SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE IS A CITIZENLY ISSUE

SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE IS A CITIZENLY ISSUE: RETHINKING

FEMINIST PREVENTION APPROACHES UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

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LAY ABSTRACT

Today, one can scarcely turn on a television, open a newspaper, or visit an online news source without some mention of a case of sexualized violence. What are we doing to prevent this social ill? In this dissertation, I analyze two approaches to sexualized violence prevention: strategies that encourage the import of communication during intimate encounters (consent discourse) and strategies that encourage persons most vulnerable to sexualized violence to engage in defensive measures (fighting strategies). Through an investigation of academic theories and practical mobilizations of these prevention approaches, I consider their connection to dominant conceptions of the human and what it means to 'live together.' From these analyses, this dissertation ultimately argues that we must be attentive to the ways we think about, talk of, and implement prevention strategies so that we do not inadvertently reproduce the very oppressive conditions that enable sexualized violence to occur in the first place.

ABSTRACT

Sexualized violence is a citizenly issue. It is a phenomenon that, in the Canadian context, is formed and informed by the settler-colonial nation-state. Yet, as the spike in attention to instances of sexualized violence in news media suggests, sexualized violence is also a sociopolitical ill, one that causes harms to persons who experience it and those who care for them. How, then, might we ensure that sexualized violence is no longer a possibility? Feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates have created or contributed to several identifiable approaches to sexualized violence prevention: education about consent, teaching self-defence, and implicating bystanders in the continuation of sexualized violence. In this dissertation, I focus on two of these approaches to sexualized violence prevention – consent discourse and fighting strategies – and consider how their amenability to a normative form of rationality that governs conceptions of citizenship – neoliberalism – might not only limit the preventative efficacy of such approaches, but also work to (re)produce the very conditions that allow sexualized violence to occur in the first place. Analyzing these prevention approaches through close readings of academic theories of prevention and practical mobilizations of these approaches (i.e. a poster campaign, a short independent film), I ultimately argue that while neoliberalism's idea(l)s of individualism, personal responsibility, and normative interpretations of 'equality' function to potentially limit or contradict a feminist anti-sexualized violence goal of emphasizing the structural causes of sexualized violence, it is also the case that these theoretical and practical projects can produce alternative understandings of what it means to be 'human' and to 'live together.'

For my loving partner, Patrick Evan Moor.
Your incredible kindness, care, and empathy enabled me to see this project to an
end.

And in memory of my Grams, Annie May Halliday.

I have your hands
Mom tells me so
Thick wrists and strong fingers
A woman made to work

You are a woman
Who toiled with her hands
Toiled so hard
They began to twist
Ache
Burn

But you never stopped toiling
With those twisted hands
You toiled so long, so hard
So your daughters
And your daughter's daughters
Might not have
Twisted hands
Might be able
To do something more
Than just survive

I am sorry to say
But my hands are twisting
Like yours
Like my Mother's
But because of you
I am allowed
To use these twisting hands
To claw and crawl towards my dreams

I miss and think of you every single day.

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When I began this PhD five years ago, I was terrified. Not only was I unsure about my decision to pursue a degree in a department other than Women's and Gender studies, but I would be also living on my own for the first time, away from friends and family. I distinctly remember my first weekend alone in Hamilton. After driving the wrong way down several one-way streets (an urban feature uncommon in my hometown) incurring some angry honks and shouts, and meeting some less-than-friendly store clerks, I felt deflated, lonely, and stupid. Why did I think I could handle so many life changes at once? Who was I to think I could survive in such a big city, in a new a school, working in a field of study that was relatively foreign to me? Fortunately, my first day on campus quelled my doubts. Upon entering my assigned office space, I was introduced to two beautiful humans: Sarah Wahab and Nicole Lamont. Perhaps recognizing my trepidation, Nicole and Sarah – students already familiar with McMaster – took me under their wings, attending welcome seminars with me, helping me learn the layout of McMaster's sprawling campus, and sharing educational resources. That day I went home with the hope that I could, indeed, handle all the newness I was encountering. It was the first day I did not cry before I went to bed. There were good people here, and I would be okay.

Once classes began, I met several other graduate students that played an important role in my education: Kristin Shaw, Emma McKenna, Joel Guillemot, Emily Scherzinger, Sharifa Patel, Brycen Janzen, Christien Garcia and Jocelyn Smith. Their brilliance, resiliency, kindness and humour helped subdue my loneliness and stimulate my intellectual curiosity. Thank you all for your friendship and comradery.

Alongside my peers, I had the pleasure of working with several exceptional professors at McMaster: Dr. Chandrima Chakraborty, Dr. Grace Keller, Dr. Lorraine York, Dr. Nadine Attewell, and Dr. Catherine Frost. In each of these professors' graduate seminars, I learned the importance of active listening, but also asserting myself in group discussions. Your classes were integral to

expanding my breadth of knowledge and encouraging new lines of inquiry in my research. Thank you for your wise mentorship and welcoming classroom spaces.

In the second year of my PhD, I was hired by Dr. Paula Gardner as a research assistant working within her feminist collective, EFECT (Ethical Feminist Experimental Collaboration Toolkits). What I at first regarded as an excellent opportunity to earn some much-needed cash soon turned into an important research project and collaborative relationship. Trusting me with to help her with her project expenses, introducing me to feminist scholars across the country, and allowing me to take the lead on an annotated bibliography project, Dr. Gardner gave me the opportunity to try my hand at new academic and intellectual ventures, whilst mentoring me with the utmost respect and compassion. I feel so blessed to have had the opportunity to work with you, Paula, I look forward to seeing what sort of collaborations might lie ahead for us.

Alongside my work with Paula, I've also had the wonderful opportunity of working under Dr. Sarah Brophy, Dr. Christien Garcia, and Jocelyn Smith as a teaching assistant. Under these scholars' wise direction, I learnt what it means to be a firm and engaged, but fair and compassionate instructor. Thank you for giving me the space to hone my teaching style.

I am also very grateful for the detailed and insightful feedback that my external examiner, Dr. Carrie Rentschler, provided me through her final report and feedback during the oral defence. Dr. Rentschler, you have encouraged me to look at my project and the contributions it is making to various fields of inquiry in a different light. I am incredibly appreciative of your unique insights, and productive commentary.

In terms of the creation of this dissertation, a big thanks goes to my second reader, Dr. Janice Hladki, for graciously seeing me through this degree despite retiring before my defense (Congratulations!). Janice, your thoughtful responses to my work – especially those aspects that focus upon visual culture – have been central to not only informing my dissertation, but also my decision to pursue a project that focuses on film. Moreover, your patience, scholarly expertise, and willingness to engage me in challenging intellectual conversations have helped me elevate the criticality of my discussions. You are an incredibly warm and wise human being, and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with an expert in my field.

This dissertation would not read as nearly as clearly as (I hope) it does if it was not for my first reader, Dr. Melinda Gough. Melinda, I want to thank you for your patience with me as I learned different writing techniques, styles, and the specifics of certain grammatical conventions; writing has always been a bit of a challenge for me (and a point of academic insecurity/vulnerability), but your gently-worded commentary made editing feel much more doable, and a lot less troublesome. Moreover, thank you for your willingness to meet with me to talk through my ideas, and your reading of various drafts of these chapters. Your comments and

suggestions pushed me to think about the limitations of my work, and whether or not certain limitations were ones I could 'live with.' Thank you for always making time to converse with me and comment on my writing. I sincerely hope that one day my editorial sense is as keen as yours!

Dr. Amber Dean, where do I begin? It would not be an exaggeration to say that without your mentorship, I would not have completed this degree. From reference letters to scholarship applications, from seemingly endless rounds of editing and revisions to anxiety-ridden phone calls, you have always shown up for me as a supervisor, mentor, and friend. Not only has your own work been informative to my thinking of the problem of sexualized violence (as evidenced by your presence in this dissertation), but you always pushed me to think about the implications of my work: what is at stake here? Why should we care? Yet, I never cease to be amazed by the efficacy of your approach to supervision: not once did you tell me that 'I had' to do something or approach a topic in a certain way. Even when you disagreed with an idea I proposed, you gave me the space and time to figure out that, as I used to so lovingly put it, was usually 'full of shit.' Despite your busy schedule you *always* made time for me and were so very considerate of and helpful in navigating various challenges I incurred in relation to commuting and mental wellness. I truly hope that a little bit of your intellect and cool-approach to the heated environment of academia has rubbed off on me during these five years. Thank you for everything – especially for always having brie at our meeting!

In a more personal vein, I have been very blessed to still have a close friendship with the same four women I met in elementary school: Robyn Glen, Natalie Bunoza, Jenna St. James, and Sarah Barrett. Although we have all chosen different paths in life, I always look forward to our 'girls nights' and 'movie nights.' Thank you for always asking me 'how is school going,' even when you knew that the answer might result in a thirty-minute monologue about sexualized violence. And thank you for continuing to include me in group activities, even when time and financial constraints made my participation challenging. You ladies have always made me feel like I belong, and you will always have a friend in me.

A year before I began my PhD, I met my partner, Patrick Evan Moor. When I moved to Hamilton and began this degree, I'm not sure that either of us fully knew what we were getting into: long commutes, tight budgets, more than a little neurosis, and a lot of tears and sleepless nights. Yet, in spite of it all, you stood by me; you challenged me when I needed to be pushed, and took care of me when I was unable or unwilling to take care of myself. I am grateful for your warmth, intelligence, and strength. You are my heart.

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individually and as a family, you both are and have been my number one supporters, believing in me and my dreams when I was ready to give up. You are exceptional humans; and I am what I am and who I am because of your love. You helped me realize my dreams, and there are no words to express the depth of my appreciation for both of you. I love you both so very much.

Given all the support and help I received from the above individuals, I thus regard this dissertation to be a collaborative endeavour. However, any mistakes or oversights are mine alone.

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Preface: On Sexualized Violence, (Personal) Experience, and Disclosure

In mid-September of 2018, I embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Dublin, Ireland, to participate in the *Understanding New Rape Cultures* (UNRC) Conference. This was an exciting trip for several reasons. For one, I had not travelled on a plane since I was twelve and was absolutely thrilled to be journeying outside of North America for the first time. Additionally, UNRC would also mark the first time I attended a conference that centered on my research concern: sexualized violence. At this intimate gathering of approximately forty attendees from various backgrounds (academics, grass-roots activists, lawyers) travelling from different places around the globe (Rome, South Africa, Israel, Britain, U.S.), I was eager to meet other people who, like me, worked on sexualized violence on a daily basis. This trip, however, was important to me for another reason: at this conference I would say in public for the first time that I am a victim/survivor of sexualized violence.

Significantly, the act of the disclosure – understood, at least initially, as a narrativization of one's first-person experience of an act of sexualized violence – was actually the topic of my UNRC presentation. Through my research, I had encountered several prominent theorists working on sexualized violence who include an account of their first-person experiences of sexualized violence in their published work (Ahmed 2017; Alcoff 2018; Bourke 2007; Brison 2002; Cahill 2001; Campbell 2002; Estrich 1987; Freedman 2014; Warshaw 1988).[1] Part of the

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[1] In a much broader sense, I also understand that disclosures can involve a narrativization of one's experience of witnessing sexualized violence, or their experience of hearing another's testimony to an experience of sexualized violence. Although later in this preface I will problematize/question

function of my conference paper was thus to think about what these disclosures in academic writing were doing: what is the point of including disclosures regarding experiences of sexualized violence in research on sexualized violence? Given my experiences, however, these questions were not just ones of intellectual curiosity, but were decidedly personal. Specifically, I was wondering whether *my* experiences of sexualized violence had a place in my dissertation: what would a disclosure do to or for my dissertation? Could a disclosure lend 'credibility' to my work? Would a disclosure be part of an ethical framework, granting a kind of transparency and reflexivity to my research? Might a disclosure facilitate a connection between myself and my reader(s), a connection that could generate new insights in relation to sexualized violence? Always a worrier, I had other questions regarding disclosure too: could a disclosure be read by some as evidence of a kind of 'bias' on my part? What if my disclosure was interpreted as a move to make my dissertation more 'enticing,' included for what Laura Abrams describes as "gratuitous shock-value" (2003, 163)? Or might a disclosure be glossed over by some readers as a result of what Susan Moeller calls "compassion fatigue" (1999, 10), read as one of many tragedies that persons routinely encounter in our hyper-informational age? These latter questions were especially important to me considering that my dissertation work is not about victim/survivor testimonies to sexualized violence, but sexualized violence

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this preliminary definition of disclosure in other ways (i.e. does disclosure have to be overt?), due to space constraints, I am limiting my discussion of disclosure in this section to first-person experiences of sexualized violence articulated in academic writing. Moreover, the various scholars cited here do not use the word disclosure to describe their narrativization of their experiences of sexualized violence. Instead, using the definition of disclosure provided above, I read their testimonies to experiences of sexualized violence as disclosures.

prevention. And, as I discuss below, although I do believe disclosures can in some cases work towards sexualized violence prevention, I wondered what my past experiences of sexualized violence had to do with my work that explicitly centered on a future-oriented approach to ending sexualized violence.

To respond to these questions, in my conference paper I tried to work out what disclosures can do in relation to the discloser, the potential audience(s), and the broader community. In terms of the would-be readers of such disclosures, I proposed that engaging with another person's experience of sexualized violence could be affirming and empowering, potentially validating the reader's own experiences. Alternatively, for readers who may not have experienced sexualized violence, disclosures might also have an enlightening and informational effect, providing a new perspective on the topic of sexualized violence. In terms of the author(s) of such works, I suggested that disclosures might work cathartically, giving one the space to articulate experiences in a way where the author can control its framing. Indeed, disclosures might even lend authors a unique kind of credibility or demonstrate that they have a uniquely vested interest in resolving the problem of sexualized violence. And even going beyond the effects of disclosure upon an individual, speaking to and about one's experience of sexualized violence in one's academic writing can contribute to a powerful shift in the ways we work on sexualized violence. As persons with relative amounts of privilege – the privilege of having one's work published and thus validated by different sociopolitical institutions, for example – disclosing one's experiences in academic writing can potentially produce original insights into the phenomenon

of sexualized violence, new attitudes towards sexualized violence, and novel ideas regarding its prevention.

Alongside these potential benefits of disclosure, however, I also perceived some potential limitations. For instance, I had concerns about how a description of sexualized violence could intentionally or unintentionally provide a kind of definitional threshold for what 'counts' as sexualized violence (more on this in the first section of the Introduction). Indeed, the way one characterizes or frames one's experiences of sexualized violence (the words one chooses, the narrative structure, the pace of the disclosure, the space given to elucidating this experience) could work to alienate or invalidate readers' experiences of sexualized violence, even if such an effect is unintentional. Moreover, some disclosures might necessitate other kinds of disclosures, as in cases when one experienced sexualized violence while intoxicated or on drugs, or while engaging in sex work; these other disclosures might feel just as, if not more, risky in relation to the disclosure of experiencing sexualized violence. Relatedly, we might also think about persons who have experienced sexualized violence at the hands of a person who is stereotypically associated with sexualized violence (i.e. the myth of the black rapist, see Davis 1983, 182). Here, the identities of persons involved in an act of sexualized violence might complicate a person's decision to disclose.[2] As one participant's presentation at UNRC encouraged me to consider,

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[2] Alice Walker's short story, "Advancing Luna – and Ida B. Wells" does a good job of illustrating this dilemma. Walker's story centers upon the black, female narrator's friendship with a white woman, Luna, during the civil rights era. Whilst the narrator is in Uganda, Luna is raped by a black man, but chose 'not to scream.' The rest of the story (as well as its appendices and amendments) detail the narrator's struggle with reconciling the injustice of her friend's experience

sometimes disclosures also require consideration of how the disclosure might impact one's own community, positioning one (because of their disclosure) as a kind of betrayer of or traitor to one's people.[3] And finally, in a very broad sense, it is important to remember that disclosures are undoubtedly embroiled in larger schemas of power that enable some stories to be heard over others. Specifically, I noticed that the majority of instances of disclosure to sexualized violence in written academic work on sexualized violence came from persons of relatively privileged positionalities: white, cis-gender, heterosexual women who often hold reputable positions within academic institutions (for example, Abrams 2003; Brison 2002; Bourke 2007; Cahill 2001; Estrich 1987; Freedman 2014; Warshaw 1988). Although the representation of a larger portion of disclosures by individuals from these positionalities might be attributable to systemic, sociocultural factors that prevent or hinder some persons of colour, queer and trans individuals, disabled persons and poor persons from engaging in this kind of work, from gaining access to the spaces where this work is conducted, or from feeling safe enough in these spaces/places to disclose, I cannot help but think about how privileged aspects of one's positionality – whiteness especially –

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of sexualized violence with the injustices that Black men wrongfully accused of the rape of white women have experienced.

[3] In her presentation, "'You Must Give Your Man what is Rightfully His': How Black Married Women Make Sense of Sexual Violence in their Intimate Relationships in South Africa," Memory Mphaphuli talked about how participants in her study accused her of imposing 'white knowledge' upon the stories of South African women regarding their experiences with their husbands. Although Mphaphuli was not disclosing her experience, her discussion of other women's disclosures reminded me that disclosures can be part of broader discourses that can work to characterize a community. Because sexualized violence is often regarded as something negative (perhaps even a social ill), to have one's disclosure taken as 'evidence' of the character of one's entire community can be a frightening and dangerous prospect.

enable one to even debate about whether one should or can speak to their experience of sexualized violence in one's academic work. As such, some limitations of disclosure might be less about the content of what is disclosed (although, this might undoubtedly be an issue), and more about how the disclosure itself might inadvertently function to uphold systems of privilege/oppression whereby some voices are heard and others are not, and whereby some debate whether or not to speak in these privileged contexts while others are still fighting for the right to speak at all, the possibility of being heard, or both.[4]

From these musings presented at UNRC, I was left with the distinct worry that sometimes disclosures function in ways that we – feminist scholars working on sexualized violence – do not intend or could not imagine. Importantly, these concerns were echoed by conference participants in our conversations following the presentations. Expecting a bit of push-back from the audience given that I was being critical of the function of disclosures at a conference about sexualized violence, I was relieved to hear my questions and concerns affirmed: it is not just *that* we disclose that is important, but where these disclosures go and what others do with them (factors that might be largely out of one's control) that also deserves

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[4] I think this phenomenon is perceptible beyond the academic sphere. Specifically, I am here reminded of the ways in which discussions of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada often ignore or sideline how sexualized violence plays into the forced disappearance and deaths of such women. How, then, might the question of literal survival sometimes take precedence over the question of the way sexualized violence unduly affects certain communities? And how might that need to foreground the import of lives being lost work – perhaps unintentionally – to divorce the ways sexualized violence might cause some persons to be more vulnerable to the violence that leads to being classified as 'missing and murdered' in the first instance?

our consideration. Hence, I wonder if disclosures (especially in the #MeToo era) are too often regarded as a means (or *the* means) of accomplishing anti-sexualized violence work, where relaying the pain, violence, and/or terror of one's story is expected to deter would-be perpetrators through some empathetic revelation. Moreover, I worry that regarding disclosure as a potential means to prevent sexualized violence places too great an onus on victims/survivors to tell our stories towards a kind of preventative 'good'; there is no guarantee that these experiences will be heard in a way that challenges the normalization of sexualized violence, or heard at all. As Renée Heberle argues, "with the relatively widespread exposure, discussion, and moral condemnation of sexual violence, through speakouts but also through popular culture, the incidents have not decreased" (1996, 64).[5] Indeed, no matter how carefully we tell our stories, there is no telling the ways in which they will be taken up by our readers.

For these reasons, this dissertation offers no lengthy or detailed description of my experiences of sexualized violence. Aware of how certain aspects of my positionality (as a white, lower-middle class, cis woman) might contribute to my fear of repercussions from a written disclosure, and also how my positionality could contribute to my disclosure being read in ways that are more generous than the disclosures of those from more marginalized positionalities, I am unsure if a detailed disclosure is needed from a person like me, in this particular format, at

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[5] One might also look to the work of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub for further discussion regarding the limits of telling stories of trauma. Specifically, in their 1992 book, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,* chapters one through three discuss both the need for and the impossibility of the role of the witness in testimonies to trauma.

this current moment.[6] These things considered, I thus feel that it is enough to say that I have experienced sexualized violence, that I regard myself as part of a community of survivors/victims, and that I feel you, readers, who might also be part of that community. Although I am not able or willing to disclose in the ways we typically associate with disclosure (a description of experience), I do, however, still find value in stating that I am a victim/survivor insofar as I believe it works to challenge cultures where such statements have been – and might still be – deemed inappropriate.

In coming to these realizations and this decision about my personal disclosure, however, I also recognized that perhaps my concerns about disclosure were not just about the narrativization of one's experiences of sexualized violence. Specifically, I wondered: are all disclosures overt? Are there other ways to acknowledge and/or engage with one's personal experience of sexualized violence, ways that do not necessarily involve a naming and/or a description of one's experience of sexualized violence? Perhaps, then, my engagement with and focus upon narrativizations of one's experience of sexualized violence in

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[6] Citing the sociological work of Margaret T. Gordon and Stephanie Riger, Sharon Marcus notes that "the distribution of fear corresponds to the other unequal distributions of privilege" (1992, 394). As such, persons who enjoy privilege (or aspects of privilege) - a status that makes a person less likely to experience violence or oppression in certain respects – might actually experience fear more intensely than those who are statistically more likely to encounter violence and/or oppression. Although there is something to be said about feeling fearful (or being made to feel fearful) as a kind of oppressive mechanism in and of itself (see Ahmed 2004, 68-70), that persons who are less likely to experience that which they fear are still more fearful (irrationally so) of certain things/happenings than those who are statistically more likely to experience violence/oppression is important to the construction of certain bodies as (more) fragile, (more) worthy of protection, and (more) vulnerable to harm. In stating, then, that I am afraid of the repercussions of telling the particularities of my experiences of sexualized violence in my dissertation, I am also aware that this kind of fear (and statement of such fear) might also contribute to problematic discourses regarding white-settler fragility.

published academic writing had unduly narrowed my conception of what disclosure can be, and relatedly, of how one's personal experiences of sexualized violence can be acknowledged and addressed in one's academic work on sexualized violence. Following these realizations, my interest thus shifted from the question of the potential effects of a narrativization one's experience of sexualized violence in academic writing (a disclosure) to a pondering of a more general consideration of the role of experience: the 'stuff' that is communicated through a disclosure. Surely we cannot rely on disclosure to do all the work involved in accounting for how our experiences have impacted the ways we research sexualized violence; in what other ways, then, can one's experience of sexualized violence be communicated and/or recognized in one's academic work on sexualized violence? And what might be the effects of a less overt and/or direct engagement with such experiences?

Significantly, there has been much feminist theorizing on the role of experience in academic research. For example, Patricia Hill-Collins draws on the experiences of black women who work in domestic settings to demonstrate the value of 'insider-outsider' knowledge (1986). Relatedly, scholars like Alison Wylie (2013), Nancy Hartsock (1998), Sandra Harding (1987), Donna Haraway (1986), and Dorothy Smith (1992) posit the import of standpoint theory to critically question the concept of objectivity and/or privileged knowledges and values, especially in the sciences. In another vein, Chandra Mohanty (1987, 2003) advocates for an intersectionally-informed 'politics of location' to strengthen feminist research. And Joan W. Scott acknowledges the problems of using experience-as-evidence, instead arguing for an analysis of the role of experience

in subject formation, not just of experience itself (1991).[7] Although my engagement with the question of disclosure is informed by these related but decidedly different takes on the role of experience in feminist research, my approach to experience is – funnily enough – informed by my experience of working on experience.

A dominant concern regarding the inclusion of experience in feminist research acknowledges the ways in which a turning to experience in one's research can result in a problematic self-centered – and perhaps self-serving - individualism. As Linda Finlay argues, in self-reflexive research "the researcher treads a cliff edge where it is all too easy to fall into an infinite regress of excessive self-analysis at the expense of focusing on the research" (2002, 532). During the process of writing my dissertation, I frequently experienced the kind of 'cliff treading' Finlay describes. Most memorably, while writing chapter two (which focuses on consent discourse), I was especially stuck between how my personal experiences gave me a particular perspective into some of the problems of consent discourse, and how my feelings regarding my assault (and my attribution of part of the blame for my assault to the failure of consent discourse) might be working against a clear and fair assessment of consent discourse. My first instinct in relation to this tension in my work was to try to ignore my feelings and 'stick to the facts'; this dissertation was not about me and my experience, but

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[7] Because of space constraints, this is a decidedly limited list of feminist scholars who work on the question of experience. For a more in-depth overview, see *The Feminist Standpoint Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* edited by Sandra Harding.

about how certain approaches to sexualized violence prevention might be unwittingly contributing to its perpetuation.

What is clear to me now, however, looking back on notes I took during the writing of that chapter, is that *not* having my experiences bear upon my research was never an option for me. I had chosen to work on sexualized violence prevention in my doctoral work because I am a victim/survivor; the primary materials I analyzed were chosen from classes and volunteer positions I took because I had experienced sexualized violence; and my passion for finding better ways of preventing sexualized violence stemmed from my outrage and frustration at being one such person who experienced sexualized violence. Whether I liked it or not, whether I thought it benefited or hindered my research, my experiences were deeply imbricated in and with my work. As disability studies scholar Eli Clare best states, my experience of sexualized violence has "shaped every part of my life. This is not hyperbole, not a claim to perpetual victimhood nor a ploy for sympathy, but rather an enraging truth" (2017, 159). The question for me, then, was not *if* my experiences impacted my research, but *how* to work on and with my experiences so that they impacted and informed my research in the most productive and ethical manner possible.[8]

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[8] I want to clarify my use of the word 'productive' here. There is something very unsettling to me about framing my experience of sexualized violence as having productive implications. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, the (re)framing and/or mobilization of one's experience of sexualized violence towards ends that are socially, culturally, politically, and economically regarded as 'productive' (i.e. writing a self-help book; attending speak-outs) has a distinctly neoliberal inflection that seems to suggest that a failure to 'make the best' of one's experience of sexualized violence is a missed opportunity. This kind of thinking that places the onus on the person who has experienced sexualized violence to transform their pain into something beneficial (either for the person themself, or others) is not what I am trying to (re)produce here. Yet, I am unsure if there is a way around conceptualizing my desire to mobilize the challenges I have

Being aware of my feelings, feelings that are undoubtedly connected to my experience as a sexualized violence victim/survivor, thus became an important methodological aspect of reading for and writing this dissertation. For example, part of my critique of consent discourse (see chapter two) came from my realization of the ways this prevention approach failed me: how the person who assaulted me did indeed understand my desire not to proceed, but simply did not care. Indeed, my feelings of incredulity regarding why this overly simplistic prevention approach is mobilized with great frequency initially produced a rather scathing critique of consent discourse, with no consideration of any redeeming aspects to consent approaches. Following Scott, then, I realized that drawing on one's experience in research can be both productive and limiting. As Scott explains:

> Experience is not a word we can do without, although, given its usage to essentialize identity and reify the subject, it is tempting to abandon it altogether. But experience is so much a part of everyday language, so imbricated in our narratives that it seems futile to argue for its expulsion. It serves as a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that is "unassailable." Given the ubiquity of the term, it seems to me more useful to work with it, to analyze its operations and to redefine its meaning. (1991, 797)

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experienced in being a person who has endured sexualized violence and writes on sexualized violence in a way that does not align with a neoliberal impetus to turn a negative into a positive.

Indeed, although experience alone cannot do the work of creating a robust, critical interrogation of sexualized violence prevention approaches, it is also equally problematic to assert that experiences and feelings have no bearing on how one approaches the topic of sexualized violence.

My investigation into the role of disclosure and experience in research on sexualized violence thus brought me to the work of Linda Martín Alcoff. In her article "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Alcoff attempts to address a similar kind of methodological problem I address here: should a person who is not a member of a particular group speak for or on behalf of the interests of that group? Recognizing that there are contextually specific factors that should always be considered when questioning one's decision to speak or not, Alcoff is weary of creating a kind of "algorithm" for determining when, how, and where to speak, "as if we could plug in an instance of speaking for and factor out an analysis and evaluation" (1991-1992, 24). Nevertheless, Alcoff believes it is possible to create a set of "interrogatory practices that are meant to help evaluate possible and actual instances of speaking for" (1991-1992, 24). Framing these practices as "meant only to suggest a list of questions that should be asked concerning any such discursive practice," what I appreciate about Alcoff's efforts is that she recognizes the limitations of prescriptive approaches and guidelines, and instead presents her readers with a series of considerations to ponder in relation to the question of speaking for (1991-1992, 24). Borrowing and building upon Alcoff's suggestions, I thus want to propose a similar set of "interrogatory practices" that could aid in one's decision to disclose (or the extent to which one wishes to disclose) in one's research on sexualized violence:

1. Alcoff suggests that the "impetus to speak must be carefully analyzed and, in many cases, … fought against" (1991-1992, 24). Thinking about the ways certain persons have been taught that they are "more likely to have truth," whereas others have been taught to "speak haltingly, with apologies, if they speak at all," Alcoff incites her readers to think about why they feel entitled (or not) to speak. In relation to disclosures or other kinds of inclusions of one's experience of sexualized violence in one's research on sexualized violence, I believe Alcoff's recommendation can lead one to important considerations: why do I (or don't I) believe I can disclose or include my experiences of sexualized violence in my research? What social, cultural, political, and economic (e.g. gender, race, educational background) factors might underpin these feelings and beliefs regarding my ability (or not) to disclose?

2. Related to the previous consideration, Alcoff also suggests that it is prudent to contemplate "the bearing of our location and context on what it is we are saying" when deciding whether or not to speak (Alcoff 1991-1992, 25). In relation to disclosure, we might similarly address contextual factors that influence our decision to disclose, and the potential effects of that disclosure: how does the intersection of aspects of my identity mediate my interaction with and representation of my personal experiences of sexualized violence? Moreover, how do the meanings attached to aspects of my identity – meanings that shift according to time and location – shape my decision to disclose, the way I disclose, and potential interpretations of my disclosure?

3. As will be discussed further in the introduction, it is also significant to consider, as Alcoff notes, the "accountability and responsibility for what one says" (1991-1992, 25): how might the ways I am conveying my experience mediate its reception? Am I framing my experience as a kind of transcendental truth, or am I situating my experience within the temporal and contextual specifications in which it has occurred, and in which I am presenting these experiences?

4. And, finally, Alcoff suggests that those concerned with the problem of speaking for others must "analyze the probable or actual effects of the words on the discursive and material context" (1991-1992, 26). Indeed, it is not enough to just think about who is speaking, but one must also consider "where the speech goes and what it does there" (1991-1992, 26): who is this disclosure for? What do I hope this disclosure, or integration of experience, might accomplish?

These considerations, although helpful, undoubtedly fall short of capturing all the complexities involved in one's decision to employ personal experience in one's research. We might also think, for example, of the question of safety: how might a disclosure in academic work pose risks for certain people in relation to their employment/career, their personal security/safety, and even their communities? And how might such risks – or lack thereof – factor into one's decision to include one's personal experience of sexualized violence in their research on sexualized violence? Therefore, it is crucial to note that I do not believe that these four "interrogatory principles" should be treated, regarded, or used as a means to arrive at the answer of whether or not one should disclose; instead, these principles

might be best utilized as a kind of entryway into thinking about how to approach research that is related to their personal experiences.

Attempting to adhere to my own recommendations, I thus use the following introductory chapter to seek to make more explicit the ways in which experience comes to bear upon my process and postulations. An experiment in practising the arguments regarding experience and disclosure that I present above, the introduction that follows reflexively traces where and how experience comes to bear on my work, and with what effects: my understanding of major terms and definitions that structure my analyses and arguments, the historical-theoretical framework that underpins my body chapters, and a short summary of arguments to come. In this sense, the introduction is organized much like a story: it takes readers from how I came to be interested in the topic of sexualized violence, to my more specific concerns about sexualized violence prevention, to the ways I came to structure the smaller arguments that form my larger claim about sexualized violence prevention. This is not to say, however, that in treating my experiences with the same critical vigour as other forms of knowledge I believe I have a kind of pure, transparent insight into the effects of my past experiences upon my current actions; indeed, I am unsure if any person could have that depth of insight regarding their unconscious motivations. Instead, these moments of reflection and reflexivity regarding the role and effect of my experiences in relation to my research represent partial, cursory investigations into the relationship between research and experience. Nevertheless, my hope is that this kind of experiential tracing – a theoretically inflected storytelling – helps me move away from some of the more problematic employments of experience and

disclosure in academic work, and instead allows me to articulate the nuances and tensions of how my experience fits (and/or does not fit) within larger conversations and narratives regarding sexualized violence.

Introduction: The Role of Neoliberalism in Feminist Sexualized Violence

Prevention Theories and Strategies

In the spring of 2018, Dr. Charlene Senn, a professor of Psychology and Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Windsor, was awarded the federally funded position of Canada Research Chair in Sexual Violence. According to Senn, the accolade will allow her to further develop her anti-sexualized violence initiative known as the Enhanced Assess Acknowledge Act Education Program (EAAAE) (CBC 2018). Created in collaboration with various Canadian and American scholars (Misha Eliaswiz, Paula Barata, Wilfreda Thurston, Ian Newby-Clark, Lorraine Radtke, and Karen Hobden), the EAAAE Program teaches first-year female undergraduate students various techniques to resist attempts of sexualized assault (Senn et al. 2015). Divided into four three-hour units, the first iteration of the program aims to improve women's "assessment of the risk of sexual assault by male acquaintances" (Unit 1: Assess), enhance their "acknowledge[ment] of the danger in situations that have turned coercive" (Unit 2: Acknowledge), provide "2 hours of self-defence training based on Wen-Do" (Unit 3: Act), and help women "develop strategies for sexual communication" (Unit 4: Sexuality and Relationships) (Senn et al. 2015, 2328). With $1.4 million in funding coming from Senn's new prestigious position, the scholar notes that she plans to expand the EAAAE program so it can be disseminated to girls as young as fourteen (CBC 2018). In focusing on the actions of potential victims of sexualized violence, Senn hopes her program will be different from others that "have failed to stop [the] perpetuation of sexual violence" (CBC 2018).

Fast forward almost a year later: on February 15th, 2019, McGill University announced that it will be holding information sessions on a newly instituted "Consent Training Program" (Sheffres 2019). Implemented in compliance with the Quebec *Bill 151: An Act to prevent and fight sexual violence in higher education institutions*, this consent training program requires that "all McGill students, faculty, and staff will participate in the mandatory online consent training" scheduled to begin in the spring-summer of 2019 (Sheffres 2019). Preliminary descriptions of the training program characterize it as an "interactive online education program" that consists of two versions (one for staff and one for students) containing four different thirty-minute modules addressing sexual violence, sexual consent, bystander intervention, and supporting survivors (Sheffres 2019; Liepins 2018). Despite the variety of issues related to sexualized violence addressed by the program, the tentative title of the training module – "Consent Training Program" – suggests that consent-based prevention education is of foremost importance to this anti-sexualized violence initiative. Significantly, the wish to centre consent in McGill's anti-sexualized violence efforts was echoed in the February 15th announcement; as Dean of Students Christopher Buddle stated at the informational meeting, "OSVRSE [the Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education] will continue to facilitate and grow their programming… around issues of consent" (Sheffres 2019).

I share these two anecdotes about sexualized violence prevention efforts to exemplify some of the practices and discussions at the forefront of contemporary sexualized violence prevention efforts in Canada. As these examples suggest, there is indeed some recognition by powerful institutions (such as, but not limited

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to, governments, universities, military, and hospitals) of the problem of sexualized violence. Yet, as these two examples also suggest, contemporary prevention efforts have focused heavily on post-secondary institutions as spaces, places, and cultures that are very deserving of our anti-sexualized violence efforts - and with good reason. Studies show that Canadian post-secondary students have significantly higher rates of sexual assault as compared to those whose main activity is paid work in the labour market (Brennan and Taylor-Butts 2008). However, in thinking about the problem of sexualized violence in post-secondary institutions and such institutions' responses to this problem, I have also wondered if the university or college is the only large-scale institution that is playing a fundamental role in mediating our conceptions of and responses to sexualized violence. Surely some of the perpetuation of sexualized violence in Canada is attributable to the policies and cultures fostered in these institutional spaces, but I wonder if in our focus on the college/university as an institution, space/place, culture, or even community that enables the perpetuation of sexualized violence, we have inadvertently overlooked another institution (one that works both on and within the university) that also regulates the occurrence and perceptions of sexualized violence and our ideas towards its prevention: namely, citizenship and the normative orders of reason that regulate citizenly belonging and interactions. I therefore question: how does citizenship, a means of structuring how we live together, influence the ways we conceptualize sexualized violence, a problem of living together?

Concentrating on two approaches to sexualized violence prevention exemplified in the above anecdotes, fighting strategies and consent discourse, this

dissertation investigates the informative relationship between these sexualized violence prevention approaches and neoliberalism. In the body chapters, I explore how the theoretical underpinnings and practical mobilizations of consent discourse and fighting strategies inform and are informed by a neoliberal logic. To frame these pointed analyses, however, this introduction investigates how neoliberalism's attempt to broadly characterize 'the human' as fundamentally self-interested, but also having the capacity to self-sacrifice for a 'greater good,' works to potentially detract from the feminist goals of these anti-sexualized violence efforts. The various chapters of this dissertation thus work with this introduction to support my overarching postulation that we – feminists interested in ending sexualized violence – need to consider how our approaches to sexualized violence prevention are affected by broader sociopolitical ideologies that determine the conditions of possibility within which prevention strategies are imagined and implemented. At stake in this analysis is, therefore, the very possibility of ending sexualized violence, for if we refuse to engage with the ways our ideas are complexly intertwined with the governing forms of rationality that aim to dictate how we should live (with one another), we might inadvertently end up reproducing conditions that enable sexualized violence to continue.

As mentioned in the preface, however, this introduction will work to not only frame the arguments-to-come, but to also render explicit the role of my experience in this 5-year research process. Consequently, in what follows, I will not only outline key concepts and ideas, but also give voice to how my personal experiences cohere with (and/or depart from) my academic ones. The point here, then, is not just to introduce you to this work (the dissertation), but in some ways,

to introduce you to me: an academic feminist, sexualized violence

victim/survivor, and a person trying to figure out how to live more ethically, and

less (involuntarily) violently, with others.[1]

Defining Terms: What is Sexualized Violence?

The ways we choose to define sexualized violence can have profound

implications for the persons and communities who engage with or adhere to those

definitions. To give a personal example, I can distinctly remember being excited

to read Linda Martín Alcoff's most recent book, *Rape and Resistance.* An admirer

of Alcoff's other scholarly work, I anticipated a unique, well-argued perspective

on the topic of sexualized violence. However, upon reading the introduction to her

book where Alcoff describes and evaluates some of her own experiences with

sexualized violence, I became quite uncomfortable, if not agitated. Describing

what I understood as a sexually violent encounter in detail, Alcoff follows her

story with the statement: "I would not call this rape, but consider it less than

optimal sexual behavior on his part" (2018, 6).[2] Despite it being evident from

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[1] There are of course instances in which enacting violence with another can be desired, wanted, and ethical – as is the case in a variety of BDSM relationships.

[2] For readers who might be interested in garnering some further context regarding the passage/story mentioned here, I have reproduced it below. Please, however, be advised that the following discussion includes a detailed retelling of an experience of sexualized violence: "Imagine, if you will, what it feels like to wake up and find yourself in a strange bed in the act of sex, within, shall we say, the passive position. Imagine that the other party is someone you know and perhaps are even in something of a relationship with, but someone you have not had sex with before this point. It is as if you are entering into an event in the middle. Someone else has had you signed in, delivered up, and things have gotten well under way, before you have, in a sense, arrived. It may seem implausible that one can wake up only at this late stage of an activity, but imagine that before sleeping you drank alcohol and/or did some drugs, perhaps given to you by the person who is now on top of you. This is the sort of thing that happened to me. *It does seem overly harsh to call this rape*, but there is the fact that I did not participate in the initiation of the event. Soon afterward I broke off the relationship; the event just described left me with a bad feeling I

other discussions in that introduction that Alcoff is most interested in discussing 'rape' as it is employed in a judicial sense – something different than what I am terming 'sexualized violence' – the combination of a graphic description of a very specific experience of sexualized violence with a rather narrow definition of what sexualized violence 'is' (a description that felt to me more like a dismissal) really stuck with me in quite a negative way. Not only did this evaluation of her experience bother me because it came from a source that I trusted and respected, but it bothered me in the sense that it made me question the seriousness of one of my own experiences. Because of this jarring happening, I was thus reluctant to return to the rest of book: in what other ways might this text that I was expecting to be a source of inspiration and intrigue instead be a source of anxiety and self-doubt?

I did eventually finish *Rape and Resistance*, and, importantly, it became an integral methodological tool in developing some of the ideas presented in later chapters. The point I want to stress here, however, is that the ways we define and talk about sexualized violence do something more than specify or narrow a given topic; our definitions and descriptions impact how we understand our material experiences and the import (or lack thereof) we lend to such experiences. What

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could not quite articulate at the age of 16, but it was a sensation strong enough that it had to be addressed. I knew I could not trust him. Sex may always involve some degree of instrumentalization, as both Kant and Sartre believed, and yet in this instance I felt no give and take, no reciprocal modifications of autonomy. I had had boyfriends and some sex before this point, but those events had been more like partnerships, collaborative adventures, shared risk-taking. I like to think I was on my way to developing a sense of sexual agency, even if it was still relatively undeveloped. But this event was different. I realized when he was on top of me that he had no condom, nor did he use any other method for avoiding pregnancy. I subsequently found myself pregnant, sometime after I'd broken off relations with him, and a series of ensuing events led to my dropping out of high school" (Alcoff 2018, 6 – emphasis mine).

my experience of reading Alcoff's text confirms, then, is that how we come to know and imagine (and communicate what we know and imagine) is bound up with the language we use. The terms we use to describe phenomena and the ways we come to define those terms shape the conditions of possibility regarding how we approach, interact with, and imagine a certain thing. For me, choosing to use the term 'sexualized violence' and explaining what I mean by that term is a powerful act that not only speaks to the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation (how my understandings of power and identity, for example, inform my thinking), but could actually function to alter the ways readers of this work approach, understand, or interpret sexualized violence. In order to explain why I use the term 'sexualized violence' and what that term means in the context of my work, I first explore some other concepts integral to this dissertation.

Power and Identity

Coming from undergraduate and master's programs in feminist studies that were taught from a distinctly post-structuralist position, it is perhaps unsurprising that the notions of power that underpin my thinking are of a Foucauldian nature. Although it is important to note that Foucault proposes both "action-theoretical" (power as repressive) and "constitutive" (power as the ability to act or influence) conceptions of power, my understanding of power more closely aligns with Foucault's latter theorizations regarding power as having a variety of functions and effects – which, of course, also takes into account his other understanding of power as 'power over' (Allen 2016; Foucault 1990, 92). Significantly, for me, what is useful about Foucault's latter understanding of

power as "coming from everywhere" is that it allows us to understand how power can be experienced as a negative, oppressive, and even violent force, but also as a productive, empowering, and generative tool (1990, 93). More specifically, Foucault's understanding of power helpfully accounts for the ways phenomena can have different effects despite similarities in terms of context. Indeed, perhaps the most useful example of this multifaceted conception of power is Foucault's understanding of power as producing the individual, or subjectification.[3]

In her work on gender (1990, 1993) and grievability (2004, 2009), and her exploration of the psychic life of power (1997), Judith Butler works on and with Foucault's multidimensional notion of power as it pertains to the creation of the subject. For Butler, Foucault's notion of the subject as created through structures of power is important for accounting for how power is not just something we struggle against, but a force that actually constitutes us as subjects. As Butler poignantly explains:

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[3] This is not to say that Foucault's theories regarding power are beyond reproach. We can think, for example, of the ways Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky critique Foucault for failing to recognize particularly gendered aspects of power (Allen 2016; n.p.). Specifically, as Amy Allen argues, Sandra Bartky "criticizes Foucault for failing to notice that disciplinary practices are gendered and that, through such gendered discipline, women's bodies are rendered more docile than the bodies of men (1990, 65)." Relatedly, as Allen also points out, Susan Bordo argues that Foucault's model of "self-surveillance does not adequately illuminate all forms of female subordination — all too often women are actually compelled into submission by means of physical force, economic coercion, or emotional manipulation" (2016). Moreover, readers familiar with Foucault's work will recall his controversial understanding of rape as one kind of enactment of repressive power amongst others. Indeed, in Foucault's view, rape is no different from other kinds of violence, and he stresses the importance of seeing rape as an enactment of physical violence separate from any sexual motivations (1988, 200-2). As we shall see below, my definition of rape and sexualized violence departs from Foucault's understanding. And like other feminist scholars, I attribute an inattentiveness to the particularities of sexualized violence to Foucault's failure to fully account for gender and race as factors that mediate one's ability to act or influence. For further discussion of Foucault's views on rape, see Ann Cahill's article "Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body" (2000).

> If, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well
> as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its
> desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong
> sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and
> preserve in the beings that we are. (1997, 2)

Power can thus be at once generative and repressive in relation to processes of subjectification: it can produce subjects that are "restrained by the very structure of power" which also *produces* us as subjects (Butler 1990, 2).[4]

In relation to a dissertation on sexualized violence, this understanding of the creation of the subject and power is important, for although it accounts for the ways subjects are subjected to power mechanisms (both repressive and productive) that might be beyond our control (although not necessarily arbitrary in their application – the production and reproduction of certain identities in relation to oppressive norms, as we shall see, might also be integral to the actual formation and maintenance of a community in which a subject exists), this account still

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[4] Given space constraints, I chose to engage with Butler's work on/with Foucauldian thought given the importance of her work on precarity and grievability to my questioning of notions of 'being together' in later parts of this dissertation. However, it is not lost on me that there are many other feminist theorists that both employ and take to task Foucault's work on power (and sometimes, both at the same time). Two particularly helpful illustrations of varying approaches to Foucault's work in relation to feminism are Jana Sawicki's *Disciplining Foucault: Power, Feminism, and the Body* (1991) and Lois McNay's *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender, and the Self* (1992). In Sawicki's book, the author investigates Foucault's later works to challenge earlier feminist postulations that phallocentric discourse is an inevitability (1991, 8-9). Although not without its problems and limitations, Sawicki is confident that Foucault's conceptualization of power leaves room for acts of resistance. Alternatively, in McNay's text, the author is concerned with how Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power as creating passive bodies fails to account for "how individuals may act in an autonomous fashion" (1992, 3). Evidently, then, interpretations and uses of Foucault's work in feminist theory are diverse and varying; for the sake of time, however, I have chosen to limit my discussion of Foucault's work to the basics of his conceptions of power, an aspect of his work that I believe is necessary for an understanding of my definition of sexualized violence (a term central to this dissertation).

leaves room for the possibility of transformation. Indeed, the subjected individual is not just the subject of power, but potentially the subject *in* power. This very openness to the possibility of multiplicity and change – where the subject is not just acted upon but can also act, whereby repressive kinds of power can be reconfigured to function differently, productively – is significant for a project that takes the prevention of sexualized violence as its central object. Through these Foucauldian understandings of power and identity as malleable, we can thus simultaneously account for the ways in which certain kinds of persons experience sexualized violence in particular ways and, potentially, at rates higher than other individuals, while also leaving space to think about how the same subjects unduly affected by the repressive power of sexualized violence might also – perhaps by virtue of the ways they are negatively subjected – be able to resist the repressive power that contributes to their oppression.[5] Some of this resistance work operates

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[5] For reference, a study by the government of Ontario estimates that as many as one in three women in Canada will experience sexualized violence at some point in their life (Benoit 2015). In their 2015 report on sexualized violence against women in Canada, Cecilia Benoit et al. note that girls and young women between the ages of 15–24 are the most likely victims of sexual violence, sexual assaults account for one third of the violent crimes committed against Indigenous women, that disabled women with physical activity limitations are two times more likely than women without such limitations to experience sexualized violence, and that, although difficult to evaluate because of large and diverse populations, immigrant and refugee women are more vulnerable to sexualized violence because of "a lack of host-country language skills, isolation from family and community, lack of access to dignified jobs (e.g., those that reflect their skill-set and level of experience), uncertain legal status, as well as their experience with authorities in their country of origin" (Benoit et al. 2015, n.p.). Research also demonstrates that sexualized violence occurs at a higher rate among lesbian and bisexual women as compared to women who identify as heterosexual (Beauchamp, 2004). Benoit et al. note that there is little research in a Canadian context that speaks to the experiences of gender fluid persons, trans persons, intersex persons, and persons who engage in sex work in relation to sexualized violence (2015). However, other studies conducted in the United States and by independent organizations in Canada suggest that such individuals experience sexualized violence at a higher rate than cis-gendered persons, and persons not involved in sex work (Bucick 2016).

at the level of discourse, making the ways we define sexualized violence play a significant role in how we might go about its prevention.

Rape

When I speak and write about sexualized violence, I often receive the question: why use the term 'sexualized violence' and not 'rape?' This is a great question because the word 'rape' is bound to a complex socio-legal history and is thus quite powerful. Why, then, wouldn't I use the term rape? First, in general terms, the word rape denotes a specific type of sexualized assault that is traditionally characterized by unwanted bodily penetration (most often, but not limited to, penile penetration). However, many scholars have described rape as an "essentially contested concept" (Bourke 2007, 9). As Joanna Bourke notes, because "rape and sexual violence are deeply rooted in *specific* political, economic and cultural environments" (2007, 7 – emphasis original) it is challenging to assert a single meaning of the term that will be true to its understanding in all times and places. In relation to the Canadian and American context, however, rape has evolved from its historical socio-legal conceptualization as a crime of 'property' whereby the penetrative assault of a woman by a man to whom she was not married or otherwise related was regarded as a crime done to the woman's male relative(s). Given that the sociocultural and political 'value' of women historically resided in their 'usefulness' to men, rape thus represented a kind of social death for many women (Marcus 1992, 387). Therefore, rape is a word that is bound with ideas of loss and terror; it is perhaps then unsurprising that it has been used (and not unproblematically) as a means to

describe the horror of other phenomenon that might be difficult to comprehend, such as the 'rape of the land' or the 'rape of the nation.'

However, even as it is employed in several contexts due to its strong emotional connotations, the denotative aspects of the word 'rape' are often quite narrow. For example, we can think of how the word 'rape' is gendered through definitions that highlight the import of 'penetration,' or 'penile penetration.'[6] Here, the word 'rape' produces and is produced by gendered assumptions regarding who is the subject and object of violence, whereby the person perpetrating the sexually violent actions or behaviours is enacting (dominant/aggressive/violent) masculinity or read as enacting such a masculine positionality, while the person experiencing sexualized violence is 'feminized' or read as experiencing 'feminization.' Importantly, then, such gendered assumptions inherent in definitions of rape thus foreclose the possibility of understanding 'rape' as something that, for example, can be perpetrated by woman-identifying people, or as something that can occur between male-identifying people (Cahill 2001).

Relatedly, in Canadian and American historical-legal traditions the word 'rape' has been normatively reserved for the sexually violent experiences of white women, supposedly perpetrated disproportionately at the hands of men of colour.

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[6] Given a popular understanding of the word rape as violent penile penetration, one might argue that the term is related to what Margaret Jackson identifies as the "coital imperative" (1984, 44). Working alongside the assumption that heterosexuality "is natural," the coital imperative suggests that "the most natural form of heterosexual activity is coitus, i.e. penetration of the vagina by the penis" (Jackson 1984, 44). Importantly, one might argue that if one understands 'rape' (penile penetration) as the most egregious form of sexualized violence, the term and surrounding discourses contribute to this coital imperative, subordinating and perhaps even glossing over other kinds of sexualized violence.

Furthermore, scholars such as Michelle Jarman highlight that this racialized, gendered dynamic in relation to rape is both historically and contemporarily complicated by the fact that black men accused of raping white women were sometimes also cognitively disabled (Jarman 2012, 90). The word rape is thus loaded with all sorts of racial and ability-centered stereotypes that contribute to the sociolegal validation of some experiences as 'rape' and others as something else, such as a 'misunderstanding,' something other than violence, or as the fault of the person 'claiming' rape (Deer 2015; McGuire 2010; Smith 2005). 'Rape' is thus strongly connected with certain kinds of sexualized, gendered, ability-centered and racialized harms, ones that do not necessarily accurately reflect who perpetrates and experiences sexualized violence.

Evidently, then, rape is both a very specific term, denoting a particular kind of sexualized harm, and, at the same time, a very broad term connoting all sorts of problematic historical relations that continue into the present. For all its complexities, however, rape is an insufficient term for the kind of work I wish to conduct in this dissertation. Perhaps ironically, I want to employ a term that can speak to various kinds of acts and behaviours that comprise what is sometimes termed 'rape culture': a term used to describe how the social/cultural aspects of a sociopolitical community construct sexualized violence as always already a possibility, if not a necessity, for maintaining the norms of a given community. However, and perhaps unsurprisingly given my hesitations about the word 'rape,' I also struggle with the term 'rape culture.' In many 'popular' manifestations of the term (i.e. news media, [feminist] blogs, social media) rape culture is defined in a way that stresses how attitudes about gender and sexuality contribute to the

continuation and normalization of sexualized violence.[7] However, there is often a failure in such common uses/explanations of the term to analyze or even acknowledge the ways other factors – such as race, settler-colonialism, or ability – contribute to the normalization and perpetuation of sexualized violence. Nevertheless, a less than complex treatment of the term 'rape culture' by certain sources and in certain spaces does not necessarily or inherently make the term problematic. Rather, I wonder if the connotations associated with the word 'rape' in 'rape culture' (connotations discussed above) might in some cases encourage a particular and narrow understanding of the kinds of attitudes and beliefs that contribute to the perpetuation of sexualized violence. In this sense, although I do not necessarily oppose the use of the term rape culture – in fact, I think it can be very helpful in giving persons the language to describe their experiences living in a particular culture – I do not employ it with great frequency given its imbrication in a linguistic narrowing of the kinds of experiences that qualify as worthy of attention (i.e. rape versus sexual harassment).

For the aforementioned reasons, then, the term 'rape' – at least on its own – can never do the kind of inclusive work regarding sexualized violence that I am interested in engaging in. Given its narrow definitional and broad historical attachments, the term 'rape' therefore appears very rarely in this work, and is used almost exclusively in direct quotations from other authors, or when speaking of

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[7] For an example, see https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/03/examples-of-rape-culture/.

the phenomenon 'rape culture' – a term far too widely employed for me to justify changing it to 'sexualized violence culture.'

Sexual Violence or Sexualized Violence?

After the term 'rape,' sexual violence is likely the next most commonly used term to describe unwanted sexualized acts or behaviours. Unlike the word 'rape,' 'sexual violence' is far more ambiguous. Rather than referring to a specific kind of sexually violent act, 'sexual violence' acts as a kind of umbrella term referencing a spectrum of different kinds of acts and behaviours that contribute to the degradation of the self in a sexualized sense. For me, the idea of using a word that represents a host of different kinds of acts that violently target intimate parts of our identities and lives importantly leaves space for people to hear and understand our experiences differently, experiences that we might have previously felt excluded from because of framing issues (i.e. talking exclusively about 'rape'). For the first two years of my PhD, I thus used the word 'sexual violence' to distinguish my topic from other related phenomena (for example, gender-based violence).[8]

However, in the third year of my doctoral work I made a small but important shift in relation to terminology: from sexual violence to *sexualized* violence. Although this shift might be viewed by some as a kind of 'hair

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[8] I understand gender-based violence as kinds of harm done to a person that target aspects of their being tied to their gender identification. Although sexualized violence might be a kind of gender-based violence, the terms are not mutually exclusive: sexualized violence, unlike gender-based violence, qualifies the kind of violence done to another as sexualized.

splitting,' I use the term sexualized violence (and not sexual violence) purposively following the authors of the "Too Many Victims" Report:

> Violence is described as 'sexualized' rather than 'sexual' because, while 'sexual assault,' 'sexual abuse' and 'sexual exploitation' all make it clear that the victim is unwilling and free of blame, the term 'sexual violence' could be taken to suggest that a victim is somehow a consenting participant in violence rather than a true victim of a perpetrator of sexualized violence. (2016, 4)

In the above quotation, the authors of the "Too Many Victims" report imply that because the words 'assault,' 'abuse,' and 'exploitation' clearly describe the actions or behaviours of the perpetrator done to another against their will, they do not need further qualification. However, from the above definition, it is unclear what adding the suffix 'ized' to 'sexual' in 'sexual violence' accomplishes.

As the Oxford English Dictionary explains, one way the suffix '-ize' works is to turn a noun or an adjective into a verb that connotes a becoming, making, or making like (2018). In calling this type of violence 'sexualized,' I thus aim to stress that someone or something has 'sexualized' violence through particular acts or gestures. To be sure, the term 'sexualized violence' describes the way someone or something qualifies violence through a particular action: this is a type of violence that is sexualized or is 'made to be' sexual; alternatively, the term 'sexual violence' only qualifies or describes a kind of violence: a type of violence that simply 'is' sexual. The suffix 'ized' within the term 'sexualized violence' thus emphasizes an actor and an action and signals that sexualized violence is something that is socioculturally produced. Sexualized violence is not a

phenomenon that inevitably 'exists,' regarded as natural or unavoidable, but is something that is enacted by individuals imbricated in a particular sociocultural moment that structures the conditions that enable these kinds of actions to be regarded as possible. Thus, the term sexualized violence works to overtly remind us that sexualized violence is not just something that happens or 'is,' but something that is made (to happen).

Importantly, such a discussion of the purpose of the label 'sexualized violence' is related to heated debates within feminist writing and activism regarding whether sexualized violence involves 'sex' at all or is only about power. For example, in *Rethinking Rape*, feminist theorist Ann Cahill spends an entire chapter reproducing and analyzing a debate in feminist theorizations of sexualized violence between those who regard it as an act of power (such as Susan Brownmiller), and those who regard is as an act of sex (such as Catherine MacKinnon). In relation to these debates, I regard an understanding of sexualized violence as *only* about power to be a bit limiting. For me, there is something important about sexualized violence being a kind of violence that targets sexualized aspects of our bodies and identities. In this sense, although I believe sexualized violence to be an attempt to exert 'power over' another, this power over has specific effects and meanings due to the fact that it targets very specific aspects of ourselves that are socioculturally regarded as 'sexualized.' In this sense, sexualized violence is never just about 'power,' but about the ways power is employed (in this instance) to damage a particular aspect of ourselves.

In the context of the "Too Many Victims" report, the import of emphasizing the role of the perpetrator – the person who 'sexualizes' the violence

– is related to their aim of stressing the blamelessness of persons who experience sexualized violence, in this case, Indigenous children and youth in state care systems. For them, emphasizing violence as sexualized works to remind those who engage with the report of the vulnerability of the children and youth in their study. Reading this important work at a time when the Jian Ghomeshi case was gearing up for trial, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was beginning to hear testimonies of Indigenous people subjected to state abuse, and testimonies of sexualized abuse at the hands of Bill Cosby were mounting, it made good sense to me to emphasize the import of victim/survivor blamelessness. Although I cautiously agree with theorists like Sharon Lamb, who suggests that an uncritical assertion of victim/survivor blamelessness can be harmful in its own way (1996), I felt and still feel that at a moment when victim/survivor believability is quite literally being 'put on trial' it is not a vain effort to try to remind readers (via terminology) that persons most responsible for preventing sexualized violence are perpetrators, and that sexualized violence is a constructed phenomenon, not a 'natural' occurrence.

The term sexualized violence is thus used in this dissertation to refer to a spectrum of unwanted sexualized acts and behaviours that do harm to sexualized aspects of the self. In using the term 'sexualized violence' I am able to refer to and imply a connection between a variety of harmful acts and behaviours, such as rape and non-consensual groping, without suggesting that one kind of sexualized

harm is more egregious than another.[9] Moreover, in emphasizing the sexualization of a kind of violence through the use of the term 'sexual*ized* violence,' I am able to qualify a kind of harm or wrong that emphasizes the actions of the perpetrator, as well as the sociocultural construction and maintenance of sexualized violence.

Victim/Survivor

Closely related to the term 'sexualized violence,' there is one other choice I make in this dissertation with regards to terminology that deserves discussion. In keeping with the theme of inclusivity characteristic of my approach to terming and defining 'sexualized violence,' I use the term victim/survivor to describe myself in relation to my own experience of sexualized violence, and to refer to others who have experienced sexualized violence when a preferred term is not indicated or available. Both historically and contemporarily, there are vigorous debates regarding how persons who experience sexualized violence refer to themselves, and how they are identified by others (Alcoff and Gray 1993; Brosi and Rolling 2010; Heberle 1996; Hunter 2010; Jordan 2013; Kelly et al. 1996; Lamb 1996, 1999; Mardorossian 2002, 2014; Nissim-Sabat 2009; Riessman 1989; Swink and Leveille 1986). Although I do not have the space to address all the nuances of arguments put forth by scholars who debate the use of the terms

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[9] Such a movement away from hierarchizing kinds of sexualized violence is important to me insofar as my experience of what would probably be understood as 'rape' had a far less significant impact upon me than an instance of inappropriate touching that I experienced at the hands of someone I trusted.

'survivor' or 'victim' to refer to persons who have experienced sexualized violence, I believe it is still useful to summarize some recurrent themes.

Generally, the term 'victim' has been used to highlight the blamelessness of a person who has experienced sexualized violence (Hunter 2010, 177). Closely connected to its use in a criminal justice framework, the term victim responds to stereotypical assertions that persons who have experienced sexualized violence have in some way contributed to their assault, and instead locates them as persons worthy of sympathy and/or pity. However, some scholars argue that the term 'victim,' in its attempt to remove ideas of blame from those who experience sexualized violence, might actually go too far, precluding the ability for persons who experience sexualized violence to act, post-assault, with agency (Lamb 1999). As Carine Mardorossian summarizes, critics of the term victim often see the term "as a willful misrecognition of people's power of self-determination, as an ideological instrument of subordination that encourages them to remain stuck and conceals their ability to change the unfortunate circumstances of their lives" (2014, 41). For some persons, then, the term survivor is more useful insofar as it signals the ways in which persons who have experienced sexualized violence are not just acted upon, but act in their own right to overcome their experience of violence and oppression.

The term 'survivor' is not, however, without its problems. In the first instance, the term 'survivor' might indicate that what a person has 'survived' is in the past, thus concealing the potential ongoing effects of sexualized violence and sidestepping scholarly acknowledgements of how trauma works against linear conceptions of time (Hunter 2010, 177; Felman and Laub 1992). Moreover, the

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idea of a 'survivor' can also be understood in relation to neoliberal idea(l)s of personal responsibility that might work to relocate the responsibility for 'recovery' (to move beyond the experience of sexualized violence) to the individual. In response to these critiques of the term 'survivor,' there has thus been a resurgence of interest in – perhaps a reclaiming of – the term 'victim,' in order to disrupt the idea that the aftermath of sexualized violence is solely the responsibility of persons who have experienced it. There are also other terms being proposed to describe persons who have experienced sexualized violence. For example, at the "Understanding New Rape Cultures" conference, Dr. Hazel Larkin proposed the term 'victor' to replace the terms victim and survivor.

Aware of these debates, my choice to use the term victim/survivor comes more from my own experiences than from an adherence (or a reluctance to adhere) to a certain argumentative position on the subject. From day to day, and even from hour to hour, I oscillate between feelings more associated with the term victim (I experienced something that was out of my control) and feelings more associated with the term survivor (despite these negative experiences, I am accomplishing 'x' and 'y'). Although I believe being aware of the various critiques of both terms is helpful for a more general understanding of the complexities of being a person who has experienced sexualized violence (and, relatedly, the import of discourse to our material experiences), I do not believe either term fully represents the nuances of my experience and thus use the term 'victim/survivor' to denote persons who have experienced sexualized violence. Based on those feelings/experiences, throughout this dissertation I use the term 'victim/survivor' to not only speak to my own experiences, but also to try to be

inclusive of those who might identify as victim, survivor, or like me, both. There is, of course, always the possibility that some who read this dissertation might not identify as either, and that is okay too. I look forward in future work to engaging with other ways people are continually rethinking how we come to position ourselves in relation to our experiences of sexualized violence.

Scope and Breadth

It is, however, not lost on me that there are problems with categorizing such a broad range of actions and behaviours under a single term (sexualized violence) or compounding two identarian positions (victim/survivor). Indeed, there are a whole host of reasons to employ specific terms and definitions when discussing sexualized violence and related phenomena. For example, perhaps one is working on the legal dimensions of sexualized violence and is thus bound to discuss it in a way that coheres with a community's laws. Alternatively, setting a clear and consistent definition of sexualized violence might serve a political purpose. Given the arguments of perpetrators that there is ambiguity regarding what is and what is not sexualized violence, a firm definition of the phenomenon can work to thwart insidious gestures.[10] As I have indicated, however, I am not as

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[10] In their 2004 work, "The Implicit Theories of Rapists: What Convicted Offenders Tell Us," Devon Polaschek and Theresa Gannon discuss the tendency for some perpetrators to frame their experiences as a misunderstanding. Terming this phenomenon an implicit theory of "women as unknowable," the authors describe how some perpetrators attribute their sexually violent actions to their inability to discern the 'true' desires of women. For example, Offender #33 stated to interviewers, "I love them. I love those girls, dirty girls. Bad girls have more fun. We like those girls but we wouldn't want them for our own. We're constantly surrounded by girls like that, girls *for* that [i.e. sex]. And not understanding what love is, and not understanding that no means no. We hate that." (Polaschek and Gannon 2004, 299 – emphasis original).

concerned with the legal aspects of sexualized violence as I am with its sociocultural aspects. What, then, might be some problems with an overly-broad definition of sexualized violence as it pertains to the way I employ the term here?

In the introduction to her book *Trauma: A Genealogy,* Ruth Leys relays her hesitations about the widespread application of the term trauma, hesitations that I believe are also useful to understanding some of the problematics of the term 'sexualized violence.' As Leys demonstrates, the term trauma is a concept with meanings that change over time and space. In this sense, applying the term 'trauma' to a range of experiences might encourage overgeneralizations; the lack of specificity regarding the kinds of behaviours and actions that compose what is termed 'trauma' can produce inconsistencies when attempting to talk about the phenomenon across differences (i.e. national). As Leys further explains, "the expansiveness of such a casual approach to trauma… inevitably leads to skepticism about the reality of trauma" (2000, 8). Here, Leys worries that a term might become so broad and (over)inclusive that its referent becomes rather incomprehensible, and potentially 'unreal.'

In relation to the term 'sexualized violence' some of the problems that Leys identifies with 'trauma' are perceptible, if not exacerbated. For example, as an 'umbrella term,' how does 'sexualized violence' fail to capture nuances between what is considered 'sexualized' and/or 'violence' in a given place, at a particular time?[11] If sexualized violence refers to a broad range of actions and

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[11] Christine Helliwell offers a great example of this conundrum in her article "'It's Only a Penis': Rape, Feminism and Difference" when she discusses one community's understanding that 'rape' is not possible given women's dominant, or more active role in intimate encounters.

behaviours, and if particular actions and behaviours require particular responses, how do we begin to address 'sexualized violence' in a way that is attentive to the idiosyncrasies of certain kinds of sexually violent actions and behaviours and persons' experiences of those actions and behaviours? And if we can agree that, generally, sexualized violence is a phenomenon that should be stopped, how does a terminological approach that is vague about the 'what' of 'what needs to be stopped' figure as a potential sticking point for both material and immaterial acts of resistance?

I agree that the question of breadth – whether or not a term is overbroad and with what implications – is an important one. Thinking of feminist works that have critiqued the overly general use of terms like 'woman,' or 'lesbian,' to represent a diverse group of people, being overly inclusive with one's aims can lead to the creation of generalizations that might work to (unintentionally) exclude, minimize, or render invisible particular kinds of experiences (Weisser and Fleischner 1994). Importantly, on its own, using the term 'sexualized violence' in this dissertation does not necessarily mitigate such risks. However, in terms of this dissertation and its goals, there are two important reasons why I believe a more general understanding of sexualized violence is both acceptable and perhaps even beneficial for the arguments I will put forth.

In the first instance, although my definition of my primary subject of study is quite broad (sexualized violence), the context and time frame in which I consider this phenomenon is much narrower. Specifically, I am interested in how sexualized violence prevention operates in a contemporary (since approximately

2005) Canadian context.[12] Given the size and diversity of Canada, however, it is important to recognize that there still might be important differences across the ways sexualized violence might be interpreted. To narrow my scope further, then, I employ the term sexualized violence to discuss the ways distinct but related behaviours and actions that do harm to one's sexual being operate in academic theories of sexualized violence, in common approaches to prevention, and in visual cultural productions.

Secondly, in this dissertation I have a very specific concern in relation to sexualized violence that I believe might benefit from, if not require, a less rigid understanding of sexualized violence: namely, prevention. By its very definition, prevention means stopping something from happening or occurring. Therefore, sexualized violence prevention is forward-looking, and although how we approach prevention might be based upon past and current experiences and understandings, prevention work largely involves an openness to that which is yet-to-come. In this sense, having a broad definition of sexualized violence, one that does not preclude that we know, understand, or could imagine the ways one can be harmed by sexualized violence, is integral to creating thoughtful strategies that aim to end sexualized violence. I therefore recognize that my terms and definitions are not perfect: they will not be helpful to every anti-sexualized

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[12] That said, in approaching the issue of sexualized violence from a cultural studies perspective, it is not uncommon for cultural productions, material happenings, and debates originating from the United States to have an influence on how sexualized violence is approached in the Canadian context. In this sense, I reference both Canadian and American examples when discussing sexualized violence. However, to ensure that my work mostly reflects an understanding of sexualized violence in a Canadian context, the primary sources that inform my body chapters are largely created and disseminated in Canada.

violence project or aim. However, in defining these major terms/ideas and describing how I came to define them in these specific ways, my hope is that readers will have a better understanding of my approach to prevention.

Theoretical Frameworks and Historical Tracings

My interest in sexualized violence began during my master's degree when I was reading quite a bit of political theory. In a course on feminist theory, I was introduced to Butler's ideas regarding grievability, vulnerability, and precarious life (2004; 2009). In these works, Butler proposes that there are normative frameworks of recognition that influence our perception of who is regarded as deserving of rights and protections and who is not. Importantly, her texts lead me to a particularly vexing question: how can one at once be a member of a sociopolitical community, but simultaneously denied certain aspects associated with that membership?

At the same time that I was grappling with Butler, I was recovering from an experience of sexualized violence and, perhaps because of this personal happening, was very attuned to the way sexualized violence was being treated in news media. Specifically, I remember reading about several cases where victims/survivors of sexualized violence testified to the lack of attention and seriousness given to their complaints by both police and the legal system.[13]

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[13] See, for example, the following *Globe and Mail* article from 2013 speaking to the poor treatment of sexualized violence complainants by the Canadian court system: https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/how-canadas-sex-assault-laws-violate-rape-victims/article14705289/. See also the following article from the *Toronto Sun* detailing Justice Robert Dewar's comments regarding victim/survivor attire during a sexual assault case:

Reading the question of sociopolitical inclusion/exclusion alongside my experiences of sexualized violence thus lead me to a more specific problem: how can persons who have experienced sexualized violence be regarded as members of a given sociopolitical community (citizens of Canada), while simultaneously denied their basic right to freedom from harm (and redress when they do experience harm)? Importantly, from these musings came a proposition that would inform the rest of my dissertation: sexualized violence is a citizenly issue.

Sexualized Violence is a Citizenly Issue

At its most basic, I conceptualize sexualized violence as a citizenly issue insofar as it is generally regarded as a sociopolitical ill (if not a crime), perpetrated and perpetuated by individual citizens. However, citizens' experiences with and of sexualized violence only represent part of the interrelation. To be sure, sexualized violence and citizenship also inform each other on an epistemological, definitional basis; their relation is foundational to conceptualizations of what these phenomena 'are.' As various scholars have demonstrated, citizenship shapes and regulates sexual conduct. Indeed, the formal and informal rules and regulations of a sociopolitical community work to produce understandings of certain sexual practices and behaviours as normative and (re)productive, beneficial to the maintenance of the nation-state, or as abnormal and deviant, potentially threatening to a community (Berlant 1997; Cossman

https://torontosun.com/2012/03/22/controversial-judge-again-hearing-sex-assault-cases-2/wcm/8382ffe2-e184-416a-96e2-37ab980da945

2007; Foucault 1990; Phelan 2001; Plummer 2003; Puar 2007; Richardson 2000).

However, just as citizenship depends upon and shapes understandings of

acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices, discourses regarding sex and

sexuality also inform the creation and maintenance of the sociopolitical body to

which citizens belong. For example, scholars like Melissa Matthes (2000) and

Tanya Horeck (2004) demonstrate how foundational myths of several modern

nation-states rest upon stories of sexualized violence to explain or justify their

formation or reformation. Thus, my cursory investigation into the links between

sexualized violence and citizenship lead me to believe that the two phenomena

should be understood in a relation of contingency, for the ways we understand

citizenship and sexualized violence rest upon how each phenomenon regulates

and is regulated by the other.

Sexualized Violence is an Issue of Settler-Colonial Citizenship

In their works on sexualized violence and Indigenous women, Andrea

Smith and Sarah Deer provide historical and theoretical tracings that speak to how

sexualized violence is not just a gender issue, but also a settler-colonial one. In

her 2005 book, *Conquest*, Smith argues against a popular notion in feminist

theory that sexualized violence is primarily an effect of patriarchy. Instead, Smith

suggests that sexualized violence should be understood as a tool used to destroy

Indigenous communities through the violent implementation of patriarchal

ideology (2005, 61). As Smith explains:

> When colonists first came to the Americas, they saw the necessity of
>
> instilling patriarchy in Native communities because they realized that

> Indigenous peoples would not accept colonial domination if their own
>
> Indigenous societies were not structured on the basis of social hierarchy.
>
> (2005, 61)

To install this social hierarchy (patriarchy), colonists thus focused their attentions upon important members of Indigenous communities: Indigenous women (Smith 2005, 61).

The targeting of Indigenous women through sexualized violence is significant for a couple of reasons. As Deer best explains:

> The power of women's sexuality, because of its potential to affect
>
> reproduction and identity, is often a target of those seeking to destroy a
>
> people. Rape is often linked to conquest and genocide precisely because of
>
> its effects on reproduction. The role of a woman as a mother was often a
>
> critical component of identity within most Indigenous communities.
>
> (2015, 112)

Sexualized violence against Indigenous women thus served two important functions for colonizers. In one sense, it worked to destroy Indigenous communities' sense of being a people by attacking members of the community who had important roles in the social, cultural, and political production and reproduction of a community (Indigenous women). However, as colonizers disrupted Indigenous communities through sexualized violence, the act of sexualized violence also worked to install the colonizer's ruling ideology – a gender-based hierarchy (patriarchy) – through the violent subordination and dehumanization of Indigenous women.

Today, then, scholars like Smith and Deer argue that part of a project of decolonization is recognizing how this colonial-patriarchal project of sexualized violence continues into the present. However, understanding sexualized violence as a settler-colonial, patriarchal tool means also thinking about sexualized violence not only as it is experienced by racialized/colonized women but also as it is experienced by settlers (i.e. white women). Because sexualized violence (re)instantiates the premise of Western, settler-colonial patriarchal tradition (the subordination of women), it can be understood as part of the maintenance of the settler-colonial nation-state. Thus, although experiences of sexualized violence across Canada are unique, it is also crucial to recognize how these instances of sexualized violence are connected in their reimplementation of a patriarchal, white supremacist, settler-colonial ideology that was integral to the formation of the Canadian nation-state.

It is thus not enough to think about the ways in which discourses of sex, sexuality, and gender intermingle with discourses of citizenship to garner a better understanding of sexualized violence. Indeed, in a settler-colonial context like Canada, sexualized violence is always already imbued with discourses regarding sovereignty and race that are an inseparable part of the (in)formative relationship between sex/sexuality/gender and citizenship. If, then, sexualized violence was (and, I would argue, still is) used as a means of forming the Canadian nation-state, how might discourses of Canadian citizenship underpin the perpetuation of sexualized violence in Canada today? Put differently: how do Western conceptions of 'living together' in a sociopolitical community potentially enable – or even encourage – the conditions that allow sexualized violence to occur?

"A Colonizing Force": Neoliberalism

In her work on contemporary Canadian and American feminisms, Catherine Rottenberg argues that "neoliberalism is slowly colonizing every aspect of our world" (2016, 332). The use of the word colonization to describe the movement and process of neoliberalism is apt here for a couple of reasons. First, the term 'colonizing' tips us off to the ascendant quality of neoliberalism. As Wendy Brown explains in her work on the term, neoliberalism is "a loose and shifting signifier" that can simultaneously refer to "economic policy, a modality of governance, and an order of reason" (Brown 2015, 20). Indeed, neoliberalism has several different meanings, conceptualized as "a set of state policies, a phase of capitalism, or an ideology that sets loose the market to restore profitability for a capitalist class" (Brown 2015, 30). However, what is common to the different kinds and uses of neoliberalism is a concern with how neoliberalism attempts to normalize an approach to life and living that abides by an economic rationality that stresses the importance of personal entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and capacity-building. As David Harvey argues, neoliberalism "becomes hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (2007, 3). In affecting (or working to affect) so many aspects of life, and attempting to affect life in such a totalizing manner, neoliberalism thus functions much like a colonial force: it endeavours to install a ruling mode of thinking (in this case, a particularly economic one) that is both immediately felt and slowly implemented, differentially implemented across

time and space but also peculiarly unified in its movement to have its central tenets become dominant.

Describing neoliberalism as 'colonizing' is also particularly suitable considering the way neoliberalism plays an important role in the perpetuation of settler colonialism. As Elizabeth Strakosch explains, neoliberalism builds upon the inclusive exclusions of Indigenous people within an earlier liberal paradigm:

> Like social liberalism, it [neoliberalism] formally includes Indigenous people as citizens and therefore claims to have resolved colonialism, but like classic liberalism, it allows the selective coercion, racial pathologisation and exclusion of Indigenous subjects in order to maintain settler privileges. It does this while emphasising economic necessity and individual welfare, and erasing the political dimensions of its actions. Neoliberalism, therefore, depoliticises and technicalises colonial hierarchies, framing them as a result of natural economic process and individual capacity failures. (2015, 7)

Reinterpreting classical liberalism's emphasis on individual liberties through the lens of a market-based rationale, neoliberalism continues the colonial project.[14] It

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[14] As Strakosch explains, "Historically, the rise of colonialism coincides with the rise of liberalism in many of the key colonising states (Ivison et al. 2000: 2; Ivison 2002; Duffield and Hewitt 2013). At the same time as European societies were developing notions of individual rights, democracy and the illegitimacy of absolute authority, they were initiating some of the most hierarchical and destructive political encounters ever seen" (2015, 5). According to Strakosch, then, liberalism is a particularly paradoxical phenomenon given its differentially allocated conception of who 'has' (or is 'deserving') of liberties. However, the apparent contradiction between a liberal-era emphasis on the individual liberties and freedoms and the infringement of such 'rights and freedoms' of Indigenous peoples by colonialists was first thought to be 'resolved' (at least from the colonists' perspective) by excluding Indigenous people (as well as women, non-white persons, and poor and working-class people) from the category of "capable individuals, and hence from citizenship and its associated rights" (2015, 5). Later, in the social liberal era, the extension of citizenship to Indigenous persons (and, at different times, women, non-white persons, and poor and working-

accomplishes this through an inclusion of Indigenous people within the neoliberal order as de facto citizens, but this inclusion is premised upon the exclusion of (many) Indigenous people through their rendering as 'incapable' under an order that celebrates individual capacity building (self-care, entrepreneurship, personal responsibility) (Strakosch 2015, 27).[15] For these reasons, Rottenberg is quite right in describing neoliberalism as a 'colonizing' force; it quite literally contributes to the continuation of a settler-colonial project inextricably connected to the promotion of patriarchal ideology and practice.

Building upon this understanding of neoliberalism as 'colonizing,' in this dissertation I thus want to think about how neoliberalism – a governing form of rationality that, as we have seen above, influences (if not structures) our ways of living together in a Canadian context – mediates our conceptualizations of sexualized violence, and thus also how we approach its prevention. If neoliberalism aims to interpellate all subjects and aspects of life and structure modes of being according to an economic rationale, then sexualized violence and its prevention should be no different. Moreover, if neoliberalism plays an important role in reimaging key tenets of liberal ideology that contribute to the

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class people) was sometimes falsely regarded the end of colonialism. However, such inclusion within the liberal order further foreclosed on Indigenous political claims (i.e. sovereignty), and in the words of Strakosch, "further entrenches rather than dismantles existing settler authority" (2015, 5).

[15] In different ways, other persons who were incorporated late into the citizenly fold (women, non-white persons, poor and working-class persons) are also rendered 'incapable' or 'less-than capable' within a normative order of reason that privileges (self) efficiency. We might think, for example, of Rottenberg's argument regarding the way middle-class (and I would add, white) women are interpellated into neoliberalism based on the ideal of "individual fulfillment" premised upon such women's capacity for (or ability to become capable of) balancing "a career and maternity and smart (self-)investments in the present to ensure enhanced returns in the future" (2016, 331-2).

perpetuation of settler-colonialism, and if settler-colonialism is a key factor to contemplate in thinking through sexualized violence in a Canadian context, then it would follow that neoliberalism is an especially significant order of normative reason to investigate in relation to sexualized violence. However, as mentioned briefly, neoliberalism is a term that can have many different meanings and can function in different ways across time and space. It is thus possible to talk about neoliberalism – a normative order of reason that attempts to structure all aspects of life according to an economic rationale – and neoliberalism*s* – the various ways this normative order of reason operates in particular contexts.

Which Neoliberalism? A Clarification

My employment of the term neoliberalism follows the work of Wendy Brown, a feminist political theorist heavily influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. Distinguishing her approach to neoliberalism from those that are predominately concerned with neoliberalism's effects upon the economy and capitalism, Brown puts forth a definition of neoliberalism that focuses upon its sociocultural and political influence as a "governing rationality:"

> In contrast with an understanding of neoliberalism as a set of state policies, a phase of capitalism, or an ideology that set loose the market to restore profitability for a capitalist class, I join Michel Foucault and others in conceiving neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life. (2015, 30)

Importantly, then, Brown is interested in discussing neoliberalism in its more general sense, the way in which it functions as a "governing rationality," "normative form of reason," or "condition of possibility" that "disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue" (2015, 31 – emphasis original). This account of neoliberalism leaves room for the study of neoliberalisms – the specific ways this market-based rationality works on and with different aspects of life and living. In this way, Brown can oscillate between giving accounts of particular instantiations of neoliberalism whilst still drawing connections between these particular instances so that it is possible to speak of an overarching 'neoliberalism.'

My approach to neoliberalism as it pertains to sexualized violence and its prevention is of this specific-general approach. As I will explain in greater detail later in this introduction (see section: "Argument and Aims"), the body chapters of this work will contemplate specific sexualized violence prevention approaches as they are employed in a Canadian context. Here I will be most concerned with specific manifestations of neoliberalism*s* in relation to academic theories of sexualized violence prevention, a government-sponsored prevention campaign, and an independent short film. Now, however, I want to focus upon the more general sense of neoliberalism described above: how does neoliberalism – conceptualized here as a normative form of reason that promotes the economization of all spheres of life – affect, and how is it affected by, consent discourse and fighting strategies? What is it about neoliberalism that makes it so important to a study of sexualized violence prevention approaches?

Neoliberalism, Relations of Competition, and Inequality

In her work on masochism and masculinist violence, Renée Heberle argues that "the paradoxes of liberal, modern subjectivity should be taken into account as we struggle with ending sexual violence" (2009, 125). For Heberle, turning to liberalism to better understand the perpetuation of sexualized violence is bound to feminist realizations that "the terms of the liberal polity [are] not lessening the level of domestic violence, sexual assault or rape" (2009, 125).[16] If liberalism is so important to understandings of sexualized violence, why focus on neoliberalism?

In one sense, I focus on neoliberalism over and above classical liberalism in this dissertation because of the temporal contexts of the examples I draw upon in my body chapters. As Brown argues, neoliberalism emerged as the new dominant form of rationality during the mid-late twentieth century and remains dominant today (2015, 9; 2016, 4). Given that the primary sources I analyze in this dissertation were created and mobilized from 2005 onwards, it makes good sense to concentrate on a governing form of rationality that covers this timeframe.[17]

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[16] When using the terms 'liberal' and 'liberalism,' I am referring to a governing rationality that shapes the conditions of possibility in a given sociopolitical community that takes as its object the acquisition of 'liberty' for an individual or a group of individuals.

[17] I recognize, however, that neoliberalism was well-developed prior to the 1990s, and depending upon the scholar one is consulting, traceable to the 1960s or 1970s in Canada and the United States. However, I argue that although neoliberal ideology is perceptible in pre-bystander prevention strategies (i.e. consent discourse), these similarities might be attributable to classical liberalism rather than *neo*liberalism. Indeed, I am interested in how the nuances of *neo*liberal ideology, which according to scholars like Moira Carmody and Kerry Carrington, became dominant in the 1990s, affected the creation and mobilization of a prevention discourse constructed in the same time period (2000, 347)

However, I choose to analyze the relationship of consent discourse and fighting strategies to neoliberalism for another important reason: unlike classical liberalism, neoliberalism promotes disinterest in, and perhaps even a reliance upon, the (re)production of inequities. Significantly, the idea(l) of equality amongst individuals is a foundational tenet of liberalism. And even if from its earliest manifestations the theoretical premise that everyone is equal in regards to their 'property in person' was patently false in a practical sense (we can think, for example, of the ways the term 'individual' was and is often coded as male, white, middle-upper class, able-bodied), it still seems important that there was at least some sort of desire for equality under liberalism, even if the heralding of equality was – in the best cases – a pipedream, or, in a more insidious interpretation, a clever way of concealing the way liberalism's connections with other ideologies (such as capitalism and colonialism) always already made attaining such equalities an impossibility.

Under neoliberalism, however, the push towards equality transforms into something else. As Brown explains, in the transition from liberalism to neoliberalism, there was an important shift from understanding relations with others as ones of exchange to ones of competition. Because competition is "not natural" and requires "winners and losers," inequality, rather than equality, becomes an important, if not necessary, aspect of neoliberalism (Brown 2015, 63-4). Thus, under neoliberalism:

> Freedom is shaped, conditioned, and constrained within a form of
> subjectification characterized by increasing competition and social
> insecurity. It is an apparatus that produces only certain kinds of freedom

> understood in terms of a specific notion of self-interest, while effectively
>
> pre-empting other possible kinds of freedom and forms of self-interest
>
> (including various collective, communal, and public forms of self-interest)
>
> that necessarily appear as impolitic, unprofitable, inexpedient and the like.
>
> (Hamann 2009, 51)

Neoliberalism thus thrives on inequality in a way that liberalism did not (or at least did not so openly); not only is inequality necessary to promote the relations of competition so central to neoliberalism's economic rationale, but often when one attempts to address inequality within neoliberalism, it responds to such a claim in a way that re-orients inequalities as a problem for and to be solved by the individual. It should come as no surprise, then, that neoliberalism promotes a focus on individual agency and capacities, rather than structural problems, for overcoming various kinds of oppressions and inequities (Fortier 2010, 19).

Yet, as critical disability scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder note in their analysis of the intersection between ability, queerness, and neoliberalism, the push for equality so central to liberalism does not completely vanish within neoliberalism. Instead, equality within neoliberalism is regarded as something that has either largely been achieved and/or is being achieved through (re)interpretations and the regulation of normalcy (2015, 2).[18] Mobilizing the rights-based discourse of liberalism towards addressing "devalued embodiments,"

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[18] Although Mitchell and Snyder discuss the neoliberal regulation of normalcy and inclusionism in relation to disabled and queer modes of living, I believe their observations regarding neoliberalism's inclusive exclusions can be extended further to speak to the experiences of people occupying other marginalized identity categories, thus making their ideas significant for an understanding of neoliberalism as it pertains to the analysis of sexualized violence.

Mitchell and Snyder note that, paradoxically, neoliberalism has enabled increased participation and social visibility for some disabled people (2015, 3). However, this increased participation and social visibility is made possible, in part, through attempts to include some disabled and queer persons within the citizenly fold through ideas of tolerance. Labelling this kind of inclusive exclusion "inclusionism," Mitchell and Snyder describe this phenomenon as "an embrace of diversity-based practices" that encourages the inclusion of people "who look, act, function, and feel different," at the expense or exclusion of disabled people who create and engage in alternative modes and values for living "that do not simply reify reigning concepts of normalcy" (2015, 4).[19]

Combined with an emphasis on relations of competition so crucial to forming and maintaining neoliberalism's economic-based rationality, the neoliberal regulation of normalcy through inclusionism thus overtly opposes an understanding of a sociopolitical community that draws attention to the ways in which various kinds of issues for individuals and communities could be the result of structural factors and not just a problem of the individual. By attempting to

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[19] Specifically, I wonder if we might consider the flourishing of various sociocultural and political movements (i.e. #MeToo, #Timesup) as working – perhaps unintentionally – to manage and/or regulate discourses of citizenly inclusion through a normalization of 'women's' ability to speak to their experiences of sexualized violence, and against their abusers. Although the kinds of testimonies that are most frequently circulated, and thus perhaps heard, are imbricated in the complex intersection of power, wealth, and celebrity, it seems important that attempts to support anti-sexualized violence movements that address the plight of 'women' often also work to devalue the experiences of people of colour. Here we might think of how white actress Allyssa Milano's use of the #MeToo hashtag was taken up in a way that subverted the movement's initial goal of addressing women of colour's experiences of sexualized violence. We might also think about how some of the most high-profile cases of women testifying to experiences of sexualized violence at the hands of a celebrity spoke to the actions of black men (i.e. Bill Cosby, R. Kelly, and Michael Jackson).

incorporate persons with marginalized (aspects of their) identities into normative practices and rituals, life under neoliberalism can give the appearance of the promotion of discourses of equality through discourses of tolerance, whilst still relegating those that challenge idea(l)s most central neoliberalism (i.e. individualism, personal responsibility, capacity-building) to the margins. In relation to sexualized violence and its prevention, understandings and attempts to address various social, cultural, and political ills (or the way neoliberalism fails to understand or address such ills) thus function as sticking points, if not outright obstacles. If, according to a feminist (as opposed to legalistic) anti-sexualized violence perspective, sexualized violence is not just a problem of individual perpetrators and/or victim/survivors but a problem that is formed and informed by broader oppressive discursive and ideological structures (sexism, racism, classism, ableism), then conceptualizing and mobilizing strategies towards sexualized violence prevention under a system that attributes blame or responsibility for systemic issues to 'non-normative' individuals could make such efforts perceptibly more difficult. I thus ask: how do we, as feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates, work on the problem of sexualized violence prevention in a way that draws connections between the role of the individual and the values/norms of a broader community in perpetuating this phenomenon while contending with a normative form of rationality that is dead set on downloading the responsibility for sexualized violence to the individual? This is a question that continues to plague me as one such feminist anti-sexualized violence advocate, and – perhaps intuitively – propels the inquisitive thrust of this dissertation.

Neoliberalism, Self-Interest, and Self-Sacrifice

I want now to return to Heberle's postulations on liberalism with a slight modification: how might the "paradoxes of [*neoliberal*] modern subjectivity" be taken into account in feminist efforts to end sexualized violence (2009, 125)? In her work on neoliberalism, Brown identifies several important differences between classical liberalism and neoliberalism, many of which I have already discussed (a dissemination of an economic rationale to all aspects of life, a shift from relations of exchange to relations of competition, and a movement away from the pursuit of equality). However, there is another important difference between liberalism and neoliberalism, a difference that I believe contributes to the challenges of mobilizing feminist sexualized violence approaches under neoliberalism: the idea(l)s of self-interest and self-sacrifice.

In *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Brown references an idea(l) of classical liberalism that was modified under neoliberalism: the idea(l) of the human as fundamentally self-interested. In brief, the idea(l) of the human as fundamentally self-interested is prominent in early classical liberal theories of political community, also called social contract theory. Popularized during the 17th to 18th century by theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, social contract theory attempts to explain why forms of rule and governance are justifiable despite liberal postulations that 'individuals' within a body politic are 'free and equal.' As political theorist Carole Pateman argues, common to and emerging from these enlightenment-era thought experiments were postulations regarding the inherent 'nature' of human beings – a common one being that humans are inherently and

primarily self-interested (1989, 55). Following this supposition regarding 'human nature,' membership in a sociopolitical community was thus believed (at least according to liberal social contract theorists) to mitigate the threats that others posed by virtue of being primarily self-interested.

Brown, however, is unsure if the idea(l) of the human as fundamentally self-interested carries forth from classical liberalism to neoliberalism in a direct manner. Specifically, Brown explains that:

> I do not think "interest" adequately captures the ethos or subjectivity of the contemporary neoliberal subject; this subject is so profoundly integrated into and hence subordinated to the supervening goal of macro-economic growth that its own well-being is easily sacrificed to these larger purposes. (2015, 83)

For Brown, then, the neoliberal subject is not only characterized by an unmoving self-interest, but by a potentially self-destructive allegiance to the large-scale economic discourses that underpin neoliberalism - such as competition, responsibilization, and individualization. Brown terms this new idea(l) "moralized sacrifice": as people are encouraged more and more to think of the self as "an individual firm" where one practices "self-investment," individuals are increasingly also encouraged to configure various modes of belonging (such as employment or citizenship) as being part of a "business ('team')" (2016, 3). As Brown elaborates, under neoliberalism:

> A logic unfolds that blends the hardheaded approach to human capital of any successful firm with a national-theological discourse of moralized sacrifice, a sacrifice required for the health and survival of the whole.

> Moralized sacrifice finesses the paradox of unrewarded conduct
>
> normatively prescribed by neoliberalism. (2016, 3-4)

To summarize, then, individuals are interpellated into neoliberal logic through a discourse of self-improvement. Self-improvement under neoliberalism is intimately connected to the improvement of the 'whole' (i.e. the institution, company, organization, community, or even nation-state); however, because the improvement of 'the whole' derives from the labour of individuals, the successes or failures of both individuals and community are attributed to individuals.

What, however, do these discourses of self-interest and self-sacrifice have to do with sexualized violence prevention? Transforming the liberal desire for equality amongst citizens into something more akin to a 'survival of the fittest,' living under neoliberalism and its conception of the human as fundamentally self-interested and self-sacrificing makes it challenging to relate to one another in a way that amounts to something other than threatening. As we shall see in chapters to come, this limited conception of human nature might make it difficult to address a sociopolitical problem rooted in our interrelations and interdependency: how can we work to prevent sexualized violence if we are living under an order of normative reason that repeatedly highlights the primacy of a desire to potentially injure another for one's own gain? Moreover, if under this normative order of reason one's self-interest is only really curbed by one's interpellation into a system that frames the 'greater good' as the responsibility of individual actors, how are we to account for the ways in which systems, institutions, and structures also have a hand in perpetuating sociopolitical ills like sexualized violence?

The ways neoliberalism impacts sexualized violence prevention (and vice versa) are, however, contingent upon *the kinds* of sexualized violence prevention approaches under consideration, and the way such approaches are understood. In the next section, I thus move to a discussion of the specific sexualized violence prevention approaches investigated in this dissertation – consent discourse and fighting strategies – alongside an examination of their relationship to neoliberalism.

Consent Discourse and Fighting Strategies

Approaches to sexualized violence prevention are multiple; to be sure, engagement in feminist anti-sexualized violence work often requires the employment of several different approaches at once. Nevertheless, it is still possible to discern some trends in approaches to prevention. Drawing on definitions provided by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in the US, Georgia Knowles explains that sexualized violence prevention can be understood as occurring at three different levels:

> Primary prevention aims to stop sexual violence *before* it occurs.
> Secondary prevention relates to the first response to survivors and perpetrators after violence has occurred and tertiary prevention is about long term responses to survivors and perpetrators. Tertiary prevention also includes perpetrator treatment programmes. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Knowles 2016, 38 – emphasis original)

Alongside these levels of prevention, however, are different theories of prevention that inform how preventative efforts are employed at the various levels. In Knowles' work

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on myths in sexualized violence prevention poster campaigns, she identifies six

different approaches: rape resistance, rape avoidance and risk reduction, social norms

theory, bystander intervention theory, models of ethical relating, and approaches which

focus on engaging men as allies (2016, 39).[20] In this dissertation, my analysis focuses

upon two sexualized violence approaches that operate at the level of primary

prevention. I focus on primary prevention approaches because although secondary and

tertiary responses could function to prevent future acts of sexualized violence by the

same perpetrator, they both require an act of sexualized violence to have already

occurred in order to 'work,' and thus assume that sexualized violence is always already

a possibility. Operating from the idea that sexualized violence is not an inevitable

outcome of human interrelations, I thus concentrate on two sexualized violence

prevention approaches that operate from the perspective that an instance of sexualized

violence does not have already had to occur in order for their preventative potentialities

to be mobilized: namely, consent discourse and fighting strategies.[21]

Consent Discourse

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[20] In brief, according to Knowles, rape resistance strategies concentrate upon how individual women can prevent sexualized violence through modifying their behaviour to actively fend off attackers. Similarly, avoidance and reduction strategies also aim to modify women's behaviour to prevent sexualized violence, but are more so interested in the ways women can avoid situations where sexualized violence is likely to occur. The social norms approach attempts to change sexualized violence-supportive attitudes (and typically address men). Bystander intervention approaches attempt to engage would-be witnesses to sexualized violence and engage them in preventative work. Ethical modes of relating is the term that Knowles uses to describes consent-based approaches to prevention. And, finally, engaging men as allies attempts to alter the violent constructions of masculinity that theorists believe contribute to sexualized violence (2016, 38-45).
[21] As will become apparent in chapter two, bystanderism is also a sexualized violence prevention approach that garners some attention in this dissertation. However, my engagement with bystanderism is predicated upon the way this prevention approach is altered by its mobilization alongside consent discourse. In this sense, bystanderism is a secondary aspect of my analysis.

Notions of consent as they are featured in sexualized violence prevention approaches today are undoubtedly tied to classical liberal notions of contract. In Western political philosophy, one prominent way that contract has been conceptualized is as a means of forging egalitarian relations amongst persons who are regarded as inherently motivated by their own self-interest. The idea that one cannot simply do what they want to or with another is explicit in notions of contract, whereby one enacts or performs a recognition (and perhaps respect for) another person's autonomy by framing what one desires from another as a choice to which one can consent or dissent. Although this particular notion of contract (and relatedly, consent) arises from attempts to understand and/or explain the purpose of a sociopolitical community, it is reproduced and reimagined to structure relations within a sociopolitical community as well (economic relations, intimate relations).

In relation to sexualized violence prevention, much like its application in other spheres of life, consent works to reinforce the autonomy of persons entering into (sexualized) interrelations: it demands that persons frame sexualized interactions as a choice to which persons can consent or dissent. Contemporary mobilizations of consent as a prevention approach thus posit that sexualized violence is the result of poor communication between potentially intimate partners: in consent discourse, sexualized violence is defined as sexual acts that occur in the absence of a partner's (or partners') permission. The remedy for sexualized violence is thus inherent in consent's definition of sexualized violence:

sexualized violence cannot occur if a person seeks the permission of the other person (or persons) with whom they wish to engage in sexualized activities.[22]

Given the myriad of ways consent structures personal, economic, and political relations (i.e. marriage, business contracts), it is thus perhaps unsurprising that it has become dominant in sexualized violence prevention efforts, as it has in other areas of social life. As Melanie Ann Beres notes in her work on consent, "in recent years, there has been a substantial increase in consent-focused rape prevention education and activism" (2018, 181). For example, we can think of the import of consent discourse to (re)structuring approaches to sexualized interrelations within institutional spaces such as the university. In the introductory anecdote about McGill University, for instance, consent is singled out and elevated as *the* prevention approach structuring the university's mandatory training. Importantly, however, McGill is not alone in their centering of consent discourse within institutional prevention efforts. Oxford and Cambridge universities, for instance, have mandated consent training for all incoming students, and California passed a law requiring all colleges to provide policies and training for students on affirmative consent (where it is the initiator's responsibility to ensure consent has been granted).

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[22] I am careful here to avoid the words 'want' and/or 'desire' when describing the function of consent. To be clear, I do not believe that in the vast majority of cases consent works to communicate one's desires regarding sexual activities. Rather, the term denotes a bare-minimum threshold regarding one's will; in other words, consent in the way I am mobilizing it here is linked to legalistic understandings of assault regarding choice and one's communication of that choice. Indeed, one can choose to engage in a kind of behaviour/activity without desiring that activity/behaviour.

Yet, consent discourse extends beyond the boundaries of post-secondary institutions as different kinds of community-based activist campaigns have also taken up the language of consent. Slogans such as "consent is sexy," "yes means yes," "no means no," and "sex without consent is rape" are popularized by social-media campaigns and activist efforts such as SlutWalk (Beres 2018, 181). Indeed, it is difficult to find a prevention campaign today that does not, in some way, reference consent, making the discourse perhaps a rather obvious choice as a primary object of study.

Given the ubiquity of consent in a variety of sexualized violence prevention efforts, I thus began to describe this phenomenon as a discourse. As I discovered, however, consent discourse is not a novel term, and is used in the work of Kate Lockwood Harris to describe "discussions and messages about how people agree to sexual interaction while navigating their own and others' shifting needs and desires" (2018, 155-6). In my work, however, I employ the term consent discourse a bit differently than Lockwood Harris. While Lockwood Harris uses consent discourse to refer to the actual moment of consent (the act of discourse between two or more potentially intimate sexual subjects), I use consent discourse in more of a Foucauldian sense. As Chris Weedon explains, discourse, as described by Foucault, refers to:

> … ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body,

> unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they
>
> seek to govern. (1987, 108)

In thinking of consent as a discourse, consent – the idea of attaining permission from a person (or persons) to engage in sexualized activities or behaviours – becomes a means of defining the reality of social worlds and the persons that inhabit them. Specifically, via its deep imbrications in the structuring of classical liberal and neoliberal governing rationalities, consent becomes a dominant, if not hegemonic, idea for understanding who and what we are through its structuring of what 'ethical' or 'fair' human interrelations should look like. Importantly, then, unlike fighting *strategies* (which I will discuss below), consent is a *discourse* insofar as it attempts to structure sociocultural and political conceptions of what sexualized violence is (definitional) and how it can be prevented (strategy). Put differently, consent discourse is a manner of speaking and thinking about sexualized violence and its prevention that defines the limits of what is intelligible about sexualized violence and what is not.

Fighting Strategies

The term 'fighting strategies' denotes an approach to sexualized violence prevention that positions persons most vulnerable to sexualized violence (usually women) as crucial to prevention. Although encompassing a variety of tactics, such as self-defence and cultural materials that portray women violently resisting or responding to experiences of sexualized violence, what is common to fighting strategies is the idea that sexualized violence is a problem that must be actively combatted, whereby this 'combat' or 'fighting' is spearheaded by those most

vulnerable to sexualized violence. Importantly, then, the idea of 'fighting' sexualized violence is linked to an understanding of sexualized violence as occurring because certain persons are always already characterized as weak, passive, and vulnerable (again, mostly 'women') in cultures that equate the ability to engage in violence with power (Marcus 1992). 'Fighting' sexualized violence is thus not so much about the material capacity for persons to thwart an assault – although fighting strategy proponents do not totally exclude this possibility. Rather, to 'fight' sexualized violence means to alter the sociocultural conditions that position certain persons as always already sexually violable.

Clearly working against consent discourse's proposition that sexualized violence is a problem of individuals within a sociopolitical community rather than of the community itself, it is thus perhaps unsurprising that fighting strategies do not occupy the same hegemonic status within the anti-sexualized violence movement. Nevertheless, fighting strategies are still employed with some frequency. We can think, for example, of Charlene Senn, Misha Eliasziw, Paula Barata, Wilfreda Thurston, Ian Newby-Clark, Lorraine Radtke, and Karen Hobden's (2015) report regarding the efficacy of self-defence in preventing sexualized violence mentioned above. Contributing to the sociopolitical validation of fighting strategies within anti-sexualized violence circles, the report surveys the impact of self-defence classes on reducing instances of sexualized assault and attempted sexual assault, demonstrating a significant decrease in likelihood of experiencing sexualized violence for the self-defence group as compared to the control group. However, we can also think about fighting strategies that operate on the level of visual culture, such as filmic productions, as holding a place of

some significance in our cultural imaginary. Following the work of Kelly Oliver (2016), there is a trend in contemporary cinema to create works that feature young women assaulting and being assaulted; regardless of the intentions of the producers of these works, they have been interpreted by some viewers as contributing to a cultural movement that aims to resituate 'women' as subjects, and not just objects, of violence (Oliver 2016). Although not attaining the same consistent, wide-spread usage as consent discourse, it is evident that fighting strategies still occupy an important place within the anti-sexualized violence movement at our current moment.

Consent Discourse, Fighting Strategies and Neoliberalism

Initially, my decision to focus on consent discourse and fighting strategies originated from my personal experiences. However, a closer engagement with both consent discourse and fighting strategies led me to believe that they are connected in a different way: through their adherence to a neoliberal notion of the human as primarily self-interested and self-sacrificing. At first glance, thinking about the idea of self-interest and self-sacrifice in relation to sexualized violence prevention might seem a bit odd: would not all attempts to prevent sexualized violence inherently involve a degree of self-interest since they work to protect the 'interests' of would-be victims/survivors (and potentially even perpetrators)? And by virtue of working to end a sociopolitical ill within a community, would not all efforts to prevent sexualized violence involve a degree of 'self-sacrifice' to the cause of prevention? Perhaps, but here I am not as interested in the ways that sexualized violence prevention approaches cater to individual or even group

interests or actions; rather, I am curious about how the neoliberal idea(l)s of the human as inherently self-interested and self-sacrificing mediate how sexualized violence prevention strategies are imagined and mobilized.

Take, for example, the role of self-interest and self-sacrifice in relation to consent discourse. The very idea that persons need to contract into sexual relations precludes an understanding of the human whereby part of one's self-interest is bound to the well-being of an 'other.' Positing that one has to (re)produce an understanding of the 'other' as 'free and equal' via the act of contract, what is implied in consent discourse is that without such a 'check' it is very possible that persons might infringe upon the autonomy of another to satisfy their own interests. Moreover, as consent discourse individualizes the problem of sexualized violence by framing others as always-already threatening, it can also be mobilized in ways that manipulate the approaches' relationship to a 'greater good.' What might it mean, for example, to understand the 'good' of consent discourse not in terms of potentially avoiding sexualized violence, but as a means to save taxpayers money (i.e. through avoiding lengthy and costly investigations of instances of sexualized violence)? [23]

In relation to fighting strategies, the implications of the idea of the human as inherently self-interested and self-sacrificing are similarly imbricated within the strategy but approached from a different perspective. Within fighting strategies there is a belief that sexualized violence is an effect of an already

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[23] For an example, see this *Ms. Magazine* article on the Violence Against Woman Act: http://msmagazine.com/blog/2011/08/25/the-violence-against-women-act-saves-money-and-lives/

established hierarchy of violence and power; that another person in a position of (relative) power may act 'self-interestedly' is regarded by fighting strategy proponents as not just a dangerous potentiality to be checked (as in consent discourse), but a constructed threat to be actively fought or combatted by those most vulnerable to sexualized violence. Here individuals are required to self-sacrifice their time and resources towards engaging in proactive actions and behaviours aimed at mitigating a threat that (hopefully) has not necessarily manifested itself as such.

What is apparent, then, is that conceptualizations of sexualized violence prevention in Canada have already been influenced by neoliberalism: the very principles at the core of each strategy are inextricably tied to a neoliberal notion of the human as fundamentally self-interested and self-sacrificing. Given these connections between consent discourse and fighting strategies in relation to neoliberalism's idea(l)s of self-interest and self-sacrifice, then, I follow Alcoff in wondering: "…what would formulations of sexual[ized] violence [prevention] look like without individualist concepts of the self" (2018, 153)?

Reimagining 'Living Together': Towards a Recognition of Autonomy and Interdependence

Thus far I have discussed the ways feminist conceptualizations of sexualized violence and approaches towards its prevention are imbricated in discourses regarding citizenly belonging. Identifying neoliberalism as an important normative order of rationality that seeks to manage the kind and quality

of citizenly relations, I am proposing that feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates need to be attentive to the ways in which neoliberalism's normative interpretation of the human as primarily self-interested and self-sacrificing, relating to others through the lens of potential threat, might alter the conceptualization and practical employment of a kind of prevention that regards sexualized violence as an individual *and* structural issue. As a normative order of rationality that aims to disseminate a way of thinking about life ('being' and 'being with') through economic terms that favour relations of competition, neoliberalism leaves little room for a consideration of how our broader structures that define and attempt to determine how we might 'live together' (including, perhaps ironically, neoliberalism itself) function in ways that might perpetuate sexualized violence. A large part of the work of this dissertation is to understand where and how neoliberalism's rationale comes to bear on sexualized violence prevention approaches analyzed in this work, and with what effects. However, this dissertation also asks: if neoliberalism presents itself as a potential problem or limiting factor in conceptualizations of sexualized violence and its prevention in relation to feminist anti-sexualized violence theories, are there other ideas regarding what it means to 'live together' that might speak to sexualized violence prevention theories in ways that are complimentary and productive (as opposed to contradictory and counterproductive) to the feminist idea that we all ought to be responsible (to varying degrees) for the prevention of sexualized violence?[24]

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[24] Before I endeavour to answer this question, a quick note on terminology. Ideas of community (often termed sociopolitical community) and 'living together' are prevalent in this dissertation. However, as Janice Hladki argues in her work on collaboration, all too often such notions of living

My reading of the work of Judith Butler tells me that yes, there are other ways to conceptualize notions of the human and interrelations that challenge the notion of the human as primarily self-interested and self-sacrificing. Specifically, in a variety of her works, such as *Precarious Life* (2004), *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), *Frames of War* (2009), and *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Butler envisions an alternate means of achieving political community by thinking through the notions of 'person' and 'human' that underpin who can belong to a sociopolitical community, and the kind and/or quality of life within that community. In these works, Butler draws our attention to the import of human injurability, vulnerability, and the existential quality of life to conceptions of sociopolitical community. For Butler, the problem with a variety of conceptions of sociopolitical community lies in understandings of the subject as primarily threatened by others who are inherently self-interested and self-sacrificing to neoliberal aims, and with how this idea(l) impedes the possibility of that subject understanding its relation to others as anything other than threatening. As Butler explains:

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and/or being together, notions connected to the idea of 'community,' are problematically understood "as harmonious relations and unambivalent solidarity between and among individuals" (1998, 32). For Hladki, the issue of overemphasizing the "'unity' in 'community'" misrepresents collectives as "homogenous whole[s]," ignoring "relations of power, social difference, and struggle" within and without such collectives (1998, 32). It thus seems important to note that when discussing community or sociopolitical community, I do not wish to reify these kinds of overgeneralizations where "complex and contradictory social locations of individuals [are] erased" (Hladki 1998, 33). Instead, I use the terms 'community,' 'sociopolitical community,' and 'living together' as ways to identify potential modes of interacting with others outside of common discourses and scripts, such as citizenship. The use of these terms, then, intends to embrace Hladki's observation that "in any community there are unstable and shifting relations of power, diverse political positions, and subjects are constituted by multiple and unfixed locations and driven by complex and contradictory motivations" (1998, 33). The use of these less specific labels (i.e. sociopolitical community versus nation-state) and terms (i.e. living together versus community) is therefore meant to encourage myself and my readers to think with and against understandings of collectives that gloss over difference and struggle in favour of highlighting unity and togetherness.

> If a particular subject considers her- or himself to be by definition injured
>
> or indeed persecuted, then whatever acts of violence such a subject
>
> commits cannot register as 'doing injury,' since the subject who does them
>
> is, by definition, precluded from doing anything but suffering injury. As a
>
> result, the production of the subject on the basis of its injured status then
>
> produces a permanent ground for legitimating (and disavowing) its own
>
> violent actions. (2009, 179)

Relayed here through the language of injury and injurability, I believe Butler's

observations regarding the problems of a too ardent focus on the status of oneself

as 'injured' have important implications for what it means to be human, and

human within a sociopolitical community: positioning humans as always already

under threat creates a moral ground for justifying one's own threatening or violent

reactions.

In relation to consent discourse and fighting strategies, we can see how

this idea of a heightened attention to one's own capacity to be injured, and/or an

inattention to one's capacity to injure (and its effects), operates problematically as

an implicit assumption connected to the idea of the human as primarily self-

interested and the neoliberal goal of becoming a 'human capital' that benefits the

'whole.' In consent discourse, for example, the desire to protect oneself from

injury from self-interested others is implicit in the idea that forming an intimate

contract protects both parties from the potentially insidious aims/desires/wants of

another: the contracted subject (presumably) has their will/desire/wants protected

from a self-interested other through consent discourse's incitement to question

one's partner(s) about whether they consent or dissent to a specific activity,

whereas the contracting subject who asks permission to engage in a particular activity has their reputation/freedom protected from a self-interested other who might misrepresent the kind and quality of the interaction (i.e. false sexualized violence allegations) for various reasons (spite, malice, financial gain). And, although asking for consent might in some cases be regarded as 'unsexy,' or 'awkward,' the 'good' neoliberal subject will engage in the practice of consent regardless for the 'greater good' of the community: they will make a self-sacrifice. The problem, however, of focusing on protecting the 'interests' of both parties equally within consent discourse fails to recognize the ways in which partners might enter a contract upon unequal grounds: how might a focus on the interests of individuals gloss over every individual's imbrication in broader systems that confer differential amounts of privilege and oppression that will affect the ways in which persons can propose a contract and respond to a contract proposal? Moreover, the framing of the problem of sexualized violence in consent discourse as a problem of individual actors mitigates the responsibility of broader sociopolitical structures for enabling and/or perpetuating these instances of violence.

Relatedly, in relation to fighting strategies, the understanding of the human as primarily self-interested, as always already injured by the potential threats of self-interested others, forecloses the possibility of a person understanding their own actions – even those made in self-defence – as potentially violent actions, ones that could contribute to the perpetuation of certain kinds of sexualized violence. Potentially individualizing the prevention of sexualized violence, an inattention to the ways in which fighting strategies might suggest (or

evenly openly promote) the use of violent behaviours to 'combat' sexualized

violence potentially reifies, rather than challenges, discourses that suggest it is

appropriate for an individual to act violently in the face of violence – discourses

that, if we are to take perpetrators at their word, are sometimes used to justify the

violent actions of perpetrators (i.e. she threatened/challenged my masculinity as a

'reason' for sexualized violence).[25] This, of course, is not to say that there are

clear lines that divide appropriate from inappropriate uses of violence, or that all

fighting strategies advocate violence; rather, what I am trying to suggest here is

that the framing of certain persons within fighting strategies as always already

susceptible to injury, and mobilization of that framing to justify the potential use

of violence to prevent violence might, as Butler so aptly acknowledges, make it

challenging for one to regard one's own actions as potentially violent.

My interpretation of Butler's work thus helps us garner a better sense of

the problem of neoliberalism for sexualized violence prevention strategies: if

sexualized violence is a sociopolitical problem that arises from the production and

(re)production of the settler-colonial nation-state and the terms of living together

within that state, then we might understand sexualized violence not just as one

kind of problem affecting a sociopolitical community, but as a problem arising out

of the very tenets that created and now maintain that sociopolitical community.

How, then, might we challenge idea(l)s that unduly favour a notion of the human

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[25] In chapter one, I discuss at length theories of perpetrator motives for sexualized violence, and how the fear of a degraded masculinity is cited by some perpetrators as their 'reason' for committing acts of sexualized violence.

as primarily autonomous, self-interested, and relating to others through a discourse of threat?

In *Frames of War*, Butler further develops her notions of precarity and precariousness, theories that I believe are important to a reconceptualization of notions of the human and humanly interrelations. According to Butler:

> Precariousness and precarity are intersecting concepts. Lives are by definition precarious [we can be injured, we can die] … Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. (2009, 25)

Although all living beings experience precariousness, not all beings experience precarity in the same way, and Butler attributes this differential allocation of precarity to the ways in which certain lives are framed as mattering within a particular national or communal context. For Butler, it is thus important to consider that how a 'life' comes to be recognized as a life 'worthy' of care and protection is "partially dependent on that life being produced according to norms that qualify it as a life, or indeed, as a part of life" (2009, 3).

An important question for Butler, then, is how to extend the norms or 'frames' of recognition in order to eliminate precarity. For Butler, however, a lessening of precarity does not necessarily equate to opposing recognitions of or movements for greater autonomy (although we might say that she is advancing a critique of certain normative conceptions of autonomy, such as those linked to a conception of self-interest). Specifically, Butler asks: "Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon

us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another" (2004, 27)?

In Butler's view, then, the subject is never an entirely independent being; the formation of the subject is contingent upon the being of the other. As Butler explains, "the 'I' first comes into being as a 'me' through being acted upon by an Other, and this primary impingement is already and from the start an ethical interpellation" (2005, 89). However, Butler is quick to note that this interpellation of the subject as formed always already in relation to the 'other' is more than just a heralding of relationality:

> … it won't even do to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one … Despite my affinity for the term relationality, we might need other language to approach the issue that concerns us, a way of thinking about how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well. (2004, 24)

Part of the reason, I believe, that Butler is suspicious of a complete turn to relationality is because of the import of conceptions of autonomy for social justice movements. As Butler explains, "essential to so many political movements is the claim of bodily integrity and self-determination. It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense *our own* and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies" (2004, 25).[26] However, Butler posits that as we struggle for autonomy, we need to be struggling for something else as well: "a conception of

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[26] Indeed, claims for rights and autonomy are "part of any normative aspiration of a movement that works to maximize the protection and the freedom of sexual and gender minorities, of women, and of racial and ethnic minorities, especially as they cut across all the other categories" (2004, 26).

myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impinging upon them as well, and in ways that are not fully in my control or clearly predictable" (2004, 27). Here Butler wonders how we might simultaneously work towards autonomy in some spheres, while at the same time considering the ways in which we impose and are imposed upon by others who, like us, "are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another" (2004, 27).

Butler thus proposes an alternate version of the human and community where we recognize a connection to others through a shared precariousness, but recognize how that precariousness – that condition of being in common – "cannot be thought without difference" (2004, 27). Imagining living together in a way that recognizes that all persons are vulnerable to death and injury (precariousness), and that preventing that injury (self-interest) might be a normative dimension of life, Butler asks if questions about self-preservation and survival always have to be about the individual, or if they could also be about "relationality… as a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, [and] also an ongoing normative dimension of social and political lives" (2004, 27).

For Butler, then, what needs to be avoided in conceptualizations of the human and humanly interrelations is a kind of hegemony of one approach: we are fundamentally interdependent, and because of that fact, we need a concept like autonomy to advance rights, freedoms, and protections from harm for minority groups. Which is why in Butler's work a turn to vulnerability or precariousness is not opposed to other normative frameworks that help conceptualize interpersonal relations and ideas of the human, such as ones that highlight autonomy. In this sense, Butler's relational

theory of 'being' together through a gesture towards the recognition of all persons' precariousness must be considered alongside discourses of autonomy.[27] Her strategy here is an important one, as it suggests we cannot simply do away with certain problematic norms, as another will come to take their places. Rather, one must work on and with such problematic norms, while espousing new ones that challenge a dominant framework's totalizing tendencies. Thus, to begin to address sociopolitical issues, one must not simply seek to replace problematic ideas, but work on, with, and sometimes, against such theories.

In this dissertation, I take up Butler's suggestion to interrogate the normative frameworks of recognition that work to establish the limits of human intelligibility within a sociopolitical community, specifically under neoliberalism. In particular, I consider how we can work on and with neoliberalism in order to challenge the hegemony of narrow notions of autonomy within this normative order of reason (notions of autonomy that manifest in a conception of the human as primarily self-interested and as encouraged to understand one's relations to others as ones of threat). As such, I ask: how does neoliberalism's limited conception of the human as primarily self-interested and self-sacrificing impede our ability to be with one another in ways that promote all persons "persisting and flourishing" (Butler 2009, 20)? If we can regard neoliberalism as a normative framework of recognition, or a governing rationality, in what ways do our sexualized violence prevention strategies work within, on, and perhaps even against, a notion of the human as fundamentally self-interested

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[27] Butler's conception of autonomy is inseparable from her conception of relationality. Because the other is needed in order to make the 'I/me,' autonomy in the purest sense – personal sovereignty or the freedom from external influence – is a fallacy for Butler.

and self-sacrificing? And, given the informative connections between sexualized violence and (settler-colonial) citizenship, how might an analysis of the limitations and productive elements of neoliberal ideals within sexualized violence prevention work towards a more general improvement of our citizenly relations?

Arguments and Aims

This dissertation is a response to questions posed in this introduction regarding the relationship between sexualized violence prevention and discourses of citizenship: in thinking about the ways sexualized violence prevention is formed and informed by problematic governing rationalities, we can not only attain a better sense of how to end instances of sexualized violence, but also potentially discover new ways of approaching the problem of 'living together.' More specifically, my claim is that in order to best prevent sexualized violence, feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates need to be attentive to the ways normative notions of the citizen, formed and informed by neoliberalism as a governing rationality, function as a kind of lens or framework that limits conceptions of what is possible in relation to sexualized violence prevention. To truly prevent sexualized violence, therefore, we must not only critique and re-imagine current prevention approaches, but radically rethink notions of the 'citizen' and the premises that underpin 'belonging' in sociopolitical communities.

In the chapters that follow, I will thus consider how two popular approaches to sexualized violence prevention in Canada – consent discourse and

fighting strategies – are amenable to neoliberalism as a governing form of rationality, and contemplate the consequences of this amenability. Importantly, I use the term "amenability" following Clare Hemmings' work on feminist stories' entanglements with other ideologies and narratives that "we might otherwise wish to disentangle ourselves from if history is not simply to repeat itself" (2011, 2). Like Hemmings, and in relation to sexualized violence prevention, although I will argue that the amenability of consent discourse and fighting strategies creates substantial limitations in terms of the efficacy of such prevention approaches, I also suggest that in (re)producing neoliberalism's central tenets and ideals, such prevention strategies break with themselves to open onto the possibility of conceptualizing more relational ways of 'being with' one another. The amenability of consent discourse and fighting strategies to neoliberalism is not, therefore, a linear relationship whereby the tenets of neoliberalism as a governing rationality simply mediate sexualized violence prevention. Rather, I am interested in how contemporary theories and practical mobilizations of consent discourse and fighting strategies also speak back to, and thus potentially modify, neoliberalism. Even though both approaches, I suggest, do adhere to a neoliberal conceptualization of the human as fundamentally self-interested and self-sacrificing, I thus also ask: in what ways might mobilizations of these prevention approaches promote a means of living together that recognizes Butlerian notions of the human whereby one's autonomy is conditional upon the ways we are bound to one another in ways that are not of our choosing?

My tactic to investigating these sexualized violence prevention approaches is informed by my personal experiences, and by the theories of Eve Kosofsky

Sedgwick. Recalling my discussion at the beginning of this introduction regarding my heavy-handed readings of consent discourse and fighting strategies, it was imperative for me to find a way to articulate my skepticism and worries regarding these prevention approaches whilst remaining open to the possibility that in spite of their limitations these approaches might have something important to offer to feminist anti-sexualized violence prevention efforts. As such, the methodological approaches of the chapters of this dissertation are informed by Sedgwick's theories of paranoid and reparative readings. For Sedgwick, the paranoid reader ascribes to a kind of hermeneutics of suspicion, which assumes that one cannot (nor should not) be surprised in their quest for knowledge (1997, 3). This kind of reading, perhaps all too familiar to those of us in anti-oppressive studies, stultifies the reader's ability to be open to alternate possibilities – a potential means of disavowing the 'always already' assumption that one may take in relation to a particular phenomenon, idea, or theory. Alternatively, reparative reading practices involve being open to the possibility or surprise of learning in spite of feelings of suspicion regarding the work or idea in question. In this dissertation I engage in both practices, training a critical eye on different manifestations of consent discourse and fighting strategies, whilst also being open to the possibility that the various manifestations of these prevention approaches might offer important and new insights about how to work on and with neoliberalism.

Following such a framework, in the first chapter I consider how consent discourse and fighting strategies can be similarly imbricated in neoliberal affective economies in spite of the different ways they conceptualize sexualized violence and thus imagine how it should be prevented. Surveying theoretical,

academic works that articulate the fundamental principles of consent discourse and fighting strategies, I identify two different affectivities – familiarity and fear – that underpin the impetus and goals of these prevention approaches. Demonstrating that familiarity and fear have important functions in (re)producing aspects of neoliberalism, chapter one articulates how the amenability of both prevention approaches to neoliberal affective economies might work to perpetuate, rather than prevent, the conditions that allow sexualized violence to occur.

Acting more as a paranoid reading of consent discourse and fighting strategies, chapter one lays the groundwork for more generous, reparative readings of practical mobilizations of consent discourse and fighting strategies in chapters two and three. In chapter two, for example, I explore the role of consent discourse in the Ontario provincial government's Draw-the-Line sexualized violence prevention campaign. Primarily a campaign that is articulated through a bystander approach to sexualized violence prevention, a heavy mobilization of consent discourse within Draw-the-Line problematically reproduces the notion of neoliberal individualism and personal responsibility, potentially mitigating bystanderism's attempt to situate sexualized violence as a community problem. However, this chapter also explores how the combination of consent discourse's autonomy-supporting rhetoric and a visualization of bystanderism's relationality can work to upend consent discourse's more problematic and ineffectual prevention elements. Analyzing the textual and visual elements of five posters created by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, I suggest that visual aspects of these posters that hint at issues of land appropriation and destruction, relationality

between human and non-human entities, and the affective elements of living with others work to complicate consent discourse's simplistic rendering of sexualized violence as a personal problem. I thus ultimately suggest that consent discourse might be most effectively mobilized in sexualized violence prevention campaigns when it is implemented in ways that complement, rather than dominate, other prevention approaches (such as bystanderism's) impetus to challenge neoliberal ideals that attempt to download the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention onto contracting parties (would-be perpetrator and would-be victim/survivor).

Following a similar format, my final chapter – chapter three – contemplates the role of cultural materials that espouse the logic of fighting strategies in preventing sexualized violence. Although highlighting some troubling limitations of fighting approaches in reproducing a conception of the 'other' as inherently threatening through an analysis of the rape-revenge genre of film, the major concern of this chapter is an investigation of how such cultural productions could work to disrupt elements of a neoliberal rationality that help enable the occurrence of sexualized violence. To accomplish this, I engage in an extensive critical reading of the short Canadian film, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* (2012). In the film, viewers are privy to an Indigenous woman's quest to avenge her own and other Indigenous women's experiences of sexualized violence at the hands of white men. However, unlike other films that take up sexualized violence revenge, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* exposes and plays with some of the genre's anti-feminist and neoliberal tropes and imagery towards producing a work that is more in line with anti-sexualized violence advocates' aim of making sexualized

violence no longer a possibility. Arguing that the film operates as a kind of limit-case of the rape-revenge genre, I ultimately suggest that the film's use of what I term "retributive violence" to enact revenge upon the white male abuser raises important questions about the role of race, gender, and settler-colonialism in representations of imagined violence and revenge, questions that might work to implicate a viewer in a project to end sexualized violence. Through an analysis of the film's narrative structure, visual cues, and attention to identity-based and geopolitics, I thus posit that cultural productions that adhere to the tenets of fighting strategies are most effective when they connect the 'threat' of sexualized violence to the ideologies and discourses that both allow sexualized violence to occur and structure the larger community.

Taken together, what the individual arguments of these chapters reveal is that in order to best prevent sexualized violence, feminists need to be attentive to how the governing rationalities that structure our ways of living together (in this case, neoliberalism) – and the notions of the 'human' that underpin such rationalities – mediate our prevention approaches. Indeed, both the successes (i.e. large-scale dissemination) and failures (i.e. ineffectiveness) of these sexualized violence prevention approaches are linked to their commensurability with, and amenability to, the goals of broader sociopolitical systems and discourses of belonging: namely, neoliberal ideals of the citizen. The examples of sexualized violence prevention approaches that form the basis of analysis in these chapters do not simply (re)produce neoliberal logic, however; even as these manifestations of prevention approaches rearticulate some of neoliberalism's central terms, through that rearticulation there is a break in the frame of reference through which

there emerges a political possibility for something different. It is here, in the spaces and places where neoliberalism as a normative order of reason (re)produces itself that we also find different conceptions of the human and belonging, ones that speak to (rather than against) the possibility of understanding sexualized violence in ways more consistent with feminist anti-sexualized violence aims: as both a specific phenomenon enacted, experienced, and perpetuated by 'individuals,' but where 'individuals' are understood to be subjects that are formed and are informed by broader communal norms and discourses. In this dissertation, then, I am not so much asking whether specific sexualized violence prevention approaches or particular mobilizations of such approaches are 'good' or 'bad' in relation to feminist anti-sexualized violence aims. Rather, I wonder how these approaches' amenability to a normative order of reason that is problematic for, if not contradictory to, feminist anti-sexualized violence aims might not only produce problems or limitations, but also open possibilities for imagining sexualized violence prevention and sociopolitical communities otherwise.

Chapter One - Between Familiarity and Fear: Neoliberal Affective Economies and Theories of Sexualized Violence Prevention

Our affect is *never merely our own*: affect is, from the start, communicated from elsewhere. It disposes us to perceive the world in a certain way, to let certain dimensions of the world in and to resist others. (2009, 50)
– Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, emphasis mine

Consent Discourse and Fighting Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

Consent discourse and fighting strategies are approaches to sexualized violence prevention; their goals are to ensure that sexualized violence can no longer occur. The wish to end sexualized violence is, however, where the similarities between these two prevention approaches seem to end. Understandings of what sexualized violence 'is,' why sexualized violence happens, and how it might be prevented are distinctive, if not outright oppositional, in these two prevention approaches. For instance, consent discourse takes sexualized violence to be a problem of communication between individual people, and thus posits that it can be prevented through educating persons on the import of clear communication to retain sexual autonomy. Alternatively, fighting strategies understand sexualized violence as an effect of broader sociopolitical hierarchies of oppression (mainly patriarchy), and therefore locate the prevention of sexualized violence in the defensive and sometimes offensive material actions and symbolic gestures of women-identifying people. Thus, while consent discourse understands sexualized violence as a problem of and to be solved by individuals within a community, fighting strategies regard sexualized violence as a collective problem but one that needs to be addressed by individuals most affected by sexualized violence in that community.

Despite their differences, it is, however, evident that both consent discourse and fighting strategies are noteworthy prevention approaches. Take, for example, the anecdotes mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation: whether it is through a positioning of one prevention tactic as 'the' prevention strategy in post-secondary institutions (i.e. McGill), or the governmental funding of an academic project that seeks to mobilize aspects of fighting strategies (Senn 2015), both examples speak to the sociocultural and political relevance of these prevention approaches. Yet, even as we think of these two prevention approaches as similar in terms of their present significance within feminist anti-sexualized violence work, it is also true that there are important differences between the prevention approaches. Indeed, whereas fighting strategies clearly have their academic feminist proponents in scholars like Sharon Marcus (1992), Nicola Gavey (2005), and Senn (2015), consent discourse does not have an easily traceable relationship to academic feminist theories of sexualized violence prevention. Instead, consent discourse manifests as a kind of 'watered-down' version of early feminist arguments for sexual rights and freedoms that are mobilized today to underpin neoliberal, state-driven initiatives. Given these differences, then, one might thus wonder: what allows these two seemingly divergent approaches to prevention to be accepted as tenable in our current sociopolitical moment despite their different approaches to prevention?

One response to this question involves an argument about audience. Indeed, it might be that consent discourse and fighting strategies can both exist as viable prevention approaches at this given moment simply because they are taken up by different mobilizers and geared towards different audiences. Consent

discourse, for example, is commonly circulated/repeated/articulated in cultural

productions created by large organizations, and often addresses mainstream

audiences: large-scale political campaigns spearheaded by governments (i.e.

birdsandthebees.ca), celebrity-endorsed campaigns and productions (i.e.

nomore.org), and mainstream (Hollywood or primetime) media (i.e. *Law and

Order SVU*).[1] Alternatively, fighting strategies are most commonly mobilized by

organizations and in spaces informed by a critical feminist sensibility: rape crisis

centers (i.e. R.A.D. [rape aggression defense] courses), feminist recovery retreats

(i.e. sunlightretreats.org), and fringe cultural productions (i.e. *American Mary*

[2012]). [2] One might thus posit that these prevention approaches can be so

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[1]"Nomore.org" is an international coalition of non-profits, corporations, government agencies, media, schools, and individuals dedicated to ending domestic and sexualized violence. To accomplish this, "Nomore.org" produces cultural materials that aim to alter attitudes surrounding sexualized violence. Of interest here is the celebrity PSA campaign that aims to challenge myths surrounding consent. For more information visit: https://nomore.org/campaigns/public-service-announcements/

The Birds and the Bees" is a sexualized violence prevention campaign funded by the Nova Scotia provincial government geared towards youths ages 14-20. Consent features prominently in the various scenarios presented in posters and online videos featuring cartoon characters (animals and insects) involved in challenging sexual situations. For more information visit: https://breakthesilencens.ca/awareness-campaign

The Emmy-winning, 19-season long primetime American television series *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* addresses semi-fictional instances of sexualized violence through representations of victims' and perpetrators' dealings with Manhattan law enforcement. Many recent episodes have explicitly centered on questions of consent in determining if sexualized violence has (or has not) occurred. For example, in episode 12 of season 17 titled "A Misunderstanding" detectives investigate a teenage girl's sexual assault complaint, concentrating heavily upon her understanding and ability to consent. For more information see: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0203259/

[2] Sunlight Retreats is a for-profit organization that holds various workshops for sexualized violence survivors to encourage 'healing.' Currently, the retreats are mostly offered in the Western United States (San Diego CA, Washington D.C.). Importantly, one of the workshops offered for San Diego participants is offering self-defense training under its "Sessions for Strength" workshop. For more information see: https://www.sunlightretreats.org/

R.A.D. – short for Rape Aggression Defense – is a course or system that specifically aims to teach 'women' how to fend off unwanted (sexualized) contact from other persons. Developed by a former police officer in the United States, the program is frequently employed at university and college campuses across North America. For a Canadian example, see the following page of University of Ottawa's "Protection Services": https://www.uottawa.ca/protection/en/self-defense-course-rad

different, but also be regarded as 'viable' or 'effective' prevention approaches, because they circulate in different spheres and appeal to different persons through their respective theories regarding sexualized violence and its prevention.

The question of who is taking up these prevention approaches and in what contexts is thus significant not only in the sense that it reveals differences in these approaches' relationships to power (who is mobilizing these approaches and how), but also because of the ways these questions allow us to better understand when and why consent discourse and fighting strategies are (or are not) mobilized. However, I am not entirely convinced that considering scope and audience is the *only* avenue for understanding why both these approaches circulate at our current moment. Indeed, it seems to me that there is something important about the current neoliberal political climate through which these strategies are created and mobilized that impacts how these sexualized violence prevention approaches are received and employed.

Importantly, several scholars have taken up the question of the link between sexualized violence and neoliberalism as it pertains to the institutionalization of rape crisis centres (Bumiller 2008; Newman 2013), legal reforms (Fischel 2016; Gotell 2007, 2008, 2012; Hall 2004; Stringer 2013), the

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American Mary (2012) is an American rape-revenge film produced and directed by the Canadian Soska sisters, Jen and Sylvia. Telling the story of Mary, a medical student studying to be a surgeon, the film depicts her struggle to maintain her career after being drugged and sexually assaulted by her professor. For further information see: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1959332/
As I will discuss in chapter two, because fighting strategies work from the idea that social inequalities – most often patriarchy - perpetuate the existence of sexualized violence, it is probable that productions that mobilize this approach appeal to an audience that is more critical of the sociopolitical status quo.

framing of experience (survivor versus victim discourses) (Gilmore 2017; Hall 2004), representations of sexualized violence (Bumiller 2008; Henry 2014; Ress and White 2016; Stringer 2013), and recovery narratives or discourses (Healicon 2016). In different ways, these works usefully demonstrate that sexualized violence and neoliberalism are in conversation with one another: it is not just that neoliberalism's governing rationality affects the material happenings of and discourses surrounding sexualized violence, but also that sexualized violence as both a violent happening and (in many cases) a sociocultural discourse (i.e. rape culture) also reiterates or extends neoliberalism as a condition of possibility regarding citizenly interrelations.

However, with the exception of Rachel Hall's work on the responsibilization of would-be victims of sexualized violence prevention under neoliberalism, very few studies that take up the intersection between neoliberalism and sexualized violence address the issue of *prevention* in a direct or overt manner. Part of the work of this dissertation is to demonstrate that such connections between sexualized violence prevention and neoliberalism are not only multiple, but incredibly relevant for understanding our prevailing governing rationality and our approaches to prevention. For example, we can think about how sexualized violence prevention's future orientation makes it all the more responsive to neoliberalism's self-centered futurism via the relegation of interrelations as competitive. In another related sense, there is a perceptible link between the mechanisms of neoliberal rationality (i.e. responsibilization, individualization, inequality) and current mobilizations of sexualized violence prevention approaches that deserves our attention. In the following chapters, I

take up these two concerns regarding neoliberalism and sexualized violence prevention via close readings of cultural productions that mobilize consent discourse and fighting strategies. However, in *this* chapter, I approach sexualized violence prevention and its connection with neoliberalism a bit differently, thinking not as much about how consent discourse and fighting strategies are mobilized (i.e. material and cultural productions) but more about the theoretical underpinnings of these prevention approaches. More specifically, I am interested in how a particular analysis of neoliberalism, one attuned to the way it functions as a governing rationality through the management of affect, might work to illuminate some similarities between the two prevention approaches.

Significantly, much important work has already been conducted regarding the affective dimensions of neoliberalism. Following scholars who trace the connection between citizenship and affect more generally (Berlant 2004; Di Gregoria and Merolli 2016; Hung 2010; Johnson 2008; Mookerjee 2005; Zembylas 2013), scholars working on neoliberalism, such as Anne-Marie Fortier (2010; 2016) and Ben Anderson (2016), have posited the import of affects, emotions, and feelings to the creation and maintenance of neoliberalism as a normative field of reason. As Anderson explains, "collective affects are part of the conditions of formation for particular neoliberalisms and therefore understanding the affective life of neoliberalism is critical to explaining how it emerges, forms and changes" (2016, 734). Useful in their identification of recurring affectivities under neoliberalism, such studies demonstrate that neoliberalism operates through a kind of emotional management.

Importantly, such recognition of the import of affect to neoliberalism coincides with other scholars' interest in affect, emotion, and feeling – terms I will unpack and define in what follows – in relation to sexualized violence. Whether it be first-person disclosures of academics working on sexualized violence (Ahmed 2017; Alcoff 2018; Bourke 2007; Brison 2003; Cahill 2001; Estrich 1987; Warshaw 1988), close readings of the affective resonances tied to the symbolics of representing sexualized violence (Gilmore 2017; Horeck 2004; Oliver 2016; Sielke 2002), or a consideration of the emotional difficulties of working closely with sexualized violence as a sociopolitical problem (or with persons who have experienced sexualized violence) (Campbell 2003; Martin 2005; Renzetti & Lee 1993; Ullman 2014), scholars and activists are very attuned to the specific emotional elements of working on sexualized violence. However, although affect, emotion, and feelings are often discussed in work on sexualized violence, they are rarely mentioned in work on sexualized violence prevention.\ I have thus wondered: what is the role of affect, emotion, and/or feeling in theorizing sexualized violence prevention? If neoliberalism is an economic rationale effecting all aspects of life, and if one important way neoliberalism accomplishes this economization is through the management of affect, what might a study of affect within sexualized violence prevention literature tell us about sexualized violence prevention's imbrication with neoliberal ideology?

In this chapter I respond to such questions by arguing that the affective underpinnings and goals of consent discourse and fighting strategies – familiarity and fear, respectively – make these sexualized violence prevention approaches problematically amenable to what I am calling 'neoliberal affective economies:'

kinds of affects that serve the 'market rationale' that neoliberalism presents as a dominant mode of rationality.[3] Through an investigation of academic works that theorize consent discourse and fighting strategies, I explore the import of affects, emotions, and feelings to neoliberal rationality, and consider how these same affects, emotions, and feelings mediate theoretical conceptualizations of consent discourse and fighting strategies. This chapter thus works to accomplish two interrelated goals. In one sense, an analysis of the affective elements of consent discourse, fighting strategies, and neoliberalism provides an explanation about how these two seemingly divergent approaches to sexualized violence prevention both seem viable despite their conceptual differences. However, from this analysis and argument, this chapter also demonstrates how sexualized violence prevention approaches can potentially operate counterproductively when speaking these affective languages of neoliberal ideology. Because the general aims of neoliberalism are largely antithetical to the elimination of sexualized violence (an emphasis on equality over and above equity, a directive to manage rather than resolve 'problems'), such prevention approaches' collusion with neoliberal affective economies potentially limits their preventative efficacy. Following Clare Hemmings' work on feminist storytelling, this chapter ultimately argues that if we are not attentive to the ways governing modes of rationality – the terms that structure how we think and act – impact our conceptualizations of sexualized

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[3] Following Sara Ahmed's work on 'affective economies' (2004), the term 'neoliberal affective economy' suggests that far from being 'in' objects or subjects, (neoliberal) affects circulate between points, structuring different kinds of interrelations in a way that serves an economic rationality.

violence prevention, we might end up unintentionally (re)producing the conditions through which sexualized violence continues to exist.

To make these arguments, in the first section of this chapter I briefly outline the understanding of affect that informs the chapter as a whole. Drawing on the work of Teresa Brennan, Ann Cvetkovich, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Sara Ahmed, I posit a fluid definition of affect that stresses the import of considering feeling as both an individual and social experience. In the second section, I begin my analysis of the affective dimensions of consent discourse and fighting approaches, demonstrating that there are indeed affects that function hegemonically within theorizations of each sexualized violence approach: fear and familiarity. Drawing on Engin Isin's work on neoliberal affective citizens, in section three I then argue that although operating on different ends of an affective spectrum, both fear and familiarity are imbricated in a similar neoliberal affective economy. Finally, the last section of this chapter explores why these sexualized violence prevention approaches' connection to neoliberal affective economies matters. Specifically, I suggest that the amenability of consent discourse and fighting strategies to neoliberal affective economies might actually limit the preventative efficacy of these approaches. Arguing that consent discourse's familiarity and fighting strategies' fearsomeness might enable, if not potentially inadvertently incite, sexualized violence, I conclude that what might allow these sexualized violence prevention approaches to enjoy popularity in this given moment – namely, how they work on and with dominant neoliberal affective economies – might also cause these strategies to operate in a manner

counterproductive to their prevention aims, potentially perpetuating rather than preventing sexualized violence.

At stake in this analysis is, therefore, an understanding of how governing modes of rationality – the terms that structure how we think and act – can *affectively* impact the efficacy of our sexualized violence prevention approaches. More than just an understanding of their hegemony within the field of sexualized violence prevention, then, this comparative analysis can work to improve these sexualized violence prevention approaches by helping us to acknowledge the ways that the affective elements of ideologies of governance – in this case, neoliberalism – limit the ways we imagine sexualized violence prevention. As Bronwyn Davies argues in her analysis of neoliberal regimes, persons interested in and attuned to the effects of neoliberalism on various aspects of individual and sociocultural consciousness "need to understand how this major shift in culture occurred, what it does to us, and how to crack it apart" (2005, 4). In this chapter, I concentrate on elucidating an aspect of the 'what' of 'what neoliberalism does' to anti-sexualized violence efforts, laying the necessary groundwork to 'crack apart' the relationship between neoliberalism and sexualized violence prevention in later chapters.

Affect, Feeling, Emotion

In her chapter "An Affective Turn?: Reimagining the Subject of Feminist Theory," Anu Koivunen describes a central challenge of working on affects, emotions, and feelings in a contemporary academic context:

> The concepts themselves are the battlefield. On one hand, the many, often contradictory definitions and uses of these key concepts [affect, feeling, emotion] witness the transdisciplinarity of the research field and the various disciplinary traditions involved. On the other hand, the choice of concept – is one to use affect, emotion, feeling, and in what sense? – is a question of negotiating and positioning oneself in relation to the key conceptual sets of cultural analysis. (2010, 10)

Here, Koivunen suggests that part of the challenge of working with or on 'affect,' 'emotion,' and/or 'feeling' is that the terms themselves are highly contested; and, like Koivunen, I struggle with various competing definitions and mobilizations of the terms 'affect,' 'emotion,' and 'feeling.' For example, I am often leery of theories – frequently advanced by those who adhere to Deleuzian conceptions of affect – that rest too heavily on the notion of affect as autonomic (occurring before cognition). Although I believe there is merit in the suggestion that some of what we 'feel' is of the pre- or unconscious realm, it is also important to continually consider how varying social, cultural, and political forces imprint upon our unconscious. Thus, even though I am reluctant to take a firm stance regarding my definition of the words 'affect,' 'emotion,' and 'feeling' – to enter the 'battlefield' that Koivunen describes – I believe that it is necessary to provide an explanation for how I imagine such terms functioning in this chapter.

The understandings of the words 'affect,' 'emotion,' and 'feeling' I employ are influenced by the works of Teresea Brennan, Sara Ahmed, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Ann Cvetkovich. Although these theorists approach the issue of affect/emotion/feeling differently – perhaps due to their varying disciplinary

specialties – all of them argue for a fluid understanding of these terms. For example, Fortier notes, "I conceive of affect and emotions as irreducibly entangled; as Sara Ahmed puts it (2014, 208), '[e]motions ... involve bodily processes of affecting and being affected'" (2010, 1038-9). Importantly, Cvetkovich takes a similar stance regarding the separation of such terms, stating that "I tend to use *affect* in a generic sense, rather than in the more specific Deleuzian sense, as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings" (2015, 4 – emphasis original). And finally, Brennan argues, "there is no reason to challenge the idea that emotions are basically synonymous with affects (if more an evidently physiological subset), or that moods and sentiments are subsets referring to longer-lasting affective constellations" (2004, 5-6).

In suggesting that we employ the term affect 'generically' or interchangeably with other words like 'emotion' and 'feeling,' Fortier, Ahmed, Cvetkovich, and Brennan stress the relationality of these concepts. Such arguments are significant because in scholarly literature on 'affect,' 'emotion,' and 'feeling,' the terms can and have been defined individually. For example, in his review of the work of Brian Massumi, Eric Shouse defines feeling as "a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled," emotion as "the projection/display of a feeling," and affect as "a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential" (2005). Thus, although we might be able to talk about affect, emotion, and feeling as separate but related phenomena, Fortier, Ahmed, Cvetokovich and Brennan question whether we *should* talk about them separately in all contexts. Concerned

with the ways in which definitions of affect, emotion, and feeling can work to reinforce, or perhaps rearrange, a problematic Cartesian mind-body dualism which posits the import of reason over affect (or, in the most recent turn, affect over reason), these scholars choose to read affect, emotion, and feeling as always already working together to inform how we experience the world. As Fortier best states, our experiences are "*at once* deeply felt and embodied *and* social and public" (2016, 1039 – emphasis original). In this sense, to speak of affect as a category that encompasses emotion or feeling, or as a term that can be used interchangeably with emotion and feeling, is to remind us of the messiness of thinking about the individual and social, the material and the immaterial, the personal and the political; it is a way of signalling our complex, and sometimes inexplicable, ways of being in the world.

Following such theories, then, I will use the terms 'affect,' 'emotion,' and 'feeling' interchangeably in order to suggest that our experiences are not just somatic or sensory, or cognitive or constructed, but all these things (sometimes simultaneously). Like Cvetkovich in her work on public feelings, I thus want to suggest that "terms such as *affects, emotion,* and *feeling* are more like keywords, points of departure for discussion rather than definition" (2003, 5 – emphasis original). Although at moments I will discuss the quality and particularity of certain affects, feelings, and emotions, I am therefore less interested in investigating specific affects towards a definitional theory, and more interested in thinking about how certain feelings manifest in sexualized violence prevention theories, and with what effects. Following Cvetkovich, then, as my point of departure, I ask: how do fighting strategies and consent discourse 'feel'?

Fear in Fighting Strategies and Familiarity in Consent Discourse

Fear and Fighting Strategies

Beginning with fighting strategies, this specific sexualized violence prevention approach suggests that sexualized violence is caused by gendered discourses where women are regarded as always already vulnerable to experiencing, and men as always already capable of perpetrating, sexualized violence. Unlike consent approaches, which, from the perspective of fighting strategy theorists like Sharon Marcus, merely attempt to "*persuade men* not to rape," fighting strategies take an assertive approach to prevention (1992, 388 - emphasis original). Rather than seeking the cooperation of would-be perpetrators (men) in an effort to end sexualized violence, fighting strategy theorists propose that persons vulnerable to sexualized violence (women) must fight sexualized violence themselves.[4] That is, in order to reclaim their sociocultural and embodied power towards the goal of making sexualized violence no longer a possibility, vulnerable persons must fight sexualized violence on a symbolic level in order to create a material impact.

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[4] It is worth mentioning that in much of the literature discussed in this section that theorizes fighting strategies, other kinds of factors – such as race, class, ability, sexuality, and gender-fluidity – are subordinated to the import of gender oppression in the fight to end sexualized violence. Although theorists such as Marcus and Gavey do in fact discuss issues such as race, age, and context as they pertain to sexualized violence, they are often side-notes to their broader gender-based analysis of the problem of sexualized violence. As we shall see in chapter three, the primacy of gender oppression to these theories poses some particular problems for people that also experience gender oppression as intersecting with other kinds of oppression, such as that caused by settler-colonialism.

Fighting strategies thus firmly locate the persistence of sexualized violence in the sustentation of what Nicola Gavey calls the "cultural scaffolding of rape" (2009, 97). For theorists like Marcus and Gavey who adhere to this poststructuralist framework, it is not so much that men can physically commit acts of sexualized violence that is the problem, but that we live in a culture that consistently (re)creates the possibility of men raping and women as rapeable that allows the perpetuation of sexualized violence. As Marcus explains:

> Rape exists because our experience and deployment of our bodies is the effect of interpretations, representations, and fantasies which often position us [women-identifying people] in ways amenable to the realization of the rape script: as paralyzed, as incapable of physical violence, as *fearful*. (1992, 400 – emphasis mine)

For Marcus, then, the starting and end-point for theories regarding fighting approaches to sexualized violence prevention is a recognition that women are not *inherently* fearful of sexualized violence but are often made to *feel* fearful through recurring representative tropes. Specifically, scholars like Gavey and Marcus suggest that there is a kind of circularity within 'rape scripts' where fear of sexualized violence works to restrict women's bodily comportment (i.e. not going out at night), and women's restricted bodily comportment (i.e. their 'feminine' passivity, their physical and emotional 'fragility') can contribute to a fear of sexualized violence – as well as its perpetuation. For such scholars, then, the question of whether women's fear of sexualized violence is justifiable (sexualized violence is a real and material threat) is less important than the idea that this fear creates, and is created by, patriarchal ideologies that subordinate women.

Therefore, sexualized violence – although a material phenomenon – is largely perpetuated by immaterial discourses that position women as weak and fearful, and men as assertive and fearless. In other words, the continuance of sexualized violence is, in large part, caused by the (re)production of women's fear of sexualized violence.

For fighting proponents, then, in order to no longer be subjects of fear and/or 'objects' of violence, women must become subjects of violence and create new subjects of fear. To accomplish this transition, there are two different but related strategies that mobilize the feeling of fear towards the goal of prevention. In the first instance, proponents of the fighting strategy propose a shift in the "gendered grammar of violence" through altering the symbolic economy of fear (Marcus 1992, 400). Not necessarily advocating a kind of material violence (or threat of violence) directly, these kinds of fighting strategies work to disseminate what J. Halberstam terms "an imagined violence" occurring on the level of representation. Here, representations of women-identifying people 'fighting' their abusers work to counter dominant discourses and stereotypes regarding who enacts and who experiences various kinds of violence (1993, 187). One such way this shift is accomplished is through cultural representations such as those where potential victims are portrayed as fighting or killing those responsible for committing sexualized violence against them, as in a variety of rape-revenge films such as *I Spit on Your Grave* (2010), *Ms. 45* (1981), *Teeth* (2007), *The Woman* (2011) and *American Mary* (2012). Although not all such cultural productions are created for the purpose of preventing sexualized violence, the influx of representations of women-identifying people harming their abusers might function to alter the

cultural imagination by creating the possibility that persons who harm women-identifying subjects could themselves be harmed.[5] Or, alternatively, in portraying these women-identifying retaliators as representing anomalous embodiment (i.e. engaging in gruesome acts of violence atypical of cultural notions of appropriate feminine comportment) such filmic representations might contribute to the creation of a fear that is less about potential retaliation, and more about creating alternative cultural scripts (of women-identifying avengers) which deviate from neoliberal discourses of gendered and ability-centered normalcy.[6] Through the production of cultural representations of fighting sexualized violence, scholars like Marcus argue that "we can begin to imagine the female body as a subject of change, as a potential object of *fear* and agent of violence" (1992, 400 – emphasis mine). Such tactics of fighting sexualized violence therefore work to re-write the "gendered grammar of violence," where potential victims are represented as subjects to be feared rather than fearful subjects, or subjects of violence rather than objects of violence (1992, 400).

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[5] For some, the discussion of the 'rape-revenge' narrative might seem obscure, given the way it is commonly linked with amateur horror films. However, as film theorists Jacinda Read and Claire Henry acknowledge, rape revenge can be considered as not just a genre of horror but a kind of narrative structure that appears in a wide variety of cinematic genres (action, thriller, western, drama) and also literary cultural productions (Henry 2014, 1-2; Read 2000, 6-8). Understood in this broad sense, rape-revenge is a term that describes the narrative structure of a cultural production where sexualized violence is integral, rather than incidental, to the narrative progression of the work in question. As per the cultural examples I cite, this definition of rape-revenge encompasses a broad range of popular (i.e. mass-screened) and niche visual works.
[6] In her work on posthumanism and monstrous embodiment, Margrit Shildrick discusses how within parts of Western (Canadian, American, and Western European) cultures, women-identifying subjects are frequently figured as "the non-subject other, the excluded, the embodied, the monstrous" (1996, 1). According to Shildrick, these monstrous 'feminine' figures appear frequently as both a means to challenge, and define through opposition, "the rational, autonomous, masculine subject" (1996, 8). It is quite possible, then, that for some viewers, the fearsomeness of women-identifying retaliators is about how the attainment of an invulnerable human self so central to conceptions of neoliberalism is achievable (largely) through the (re)production of the monstrous 'feminine.'

However, the symbolic effects of fighting strategies' attempts to alter the gendered grammar of violence can also be bolstered through work completed on a more material level. Specifically, several theorists cite the material and symbolic benefits of self-defence training in altering the symbolic economy of fear (Cahill 2001; Gavey 2009; Marcus 1992; McCaughey 1997; Rentschler 1999). In the self-defence approach to sexualized violence prevention, theorists posit that self-defence can not only alter the embodied relation between would-be victims and perpetrators but could also modify a broader sociopolitical symbolic economy that situates men as active, aggressive, and violent, and women as passive, weak, and peacekeeping. Here, theorists that support self-defence acknowledge its potential immediate and individual preventative function (i.e. individual women fight off rapists) and its more long-term and sociocultural function of providing women with the material tools to alter their immaterial signification as weak and vulnerable, potentially (re)situating women as aggressive/active subjects/citizens (Cahill 2001, 207; Gavey 2009, 115; Marcus 1992, 400). As Ann Cahill asserts, for example, "self-defence training challenges the discourses of a rape culture by giving would-be rapists good reason to *fear* women" (2001, 204 – emphasis mine). Indeed, the possibility of women defending themselves from would-be attacks holds the potential of altering a material and symbolic economy of violence whereby women become subjects in, rather than object of, violence. It is thus the fear of women's retaliation, posited by the threat of women's ability to physically halt an attack, that lies at the center of self-defence as a prevention approach.

From such an analysis, I propose we might understand fear as both the impetus for and preventative goal of fighting strategies. Recognizing that women's fear of sexualized violence is part of a patriarchal ideology designed to keep women in marginalized positions, fighting strategy proponents suggest that women's (constructed) fear of sexualized violence might be (re)oriented in order to curtail the threat of such violence from men. Put differently, for fighting strategy proponents, if the construction of women as fearful of sexualized violence has, in part, allowed sexualized violence to occur by rendering women as inevitably rapeable and women's defences as ineffectual, then it should hold that a similar attempt to elicit fear in would-be perpetrators could potentially dissuade them from engaging in sexualized violence. As Marcus best states, "to construct a society in which *we would know no fear*, we may first have to *frighten* rape culture to death" (1992, 400-1 – emphasis mine). Fighting strategies are thus entangled in the affective politics of fear: they emanate from the recognition of women's constructed position as subjects of fear and attempt to alter such positionality (and end sexualized violence) by redirecting such fear towards would-be attackers.

With this understanding of fighting strategies as intrinsically bound to fear, we might then ask: does consent discourse also have a kind of affective underpinning that organizes it as a sexualized violence prevention approach? Although I will answer such a question in the affirmative, it is important to note that a reading of consent discourse through the lens of affect is decidedly more complicated than the aforementioned reading of the affective underpinning of fighting strategies. In the first instance, there are actually few contemporary

feminist theoretical texts that view consent discourse and its current hegemony in sexualized violence prevention efforts as practical or effective.[7] I am thus reading the affective undercurrents of consent discourse not from texts that predominately advocate for the effectiveness of consent discourse as a sexualized violence prevention strategy (as I did above with fighting strategies), but rather I am engaging with scholars who, like me, are concerned with consent's hegemonic status within Western prevention efforts, and are dubious of its efficacy as a stand-alone prevention technique.

A second related factor that makes a reading of consent discourse's affective modalities challenging is that the affect I regard as dominant in consent discourse – familiarity – is not actually stated explicitly in the analysed texts as fear is in relation to fighting strategies. Not only am I basing my arguments regarding consent discourse based upon texts that are leery of consent's preventative efficacy, I am also doing the work to prove that there is a particular affective current in consent discourse, as opposed to simply demonstrating that such currents are prevalent within prevention theories. Although I believe this difference between my uses of primary texts to talk about sexualized violence prevention strategies and affect is important to acknowledge – indeed, it might say something important about the trend in critical feminist work on sexualized violence that fighting approaches are frequently heralded while consent discourse is maligned– I do not believe, however, that this difference discounts the import

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[7] Some exceptions here would be works that advocate the use of consent discourse as an effective sexualized violence prevention approach, albeit with some significant caveats. See, for example Plaxton 2015 and Cowan 2007 for further reading.

of the similarities I draw between the affective thrusts behind these two

sexualized violence approaches in later sections of this chapter.

Familiarity in Consent Discourse

      That said, I want to start with a discussion of Ahmed's work on diversity

documents to understand how I have come to believe that familiarity underpins

consent discourse. In her work on institutionalized racism in Western universities,

Ahmed analyzes documents produced by the university designed to decrease (or

ideally, eliminate) different kinds of racialized oppressions on university

campuses. According to Ahmed, however, such 'diversity documents' are not

only insufficient at addressing institutionalized racism, but are, in fact, potentially

counterproductive to anti-racist aims. In terms of diversity documents themselves,

Ahmed argues that the actual creation (the writing) of diversity documents to

meet government or institutional standards can distract one from engaging deeply

with the issue of racism. As Ahmed describes, quoting an interviewee:

> 'You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing.' The
>
> implication of this description is that while doing the document is doing
>
> something, it is also a way of not doing something: you do the document
>
> *rather than* 'doing the doing,' where this other sense of doing would
>
> require doing something more than the document. (2012, 86)

For Ahmed, part of the problem of diversity documents is that the process of

'doing the document' becomes what it means to 'do' diversity work. Here, to

engage in diversity work is more about meeting institutional guidelines than an in-

depth questioning of what is needed in particular contexts to promote diversity.

According to Ahmed, however, it is not just that creating diversity documents can take time away from more meaningful conversations about institutional racism. Indeed, diversity documents can create other problems once they are finished. As Ahmed argues, "the existence of the [diversity] document is taken as evidence that the institutional world it documents (racism, inequality, injustice) has been overcome. The creation of equality systems can thus conceal the inequalities that make such systems in the first place" (2012, 100). For Ahmed, then, diversity documents might become valuable not in terms of their content, but for the way they symbolize the 'benevolent' intentions of a university over and above more substantive anti-racist actions and discussions. To signal these covert limitations of diversity documents, Ahmed labels them 'friendly documents:'

> Friendly documents might accumulate value through their circulation, but that circulation might depend on not challenging anything. They can communicate (in the sense of being sent out, and even in the sense of reaching their destination) because as a form of communication they have been emptied out of any difficult content. If circulatability relies on friendliness, then documents might even be passed around *more* when they are doing *less*. More challenging documents are more likely to get stuck. (2012, 95-6 – emphasis original)

For Ahmed, friendliness is a word that describes the nature or quality of the relationship between two nodal points in a broader affective economy as comfortable, common, and/or of ease – *familiar*. Used to analyze the phenomenon of diversity documents, friendliness connotes a relationship between the

document writer and the document that is 'comfortable' or 'easy' – like being with a friend – because in 'doing' such a document, one circumvents the complexity of doing more challenging diversity work (i.e. questioning the political function of diversity agendas for universities). For Ahmed, precisely because such documents side-step the complexity of diversity work, they circulate easily, and often frequently. The writing of the diversity document thus becomes 'doing' diversity work, and its frequent circulation – because of its lack of complexity – becomes a sign of the document's effectiveness. The friendliness surrounding a diversity document's creation and circulation thus becomes what the document or idea 'does': produce positive feelings through an acknowledgement that a sociopolitical issue is being addressed, in place of critically thinking or actually addressing an idea or issue.

With such an understanding of Ahmed's theorizations regarding diversity documents, I now want to think about how these ideas can be mobilized to further understand the affective underpinnings of consent discourse. At its most basic, consent discourse is described as working 'preventatively' by defining what sexualized violence is, and what it is not. As Joseph Fischel explains, consent "names a state of affairs (someone either has or has not consented) that has moral significance: the absence and presence of consent cleanly divides sexual harm from freedom" (2016, 10 – emphasis original). Inherent to most conceptions of sexual consent – what I am calling 'consent discourse' – is an assumption that communication between intimate partners is an important, if not the most important, aspect of ethical (legal [and in some cases, thus 'moral']) sexual relations. As a sexualized violence prevention approach, then, consent works from the assumption that if persons were to know that

they need to attain consent from potential sexual partners, and that attaining consent is 'the law' (moralistic/sociocultural and political), they would not engage in sexualized violence (engaging in sexual acts or behaviours despite a person's/partner's non-consent).

However, much work on consent demonstrates that the phenomenon, at least on its own, is insufficient at preventing sexualized violence. For example, a prominent critique of consent approaches is that consent treats sexualized violence as a mere problem of miscommunication between potentially intimate partners. However, as scholars such as Sarah Walker argue:

> …adequate prevention programs must go beyond basic sex education and communication training … [sexualized violence] is not a matter of *miscommunication* about sexual desires. Instead, this phenomenon relates to the 'taken for granted' assumptions about sexuality and relationships. (1997, 163 – emphasis mine)

Relatedly, Patricia Donat and Barrie Bondurant posit that, "discussions of miscommunication and acquaintance rape often imply that, if a woman is clear enough in refusing sex, the man will not force her. The research, however, does not support the assumption that women are *unclear in their communications* of nonconsent" (1999, 701 – emphasis mine). And more recently, Melanie Beres (2004; 2007; 2010; 2014) has written extensively on the pitfalls of the theory of miscommunication in consent discourse, most poignantly arguing that her research:

> demonstrates that both men and women are literate in reading their partner's willingness to participate in sexual activity, even under

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circumstances where partners do not know each other well. Thus, I

recommend that date rape prevention programmes teach individuals to

expect partners to be literate in ways of communicating willingness to

have sex and that they themselves are equipped to read this form of

communication. Programmes based on miscommunication theory should

reconsider this emphasis in light of accumulating evidence to the contrary.

(2010, 12)

What such studies tell us, then, is that although in some cases miscommunications

and misunderstandings might be *a part* of the reason why sexualized violence

occurs, sexualized violence as a sociopolitical issue cannot be simply attributable

to poor communication between potentially intimate parties. If, then, at its core,

consent discourse bears out the idea that an incitement to communicate with

intimate partners will prevent sexualized violence, why does consent continue to

be employed as a popular prevention approach in spite of such critiques?

I believe consent discourse continues to be employed with such frequency

because it works as what Ahmed terms a 'friendly' discourse, bearing out of and

working to produce feelings of familiarity. Recalling the discussion of consent

discourse in the introduction to this dissertation, it is crucial to remember that

consent discourse has its roots in a classical liberal idea(l) of contract. In liberal

theorizations of political community, contract was – and often still is – posited as

the most egalitarian means of facilitating relations between subjects within a

sociopolitical community (and between a sociopolitical community and its

subjects – social contract theory). However, in many different ways, scholars have

proven the liberal idea(l) of contract to be a fallacy. We can think, for example, of how

Shane Phelan's work on sexual minorities (2001), Charles Mills' work on the racial contract (1997), Robert Nichols' work on the "settler contract' (2013), and Pateman's work on the sexual contract (1989) demonstrate how the idea of contract has functioned to uphold, rather than diminish, relations of inequality within a sociopolitical community. Indeed, although it might frequently be posited as the most egalitarian means of being together – "the paradigm of free agreement," as Pateman terms it – contract is just that: a particular *method* for facilitating exchange (1989, 6). Consent discourse tells us nothing about the context in which such contracts should be made (other than that individuals entering into contracts should be 'equal') and says nothing of the kinds of contracts that can (or perhaps ought not to) be made.[8] Thus, we can think of the way consent discourse draws upon contract – a normative, widely recognizable, relational framework – to structure its solution to sexualized violence as a source of familiarity. In using a familiar means of dealing with sociopolitical ills – contract – to remedy sexualized violence framed as a personal problem, consent discourse arises from a desire for the positive feelings of familiarity: it treats a serious community issue (sexualized violence) as one problem (among many) that can be easily resolved using methods we often already practice.

Pushing this argument a bit further, however, I maintain that it is not just that consent discourse is familiar insofar as it relies on a severely limited, but widely

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[8] As Pateman best states, "if two individuals make a contract, the fact that the contract has been made is sufficient to show that the exchange must be equal" (1989, 57). That a particular 'individual' in question might be contracting with another subject that holds more power due to other sociopolitical relations and ideologies (i.e. race, class, gender, citizenship-status), or that the 'individual' may not have other agreeable options other than consent, are unimportant; in theories of contract, it is only significant that an individual has a choice, and that this choice is made freely, without force or (overt) coercion.

recognizable, framework for addressing inter-subject conflicts to prevent sexualized violence (contract), but that consent discourse also aims to produce the same sort of easy and comfortable feelings as part of the solution to the problem of sexualized violence. Specifically, consent discourse aims to incite feelings of familiarity in its response to sexualized violence – the 'feeling' that sexualized violence can be resolved, and resolved relatively easily – by subordinating a recognition of how structures of oppression function to perpetuate sexualized violence to the idea that sexualized violence occurs because of problems of communication between 'autonomous individuals.' As Linda Martín Alcoff so poignantly acknowledges:

> There is *no easy way* to establish the dividing line between harmful and harmless sex. Violence is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion of demarcation: many rapes evolve from non-violent forms of manipulation and coercion, and some sex includes violence the participants enjoy. Relying on consent is the main way many argue we should normatively distinguish between good and bad sexual practices, but consent is always embedded within structures that pose challenges for low-status groups of all sorts. (2018, 77 – emphasis mine)

As Alcoff begins to suggest here, all too often discussions or mentions of consent in sexualized violence prevention approaches take the place of more robust discussions regarding sexual ethics. For example, how do the identities of the contracting parties, the places and times in which they make a contract, and the mental states of the parties involved affect the decision to consent, and/or the quality of consent? Although such questions might be undoubtedly part of more 'informed' uses/investigations of consent discourse, the most important aspect of consent discourse is the act of consent itself

rather than the conditions which structure how and if consent is given. Much like how the writing of diversity documents becomes the "doing" of diversity work, consent discourse foregrounds one act (i.e. an intimate contract to which one may or may not consent) at the expense of other acts that might be decidedly more difficult to confront (i.e. more substantial conversations regarding sexual wishes and desires). Teaching about the import of and attaining consent thus becomes the 'doing' of prevention work under consent discourse.

Like the diversity documents Ahmed discusses, consent discourse thus circulates broadly, reaching a large audience, but perhaps circulates so widely precisely because it draws on a form of inter-subject conflict resolution – contract – that has "been emptied out of any difficult content" regarding the context and kind of our inter-subject relations (2012, 96). Consent discourse therefore arises out of familiarity insofar as it is easier to question the ways individual subjects interact with each other than to question how the governing rationalities and frameworks of our communities contribute to the continuation of sexualized violence. Furthermore, consent discourse aims to produce feelings of familiarity as a preventative goal by suggesting that sexualized violence is a product of poor communications that can be resolved by quick and simple conversations (contract). Consent discourse is thus a kind of response to sexualized violence that is familiar: it approaches sexualized violence as a non-unique problem (merely one sociopolitical issue amongst many) and aims to reproduce this kind of calm banality in its prevention approach of 'better communication.' Providing an overly simplified epistemological framework that glosses over the root problems of the issue it aims to address in favour of establishing an egalitarian means of discussing such a problem, consent discourse is in fact passed around more, even as it is doing

very little to address the problem of sexualized violence precisely because it renders sexualized violence – a highly complicated sociopolitical issue – something that *feels* knowable: consent is easy; it is comfortable; consent is *familiar*.

From this analysis, we can thus understand consent discourse and fighting strategies as predominately informed by different ideological conceptions of what sexualized violence 'is,' how to remedy it, and how these differences relate to each approach's varying affective undercurrents. In the case of fighting strategies, an understanding of relations within sociopolitical communities as fundamentally inequitable encourages an understanding of sexualized violence as one of many threats used to maintain patriarchal ideology. Because fear is such a[n unfortunately] successful tool in (re)marginalizing persons already disadvantaged by broader sociopolitical hierarchies, it is perhaps unsurprising that fear becomes the choice affect par excellence for fighting strategy theorists to employ to prevent sexualized violence. Alternately, in consent discourse, there is little – if any – consideration of the problems of our current sociopolitical structures; instead, consent discourse presents an adherence to the liberal idea(l) of contract as *the* means to keep our baser self-interested instincts at bay. Rehashing the familiar idea that sexualized violence – like so many other sociopolitical ills – is merely a problem of communication, consent discourse employs a 'familiar' (comfortable, easy, kind) understanding of sexualized violence and its resolution.

In making these arguments, however, I have undoubtedly only strengthened the seeming chasm between these two approaches rather than evidenced a potential connection. Not only different in the ways they conceive of, and thus work to prevent, sexualized violence, we can now perceive how consent

discourse and fighting strategies also vary in the ways they interact with feelings to try to increase the efficacy of their prevention approaches. In the next section, I therefore turn to an analysis of neoliberalism and affect as a means to investigate a possible connection between the affective economies that embroil these two approaches.

Neoliberal Affects: The Bionic and Neurotic Citizen

In his 2004 article "The Neurotic Citizen," Engin Isin makes an argument for understanding neoliberalism not just in terms of its projects (i.e. the withdrawal of the state from certain areas), but also in terms of the production of particular notions of the citizen: namely, what he labels the bionic and neurotic citizen (2004, 217). As Isin notes, traditionally the classical liberal and neoliberal subject has been regarded as "sufficient, calculating, responsible, autonomous, and unencumbered" (2004, 217). Terming such a rational subject the 'bionic' citizen, Isin argues that this figure of neoliberalism is not only intellectual, but affective. Refusing to separate experiences traditionally associated with the mind (i.e. rationality) with those of the body (feeling, emotion, affect), to speak of rationality as being associated with certain feelings is to speak to the full complexities of our experiences. Hence, when Isin states but does not expand upon the proposition that "…these rationalities [of the bionic citizen] would also include affects and emotions," I argue that he is encouraging us to understand rationality – and thus the figure of the bionic citizen – in terms of a kind of

thinking-feeling: rationality is not just something one 'does' with one's mind, but something that one also feels with one's body (2004, 22).

Importantly, however, the crux of Isin's arguments regarding the proliferation of neoliberalism through the creation of specific affective subjectivities lies in his assertion that the figure that has been traditionally conceived as central to neoliberalism – the bionic citizen – cannot contain all the ways neoliberalism interpellates subjects into conducting themselves according to a market-based rationale. Specifically, conceptions of the bionic citizen are insufficient for "account[ing] for the relationship between technologies of the self and technologies of power that approximate to the most recent social, medical, cultural and technological transformations of control societies" (Isin 2004, 223). Thus, the bionic citizen is also accompanied by another influential figure, "the neurotic subject" (2004, 217).[9] For Isin, the neurotic citizen denotes subjects who govern themselves predominately through affects that stand apart from discourses of rationality. More specifically, the neurotic citizen is one whose conduct arises from and responds to fears, anxieties, and insecurities that are addressed and managed by systems of governance, rather than remedied (2004, 217). As Isin

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[9] Importantly, Isin goes on to identify the figure of the neurotic citizen with a new understanding of a governing rationality, "neuroliberalism" (2004, 223). For Isin, the term neuroliberalism signifies a combination of neoliberal ideals informed by insights from the behavioral sciences. Although I can appreciate Isin's demonstration of the ways neoliberalism is transforming through the creation of the similar but distinct term, 'neuroliberalism,' I am not entirely convinced by his move to isolate some important affective dimensions of neoliberalism into a different category of governing rationality. Following scholars such as Fortier (2016) and Anderson (2016), I understand such a separation of some of the affective dimensions of neoliberalism from what is commonly understood as its more 'intellectual' (rational) dimensions as a reinforcement of the thinking-feeling binary that Isin himself tries to dismantle in his article. In this sense, I mobilize Isin's ideas of the neurotic citizen only insofar as I see them speaking to the way neoliberalism operates as a normative framework of reason.

best describes, "the neurotic citizen is incited to make social and cultural investments to eliminate various dangers by calibrating its conduct on the basis of its anxieties and insecurities rather than rationalities" (2004, 223). However, like the bionic citizen, the neurotic citizen is also thinking-feeling: neurosis is not just an 'unthinking' feeling, but a complex phenomenon that denotes an experience of the mind and the body.

For Isin, the bionic and neurotic citizen are not, however, dichotomous subjectivities that exist as "mutually exclusive" and "independent"; rather the bionic and neurotic subject exist in a "tension filled relationship," one that I believe is representative of the complex relationship between the self-interested and the self-sacrificing citizen (2004, 223). Similar to the way self-interest and self-sacrifice can be approached as separate idea(l)s of neoliberalism, but idea(l)s that exist in a bilateral, informative relationship, the bionic and neurotic citizen-subject can also be understood as affective subjectivities produced by neoliberalism, but ones that can be understood independently even as they exist together, within the same subject. Indeed, just as self-interest and self-sacrifice continue to form and inform the ideological basis of each other as governing qualities of the neoliberal 'human,' the bionic and neurotic citizens "produce each other" (2004, 232). One point, then, that Isin attempts to make through the identification and discussion of the bionic and neurotic citizen is that although these contemporary subjectivities appear to be at different ends of an affective continuum, they are affective subjects that are produced by and work to produce neoliberalism.

From Isin's complex figuration of the two kinds of citizen-subjects that are produced by and work to produce neoliberal forms of rationality, I want to propose that the familiarity of consent discourse corresponds to affective characteristics of Isin's 'bionic' citizen, while the fear imbued in fighting strategies parallels aspects of Isin's neurotic citizen. In terms of consent discourse, the resonances between this prevention approach and the bionic, rational citizen lie in their similar mobilization of rationality, responsibility, and risk-management. For example, in her critique of consent discourse, Lise Gotell writes that:

> … normative sexual interaction is reconceived [in consent discourse] as being like an economic transaction, and good sexual citizens are reconfigured to resemble *rational economic actors* assuming responsibility for their actions and the risks that they take. Tied to this decontextualized framing, the production of *risk-managing subjects* who diligently practise sexual safekeeping become privileged as a governmental technique for managing the once social problem of sexual violence. This method of governance relies on the production of self-regulating sexual subjects who govern themselves without the need for state control or repression. (2012, 366 – emphasis mine)

Here, Gotell demonstrates that rationality is key to the dissemination of consent discourse. Framing sexual interactions as something like an economic transaction, consent becomes the common-sensical means for potentially intimate sexual subjects to take responsibility for ensuring 'egalitarian' relations with others. It cannot be taken for granted, however, that consent – and more specifically,

contract – is often framed as the most logical means of facilitating relationships amongst 'free' individuals. As we saw in section one, contract does not actually create relations that are ethical, but only ensures that the method of achieving an agreement is – theoretically – ethical. Therefore, and following Isin, it is important to remember that that which is deemed rational does not come to be understood as such based on logical calculations alone (for if it were, we would be using contracts in much more limited senses today); rather, that which is deemed rational comes to be understood as such because some things *feel* rational.

Although there are definitely other possibilities for approaching the affective dimensions of 'rationality,' what I want to concentrate on here is how that which comes to be understood as 'rational' can become such because of feelings of familiarity. We can think, for example, about how that which is understood as 'common-sense' ('rational') becomes such because of previous experience that confirms that which is in question. In relation to consent discourse, the familiarity of this idea of contracting as the most egalitarian means of interacting with others is part and parcel of the neoliberal idea(l) of rationality imbued in the bionic citizen: it is not simply that something 'is' rational, but it also can *feel* rational insofar as it upholds already accepted (tried and true) notions of 'being together' – in this case, contract. As such, the feelings of familiarity out of which consent discourse emerges (its reliance on common-sense notions of contract as facilitating egalitarian relations) are linked to a tendency within neoliberalism to interpellate subjects based on 'acting rationally' whereby that 'rationality' is often inextricably linked to that which is tried, true, and thus, familiar.

Importantly, alongside rationality, the role of fear in constructing and maintaining sociopolitical communities is quite well established (Ahmed 2004; Bauman 2006; Glowacka 2009). In Ahmed's work, for instance, the author suggests that what makes fear so conducive to liberalism, and now neoliberalism, is how such normative orders of rationality work to establish and maintain themselves through a process of identifying potential sources of fear, better known as threats.[10] Importantly, however, neoliberal governance does not necessarily seek to eradicate the threats that work to produce fear. Indeed, if the aim of neoliberalism was to destroy the threats that produce fear, such a project would undoubtedly work to unravel the nation-state that is dependent upon the threatening other for a binaristic conception of itself as 'unique' and 'good.' Instead, neoliberal forms of governance aim to manage threats, limiting but not erasing the perceived harm threats may cause to the community. In this sense, fear does not 'create' neoliberal communities but is an *effect of* neoliberalism as an ideology of governance and form of governmentality that posits the primary relation between citizens as one based upon the threat of 'other' citizens and non-citizen 'others.'

Thinking, then, about how sexualized violence prevention approaches might also take up this second citizen-figure of neoliberalism that works from one's fears and anxieties, it is apparent that fighting strategies correspond to the neurotic citizen in some important ways. Due to their calculated incitement of fear

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[10] We can think, for example, of the figure of the 'Muslim' terrorist as a prominent source of fear in the post-9/11 era.

in would-be perpetrators through an identification of various threats (i.e. patriarchy), followed by proposals to remedy sources of fear (i.e. sexualized violence), fighting strategies work to regulate the conduct of subjects through rational calculation and through affective management based upon one's interactions with 'threats.' We can think, for example, of how the idea to train would-be victims of sexualized violence to defend themselves against the potential of future attacks ascribes to a kind of risk-management discourse characteristic of the bionic citizen. However, what I argue motivates, or perhaps underpins, that calculated risk-assessment is both the fear of experiencing sexualized violence, and the desire to instill a similar kind of immobilizing fear in would-be perpetrators. In working from and with fear, fighting approaches are thus able to articulate a radical claim that sexualized violence arises from the very (oppressive) structures that maintain a community, in a language comprehensible to a broader sociopolitical community—the language of threat.

Bringing these analyses of consent discourse/the bionic citizen and fighting strategies/the neurotic citizen together, I propose that one answer to the question of what allows these two seemingly different sexualized violence approaches to both be regarded as highly desirable prevention approaches at the moment might lie in the ways they are differently imbricated in the same neoliberal affective economy. Specifically, consent discourse's familiar reliance upon contract corresponds with the neoliberal bionic citizen who is governed by a thinking-feeling rationality. Relatedly, fighting strategies' reliance on fear as both the motivation and aim of sexualized violence prevention links to Isin's conception of the neoliberal neurotic citizen who is governed by anxieties and

fear of threats. If, then, the bionic and neurotic citizens are two figures that stand in "a tension-filled relationship" (Isin 2004, 223) that works to interpellate subjects differentially into the same neoliberal fold, then it might also be the case that consent discourse and fighting strategies similarly approach the problem of sexualized violence from different theoretical, practical, and affective positions, but are ultimately captured by and contribute to the same underlying neoliberal governing rationality that aims to calibrate subjects' conduct according to the economic principles of competition.

This kind of analysis, however, must be tempered by the understanding that it is not that neoliberal affective economies, or neoliberalism more generally, dictate the mood or tenets of sexualized violence prevention approaches; instead, these sexualized violence prevention approaches also inform neoliberalism. As Fortier argues, "affective citizenship does not exist on its own nor does it occur 'naturally': it arises from, requires and/or produces physical (bodily, geographical and architectural), financial and material … investments to sustain or reorient or alter it" (2016, 1041). In this sense, we might think of sexualized violence prevention strategies and neoliberalism as operating in a relationship of creative symbiosis: not only does neoliberalism help us to understand the affective objects/subjects of these two approaches as different manifestations of one kind of ideology of governance, but an understanding of these prevention approaches helps us to comprehend how feminist aims can unintentionally fold into neoliberal, anti-equity agendas. For instance, how does consent discourse's emphasis on communication between parties that 'should' be regarded as equal help reinforce common-sense assumptions regarding the inherent 'equality of all

persons' (in their capacity to strive for 'greatness') in the neoliberal era? Similarly, we might ask: how does fighting strategies' mobilization of the idea of the other as potentially threatening reinforce and potentially reshape neoliberal discourses of independence and personal responsibility?

Potential Problems: Fear, Familiarity and their Preventative Possibilities

   To speak to such questions, we must first remember that the relationship between contemporary feminisms and neoliberalism, in a general sense, is one of tension. For example, we might think of how discourses of choice (Bumiller 2008; Rottenberg 2014, 2016; Strakosch 2015), agency (Bay-Cheng 2015; Duggan 2003; Stringer 2013), and self-improvement (McRobbie 2009) are important tenets of some contemporary feminist movements, but also part and parcel of a neoliberal impetus to extend an economic rationality beyond market-based domains. Significantly, the economic rationale of neoliberalism often runs contrary to a feminist recognition of the import of structural oppression to how persons are able to conduct themselves and interact with others. Relatedly, then, if sexualized violence prevention can be considered a central feminist goal or aim, then discussions of the problems with the amenability of sexualized violence prevention approaches to a neoliberal affective economy are undoubtedly tied to debates regarding the (often negative) impact of neoliberal ideology upon feminism(s) more broadly (see, for example, Bay-Cheng 2015; Brown 2015; Bumiller 2008; Duggan 2003; McRobbie 2009; Berstein 2012; Ludwig 2016; Rottenberg 2014, 2016; Strakosch 2015). Here, however, I want to narrow my

focus to the specific problems that neoliberal affective economies might pose for sexualized violence prevention approaches. Specifically, I ask: why is it a problem that consent discourse arises out of and aims to produce feelings of familiarity, and relatedly, why should we care that fighting strategies bear out of and seek to reproduce neoliberal feelings of fear?

As we will recall, a primary critique of consent discourse is its problematic rendering of sexualized violence as a problem of communication between otherwise rational and benevolent subjects. Through the work of scholars such as Walker, Donat and Bondurant, and Beres, we saw that in the vast majority of cases, potentially intimate sexual subjects are able to discern the willingness of their partners to participate in sexual activities, thereby rendering the idea that sexualized violence is largely a problem of poor communication something of a myth (perhaps even a rape myth). What allows this miscommunication myth to perpetuate, I have argued, is the familiarity of the message imbued in consent discourse: if sexualized violence is a problem of communication between individuals, then we do not need to engage in a substantial rethinking of our sociocultural norms. Instead, we can rely upon contract – a normative means of establishing agreements between equal parties – to solve the problem of sexualized violence. However, I want to push these observations a bit further in this section. Specifically, I want to suggest that it is not just that consent discourse reproduces the familiar myth of sexual miscommunication that is a problem, but that through this myth of miscommunication, consent discourse might actually provide a means to enable certain kinds of sexualized violations to occur.

In her work on consent discourse, communications scholar Kate Lockwood Harris offers a perspective on how communication myths – widely

circulating misconceptions about how we (best) communicate with one another (2018, 156) – embedded within consent discourse might hinder consent's preventative efficacy. Specifically, Harris argues that many mobilizations of consent discourse falsely propose that total clarity regarding another's will in relation to potential intimate contact will always precede ethical behaviour (clear 'yes or no' consent must always come before sexual encounters to prevent sexual violence) (2018, 156). Harris, however, proposes that assuming 'ethical' sexual relations are always preceded by clear communication might "give rapists an out," avoiding culpability by citing misunderstanding (2018, 164). As Harris explains, such a critique is complicated:

> Communication scholars regularly acknowledge the ambiguity and
> complexity of human interaction, but to do so in the context of sexual
> consent seems risky. Outside feminist academic and activist circles, people
> who acknowledge communication's ambiguity will sometimes throw up
> their hands and conclude that ethical action in the midst of divergent
> meanings is impossible. Rape apologists routinely use this logic as an
> excuse for assault. In the midst of this public context, to grant consent's
> complexity would seem to reinforce a rape-supportive argument. But the
> language of communication myths can help to show how the opposite is
> true: Denying consent's complexity leaves rape-supportive arguments
> intact. (2018, 161)

For Harris, the miscommunication hypothesis underpinning consent discourse (the idea that sexualized violence occurs because of communicative misunderstandings between potentially intimate partners) is itself a kind of myth: when there are differing interpretations regarding another person's position on

engaging in sex, there is an "*absence* of communication, not *mis*communication" (2018, 171). Importantly, recognition of this communication myth works to explain why consent discourse might fail at preventing sexualized violence. In suggesting that there is a clear and direct meaning to be garnered from the phrases 'yes' and 'no,' consent discourse falsely proposes that a) sexualized violence is a product of persons misunderstanding these phrases (and thereby suggests that meaning stays constant over time and space), and b) that stating 'yes' or 'no' is the beginning and end of communications regarding sex. Neither proposition, however, gets at the root of the problem underlying sexualized violence: that one person regards their will as more important than the sexual autonomy of another. As Harris best states:

> He heard and understood no. His argument that no could mean many other things is not predicated upon an earnest attempt to reconcile ambiguity. Instead, he insists what he wants is more important than the wishes of another person, and he renders her desires nonexistent. This logic is the motor of rape, and people should combat it. Instead, when feminists – myself included – say 'no means no,' we leave implicit that everyone must respect what other people want to do with their own bodies. We resist claims about the ambiguity of language and, in so doing, respond to the symptom, not the disease. (2018, 163)

What Harris' work helps us understand, then, is that if consent discourse responds to a myth regarding the cause of sexualized violence (i.e. miscommunication), then it is perhaps unsurprising that consent discourse's solution to the problem of sexualized violence also operates in the realm of myth. Regardless of whether

consent discourse provides a viable solution to the problem of sexualized violence, it does provide *a* solution. We might then ask: what does the solution to sexualized violence that consent discourse provides (i.e. better communication) do to or for the existence of sexualized violence as a sociopolitical ill?

In her work on consent, Alcoff proposes that one such function of consent discourse might be definitional: consent works as a sort of script that tells would-be perpetrators how to avoid being accused of or prosecuted for sexualized violence. As Alcoff explains, "If all a perpetrator has to do is produce stated consent, this can actually make women more rather than less vulnerable to structural and contextual manipulations…. By maintaining a *singular* focus on consent, we can actually make it more difficult to discern sexual violations" (2018, 138, 127 – emphasis original). Here, Alcoff suggests consent discourse might be less about the prevention of sexually violent or unethical behaviours and more about the social and legal delimitations of what gets *read* as sexually violent behaviours. And it is here, I argue, that we can locate the problem of consent discourse's imbrication in neoliberal affective economies.

At its most basic, consent discourse makes an important statement about learning and respecting the individual will and autonomy of one's sexual partners. However, within a neoliberal affective economy that promotes contracting, which then creates feelings of familiarity – a means of merely managing sociopolitical problems with familiar structures and ideas – consent discourse becomes something insidious: a potential means of suggesting how one can 'get away with' committing sexually violent and/or unethical behaviours (i.e. by attaining 'consent'). Indeed, consent discourse's imbrication in a neoliberal affective economy of familiarity contributes to

the reproduction of patently false information regarding sexualized violence (i.e. it's a problem that can be resolved with better communication), and as a result it very well may cause consent discourse to function counterproductively: instead of relaying *that* a person should not engage in sexualized violence and why, in some instances, consent discourse might relay *how* a person can avoid engaging in acts that are read by the sociopolitical community as sexually violent (i.e. find a means to illicit an affirmative response). And although I agree that relaying 'how not to rape' might be an important part of sexualized violence prevention, such an assertion must be accompanied by a robust understanding of *why* sexualized violence is wrong and harmful to all persons in a sociopolitical community. In rendering sexualized violence a problem of (mis)communication between discrete individuals, however, consent discourse often fails to articulate a meaningful 'wrong' of sexualized violence, making its efforts to relay 'how not to rape' read something more like a how-to-avoid-repercussions guide for those eager to attain sexualized contact with another. In this sense, it is very possible that consent discourse might actually enable certain kinds of sexualized violence to occur by making such instances of sexualized violence incomprehensible as such: sexually violent acts that occur with consent cannot 'be' sexualized violence under the familiar auspices of consent discourse. There is no room for interpretation or ambiguities regarding identities, dynamics, history or culture: only a yes or a no.

Troublingly, similar but distinct issues are perceptible in relation to fighting strategies' reliance upon the neoliberal affective economy of fear. For example, although fighting strategies' reliance upon the language of threat might allow the prevention approach to be more comprehensible to a broader sociopolitical community governed in part by neoliberal neurosis, this language of

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threat also alters the underlying beliefs and theories that propel fighting strategies. Take, for instance, the suggestion imbued within fighting strategies that sexualized violence bears out of the very (oppressive) structures that maintain a community – patriarchy. When this idea regarding the causes of sexualized violence is articulated within and through a neoliberal affective economy of fear, the theory is altered to reinforce the neoliberal status quo of producing self-efficient, rational, and responsible citizens, causing the strategies to operate in a way different from their feminist inceptors' intentions. For example, in Bumiller's discussion of representations of sexualized violence in "contemporary" mainstream media (i.e. news reports, televised trials about sexualized violence cases), the initial goal of demonstrating the prevalence of sexualized violence in (and due to) a patriarchal society actually functioned to "provoke deep-seated animosities and stimulate incomprehensibility" about sexualized violence (2008, 17). Here, rather than challenging gendered stereotypes regarding who perpetuates sexualized violence (systems of oppression that are in fact vital to the reproduction of the neoliberal citizenly body), cultural fighting strategies are re-interpreted in media representations and in anti-crime governmental campaigns, often locating a different origin of sexualized violence: in the behaviours of those deemed less-than-ideal citizens, namely racialized and lower-class citizens.[11]

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[11] Such transformative appropriations of fighting strategies can be perceived, for example, in media attention given to stories of sexualized violence where the perpetrator is a person of colour or where the victim is white (Moorti 2002; Projansky 2001). Moreover, cultural productions adhering to the fighting strategy most often portray the heroine killing or injuring a perpetrator who struggles with mental wellness issues (e.g. *Jessica Jones* 2015) or is of a lower socioeconomic position (e.g. *I Spit on Your Grave* 2010; *Avenged* 2013). Importantly, the 'villains' of fighting-strategy cultural productions are rarely persons of colour. According to feminist film critic Carole Clover, binaristic character formations in horror films, including rape-

Relatedly, such a de-radicalization of fighting approaches also appears in current mobilizations of the self-defence strategy. Here, fighting sexualized violence through self-defence is appropriated to reinforce neoliberal ideals through institutionalization. Rather than mobilizing self-defence approaches to challenge a gendered grammar of violence that situates women as vulnerable and passive, self-defence strategies are reinterpreted as a neoliberal practice of self-protection.[12] Articulated through the neoliberal rhetoric of threat, the underlying goal of the fighting approach to alter gendered sociopolitical norms is transformed into a project that reinforces the ideal, self-sacrificing neoliberal citizenly subject.

There is, however, another important practical limitation caused by fighting strategies' workings within the neoliberal affective economy of fear. In her 2009 essay, "Rethinking the Social Contract: Masochism and Masculinist Violence," feminist theorist Renée Heberle argues that, contrary to traditional understandings of sexualized violence as a result of male entitlement or domination,

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revenge, use the associations between gender, class, and ability to culturally codify antagonists as 'other' while avoiding an overt racialized othering. In this sense, although an antagonist is often white, he is signified as 'other' or 'degenerate' through his associations with issues of hygiene (mental and physical), morals, education, and wealth – factors that are undoubtedly related to the historical creation of contemporary racialized hierarchies. The tendency to portray the perpetrators of sexualized violence in rape-revenge films as deprived and depraved white men thus problematically draws upon the stereotypes of the black male rapist – attributing 'his' (mythical) qualities to a white male character – without having to overtly negotiate discourses of race as they intersect with experiences and histories of sexualized violence. Moreover, as Bumiller notes, "by locating the genesis of sexual violence in sites of excess, such as racial hatred, open borders, and sexual perversion, interpretations of horrific events rarely evoke questioning about the origins of violence in traditional domestic settings" (Bumiller 2008, 20).

[12] For example, we can recall that in the self-defence training program created and analyzed by Senn et al. to discern the efficacy of rape-prevention techniques, two out of four units focus upon helping women to assess "the risk of sexual assault," "develop problem solving strategies to reduce perpetrator advantages" (Unit 1), and assist "women to more quickly acknowledge the danger in situations that have turned coercive" (Unit 2) (2015, 2328). Only Unit 3 provided Wen-Do self-defence training, and its relation to gendered norms was only discussed in terms of overcoming "emotional barriers to forceful physical defence against male acquaintances when the threat demands it" (2013, 7).

"sexualized violence can be interpreted as a reactive response to the radical decentering of the subject of power in modernity" (2009, 125). Surveying recent scholarship that documents the rationales most commonly given by men for their sexually violent actions, Heberle posits that perpetrators are acting out their failure to uphold the tenets of masculinity, an important tenet being the "having" of one's (feminine) object of desire. Men attempting to perform an idealized masculinity who also commit acts of sexualized violence understand their acts as a *re*actionary 'masculine' performance responding to the feminine figure who threatens their subjectivity. Such a performance signals 'her' unwillingness to be 'had,' but she is also necessary for the constitution of the masculine self as its binary pair. Thus, for the would-be perpetrator, "the feminine threat must be punished" through sexualized violence (Heberle 2009, 143). However, this punishment does "not necessarily [bear] out of a righteous sense of dominance . . . but out of a reactive and persistent fear of self-dissolution" (Heberle 2009, 143). Hence, it is possible that persons who commit acts of sexualized violence are not just subjects of fear, as fighting theorists state, but also *objects* of fear in a rigid gendered binary.

Significantly, Heberle's postulation regarding a fear of the feminine other as a 'reason' proposed by perpetrators for their acts of sexualized violence is echoed in more recent sociological literature on sexualized violence offenders. For example, in Lauren O'Sullivan's (2003) study of sexualized violence, she found that the 'anger rapist' often used sexualized violence as a means to "vent his rage on his victim and to retaliate for perceived wrongs or rejections he has suffered at the hands of women" (2009, 29). Similarly, in Anne Flinck and Elija Paavilainen's study of men's violent behaviour in intimate partnerships, they observed that men's "violent behavior was a way of escaping fear and terrible feelings. Men feared the woman, their own

destructive thoughts, and the consequences of these thoughts" (2008, 248). And finally, and perhaps most interestingly, Devon Polsachek and Theresa Gannon's (2004) study of convicted rapists significantly modified previous research on offender rationales. Responding to Donald Polaschek and Tony Ward's (2002) proposed five implicit theories that guide rapists' interactions with their victims (women are unknowable; women are sex objects; male sex drive is uncontrollable; entitlement; and dangerous world) (2004, 300-302), Polsachek and Gannon found that one category of the previous implicit theories – 'women as unknowable' – seemed inaccurate. Instead, the authors found that "offenders did occasionally take this neutral view [of women as 'unknowable'], but far more often, they thought that *women were out to harm men*. They experienced this inherently malevolent and vindictive quality of women as emerging unpredictably, making women seem dangerous" (2004, 305 – emphasis mine).

Although there must be some care taken here to avoid excusing sexualized violence, or positioning perpetrators as victims, such work on offence-supportive rationales is important for understanding the limitations of fighting strategies. Specifically, these studies demonstrate that fear and threat are not just the results of, or strategies towards, preventing sexualized violence but are also potential motivations for engaging in sexualized violence. If sexualized violence is, at least in some cases, the result of fear produced through binaristic understandings of the other, and of the other as primarily threatening, it would seem that overly general attempts to prevent sexualized violence with further threats aimed to incite fears in would-be perpetrators are not only conceptually but also potentially quite literally dangerous.

Although there are perceptible limitations imbued within consent discourse and fighting strategies, this analysis reveals that some of these limitations are attributable to the ideology of governance – neoliberalism – within which these prevention approaches have been popularly theorized and mobilized. In consent discourse, the 'friendliness' of the seemingly rational solution to the problem of sexualized violence as 'better communication' becomes what consent discourse is actually 'doing': making an uncomfortable and challenging sociopolitical issue seem manageable, familiar, and potentially solvable. However, it is the very simplicity of consent discourse's rendering of sexualized violence as that which occurs in the absence of consent that, in part, allows the discourse to circulate (unchallenged) so broadly, but also causes it to function – potentially – as a means of telling persons how to avoid committing acts that are easily and readily discernable by the broader sociopolitical community as 'wrong' or 'violent' (i.e. illegal). Relatedly, fighting strategies' entanglement in neoliberal affective economies of fear often functions to render moot the complex location of the issue of sexualized violence as within the very structure of a sociopolitical community. But even more alarmingly, it is this very reliance upon fear to potentially 'scare' would-be perpetrators into not committing acts of sexualized violence that could, in fact, contribute to further acts of sexualized violence – if we are to take perpetrators of sexualized violence at their word. Taken together, it would seem that consent discourse and fighting strategies' imbrication in neoliberal affective economies might actually work to render these prevention strategies counterproductive, meaning that they might actually work to encourage the further perpetuation of sexualized violence, rather than its prevention.

While these claims about how consent discourse and fighting strategies' potential to promote, rather than prevent, sexualized violence might seem like a rather bold assertion, I would not go so far as to postulate that a goal or aim of neoliberal ideology is (the perpetuation of) sexualized violence. From the aforementioned analysis, however, I do think it is reasonable to assert that neoliberal forms of governmentality have no interest in preventing sexualized violence; and this, I argue, is precisely why consent discourse and fighting strategies incur such large and troubling limitations at our current moment. At their core, consent discourse and fighting strategies share a desire to end sexualized violence. Although each approach might treat the problem of sexualized violence differently, both approaches share the idea that sexualized violence is a kind of sociopolitical ill that arises from issues within a sociopolitical community (consent discourse) or of the sociopolitical community itself (fighting strategies). However, this basic tenet of prevention approaches – that sexualized violence is a problem within and/or of sociopolitical communities – is incommensurable with a broader neoliberal project that seeks to manage and control systems of domination, rather than eliminate them. Therefore, in working with and on feelings that align with affective economies used to enforce neoliberal ideology, consent discourse and fighting strategies are more readily appropriated by neoliberalism, a normative frame of rationality that is less interested in changing the fundamental structure of citizenship as a mode of belonging than it is with merely managing sexualized violence in a way that maintains current ideals and modes of belonging.

Conclusion: Other Possibilities?

In this chapter I provide insights about why two very different – but similarly limited – sexualized violence prevention strategies are popular in our current sociopolitical moment. Specifically, I argue that these affective impetuses and goals of consent discourse and fighting strategies – familiarity and fear – similarly relate to affective economies that aim to reinforce or (re)produce the economic rationale key to neoliberal ideology. Working to explain why consent discourse and fighting strategies seem effective despite their respective differences in approach to prevention, this connection between the sexualized violence prevention approaches and neoliberal affective economies also functions to reveal something else: ways in which consent discourse and fighting strategies can operate in a manner counterproductive to feminist, anti-sexualized violence goals. As such, one reason these two prevention approaches are tenable at our current political moment might also contribute to their undoing. In working on and with neoliberal affective economies, consent discourse and fighting strategies could potentially become not only less effective, but potentially harmful to sexualized violence prevention aims.

Even as I make these critiques, however, I am leery of their purpose, or what they might 'do' to or for sexualized violence prevention. For example, given the sharp (re)turn in the last years to questions of survivor believability (for example, the reception of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's senate judiciary committee testimony), and renewed suggestions regarding male entitlement to sex (i.e. the violent actions of persons identifying themselves as 'Incels' [involuntarily celibate]), I wonder if critiquing a means – any means – of prevention is the best

course of action at a time when ambiguity is often used as a means for justifying

sexually violent acts. We can think, for instance, of the ways in which

perpetrators of sexualized violence cite the complexity of language, sexualized

encounters, and human interaction more generally as a/the 'reason' for an

assault.[13] Similarly, there is something unsettling to me about a move to consider

the fearful feelings of perpetrators when incidences of perpetrator/defendant rights

are being upheld over those of victims (e.g. Ontario Superior Court Justice Nancy

Spies' 2018 decision to allow the defense of extreme intoxication in sexual assault

cases).

Importantly, however, I believe these are tensions that cannot, and perhaps

should not, be resolved. As I have striven to demonstrate in this chapter, part of

the work of sexualized violence prevention is considering context, the ways in

which our theories of prevention speak to and about, and work from and on, our

particular sociocultural and historic situations. We cannot always predict the ways

in which our ideas regarding prevention will work with happenings in different –

and even our own – sociopolitical communities. Which is why, I maintain, it is

important to continually interrogate the broader governing frameworks that

mediate our conceptualizations of prevention.

Indeed, as we will see in the forthcoming chapters, it is in fact possible for

consent discourse and fighting strategies to be implemented critically; that is,

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[13] In Harris' work on consent, she cites several examples of how sexualized violence prevention campaigns create scenarios (to deconstruct) in which the perpetrator cites communicative ambiguity as the 'cause' of an assault (2018, 161-164). In more material terms, we can also think about the ways Jian Ghomeshi and his defense team represented the multiple and complex actions and language of the victim/survivors as a means to create ambiguity surrounding whether assaults took place (Tucker 2014).

although it is important to acknowledge that familiarity and fear are the dominant affects of consent discourse and fighting strategies, and that this affective dominance is potentially problematic to (if not outright dangerous for) feminist anti-sexualized violence prevention efforts, it is also crucial to acknowledge that there are exceptions. For example, how might the familiarity of consent discourse's reliance upon the liberal and neoliberal ideal of contract as egalitarian be complicated by situating potentially intimate relations within a broader historical and geopolitical context? Or, how might a more in-depth consideration of the identities of those involved in implementing fighting strategies complicate an understanding of the incitement of fear in would-be perpetrators as entirely problematic? To respond to these questions, in the next two chapters I will analyze consent discourse and fighting strategies separately, thinking about their relation to neoliberalism through specific examples: a poster-campaign (consent discourse) and a short independent film (fighting strategies).

To conclude this discussion, however, I want to stress that the analysis presented in this chapter regarding consent discourse and fighting strategies' imbrication in/with neoliberal ideology is important insofar as it advocates for a kind of 'check' (or 'worst case scenario') with regard to how much or how little a prevention approach is relying upon a dominant sociopolitical ideological register to articulate and attempt to achieve its prevention aims. Indeed, this analysis reveals that it is incredibly important for sexualized violence prevention advocates to interrogate the underlying beliefs and assumptions that motivate prevention efforts. And if we do not, we may end up inadvertently perpetuating rather than preventing sexualized violence.

Chapter Two - Undercutting Bystanderism with Consent: Complicating the

Hegemony of Consent Discourse in the Draw-the-Line Sexualized Violence

Prevention Campaign

I want to underscore that something impinges upon us, without our being able to anticipate or prepare for it in advance, and that means that we are in such moments affronted by something that is beyond our will, not of our making, that comes to us from the outside, as an imposition but also as an ethical demand. *I want to suggest that these are ethical obligations that do not require our consent, and neither are they the result of contracts or agreements into which any of us have deliberately entered*. (2015, 100-101)
– Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly,* emphasis mine

The Discourse within the Approach: An Introduction to Draw the Line

In 2012, the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) and Action

Ontarienne contra la Violence faite aux Femmes (AOcVF) launched the anti-sexualized

violence prevention campaign, Draw-the-Line (DtL).[1] The goal of the campaign, as

described on DtL's website, is to "engage Ontarians in a conversation about sexual

violence" (OCRCC 2018f). To accomplish this goal, OCRCC and AOcVF partnered

with four additional anti-sexualized violence collaborators – EGALE (Equality for

Gays and Lesbians Everywhere), Mujer, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and the White

Ribbon Campaign – to create a series of twenty-five posters.[2] The complete collection

of posters, viewable on DtL's "Resources" page, are represented in small, vertically-

oriented rectangles, distinguished from the white background by a thin grey line

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[1] Throughout this chapter, I will use the abbreviation 'DtL' to reference the Draw-the-Line campaign.

[2] All observations regarding the Draw the Line website were conducted from January-March of 2016. Since then, DtL has added 10 new posters, most of which were created by The White Ribbon Campaign. I have chosen not to address these new posters in my analysis as they have not been included in DtL's topic filtering: a navigation option that DtL uses to organize their posters that I will discuss in more depth later in this chapter.

(OCRCC 2018d).[3] Each rectangle includes a cropped image of the full-sized poster in the top portion of the rectangle, and four 'clickable' links in the bottom half of the rectangle: "Details," "Download," "Order (free)," and "User Guide." Combined with the various organizations' use of bright colours, interesting shapes, and familiar scenes (such as a Facebook page, or a sports field), the incompleteness of these images spawns curiosity: there is text on these images, but not all words or phrases are completely visible. What are these posters saying? What are they visualizing? And why?

If a viewer selects an image within one of the many rectangular boxes, they will then be taken to a full-screen viewer of the poster. From these individual perspectives, viewers discover that each poster is unique in its choice of background, lettering, and scenario presented; however, there is an obvious formula to the design of the posters. Every poster narratively poses a scenario related to sexualized violence in the top half of the poster, followed by a line that distinguishes a question about the above scenario in the bottom half of the poster. In this bottom section, viewers – who are positioned as neither perpetrators nor persons experiencing sexualized violence, but as bystanders – are asked how they might respond to the described instance or threat of sexualized violence (OCRCC 2018d).

DtL is thus a sexualized violence prevention campaign that employs text and images to mobilize a specific approach to prevention: bystanderism. As is explained on the DtL website, the campaign aims to "equip bystanders with information on how to

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[3] Although I have included links to the pages and images I discuss in this chapter in the "Reference" section of this dissertation, the first time I reference an image in this text, I will also include URL links to the images in the footnotes. The purpose of this gesture is to hopefully increase readers' ease of access: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/index.html

intervene safely and effectively" in situations of sexualized violence (OCRCC 2018f).

Importantly, however, nowhere on the DtL posters, User Guides, or website more

generally is there a definition of the term 'bystander.' However, in sexualized violence

prevention literature, bystanders are generally described as people who are witnesses to,

or witness the potential for, sexualized violence (Banyard 2015, 3; Rentschler 2017,

565).[4] As a sexualized violence prevention approach, bystanderism works to address

and/or implicate these bystanders: people not experiencing sexualized violence but who

are in some manner a party to the perpetration and perpetuation of sexualized violence.

Bystanderism as an approach to sexualized violence prevention thus attempts to

highlight one's imbrication in the lives of people who may be experiencing sexualized

violence as, for example, friends, family members, peers, colleagues, and/or

acquaintances. In short, it aims to demonstrate one's involvement in sexualized

violence through one's connections to those who perpetrate such acts and those who

experience it; in drawing attention to such relational connections, bystanderism works

to responsibilize all people for the prevention of sexualized violence.

Through an adherence to bystander prevention theory, DtL's posters and User

Guides work to portray sexualized violence and its prevention as more than a 'private'

interpersonal problem, and instead as a 'public' communal problem. Such a message of

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[4] Importantly, I acknowledge that some persons might be suspicious of the assertion that
bystanders are positioned in anti-sexualized violence campaigns as potential witnesses to
sexualized violence, rather than people that might witness events that act as a precursor to
sexualized violence. However, recalling that I am using a broad understanding of sexualized
violence that can encompass a range of sexually violent acts and behaviours, it is quite possible
that a bystander could witness sexualized violence as I define it here. For example, although it
might at times be less likely that a bystander may witness an act of violent bodily penetration, it is
much more likely that they might witness sexually violent acts and behaviours that are
socioculturally and legalistically regarded as 'less harmful,' such as groping or cat-calling.

bystanderism is inferable from DtL's "About" page, which states: "sexual violence is a lot more than rape. Everything from sexist jokes to stalking, harassment and assault contributes to *a culture that condones and supports sexual violence*" (OCRCC 2018f, emphasis mine). Importantly, DtL's definition of sexualized violence shapes what the campaign aims to accomplish and how it will meet these goals; a community must not only attempt to relay information that would help prevent individual assaults, but also work to alter our cultural beliefs regarding sexuality, allowing sexualized violence to occur in the first instance. In this sense, bystanderism is different than the other two prevention approaches discussed in this dissertation. Unlike consent discourse and fighting strategies, bystanderism is most concerned with situating sexualized violence prevention as an action that can be taken up by a variety of people, not necessarily just those who (might) perpetrate or experience sexualized violence.

Yet, bystanderism is not the only sexualized violence prevention approach mobilized by DtL. Although as a campaign (all twenty-five posters plus the User Guides) DtL may perform or mobilize a bystander prevention strategy, I argue that another kind of sexualized violence prevention is prominently at work in this campaign: consent discourse. The import of consent to DtL becomes apparent through an analysis of the campaign's filtering options that organize the twenty-five posters by categories. Here, thirteen posters – more posters than in any other filtering category – are placed under the heading/theme, "Consent." Given the campaign's heavy reliance on bystanderism, I am thus curious about why DtL also relies so greatly on the idea of consent. Is there something that consent accomplishes in a sexualized violence prevention campaign that the strategy of bystanderism cannot?

Significantly, the inclusion of messages that stress the import of consent to preventing instances of sexualized violence in the DtL campaign is likely related to broader sociocultural, historical, and political factors. Perhaps most importantly, because an affirmative consent standard – the idea that non-criminal sexual actions occur with a positive indication of consent (yes, definitely, absolutely) – underpins Canada's current criminal laws regarding sexualized violence, it may be intuitive that a government-funded campaign would turn to federal law for guidance and affirmation regarding acceptable and unacceptable forms of sexual behaviour. Although bystanderism might link the causes of sexualized violence to communal norms and ideologies, it does not directly or inherently provide an explanation for what sexualized violence 'is' as in consent discourse. It is thus quite possible that consent discourse is mobilized in the DtL posters and User Guides as means to address bystanderism's definitional oversight.

Yet, we will remember from discussions in the Introduction and Chapter One that scholars from a variety of disciplines contend that consent often falls short of its purported definitional and preventative aims in relation to sexualized violence (Beres 2014; Bumiller 2008; Cahill 2001; Cowan 2007; Drakopoulou 2007; Gotell 2007, 2008, 2012; Hakvag 2010, Heberle 2002, Pateman 1980, 1989). Instead of creating a clear line that divides sexually ethical/moral/legal behaviours from sexually unethical/immoral/criminal behaviours, consent operates more like a siphon that filters and organizes instances of sexually 'normal' (non-violent, non-coercive) and sexually 'deviant' (violent, coercive) acts according to the broader sociocultural norms of a given sociopolitical community. It is this normative siphoning that makes the hegemony of consent

discourse in prevention efforts so alarming: far from being a neutral means of defining sexualized violence (as sexualized acts that occur in the absence of consent), consent caters to people who exercise an undue amount of privilege according to their sociocultural positionality (i.e. age, race, ethnicity, gender, sex, disability, class). Given such critiques and their frequency within both academic and activist circles, it is puzzling that messages of consent appear with such frequency within DtL. I thus ask: what might be the impact of including the largely limited idea of consent alongside bystanderism in a sexualized violence prevention campaign like DtL? Moreover, how does consent work with bystanderism when mobilized in the same prevention campaign?

In this chapter, I contend that consent is employed in the DtL campaign as a discourse through which the sexualized violence prevention strategy of bystanderism is articulated. Centering my initial analysis on the thirteen posters that appear under the website's "Consent" filtering option, and later narrowing this focus to the five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters placed under the heading "Consent," I posit that the effect of articulating a bystander approach to prevention through consent discourse is largely problematic for feminist anti-sexualized violence aims.[5] Specifically, the textual elements of the "Consent" posters and User Guides reinforce normative, neoliberal interpretations of consent discourse that privatize and/or paternalize the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention to individuals who are directly involved (victim/survivor and

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[5] As I will explain further in the following section, there are several important reasons why I chose to focus upon these five posters and not others in this chapter, such as space constraints and the scope of my analysis.

perpetrator) in the violent act. (Re)articulating the neoliberal idea(l) that humans are inherently self-interested and self-sacrificial, the textual employment of consent discourse in these posters problematically contradicts bystanderism's impetus to broaden whom we imagine as potentially able to stop this sociopolitical ill. It will thus become clear that the effect of employing consent discourse as a means to articulate a bystander approach to prevention within DtL is largely negative for feminist anti-sexualized violence aims, as the message about who might be able to prevent sexualized violence and who might be responsible for such prevention is at best confused, and at worst, individualized through the textual mobilizations of consent discourse.

However, in this chapter I also recognize that the DtL posters are composed of more than just textual elements; indeed, every poster also contains visual aspects that I believe also contribute to the theorization of what sexualized violence 'is,' and what its prevention might entail. Therefore, I also conduct an analysis of the visual elements of five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters, considering how the various graphic elements (i.e. the backgrounds, the dividing lines) might interact with the more problematic textual components of the poster described above. Employing various visual devices (colour, symbolism), I posit that the visual aspects of these posters could function to (re)instantiate bystanderism's goal of deprioritizing the role of the individual in preventing sexualized violence. The visual aspects of these posters thus function reparatively, posing an opportunity for a more complex reading of sexualized violence prevention, one that intertwines consent discourse's definitional narrowing and bystanderism's inclusive broadening.

To make these arguments, in the first section of this chapter I continue outlining some key features of the DtL program whilst addressing the thirteen posters featured in the "Consent" filtering option to illustrate some common critiques of consent discourse in sexualized violence prevention theory. In the next section, I address the import of sociocultural and political context to an analysis of DtL by situating the campaign within a history of Canadian sexualized violence prevention efforts. Here, I will also consider how such prevention efforts have shifted according to the changing logics of neoliberalism. In the third section, I deepen my analytical critique of consent discourse and its relationship to neoliberalism by drawing on the work of Jospeh Fischel to think about the ways in which the textual elements of five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters and User guides that appear under DtL's "Consent" filtering option mobilize consent discourse in a way that mediates (and perhaps mitigates) bystanderism's goal of situating all members of a community responsible for the prevention of sexualized violence. In the final section, I then shift registers and attempt to perform a reparative reading of the role played by consent discourse in the DtL posters. Continuing with a focus upon the five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters, I consider how the visualization of bystanderism's central premise of communal responsibility for sexualized violence prevention might work to temper some of the more problematic elements of the discursive representations of consent discourse discussed in the previous sections.

From these analyses, this chapter will ultimately suggest that although bystanderism and consent discourse may very well need each other for a broad preventative effort that covers different kinds of potentially violent sexualized scenarios, it is also necessary to consider how consent discourse's emphasis on the

responsibility of individuals directly involved in instances of sexualized violence (perpetrators and victims/survivors) detracts from bystanderism's attempt to responsibilize people not necessarily experiencing or engaging in acts of sexualized violence for its prevention. Following Fischel, my goal in this chapter is, however, not "to upend consent," but rather to "deprioritize its… claim as a metric for permissible sex" by considering the ways its ascendancy works to subvert the major conceptual tenets of the bystander strategy of sexualized violence prevention (2016, 11). At stake in this analysis is thus an understanding of how different approaches to sexualized violence prevention (consent discourse and bystanderism) can be differentially mobilized (via text and visualization, respectively) to circumvent a problematic neoliberal (re)inscription of the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention upon certain individuals.

Drawing a Line around Draw the Line

General Context

My first interaction with DtL occurred during a training session for volunteers at the Sexual Assault Centre London (now known as Anova). In this seminar, participants (trainees for various volunteer positions at Sexual Assault Centre London) sat in a half-lit room and were encouraged to engage with several DtL posters that were digitally projected onto a white screen.[6] I later encountered several posters displayed on the main and basement floors of the McMaster Student Centre during the fall and

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[6] Unfortunately, I did not take any notes during this initial viewing of the DtL posters. Moreover, I cannot accurately remember which posters were displayed, or how many.

winter of 2015-2016.[7] Importantly, my engagements with the program are not

exceptional in terms of where and how DtL is typically implemented.[8] As per my

investigation of DtL's Twitter account – where campaign organizers promote events

related to the program – it is commonplace for rape crisis centers and various

elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions to mobilize the DtL program

within such institutional spaces. However, DtL head co-ordinator, Julie LaLonde, also

works with various community organizations and workplaces to conduct DtL seminars

in what are commonly understood to be 'public' spaces: libraries and city halls.

In terms of implementation, DtL is most commonly made actionable in two

ways according to the needs/desires of the sponsoring body: 1) the posters may be

displayed on their own (as per my viewing of these posters in the McMaster Student

Centre) or 2) the posters may be presented to a group of people and the User Guides are

used by group facilitators as a means to facilitate discussion regarding the scenarios the

posters pose, and/or sexualized violence more generally (as per my experience with

Anova London).[9] Yet DtL is not a program that needs funding or institutional

sanctioning to be implemented. As a government-funded campaign, DtL materials are

free to people who have access to an internet connection, and hard copies of the

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[7] Again, with a lack of notes, and a failing memory, I cannot – at least with any confidence – relay which posters were displayed in the McMaster Student Centre. However, I am sure that there was more than one poster. Moreover, I do recall that these posters were not displayed together.
[8] My interaction with the DtL campaign, and the five posters discussed in most detail in this chapter, arise from my interactions with these materials in their digital form. In future work on the DtL campaign, I would like to include in my analysis an interrogation of form, space, and placement upon potential poster reception. For example: how are the posters arranged? How many posters are displayed at a given time? Where are they placed? At what height? Does the context of where the poster is situated invite all kinds of interaction (personal versus communal)?
[9] Although it has not been my experience, it is possible that DtL posters may be displayed so that the poster *and* the User Guide is visible to potential viewers.

materials can be ordered free of charge from campaign organizers in English, French, Arabic, Chinese, Filipino, German, Hindi, Italian, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish and Urdu (OCRCC 2018d).

Perhaps evidently, then, my first encounters with the DtL posters spawned my intrigue. The careful word choices present in the scenario-question aspect of the posters quite clearly indicated to me that DtL is attempting to situate individual instances of sexualized violence within a broader sociocultural and political environment that enables such acts of violence to happen, following what scholars such as Victoria Banyard understand as the 'aim' of bystanderism (2015, 3). Moreover, DtL's policy of 'open access' importantly reinforces the program's understanding of sexualized violence as reproduced by social and/or cultural norms; in making all posters and User Guides available to people who have access to a digital device that connects to the internet (and not just, for example, persons affiliated with government or government-funded organizations), DtL reinforces the idea that sexualized violence prevention is an activity that many persons can and should endeavor to participate in. I was thus impressed by the way the posters introduced conceptually and emotionally difficult subject matter and situations (i.e. instances of sexualized violence) in a manner that works to call-in, rather than call-out, those who perpetuate (a culture of) sexualized violence. Additionally, the gesture to make materials easily accessible (relatively low-cost and available in a variety of languages) alongside the move to involve a 'diverse' groups of anti-sexualized violence organizations (diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, gender and/or sexual orientation, and nationality) works further towards the broader bystander aim of inclusion; indeed, if we are all responsible for sexualized violence

prevention, DtL's campaign should be informed by and accessible to a broad spectrum of individuals.

Given the sheer breadth of topics covered by the DtL posters and User Guides, however, it seemed unrealistic to address all twenty-five posters in this chapter in a way that would give each poster the kind of careful, critical attention it deserved. To further narrow my focus, then, I decided to draw upon DtL's topic 'filtering' option. Importantly, when one accesses the DtL webpage, and selects "Resources" (where DtL posters are located), the user is given two options: view all posters, or filter by category.[10] Under the 'filter by topic' option, there are twelve filtering categories available: Alcohol Facilitated; Consent; Healthy Relationship; Online Sexual Violence; Sexual Exploitation; Transphobic Violence; Campus; Healthy Masculinity; K-12; Party Culture; Sports Culture; Workplace Sexual Harassment. Given my specific interest in the role of consent discourse in DtL, and given that thirteen posters – more posters than any other filtering category – populated the "Consent" filtering option, I decided to take a closer look at the posters that comprise the "Consent" category in the DtL filtering.

Critiquing Consent: Posters under "Consent" Filtering Option and Literature Review

My initial engagements with the thirteen posters and User Guides under the "Consent" filtering option produced a sense of excitement. Unlike other prevention

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[10] One can access these viewing options by following this link: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/topics.html

campaigns I had encountered, these posters included diverse scenarios that incorporated actions and behaviours that are not commonly regarded as sexualized violence (i.e. controlling one's access to birth control). Moreover, many of the questions posed to viewers were open-ended, requiring something more than a 'yes or no' answer. The posters therefore read to me as a potential means encouraging one to think deeply and/or critically about the situation posed, and/or engage in discussion with others about the topic. Coupled with the posters' eye-catching backgrounds, I was optimistic that DtL was doing something different, something potentially more productive for feminist anti-sexualized violence aims than what I had seen in other poster campaigns.

Yet, during these first encounters I was simultaneously alarmed by the ways in which these messages of communal responsibility for sexualized violence prevention are coupled with the individualizing rhetoric of consent discourse. Through a closer analysis of these thirteen posters, it thus became apparent that an overarching goal of the DtL posters and User Guides is an emphasis on defining sexualized violence as that which occurs in the absence of consent. Such an understanding of consent is repeatedly conveyed in the DtL posters implicitly through their 'public face'– their scenarios and questions – as well as the User Guides. For example, one representative poster works to define sexual violence by stating that "consent matters," and defines consent through the phrase "yes means yes" (OCRCC 2018c).[11] On the front of the poster, viewers are presented with white text and a royal blue background, reminiscent of Facebook's design and colours. The poster's text raises the issue of consent through a scenario

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[11] To view this poster, see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/dtl-fb.html

about forwarding intimate photographs of people who did not agree to the photographs being shared. Importantly, the User Guide instructs viewers to view this scenario as an issue of consent, stating, "consent matters," and defines consent "…as something that must be asked for every step of the way" (OCRCC 2018c). Significantly, the definition of consent in the User Guide, and a reinforcement of its verbal articulation in this poster, buttresses the importance of garnering a person's permission to engage in a potential sexual encounter, rather than inferring such permission from a person's actions, behaviours, or dress. In other words, this animation of consent discourse works to define sexualized violence through its suggestion that such violence occurs because of a lack of communication between people, or a lack of understanding of a sociopolitical community's laws. What is more, this DtL poster and others like it repeatedly connect the import of consent to Canadian law. For example, in the 'Facebook' poster discussed above (OCRCC 2018c), the User Guide states "sharing or possessing a nude photo of someone under the age of 18 can be legally defined as possessing or distributing child pornography" (OCRCC 2018c).

As we saw in chapter one, however, scholars are largely unconvinced that sexualized violence occurs due to a misunderstanding or miscommunication regarding whether or not one desires to engage in a particular sexual activity (Beres 2014, 377). Surely such miscommunications do occur, but it is unlikely that the majority of instances of sexualized violence are problems of communication. It is thus likely that, as feminist theorists since the 1970s have suggested, sexualized violence is not just a problem of communication but also a problem of masculinist entitlement and

unbalanced power relations.[12] Here, one might gather that the problem of sexualized violence could indeed be a problem of communication, but a specific problem of communication wherein the trouble lies with communicating sociocultural norms that suggest that some people are entitled to sexual access to others' bodies and have the ability to force such relations to happen. However, a recognition of how such structures of oppression function to perpetuate sexualized violence is much more difficult than the idea that sexualized violence occurs *just* because of problems of communication between 'autonomous individuals.'

Yet, consent discourse as it appears in the DtL campaign goes beyond a mere communication of a sociopolitical community's laws as a remedy to sexualized violence and actually upholds and reproduces (implying action here) the idea(l) of the free and equal individual implicit in both general and sexualized violence prevention theories of consent. Specifically, consent discourse often glosses over the ways in which gendered, racialized, and classed discourses of entitlement bear upon contractual intimate relationships – much like the way our sociopolitical contracts do. For instance, one poster created by the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres poses a scenario of sexualized violence that occurs in a leisure setting: a club. This setting is reflected by the brightly coloured purple and yellow

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[12] For instance, writing in the 1980s, feminist scholar Catherine MacKinnon put forth the contentious proposition that the reason criminal courts have such a difficult time telling the difference between consensual sex and forced sex is because all (heterosexual) sex under the oppressive conditions of patriarchy is coercive (1989, 224). In other ways, feminist scholars have argued that an end to sexualized violence means: an eradication of the aggressive forms of toxic masculinity (Bourke 2007, 418); altering the gendered grammar of violence where men are subjects of violence and women are objects of violence (Marcus 1992, 392; Gavey 2009; Heberle 1996, 68); and acknowledging that sexualized violence is a tool perpetuating other kinds of violence such as racism (James 1996, 147; Davis 1983) and colonialism (Deer 2010, 625; Hunt 2013; Smith 2005, 8).

background, which compliments the text that states, "Your wasted friend staggers out of the bar with some guy" (OCRCC 2018k).[13] In this poster it is implied that it is the 'guy' who needs to seek consent. Therefore, this poster (and others like it) reflects the reality that the majority of perpetrators of sexualized violence are men. The DtL campaign thus focuses on representing the importance of men asking their partners for consent as a prevention strategy. Although the emphasis on teaching men to ask for consent might reflect an unfortunate reality, the problem with this kind of mobilization of consent discourse is that it does not challenge this reality. Specifically, consent-based approaches to sexualized violence prevention reinforce what feminist legal scholar Lise Gotell terms "an active masculine sexuality and a reactive feminine sexuality" (2008, 877). In (re)positioning people who identify as men as always already the people who initiate or set the parameters for an intimate encounter, the DtL campaign, like other consent-based sexual violence prevention strategies, functions to reaffirm the gendered (unbalanced) power structure.

Relatedly, the emphasis on saying 'yes or no' to sex, prominent in many of the User Guides and posters in the "Consent" category, glosses over the broader sociocultural implications that might make a response to a proposal of sexual intimacy more complicated than just 'yes or no.' For instance, in one poster created by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation that asks viewers if they should help a friend that is passed out from intoxication at a party, the User Guide states, "[o]nly yes means yes. You can't consent if you're drunk" (OCRCC 2018h).[14] However, as Gavey notes in her study of

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[13] To view poster, see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/dtl-bar.html
[14] To view poster, see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/nan-party.html

sexualized violence, limitations upon what counts as consent in contemporary Western society are problematic insofar as refusals to consent "are, in fact, typically not accomplished through the bare linguistic act of saying no" (2005, 145). For Gavey, consent discourse fails to take into account broader sociocultural norms that encourage women to cater to a male sex-drive (2005, 138), that construct a kind of femininity based upon passive acquiescence (2005, 145), and that give primacy to a sexual identity as a 'good lover' (2005, 146), all of which function to mediate a person's decision to say 'yes or no' to an intimate encounter. Such observations are supported by the quantitative work of scholars who have found that "consent is more frequently communicated non-verbally, rather than verbally (Beres et al., 2004; Hall 1998; Humphreys, 2007; Jozkowski and Peterson, 2013)" (cited in Beres 2014, 375). In this sense, promotion of a 'yes-means-yes' strategy, always already linked to its corollary, a 'no-means-no' approach to sexualized violence prevention, problematically arrives too quickly at the postulation that all persons can readily and easily articulate a simple response to a proposed sexual contract, and thus glosses over the broader sociocultural implications that make such direct answers difficult for many to articulate, and difficult for many more to 'hear.'

Similarly, a general critique of consent discourse applicable to the DtL posters is the issue of placing the onus for resolving intimate issues largely on the individual, avoiding a consideration of other sociocultural factors contributing to the perpetuation of sexualized violence. For example, one poster under the "Consent" filtering option is portrayed as a text-message conversation. Replicating the white and grey background of an iPhone messaging application, the scenario on the poster explains that the viewer's 'aunt' is experiencing controlling behaviours from her new love interest, and

asks viewers if they should, "mind your own business" (OCRCC 2018g).[15]

Significantly, the User Guide for this poster attempts to clarify the correct answer to

this question, stating that "screening calls and limiting someone's social circle are signs

of an unhealthy relationship" (OCRCC 2018g). Of course, bringing sexualized violence

into a discourse which situates it as a community 'health' problem is important insofar

as it may help people experiencing and perpetrating sexualized violence to access

different sorts of medicalized forms of support, and also help raise awareness of the

long-lasting effects of sexualized violence upon some people. However, the signalling

of only certain, individual behaviours as 'unhealthy' glosses over the ways in which

patriarchy, settler-colonialism, racism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism are also

unhealthy insofar as they contribute to the continuation of sexualized violence by

providing discourses that structure who is sexually violable.[16] In this sense, the over-

emphasis on what is 'unhealthy' as an individualized problem within a relationship

makes less visible the ways in which our normative (gendered, classed, racialized,

ableist and heterosexualized) means of being with one another might also be regarded

as 'unhealthy.' Thus the problem of sexualized violence viewed through the lens of

consent – where sexual relationships without consent are deemed not only wrong,

insofar as they are illegal, but also 'unhealthy' – functions to position sexualized

violence as a personal problem, where its prevention becomes an issue of promoting

communication between potentially intimate individuals, rather than a contemplation of

the factors that might lead one to think that they could or even should engage in sexual

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[15] To view poster, see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/dtl-text.html
[16] For example, Angela Davis argues in relation to Black women's experience of sexualized violence that "racism has always drawn strength from its ability to encourage sexual coercion" (1983, 176).

relations with a person against their will. As Ann Cahill best explains, "liberal theories understand consent as that which must be freely given – this conceptualization is problematic as consent, when taken against political and social structures that seriously limit women's agency and autonomy under many circumstances, may muddy the waters" (2001, 171).

I thus argue that the purpose of the consent-based discourse within these thirteen DtL posters and User Guides is to relay to potential bystanders, victims, and perpetrators what 'counts' as sexualized violence, positing that it occurs because of a lack of communication between persons, or a lack of understanding of a sociopolitical community's laws. Specifically, what consent discourses in relation to sexualized violence prevention primarily accomplish is a creation and mobilization of a definition of legal and illegal intimate relationships.

Yet, one might counter my critiques of consent discourse with the observation that consent discourse does indeed challenge ideas of entitlement and power imbalances by reminding people that they are not entitled to do any act unto another person and must ask if a person is willing to engage in any sexual activity. One might further argue that consent-based approaches to sexualized violence prevention also challenge uneven power relations by positing that all people have the power to consent to or reject a proposition to engage in intimate acts. In response to these critiques, I want to argue that although there may be an emphasis on disrupting ideas of entitlement and uneven power relations within consent discourses employed in the DtL posters, this disruption is an implicit and secondary rather than an explicit and primary goal in such consent discourses. Importantly, it is the mere attainment of consent, rather than a reformulation of unequal interpersonal relations, that is emphasized as most important

in consent-based sexualized violence prevention discourse. In this sense, the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention ultimately rests upon those directly engaged in potential intimate contact. An excellent question arising from such an analysis is thus: does consent discourse (unintentionally) work to undermine bystanderism's goal of distributing responsibility for sexualized violence prevention amongst all members of a community?

Whose Responsibility, Who is Responsible?: Consent Discourse in Neoliberal Times

Interpretations of 'responsibility' are historically and contemporarily significant to debates regarding sexualized violence prevention. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, anti-sexualized violence activists and theorists in Canada and the U.S. pushed for a shift in discussions regarding sexualized violence where the perpetrator – instead of the victim – would be held responsible for acts of sexualized violence and their prevention (Gilmore 2017, 134). As part of an anti-victim blaming movement, sexualized violence prevention efforts during this time were largely responding to a liberal ideology centering upon the ideal of the neutral individual. Arguing that the 'individual' of law and nation is not impartial but male, heterosexual, middle to upper-class, ableist, and white, activists and scholars suggested that sociocultural and political hierarchies (i.e. white-supremacist, capitalist, ableist, heteropatriarchal) subversively governed who was (and is) labelled 'responsible' for sexualized assaults. If women-identifying people, especially racialized women, poor women, disabled women, and queer and trans women, were never or rarely read to be true 'individuals,' but rather a product of their

aberrant intersecting identities, it is only commonsensical under liberal ideology that they – people who deviated from the white, cis, male, able-bodied norm – were being held responsible for deviations from lawful and moral sexualized experiences (for example, violence).

To address the problem of victim-blaming, consent discourse emerged as a means of shifting the burden for the prevention of unlawful and unethical sexual behaviours. As legal theorist Sharon Cowan explains, to address the problem of an overreliance on the bodily specificity (identity politics) of persons who experienced sexualized violence, feminist scholars and activists aimed to redefine "rape in terms of a violation of sexual autonomy and choice, that is, a lack of consent" (2007, 95). Through consent discourse, responsibility for sexualized violence and its prevention was thus diffused between potentially intimate parties: one must ask for and give or decline consent in order for sexualized encounters to be legal, and presumably, moral.

Building upon the gains made by consent discourse, today's activists and scholars present a different mobilization of responsibility as it figures in prevention strategies. Beginning in the early-mid 1990s, bystanderism – the strategy that DtL enacts – emerged as a means of moving beyond an attribution of responsibility for sexualized violence prevention to those people who may be sexually intimate. Instead, bystanderism attributes responsibility to the broader community that produces and reproduces the sociocultural scripts and ideas that allow for the perpetuation of sexualized violence (Banyard 2007, 464). Although bystanderism mobilizes several strategies for relocating the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention to those not directly involved with an instance of violence, some common strategies include

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highlighting a person's relationship (and the import of that relationship) to a person involved in an instance of sexualized violence (i.e. using terms like 'friend' or 'aunt'), or highlighting the bystander's ability to intervene in instances of sexualized violence (i.e. asking or relaying what actions a person may take to prevent sexualized violence).

Like the work of previous anti-sexualized violence activists which responded to liberalism's narrow individualism, these recent shifts in prevention theory are undoubtedly connected to the dominant form of governmentality within which such theories are developed and deployed.[17] I thus maintain that is crucial to consider in an analysis of a bystander prevention campaign how neoliberalism effects the creation and continual mobilization of bystanderism as a sexualized violence prevention strategy.

As we will recall, in the vast majority of literature regarding sexualized violence prevention and neoliberalism, scholars acknowledge neoliberalism's negative effects (Gotell 2008, Bumiller 2005, Duggan 2002, Brown 2015, Rottenberg 2014). In the Canadian context, Melanie Beres, Barbara Crow, and Lise Gotell note in their 2009 study of Canadian rape crisis centers that work around sexualized violence during the 2000s was "being increasingly privatized," and when governments did interact with rape crisis centers, there was a "move to dismantle gender specific supports and replace them with degendered 'victims' services'" (2009, 158). In 2011, however, one year before the launch of DtL, the Ontario government announced the creation of a Sexual Violence Action Plan (Ministry 2018) – a

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[17] I employ the term governmentality following the work of Kristin Bumiller, who describes the term as "a concept that is drawn from the political theorist Michel Foucault, whose analysis of power in modern societies demonstrates how coercive forms of authority are manifested through quasi-governmental instruments and other 'softer' forms of power (2008, 6).

move that signalled an alteration in the way in which neoliberal ideology influenced sexualized violence prevention work. Formally launched in 2014, the "It's Never Okay" Action Plan to stop sexual and gendered violence (funded by the Ontario government) provided over $41 million dollars in order: to fund rape crisis centers, universities, colleges, hospitals, and police services to increase public education projects regarding sexualized violence (i.e. #WhoWillYouHelp); to provide anti-violence training for professionals in hospitality, health, education and community service industries; to enhance legal support for survivors; and to create legislation which mandates sexual violence policies in workplaces and post-secondary campuses. Informed by recommendations from rape crisis centers and other experts in the field of gendered violence, "It's Never Okay" rejected the previous neoliberal idea(l) of absorbing the issues of marginalized populations into larger, supposedly 'neutral' frameworks (i.e. victim services); instead, the new Action Plan signalled a move towards 'promoting diversity' by granting aid and funding to issue and/or community specific organizations and programs.

However, the move towards diversity and inclusion in relation to sexualized violence prevention did not signal the end of the effects of neoliberalism upon prevention efforts. For example, in the context of the creation and mobilization of the government-funded DtL campaign, attributes of neoliberalism are readily discernable in the manner in which diversity is addressed within the DtL posters through what Sandra Harding terms an "add and stir" approach to diversity work (Harding 1987, 4). Representative of neoliberalism's agenda of equality over and above equity, the 'add and stir' assumes that simply including people who occupy marginal positionalities will 'do' the work of diversity or

diversification: dismantling problematic hierarchies, ideologies, and assumptions that underpin a group or project.

In the context of DtL, this 'add and stir' approach can be discerned through the ways the posters created by organizations representing specific groups (i.e. Nishnawbe Aski Nation representing Indigenous people, Mujer representing Latin-American people, and EGALE representing LGBTQIA2S people) articulate concerns of their given communities – and only their given communities – in the posters they create. For instance, all posters created by EGALE represent situations of sexualized violence as experienced by trans people. Importantly, however, the EGALE posters are the only posters that address trans persons' experiences of sexualized violence. In these posters, a subject's trans identity is treated as *the* reason the person in question is experiencing sexualized violence. In one poster, for instance, the text reads, "Someone posts on Facebook that Daniella is 'actually a dude.' Do you share it?" (OCRCC, 2018e).[18] Given the ways people who are trans disproportionately experience sexualized violence, such a representation which highlights the ways trans people unduly experience sexualized violence by virtue of being trans is not necessarily a problem. However, it is concerning that there is no attempt in any of the EGALE posters to consider how race, sexuality, class, and/or disability might also impact a trans person's experience of sexualized violence. Similarly, there is no consideration of the specifics of trans persons' experiences of sexualized violence in the posters created by Mujer, White Ribbon, and the Nishnawbe Aski nation. It is thus

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[18] To view this poster, see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/egale-fb.html

possible to read the incorporation of and the work produced by the four community-specific anti-sexualized violence collaborators within a broader contextual trend of neoliberal diversity or diversification. Although perhaps unintentional, this singular, identity-based approach to sexualized violence prevention problematically favours a representational identity politics: where the circulation and/or simple naming of a marginalized group is expected to do the work of diversifying a given phenomenon.

Because neoliberalism is the dominant ideology of governance at the present moment and DtL is a government-funded campaign, I am, however, less interested in suggesting that the campaign's creators are somehow 'dupes' of neoliberalism than I am in acknowledging the ways in which we are all – often unconsciously – interpellated by neoliberal ideology. In fact, one might regard the increased funding and willingness on behalf of Canadian governments to listen and consider the ideas of anti-sexualized violence organizers as a positive step towards eradicating sexualized violence. Moreover, it might be important, if not necessary, for such a campaign to incorporate neoliberalism in order to become broadly intelligible at this time. Thus, without assigning blame for the amenability of DtL's posters to neoliberal ideology, and without attempting to posit whether or not the ascription to neoliberalism is conscious or not, it is still important to think about how neoliberalism functions in and through the campaign, and what effects it may have on the broader aims of the prevention strategy – bystanderism – to which DtL ascribes.

Returning, then, to an understanding of DtL as a *bystander* sexualized violence prevention campaign, DtL's relation to neoliberalism is further complicated by

considering the way the discourse of responsibility is mobilized in the campaign. In stark contrast to other neoliberal projects that attempt to responsibilize individual actors for sociopolitical ills, bystanderism addresses the problems of neoliberal individualism (personal responsibility) by working to *responsibilize* many persons, perhaps even a community. In one sense, then, we might think of bystanderism as a/the 'good' of neoliberalism's effect on sexualized violence prevention, despite its other well-documented ill-effects in different realms.[19]

Understanding that DtL's bystanderism is largely communicated through consent discourse, however, I want to further investigate whether consent discourse mitigates bystanderism's productive responsibilizing function within neoliberalism: if, as we have seen, consent discourse's aims and methodologies cohere a bit too neatly with problematic neoliberal idea(l)s, are these problems also (re)produced in a campaign that foregrounds a bystander prevention strategy? And if so, with what effect? To address these questions, in the following section, I consider some limiting effects of consent discourse upon the responsibility-diffusing prevention strategy of bystanderism. However, to ground this analysis, I narrow my focus even further by concentrating my analysis on the five posters and User Guides created by the Nishnawbe Aski nation (a decision made based on this DtL contributor's over-representation in the "Consent" section of DtL's filtering options).[20]

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[19] Kristin Bumiller (2005) and Lise Gotell (2008) discuss at length the problematic impact of neoliberal ideology upon government/community response to sexualized violence (rape crisis centres, Bumiller 2005 and Canadian law reforms, Gotell 2008).

[20] In total, there are six posters contributed by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation to the DtL campaign, five of which are categorized under the heading 'Consent' via DtL's filtering option.

The five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters and User Guides under "Consent" represent a range of interpretations of the prevention approach. For example, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation poster that appears first (if one is reading from left to right) under the "Consent" filtering option, which I will refer to as "Water," features a familial scenario of sexualized violence.[21] White text in the upper half of the poster states, "Your sister tell you that her husband won't allow her to go on birth control" (OCRCC 2018j).[22] In the lower half of the poster, below a taught rope, is the question, "Do you change the subject?" (OCRCC 2018j). Notably, many features of the "Water" poster reappear in the other four Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters that appear under the "Consent" filtering option. Namely, all Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters: feature the same white lettering; position the scenario that features sexualized violence in the top half of the poster and a question in the bottom half of the poster; use a rope to separate the scenario of sexualized violence from the question of what the viewer might do; include the DtL web address immediately below the rope divider (draw-the-line.ca); incorporate the Nation's name and emblem at the very bottom of the posters; and feature some sort of 'natural' or 'environmentally-related' background.

Despite these similarities, however, all five posters are unique in terms of their scenarios, questions to the viewer, and their backgrounds. For instance, the

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[21] Although each of the five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters are identified in the text through citations, it occurred to me that the lettering that distinguishes each poster proceeding the year – for example, the 'h' in (OCRCC 2018h) - does not contain any information that will necessarily help the reader easily recall which poster I am referring to. Therefore, I chose to give each poster a one-word name based upon their backgrounds ("Water," "Grass," "Forest," "Fire," and "Clouds") with the hopes that these names might help readers better recall the image I am discussing.

[22] To view the poster, "Water," see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/nan-sister.html

poster which I will call "Grass" focuses on an instance of sexualized violence at a community gathering, stating, "Your friend passes out on the couch at a party," and then asking, "Do you leave her there?" (OCRCC 2018h).[23] This scenario is set against a background of out-of-focus greenery, with only a few distinct blades of grass outlined near the centre of the poster. Contrastingly, the poster I label "Forest" features a landscape background. Depicting a scenic woodland bathed in red light, the text of this poster focuses on intra-community relationships, stating, "A community helper has a reputation for being 'touchy.' Do you say something?" (OCRCC 2018a).[24] Relatedly, in the poster I will refer to as "Fire," a scenario with a more intimate relation is presented against a background of red, orange and yellow flames: "Your neighbour tells you she 'deserved' what happened to her because of the clothes she chose to wear. Do you change the subject?" (OCRCC 2018i).[25] And, finally, the poster I term "Clouds" focuses on digital forms of sexualized violence, stating: "A community member has been texting your friend inappropriate messages" (OCRCC 2018b).[26] In this poster, the scenario of sexualized violence is set against grey and purple ominous looking clouds that begin at the top of the poster, and extend just below the roped divider. The question, "Do you tell someone?" (OCRCC 2018b) appears just above what I interpret as deep purple water, and is set against a lighter, white and purple sky.

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[23] To view the poster, "Grass," see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/nan-party.html
[24] To view the poster, "Forest," see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/nan-touchy.html
[25] To view the poster, "Fire," see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/nan-neighbour.html
[26] To view the poster, "Clouds," see: http://www.draw-the-line.ca/resources/nan-txt.html

Alongside the fact that over eighty percent of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters appear under the heading "Consent," the fact that no other DtL contributor has as many posters/User Guides under that heading makes these posters worthy of further investigation and especially helpful for an investigation that seeks to explore how bystanderism's diverse mobilization of 'responsibility' for sexualized violence prevention might be altered through consent discourse's neoliberal amenability. Specifically, I am curious as to how the User Guides interact with the scenarios and questions posed by the posters to reinforce the idea(l)s of bystanderism, consent discourse, or both. Here, I wonder: can bystanderism's message of communal responsibility for sexualized violence prevention remain when articulated through consent discourse's individualizing rhetoric?

From Privatization to Paternalism: A User Guide Analysis

Interestingly, a major component of DtL's theory of sexualized violence prevention is an attempt to diffuse the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention by addressing relational others and not just would-be perpetrators and victim/survivors of sexualized violence. However, a closer reading of the articulation of bystanderism through consent discourse in the User Guides of Nishnawbe Aski Nation indicates that the goal of bystanderism might be upended by a neoliberal ideal or tension that is often (re)produced through consent discourse: what Elizabeth Strakosch identifies as privatization and paternalism. As Strakosch argues, "Neoliberalism… celebrates the self-reliant, capable individual and denounces state regulation of such individuals as unproductive.

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However, it simultaneously allows increased coercion by the state where individuals or groups are deemed to lack appropriate capacity" (2015, 6). Here, Strakosch's interpretation of neoliberalism helpfully acknowledges the way this normative order of reason does not just aim to include persons in its crusade of responsibilization, but must also find a way to deal with those who are unfit or unable to govern themselves (internalize and police oneself according to the nation-state's sociocultural and juridico-political rules and regulations).

In terms of privatization, consent is often used in DtL User Guides as a means of reinforcing the power/import of individual autonomy in sexual decision-making through discourses of choice, and as a way to highlight risk-management through perpetual sexual contracts. For instance, in the User Guide for the poster, "Fire," under the section 'Why Draw the Line' (OCRCC 2018i), it states, "[s]exual violence is not acceptable at any time. It does not matter what a person *chooses* to wear, nobody 'deserves' being sexually assaulted" (OCRCC 2018i – emphasis mine). Similarly, in the same section of the User Guide for the poster, "Water," it states, "Sexual violence is unacceptable. Period. This includes when a person is in a relationship. Every person has control over their body and their *choices* must be respected (OCRCC 2018j – emphasis mine). Interesting here is the emphasis on choice in relation to the question of 'why draw the line.' The wording 'why draw the line' signals that the User Guides are speaking to more than just bystanders (i.e. people not directly involved in the assault). Indeed, if creators were intending to restrict the campaign's specific address only to bystanders, they might have instead stated, 'why intervene,' which would imply that the addressee is not already involved in the assault, as per the standard

definition of a bystander. Without this specification, this part of the User Guide addresses all people – would-be victim/survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders – implying that bystanders, would-be perpetrators, *and even victim/survivors* have choices in relation to sexualized violence. In and of itself, such a small instance of what might be perceived as low-grade victim-blaming may seem trivial; however, in relation to another section of the User Guide, such a statement takes on new significance.

In the next section of all posters' User Guides, DtL articulates 'when' one should 'draw the line' in relation to sexualized violence. For example, in the poster, "Clouds," the User Guide states that, "[c]onsent matters. Consent must be asked for every step of the way. What's more, texts of a sexual nature are types of sexual harassment and should not be allowed or accepted" (OCRCC 2018b). The vague wording of this section of the User Guide presents several problems. In the first instance, the absence of a qualifying word before texts (i.e. unwanted, undesired, unsolicited) suggests that all texts of a sexual nature are harassment. Moreover, the idea that these texts 'should not be allowed or accepted' places the responsibility upon the person receiving (presumably unwanted) sexualized messages to somehow pre-emptively reject such a text (perhaps an impossible feat). Importantly, these rhetorical overgeneralizations in the User Guide are not clarified by the context of the "Clouds" poster, which reads: "[a] community member has been sending your friend inappropriate messages. Do you tell someone?" (OCRCC 2018b). Here, we garner no further information about the positionality of the person sending the texts or the person receiving, and the word 'inappropriate' does not indicate in what ways the message is improper. What the

User Guide does accomplish, however, is relaying of the message that consent is the deciding factor on whether or not sexualized violence has or will happened (sexual activity in its absence is sexualized violence, whereas in its presence is simply 'sexual activity'). According to this User Guide, sexualized violence happens ('when' you should draw the line) when consent is a) not present and/or b) not ongoing. Consent is thus something that the initiator of the sexualized encounter is implicitly responsible for, ensuring consent is perpetually asked for and affirmed.

Taken together, these two sub-sections of various Nishnawbe Aski Nation User Guides work to render sexualized violence prevention as a personal, private choice that all people are empowered to make via the discourse of consent. The choice to prevent sexualized violence through consent discourse is an act of risk-management or risk-aversion: would-be perpetrators (i.e. those who initiate sexual activity) should/must choose to ask consent 'every step of the way,' and would-be victims (i.e. those who are asked to engage in sexual activity) should/must choose to articulate their responses promptly and clearly. Recalling the discussion of neoliberalism's conception of the human in the introduction to this dissertation, we might understand the impetus towards privatization of 'choice' in relation to the idea of the human as self-interested. As Lise Gotell argues, such a move towards an affirmative consent-standard is not as progressive as it may seem and may actually function as "a form of 're-privatization'" (Gotell 2007, 132). As she explains:

> … consistency, rationality, and risk-avoidance constitute new markers of
>
> normative conduct against which the behaviors and credibility of actual

> complainants are measured and assessed. Within recent Canadian sexual
> assault decisions, good sexual citizens are reconfigured as being like
> rational economic actors, assuming responsibility for their actions and the
> risks that they take. (2008, 881-2)

Consent discourse therefore works to re-centre the onus for sexualized violence prevention upon the parties who are intimately involved: it is in the best interest of the would-be victim to explicitly convey their acceptance or rejection of advances (lest they experience sexualized violence), and it is in the best interest of the would-be perpetrator to ensure they have received a clear indication of consent. Thus, although it is the job of bystanders to intervene, these posters' User Guides make clear that it is ultimately the choices of the empowered 'choosing' parties involved (their questions and their responses) that dictate whether sexualized violence has or will occur. Given that consent discourse ignores the sociopolitical and cultural inequities that may mediate a person's ability to 'choose' (as discussed above), this neoliberal articulation of consent as a personal, private responsibility further exacerbates an inattention to factors that may make it difficult to simply say 'yes or no' to sexual activity. Responsibility for the prevention of sexualized violence is thus privatized in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters and User Guides, contradicting DtL's broad goal of aiming to engage persons that are not necessarily involved in the act of sexualized violence or in its prevention.

Although it is apparent that consent discourse is attentive to a host of sociopolitical factors that influence the consent of informed actors, some actors who cannot be responsibilized for sexualized violence are also interpellated into

sexualized violence prevention via consent discourse. Specifically, consent discourse is often concerned with the inability of persons of particular positionalities or in particular states to consent. As per Canadian law, those who cannot consent are persons who lack capacity to make 'informed' decisions: persons who are intoxicated or under the influence of a substance that alters neurological functions, persons under the age of eighteen who engage in sexual activities with persons over the age of eighteen, and persons with neurological impairments/challenges. In the Nishnawbe Aski Nation User Guides, an acknowledgement of such individuals' inability to consent is frequently highlighted. For example, the User Guide for the poster "Forest," under the section 'Why Draw the Line' states, "[w]hen we look away, we allow sexual violence to continue. 85% of sexually abused children and teens are abused by someone they know. The law protects children under 18 from sexual exploitation: any sexual contact between a child younger than 18 and a person of authority is legally considered sexual assault" (OCRCC 2018a). Following that statement, in the section titled, "When to Draw the Line," the User Guide further explains, "[w]hen someone abuses a position of trust or authority, consent is not possible. Where there is no consent, there is sexual violence" (OCRCC 2018a). With these statements, DtL communicates the import of consent as free of coercion. Although not directly stated, that consent is free of coercion is implied through the ideas that a) consent must be given in an environment that is primarily 'power-free' or with minor power-imbalances, and b) that because of their dependency upon many (older) persons for sustenance in Canadian society, persons under the age of eighteen are almost always in a relation of dependence

with a person over eighteen, and are thus unable to contract with persons who have authority over them in a coercion-free manner.

In his work on consent discourse in Canada and the U.S., Joseph Fischel challenges such clear-cut distinctions made between empowered individuals capable of consenting and disempowered individuals who can never truly give informed consent. Drawing on the work of political theorist Brenda Cossman, Fischel argues that although "the borders of sexual, cultural, and legal citizenship are barricaded not so much by consent as by neoliberal disciplinarity," consent and its presence in law and prevention discourse work for neoliberal ideology as "an index of permissibility [and] impermissibility" regarding sex and sexuality (2016, 76). Fischel is thus concerned with how the figure of the sex predator/offender works to contain fears or concerns about unethical sexual behaviours. As Fischel explains:

> Because the 'consenting adult' cannot capture sexual ethics as cleanly or completely as the court or the nation would like – that is, on the one hand, because a whole lot of sex is still harmful that involves legally consenting adults, and, on the other, because not all sex among minors or between minors and adults is necessarily harmful – the figure of the sex offender… contains the ambiguities of adult consent that threaten its coherence as a normative compass in the labyrinthine universe of sex and law. (2016, 57)

According to Fischel, the figure of the sex predator functions to regulate social anxieties about violent or unethical sex. Careful to avoid stating that we should eschew attempting to institute some sort of sexual ethics regarding situations where people from different positionalities might come to contract sex (for

example, in sexual relations between a youth and an adult), Fischel still argues that current consent discourse "denies the (sexual, relational, becoming) autonomy" of the party deemed incapable of consent (2016, 137).

To pause for a moment, I recognize, however, that I may seem to be presenting two contradictory critiques of consent discourse. On the one hand, I argue that neoliberal notions of the autonomous subject do not go far enough in accounting for the factors that influence a person's decision or ability to consent. Specifically, underpinning consent discourse is the assumption that all persons come to the act of sexual contract on equal footing – which, as I have demonstrated, is often not the case in a white supremacist, classist, ableist, heteropatriarchy – thus privatizing the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention. On the other hand, as I argue above via Fischel, legally bracketing of certain persons as never capable of consent simply takes the notion of accounting for sociopolitical difference (be it in terms of identity or 'mental state') too far. Here, we might recall Butler's position on sexual autonomy as a necessary, but ultimately insufficient goal for social movements; for Butler, attempts to recognize individual autonomy act as an important means of complicating an understanding of the human condition as only relational, glossing over important differences between persons. However, such struggles for autonomy are always limited insofar as they never quite capture the complexity of the relational nature of subject formation (there is no 'I' without a 'you'). In relation to consent discourse, there is a twisting of this movement towards recognizing autonomy insofar that some persons will never be in a position of relative equality with another individual; as such consent discourse (re)creates a paternalistic

positionality by stating that certain persons are never responsible for ethical sexual decision-making. Therefore, I believe these critiques – consent discourse goes too far and/or not far enough can exist simultaneously insofar as the legalistic and sociocultural determination of which people are incapable of consent does not actually work to promote the sort of robust conception of autonomy that I advocate in the first critique. Instead, treating people as always already incapable of consent – whether that be for a relatively short period of time such as when one is intoxicated, or for a longer period of time as when one has a life-long mental impairment – again circumvents a consideration of the sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which a person might come to engage with another in a sexual manner, but oddly assumes that such people are not responsible for the sexually violent acts they may commit (for instance, we rarely see prevention campaigns that stress that intoxicated persons cannot solicit consent from a sober person).

Returning then to the analysis of the User Guide from the poster "Forest" (OCRCC 2018a), this seemingly contradictory aspect of consent discourse regarding autonomy (or lack thereof) is discernable. On one hand, consent discourse encourages certain individuals (youth, intoxicated individuals, individuals with cognitive impairments) to self-sacrifice their sexual autonomy to the 'greater good': the creation of clean and clear moral and legal boundaries regarding sex, boundaries that too neatly relegate the figure of the 'risky' subject who even attempts to attain consent from these always already non-consenting individuals to the category of 'sex predator.' On the other hand, however, would-be perpetrators are cast as irresponsible and immoral through their aberrant quest

to seek consent from those deemed always already unable to provide it. Responsibility thus operates in two senses here: there are those who cannot be held responsible for preventing sexualized violence because of their inability to consent, and those who are irresponsible in the sense that they try to elicit consent from such ill-positioned individuals. In a paternalistic manner, always already non-consenting individuals are thus included in consent discourse through their exclusion: consent discourse interpellates the 'irresponsible' (in both senses of the term) insofar as it problematically excludes them from the capacity to consent.

Far from discrete factors, however, privatization and paternalism often come together in consent discourse to present a clear picture of perpetrators and victims as the central figures responsible for instances of sexualized violence and its prevention. Recalling that it is both self-interest and self-sacrifice that compose the 'nature' of the human in neoliberalism, the discourses of privatization and paternalism similarly operate in these Nishnawbe Aski Nation User Guides as a means to define and explain who is responsible for the prevention of sexualized violence. Much like a Mobius strip, no matter the angle from which you approach consent discourse in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters, all people are incorporated as either responsible risk-managers, or irresponsible risk-takers.[27] For example, in the User Guide for the poster "Grass" (OCRCC 2018g) under the section 'why draw the line,' the Guide reads: "[w]hen we leave a friend passed out she may be vulnerable to being sexually assaulted. Every choice we make and every action we take – no matter how small – has the power to make a difference"

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[27] I borrow this analogy from Gorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* (1995, 37).

(OCRCC 2018g). As noted above, the emphasis on choice in this section speaks to the responsibility of all parties to prevent sexualized assault. Here, the 'we' of "every choice we make" could refer to both the would-be victim who is unconscious from intoxication, the bystander who witnesses their friend's unconscious state, or the perpetrator of the assault. However, this ambiguity regarding responsibility is altered by the statement in the following section, 'When to Draw the Line.' In this section, the Guide states, "[c]onsent matters. Only yes means yes. You can't consent if you're drunk" (OCRCC 2018g). In one sense, this second statement could be interpreted as information useful to the bystander's decision to 'intervene' in a situation of potential assault: your friend cannot consent to sexual activity because she is drunk. However, as per the first section of the User Guide, the 'friend' in question is not simply drunk, but so intoxicated that she is passed out. The glossing over here of states of intoxication (there is something in-between sober and drunk, and something else in-between drunk and unconscious from intoxication) works towards a responsibilizing of the irresponsible (the 'drunk' friend). According to the paternalistic neoliberal logic of consent discourse, persons of diminished capacity cannot consent, and are therefore not responsible for instances of sexualized assault; however, according to the privatizing neoliberal logic of consent discourse, empowered individuals are responsible for making choices that enable them to reject or affirm consent. In a subtle manner, then, this User Guide contradicts the idea of the nonconsenting (and thus 'blameless') would-be victim by glossing over states of incapacity and emphasizing the role of choice in sexual encounters. The User Guide does this, in part, by shifting its mode of address between sections of the User Guide from

'we' to 'you,' which clearly addresses the would-be victim. To be sure, the friend in question may be unable to consent, but her 'incapacity' is painted with undertones of blame given the emphasis on 'choice' – her choice to become intoxicated – articulated earlier in the User Guide.

In thinking about consent discourse as it is articulated within a bystander strategy, I thus argue that there is a significant possibility that discourses of communal responsibility so central to bystanderism are diminished in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters by the intersection of the privatizing and paternalistic functions of neoliberalism employed through a mobilization of consent discourse. If bystanderism is a prevention strategy that works through the problematic individualization of responsibility typical of consent discourse, the move to articulate bystanderism through the rhetoric of consent works against its goal of dispersing responsibility. Because consent discourse works to clearly define the wrong of sexualized violence as a disregarding of one's will (or the will of a person deemed capable of having a will that is competent, or worth 'hearing'), an overreliance upon its rhetoric will always already work to place the onus of prevention upon those directly involved in sexualized violence (those risk takers and risk averters) and not the broader community. Of course, such a direct localization of responsibility is not necessarily a negative thing. I would argue that would-be perpetrators should have more responsibility in preventative work/discourse. However, when overemphasized in bystander strategies, consent discourse ultimately renders the responsibility for prevention as that of the self-interested and/or self-sacrificing parties directly involved. To be sure, bystanders

cannot intervene unless a situation of non-consent already exists between the potentially sexually intimate parties.

What's more, it is evident that consent discourse can only be mobilized in limited ways to address the sociopolitical inequities that might affect the ways one comes to 'contract' sexualized intimacy. That the User Guides analyzed above were created by an Indigenous organization but make no mention whatsoever of the particularities of Indigenous experiences of sexualized violence is telling. Indeed, consent discourse only makes good common-sense in a neoliberal context insofar as it addresses a supposedly neutral, abstract, individual; any attention to mediating factors such as race, class, gender, or sexuality work to complicate the simplifying function of consent as a prevention discourse.

Reparative Readings: Tempering the Rhetoric of Consent Discourse with Visualizations that Support Bystanderism

Despite the obvious limitations of consent discourse, it is still important to acknowledge its potentially productive and positive implications. Because sexualized violence legislation in Canada is governed by an affirmative consent standard, consent discourse provides an important vehicle for communicating a sociopolitical community's laws (and the ideas/ideals behind such laws). As a study from Beres has revealed, a number of people – especially young people – are confused by the difference between the concept of consent and the concept of one's willingness to engage in sexualized actions/behaviours, making a campaign that focuses on consent's definition potentially important for certain audiences

(2014, 387).[28] Based on such observations, I now want to think about how the visual elements of the posters complicate the previous readings of the five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters that appear under the topic filter, "Consent," on the DtL website. Although scholars have repeatedly highlighted the limitations of poster campaigns as too brief an intervention to be truly effective in altering attitudes regarding sexualized violence, I argue something a bit different in relation to DtL (Beres 2014; Johnny and Mitchell 2006). Specifically, the five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters in the DtL campaign are – at least from a theoretical standpoint – potentially more effective at broadening conceptualizations of sexualized violence on their own than they are when coupled with the restrictive User Guides discussed in the previous section. Understanding the User Guides as a means to manage interpretations of the posters, I am interested in how the posters contemplated on their own might open up different lines of thought/questioning regarding sexualized violence via a consideration of their discursive elements (the text) and their visual design.

As previously touched upon in sections one and two, the discursive aspects of the DtL posters by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation work towards hailing people as responsible for sexualized violence prevention – even if they are not the people perpetrating or experiencing such violence. This hailing is locatable in the questions of the DtL posters that work to encourage viewers to scrutinize

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[28] As a reminder, we will remember that consent discourse does not necessarily account for one's will or desire to engage in certain acts or behaviours. Rather, consent is about the communication of permission or denial. Although one might interpret the communications involved in consent (the 'yes' or the 'no') as an indication of one's will, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, one's will or willingness may or may not play a factor in one's decision to consent to sexual intimacy.

common-sense responses to disclosures and to witnessing sexualized violence or actions and behaviours that could lead to sexualized violence, namely: minimization of acts of sexualized violence (OCRCC 2018c), ignoring acts of sexualized violence (OCRCC 2018g), silence in response to disclosures (OCRCC 2018a; OCRCC 2018b), leaving a situation where there is the potential for sexualized violence (OCRCC 2018g), and changing the conversation topic from sexualized violence to another subject (OCRCC 2018h; OCRCC 2018i). These open-ended questions are narrowed, however, by the confines of the scenario posed in the first section of the poster that works to implicitly convey a lack of consent (or 'informed' consent) as one possible sign or indicator of sexualized violence. For example, in the poster "Water," the scenario reads, "[y]our sister tells you that her husband won't allow her to go on birth control. Do you change the subject?" (OCRCC 2018j). Although the word 'consent' does not appear in the poster, issues regarding consent are inferable from the restriction of choice placed upon the 'sister' in this situation. Specifically, the situation is framed in a way where there is no question of consent, but rather a questioning of the role of coercion in sexually related scenarios through the phrase 'won't allow.' Combined with the open-ended question, "do you change the subject?," the poster encourages viewers to think of their role ('do you') in instances of sexualized coercion ('won't allow'). In this sense, consent therefore works as an important, but discrete and implicit, discourse that hones the focus of bystander intervention.

The workings of consent discourse as a mediating force to bystanderism in the aforementioned example are not specific to the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters however, but rather are a feature of all consent-based posters in the DtL

campaign. What distinguishes the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters from other DtL posters under the "Consent" filter, then, is not their textual aspects, but the visual aspects of the posters. Specifically, the posters created by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation are visually distinct in two ways: in the background of the posters, and in the type of 'line' used to divide the scenarios from the questions.

Thinking first about the background of all DtL posters, it is significant that posters created by the OCRCC and White Ribbon represent and reflect the environment within which the described scenario may take place: a phone screen, a Facebook page, and bright colours/lights reminiscent of a club or party. However, the posters from Nishnawbe Aski Nation present a more generalized 'nature' setting for the scenario, representing various landscapes (i.e. a forest), weather patterns (i.e. clouds), and naturally occurring elements (i.e. fire, grass, or water). Upon first consideration, such distinctive choices of background by Nishnawbe Aski Nation might be read as an attempt by the group to insert mediations upon Indigenous people's connection with 'land' and 'nature' into conversations regarding sexualized violence. More specifically, if the posters are created by the Nishnawbe Aski, an Indigenous Nation representing forty-nine distinct Northern Ontario Tribes, the posters' references to the 'environment' and 'nature' might be interpreted as hinting at the connection between human actions and the land. A reading of this human-environment relationality could reinforce bystanderism: as we are inextricably connected to our environments, so too are we inextricably connected to each other by virtue of sharing such environments. Importantly, such a reading of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters is similar to Carrie Rentschler's understanding of the import of response-ability to sexualized

violence prevention. As Rentschler explains, drawing on the work of Kelly Oliver, "subjectivity is grounded in the capacity to respond and be responded to. It requires the social address of another person, containing both 'the condition of possibility of response … and the ethical obligation to respond and enable response-ability from others' (Oliver 2001, 15)" (2014, 68). For Rentschler, then, response-ability is a useful term that works to signify the capacity for a subject or a community to respond ethically to sexualized violence. In relation to the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters though, I wonder if the process of subjectification goes beyond 'social address' and might also gesture towards the ways we are in a relation of "mutual co-constitution" with the land and environment (Rentschler 2014, 68)? From this understanding of response-ability that deprioritizes human-human connections, one might read the Nishnawbe Aki Nation's posters' naturalistic backgrounds as implying a duty to intervene in instances of sexualized violence by reminding viewers of their relational connection to the people experiencing sexualized violence through the land/environment which we share. Indeed, like the environment we live within, sexualized violence is also a kind of environment, and as such, we all have a responsibility to act towards its erasure.

As I make these arguments, however, I also worry how reading posters created by Indigenous people through the lens of 'nature' and 'environment' might be playing into the settler-colonial trope of the 'ecological Indian' which works to romanticize Indigenous forms of spirituality linked to the land, the environment, or 'nature' (Dunaway 2008; Fritz 2012; Harkin and Lewis 2007; Nadasdy 2005; Smithers 2015; Willow 2010). As Justin Fritz explains, the trope of the 'ecological Indian' works problematically to "perpetuate the

essentialization, homogenization, and naturalization of Indigenous peoples"

(2012, 21). What's more, the trope of the 'ecological Indian' works to reaffirm

ideas of Indigenous people as non-urban, when in actuality, as Amber Dean notes,

Indigenous people have been a part of urban environment throughout the histories

of cities and settlements (2015, 50-1).

Although acknowledging such a reading of the posters is possible, I want

to complicate such ideas regarding the significance of the 'natural' poster

backgrounds by investigating the import of space/place in conversations regarding

violence against Indigenous women and the representation of sexualized violence

as atmospheric and elemental. In relation to Indigenous ways of being, land is not

just a site to romanticize relationality, but a space of contestation (Coulthard

2014; Simpson A. 2014; Simpson L. 2014). Although land can represent healing

and community, as well as precarity, it can also represent violence: how land is

stolen ([settler] colonialism) and how certain spaces/places are tied to atrocities

directed towards Indigenous people (Goeman 2009; Razack 2002). More

specifically, scholars working on colonialism and sexualized violence, such as

Andrea Smith and Sherene Razack, and Indigenous scholars, such as Isabel

Altamirano-Jiminez, Sarah Deer, Mishuana Goeman, Sarah Hunt and Dory

Nason, all contend that there are connections between the high rates of sexualized

violence against Indigenous women and the theft of Indigenous lands

(Altamirano-Jiminez 2013; Deer 2010; Goeman 2013; Hunt 2013; Smith 2005;

Nason 2014). As Goeman explains, "[t]he pitfalls of simplifying Native peoples'

relationship to land into romanticized and mystical or merely political categories

are that these studies too often overlook the gendered and violent nature of

colonizing Native [sic] lands…" (2013, 37). Although sexualized violence can be used as a metaphor for the concept of colonialism (Deer 2010, 625), Smith argues that there is a material connection "…between patriarchy's disregard for nature, women, and indigenous [sic] peoples. The colonial/patriarchal mind that seeks to control the sexuality of women and Indigenous peoples also seeks to control nature" (2005, 55). Indeed, whether it be the assaults upon the matriarchs of Indigenous communities (Carter 1997, 179-82), the pollution of the environment that affects Indigenous women's bodies and thus children (Smith 2005, 64), or the creation of spaces of prostitution associated with Indigeneity (Razack 2002, 141; Deer 2010, 625), the process of colonization has been largely a sexually violent one.

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters that represent space as the 'background' to scenarios of sexualized violence might thus be read as gesturing towards something more complicated than relationality via a 'natural' or 'environmental' connection. For instance, the poster "Forest" depicts a lush woodland surrounding a winding river (OCRCC 2018a). Although it is unclear if the photo was enhanced or merely taken during fall at a time of sunset/sunrise, the colour of the image is striking insofar as the land is immersed in red light. Connoting ideas as diverse as love, power, and anger, the meaning of the colour red in this background is perhaps most obviously read as being tied to the scenario foregrounded in the poster. Here, an act of violence is foregrounded discursively while that violence is reinforced through a background of a landscape painted with the colour of blood. Because the landscape is non-specific as compared to the situationally specific backgrounds of other DtL posters (for example: a phone

background for a scenario about text-messaging), the background of

'sunset/sunrise' poster (OCRCC 2018a) might be referring to a broader historical-

contextual 'background' to the scenario of violence described on the poster.

Specifically, the 'blood' red land might connote the history of violent colonialism

that enables sexualized violence (and especially sexualized violence against

Indigenous women) to occur in the first instance. Although there are definitely

spaces where different women are more likely to experience sexualized violence,

the generalized nature of this landscape suggests that sexualized violence can

occur anywhere in the context of colonialism. In this sense, the background of the

Nishnawbe Aski Nation poster works to potentially inflect the foregrounded

scenario with layers of complexity, symbolically communicating that sexualized

violence is attributable not only to the perpetrating individual as the discursive

element of the poster suggests, but also to broader sociohistorical conditions that

'set the scene' for such acts of sexualized violence to occur.

Yet, not all the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters draw on space to

complicate discourses of consent as they materialize in the textual scenarios. For

instance, atmospheric conditions, such as dark clouds/thunder/rain (OCRCC

2018b), and natural elements, such as fire (OCRCC 2018h), compose the

backgrounds of several Nishnawbe Aski posters. Even more abstract than the

decontextualized landscape discussed above, these atmospheric and elemental

backgrounds do not necessarily connote a complex history such as colonialism;

instead, they could connote something more basic via the representation of natural

phenomenon that have multiple, popular symbolic interpretations. Specifically, I

wonder if these 'natural' poster backgrounds work to represent affect, feelings, or

emotions. Consider, for instance, the dark atmosphere of one Nishnawbe Aski

Nation poster (OCRCC 2018b); one might interpret the dark clouds as gloomy,

signifying 'negative' feelings of sadness, melancholy, despondency, and perhaps

even fear. Relatedly, the close-up image of flames (OCRCC 2018h) could connote

feelings of warmth and comfort, but also something more akin to pain and danger

due to viewers' proximity to the fire. Thus, one might read the affective

connotations of these atmospheric and elemental pictures as complementing the

experiences of the people who have endured sexualized violence described in the

foregrounded scenario. For example, in the poster where a person is receiving

inappropriate text messages, one may feel unfortunate like one feels when a storm

is approaching (OCRCC 2018a), or the self-blaming neighbour may feel pain like

when one gets too close to a flame (OCRCC 2018h). Much like fire and

storms/rain will and must occur in order to sustain life, so are relational

encounters necessary for human sustenance; yet, both atmospheric/elemental and

relational encounters can also be violent and harmful.

Importantly, then, a possible reading of these 'elemental' Nishnawbe Aski

Nation backgrounds relates to a gesturing towards a loss of control. Similar to the

ways many victims/survivors of sexualized violence feel a loss of autonomy,

these naturalistic phenomena, like fire or storms, are typically beyond human

regulation.[29] Moreover, like the out-of-focus blades of grass in one poster, such

natural phenomena can be difficult to understand or perceive (OCRCCC 2018h).

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[29] However, the actions of humans (pollution, deforestation) have undoubtedly contributed to
environmental changes.

More than just sadness or fear, then, these posters may be hinting at feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and helplessness, feelings a victim/survivor of sexualized violence may experience, as may a potential bystander. Working against consent discourse's reproduction of a neoliberal sense of privatization and/or personal responsibility for sexualized violence prevention, the elemental backgrounds that feature unruly aspects of nature (fire, storms) complicate a discourse of absolute certainty or mastery regarding either one's experience of sexualized violence, 'when' one should intervene in potential instances of sexualized violence, or both. This is not to say, however, that feelings of helplessness or anxiety experienced by a bystander or a viewer are akin to those who experience sexualized violence (or that a potential bystander/viewer could not also be a victim/survivor); rather, such posters might be attempting to make connections across differing experiences of sexualized violence by connoting common and uncomfortable feelings that sometimes arise in relation to sexualized violence.

Thus, I argue that it is also possible that these backgrounds might be read as commenting not so much upon the feelings of those involved in instances of sexualized violence as upon the relationality of those feelings. Recalling my earlier discussion of affect as that which arises from the interactions between bodies (animate and inanimate), then I wonder if the 'atmospheres' and 'elements' represented in these posters – things that occur between bodies – gesture towards the relational, affectual effects of sexualized violence upon people involved and bystanders. Just as it can be challenging to determine when to take shelter from a storm or to step back from a fire, it is equally challenging to know when and how to intervene in potential encounters of sexualized violence.

Therefore, instead of representing sexualized violence as a problem of individuals – as per consent discourse communicated implicitly in the posters' discursive aspects – the vague visual representation of atmospheres and elements with widely recognizable negative emotional connotations might speak to the differing but shared experience of sexualized violence via witnessing and disclosure of sexualized violence. Complementing the discursive elements of the posters, these ambiguous backgrounds that connote negative affects can therefore speak to the challenges of knowing when to intervene in instances of sexualized violence, and the challenges one faces in affectively confronting potential acts of sexualized violence.

Importantly, however, I am unsure if feelings of a loss of control, helplessness, or anxiety that are connoted through the elemental backgrounds of some Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters are meant to be equally generalizable to all potential viewers. Given that this particular set of posters is created by an Indigenous organization, it seems important to think about the impact and intersection of gender and race upon one's interaction with potential acts of sexualized violence. Take for example the interaction between the textual aspects and background of the poster, "Clouds" (OCRCC 2018b). Set against a background of what appears to be an impending storm, the text reads, "A community member has been texting your friend inappropriate messages" (OCRCC 2018b). The use of the term 'community member' to describe the perpetrator, rather than other terms like acquaintance or friend, gestures towards a group of persons connected through shared characteristics and/or goals/beliefs/values. Although there are many 'communities' that could be

referenced here (i.e. LGBTQ, religious, ideological), the Nishnawbe Aski Nation

logo in the bottom left-corner of the poster encourages viewers to read the poster

in terms of Indigenous community. Consequently, I wonder if the feelings of

uncertainty, despondency, or impending trouble conveyed by the stormy

background of the poster, considered in tandem with the textual aspects of the

poster, might be hinting at the disproportionate amounts of sexualized violence

experienced by members of Indigenous communities.[30] Importantly, a similar

phenomenon is discernable in the "Fire" poster, but in relation to gender *and* race.

Unlike the "Cloud" poster, the "Fire" poster genders the persons experiencing

sexualized violence as women-identifying through feminized pronouns: "Your

neighbour tells you she 'deserved' what happened to her because of the clothes

she chose to wear" (OCRCC 2018i). Thinking about these aspects of the poster

together (the logo, the fiery background, the gendered language in the text), the

poster might be read as speaking to the disproportionate number of Indigenous

women who experience sexualized violence in Canada. Thus, the representation

of a 'lack of control' through the elemental aspects of some Nishnawbe Aski

Nation posters could function as a means to speak back to consent discourse's

tendency to over-generalize experiences of sexualized violence as equally

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[30] It is difficult to locate quantitative research regarding Indigenous peoples' experiences of sexualized violence. Interestingly, of what little data does exist, sexualized violence is often collapsed into an analytical category that encompasses a variety of forms of physical violence, or focuses on Indigenous women's experiences of sexualized violence at the hands of Indigenous men (Brennan 2011; Brownridge 2003; Collin-Vézina et al 2009). Nevertheless, as Arielle Dylan, Cherly Regehr and Romano Alaggia note in their study regarding the treatment of Indigenous women who have experienced sexualized violence by Canadian law-enforcement institutions, given that "…all Aboriginal people in Canada are… far more likely to be victims of violent crime than other Canadians," it seems safe to say that Indigenous communities' experiences of sexualized violence should be no different (2008, 679).

encountered by all members of the population, while still leaving space to draw connections between differing experiences.

Taken together, then, these two approaches to thinking about what 'lies behind' scenarios of sexualized violence – literally and symbolically in the posters – demonstrate how the Nishnawbe Aski Nation inflects their DtL posters with levels of representational complexity that works to both complement and complicate consent discourse as it is represented in the textual elements of the poster. Indeed, these posters could be read as enacting Vanessa Watts' conception of Place-Thought: "a theoretical understanding of the world via a physical embodiment" (2013, 21). Understanding the land as "alive and thinking," where "all elements of nature possess agency" (Watts 2013, 23), Place-Thought helps describe relational connections between the instances of sexualized violence described in the texts of the posters and the 'natural' backgrounds. As Watts argues, "[t]he feminine and land is fundamental to our existence as people (Gunn-Allen, 1992). So, in an attempt to conquer such people, where would you start? Our land and our women, disabling communication with Place-Thought, and implementing a bounded agency where women are sub-human/non-human" (2013, 32). If, then, "colonization has disrupted our [Indigenous peoples'] ability to communicate with place," and if colonization is always already a sexually violent process, then the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters work to encourage a consideration of the violence humans do unto each other *and* the land/environment (Watts 2013, 24). Which brings me to my final point about the backgrounds of the five Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters: the relational connection

between the destruction of land/environment, and the destruction of sexualized violence.

Similar to the motifs present in "Clouds" and "Fire," the poster "Water" also might imply negative affective connotations. Significantly, the poster accomplishes this foreboding connotation through the juxtapositioning of the scenario of sexualized violence and the question posed to the viewer in relation to the background image of moving water. Specifically, the scenario presented in the poster – "your sister tells you that her husband won't allow her to go on birth control" (OCRCC 2018j) – appears just above the edge of the water. The water that is visualized in the poster, however, is not calm and serene like in the water of the river in the "Forest" poster; instead, the edge of the water is choppy, peaking in the middle like a small wave, suggesting that this water is not settled, but is moving, and potentially moving rather quickly and violently. Underneath this moving water is the question, "do you change the subject?" alongside the Nishnawbe Aski Nation logo (OCRCC 2018j). Here, I wonder if the representation of vital, but potentially dangerous elements of nature (water) might be employed in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters to connect the destruction of Indigenous lands and environments, to the effects of such acts of environmental violence (i.e. floods) and the perpetuation of sexualized violence. Specifically, a consideration of the visual elements of the "Water" poster alongside the consent-based text might be read as working to challenge the neoliberal, decontextualized elements of consent discourse that appear in the poster's text by reminding viewers of the ways in which the violent colonization of and resource extraction from Indigenous lands has historically and contemporarily aligned with the

violence done unto Indigenous women. One way the poster accomplishes a representation of these interconnected experiences of violence is through positioning the textual acknowledgements of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (the logo) and the bystander/viewer (the 'you' of the question) as under (the) water. Interpreting the water in the poster as flood waters caused by the destruction of lands, environments, and ecosystems under colonialist regimes, or perhaps colonialism itself, "Water" might thus encourage a viewer to consider the effects of such environmental destruction upon Indigenous communities (the Nishnawbe Aski Nation logo) and themselves (the 'you' in the question).

Importantly, however, the Indigenous woman experiencing sexualized violence in the poster's scenario (the sister) is positioned as just above the churning water. Although such positioning might signal Indigenous women's position of precarity in relation to the forces of colonialism (the water), that this woman represented by the textual elements has not succumbed to the water might indicate a hopeful futurity. Indeed, contrary to the many representations of Indigenous women as 'under threat' (representations that although troubling are indeed reflecting a sad reality), the "Water" poster also leaves space for the possibility of such Indigenous women experiencing such environmental and sexually violent effects of colonialism as being/living in a 'different space.' Significantly, the positioning of this Indigenous woman in an alternative space does not dismiss the possibility of further challenges or violence (she is still positioned dangerously close to the moving water, read here as the violence of colonialism), but also leaves room for the possibility for this woman to do something different in relation to the effects of colonialism (i.e. she is not under

the water, so perhaps she could help pull her community [represented by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation logo] out of 'danger'). Considered alongside its visual elements, then, the poster's textual focus on the neoliberal, consent-based privatization of 'choice' is rendered much more complicated through its visual references to the (re)production and effects of a colonial system that produces the conditions in which such acts of violence (environmental and sexualized) can occur.

Alongside the engaging backgrounds of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters, there is, however, one more important distinctive visual element of the posters that adds another facet of complexity. Specifically, every Nishnawbe Aski Nation poster replaces the traditional line that separates the scenario from the question in all other DtL posters with an image of a rope with 'draw-the-line.ca' appearing underneath. Although to some just a minor design detail, the rope in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters offers a multitudinous symbolic: ropes can be made of synthetic or natural materials, and often combine the intertwining of individual strands of material. The construction of the rope often depends on its use: rope is often a tool that can be used to bind or to separate, to help move things or hold them in their place. In short, a rope's use is tied to its context – who is using it and for what purpose.

In the context of DtL, the rope is most obviously used to separate the scenario of sexualized violence from the question of intervention. Although the use of the rope could thus simply reflect an aesthetic preference – one might argue that the rope pictured in the DtL posters that is constructed of natural fibres complements the 'natural' backgrounds of the posters – I argue that it has other

potential meanings.[31] Specifically, because the viewer cannot discern if the rope is cut at the poster's limits or continues beyond the bounds of the frame, it is unclear if the rope functions to separate the scenario and the question, or perhaps instead works to tie the scenarios, and the people involved, together. Thus, although the rope might be interpreted as signifying a means of separating the scenario (an instance of sexualized violence) from the question (the attempt to illicit bystander intervention), it could also be read as a means of binding those two phenomena. Here, Butler's work on survivability is useful in thinking about how conceptions of 'boundedness' can have multiple implications: "if we accept the insight that our very survival depends not on the policing of a boundary – the strategy of a certain sovereign in relation to its territory – but on recognizing how we are bound up with others, then this leads us to reconsider the way in which we conceptualize the body in the field of politics" (2009, 52). In thinking about the rope as both a boundary between the bystander and the people directly involved in sexualized violence, and as perhaps a kind of 'bind' that ties the two together, we can see the rope as symbolizing multiple possibilities of intervention. Although the viewer cannot see and thus 'know' what happens to the rope outside of the poster, I wonder if this unknowingness works to reflect the critical

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[31] In Indigenous filmmaker Shelly Niro's 1998 film, *Honey Moccasins,* the viewer is privy to a lengthy intro in which rope is used to 'write' the introductory credits for the film. Significantly, I interpret the use of rope in this Indigenous artistic production as having a similar function to the use of rope in DtL. Specifically, in spelling each filmic contributor's name in rope, Niro communicates a sense of connection and community between those involved in the production of *Honey Moccasins*. However, given that the roped text is only made visible when illuminated by a hand holding a match, there seems to be an implied sense of danger or fragility, as at any moment the roped credits could go up in flames. Ropes are thus important in contemporary Indigenous visual culture for signifying multiple meanings.

thinking/imaginings the poster literally asks viewers through its question. Put differently, we might think of the 'endless' rope as a visual cue that works to subtly reinforce the 'open-endedness' of responses to the textual elements of the poster. Here, the continuation of the rope of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters may work as a means of reinforcing the import of the poster's questions in promoting ongoing conversations about sexualized violence. Relatedly, the rope might be read as a means of speaking back to the restrictive framing of the posters' User Guides, which aim to delimit the ways viewers interact with the posters.

Through their visual aspects, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters thus present a distinctive approach to sexualized violence prevention. Employing seemingly simple visuals, the collective works to nuance both the strategy of bystanderism and the discourse of consent through which the strategy is articulated. Signifying the complex histories and contexts within which sexualized violence occurs and the affective connections (or perhaps binds) between all people who live in this society of sexualized violence, Nishnawbe Aski Nation articulates a kind of bystanderism that promotes a community-wide response-ability to sexualized violence, one that makes use of consent discourse without an overreliance on the simplistic neoliberal dualism of paternalism or privatization. Drawing on the work of Margot Leigh Butler and Amber Dean, I suggest that bystanderism in these posters, by implicating the viewer in the perpetuation of sexualized violence, promotes "…forms of empathic or felt engagement that necessarily tie feeling to responsibility, leading us towards practices of inheritance" (Dean 2015, 17). In short, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters hold

the promise of a mobilization of bystanderism that works to uphold, rather than subvert, the idea of communal responsibility for sexualized violence prevention.

Conclusion: The Ethical Demands of Living with Others

In the conclusion to her formative work on bystanderism, Banyard wonders, "how do we design accessible prevention tools to reach diverse audiences while also ensuring that individuals pay careful attention to the messages we send? We need to make sure that the delivery mechanism doesn't dilute the power of prevention information" (2015, 80). In this chapter, I have endeavoured to demonstrate the potential dangers of an overreliance upon consent discourse as 'delivery mechanism' of bystanderism through an analysis of the DtL campaign. Specifically, when mainly articulated through the rhetoric of consent – with its emphasis on 'individual choice' – the message of communal responsibility so important to bystanderism becomes convoluted, if not undermined. Importantly, in her work on the ethical demands of living with others, Judith Butler speaks of such limitations of consent, describing how the discourse cannot capture how we are bound to one another in ways that are not the result of a choice; moreover, it cannot account for the ways in which sexualized violence impinges on us simply by virtue of our relations with others – for example, how we are touched by sexualized violence insofar as it touches persons important to us (our friends, our family, our co-workers, our neighbours, ourselves). It is thus evident that consent as a prevention discourse is severely limited on its own, as well as when mobilized through bystander campaigns in an overly prescriptive manner.

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However, I have also striven to demonstrate that there is a means of employing consent discourse and bystander strategy together towards a more complex, nuanced treatment of sexualized violence prevention. Specifically, the five posters created by Nishnawbe Aski Nation that appear under the "Consent" filtering option work to visualize the complexity of sexualized violence and communal intervention through discursive and visual layers of historicity and affective connectivity. In using theories of bystanderism to temper the potentially individualizing thrust of consent discourse, these posters hold the potential to shift the focus or perspectives of their audience regarding sexualized violence from one that overindulges a neoliberal impetus to privatize and paternalize the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention, to a focus that locates the individual and their ability to prevent sexualized violence in a complex web of sociocultural and political factors that help determine the conditions of possibility regarding the occurrence of sexualized violence. Indeed, in these Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters, sexualized violence is not just a phenomenon affecting individuals, but a phenomenon that affects the community through its effect on individual members.

There are, however, no guarantees with such a project. Similar to Banyard's worries, it is unclear to me if the momentary engagement viewers would likely have with the posters 'on their own' would be enough for them to pick up on the nuances of the posters, or on the broader message of bystanderism. This, of course, is not to imply a naïve or disengaged viewership, but rather to speak to uncertainties regarding receptions of visual cultural productions, especially cultural productions that might be engaged with only momentarily (i.e.

passing a poster in a hall). I therefore wonder if these Nishnawbe Aski Nation posters might be most successfully employed without their User Guides and within an educational setting, where people have the time to discuss and debate the meanings of the posters in their discursive and visual entirety.

Despite its limitations, then, consent discourse might in some scenarios be a useful means of articulating bystanderism as a sexualized violence prevention strategy. Given the difficulties inherent in attempting to start conversations regarding sexualized violence – the informational difficulties (i.e. what is sexualized violence?) but also the affective difficulties in broaching this subject matter – it is perhaps necessary to mobilize consent as discourse insofar as it works to define and thus make manageable the problem of sexualized violence. However, as the example of DtL illustrates, care needs to be taken in ensuring that consent does not become the hegemonic strategy of sexualized violence prevention, overshadowing or replacing bystanderism's attempts to draw attention to how broader sociopolitical forces are also at stake in the continuance of sexualized violence.

Chapter Three - Forging a New War Path: The Preventative Potentialities of

Imagined Violence in Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers' *A Red Girl's Reasoning*

I am already bound to you, and this is what it means to be the self I am, receptive to you in ways that I cannot fully predict or control. This is also, clearly, the condition of my injurability as well, and in this way, my answerability and my injurability are bound up with one another. In other words, *you may frighten me and threaten me, but my obligation to you must remain firm.* (2015, 110)
-Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, emphasis mine

Introduction: Imagining Violence, Imagining Prevention

The story begins in Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Viewers are privy to a familiar scene: a police officer chases a man through alleys and abandoned buildings. The drum-heavy music of A Tribe Called Red punctuates the urgency of the pursuit. The recognizable scene is disrupted, however, with the entrance of a mysterious third figure riding a motorcycle. Their helmet conceals their identity. Who is this rider? What is their role in this familiar story? Suddenly, the chase is halted as the man reaches a dead end. The figure on the motorcycle pulls into the same alleyway. They remove their helmet; the leather clad figure reveals herself as a tall, slim Indigenous woman with long black hair. Immediately the woman engages the man in combat. As she delivers a blow to the man, the idea that the Indigenous woman might be an ally of the police officer is soon dismissed. An alternative camera angle reveals the woman to also be fighting the police officer. After the mysterious woman successfully defeats both the police officer and the unidentified man a voiceover explains the identity and motivations of the woman. Delia, as viewers come to know her, is a vigilante justice-seeker for Indigenous women who have experienced sexualized violence at the hands of white men, a

form of violence which has been perpetuated and perpetrated by the colonial state and its agents.

The passage described above is the opening scene to Niitsítapi/Sámi filmmaker Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers' eleven-minute film, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* (2012). In five short acts, viewers are privy to Delia's attempt to attain justice for Nelly, an Indigenous woman whose experience of sexualized violence committed by Brian, a white, presumably well-off man, has been dismissed by the Canadian courts. With the help of an unnamed bartender who is also an Indigenous woman, Delia drugs Brian and brings him to a run-down and isolated area in Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Stripped to his underwear and tied to some metal scaffolding, Brian is questioned by Delia about his assault upon Nelly, and it is revealed that seven years earlier Brian also sexually assaulted Delia. With this revelation, it becomes apparent that Brian will not escape justice this time. Delia douses Brian with gasoline and places a lit cigarette in his mouth. The film then ends much like it began, portraying Delia riding her motorcycle, this time presumably away from a stranded Brian. Significantly, viewers are left uncertain of Brian's fate: death if he lets the cigarette burn, or a permanent scarring if he chooses to swallow the cigarette.[1]

My first viewing of Tailfeathers' film left me elated. As a feminist but also a horror film buff, I have a fraught relationship with depictions of sexualized violence in many filmic genres, but even more so with those that tell a story of

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[1] Importantly, this is an interpretation of *A Red Girl's Reasoning* articulated by Katelyn Verstraten in her article on the film (2013). Verstraten's interpretation of Tailfeather's work is also used in Allison Hargreaves work on the film (2017, 181).

sexualized violence and revenge. Although I often find myself emotionally invested in such seemingly subversive narratives of sexualized violence that is avenged – often brutally – by those who experience it, my critical feminist senses all too often cringe at the ways many films eroticize sexualized violence, and generally over-simplify while spectacularizing the instance of sexualized abuse. In one sense, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is similar to other films that portray vengeful acts in response to instances of sexualized violence: it is fast-paced, filled with spectacularly choreographed fight-scenes, and oozing with a sense of righteousness when the protagonist enacts their often-violent justice. Yet, in another sense, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* vastly differs from what is frequently labeled the rape-revenge genre: films where sexualized violence is central rather than incidental to the plot of a given film or narrative. Indeed, although 'about' sexualized violence, Tailfeathers' film does not depict any instances of sexualized violence against women, nor does it portray sexualized violence as an individualized, one-time event. I thus understand Tailfeathers' work as communicating something more complicated than the typical film about sexualized violence and revenge, something important about sexualized violence and its relation to broader sociocultural factors such as settler-colonialism, misogyny, and geopolitics. With more at stake than a momentary thrill from watching a rapist get their ass kicked, Tailfeathers' work reads to me as a kind of would-be threat to enemies of Indigenous women, suggesting the import of Indigenous women's experiences of and responses to sexualized violence towards its eradication.

In their 1993 essay, "Imagined Violence, Queer Violence: Representation, Rage, and Resistance," J. Halberstam makes similar observations regarding the productive potential of representations of subversive acts of violence – that is, of depictions of violence enacted by persons occupying marginal positionalities unto those occupying positions of (relative) privilege. Importantly, their work has been crucial to my interpretation of films that deal with sexualized violence. Specifically, Halberstam describes the (potentially) generative effects of imagined violence as locatable within the way it represents an alternative reality which could potentially shift the "responsibility for articulating the relationship between fantasy and reality" from persons occupying marginalized positionalities to those occupying privileged positionalities (1993, 192). Although careful to avoid suggesting that the relationship between fictionalized violence on screen and 'real-life' material violence is predictable, straightforward or causal, Halberstam maintains that "it is by imagining violence that we can harness the force of fantasy and transform it into productive fear" (1992, 195). For Halberstam, then, subversive representations of violence hold the promise of a reversal of the sociopolitical economy of violence, encouraging those who have enjoyed a fairly constant positionality as subjects in/of violence to imagine themselves otherwise, as objects of violence.[2]

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[2] My use of the word 'economy' here borrows from Jacqui True's work on political economies of violence. When speaking of an 'economy of violence,' I am referring to the way in which violence functions as a kind of capital, affecting, in the words of True, "…the workings of power not only through visible coercion that is direct in its effects but also in the material basis of relationships that govern the distribution and use of resources, benefits, privileges, and authority within the home and society at large" (2012, 8).

Significantly, one of the ways Halberstam addresses the efficacy and ethics of representing violence as a means of preventing violence is through an analysis of the 1991 rape-revenge film, *Thelma & Louise*. Focusing upon the scene in which Thelma shoots and kills Harlan, a drunken bar-goer who attempts to sexually assault her best friend, Louise, Halberstam suggests that the film has an important feminist function. Arguing against those who suggest the use of violence – representational or otherwise – is a dubious and/or dangerous prevention strategy, in relation to representational violence, Halberstam asserts that:

> A description of women committing acts of violence against men does not simply use 'male' tactics of aggression for other ends; in fact, female violence transforms the symbolic function of the feminine within popular narratives and simultaneously challenges the hegemonic insistence upon linking of might and right under the sign of masculinity. (1993, 191)

For Halberstam, however, imagined violence does not just challenge a moralistic 'care-based' or 'maternal' feminism (and the ways such theories [re]produce a white, middle-upper class feminism), but it also has a practical preventative function. As they state, "imagined violence does not stop men from raping women … but it might make a man think twice about whether a woman is going to blow him away" (1993, 199).

From Halberstam's theory of imagined violence, their analysis of *Thelma & Louise*, and my own multiple viewings of *A Red Girl's Reasoning,* I thus began to wonder why representations of women injuring or killing the persons that assault them are not more frequently employed towards feminist anti-sexualized

violence aims. If a rape-revenge film holds the potential to encourage a spectatorial re-thinking of one's position within an economy of violence, could a film like *A Red Girl's Reasoning* be mobilized to support feminist anti-sexualized violence aims? And, if so, what is it 'about' a film that could make it potentially amenable to feminist goals?

In this chapter, I address such questions by conducting a close analysis of Tailfeathers' film, *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, an example of a cultural production that might be employed as a kind of fighting strategy towards feminist anti-sexualized violence aims. Here, I understand feminist anti-sexualized violence ambitions broadly as the general desire to make sexualized violence no longer a possibility. In attempting to address the aforementioned questions, however, it is imperative to note that this chapter steers away from an argument that attempts to prove that Tailfeathers' film *is* a rape-revenge film, or a sexualized violence prevention device. Moreover, this analysis in no way suggests that *A Red Girl's Reasoning* functions as a kind of 'how-to-guide' for preventing sexualized violence or taking revenge upon one's abuser. Instead, I consider how Tailfeathers' film alters the common tropes of the rape-revenge film, and how these alterations could be interpreted as aligning the film and its themes with the most productive aspects of the fighting strategy of sexualized violence prevention. Working to expose the normative racist, classist, colonialist and sexist underpinnings of traditional neoliberal citizenly belonging, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* challenges any simple understanding of representations of revenge in response to sexualized violence as always already self-defeating and problematic. Tailfeathers' complex and oftentimes contradictory mobilization of violence as

both a form of and a way to work against oppression provides a challenge to common-sense understandings about how identity politics inform (or do not inform) our ways of interpreting representations of sexualized violence. From this analysis, I ultimately argue that the film explicitly works to disrupt the sociocultural neoliberal discourses that enable sexualized violence to occur, making it a controversial but potentially helpful tool that might be employed for feminist anti-sexualized violence aims.

To develop these claims, I divide this chapter into three sections. Following Halberstam's assertions regarding the productive potentiality of representations of imagined violence, in the first section I situate *A Red Girl's Reasoning* within the larger sexualized violence prevention trend that I term 'fighting strategies.' To accomplish this, I think through how the film adheres to, but also breaks with, traditional tropes and themes of the rape-revenge genre, a kind of cultural production that embodies many of the tenets of fighting strategies. Rather than categorizing Tailfeathers' film as rape-revenge, however, I draw on the work of Leigh Gilmore to posit that *A Red Girl's Reasoning* might be approached as a kind of limit-case in relation to the rape-revenge genre insofar as it subverts elements of the rape-revenge film that are often flagged as problematic – if not outright dangerous – by feminist film critics. Through such circumventions and alterations of the common elements of the rape-revenge genre, I posit that *A Red Girl's Reasoning* troubles some of my central concerns regarding the productive potentialities of filmic representations of sexualized violence towards the possibility of feminist anti-sexualized violence aims.

Building upon this analysis, in the second section I argue that what potentially lends *A Red Girl's Reasoning* so well to feminist anti-sexualized violence aims is the way it not only works to counter misogyny and racism – features that are prevalent in other rape-revenge films – but also neoliberal ideology. Focusing upon how neoliberal discourses of equality, the trope of vigilantism, and the ideals of personal responsibility and individualism are mobilized but also subverted in the film, I argue that Tailfeathers' work aims to broaden the implied responsibility for sexualized violence prevention from individuals to a community by contesting a neoliberal conception of the human as primarily self-interested and self-sacrificing. Drawing on the theories of Amber Dean regarding the importance of implication in engaging all persons in a movement against colonial violence, I suggest that Tailfeathers' film works to reimagine the conditions of possibility regarding sexualized violence by representing Indigenous women as experiencing sexualized violence in a way that represents all parties (victim/survivors, perpetrators, and the state) as not innocent, but implicated in the continuance of a sociopolitical community that thrives on different kinds of violence.

In the final section, I address a particularly challenging and potentially troubling aspect of Tailfeathers' film that could limit an attempt to mobilize the film for the purposes of feminist anti-sexualized violence aims: how sexualized violence is portrayed in the film as an egregious harm experienced by the female protagonist, whereas seemingly similar acts of violence done unto sexualized parts of a male body are figured as an acceptable retribution tactic. Engaging theorists who put forth such critiques alongside those who debate the veracity of

'fighting violence with violence,' such as Paulo Friere, I argue that contrary to viewing such acts as sexualized violence, we might understand Delia's actions against white men as retributive violence and/or "acts of love" that alter, rather than simply reverse, the symbolic economy of (gendered, racialized) violence. Importantly, this kind of representation of sexualized violence against white men usefully encourages one to rethink sexualized violence as it is connected to settler-colonial politics as a specific kind of misogyny.

Through this analysis, I will thus demonstrate how Tailfeathers' film usefully negotiates some of the seemingly contradictory elements of the fighting approach to sexualized violence, most notably, how one might mobilize a fighting approach to sexualized violence prevention within a neoliberal climate. Visually and narratively signposting problematic neoliberal ideals common to the rape-revenge genre, and questioning the effectiveness, or perhaps more significantly, the 'productivity' of neoliberal ideals for *all* women in relation to feminist anti-sexualized violence aims, Tailfeathers' short, independent film (re)imagines how a controversial genre might be rethought towards feminist anti-sexualized violence aims. As a consequence, the film acts as site where feminist anti-sexualized violence scholars and activists might look to be inspired about how to mobilize aspects of fighting strategies in visual cultural productions in a manner that complicates prescriptive neoliberal assumptions of the human as fundamentally self-interested and self-sacrificing. As Delia states at the end of the film, the question then becomes which anti-sexualized violence proponents will be brave enough to "just watch me" (*Red* 2012).

Pushing the Limits: *A Red Girl's Reasoning* as a Limit-Case of Rape-Revenge Films

Rape-Revenge Films: Debates and Definitions

Compared to other strategies and discourses of sexualized violence prevention, such as consent discourse or bystanderism, we will recall that the fighting strategy of sexualized violence prevention is unique in that it rejects attempts to solicit the cooperation of would-be perpetrators or the broader community towards prevention. Undergirded by the belief that sexualized violence is undoubtedly linked to other kinds of violence and oppressions, such as misogyny, proponents of the fighting strategy argue that attempts to elicit help towards preventing sexualized violence from those who benefit (in some way) from these systemic regimes of authority will fall flat. Not only would moves to convince or engage in cooperation with would-be perpetrators and the broader white-supremacist, capitalist, hetero-patriarchal community work to reinforce marginalized persons' positions of made inferiority (i.e. asking for help versus taking action), but fighting strategies also work from the belief that persons with (relative) privilege often do not have a (large enough) stake in dismantling these hierarchies to make their cooperation full-hearted. Thus, proponents of the fighting strategy advocate that persons most vulnerable to sexualized violence (mostly women, and women-identifying persons) must lead the fight against sexualized violence, both in a material or physical and a metaphorical or symbolic sense, in order to reclaim their sociocultural and embodied power towards the goal of making sexualized violence no longer a possibility.

A prominent but subversive example of the fighting strategy is the manifestation of some of its key tenets in cultural representations where potential

victims are portrayed as fighting or killing persons responsible for their sexual abuse, a

such as *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), *Ms. 45* (1981), *Thelma and Louise* (1991),

Teeth (2007), *The Woman* (2011) and *American Mary* (2012). To describe such

films, I use the relatively common, but controversial term, 'rape-revenge.'

Significantly, scholars who work on 'rape-revenge' films disagree about the definition

of the label and what it signifies. For instance, whereas Carole Clover understands rape-

revenge as a (sub)genre of the broader 'horror' classification of films (1992), Jacinda

Read posits that rape-revenge is actually a "narrative structure" that articulates, "a

movement not from the feminine (rape) to the masculine (revenge)" by the film's

female protagonist (2000, 50). Following the work of Clare Henry, however, I prefer

to approach rape-revenge as a genre of film. As Henry explains:

> Genre is a preferable term for rape-revenge because genre studies help us
>
> to understand its processes of flux and inter-genre mutation. This labelling
>
> is also a political move to validate rape-revenge genre as being significant
>
> and worthy of study alongside the tradition genres of Westerns, film noir,
>
> and horror most commonly given attention in genre studies. (2014, 4).

Alongside Henry's arguments, given that there are repeated and identifiable

semantic/syntactic elements of the films I label 'rape-revenge' that correspond

with Robert Atlman's seven characteristics of Hollywood genre, I find the term

'genre' most helpful in understanding how I approach films labelled, 'rape-

revenge' (Henry 2014, 4).[3]

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[3] As Henry notes, Altman's seven characteristics of a Hollywood genre are: dual protagonists and
dualistic structure; a repetitive nature; dependence on a cumulative effect; predictability; a heavy

Recalling, however, my hesitations regarding the use of the term 'rape' in the introduction to this dissertation, it may seem odd that I would employ this term given its sociocultural and political limitations. For instance, the term 'rape' typically signifies an act of unwanted, violent bodily penetration; does that mean, then, that I am only analyzing films that represent such acts? In short, no; 'rape-revenge' is a well-established label in both academic and/or filmic communities used to describe films where an instance of sexualized violence is integral to the plot. Perhaps fitting in the sense that many films that could be classified as 'rape-revenge' portray an act of unwanted bodily penetration, it is important that not all films that I situate within this genre visually represent what we typically understand as 'rape,' and/or (re)present 'rape' at all. Much like my cautious employment of the term 'rape culture,' then, my mobilization of the term 'rape-revenge' makes use of a common historical and cultural filmic label in order to interrogate and complicate how the term is mobilized and understood. The label 'rape-revenge' thus enables me to narrow a field of study, whilst simultaneously leaving room for a contestation and/or questioning of the historical and cultural terms (i.e. 'rape') that make this label recognizable.

Significantly, debates regarding the labelling and classification of rape-revenge films only represent part of feminist scholar's interest in the genre. Depicting women (or women-identifying people) as integral to not only attaining justice for their own experience of sexualized violence, but also through that revenge, potentially preventing

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use of intertextual reference; a symbolic usage of key images; sounds, and situations; and a social function" (2014, 4).

future instance of violence committed by their abuser, rape-revenge films embody the central idea(l) of a woman-centered anti-sexualized violence movement characteristic of fighting strategies.[4] Independent, self-sufficient, tough, and intelligent, the women of rape-revenge films represent a productive (fictional) image of what a rejection of a softer, more polite approach to sexualized violence revenge and prevention might look like. In these films, there are no ideas of persuading or asking perpetrators to relinquish their sexually abusive behaviors and attitudes, but rather a threat that they will and must abandon such a positionality – or else. In portraying women in such a manner, the idea is that such representations might work to alter what the fighting strategy regards as the underlying reason that women-identifying people experience sexualized violence: the idea that women are always-already rapeable (Marcus 1992, 400).

Yet, it is important to note that the relationships between rape-revenge films, the fighting strategy of sexualized violence prevention, and feminist anti-sexualized violence aims are neither direct nor straightforward. As Kayley Viteo argues, rape-revenge films are especially mired in debates about feminist representational ethics regarding sexualized violence as they "… can be seen as both advocating feminist stories but also perpetuating rape in the telling and showing of it" (2012, 21). Because of the very structure of the rape-revenge film, where an act of sexualized violence is usually followed by a well-planned act of vengeance, it is often deemed necessary to depict the sexualized assault at great length to justify, or in some cases discredit, the (moral) rationalization of the violent act of revenge.

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[4] It is significant that there are films that adhere to the central tenets of the rape-revenge genre that feature transgender women. For an example, see the 2010 film with the cringeworthy titled, *Ticked off Trannies with Knives.*

As Sarah Projansky best states, graphic sexualized violence scenes function "paradoxically both to challenge rape myths from a feminist perspective and to contribute to the existence of violence against women in media culture" (2001, 96). Moreover, few if any rape-revenge films are created with the explicit purpose of sexualized violence prevention. Connections between rape-revenge films and their preventative potentialities are thus more likely to be created through viewer engagement with content surrounding the film (i.e. director/producer interviews, summaries of films on the back of DVDs), and/or to the interpretations of (critical) viewers, including scholars and activists.

It is thus perhaps unsurprising that feminist responses to the rape-revenge genre are as diverse as the films themselves. There are scholars that tend to praise the films for their empowering potentialities (Brown 2001; Halberstam 1993; King and McCaughey 2001; Lentz 1993), those that tend to be skeptical of the films' messages of female agency and power (Clover 1992; Creed 1993; Lehman 1993; Springer 2001; Young 2009), and those that work in between exaltation and critique (Franco 2004; Heller-Nicholas 2011; Henry 2014; Read 2000). The common thread throughout such analyses of rape-revenge, however, concerns its central representational paradox for feminist film critics: "the simple fact that it [a film or a television show] includes a representation of rape contributes to the existence of rape on a representational level" (Projanksy 2001, 96). It is thus both the act of revenge and *how* the precipitating act of sexualized violence is depicted that contributes to whether a film might be more or less likely read as a feminist text.

In thinking, then, about rape-revenge films as potential materializations of the fighting strategy of sexualized violence prevention, it is important to note that the film I am most concerned with in this chapter – *A Red Girl's Reasoning* – does not replicate one of the most central tropes of the rape-revenge film: a depiction of a woman experiencing sexualized violence. Moreover, unlike the vast majority of rape-revenge films, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is short (eleven minutes) and independently produced (not funded by a major production studio). One might ask, then, why think about Tailfeathers' film in relation to this cinematic genre at all if a) the actual *visual* representation of sexualized violence has been so important to rape-revenge films, yet does not actually appear in Tailfeathers' film, and b) the short, independent feature contradicts so many other common tropes of present in the many mainstream films that comprise the genre?

In her work on autobiography, Leigh Gilmore makes a case for considering how works that break the traditional themes, tropes, and structures of the autobiographical genre are important for pushing autobiography into new testimonial territory. Limit-cases – works that simultaneously adhere to and depart from the major tenets of autobiography – are significant according to Gilmore insofar as "they confront how the limits of autobiography, multiple and sprawling as they are, might conspire to prevent some self-representational stories from being told at all" (2001, 14). Like Gilmore, I am thus less interested in establishing whether or not a film such as Tailfeathers' can be classified within a certain genre – in this case, the rape-revenge genre. Rather, and following Gilmore's discussion of limit-cases, I wonder how a consideration of Tailfeathers' film as a kind of limit-case in relation to the mainstream designation of 'rape-

revenge genre of film' could be helpful in thinking about this genre's usefulness for sexualized violence prevention. As we shall see later in this chapter, Tailfeathers' film – unlike other, mainstream films I classify as 'rape-revenge' – has the explicit goal of addressing sexualized violence against Indigenous women and is geared towards a specific audience. Because of the way *A Red Girl's Reasoning* differs from the 'typical' rape-revenge film – differences, for example, in terms of funding (low versus high-budget) and circulation contexts (cinemas versus post-secondary classrooms), and more importantly, content – the film might represent a particularly fruitful site for interrogating the possibilities of this controversial genre. Therefore, understanding the rape-revenge genre as a potential example of the fighting strategy, and understanding *A Red Girl's Reasoning* as a limit-case of the rape-revenge genre, an evaluation of the film's feminist anti-sexualized violence potentialities might be enhanced by a consideration of how the film simultaneously adheres to some of the elements of the rape-revenge film praised by feminist critics, but breaks with other problematic elements of the rape-revenge genre.

Adherences and Departures: Critiquing Rape-Revenge

One of the most frequent features about the rape-revenge genre discussed by scholars is its tendency to portray sexualized violence as a terrible, harmful event – an effect of its survivor-centric focus. Because, as Projansky notes, "gratuitous representations" of sexualized violence are all too common in Western visual culture, working – for the most part – to represent hatred and violence towards women, a portrayal of sexualized violence *as violent*, as in rape-revenge

films, can work productively to portray the phenomenon as a serious issue within a society confused about its significance (2001, 95). As Alison Young explains:

> The rape-revenge movie posits that rape is an experience so dreadful that the victim's response can include *lethal violence* against her attackers. In order for the woman's acts of lethal revenge to make 'legal' and cinematic sense, the subsequent series of homicides must be at least symbolically balanced against a preceding cataclysmically serious event of rape. (2000, 45 – emphasis original)

Significantly, then, some scholars argue that in the rape-revenge film, the way the spectator is encouraged to align their sympathies with the avenging protagonist works against attitudes that suggest that sexualized violence is not 'really violence' and/or that victims are implicated in their own assaults.

Despite such productive feminist potentialities, other scholars, such as Peter Lehman, express concern at the way the rape-revenge genre tends to eroticize scenes of sexualized abuse. Using point of view shots that focus on the abuser and his pleasure, or focusing on the body of the person experiencing sexualized violence (as opposed to their expressions of pain or dissociation), some rape-revenge films overemphasize the sexual-ness of the assault. Moreover, even when the act of sexualized violence is portrayed from a victim/survivor-centered perspective, some scholars argue that this does not necessarily guarantee that the film is aiming to induce sympathy, empathy, or some sort of empathic relation between viewer and protagonist. As Henry explains in her analysis of point-of-view shots in scenes of abuse in rape-revenge films, frequent shots of the victim's face during the depiction of a sexualized assault, especially when the victim is in

pain, often function to "heighten the shock moments of horror by using a more embodied and subjective perspective" (2014, 35). In this sense, portrayals of the sexualized assault in rape-revenge films might not always be a means of encouraging viewer identification, but viewer distancing. By depicting a scene of sexualized violence through either horrific exaggeration or highly stylized aesthetics, such moments can become unreal or less real, potentially alienating the viewer with scenes of disgust, or placating them with scenes of pleasure.

In short, although potentially subverting rape myths in some respects, rape-revenge films may also (re)produce stereotypical understandings of sexualized violence. As Young most succinctly summarizes, "the acts of rape displayed in a rape-revenge story are usually those consonant with stereotypes and myths about 'real' rape, including notions that rape occurs when a stranger attacks a woman in a public place, or that rape requires serious physical violence to be used to overcome the woman's resistance" (2000, 44). For these reasons, it might be difficult to imagine how rape-revenge films could function as an example of the fighting strategy of sexualized violence prevention. If the goal of fighting strategies is to make sexualized violence no longer a possibility, it is questionable whether the graphic portrayal of sexualized violence as integral to a film's challenging of sexualized violence can be productive in reaching this end.

Significantly, however, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* omits any visual portrayal of the victim-avenger's experience of sexualized violence, thus circumventing some feminist concerns with the rape-revenge genre. Here, there is no chance of eroticizing or spectacularizing the protagonist's experience of sexualized abuse because Tailfeathers refuses to engage in such visualized representations. Indeed,

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viewers only come to be aware of the import of sexualized violence to Delia's vengeful actions through voiceovers. For instance, early in the film, viewers are privy to Delia's back-alley fight with a police officer and a shoddily dressed white man that was earlier depicted as being chased by the police officer. As the camera alternates perspectives between blows (in one shot Delia is fighting the police officer, in the next, she is hitting the man), the fast-paced angle switching slows to emphasize a particularly hefty punch that Delia throws, landing forcefully on the man's cheek and sending blood spurting from his mouth. As Delia grabs the man to knee him in the stomach, the pace of the scene slows further and Delia states in a voiceover, "I've been on this warpath for six long, lonely years." While finishing this statement, Delia then knocks the man onto a pile of garbage bags with a front-kick, implying that the 'warpath' she refers to in the voiceover is related to her violent assault against these men. As the man hits the garbage bags with a thud, the camera pans back to Delia, who regains her footing and smiles, taking stock of her handiwork. While Delia seemingly decides upon her next move, the voiceover continues to explain, "But white boys have been having their way with Indian girls since contact." Immediately following this statement, Delia kicks the man in the groin, who responds with a wince, a painful moan, and a gesture to protect or cradle his injured genitals. Using colloquialism for sexualized violence ('having their way') juxtaposed with the image of her kicking the man's groin, Tailfeathers thus represents Indigenous women's experience of sexualized violence without having to literally visualize such a scenario.

Although I would argue that the decision to omit a visualization of sexualized assault is significant in and of itself, I believe this omission is

especially important in Tailfeathers' work considering the identity of her protagonist as an Indigenous woman. As Elissa Washuta notes, because "violence against indigenous women [is] fun, sexy, and no big deal on the big screen," it is questionable if portraying one of the Indigenous women in the film experiencing sexualized violence would have what some critics understand as a positive effect of representing sexualized violence: revealing its horror (2014, n.p.). Instead, Tailfeathers makes use of narrativization and a visualization of a white man's pain to convey sexualized violence against Indigenous women (a point I will discuss further in the last section of this chapter).

Yet, it is not just that Tailfeathers' film avoids visual portrayals of sexualized violence that makes her work extraordinary, but it is also that the film avoids any in-depth description of sexualized violence against Indigenous women. Specifically, neither Delia nor Nelly describes the physical or emotional harm that Brian inflicted upon them, but rather alludes to sexualized violence via their retellings of the way the court handled their cases. In one scene, for instance, Nelly meets Delia in an alleyway cluttered by unused crates and garbage. Nelly hands Delia a manila envelope, which Delia opens, revealing a picture of a well-dressed white man. As Delia looks surprisingly at the photograph, Nelly explains, "I took him to court, but they let him walk. Said the damn kit was inclusive." Similar to the way in which visual and direct narrative cues that directly denote sexualized violence are avoided earlier in the film, Tailfeathers' work continues its visual and narrative ambiguity regarding Indigenous women's experience of sexualized violence. Indeed, it is through the word 'kit' here that viewers might be tipped off to the fact that Nelly is talking about sexualized assault (i.e. 'rape kit'

used by police to collect evidence of sexualized violence). Importantly, in relaying Nelly's and Delia's experiences of abuse through their interactions with the Canadian court system (or lack thereof, in the case of Delia) the film suggests that their interaction with the settler-colonial state represents another kind of gendered and racialized violence. The omissions of a visual and verbal description of Nelly's and Delia's experiences of sexualized violence thus do not just trouble the problems of representing sexualized violence, but actually work to connect the experience of sexualized violence with that of a misogynistic, settler-colonial state via the legal system.

Despite the omission of what is frequently understood as the primary means to facilitate viewer identification with the avenging protagonist – a graphic depiction of an instance of sexualized violence – Tailfeathers' film still seems to manage to capture some of the potentially productive elements of representing sexualized violence cited by rape-revenge scholars. For instance, viewers come to know of Nelly's and Delia's experiences of sexualized violence – the events that propel the avenging actions of the protagonist – from the women's dialogue about their experiences of abuse. As Allison Hargreaves argues in her analysis of the film, the refusal to portray sexualized violence in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is significant insofar as "…viewers must take these women at their word" (2017, 174). Importantly, such a circumvention of one of the major tropes of rape-revenge films works productively towards dismantling the oft-presumed unreliability and unbelievability of the accounts of people who experience sexualized violence. Moreover, the move to relay the women's experiences of sexualized violence through their own testimony or narrative adheres to the

prominent idea(l) of the fighting strategy of sexualized violence prevention that posits that women should spearhead efforts that work towards addressing and eradicating sexualized violence. In thus minimizing the ways sexualized violence is brought into the cultural imaginary via her film, Tailfeathers' work can be read as working more closely with the feminist anti-sexualized violence aim of working towards eradiation of such violence.

In thinking further about the effects of the ways sexualized violence are represented in *A Red Girl's Reasoning,* it is, however, important to remember the fact that Nelly and Delia are *Indigenous* women who are portrayed as credible witnesses to their experiences of sexualized abuse. As Gilmore notes in her work on testimony to sexualized assault, adjudications of women's credibility in relation to sexualized abuse "will draw from a deep reservoir of bias that connects gender and race to status across popular culture and informal spaces as well as institutions" (2017, 5). Broadly, then, although one might understand Tailfeathers' film as working to (re)produce the counter-discourse of victim/survivor believability garnering further support in recent years, it is also important that the film does so in a way that acknowledges how 'believability' is not just gendered but raced.

A Red Girl's Reasoning thus departs from the rape-revenge genre's tendency to play into stereotypical identarian politics as they pertain to sexualized violence and its intersections with discourses of race, colonialism, gender, and class. Specifically, the repeated representation of sexualized violence in the rape-revenge genre as experienced primarily by white, heterosexual, middle-class women obscures the unique experiences of women of colour and suggests white

women's experiences can stand in for or work to represent all women's experience of sexualized violence. However, as Andrea Smith argues in her analysis of sexualized violence against Indigenous women in the U.S., "gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism" (2005, 1). Importantly, through the main characters – Delia, Brian and Nelly – Tailfeathers' film visualizes Smith's arguments regarding the colonial function of sexualized violence. Tailfeathers accomplishes this by not only focusing upon Nelly's and Delia's experiences of sexualized violence at the hands of Brian, but also by suggesting that the justification for Delia's acts of revenge is contingent on other Indigenous women's current and past experiences of sexualized violence. For example, in her introductory speech Delia cites the ongoingness of sexualized colonial violence as the reason for her combative actions: "Forget what Disney tells you, Pocahontas was twelve when she met John Smith." Connecting Indigenous women's present experiences of sexualized violence (via Delia's vigilante work in the last six years) to Indigenous women's experiences of sexualized violence at the beginning of the colonial project in the Americas, Tailfeathers renders sexualized violence against Indigenous women as part of a settler-colonial project that is still occurring in the present.

To further stress the import of settler colonialism as context for sexualized violence, Tailfeathers' film avoids the traditional binary oppositions between the antagonist and protagonist of the rape-revenge film. As scholars such as Clover have noted, the tendency in rape-revenge films to rely upon dualisms such as city versus country (or urban versus rural), wealthy versus poor, educated versus

uneducated, able versus disabled, and healthy versus diseased (1992, 124-5)

draws upon discourses of race while avoiding overt racial othering. As such,

many rape-revenge films feature characters who are visibly white, but rely on

culturally coded signifiers of race to relay who is the 'evil' (racialized) antagonist

and who is the 'good' (white) protagonist. Specifically, in the traditional rape-

revenge film, the racially coded 'country folk' signify a material and symbolic

threat to the white city-goer: their 'backwards' or uneducated beliefs fuel their

rapacious desires. Viewers are encouraged to identify with the 'cultured'

protagonist from the city, a figure who represents and defends the citizenly

'civilized' ideals of purportedly modern, equitable, neoliberal society.

In Tailfeathers' film, however, the antagonist and protagonist do not need

such racially inflected geopolitical coding given that their racial differences are

visually apparent. Instead, Tailfeathers employs a politics of location and other

visualized signifiers in order to complicate, rather than reaffirm, racially-based

stereotypes. For example, the presumed civility and righteousness of the 'white'

and 'urban' is questioned through various visual and narrative representations of

the figures of Brian, the police officer, and 'the hoodlum.'[5] Brian, for instance, is

first introduced to viewers sitting at a bar tended by a full-figured Indigenous

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[5] My use of the word 'hoodlum' to describe the unnamed man who is beaten up by Delia at the beginning of the film follows the use of the term on promotional material (i.e. back of DVD cover). Although I had trouble discerning the exact etymology of the term, 'hoodlum' seems to be linked to classed and racialized conceptions of persons engaging in violent, suspect, or criminal activities in mid-seventeenth century San Francisco. Given Tailfeathers' careful attention to so many aspects of her film, it seems likely that her choice to describe this character as a 'hoodlum' is intentional – especially since he is white, and poses a threat to Delia (a more obviously raced and classed character). Nevertheless, I have chosen to reproduce the term in quotes to signify my tentativeness of its usage here in relation to an uncertain definition/history.

woman in a vibrant, red and white, polka-dot dress. With his slumped over posture seemingly contradicting his upper-class appearance, the suit-clad Brian glances at an off-screen door that viewers hear open and close. As the shot moves from the bartender back to Brian, viewers see that Delia is now beside Brian. Delia says to the bartender, "whiskey, neat,' and Brian glances at Delia with a slight smirk and raised eyebrow. His sharp, pointed features lend him a weaselly quality, and as Delia picks up her freshly-poured drink, Brian leans back in his chair and looks Delia up and down with a seedy smile: "Wouldn't take a pretty girl like you to be a whiskey drinker. You from around here?" Combined with this tired attempt at a pick-up line, Brian's smug facial expressions, his confident posturings, and his pompous attire (that is oh-so-out-of place in the dimly lit dive bar setting) link the character with urban life, but in a deprecating manner. Unlike the portrayal of haute, intelligent, forward-thinking white characters associated with 'the urban' in other rape-revenge films, Brian – like other white male characters in the film – is represented as a tiresome, unlikeable, familiar character that lacks a sense of 'civility,' a feature typically saved for characters associated with 'rural' settings in rape-revenge films.

Delia, on the other hand, is also portrayed as an urban-coded character, but in a much different manner than Brian. Working against stereotypes of Indigenous people as 'connected to the land' or 'rural,' Tailfeathers locates Delia - the strong, intelligent, and resilient protagonist – firmly within the 'urban' through her dress (tight-fitting leather motorcycle jacket and pants), her mode of transportation (her motorcycle), and her familiarity with Downtown Eastside Vancouver (her frequenting and use of various clandestine locations). Unlike Brian, however,

Delia's urban connotations are positive: her clothing is attractive but appropriate for her job, and her mode of transportation is powerful yet allows her to agilely navigate city streets. Thus, in associating all of these characters differentially associated with the urban and having the battle for Nelly's and Delia's justice play out within the city, Tailfeathers links the fight for Indigenous sovereignty, rights, and justice to a distinctly settler-colonial place, but a place where Delia – rather than Brian – has the upper hand. In connecting both the assaults and the battle for justice to the urban, Tailfeathers thus questions not only the idea(l) of white, urban civility (these terrible things happen on *your* turf), but suggests that sexualized violence against Indigenous women is a problem that must be dealt with in a way that is attentive to the politics of place.

Importantly, such complicated colonial geopolitics are further foregrounded in the film through Brian's strongly coded utterance to Delia in the bar. Prior to going to the washroom after their meeting at the bar, Brian whispers to Delia, "don't disappear." Most obviously a reference to the disappearance of Indigenous women across Canada, Brian's words have another important significance according to Hargreaves: "resonant of that nostalgic colonial fantasy of the vanishing Indian, this directive reads ironically against the clichéd pick-up line: 'you from around here?' Delia can't help but *be* 'from around here,' and there's no risk of her disappearing" (2017, 175 - emphasis original). Gesturing towards the genocide of Indigenous communities and the theft and destruction of their rightful sovereignty over their land, Tailfeathers renders the distinction between 'kinds' of white people typical of the rape-revenge film moot; indeed, all white people, especially those associated with the 'civilized urban class' benefit

from settler-colonialism, and the largely unpunished acts of sexualized violence against Indigenous women are only one example. The importance of this rupturing of the urban/rural dichotomy for the film's potential to be mobilized for feminist, anti-sexualized violence aims lies, as Hargreaves argues, in the way it rebukes non-Indigenous audiences' attempts to locate themselves in this storyline as 'innocent' (2017, 174). If, in fact, all non-Indigenous people are the other who benefit from the 'disappearance' of Indigenous persons from their lands, then it stands that even those who do not necessarily engage in a kind of physical, individualized violence against Indigenous persons nevertheless benefit from the violent dispossession of Indigenous persons of their lands. It is thus important to note that such attentiveness to the ways race intersects with sexualized violence not only provides another reason why the film should be considered a limit-case of the rape-revenge genre, but also nuances the traditional fighting strategy of sexualized violence prevention. Because of the strong emphasis on altering the *gendered* economy of violence inherent in fighting strategies, the film's contemplation of how race also contributes to perpetration and perpetuation of sexualized violence might actually work to refine the methods of the fighting strategy towards meeting its goal of eradication.

Departing not only from the seeming 'need' to portray sexualized violence and rely upon overly simplistic identity-based binaries, it is thus apparent that Tailfeathers' film also avoids incorporating many of the main ideas, themes, and tropes of the rape-revenge film in a meaningful way. Assuredly, however, the film does retain some important and potentially productive aspects of the rape-revenge genre noted by feminist critics. For example, during Nelly's explanation of her

assault to Delia, she describes how the courts dismissed her case because, amongst other things, her lifestyle was read as "high risk." Alluding to sex work, addiction, as well as houselessness, the term 'high risk' carries racialized connotations, ones that stem from the ways Indigenous populations are more likely to be affected by these phenomena due to the legacy and continuation of violent colonial policies.[6] Such a reading of this line of the film is confirmed by Delia's reaction to Nelly's testimony: as she lists of the reasons why her case was not accepted by the criminal justice system, Delia purses her lips and sneers in a knowing anger.

In relation to the rape-revenge genre, the highlighting of Nelly's misgivings whilst maintaining the validity of her sexualized violence claims might be read as adhering to the tendency within the rape-revenge genre to disrupt the ideal of the 'good' sexualized assault victim. Specifically, many rape-revenge films include a protagonist who might be regarded as 'unreliable' or 'immoral' in some sense. Whether it is promiscuity, addiction, or violent behaviours, rape-revenge films can be read as disrupting the idea that 'real' sexualized violence is endured by those who are ethically and morally pure. As Sharon Lamb argues in her critique of the victim and survivor discourse, "the problem with wanting to see victims as absolutely pure and perpetrators as absolutely evil is that few in either group actually live up (or down) to these expectations" (1996, 89). Working

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[6] In another sense, Kelly Hannah-Moffat has conducted several important studies that trace the connection between discourses of 'risk assessment' in various stages for the Canadian criminal justice system (for example, pre-sentencing) and racial discrimination against Indigenous women (2010; Hannah-Moffat and Maurutto 2010; Hannah-Moffat and Shaw 2000).

with this common trope of the rape-revenge film, Tailfeathers' film demonstrates that persons who experience sexualized violence can be persons who themselves engage in violence and other seemingly amoral behaviours, all the while portraying the sexualized violence they experience as (unjustifiable) violence. Indeed, by depicting people who experience sexualized violence as victims/survivors *and* avengers, as objects *and* subjects of violence, Tailfeathers' work importantly questions the ideal of moral and/or ethical purity of persons who experience sexualized violence that is characteristic of the rape-revenge genre.

Relatedly, Tailfeathers' film also retains a feature of the rape-revenge film commonly praised or highlighted as productive by feminist film scholars: an offering a critique of the criminal justice system. Indeed, many rape-revenge films separate ideas of 'justice' from patriarchal protectors – whether that protector be a male friend and/or relative, or the masculinized state. Even when the criminal justice system appears to be functioning to the benefit of the protagonist, rape-revenge films often represent the response of the criminal justice system as inadequate. As Heller-Nicholas argues:

> That these systems [law enforcement] are broadly considered so notoriously ill-equipped to deal with rape in part provides the premise for many rape-revenge films: a person who experiences sexualized violence (or her agent) often takes justice into her own hands when the law proves incapable or unwilling to punish the criminal responsible for her suffering. (2011, 7)

The most obvious of such law-based critiques apparent in Tailfeathers' film is a representation of the state's inability to solve sexualized crimes against Indigenous women or bring perpetrators to justice when such crimes are brought to court. For instance and in relation to the former, in the scene where Brian shares a drink with Delia in the bar, Tailfeathers uses the radio in the background as a means to detail the police's inability to find suspects in the murder of an Indigenous woman to portray the state's inability to solve sexualized crimes against Indigenous women. In relation to the latter, Delia herself echoes Nelly's struggles when she states to Brian "we've both been screwed over by this country's pathetic excuse for a justice system," insinuating that Delia, like Nelly, had her case against Brian dismissed. Not only referring to the treatment of her experience of sexualized violence, Delia here might be read as referring to the ways in which the state has also "screwed over" Indigenous people in relation to land theft, or referring to a connection between land theft and the violence Indigenous women experience by virtue of that theft. Tailfeathers' work thus demonstrates that the state, a part of the criminal justice system, is also a perpetrator of violence against Indigenous women.

Importantly, however, the implication of the state in Indigenous women's experiences of sexualized violence are present from the very start of the film when Delia is engaged in combat with *both* 'the hoodlum' and the police officer. Significant to this scene is the use of alternating camera angles and split screens to represent complex geographical and racialized relationships. As we will recall, the film begins with a still shot through a chain-link fence of a man in a hoodie running through an alleyway. Importantly, however, the unnamed man and the

police officer never appear in the same frame; instead, Tailfeathers employs two different views, displayed simultaneously, to create a connection between the two men: they are both running in similar geographical areas, and it appears that the police officer is chasing the man. However, the implied connection between the two men through what appears to be a police chase is disrupted by the entrance of Delia. Once Delia dismounts her motorcycle, we see that the police officer has reached a dead-end. He stops, takes off his sunglasses, and turns around. The camera then shows Delia looking spitefully over her shoulder, presumably at the police officer. Suddenly, however, the 'hoodlum' character reappears: he is climbing over a chain-link fence. The view switches back to Delia who is now walking with a vicious confidence; the camera moves again to show the 'hoodlum' standing in front of a brick wall, opening a switch blade, presumably preparing to battle with Delia. Viewers may now be encouraged to understand Delia as an ally of the police officer: like the cop, she appears to be prepared to violently confront the 'hoodlum.' Quickly, the 'hoodlum' takes a couple of violent swipes at Delia with his knife. Expertly, Delia dodges all of the man's knife-wielding thrusts and eventually catches his hand, forcing him to drop the knife. Yet, as the knife drops the ground, viewers see that the fallen object is not a knife, but a gun. As the camera pans back up, we now see that the 'hoodlum' has been replaced by the police officer. Through a series of alternating shots, then, Tailfeathers portrays Delia as fighting both the police officer and the hoodlum.

In this introductory scene, Tailfeathers communicates several important messages about her film more generally, and racialized politics and violence. In one sense, in beginning the film with a familiar scene (a police chase) that is

thrown into question less than a minute later, Tailfeathers seems to suggest that

viewers might need to be critical of their assumptions during this film. Indeed, the

relationship between the cop and the 'hoodlum' is not really a relationship at all;

although they might occupy the same spaces (the alleyways of Vancouver's

Downtown Eastside), the connection between the two recognizable characters is

their relationship to Delia in the context of the back allies of the Downtown

Eastside. Underlying this visually exciting scene, then, is the suggestion that

Indigenous women incur gendered violence not only from non-Indigenous

citizens of the settler colonial state (the 'hoodlum'), but from its law-enforcement

agents as well.[7] As Smith importantly acknowledges, "state violence – in the form

of the criminal justice system – cannot provide true safety for women, particularly

women of colour, when it is directly implicated in the violence women face"

(2005, 154). By representing the inability of the criminal justice system to prevent

and/or bring those who perpetrate acts of sexualized violence to justice, but also

as perpetrators themselves of sexualized violence, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* subtly

implies that sexualized violence prevention must come from elsewhere.

Understanding the ways that *A Red Girl's Reasoning* recreates while

challenging the major narrative and representational tenets of the rape-revenge

genre is helpful towards thinking about its feminist, anti-sexualized violence

potentialities as they relate to the fighting strategy of sexualized violence

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[7] Here we might recall the multiple sexualized assaults on Indigenous women by Judge David Ramsay (B.C.) (CBC 2004), the long-term assaults and intimidation of Indigenous women in Val-d'Or (Quebec) (Monpetit 2018), and the abuse of Indigenous women by RCMP officers in Northern B.C. as examples of state agents' enactment of gendered, racialized sexualized violence against Indigenous women (Blanchfield 2013).

prevention. Adhering to Foucault's "constitutive" notion of power as potentially productive (i.e. power to), cultural productions that embody the fighting strategy, like some films within the rape-revenge genre, thus mobilize subversive representations of violence to challenge (primarily) gendered sociopolitical scripts regarding violence. Here, 'women' have the 'power to' mete out (often violent) justice, and potentially prevent future assaults.

However, as I have striven to demonstrate, the rape-revenge genre does not align with fighting strategies unproblematically. Depicting lengthy and often gruesome scenes of sexualized violence, (re)producing rape myths, portraying sexualized violence as an individualized, one-time event, and mobilizing identity-based stereotypes towards antagonist/protagonist character-development, representing women as having the 'power to' respond to sexualized violence with violence often comes at the cost of also contributing to the gendered, classed, ableist, and racist discourses that allow sexualized violence to occur in the first instance. However, Tailfeathers' film circumvents some of the problems of representing the avenging of sexualized violence precisely by focusing upon what Indigenous women 'can do' and have the 'power to' accomplish in relation to sexualized violence and its prevention. Specifically, Indigenous women have the 'power to' circumvent the gendered-racialized settler-colonial state towards a remaking of justice in their own vision. However, this 'power to' does not rest upon the glorification of their experiences of violence, a representation of Indigenous women as 'pure' victims, or tropes regarding Indigenous women's inherent 'viciousness.' Rather, Tailfeathers portrays Indigenous women's 'power to' respond to violence with (a kind of) violence as rooted in their unique

understanding of the gendered, raced, spaced, and classed ways Canadian society operates.

At the same time, however, I find the idea of a 'power to' enacted through representing violence troublesome. Here, I wonder how the idea of representing *individual* women as responsible for avenging (and thus potentially preventing future) instances of sexualized violence – a trope so common to the rape-revenge genre and one that is (re)produced in Tailfeathers' work - might be connected to broader sociopolitical ideologies in which rape-revenge films are created and received. In the next section, I thus want to consider another important aspect related to the rape-revenge film – and its increasing popularity – that Tailfeathers' film works on and against: neoliberalism.

Implicating Neoliberalism in Rape-Revenge Films: Vigilantism, Equality, Personal Responsibility, and Individualism in *A Red Girl's Reasoning*

Although a recognition of how neoliberalism mediates representations of sexualized violence in the rape-revenge genre is perceptible in the many and varying analyses of the filmic genre, a sustained consideration of how, exactly, neoliberalism and its interpretation of the 'good' or 'right' citizenly life affects the portrayal of sexualized violence in rape-revenge films is extremely limited within rape-revenge literature.[8] I argue, however, that the rape-revenge film is an

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[8] In her work on the rape-revenge film, for example, Henry makes a brief association between the genre and neoliberalism: "although neoliberal individualism does give us some kickass, self-reliant victim-avenger heroines… it tends to preclude exploration of structural causes or collective solutions to sexual violence as a social, not just personal, problem" (2014, 147).

important cultural product and producer of neoliberalism. Gaining popularity alongside the rise of neoliberalism, rape-revenge films simultaneously appear to push the boundaries of, whilst at the same time covertly reinforcing, neoliberal assumptions regarding personal responsibility, individualism, and 'equality.'

In a different sense, however, rape-revenge films are important insofar as they dramatize a particularly vexing tension regarding contemporary feminism(s) and their amenability to neoliberal ideology: namely, the tension between contemporary feminism(s)' commitment to inclusion (of, for example, women within narratives of justice and violence) alongside a (potentially problematic) neoliberal incitement towards individuality and personal choice.[9] The representation of this tension within contemporary feminism(s) through the rape-revenge film makes the genre – in and of itself – an important object of study for feminist scholars (and not necessarily just for those of us particularly interested in issues of sexualized violence). Specifically, we might think of the rape-revenge genre as bringing forth the integral question: how is neoliberalism imbricated in the production of dilemmas within contemporary feminism(s) regarding a tension between a struggle for (greater) individual freedoms and equality alongside the ideals of inclusion and equity?

At first glance, however, the association between rape-revenge films and neoliberalism may seem counter-intuitive. If, in fact, neoliberalism is an ideology

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[9] Not particularly convinced by sources that refer to feminism(s) as 'waves,' I use the rather vague term 'contemporary feminism(s)' here to denote a range of theories and activities undertaken by persons who wish to see the eradication of interlocking oppressions (such as, but not limited to, sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism) in the last ten to fifteen years.

that touts the importance of lawful management – specifically, the biopolitical management of the bodies that compose a sociopolitical community (Anderson 2012; 2016) – then it would seem reasonable that a film that celebrates a passionate disregard for (if not critique of) the law would work to oppose neoliberal aims. However, as Michael Kaplan argues in his analysis of *Thelma & Louise,* lawlessness and "women's gender rebellion serves to support liberal principles" (2008, 1). As Kaplan explains:

> *Thelma & Louise* represents a sophisticated attempt to produce feminism as an essentially liberal discourse, whereby feminism comes to function not as a potential challenge to, but as a powerful alibi for the liberal model of democracy. In effect, the film's carefully designed feminist narrative is its rhetorical vehicle for underwriting the liberal model of citizenship. Precisely insofar as the film is fully committed to its critique of gender politics, it is not simply a feminist film but a cunning rationalization of liberalism. (2008, 3)

Contemplating various tropes in the film, such as that of the "rebel-citizen," Kaplan endeavours to explain how a film that challenges aspects of patriarchal culture can also inadvertently end up supporting such a culture through its adherence to liberal ideals of individual sovereignty (2008, 4-5). Notably, I believe there is a similar phenomenon occurring with contemporary rape-revenge films and neoliberal principles. Because the antagonists of rape-revenge films are almost always a persons who are in some way 'othered' (coded as non-ideal citizen-figures), the victim-avenger is positioned as acting as a 'good' – albeit rebel – citizen, participating in what Amy Brandzel terms the "violent boundary

maintenance work of citizenship" (2016, 33). Here, vigilante figures play into the neoliberal conception of the human as fundamentally self-sacrificing: recognizing sexualized violence as a sociopolitical ill that is not or cannot be remedied by the state, the avenger must put herself at risk (i.e. the danger of confronting a perpetrator, the danger of committing acts of violence) for the 'greater good' of stopping a sexual predator.

However, it is also the case that victim-avengers are far from the 'ideal' risk-averting neoliberal subjects given their penchant for taking justice into their own hands. Yet, such avengers are, nevertheless, 'more' ideal (often white, wealthy, well-educated urban women) than the persons they injure through their acts of civil disobedience. In this sense, the vigilante figure in the rape-revenge film is less of a traditional 'outlaw' and more of a boundary-enforcer, an oppositional subject necessary to establishing a nationalist understanding of 'us' (those upholding and belonging to the nation-state) and 'them' (unfit subjects). As Kaplan explains, although "the (actual or potential) violence of the outlaw is a disavowed form of [neoliberal] citizenship, [the vigilante is] an irreducibly civic orientation fundamental to the very juridical edifice that establishes its legitimacy by opposing itself to it" (2008, 5). The overall problem of the neoliberal victim-avenger of the rape-revenge film in relation to feminist anti-sexualized violence aims, then, is the way in which the vigilante trope requires the perpetrator of sexualized violence to be an 'other' in order for the vigilante's violence to seem just. To be sure, although the vigilante is working extra-judicially, she is simultaneously working to (re)create the authority and boundaries of the state which the law (she breaks) works to maintain by excising undesirable others,

rather than working on the sociopolitical conditions that cause such 'others' to act in sexually violent ways in the first instance.

Importantly, however, I argue that Tailfeathers mobilizes but also subverts the neoliberal implications of the vigilante trope central to the rape-revenge film. To be sure, Delia is working extra-judicially, yet she cannot be fully co-opted by the neoliberal project of inclusion given the complex politics that structure her relationship with Brian and the state. As Smith argues, quoting Neferti Tadiar, "colonial relationships [are] the 'prevailing mode of heterosexual relations' [revealing] the extent to which… colonizers view the subjugation of women of Native nations as critical to the success of the economic, cultural, and political colonization" (2005, 8). In keeping with such understandings, Tailfeathers' film emphasizes the import of sexualized violence to maintaining the boundaries – and the privileges of those located within the boundaries – of the settler-colonial state by demonstrating how Indigenous women repeatedly experience injustice. Whether it is the case of the anonymous missing Indigenous woman described on the radio at the beginning of the film, or Nelly's experience of having her case thrown out of court because her lifestyle was "high risk, and the damn kit was inclusive," *A Red Girl's Reasoning* reverses the positionality of the typical protagonist and antagonist of the rape-revenge film: it is Brian – not Delia – who is the privileged insider who engages in the boundary work of the nation-state through his sexually violent actions. In this sense, by taking extra-judicial action against Brian, Delia is not reinforcing the nation-state, or sacrificing herself to its maintenance, but is questioning its unlawful sovereignty. Although such violent actions on her part might run the risk of further identifying Delia as the 'other,'

the unfavourable portrayal of Brian as an entitled, amoral, racist, misogynist works to interrupt the clear divisions between insider/outsider, citizen/stranger.

Closely related to the trope of the vigilante is the neoliberal ideal of equality as opposed to equity or a normalization of equality. As we will recall, neoliberalism ascribes to a kind of post-feminist sentiment positing the general equality of all persons under government, law, and within the economic sphere. In relation to 'gender equality,' neoliberal ideology often works to posit that 'women' are no longer understood as fragile naïve second-class citizens, and are thus tasked with the same concerns as men. Ignoring, however, the ways in which 'women' – read as white women here – still incur various socioeconomic and political obstacles, the trope of personal responsibility that espouses neoliberal notions of equality of opportunity ignores the racialized, classed, and colonial systems that prevent poor persons, disabled persons, and persons of colour from attaining the same kinds of successes with the same kind of ease as more privileged citizens. Importantly, the rape-revenge genre (re)produces this neoliberal trope of equality (of opportunity) over and above a situationally conceived notion of equity. As Kelly Oliver notes in her work on contemporary action films, there is an increasing trend in Hollywood to portray women as both the hunted and the hunters. As Oliver states, "our modern heroines hunt, but they are also hunted. They are both predators and prey… Within the logic of these fantasies… they deserve to be punished" (2016, 20). No longer understood to be 'less than,' Oliver demonstrates the neoliberal impetus to co-opt feminist aims of gender equity – an attempt to address the differing needs of 'men' and 'women' –

and turn such desires into a neutral gender equality where men and women are held to the same (often patriarchal) standard.

In terms of the rape-revenge film, the (re)production of the neoliberal ideal of equality is fairly obvious: all persons, including women, are capable of extraordinary acts of violence. Here, however, I am not as interested in the injuries female protagonists suffer during the prolonged scenes of sexualized violence as discussed above; instead, I am concerned by the violence victim-avengers incur through their quests for revenge. Indeed, one significant problem with such treatment of female protagonists as able to enact violence is that it functions as a means to justify representations of their abuse. As Oliver states, the resistance of these 'fighting women' "to patriarchal stereotypes becomes justification for their abuse. Their strength in fighting back against their assailants becomes filmic justification for visually revelling in the violence done to them" (2016, 21). By representing the victim-avengers as 'equals' in the economy of violence, rape-revenge films often reinforce the neoliberal idea that certain kinds of 'equality' (here, equality in terms of gendered representations of violence) accomplish a more robust sense of evening-out inequalities than is truly achieved. Here, the neoliberal victim-avenger represents both polls of the neoliberal conception of the human: her self-interest in preserving her 'equality' in neoliberalism requires her to (potentially) self-sacrifice her physical well-being.

However, Tailfeathers' film does not simply work to bring Indigenous women into a gender-neutral economy of (representational) violence. Although Delia is, undoubtedly, a worthy if not superior opponent to Brian and other white men who perpetrate sexualized violence (the police officer, the 'hoodlum'

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character), I argue that the film focuses less upon a demonstration of Delia's equality in terms of violent ability in relation to Brian, and more upon the import of other identity-based factors that contribute to one's experience of violence, and one's reasons for responding to such violence. For instance, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* demonstrates that Brian has misogynist motivations for his attacks on Nelly and Delia that are inseparable from his racist, settler-colonial beliefs. As Hargreaves argues in her analysis of Tailfeathers' film, Brian's assertion that Nelly "wanted it" and all he did "was loosen her up a bit" works "to affix to Nelly what Janice Acoose calls the 'sexually promiscuous… tawny temptress' stereotype. She 'wanted it,' Brian assures us – and as a pretext for gender and racialized violence this concept is centuries old" (Acoose as cited in Hargreaves 2017, 179). By drawing this connection, Tailfeathers' film works to demonstrate that sexualized violence is not experienced in the same way by differently racialized women. From such an observation, it thus follows that sexualized violence is not committed by the same kinds of perpetrators, or for the same reasons. In laying bare the intersection of gender, race and coloniality, Tailfeathers' film thus transforms the trope of gender solidarity common in rape-revenge films in order to represent sexualized violence in a specific, racialized colonial context.

Arguably, part of the reason that discourses of 'equality' (over and above 'equity') become so difficult to detect as problematic (they are, after all, often framed as feminist gains – however small) is because of the way neoliberal ideology promotes discourses of personal responsibility and individualist self-interested, transformation. In nearly every rape-revenge film, the crux of the

narrative rests upon the protagonist attaining justice for herself, rather than relying upon the help of others – especially 'masculine' others such as male-identifying family and friends, and the patriarchal state. As we can recall, this kind of self-administered justice is something that some scholars of the genre label as 'empowering': the protagonist (re)asserts her agency after a situation in which she had little, against a person who attempted to thwart that agency. Although such a reading of rape-revenge films is possible, I do believe that the context in which such representations occur needs to be taken into consideration to (re)think the optimism of such assertions. Specifically, I am concerned about the way in which the trope of the self-reliant avenging heroine works to bolster the idealized figure of the responsibilized neoliberal citizen. As Rebecca Stringer explains in her analysis of the neoliberalization of the movement against sexualized violence, "the ideal neoliberal citizen is often explicitly figured as one who avoids 'victim mentality': one who assumes personal responsibility for guarding against the risk of victimization, instead of focusing on their right not to be victimized" (2014, 2). Building upon Stringer, I would add here that neoliberal responsibility might not just gesture towards one's responsibility to take 'reasonable' steps to protect oneself, but also to the responsibility that persons who experience sexualized violence have in attaining justice for their crimes. The heralding of personal responsibility in rape-revenge films is thus problematic for anti-sexualized violence aims because, in the words of Stringer, they portray "victimization [and justice] as a matter of individual responsibility… rather than a circumstance occasioned by wider social forces and the workings of power" (2014, 3). Although it is doubtful that such films would prompt most persons to believe that

it is their citizenly duty to hunt down and injure and/or kill their abuser, the trope of personal responsibility easily maps onto the sociocultural trend to hold persons who experience sexualized violence responsible for the success or failure of criminal charges being brought against their abusers.

It is difficult, however, to understand the ideal of personal responsibility within neoliberal ideology without a requisite consideration of individualism. As Martin Fradley explains in his analysis of Hollywood film, "grounded in competitive individualism and sexualized self-definition, the normalization of neo-liberal [sic] femininity illustrates the abject politics of the postfeminist turn" (2013, 211). Like the neoliberal narratives of personal responsibility and gender equality, the idea of individualism relates to the broader neoliberal heralding of the entrepreneurial spirit. As Fradley explains, neoliberal women:

> … place their faith in the logics of free-market individualism rather than identify with collective political movements, embodying what Hilary Radner refers to as the neo-liberal [sic] woman "acting on her own, in her best interest, in which her fulfilment can be understood as independent of her social milieu and the predicament of other women" (Radner cited in Fradley 2013, 211).

Although I do not want to suggest that there is anything wrong with acting independently – we will recall that movements for a recognition of precarity must also require a recognition of a kind of autonomy – the mobilization of the neoliberal trope of the independent women functions problematically in relation to anti-sexualized violence aims by obscuring the ways in which sexualized

violence is a social issue that needs to be tackled collectively. As Stringer explains:

> Revenge does not eradicate violence from society. This is partly because people (and governments) who commit acts of revenge do not seek to understand the root of the crime. Rather, they focus on the individual who committed the crime, and the root of the problem that produced the act of violence never gets fully addressed or solved. (2014, 9)

In this sense, by focusing on the individual transformation of the protagonist from victim to avenger, rape-revenge films often (re)position sexualized violence as a personal as opposed to social issue, one that is best addressed on an individual basis, glossing over the possibility of collective anti-sexualized violence action.

Tailfeathers' work, however, aims to subvert this idea of personal responsibility and individualism so prevalent in rape-revenge films. As Hargreaves argues in her analysis of the short film, "Tailfeathers refuses an interpretation of colonial violence as interpersonal rather than systemic and undermines commonplace public expression of dissociation or disavowal" (2017, 182). Indeed, although it is Delia who enforces justice, her actions would not be possible without the support of other Indigenous women. In one scene, for instance, we see how the unnamed bartender provides Delia with the drink in which she pours the rohypnol to drug Brian. In a devious, almost comedic twist alleviating the viewer of any doubt regarding the bartender's allegiances, the bartender emphatically stirs Brian's poisoned drink with her own finger. Similarly, although Nelly asks Delia for help, she plays a crucial role in the revenge scenario by providing Delia with a casefile on Brian. Such acts of

solidarity amongst Indigenous women are important in not only challenging the radical individualism of neoliberal ideology, but also because, as Smith argues, "women of colour who survive sexual or domestic abuse are often told that they must pit themselves against their communities, often portrayed stereotypically as violent, in order to begin the healing process" (2005, 1). In this sense, Tailfeathers' film demonstrates the importance of solidarity amongst Indigenous women in working on and against sexualized violence. As Hargreaves so aptly summarizes, quoting the Families of Sisters in Spirit, from these gestures of solidarity "…the film advocates that Indigenous women 'look to each other for solutions'" (2017, 169).[10]

Perhaps through this representation of collaboration and cooperation amongst Indigenous women in the struggle against sexualized violence, Tailfeathers' film also becomes a call to Indigenous women for this kind of solidarity. Interestingly, however, in an interview with Joanna Chiu, Tailfeathers asserts that the film might have other audiences: "Indigenous women, know about these issues [sexualized violence against Indigenous women] already, and there is no sense of preaching to the choir" (2012). Tailfeathers thus regards her film as a means "… to get people thinking – and maybe the types of people who do not necessarily think about these kinds of things [gendered violence, racism, colonialism]… I thought an action film would attract more of a male audience"

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[10] Families of Sisters in Spirits is "a grassroots volunteer collective of family members of murdered and missing Indigenous women with support from Indigenous and non-Indigenous/settler friends and allies" (FSIS 2014).

(Chiu 2012). If, then, one imagined audience of the film is white men, I wonder: how does the film 'call-in' these viewers to the struggle to prevent sexualized violence, specifically against Indigenous women?

As Hargreaves argues in her analysis of the film, the way in which non-Indigenous viewers who wish to be allies to Indigenous women should engage with issues of sexualized violence against Indigenous women is purposively unclear in Tailfeathers' work. As argued above, viewers are not encouraged to identify with Brian, the despicable antagonist of the film; however, non-Indigenous viewers are also not encouraged to identify with Delia, as it would be impossible to do so without appropriating her experience (Hargreaves 2017, 182). Instead, as Hargreaves suggests, the film "gives viewers the tools to understand gendered colonial violence, but it does not expend any narrative resources in directing settler outrage or in assuaging settler guilt… Ultimately, the film rejects a politics of solidarity performed for the sake of *settler* reconciliation and recognition – declining to address settler allies at all" (2017, 171).

Building upon the work of Hargreaves, I thus argue that what might allow *A Red Girl's Reasoning* to be regarded – and perhaps even employed in certain contexts – as supporting feminist anti-sexualized violence aims is the way in which it (potentially) "implicates" non-Indigenous viewers in the continuation of acts of sexualized violence as a tool of settler-colonialism. Borrowing this term from the work of Amber Dean on representations of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls, a work that "implicates" its viewers can be described as "evoking forms of empathic or felt engagement that necessarily tie feeling to responsibility, leading us towards practices of inheritance" (2015, 17).

In demonstrating, as Hargreaves argues, that the "criminal justice system [is not] a legitimate site of authority, recognition, and redress," that the "Canadian nation-state is premised upon violence and displacement," and that viewers are undoubtedly part of that system as citizens of the state, Tailfeathers' work goes beyond portraying the 'horrors of sexualized violence' (2017, 183-4); rather, the film relays the horror of the fact that sexualized violence is upheld by the sociopolitical community of which the viewer is (presumably) a part. However, that a viewer will feel implicated in the continuance of sexualized violence against Indigenous women is a project without guarantees. As Dean reminds us, citing Charlotte Townsend-Gault, a "sense of implication can be evoked… by cultural productions that address us, but only if we acknowledge the address and are then 'drawn into affective relations with' that which we previously held apart from or outside of our sense of ourselves or our everyday lives (53)" (2015, 17).

In relation to *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, I thus suggest that it is precisely because the film teaches viewers about the connection between colonialism, racism and sexualized violence through the 'thrilling' and action-based genre of rape-revenge – a kind of "felt engagement" – it could produce some sense of implicatedness in some viewers. The most obvious manner in which such a goal may be accomplished through the film is via its request for viewers to join Delia on her 'war path' to not only reveal, but also to challenge the "pretty little lies… that hide the ugly truth" about sexualized violence as a tool of colonialism. Indeed, like her viewers, Delia is neither a completely innocent victim nor a guilty perpetrator: she is implicated in a sociocultural economy of violence. In this sense, I read Tailfeathers' film in relation to Dean's call to interrogate the ways in

which knowledge about sexualized violence – and knowledge related to its prevention – is not only circulated, but also produced:

> In order to understand the extremely high rates of violence against Indigenous women … we have to interrogate how Western frameworks for understanding what it means to be a 'self,' and [how in particular] liberal humanist assumptions about rational, freely choosing autonomous selfhood, are profoundly implicated in the continuation of such violence. (2015, 11)

In disseminating knowledge about Indigenous women's experiences of sexualized violence through an artistic form and genre interesting to, and productively dominated by, her target-audience, Tailfeathers disrupts and refashions both the content and the method of the genre through which she communicates her message, and sociopolitical climate (neoliberalism) that attempts to (re)position persons as self-interested individuals, working together only towards the broader neoliberal 'good.' Thus, although Tailfeathers' film does not directly suggest how one could prevent sexualized violence against Indigenous women, the film itself (potentially) functions as a work that presents knowledge about and encourages affective engagement with such prevention. If, then, the film can be considered as supporting feminist anti-sexualized violence aims, it is pertinent to ask: what might be the film's feminist, anti-sexualized violence pedagogy?

Spreading the Love?: Debating the Representation of Retributive Violence in
A Red Girl's Reasoning

Although not so naïve as to suggest that the underlying message of *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is that violence begets violence, a variation of such a message is arguably one of the film's pedagogical goals. Indeed, one of the important ways Tailfeathers' film revises the rape-revenge genre in ways that make it amenable to feminist anti-sexualized violence ideals and goals is through the omission of representations of sexualized violence against Indigenous women. Yet, the film *does* portray acts of violence that – to some – might be read as sexual or sexualized; however, these violent acts are done unto men. Specifically, there are three instances where there is violence done to men in the film that could be understood as sexual or sexualized. The first occurs when Delia steps on the groin area of the 'hoodlum' character in the opening scene; the second occurs when Delia (presumably) strips Brian down to his underwear and ties him up (though these acts are not visually represented in the film); and the third occurs when Delia violently grabs Brian by his genitals while interrogating him. Even though these moments are fleeting, given the short length of the film and the filmmakers' goals of producing a film that counters sexualized violence, I initially found such repeated mobilizations of violence enacted upon sexualized parts of the male body not only curious, but potentially troubling. Why must Delia target *sexualized* parts of the body in a bid for revenge? What is the point of such representations? And, are these instances in the film truly acts of *sexualized* violence?

The aforementioned questions undoubtedly relate to a broader

conversation regarding the efficacy of violence in solving instances of violence.[11]

Generally, those who argue against the power of retaliatory violence assert that it

will not, in the long run, work to solve any major oppressive issue – at least not on

its own. Understanding violence as the tool of the oppressor, some may argue that

its co-optation by the oppressed will do nothing more than perpetuate harm.

Significantly, however, scholars who study the issue of violence at the level of

representation often respond to such critiques by arguing that such violence that

occurs at the level of representation is related to, but not the same as, lived

experiences of such violence. Moreover, marginalized populations' mobilizations

of violence – representational and material – have much different potential effects

than the violence of their oppressors (Halberstam 1993, 191-2). For instance, Julia

Sudbury responds to critiques of representations of retaliatory violence by arguing

that to deny the efficacy of a representation of fighting violence with violence is

to recreate an oppressive hierarchy that renders the necessary actions of poor

women and women of colour as immoral. As Sudbury explains, "resources that

are racialized or class-based determine whether a woman will deal with violence

in 'law-abiding' ways" (2006, 21). To suggest, then, that representations of

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[11] A familiar debate to those engaged in the fields of cultural studies, feminist theory, critical race studies and post-colonial theory, the question as to whether persons are ever justified in mobilizing violence to end oppression is one that is frequently posited. From the anti-colonial writings of Fanon to the feminist 'sex wars,' if and how violence in its many forms should play a role in anti-oppressive struggles is widely debated and is often, if not always, underpinned by a moralistic imperative. Indeed, it is not uncommon for people to posit that using violence to end oppression is just another form of oppression (McCaughey 2001, 2), or alternatively – to borrow the words of Audre Lorde – to wonder if persons who use violence to end violence are not just using the 'master's tools' in a futile attempt to dismantle the master's house (2012, 112).

women engaging in extra-legal measures to deal with abuse is questionable is also to question the lived experiences of women whose recourse to justice through the criminal justice system is limited, ineffective, or plain dangerous. However, such conversations regarding the ethics and/or effectiveness of imagined violence do not necessarily explain why, exactly, Tailfeathers targets *sexualized* aspects of the body as a means of revenge, or as I will investigate later in this section, if these instances in the film *should* or *ought* to be understood as sexualized violence, or something else altogether.

Importantly, many theorists and activists of sexualized violence argue that sexualized violence is different from other kinds of violence precisely because it involves the *sexual* desire of the perpetrator, and actions done with *sexual* intent to *sexualized* areas of the body. Although such a position works against the popular second-wave feminist postulation that sexualized violence is an issue of power rather than an issue of sex (Brownmiller 1975), I maintain that to think about sexualized violence as simply an issue of 'power' could work to minimize the important link between sex/sexuality as a means of (re)producing power and knowledge in contemporary Western societies. As Catherine MacKinnon has argued, "if it's violence not sex, why didn't he just hit her?" (1989, 134). Building upon this observation, feminist theorists have more recently posited that representations of sexualized violence function to signify a kind of 'power over' which is typically read in gendered terms. Specifically, regardless of the sex or gender identity of the abuser and the person who experiences abuse, the abuser is often read as active/masculine and as feminizing the 'passive' recipient of the abuse through the act of sexualized violence. Thus, for example, even when acts

of sexualized violence are perpetrated against male characters by a female character, sexualized violence functions as a means of masculinizing the female character, whilst feminizing the male character. In what literature exists on the representation of female sexualized violence against men, such representations are typically praised for their preventative potentialities. As Gavey argues in her analysis of representations of women assaulting men in film:

> If we are able to imagine, and recognize, such possibilities [men raped by women] then there is room to seriously disrupt the dominant discourses of heterosexuality that cast women as passive and men as active; and which, I argue, work to support the material construction of women as victims and men as agents of sexual coercion and sexual violence. (2005, 194)

However, I am not entirely convinced of the productive potentialities of representing sexualized violence done unto one's oppressor as a means of disrupting the heterosexual matrix that scaffolds systemic gender norms. In one sense, I wonder if representing men as disempowered through an act that is largely culturally coded as 'feminizing' is counter-intuitive. Can the non-normative identities of the 'abuser' (i.e. Delia) and normative identities of the 'victim' (i.e. Brian), alongside the aforementioned parodying of the rape-revenge script, work to alter the cultural meaning of an act of retributive violence done unto a sexualized part of the body? Considering that women-identifying people are both representationally and materially more likely to experience sexualized violence, might this (re)association between sexualized violence and a 'feminized powerlessness' work to simply reinforce gendered hierarchies? To be sure, I agree with the arguments of Halberstam and the like that violence enacted by

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marginalized persons against their oppressors alters the symbolic (and material) function of that violence, yet I am not so sure the same thing can be said about sexualized violence. Because there is such a strong historicity of the connection between women – femininity – and sexualized assault, I am unsure if these connections can be 'undone' by simply portraying a 'woman' sexually assaulting a 'man.'

Importantly, Jasbir Puar voices similar concerns in her analysis of the photographs of imprisoned Iraqi men being tortured at Abu Ghraib in the early 2000s. In these photographs, various male prisoners are depicted as subject to a variety of different types of physical torture, including sexualized torture.[12] Of particular interest to Puar are the photos that feature the violent actions of a female soldier, Lynndie England. In the photograph, England is pictured as leading a naked Iraqi man on a leash. Working against an analysis of the photograph that would suggest that England's enactment of sexualized violence upon a male individual subverts a gendered economy of violence, Puar instead argues that it is the act of sexualized violence alongside the gendered and racialized categories of the persons enacting and experiencing sexualized violence that produce meaning. Specifically, Puar suggests:

> The force of feminizing lies not only in the stripping away of masculinity,
> the faggotizing of the male body, or in robbing the feminine of its

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[12] As Puar explains, the photographs depict violence enacted upon male Iraqi prisoners by men and women-identifying white soldiers, violence "that purports to mimic sexual acts closely associated with deviant sexuality or sexual excess such as sodomy and oral sex, as well as S/M practices of bondage, leashing and hooding" (2007, 79).

symbolic and reproductive centrality to nation-normative sexualities; it is

the fortification of the unenforceable boundaries between masculine and

feminine, the rescripting of multiple and fluid gender performatives into

petrified sites of masculine and feminine, the regendering of multiple

genders into the oppressive binary scripts of masculine and feminine, and

the interplay of it all within and through racial, imperial and economic

matrices of power. (2007, 100)

Puar thus attributes the function of the photograph as less about a flipping of

gendered terms of violence, and more about the (re)casting of national-normative

sexualities through a complex interplay of racialized *and* gendered identities

produced through an enactment of sexualized violence.

Thus, as I have asserted throughout this chapter, an inattentiveness to the

ways in which gender *and* race intersect to produce identitarian stereotypes bears

significantly upon how rape-revenge films are constructed. Specifically, it is

important to remember that only certain women are 'always already' culturally

understood as passive (for instance: white, Asian and some South Asian women).

As Melissa Harris-Perry argues, Black women through the trope of the Sapphire

have been understood as unreasonably violent, possessing an "emasculating

anger" (2011, 88). Relatedly, scholars such as Debra Merskin and Nancy Parezo

argue that underpinning the conception of Indigenous women as 'squaws' is the

understanding of such women as uncivilized, and thus violent (2010, 345; 2009,

380). If certain women are already read as 'violent,' 'uncivilized,' and

'emasculating,' then there is always already a paradoxical wrench thrown into the

ideological machinery of the male/aggressive/active, female/passive/reactive

dichotomy. When contemplating the ways in which gender intersects with race to inform passive/active, violent/non-violent dichotomies, it is thus no longer so clear if in fact the sexual assault of men by women works as radically for all women as is often purported by scholars such as Gavey. Such a recognition of the way race works alongside gender to construct different meanings regarding sexualized violence forces us to consider the representational identity politics working through and with both players in the sexual assaults in *A Red Girl's Reasoning*. Specifically, what might it mean that it is an Indigenous woman sexually assaulting a white man – and a white man who is a known rapist of Indigenous women – in Tailfeathers' film? As Tailfeathers herself recognizes, this kind of representation of (symbolic) violence is quite extraordinary. As she states in an interview with Verstraten, "flipping" the reality of who experiences violence was "interesting" and according to Verstraten "…is part of what has made this film so successful" (Verstraten 2013). I argue, however, that what makes the film interesting is that it does not just 'flip' the roles of oppressor and oppressed but displays an altogether different action that works to transform the subject-positions associated with particular identities.

In the context of *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, and given these complex discussions, I thus do not believe that the violence that Delia enacts upon the 'hoodlum' character and Brian should be considered 'sexualized violence.' Although Delia is indeed targeting sexualized aspects of the body (Brian's and the 'hoodlum's' groin areas), her actions appear to be void of a sexualized motivation or desire central to my understanding of what sexualized violence 'is.' Take for instance, the scene where Delia fights and defeats the 'hoodlum' character

discussed earlier in this chapter. Immediately before kicking the unnamed man in the groin, Delia's expression is one of concentration. As she builds momentum prior to the kick, her brows are slightly furrowed, and as she kicks the man, her bottom jaw juts out, relaying her exertion. After kicking the man in the groin, the camera pans back to Delia who is biting down on the glove on her right hand in an effort to remove it. Her expression ambivalent, she then pulls a pack of cigarettes from her back pocket and lights one using a zippo lighter. Combined with the voiceover explaining Delia's actions in relation to the sexualized violence done unto Indigenous women, the scene is almost completely void of any reference to sexual desire or intent. Neither Delia's expressions, actions, or her words (the voiceover) convey that Delia is enacting a sexualized fantasy or desire, nor is there a suggestion that Delia's action are motivated by sexualized intent. Rather, it is the mention of "white boys having their way with Indian girls," and the fact that Delia kicks the unnamed man's groin – a sexualized aspect of the body – that makes this scene relatable to the issue of sexualized violence.

Consider another example: towards the end of the film, Delia engages in an act of violence against a sexualized aspect of the male body. After Delia and the unnamed bartender drug Brian, viewers are taken to a different scene. Delia sits backwards on a chair staring at Brian; he is wearing nothing but a pair of boxer shorts, and he is tied to some sort of wood and metal structure with his arms outstretched to his sides. Although viewers are uncertain about where, exactly, the pair are located, the fact that we can see the roofs of some buildings in the background, and that there is a wall missing from the building the pair are occupying seems to suggest that they are in some sort of run-down and/or

unfinished building in the Downtown Eastside. As Brian awakens, he glances at Delia who says, "Old habits die hard. Hey Brian." Pulling a photograph out her bag, Delia tells Brian that the woman pictured is Nelly, and remarks upon her 'prettiness.' Brian, looking distressed and confused, asks Delia, "what is this?" Looking notably unimpressed, with pursed lips, Delia tells Brian that he was drugged with rohpnyol and she throws a baggy of pills at his feet. She then explains to Brian that Nelly was given the same drugs before she was sexually assaulted. To this, Brian exclaims, "This is crazy. I don't know how they got there," referring either to the drugs placed in Nelly's drink pre-assault, drugs he currently had in his possession, or perhaps both. Giving Brian an unconvinced look, Delia gets up from her chair and walks towards Brian as he stammers, "I'm really sorry about what happened to your friend. That's terrible, but… there's a lot of low-lifes out there." By the end of this statement, Delia is within arm's reach of Brian, and as she stares at him blankly, he struggles violently, attempting to free himself. Delia looks down at Brian's restraints, and he continues, "Sweetie, if this is about money or something," and then growls, "all you gotta do is ask." With an expression of amusement on her face, the corner of her lips slightly upturned, Delia tells Brian she is not looking for hand-outs. Brian gives Delia a momentary confused look, but his face quickly upturns into a vicious sneer: "Look, she wanted it. All I did was loosen her up a little. She was the only one." With a knowing smile on her face, Delia then asks Brian, "Do you remember me?" while staring him directly in the eye. Brian looks Delia up and down, lost in his thoughts. Giving Delia a weak head-shake 'no,' she replies, "let me jog your memory." With her right hand, Delia strikes Brian in the face, and then quickly

grabs his genitals with her other hand. Brian utters a surprised groan. In a raised, authoritative tone, still holding Brian genitals, Delia states, "You and I met seven years ago. You see, me and Nelly have a few things in common." Applying more pressure on his genitals, Delia continues, "we both know the dirty things you're capable of and we've both been screwed over by this country's pathetic excuse for a justice system." After this claim, Delia releases Brian's genitals.

Importantly, and much like the 'hoodlum' scene, Tailfeathers is careful to omit any representation of pleasure in this scene. Although I do not believe it is impossible for a viewer to potentially read sexual desire and/or intent into the scene (for example, Delia's fleeting smirks combined with the fact that Brian is tied up could hint at some sort of non-consensual BDSM fantasy for some viewers), the camera angles used in the scene alongside the dialogue seems to be much more focused on the relaying of hurt and/or discomfort of both parties. Perhaps obviously, Brian is in quite a bit of pain: he repeatedly attempts to remove his bindings, suggesting his discomfort, and when Delia strikes Brian and grabs his genitals, he repetitively winces and moans. In these instances, the camera lingers on Brian's face, seemingly encouraging the viewer to understand that he is experiencing quite a bit of distress. However, I also want to suggest that Delia may also be experiencing a kind of suffering. Her movements, behaviours, and tone of voice seem rehearsed in this scene, almost robotic. Although these interpretations of Delia's actions might be attributable to choices made by the actor playing this role (or the quality of their acting), one might also read Delia as conveying signs of her own pain as a victim/survivor confronting her attacker. Oscillating from indifference and disassociation to concentration and even

amusement, Delia's expressions could also be understood as a representation of someone completing a job or a task, and an undesirable one at that. What appears to be absent from this scene, however, is a representation of Delia's pleasure garnered from the act of grabbing Brian's groin: prior to, during, and immediately following the assault, Delia's face conveys anger, frustration, and possibly even pain, but it lacks any 'normative' signifiers of pleasure and/or desire.

I am thus inclined to posit that the instances in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* where Delia enacts violence upon sexualized parts of a male character's body are not sexualized violence (at least in the sense that I define sexualized violence in this dissertation), but something more akin to retributive violence: an intentional exercise of physical force against a person or people (or their property) that is enacted in accordance with, and in proportion to, their own prior conduct. Contemplating Delia's actions through the definition of this term, we are able to simultaneously recognize that Delia is enacting violence upon a sexualized part of the body – acknowledging cultural implications of the potential 'feminization' of a such a gesture – whilst avoiding the suggestion that Delia's motivations are underpinned by *sexual* desire and/or intentions. Instead, when understood as acts of retributive violence, Delia's actions are more like (re)actions, contingent upon the choices made by the perpetrators of sexualized violence; the decision to target sexualized aspects of the male body are then less about Delia's sexual wants, and

more about responding in kind to these men's crimes against Indigenous women.[13]

However, I also do not believe it is enough to simply regard Delia's actions through the aforementioned definition of retributive violence. Importantly, the way I have described retributive violence says nothing about the desired outcome or effect of the actions, and instead focuses on delimiting the motivations for and the kind of violence. Thus, I still wonder: what might this representation of retributive violence be doing in relation to feminist anti-sexualized violence efforts? Importantly, in his 1970 work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Friere describes steps that should be taken in order to have a less-oppressive, and ultimately oppression free, society, steps I believe might be helpful in further contemplating and elaborating upon the potential effects and/or meanings of Tailfeathers' representation of Delia's retributive acts of violence against sexualized aspects of the white, male, sexualized violence perpetrating body.

Understanding most of the introductory labour towards anti-oppressive 'ends' to be the work of the 'oppressed,' in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Friere makes some contentious but interesting claims about how we might read the actions that can/should be taken towards a liberatory revolution. Most notably,

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[13] I do recognize that some readers might infer a conceptual issue here. Specifically, we – the viewers – are unsure as to what, exactly, the unnamed 'hoodlum' character has done to garner Delia's wrath. Moreover, it does not escape me that my definition of retributive violence sounds awfully like the age-old Lex Talionis (an eye for an eye) so central to the rape-revenge genre. However, in relation to the viewer's lack of information about the hoodlum character, I want to suggest that the voiceover explaining white men's historical and contemporary sexualized abuse of Indigenous women played during Delia's beating of the 'hoodlum' character suggests or implies his guilt as one of the 'white men' that have been "having their way with Indian girls since contact."

Friere argues that what is normatively understood as 'violence' in a particular society, when done unto the oppressors by the oppressed (instead of the other way around), is not truly oppression as we understand it. As Friere argues, "acts which prevent the restoration of the oppressive regime cannot be compared with those which create and maintain it, cannot be compared with those by which a few men and women deny the majority their right to be human" (1970, 57). Friere underpins this rather radical argument by explaining that:

> The restraints imposed by the former oppressed on their oppressors, so that the latter cannot reassume their former position do not constitute *oppression*. An act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human. Accordingly, these necessary restraints do not *in themselves* signify that yesterday's oppressed have become today's oppressors. (56-7, emphasis in original)

Contributing to conceptualizations of the needs and methods of revolutionary struggle, Friere clarifies understandings of oppression and the acts of violence that underpin it by suggesting that oppression is only that which seeks to dehumanize another. Friere argues that in order to achieve a (re)humanization – or in other words, to fight oppression – there needs to be radical gestures of humanization instigated by the oppressed and effected upon the oppressor – which Friere terms a 'gesture of love':

> Yet it is—paradoxical though it may seem—precisely in the response of the oppressed to the violence of their oppressors that a gesture of love may be found. Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the

initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence

of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the

response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue

the right to be human. As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate

their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed,

fighting to be human, take away the oppressors' power to dominate and

suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the

exercise of oppression. (1970, 56)

I quote Friere's rather complicated formulation at length here to present a

different way of conceiving of retributive violence in Tailfeathers' film. Instead of

regarding the acts of the oppressed against their oppressor as immoral or unethical

responses that merely replicate the terms of their oppression (i.e. 'fighting

violence with violence'), Friere argues that the gestures of the oppressed

completely differ in effect from those of the oppressor with regards to the actor's

intentions, and the action's effects. Specifically, violence committed as 'an act of

love' is the kind of violence that works to restore, rather than denigrate, the

humanity of others. Returning the oppressors – the human or more-than-human

'other' – to a state of vulnerability (although not the perpetual vulnerability that

the oppressed experience by virtue of being 'less-than-human'), the oppressed do

not engage in acts of oppression, but acts of love.

Highly theoretical, and most commonly applied to agrarian reform and

class struggles in Friere's work, I should note that an important critique of

Friere's work involves his use of the terms oppressor/oppressed with very little

recognition as to how persons can occupy both categories simultaneously. Despite

this rather glaring flaw, I still find his work useful for an analysis of *A Red Girl's Reasoning* given the way in which the key characters in the film are largely situated as 'oppressed' (Delia) and 'oppressor' (Brian). Specifically, my discussion of Delia as a potential 'oppressor' via her engagement in acts of retributive violence against various white men in the film is meant to trouble such a simplistic reading of the film: Delia's acts of retributive violence are not simply violence for violence's sake (gratuitous), or necessarily reproducing an antiquated conception of justice (an eye for an eye). Instead, through attention to the context in which the acts of retributive violence occur (an area of Vancouver where Indigenous women frequently experience violence) and the identities of the 'doer' (Delia, an Indigenous woman and victim/survivor of sexualized violence) and 'receiver' (Brian, a white, presumably wealthy man and [repeated] perpetrator of sexualized violence against Indigenous women), it becomes apparent that there is something more complicated occurring in this film than attempts to shock viewers through representations of violence, or a (re)production of Lex Talionis.[14] Rather, given Delia's and Brian's complex social, cultural, political, and economic locations, the act of retributive violence might instead be read as an attempt to return Brian to a more 'human' positionality, where his neoliberal self-interest (acts of sexualized violence) and self-sacrifice (harming Indigenous women for the 'greater good' of the settler-colonial state) is degraded towards an opening up of a new conception of his precarious relationality to others.

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[14] Lex Talionis is Latin for the law of an 'eye for an eye.' Lex Talionis is a law of retaliation, where a punishment aims to mirror the kind and quality of an offence.

Importantly, however, the connection I am making here between Friere's work and Tailfeathers' film as a kind of 'revolutionary act' against the oppression Indigenous women experience as a result of sexualized violence made (and still, to a degree, makes) me feel deeply uncomfortable. What might it mean to call a representation of an act of violence done unto a sexualized part of the body (even when it is initiated by an Indigenous woman against a white, abusive, man) 'an act of love'? Does such a theorizing not tread dangerously close to the assertions sexual abusers have been making for centuries – that their harmful and intrusive acts are really 'gestures of love'? Perhaps, which is one reason why my mobilization of Friere's theory here is potentially contentious. Not intending to quell such feelings of discomfort – believing such feelings to be an important affective response to Tailfeathers' film – I nevertheless assert the import of remembering that in applying Friere's theories regarding material struggles to Tailfeathers' fictional film, we are dealing with symbolic or representational violence. Although representations such as Tailfeathers' can and often do have material effects – as I have argued throughout this chapter – it does not necessarily follow that representing an act of retributive violence done to a sexualized part of a 'man's' body by a 'woman' will (definitely) lead to a material replication of such events.

Further considering the value of Friere's work for an analysis of Tailfeathers' film, I am not so sure I would go so far as to label Tailfeathers' work 'an act of love'; nevertheless, one manner of reading the film – including its representations of retributive violence – is as a means of restoring 'humanity' through reminding the oppressor (i.e. potential white, male audience members) of

their vulnerability to harm, more specifically, the vulnerability of the penis.

Importantly, such an argument and investigation of representations of sexualized

violence done unto men by women is not any less contentious, but works against

an either/or argument regarding the ethical or moralistic 'value' of a

representation that can be interpreted and interacted in a myriad of ways. Indeed,

the idea that acts of protest and rebellion cannot be read as anything else than a

replication of hegemonic oppressive structures is contested by Indigenous

scholars and activists who regard their work as 'acts of love.' For example, in her

work on the #IdleNoMore movement, Dory Nason argues for a recognition of the

power of Indigenous women's love: "It is a love that can inspire a whole world to

sing and dance and be in ceremony for the people" (2014, 187). Discussing a

range of examples, from the work of Dakota writer and activist Zitkala-Sa who

investigates abuses against Indigenous women in Oklahoma in the 1920s, to Chief

Spence's fast to draw attention to the deplorable conditions in the Attawapiskat

reservation, to the Women's Memorial March held annually in Vancouver to

honour the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls across Canada,

Nason argues:

> These profound forms of love motivate Indigenous women everywhere to
>
> resist and protest, to teach and inspire, and to hold accountable both
>
> Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to their responsibilities to protect the
>
> values and traditions that serve as the foundation for the survival of the
>
> land and Indigenous peoples. (2014, 187-188)

Acts of protest or rebellion, however, do not necessarily have to be non-violent to

be regarded as loving gestures. As Nason acknowledges, it is the love of

Indigenous women for "their families, their lands, their nations, and themselves as Indigenous people" that is at the centre of their revolutionary acts (2014, 186-7). Just because an act of resistance does not look like an act of love does not necessarily mean it is not a *gesture* of love, coming from a place of love.

Being attentive to the ways in which identity and sociocultural circumstances inflect actions with different meaning, I thus argue that a representation of an Indigenous woman inflicting retributive violence upon a sexualized part of a white man's body, a white man who sexually assaulted her and others in her community, cannot be simply read as 'flipping' the terms of violence. Symbolic of the violent genocide Indigenous people experience at the hands of white settlers – through which material acts of sexualized violence were and continue to be a frequently employed colonial strategy – the retributive violence in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* gestures towards the gendered and racialized ways colonialism continues into the present, whilst portraying the possibility of Indigenous women being at the center of resistance to this phenomenon. Importantly, the retributive violence that Delia enacts upon Brian works to bring Brian down from the plane of (super)human invulnerability. Presumably, the hope is that Brian, once stripped of this invulnerability, no longer necessarily poses a threat to Delia and her community. In this sense, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* might encourage a move beyond a consideration of representations of retributive violence as always already problematic and self-defeating. Instead, engaging with the film in a way that challenges a literal, neutral reading of representations of retributive violence, one might be encouraged to consider how such violence works in the film to not only comment upon the prevalence of sexualized violence

as a strategy to enforce gendered settler-colonialism, but also to reflect on how a representation of retributive violence situates Indigenous women – a population unduly effected by sexualized violence – as key players towards its eradication.

(Re)presenting Sexualized Violence as A Fighting Strategy

Several studies on representations of sexualized violence locate the usefulness of such representations in how these works explicate the ways other sociocultural and political issues are articulated and negotiated through such representations (Henry 2013; Horeck 2007; Matthes 2000; Projansky 2001; Read 2001). For these authors, the import of studying representations of sexualized violence lies largely in what such representations can tell us about other, difficult to articulate sociocultural and political problems. However, I wonder if such assertions might too quickly gloss over how representations of sexualized violence are useful in relation to understanding the problem of sexualized violence in and of itself. Part of the work of this chapter has thus been to bring the conversation regarding representations of sexualized violence back to its own object, pushing what seems to be the 'obvious' approach to interrogating representations of sexualized violence as teaching us something about 'rape' (in a reproductive and productive manner), to thinking about what representations of sexualized violence can do towards its prevention. Although I am ultimately uncertain as to whether *A Red Girl's Reasoning* can be mobilized in a manner that would allow it to function as a 'sexualized violence prevention device,' I am confident the film can be read as forging some important new territory in

representing sexualized violence in a manner that is more helpful than problematic for feminist anti-sexualized violence aims.

As I have argued, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* might be most productively approached as a limit-case of the rape-revenge genre, working with and on its common visual and narrative tropes to bring the film more in line with the aims and goals of the fighting strategy of sexualized violence than other films of the same genre or narrative structures. For example, in presenting an intersectional understanding of experiences of sexualized violence that refuses to spectacularize the instance of sexualized violence, Tailfeathers centres Indigenous women's experiences of sexualized violence in a manner that disengages from the seeming need to 'see' or 'hear about' the violence in graphic detail in order for it to be regarded as justice-worthy and believable. Moreover, by emphasizing the import of racialized, gendered, and geopolitics to the occurrence of sexualized violence, Tailfeathers' film works against an understanding of sexualized violence as an individual, one-time event, instead connecting such occurrences to a broader community. Relatedly, then, Tailfeathers' film also draws our attention to how potential examples of fighting strategies, like the rape-revenge film, are amenable to neoliberal ideologies that stand in contrast to feminist anti-sexualized violence aims. Indeed, Tailfeather's film undermines the vigilante trope essential for maintenance of the ideal 'law abiding citizen,' but also for notions of individualistic responsibility. Representing sexualized violence as an issue that is felt as a collective harm and addressed by multiple members of a community, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* undermines the notion that sexualized violence is a problem of individual victims and perpetrators.

As I have also demonstrated, however, there are potential issues with Tailfeathers' approach to the ways Indigenous women 'deal' with sexualized violence in the film. Like other rape-revenge films, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* relies on a depiction of retributive violence as part of its plot of revenge. Yet, as I have argued, this kind of representation cannot, however, be treated as the same kind that we so often see women experiencing on screen. Indeed, Tailfeathers' portrayals of retributive violence against white men (committed by Indigenous women) might be read as a way of demonstrating how literal and representative instances of sexualized violence are often wielded as a settler-colonial tool against Indigenous women. Rather than a representation of power to (re)produce oppressive circumstances, retributive violence in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* acts as a means of disrupting a representational economy towards challenging the oppressors' traditional position of invulnerability. Like Butler's conceptions of precariousness as fundamental to tempering overzealous emphases on movements for autonomy, Tailfeathers' film steers away from conceptualizations of the human as fundamentally self-interested and self-sacrificing. Instead, Tailfeathers depicts a relationship where the main characters are constituted through a complex interplay of each subject's injurability and answerability (2015, 110). As Butler best states, "…you may frighten me and threaten me, but my obligation to you must remain firm" (2015, 110). Although Brian goes beyond threat to commit acts of sexualized violence against Nelly and Delia, Tailfeathers represents their relationship in a way where Delia's 'obligation' to Brian remains incredibly firm: although occurring in the form of a representational assault against Brian, Delia's multiple assaults might not be viewed as assaults at all, but rather 'gestures of

love' that offer an alternative imagining of what it means to live with one another in a sociopolitical community reliant upon oppressive hierarchies.

In sum, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* can be read as a representation of what negotiating the more troublesome aspects of fighting strategies and neoliberal ideology might look like. Although autonomy, independence, (personal) choice, and (greater) freedom are not problematic goals in and of themselves – and are, perhaps uncoincidentally, part of the aims of most contemporary feminism(s) – it becomes increasingly important for feminists to think about how these aims dovetail with (and are often co-opted by) a neoliberal agenda. Indeed, a central problem of the fighting strategy is its potential amenability to an ideal of a woman-led anti-sexualized violence 'revolution' that might – and often does – come at the cost of questioning the role of the broader sociopolitical community. Here, a single woman's quest for justice and retribution is often a substitute for a broader consideration of how the community as a whole might also be to blame for instances of sexualized violence. How, then, do the broader attitudes, beliefs, and rules of a community work to embolden and empower those who commit acts of sexualized violence? Significantly, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* responds to this question by implicating a broader sociopolitical structure – the settler colonial state – and its agents in the perpetuation of sexualized violence. In addressing an over-determinative individualism characteristic of the fighting strategy, Tailfeathers reimagines what imagined violence can accomplish through an attentiveness to the importance of the solidarity of Indigenous women in both coping with, attaining justice for, and potentially preventing future instances of sexualized violence.

Conclusion - #TIMESUP: Preventing Sexualized Violence in the Era of

Social Media

Since I began this dissertation in the fall of 2014, several important

cultural, social, and legal happenings have affected how sexualized violence is

perceived, understood, and treated in Canadian and American contexts. In

Canada, the trial of CBC radio personality Jian Ghomeshi opened up

conversations within the feminist anti-sexualized violence community regarding

instances of sexualized violence that have occurred in the context of large power

differentials (i.e. a celebrity perpetrator and a non-celebrity victim/survivor)

(Couling and Johnston 2018).[1] Indeed, in the wake of the Ghomeshi trial, more

Canadian women and girls have come forth with complaints of sexualized

violence against other prominent Canadian figures. For example,

singer/songwriter Jacob Hoggard (of the band Hedley) was recently charged with

sexual interference and sexual assault causing bodily harm in relation to

complaints made by a Canadian woman and a girl (under the age of 16) regarding

an event that took place in Toronto in 2016 (The Canadian Press 2018). We might

also remember that Gregg Zaun, a sports newscaster and analyst for the Toronto

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[1] Jian Ghomeshi was a popular CBC radio personality. In early 2014, the *Toronto Star* began investigating the testimony of an ex-girlfriend of Ghomeshi who stated that he had engaged in acts of sexualized violence against her. Over the course of spring/summer 2014, more complaints against Ghomeshi surfaced in various news media outlets, and on October 24th, 2014, Ghomeshi announced he was taking an indefinite leave of absence from his position at CBC. Two days later, CBC terminated Ghomeshi's employment contract. On November 26th, 2014, Ghomeshi turned himself in to Toronto police where he was charged with four counts of sexual assault and one count of overcoming resistance by choking. On January 8th, 2015, Ghomeshi was charged with three additional counts of sexual assault. Ghomeshi's trial began on February 1st, 2016, and lasted eight days. On March 24th, 2016, the judge acquitted Ghomeshi of all charges as the prosecution failed to meet the burden of proof. A second trial for Ghomeshi was set for June 2016; however, the prosecution withdrew this charge (Couling and Johnston 2018).

Blue Jays, had his contract terminated at the end of 2017 following complaints of sexual harassment from female employees (The Canadian Press 2017). And in 2018, we saw the settlement of a civil suit by four women against Canadian actor/director Albert Schultz and his co-founded production company, Soulpepper. The suit addressed Schultz's predatory sexualized behaviours against the four actors (Nestruck 2018). Thus, even though for feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates the Ghomeshi case – which ultimately ended in the radio personality's acquittal on all charges – might have felt like a failure, I want to suggest that it is also possible that the trial might have done something important in relation to our sociocultural, political, and legal treatments of sexualized violence. Specifically, despite the fact that the Ghomeshi trial (re)produced or (re)enacted a problematic gendered dynamic where the words, actions, and behaviours of the complainants post-assault came under much more scrutiny than the actions of Ghomeshi, I also wonder if the highly publicized support for the complainants in this case might have worked to alter women's and girls' perceptions of their ability to approach legal and media institutions with their experiences of sexualized violence, fostering the possibility that their testimonies might be believed and treated as a serious socio-legal matter to be remedied.

Across the border, a similar phenomenon is unfolding as multiple, significant cultural and political figures are being taken to task for sexually violent actions and behaviours. Thinking about the large amount of media attention given to the complaints lodged against, the trial and conviction of actor/comedian Bill Cosby, in the last five years there have been numerous instances where men possessing large amounts of cultural and political capital

have been publicly called out for their abusive behaviours. From the civil and criminal case of sexualized violence brought against the film mogul Harvey Weinstein, to the charges of sexual abuse of young men and boys against actor Kevin Spacey, to the publicization of U.S. president Donald Trump's misogynist and violent treatment of various women, in the last five years there has been a dramatic shift in the way American communities and institutions are responding to testimonies of sexualized violence (BBC News 2019; Bekiempis 2018; Mercia 2018).

It would be remiss of me, however, to talk about these various happenings surrounding sexualized violence – both in the Canadian and American contexts – without acknowledging the role that social media activism has played in supporting, if not outright propelling, these cultural and political changes in relation to our representations of and public conversations about the phenomenon of sexualized violence. As feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates like Tanya Horeck have argued:

> The proliferation of social media sites such as Twitter has opened up important opportunities for feminists to talk back to cultural depictions of rape and to interrogate rape culture. There is an immediacy of response that has shifted the political terrain considerably, raising new questions about our personal and affective relationship to representations of sexualized violence. (2014, 1106)

Indeed, through the use of hashtags such as #MeToo and #timesup, millions of people who have experienced sexualized violence have engaged with these platforms to express their testimonies and have become connected to (if not a part

of) a broader community of victims/survivors.[23] In this final section, I thus want to return to the question of disclosure discussed in the preface, thinking about these recent cultural shifts regarding the ways we speak about experiences of sexualized violence in relation to the phenomenon's prevention: how are these digitally-based social movements like #MeToo and/or #timesup related to sexualized violence prevention? Do these movements signify a different kind of prevention approach?

Perhaps intuitively given my arguments thus far, in thinking about these digital social media movements that address sexualized violence, I am uncertain whether they work towards sexualized violence *prevention* in the ways that founders and organizers may have desired them to. To be sure, the hashtags #MeToo and #timesup are most frequently used as means of linking various testimonies to experiences of sexualized violence that have already occurred. These new digital social movements thus read to me as something more akin to the speakouts or consciousness raising sessions popular in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in Canada and the United States that aimed to give voice to women's past

[2] #MeToo is a hashtag created in 2006 by feminist anti-sexualized violence advocate, Tarana Burke, to "help survivors of sexual violence, particularly Black women and girls, and other young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing" (Me Too 2018). On October 1st, 2017, white actor Alyssa Milano tweeted a request to her followers: "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet" (Pflum 2018). Following Milano's call, her post generated thousands of replies. As of October 11th 2018, the hashtag has been used roughly 19 million times on various social media platforms (Britzky 2018).
[3] #timesup is another hashtag created in November of 2017. During this time, a group of women in the entertainment industry began to meet to discuss what they might do to "prevent abuse and ensure equity for working women" (Time's up 2019). Breaking into groups to address different issues, one faction, the Allanza Nacional de Campesinas, published a powerful open letter that addressed the problems of sexualized violence in Hollywood. After this publication, the hashtag #timesup began to circulate as a means to call out various celebrity figures who are accused of engaging in acts of sexualized violence.

and current experiences of oppression than the prevention approaches discussed in this dissertation (Sowards and Renegar 2004, 535). And like these historical attempts to help raise awareness of women's experiences of sexualized violence, these new social media movements are experiencing similar limitations. For example, scholars like Anshwini Tambe have questioned whether #MeToo is a "white women's movement" (2018, 198). Given that media attention to the hashtag most commonly centres on white women's stories of pain, and given that "the primary instrument of redress in #MeToo is public shaming and criminalization of the perpetrator" (Tambe 2018, 200), it is questionable whether the movement works as productively for women of colour – especially black women – as it does for white women. As Tambe poignantly explains, "the dynamics of #MeToo, in which due process has been reversed—with accusers' words taken more seriously than those of the accused—is a familiar problem in black communities" (2018, 200). Thus, although created and initially mobilized with the intent of specifically addressing black women's experiences of sexualized violence, the mainstream cooptation of #MeToo has – perhaps inadvertently – reproduced a racialized dynamic that fails to consider the particular challenges experienced by victims/survivors who are black women. As Kathy Davis summarizes, "there are still many women who would not be able to participate in what has now become the #MeToo movement, either because they don't have access to the (social) media or because the sanctions would be too great" (2018, 5).

Similarly, anti-sexualized violence social media movements have also been critiqued for, in the words of Tambe, being "out of step with currents in

contemporary academic feminism" (2018, 200). Indeed, whereas academic feminism tends to favour complex discussions and representations of sexualized violence, social media movements that encourage short (i.e. 140 character) responses or testimonies might oversimplify understandings of and responses to sexualized violence. As Davis argues:

> I think that a moralizing discourse which evaluates, judges and sanctions, all in one go, may not be the best way to address the problem [sexualized violence]. Instead I think our task may be a more difficult one – namely, directing our attention to the murky and complicated ambivalences in which sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement itself are embedded. (2018, 9)

Gesturing towards racial, class-based, and sexualized politics and discourses that affect who is speaking in these movements, who gets heard, and against whom these complaints are levied, scholars like Davis worry that in spite of attempts to show the interconnectedness of various stories – which is, indeed, the goal/function of hashtags: creating connections – the same sociocultural and political mechanisms that enable sexualized violence to occur in the first place might be working to privilege the stories of some women's experiences of sexualized violence at the expense of others.

In a similar vein, other scholars worry about the rooting of these social media movements in the realm of celebrity. Typically, stories of sexualized violence articulated through various anti-sexualized violence hashtags receive the most attention when they feature the experiences or violent actions of persons with fame, socioeconomic wealth/power, or both. In and of itself, drawing

attention to abuses experienced and committed by well-known and/or highly regarding figures within a community is not problematic; in fact, holding high-power men accountable for their violent actions might function as a means to make the problem of sexualized violence visible. However, as Dubravka Zarkov argues, we need to be cautious about overly-optimistic diagnoses of the potential effects of social media movements against sexualized violence:

> We should not assume that what is happening among the political and cultural elites will automatically 'trickle down' to the streets. In other words, we should not expect that office workers, teachers, shop owners or policemen will be equally easily publicly 'blamed and shamed' or dismissed from their jobs because they have harassed and assaulted dozens of women (and men). (2018, 6)

Thus although persons skeptical of the trial-like function of #MeToo and #timesup might regard the uncertainty of whether its effects will 'trickle down' to the level of the everyday as a positive, it is evident from Zarkov's suggestion that other scholars worry that people who have experienced sexualized violence might have an unrealistic expectation that the same kind of sanctions for non-famous perpetrators of sexualized violence could be enacted.

Such observations regarding anti-sexualized violence social media movements importantly connect to my leeriness regarding the connections between anti-sexualized violence work and neoliberal discourses of self-interest and self-sacrifice. Like Tambe, Davis, and Zarkov, I have wondered: whose testimonies are being heard in the context of #MeToo and #timesup, and in what spaces? Where do these stories of sexualized violence 'go,' and what do they do

there? In whose interest? More specifically, however, I have also asked: how might the call for individuals to disclose their experiences of sexualized violence – and to engage in the intellectual and emotional labour of narrativizing that experience – towards a 'greater good' of changing conceptions and responses to sexualized violence function to (re)produce the neoliberal idea(l) that sexualized violence prevention lies primarily, if not entirely, with the individual? How are the very sociocultural structures that make sexualized violence possible – misogyny, racism, classism, settler-colonialism, ableism, heterosexism – operating within these movements as implicit regulatory mechanisms that (re)produce normative conceptions of who is worthy of care and protection? And furthermore, how might a keen focus on individual perpetrators of sexualized violence – especially those with large amounts of cultural and political clout – function as a means to detract attention from the cultures and institutions that affirm and/or enable the violent actions of these individuals?

Assuredly, these are important questions, questions that I, as a victim/survivor who has participated in these movements, find challenging on both a personal and intellectual level. For instance, I worry that movements like #MeToo and #timesup have garnered so much attention in media because of the sensational nature of what is being discussed (i.e. the details of an experience of sexualized violence) and who is being accused of such acts of terrible violence (i.e. persons already garnering the attention of the press for various reasons). Moreover, I am concerned with how movements like #MeToo and #timesup might function to (re)create uncomplicated distinctions between those who experience sexualized violence and those who perpetrate such acts: how does this

movement account for (or fail to account for) how a person might be both a perpetrator and a victim/survivor of sexualized violence? My strong feeling is that neither #MeToo nor #timesup makes a great deal of space for this possibility. If, in fact, the movements are primarily about connecting victims/survivors of sexualized violence, bringing attention to the widespread nature of the phenomenon, and (potentially) achieving a kind of justice for one's suffering (i.e. calling out individual perpetrators), it seems that bringing persons who might occupy the both/and of the victim/survivor-perpetrator dichotomy might be a bit of a contradiction, if not an outright impossibility. Can a person be a victim/survivor *and* a perpetrator within a movement that precludes the potential relationship between the two identities? And finally, I am still dubious of the preventative potentialities of a movement that is so invested in narrativizing past acts of sexualized violence. As Renée Heberle so artfully explains in relation to earlier feminist attempts at consciousness raising:

> What if in emphasizing the strategy of piecing together our reality as a rape culture through speakouts and detailed descriptions of experience, we participate in setting up the event of sexual violence as a defining moment of women's possibilities for being in the world? What if, in our empathic responses to women's suffering and insistence that "it could happen to any of us" we participate in conferring a monolithic reality onto an otherwise phantasmatic, illegitimate, and therefore fragile edifice of masculinist dominance rent with contradiction and internal conflict? (1996, 65)

Put differently, what if in speaking so much about past instances of sexualized violence, we (re)confirm its condition of possibility in our current sociopolitical moment?

Nevertheless, as we saw in the introduction to this dissertation, sexualized violence prevention is not always about addressing the phenomenon before it has occurred; indeed, another important part of prevention rests on how we deal with instances of sexualized violence as we work towards its eradication. In this sense, although the content of the social media posts linked through various hashtags (e.g. #MeToo, #timesup) might address and aim to bring attention to individual instances of sexualized violence that have occurred in the *past* and are still happening in the *present*, these extraordinarily popular movements have also contributed to cultural, social, and legal shifts regarding conceptions of sexualized violence that will likely have positive *future* implications, namely the lessening of instances of sexualized violence. Thus, although I am hesitant to label *social media movements* like #MeToo and #timesup a sexualized violence prevention approach, I still wonder if there are indeed some preventative possibilities: how might the various and widely publicized professional, financial, cultural, and personal repercussions of being named a perpetrator of sexualized violence via #MeToo or #timesup function to dissuade would-be perpetrators from engaging in violent and/or unethical sexualized behaviours? Or, in what ways do these powerful discourses regarding victim/survivor believability and credibility and the seriousness of sexualized violence work to challenge the idea that some women are always already rapeable?

It is significant, then, that several scholars have tempered a more skeptical view of these anti-sexualized violence social media movements with an incitement to also recognize the productive potentialities that #MeToo and #timesup represent for feminist anti-sexualized violence aims. For example, in their study of #MeToo and #BeenRapedNeverReported, social scientists Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller argue that such social media movements have several pertinent anti-sexualized violence functions. Specifically, Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller argue that these movements can work to: make victims/survivors feel heard; help women who have experienced sexualized violence build networks of solidarity; encourage the creation of a feminist consciousnesses that positions sexualized violence as a structural problem (2018, 238); create a potentially 'safer' or 'easier' space for people to discuss feminist views and/or experiences of sexualized violence (as compared to 'real life') (2018, 240); and provide knowledge and opportunities for learning outside institutional structures (i.e. schools) (2018, 241). Understanding such social media movements as less of an approach to prevention and more of an incitement to build community through shared testimony, the effects of these movements undoubtedly still contribute to prevention aims: in attempting to create a community where persons can discuss the similarities (and, hopefully, the differences) between experiences of sexualized violence, it is possible that people will be encouraged to understand the phenomena not as an inherent feature of being human, but as a result of certain social, cultural, political, and economic power structures.

However, I am unsure if the findings of Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller are generalizable to *all* women-identifying people participating in the #MeToo or #timesup movements. Indeed, a significant proportion of respondents cited in their article are women-identifying young people, or persons associated with a secondary or post-secondary educational institution (2018, 241).[4] Thus, when the authors argue, for example, that social media movements create a "safer or easier" space to talk about the problem of sexualized violence, it should be understood that these 'safer' spaces are framed as such through a comparison that might not exist for all women. For instance, what other kinds of spaces might middle-aged or older women have access to that girls and/or younger women who attend educational institutions do not? Or alternatively, how might institutional spaces, as constraining and problematic as they might be, also offer the only and/or best space for some women and girls to talk about sexualized violence and potentially garner support and resources?

Yet, in spite of these critiques, it is also quite possible that critics may be expecting too much, too soon from a relatively new anti-sexualized violence social media movement. As Davis explains, "while earlier feminist critiques were primarily faced with the task of establishing it as a problem, the #MeToo movement is showing just how widespread sexual harassment is and how it

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[4] Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller do not speak extensively to the identities of those surveyed. For example, at the beginning of the article, the authors states, "In addition to analyzing over 800 pieces of digital content, including blog posts, tweets and selfies, we collected the views of 82 girls, women and some men around the world, including organizers of various feminist campaigns, and those who have contributed to them" (2018, 236).Later, they further qualify this statement by relaying that, " Thirty-three per cent of the survey respondents were teenagers attending school, who argued Twitter provided knowledge and opportunities for learning and dialogue that school could not" (2018, 241).

affects countless women (and men) across the globe" (2018, 8). Although seemingly simplistic, I thus often wonder if one of the primary functions of social media movements like #MeToo and #timesup are just that: one means of demonstrating the significance of a problem (sexualized violence) by creating a community (or communities) around that problem, and a community (or communities) that speaks to that problem. Given how heavily engrained sexualized violence is in Canadian culture – we will recall that sexualized violence is integral to both the formation and maintenance of the Canadian settler-colonial state – perhaps in our thirst for a solution, we feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates have expected too much from a movement that never truly posited to have 'a' or 'the' solution to sexualized violence in the first instance.

That said, I believe it is important to recognize aspects of these social media movements that seem to garner far less attention than their famous hashtags: the organizations behind the social media movements. Significantly, both #MeToo and #timesup are not just means of connecting and organizing individuals through the topic of sexualized violence, but are also references to anti-sexualized violence organizations. For example, #timesup is both a digital means of linking various stories of powerful men's and women's engagement in acts of sexualized violence, *and* the name of an organization dedicated to the eradication of sexualized violence in various kinds of workplaces. Going beyond attempts to label, define, and launch public complaints about individual perpetrators of sexualized violence, Time's Up usefully attempts to address larger sociocultural issues that enable sexualized violence to happen in the workplace: gendered and racialized wage discrimination, childcare and maternity/paternity

policies, and the masculinization of positions of authority and/or power (Wexler, Robblennolt and Murphy 2019, 57; Tambe 2018, 201). In these instances, then, social media movements against sexualized violence might be an aspect or a mechanism of achieving broader organizational aspirations and goals that are committed to addressing a robust conceptualization of the causes of sexualized violence.[5]

However, it is also questionable if this largely legalistic response to sexualized violence characteristic of Time's Up is pandering to a carceral feminist politics that is problematic for feminist anti-sexualized violence aims. As Lesly Wexler, Jennifer Robblennolt, and Coleen Murphy note in their legalistic investigation of #timesup:

> Rather than rely solely on social denunciation, this collective [Times Up] has decided to "partner with leading advocates for equality and safety to improve laws, employment agreements, and corporate policies; help change the face of corporate boardrooms and the C-suite; and enable more women and men to *access our legal system to hold wrongdoers*

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[5] Similarly, Me Too is also interested in accomplishing anti-sexualized violence work beyond digital activism. As is explained on their website, "The 'me too' movement supports survivors of sexual violence and their allies by connecting survivors to resources, offering community organizing resources, pursuing a 'me too' policy platform, and gathering sexual violence researchers and research. 'Me Too' movement work is a blend of grassroots organizing to interrupt sexual violence and digital community building to connect survivors to resources … the 'me too' movement seeks to support folks working within their communities to attend to the specific needs of their community/communities, i.e. supporting disabled trans survivors of color working to lead and craft events/toolkits/etc. with other disabled trans survivors" (Me Too 2018)

accountable." (*Times Up* 2018 as cited in Wexler, Robblennolt and

Murphy 2019, 57 – emphasis mine)

Although I think it is helpful, even necessary, to have workplace policies in place

to help employers understand what sexualized violence is and its unacceptability,

that Times Up frames these policy-oriented gestures as productive insofar as they

can lead to the persecution of perpetrators under civil and/or criminal law reads to

me as a problematic (re)inscription of the state as the primary apparatus for

addressing (and by way of addressing, preventing) sexualized violence. And given

that when offenders of sexualized violence are in fact prosecuted for acts of

sexualized violence the recidivism rates are high, and given that sexualized

violence is a common occurrence within prisons and jails, it seems that a too

heavy reliance on criminal justice systems for a response to sexualized violence,

and an attempt prevent sexualized violence through that response, will ultimately

fail, most negatively impacting persons and communities already burdened by

various kinds of structural oppressions (i.e. racism, classism).[6]

It thus seems to me that anti-sexualized violence social media movements,

and some of their respective organizations, potentially exist in some tension with

feminist prevention aims. Although it is unclear to me whether it is a goal or

intent of these movements, it remains that many persons participating in these

movements use the social media platforms as a means to 'name and shame' their

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[6] In a 2019 study, Nicholas Scurich and Richard S. John argue that actually most of the recidivism rates for sexualized offenses are much higher than the 5-15% after five years and 10-25% after 10+ years that is typically cited in academic literature (2019, 158).

abusers. In terms of a preventative function of this aspect of the social media movements, it may be that some persons who engage in these activities might believe or hope that perpetrators will receive some sort of social, legal, or economic retribution. Functioning similarly to the way legal decisions are thought to contribute to the deterrence of crimes, there are not only no guarantees that one's actions within these movements will have preventative effects, but there is also the possibility that one's participation in these movements could create other problems, problems that even contribute to the perpetuation of sexualized violence. Such work within social media movements could, for example, (re)create myths about 'the kind' of people who are most likely to commit sexualized violence, leave a problematic system intact while concentrating sanctions for individuals, and circumvent critical thinking about socially and culturally produced norms regarding sex and sexuality.

However, it is also clear that not all persons participating in social media movements, nor all organizations connected to such movements, are interested (or as interested) in a carceral agenda. For instance, in her work on Burke's Me Too organization, Michelle Rodino-Colocino concentrates on the role of empathy within the movement/organization and its productive potentialities for feminist anti-sexualized violence aims. For Rodino-Colocino, movements organized on the basis of empathy, like #MeToo, are "both promising and risky endeavours" (2018, 96). However, as Rodino-Colocino's work illustrates, there is a difference between the use and circulation of the Me Too hashtag and Tarana Burke's foundation in relation to the production of different kinds of empathy. For example, Rodino-Colocino works with Megan Boler's idea of "passive empathy,"

which describes a kind of empathy that is predicated on the irrefutable difference between subjects. According to Rodino-Colocino, passive empathy in social justice movements is problematic insofar as "it enables oppressors, and even oppressed people, to project feelings of commonality, understanding, as well as fear and guilt rather than do the work of being self-reflexive" (2018, 96). Although Rodino-Colocino does not make this connection in her article, I want to suggest that "passive empathy" might be produced by or within the spaces fostered by #MeToo and #timesup. Indeed, as discussed above, there is nothing 'in' or 'about' the #MeToo hashtag that encourages its users to engage with these stories in a way that promotes social justice as opposed to engaging with such stories in a consumptive manner (2018, 96) that is perhaps more likely to produce a 'passive' empathy.

Yet, Rodino-Colocino also argues that Tarana Burke's initial use of Me Too and the ensuing foundation is promoting something different than passive empathy, something she terms "transformative empathy" (2018, 97). According to Rodino-Colocino, transformative empathy is distinct from passive empathy in that it "promotes listening rather than distancing or looking at speakers as 'others'" (2018, 97). Believing that the power of empathy is "sorely undervalued," Rodino-Colocino suggests that Burke strives to connect a mission of empowering black women and girls through empathy with a mission to expose a "system of oppression and privilege of which sexual harassment and assault are cause and effect" (2018, 97). As Burke herself best states, "one of the main goals of The me too Movement™ [sic] is to give young women, particularly young women of color from low wealth communities, a sense of empowerment from the

understanding that they are not alone in their circumstances" (JustBEInc 2018). However, a crucial part of this empowerment for black women and girls is fostering awareness and discussions about the systemic causes of sexualized violence:

> … the power of this movement of "Me Too," this power of empathy, this power of connection, is really about empowering people to be survivors, to be resilient, and also to make really visible that sexual violence is not about people's individual actions, that this is a *systemic problem that then requires different types of responses to deal with how systemic this problem actually is*. (Burke quoted in Goodman and González 2018 – emphasis mine)

For Burke and her organization, then, the Me Too movement goes beyond #MeToo's emphasis on individual experience to also consider the context of multiple experiences and what they mean to our understanding of and approach to preventing sexualized violence. As Burke best explains, "there are nuances in our community around sexual violence that are informed by centuries of oppression and white supremacy, but we have to confront them … there are layers of things we have to unpack" (Burke quoted in Adetiba 2017).

Following scholars like Rodino-Colocino, I thus wonder if an important aspect of these feminist responses to sexualized violence – creating spaces for disclosures and creating organizational structures that address various aspects of these testimonies – is in the midst of becoming a kind of sexualized violence prevention strategy. In her work on the efficacy of self-defense, Sarah Miller makes a convincing argument towards this end. Looking at Burke's Me Too

movement, Miller suggests that Burke's work has a "two pronged aim: to provide survivors what they need to begin healing and to work to end sexual violence" (2019, 72). For Miller these two goals are intertwined, as the empathetic connections fostered between victim/survivors through MeToo can function to heal those who have experienced sexualized violence, and healing itself may be a mode of resistance. As Miller explains:

> … healing opens the possibility for survivors to recover not only their ability to recognize and give proper moral weight to their own suffering and to the suffering of other survivors of sexual violence, but also the ability to recognize and give proper moral weight to the structural oppression in which perpetrators carried out their violation and the violation of others. The recovery of the ability to detect and engage empathic distress beyond the immediate situation forms the bedrock of the capacity to resist sexual violence. (2019, 74)

Under Miller's formulation, then, social media movements may have the potential to prevent sexualized violence through their ability to connect survivors, and for those survivors to not only heal through their empathetic connections, but to demonstrate the structural connections between individual experiences of sexualized violence, and model more ethical modes of living with one another. Put differently, scholars like Miller suggest that the space/place created by movements and organizations like Me Too#MeToo, where testimonies to experiences of sexualized violence can 'live,' could provide persons with a representation of sexualized violence that might enable one to perceive connections between experiences; in drawing connections between experiences of

sexualized violence, persons might be able to better recognize the structural causes of this phenomenon, and thus be better equipped to address such systems and structures.

Importantly, however, I still have hesitations about the productive potentialities of empathy for sexualized violence prevention. Alongside the aforementioned critiques of these social media movements, there is a plethora of literature that speaks to the dilemmas of ethical witnessing (Bennett 2005; Boler 2004; Frosh and Pinchevski 2008; Razack 2007; Tuana 2008), or the impossibility of witnessing altogether (Felman and Laub 1992; Kaplan 2005; Luckhurst 2009; Oliver 2001). Moreover, it seems that the empathy that is fostered through these social media movements and their respective organizations is most commonly discussed in relation to communities of victims/survivors. However, I wonder – at least in terms of thinking about sexualized violence prevention – if it is only victims/survivors who need an empathetic awakening to the problem of sexualized violence. Alongside victims/survivors' needs, it seems to me that would-be perpetrator and bystanders to sexualized violence might also need to be 'empathetic targets' in relation to prevention. Moreover, I also think it is important to recognize that empathetic engagement has no guarantees; in fact, in an age where technology enables so many sociocultural, economic, and political issues to be articulated in new ways, who is to say that such a movement towards empathy will not get lost in all the other calls for a deep engagement with an issue? How, then, do we attend to the possibility that those who might need to hear these experiences of sexualized violence the most are quite possibly unequipped to engage in the kind of deeply felt, reflexive empathy that Burke

and/or Miller and Rodino-Colocino call for? And finally, I am also suspicious of the optimistic assertion that social media movements like #MeToo and #timesup might create a kind of archive or repository of experiences of sexualized violence that could enable participants to infer the structural causes of sexualized violence. Not wanting to suggest that people lack a kind of critical analytical ability that would enable the perception of patterns across testimonies to sexualized, it is important to recognize that the very structures and systems the creators of such movements hope that their audiences will recognize across testimonies (i.e. racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism) might actually be at work within the testimonies themselves to prevent this very possibility.

What I believe this discussion of the potentialities of social media movements for sexualized violence prevention reveals, then, is a kind of truism for considering many sexualized violence prevention strategies: context matters. Given the ways sexualized violence is deeply rooted in our understandings of being or living together, I believe that sexualized violence prevention approaches discussed in this dissertation will be most successful when they are combined to fit the needs of the community they are addressing. And to be sure, each prevention approach has something unique to offer those who mobilize it. Consent discourse can offer persons a definitional starting point for fostering conversations regarding sexualized violence; fighting strategies acknowledge that persons most vulnerable to sexualized violence might have something unique to offer by virtue of their experiences and/or positionality in efforts towards its eradication; bystanderism attempts to diffuse the responsibility for sexualized violence prevention from would-be perpetrators and victim/survivors to the

broader community; and empathetic approaches to sexualized violence prevention recognize the import of feeling, affect, and emotion to countering sociopolitical problems. Using aspects of each approach to prevention to speak to the particular needs of one's audience thus might enable a more robust mobilization of each prevention strategy, one that hopefully takes seriously the feminist anti-sexualized violence incitement to make sexualized violence no longer a possibility.

As this dissertation has shown, though, simply combining sexualized violence prevention approaches is likely not enough to circumvent how prevention approaches are mobilized in ways that potentially (re)produce the conditions that enable sexualized violence to occur. The theories of prevention we create, and the contexts in which we mobilize such strategies, are intimately intertwined with our conceptions of what it means to be human, and what it means to live together. Neoliberalism works as a means to regulate these understandings, pushing us to conceptualize ourselves as primarily self-interested and self-sacrificing. From these conceptions come the neoliberal idea(l)s that, when mobilized in particular ways, produce effects that run contrary to feminist anti-sexualized violence aims. Through its idea(l)s of individualism, personal responsibility, and the new norm of presumed 'equality,' neoliberalism encourages us to perceive sexualized violence as a private, personal phenomenon, where prevention is the responsibility of those who may partake in intimate acts and behaviours. And at a time when awareness of sexualized violence as a sociopolitical issue is ever-present in media, but when perpetrators of such acts repeatedly avoid (serious) repercussions, the idea to focus on the individual might seem all the more appealing: people who commit sexualized violence need to be

held accountable for the harms they have enacted. Which is why I understand that interrogating our approaches to prevention in relation to their (potential) uptake of neoliberal idea(l)s is not an easy or straightforward task. In our quest to make sexualized violence no longer a possibility, it is difficult to hold those responsible for the perpetration of sexualized violence accountable, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that it is the sociopolitical community that we live within that – at least in part – made those individuals' actions possible. How, then, do we live with and/or care for others that might do us, or have done us, harm?

In her work on precarity and assembly, Judith Butler reminds us that despite the possibility of our injury, we have a responsibility to the 'other':

> We live together because we have no choice, and though we sometimes rail against that unchosen condition, we remain obligated to struggle to affirm the ultimate condition of that unchosen social world, an affirmation that is not quite choice, a struggle that makes itself known and felt precisely when we exercise freedom in a way that is necessarily committed to the equal value of lives. (2015, 122)

I wonder, then, if the ultimate preventative strategy in this neoliberal era will require feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates to begin thinking about our responsibility to not completely shun and/or dismiss perpetrators of sexualized violence. This, of course, is a difficult task, and a rather heavy ask: how do we address and hold accountable (would-be) perpetrators of sexualized violence when we know that their (potential) actions and behaviours are made possible, and sometimes condoned, by broader hierarchal social contexts? Moreover, recognizing that some anti-sexualized violence advocates are persons who have

themselves experienced sexualized violence, how would feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates go about such a task whilst being attentive to the needs of victims/survivors?

These are especially difficult questions. And although I do not have a definite or straightforward answer as to how we might address these problems, I believe Alexis Shotwell's recent work on "claiming bad kin" presents a good starting point. In her talk on anti-black racism and border militarism, Shotwell observes that "people who benefit from social relations of harm frequently try to claim kin relations with the people who are targeted by racism or … reject connections with wrongdoers" (2018a). Shotwell thus wonders what would happen if the inverse was true:

> [What might it mean] for white people and settlers more generally who benefit from historical and current effects of enslavement, colonialism, border militarism, racial distributions of environmental devastation, and capitalism to claim kin with the people producing these effects. If we are complicit in the pain of this suffering world, how might we take responsibility for our bad kin? (2018b, 3)

In response to this excellent question, Shotwell proposes that persons interested in addressing and dismantling systems and structures of racism and settler-colonialism must work on crafting "new practices of being in relation," ones that acknowledge "a conception of situatedness as arising from both the histories we inherit and the webs of connection that shape the social relations within which we exist" (2018b, 4). What I like about Shotwell's conception of working with persons who may or have engaged in acts that may harm us is that she

acknowledges that we are all situated, but differentially positioned, within systems and structures that enable violence to continue. Indeed, according to Shotwell, our "differential inheritance produces differential responsibilities" (2018b, 4).

Thinking about Shotwell's work in relation to sexualized violence prevention and the idea of claiming 'bad kin,' I am tempted to argue that because we are all connected to (differentially benefiting from and negatively affected by) systems and hierarchies of oppression that contribute to the continuation of sexualized violence, we are all differentially responsible for its prevention by virtue of those complex relations. However, such a claim feels slippery, especially at a time where (would-be) victims/survivors are already over-responsibilized for sexualized violence prevention. Nevertheless, Shotwell's work helps produce some important questions about our prevention approaches and their relationships to a normative order of rationality that encourages us to abandon and isolate our 'bad kin' (neoliberalism): how might we (re)mobilize aspects of neoliberalism's normative impulses towards the creation of a situated and situational response-ability for sexualized violence prevention? Working on and with a neoliberal impetus to responsibilize individuals, what might it mean to (re)direct a drive to individualize and personalize sociopolitical ills to combat those very sociopolitical ills? How might we flip a trend to hold individuals responsible for the prevention of sexualized violence to instead suggest that such persons are responsible, but responsible in different ways and to different degrees, for addressing and/or negotiating our role in enabling broader systems of privilege and oppression? And how might we address the sexually violent actions of

individuals by highlighting the ways these actions actually function as a kind of self-betrayal that forgoes one's relational connection to another? These questions, though difficult if not impossible to definitively answer, demonstrate how our normative beliefs and assumptions regarding what it means to be human and live together can both help and hinder our efforts to end sexualized violence. And, therefore, we – feminist anti-sexualized violence advocates – need to continue to be aware of how sexualized violence remains a citizenly issue.

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