongly about the personal as political in the fight against sexual violence, would settle on abandoning survivors' narratives.

While Cindy did not publish anti-sexual violence zines after *Learning Good Consent*, she published zines on other topics. She released two zines in the 2010s: *Filling the Void: Interviews About Quitting Drinking and Using* (2010) and *Masculinities* (2015). Both zines are collections of interviews about peoples' experiences of different traumas. While the rest of the zine scene followed and surpassed Cindy's lead away from personal narratives, she reverted to them in a new way. Platforming others' testimonies through interviews was possibly more sustainable because telling her own story may have been draining, or she may have told every story she wanted to share. Through these zines, Cindy continued to push the message that the personal is political. If she transitioned back to primarily valuing personal narratives, maybe the rest of the anti-sexual violence zine scene and movement could too.

## Conclusion

I have proven that anti-sexual violence zines and the anti-sexual violence movement have historically moved in tandem. Therefore, zines act as a window because they reflect, shape, and are shaped by their respective cultures. This project began by studying 1990s anti-sexual violence zines' "personal as political" ethos that was also present in the larger anti-sexual violence movement. In the 2000s, I identified the abandonment of survivors' narratives in anti-sexual violence zines, leading to the creation of advice zines. The zines and the larger movement underwent a transition period and began to interact with the mainstream. By the 2010s, advice zines became the majority in a space once dedicated to platforming survivors' narratives to receive witnessing. 2010s zines also repurposed survivors' narratives, creating varying effects that often decentered survivors' healing. Many zines' authorship and aesthetics also moved towards the mainstream. These shifts are reflected in the larger anti-sexual violence movement, specifically MeToo, which was co-opted by the mainstream. By using zines as a historical window, I identified a critical shift away from survivors' narratives in American anti-sexual violence zine culture, showing that this tether makes zines a powerful tool in social movements and research. In this conclusion, I discuss early 2020s zines and complicate the revered 1990s. I end by advising that the personal must always be political, in zines and beyond.

The two 2020s zines in my archive adhere to the trends of the 2010s.<sup>1</sup> Both indicate mainstreaming because they are digitally composed and tied to academic institutions. My archive's first zine of the 2020s is a typical advice zine titled *Don't be friends with rapists* (Spring 2021) by Aidan Nelson and a student organization at Ithaca College. The second is

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<sup>1</sup> This sample size is too small and it is too early in the 2020s to know where the zines of this decade will go. The discussion of these two zines shows how the 2010s changes have bled into and impacted the 2020s.

*Disorientation Zine* (Fall 2021) by the Student Labor Action Coalition and Survivors of Sexual Harm and Allies (SOSHA) at Oberlin College. *Disorientation Zine* repurposes a survivor's narrative using all three 2010s repurposing techniques but shows an increasingly disenchanted disposition with the moderation of survivors' voices.

*Disorientation Zine's* letter from a member of SOSHA is prefaced with a trigger warning and ends with resources. The forewarned survivor's narrative is a vague paragraph without graphic embodied imagery or nonlinearity that the author uses to garner the reader's attention toward activist action steps. Towards the end of the letter, the author describes why she feels like her narrative is harmfully moderated, writing:

Oberlin indirectly silences survivors by pushing a narrative that all discussions surrounding sexual violence must be “fun” and not name the violence at hand. They do this in the name of being trauma-informed—which in actual practice is so very important. Trauma-informed practices actually look like giving content warnings, checking in, not forcing anyone to be in a space that is triggering to them, providing numerous resources for support. Perhaps Oberlin does care about this in part. But in practice, in the way the college is operating now, what they are creating is a campus that pretends that sexual violence does not exist.<sup>2</sup>

The author is writing in the aftermath of the imposingly hopeful mentality of 2010s zines.<sup>3</sup> She feels that the push for “trauma-informedness” has hyperextended to force conversations of sexual violence to be “fun” or be silent. The trigger warning in SOSHA's letter reflects the extent of this silencing, writing, “*CW Sexual Assault details, mentions of R\*pe.*” The author is so wary of discussing sexual violence, given the culture of silencing survivors in the name of trauma-informedness, that she has censored the word rape like one would censor curse words

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<sup>2</sup> SLAC & SOSHA, *Disorientation Zine*.

<sup>3</sup> Which Gordon identified at its infancy.

like “F\*ck. Sh\*t. [or] D\*mn.”<sup>4</sup> Medical sociologist Jhia Louise Jackson criticizes this practice, writing, “R\*pe. Rape. Who knew that rape would still be a forbidden word...?”<sup>5</sup> Journalist Hayley Rose also scrutinizes this form of censorship, stating, “Why is ‘rape’ a bad word?... I know first-hand, as a victim of rape, that living in silence and misery to avoid offending society is a slow death of spirit.”<sup>6</sup> The censoring of the word rape imposes a stigma that is representative of the larger stigmatization of survivors’ narratives.<sup>7</sup> SOSHA’s statement and my co-worker’s upset at *Disorientation Zine*’s rape narrative support the idea that this silencing of survivors’ narratives is, at least in part, a complicated attempt to avoid retraumatization or secondary trauma to witnesses. As this thesis has explored, the 2010s into the 2020s present many new considerations and complications that drastically change zines, but another change throws zines into a new universe.

In the 2020s, a new form of popularizing zine could lend itself to the anti-sexual violence movement and the platforming of survivors’ narratives: electronic zines (e-zines). Gen Z youth trying to build community during the coronavirus pandemic sparked growth in e-zines, sometimes pithily called quarenzines.<sup>8</sup> Like riot grrrl zines, these new zines are typically a girl-led venture combining op-eds, creative writing, music reviews of independent artists, and social justice advocacy. E-zine communities have been described as fostering Gen Z’s “ability to

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<sup>4</sup> Jackson, “R\*pe.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid; While this article is from the 2014, it is relevant to this 2021 instance because the word is still “forbidden.”

<sup>6</sup> Rose, “Rape.”

<sup>7</sup> Allan & Burrige, *Forbidden Words*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Merrilees, “Zines are back;” Cheung, “Enter the ‘Quarenzine.’”

collaborate together and use [their] creativity and unique perspectives to make change.”<sup>9</sup> This description emulates the energy of the 1990s riot grrrl movement. While e-zines lack a cut-and-paste DIY approach, they involve youth teaching themselves skills like writing, web design, illustration, and marketing, which somewhat embodies the DIY mentality of circumventing mainstream media production. While recent e-zine entries on sexual violence typically do not include graphic embodied imagery and nonlinearity, they could. E-zines could also bring organizers together in a digital space with fewer viewers and a particular type of viewer based on interests and location, like Gen-Blk Zine for girls of color and Sonder Zine for young artists in Flagstaff, Arizona. These zines have a more niche approach that may mitigate some of the backlash survivors who came forward on social media through #MeToo experienced. E-zines could also spread information faster than traditional print circulation. Perhaps e-zines can foster a modernly appealing, more localized space for survivors to share their stories, contribute to sexual violence awareness, and thus prevent the decline of the movement.

It is imperative to consider how a nostalgized view of the past can contribute to this narrative of decline. While I conclude that the value of the personal as political ethos of the 1990s must guide the anti-sexual violence movement, I am not advocating for a return to the past. Journalist Allison Yarrow critiques the over-romanticized feminism of the 1990s, claiming that “... old, stale messages... persisted in the 90s, despite the decade’s lip service to modern ideals about free sexuality and gender equality.”<sup>10</sup> The anti-sexual violence movement has made bounds of progress this millennium, especially towards justice for and the inclusion of marginalized survivors, which would be devastating if erased. Nonetheless, narratives of the

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<sup>9</sup> Merrilees, “Zines are back.”

<sup>10</sup> Yarrow, *90s Bitch*, 109.

anti-sexual violence movement since the 1980s have overwhelmingly indicated a decline. Notable works that support this theory include Kristin Bumiller's *In an Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement Against Sexual Violence* (2008) and Rose Corrigan's *Up Against a Wall: Rape Reform and the Failure of Success* (2013). Women and Gender Studies scholars Carrie Baker and Maria Bevaqua argue that the narrative of decline is a misunderstood history that focuses "too narrowly on criminal justice-oriented aspects of the movement, which are wrongly taken for the whole of the movement."<sup>11</sup> They attempt to nuance this narrative with examples of how the movement has grown since the 1990s, including that it has become more inclusive of minority survivors. Another activist strategy they explore as a testament to the movement's growth is the use of artistic protests by youth. My thesis dispels this argument. Youth have used art to protest and heal from sexual violence since at least the 1990s, and in the case of zines, there *has* been a type decline in the valuing of survivors' narratives which should be fundamental to the movement. While I disagree with parts of Baker and Bevaqua's argument, I heed their warning that the narrative of sole decline is dangerous in oversimplifying the movement and making activists self-defeatist.

In concluding this project, I am drawn to the question posed to me by the conversation with my coworkers about *Disorientation Zines*, which goes beyond one zine to have implications on the direction activists should guide the anti-sexual violence movement: *shouldn't we support survivors who speak up?* Survivors' stories are too valuable to silence or even decenter for four reasons. First, the zines with survivors' narratives in my archive have shown that sexual violence *is* personal. It intimately and profoundly impacts survivors' lives, and therefore the anti-sexual violence movement must have a firm stake in survivors' well-being. Second, survivors' telling

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<sup>11</sup> Baker and Bevaqua, "Challenging Narratives of Decline," 4, 10, & 12.

their narratives and having them witnessed is healing. Third, my secondary research has shown that survivors' narratives propel the movement.<sup>12</sup> Finally, survivors' narratives are valuable tools to document history because, as I have proven, zines are interactive windows to larger politics and cultures. Although I settle on *yes*, I also recognize how precarious yet necessary it is to balance all survivors' needs, including the need not to be retraumatized.

As for concerns about retraumatizing survivor witnesses, I recommend the flawed band-aid of trauma-informed tools. For these tools to work, survivor viewers also have to learn and respect their boundaries, not consume content they know or presume will retraumatize them, and access resources. These are not easy feats, but they are essential acts of self-preservation. While in *Purge #3*, the author Marta claims that taking "every precaution where self-care is concerned" is "up to you [the reader]," there are many more factors in play when it comes to survivors' ability to care for themselves. Until America has a more trauma-informed, better-funded, and anti-racist mental health care system, survivors will systemically struggle to access the professional care they need to heal, thus putting them at higher risk for retraumatization and adverse trigger reactions. Censorship of other survivors is not the answer to these infrastructural flaws. Further activism and research should consider how to balance these various survivors' needs while preserving the importance of survivors' narratives.

Anti-sexual violence agents of change must better steer the movement toward centering survivors' narratives and healing. I do not aim to make the movement self-critical to the point of inaction but to invigorate us to know that the expertise we need is within survivors. Trauma researcher Angela Sweeney, whose quote opens this paper, supports this belief and asserts that

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<sup>12</sup> Coulter, "Agendas and Actionable Agendas," 1 & 12; Dunn, "The Politics of Empathy," 245 & 248; Santos, "Social Movements," 1.

“the expertise about what [survivors] need to heal lies with [them].”<sup>13</sup> To Sweeney, personal experience is invaluable. I agree, and further claim that the most impactful thing we can do to create social change is to listen to survivors and platform their voices. We must fight to keep the personal political.

I hope these zines have inspired you to believe in the value of survivors’ narratives to heal survivors and shape the world. If you are a survivor, I prompt you to consider making a zine or using another creative medium to share your experience. Tell your stories how you want, but remember that your zine can help create the change you aspire to see in the world. Consider the power of your actions to shape the anti-sexual violence movement. You can use trauma-informed tactics, like trigger warnings and offering resources, but do not feel the need to moderate your voice—oppressive forces will do that for you. I prompt you to use zines for witnessing to aid your healing because you matter. Prioritizing your healing is radical and sets the tone for a successful survivor-centered anti-sexual movement.

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<sup>13</sup> Sweeney, “Out of the Silence.”



If the fight against sexual violence requires a million thrown bricks,  
let this be one brick.

## Zine Archive

Making the materials used in this project as accessible as possible is vital to honor the anarchist roots of zines. Therefore, I have included links for any free digital copies of the zines in my archive. This archive is also in chronological order for ease of access.

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## List of Figures

Figure 1: Battle Angel Alita	27
Figure 2: Self- discovery	30
Figure 3: Guess what? I'm NOT depressed ANYMORE!	40
Figure 4: Remember these few things: 1, 2, 3, 4...	46
Figure 5: Signs to look for in a battering personality	48
Figure 6: Ask, Define, Homework	48
Figure 7: Supported by Verizon	56
Figure 8: Hunger and Gluttony	57
Figure 9: Definitions	57
Figure 10: Victimized, Stigmatized, and Shamed	64

## Glossary

**Advice zines:** Zines that discuss sexual violence without sharing survivors' narratives and that serve a primarily didactic activist purpose

**Countercultural archive:** An archive documenting groups and movements that oppose government and mainstream ideologies

**Decolonize:** The pursuit for cultural, psychological, and economic freedom and sovereignty for Indigenous peoples

**Personal narrative:** A story told in the first person about someone's life or experiences. A survivor's narrative is a personal narrative from a survivor about their experience/s with sexual violence.

**Rape culture:** A culture in which rape and other forms of sexual violence is ignored, excused, permitted, condoned, and even encouraged

**Rape myths:** False ideas that commonly aim to shift the culpability of sexual violence from perpetrators to survivors and are often systematically reinforced

**Sexual violence:** A widely encompassing, non-legal term that includes but is not limited to rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and intimate partner violence

**Victim-blaming:** Devaluing a form of violence or not believing a survivor, usually through the perpetration of rape myths

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