“My sister went to Steubenville, OH and all I got was this lousy shirt”: Composing Feminist Activism with The Clothesline Project

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Abstract:
This research extends the prevailing notion that “the personal is political,” and demonstrates how activists balance personal investment in social change with public arguments that may influence such change. Additionally, this work accounts for how the researcher’s own experiences of trauma mediate research. Finally, it shows how paradoxes like ‘“silence speaks’” allow for subversive communication in material, visual, textual, ‘“spoken’” and ‘“unspoken’” forms. More specifically, these dynamics are examined in the context of the international activist event, The Clothesline Project, which invites survivors of sexual violence (and those remembering victims) to communicate their experiences via text and illustrations on tee shirts that are then hung on a clothesline in a public space. In doing so, the Project addresses politics surrounding violence against women, especially on college campuses.

1 This article explores relationships between literate artifacts (documents and materials) and psychosocial compositions (cultural narratives that influence one’s actions) as they relate to feminist activism. According to Holland & Skinner, activism has focused on the promotion of literacy at the expense of understanding how literacy carries out activism (849). In other words, movements advocate literacy acquisition as a means of social, intellectual, and economic betterment. But the reading and composing practices that take place *within* movements contribute to activism’s “potential to effect social, cultural, and political change” (850). Moreover, with increased interest in rhetorics of silence, researchers have explored and called for further attention to subaltern forms of composing (Houston & Kramarae 1991) as “poetic world making, resisting the exclusionary norms of critical-rational discourse and creating a space for performative, affective, and situated meaning making” (Higgins, Long, & Flower 29). My work, then, explores subaltern compositions produced during The Clothesline Project (CP), a feminist activist event. Moreover, my work examines those compositions as situated within larger cultural narratives—how writings and graphics produce, and how they are products of, social narratives. Findings of this study suggest that, even when provided the opportunity for uncensored and anonymous expression about experiences with assault, female participants in the CP shy away from deeply personal, emotional accounts. Instead, they produce short, general statements that appeal to a loosely defined audience. This approach suggests that participants understand their literate practices as operating within social narratives that dichotomize personal and public identities.

2 Though various scholars have long researched and advocated the use of literacy for democracy, civic engagement, activism, and social change, these ideas warrant further investigation (Cushman; George; Higgins, Long, & Flower; Addison; and Lieblich). For example, Higgins, Long, and Flower used their term "community literacy" to conceptualize literacy as more than an ability to decode words, but as "the public act of writing and taking social action" (9); to support this notion, they examined "venues for deliberation and inquiry and how the literate practices that structured this activity reproduced certain values, norms, identities, and relationships"; for example, they examined community meetings and their resulting minutes, reports, and proposals (14-15). Other researchers have also looked at texts as embedded within ideological, hierarchical social constructs and possibilities for use of such texts to maintain the status quo or change reality (Bazerman; Bremner). Specifically, examining creation of "new realities" via texts (309), Bazerman argued that texts create "social facts [consisting of action through language or speech acts][…]carried out in genres[…]which arise in social processes of people trying to understand each other well enough to coordinate activities and share meanings for their practical purposes" (311 & 317). Additionally, after analysis of the creation, description, and reception of texts, Bremner concluded that "goal-oriented" texts remain intertwined with institutional exigency, thereby influencing what and how writers write (20). Finally, Holland and Skinner, as referenced above, argued that "social movements often organise activities around the use of written forms, but these literacy events and practices have received little attention for the roles they play in effecting social, cultural and political change" (849).

3 I identify two forms of literate practices that organize activities: literate artifacts and psychosocial compositions. Literate artifacts refer to documents or materials, such as those produced during social action events (protest signs, listserv sign-up sheets, exhibits); psychosocial compositions refer to social influences on one's ideology and actions, for example, how literate practices and cultural discourse affect individuals' participation in and reception of civic engagement.[1] The culture is an input and an output of the event; so, psychosocial compositions refer to an intertwining relationship. I further understand literate artifacts and psychosocial compositions in terms of how texts mediate trauma and recovery by way of media that allow the individual to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct narratives related to identity in various times, places, and relationships (Pennebaker; Anderson &

[1] The larger study from which this article originates also examines literate artifacts and psychosocial compositions as they relate to the CP's planning committee.

Maccurdy; Rose; Smyth, True, & Souto; Lepore & Smith; Fiandt; Sharma-Patel, Brown, & Chaplin; Lieblich; and Anderson & Conley).

4 My work here focuses on literate practices in the CP, an event held by college and community organizations since 1990 which provides temporary catharsis to survivors of sexual assault while raising public awareness about violence against women. As an international activist event, the CP invites survivors of sexual violence (and those remembering victims) to communicate their experiences via text and illustrations on tee shirts which are then hung on a clothesline in a public space. This project is especially important now, due to current politics regarding sexual violence against women. As of October 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that 35% of women worldwide experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. In the United States, the "National Crime Victimization Survey, 2008-2012" revealed than an average of 237, 868 people (age 12 or older) are raped or sexually assaulted each year; this number translates to approximately one act of sexual violence every two minutes (RAINN). An April 2014 *New York Times* article reported that the White House recently issued guidelines to "increase the pressure on universities to more aggressively combat sexual assaults on campus" (Steinhauer). These guidelines follow President Obama's recent creation of a task force to address the problem; this task force reported that 20% of female college students had been assaulted, though only 12% of these students reported the crime (Steinhauer).

5 With the current political situation in mind, I turn to the literate artifacts and psychosocial compositions of The Clothesline Project in order to re-examine "literacy as a lived experience" (Addison 136-51) and develop the idea that rhetoric and writing are agents of social change (Cushman;Parks and Goldblatt; George; Daniell; Higgins, Long, & Flower; and Lieblich). Furthermore, my study contributes to work that addresses how composing "revise[s]" individuals (Rose 164) and social narratives which remain "wholly dependent on [one another] for their existence" (Fiandt 571). For instance, Julier argues that artists may "re-vision" personal blame as a social issue ("Private Texts" 253), while Payne further notes that abuse survivors "have lost confidence in a stable, knowable reality. Signifiers and signified constantly shift; thus, reality and one's sense of identity are deconstructive texts" (Payne 151). But women involved in the CP "seem to see that language can be amended to reshape experience" (Julier, "Voices from the Line" 373), to rewrite—deconstruct and reconstruct—themselves. On a larger scale, Thiongo asserts that "our pens should be used to increase the anxieties of all oppressive regimes. At the very least the pen should be used to

'murder their sleep' by constantly reminding them of their crimes against the people, and by letting them know that they are seen" (221).

6 The writing and art of the CP, rather than trying to squelch oppressive regimes, aims to serve as a political act by providing honest accounts of violence to real people (Escobar 249). Choosing and engaging with images [and words] instills a sense of autonomy, even over past events (Peacock). In other words, writing *can* change power structures (Bremner 420). From this perspective, CP participation helps individuals better understand their subject positions as survivors in the larger society; in particular, CP writers and artists gain such an understanding by addressing their own healing process; addressing fellow survivors; engaging in remembrance of victims; and producing messages, either written or visual, directed at offenders or sexist cultural attitudes.

7 Addressing such painful experiences challenges activists to balance personal and public identities. Designers of the CP understand the discomfort many survivors experience when identifying themselves publicly as such. Accordingly, the CP allows survivors to "have their say" in an alternative fashion, through writing and art, and joins other activist efforts in this approach. For example, Take Back the Night, LGBQ's National Day of Silence, and The Silent Witness National Initiative all ground their work in a belief in the power of visual argument (in written words or images).

8 Visual arguments operate with particular importance in relation to rhetorics of silence, since these images often replace the act of speaking audibly. Furthermore, Fiandt suggests a propensity for the use of aesthetic appeal in social action; specifically, she claims that "just as healing intentions spur art, socio political activist intentions spur art[…] Every vital social movement immediately begins to generate art, songs, poetry, posters, murals, novels[…] So, while writing demands action, action can, simultaneously demand art" (581-82). Before Fiandt, Edelman claimed that art and literature exemplify social action which stems from "personal or collective planning or plotting […] psychopathology, or […] emotion" (9). From this view, writing and art (or writing as an art) offer responses to social and personal experiences. Indeed, people adopt ideologies based, in part, on the visual representations they encounter (Felshin 20-22). "Mundane" images, in particular, play a role in transforming ideologies; because such images lack shock value, people can more easily relate to them (Weber 45). For example, the AIDS Quilt exposes viewers to covert, transformative ideas.[2]

[2] A product of The NAMES Project Foundation, the Quilt originated in 1987 and consists of panels dedicated to victims of the AIDS virus (The Names Project Foundation). "Today there are NAMES Project chapters across the United States and independent Quilt affiliates around the world." (The Names Project Foundation).

As a common household item, the quilt raises awareness of a deadly disease, but also raises associations with home and intimacy (bed or bedroom); therefore, the quilt connects the disease with people who think it has no relation to them (Elsley 189). Similarly, some artists have used clothing to offer messages about gender, as empty clothing can provoke ideas about androgyny and gendered stereotypes, and does so "visually, silently, continuously" (Felshin 20-24 & 29). The AIDS Memorial Quilt and the use of tee shirts in the CP connect the familiar with the unfamiliar, the comfortable with the uncomfortable. In this way, the quilt, the CP, and the activist events mentioned earlier support "symbolic communication [occurring in] a host of nonverbal forms" (Carroll Smith-Rosenberg qtd. in Elseley 189). These connections to the community allow the CP to serve as "text" and "event" (Julier 250).

9 CP participants reach out to the community as first-hand witnesses of violence who then use their shirts to witness *to* others. The personal experiences they share, however, implicate larger social problems. Silence, for instance, remains a significant factor in trauma, resulting activist efforts, and the discourse of trauma and activism. For example, the perpetrator silences the victim (or survivor) during the crime, and often makes threats to ensure the survivor remains silent after the crime. Friends and family often silence the survivor (intentionally or unintentionally) by avoiding conversation about the experience or even blaming the survivor for the crime. The survivor may practice silence as a way of (seemingly) asserting power over her perpetrator, knowing she could go public about the crime at any time. The survivor may also practice silence as a means of private healing, internally processing one's thoughts and feelings and perhaps externalizing them in ways other than sharing with others. The survivor, then, may also decide to 'break silence.' Finally, silence provides anonymity, a form of protection, by eliminating the demand for use of an identifiable voice. In each case, literacy can mediate these dynamics; it allows for various forms of enclosure and public and private disclosure. For instance, people can write letters (sent or not) to offenders. They can engage in practices like name burning ceremonies, during which survivors of crime write names of, or messages to, offenders and then burn these messages. They can write official, signed testimonies. They can create abstract or explicit forms of literature or art pertaining to their experiences. They can read self-help books or materials from organizations or support groups. They can journal their experiences or participate in writing therapy groups.

10 Examining how silence is manifested in CP tee shirts sheds light on participants' choices when writing or illustrating their trauma. Field-Belenky, for instance, discovered that women describing their personal development navigated toward metaphors of voice: feeling

deaf and dumb, being silenced or really heard, and perceiving words as weapons (18). I look for the same types of knowledge construction. As Bruner suggests, I remain mindful of the ways in which CP participants' accounts fit into particular social contexts; similar to what Weber suggests about mundane images, going too far astray simply leaves us abandoned in our efforts. Lastly, Houston & Kramarae discuss ways in which women have been silenced ("via ridicule, familial hierarchies, anti-woman education policies, and male-dominated media") and ways in which women have navigated these silences through "trivial" discourses like graffiti, sewing, and journals; through women-centered support groups and presses; and through naming problems that never before had a name, like "sexual harassment," and the idea that women should physically take up little space (389).

Methods

11 My work addresses the following research question: How can we understand the literate artifacts of continued activist events in terms of composing and revising social narratives? To respond, I examined shirts produced by 12 participants in Kent State University's 2013 Clothesline Project. Eleven participants signed consent forms for their work to be included in this study; I was the other participant. As of 2013, these twelve shirts comprised approximately 20% of all tee shirts created by and collected from participants of KSU's Clothesline Project. I obtained photographs of each tee shirt (front and back, when relevant) and inductively completed a rhetorical analysis (Leach 220-26), based on the tee shirts as expressions of deep or vivid personal experiences versus general, public appeals. The rhetorical analysis, then, examines the writers' content, audience, and use of pronouns.[3] Rhetorical analysis aids the exploration of how writers and artists position themselves in relation to their purpose, audience, and the larger rhetorical context. Specifically, to examine shirts' overall message, I consider who the writers or artists address with their composition and what pronouns they use; these criteria allow me to evaluate the degrees to which their images are personal or public.

12 I chose the CP to better understand how current conceptualizations of 'active participation' as 'speaking out' remain overly simplified and, in some ways, unjust. Furthermore, participating in the project myself served two purposes. First, it allowed me to disclose my own experiences anonymously, during a time when I wished to avoid publicly identifying myself as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. Such public identification

[3] For shirts with words and images, I also conducted a semiotic analysis, as discussed by Silverman (330); here, I have space to address only the rhetorical analysis.

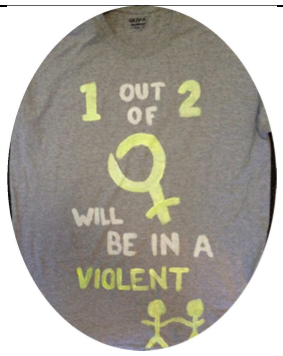
compounds complications of navigating other defining markers faced by women, such as age, gender, appearance, and professional status.[4] The CP offers one outlet where women can identify as survivors without risk of marring public identities. Second, my participation also means that I applied reflective feminist practices in my analysis, making clear that, though I participated in the project, I avoid speaking for other participants. My analysis stems from my role as a viewer of the event (except when talking about my own shirt) because, while participants received my contact information and the link to an anonymous survey about their experiences as a participant, only one CP participant in this study took the survey. Therefore, to respect the extent to which they desired participating in this study, certain types of information and arguments cannot be asserted. Nonetheless, a critical, rhetorical analysis from the viewers' position, which normally would exclude personal communication with tee shirt creators, offers valuable insight into the CP. The CP and efforts like it set out to meet survivors where they find themselves in their journey, and do so in a sensitive, respectful, and just manner. The complex rhetorical and psychological terrain these efforts tread make them worthy of further intellectual investigation. My work aims to serve as one contribution to such endeavors.

Results

13 Tables 1 and 2 present photographs of each shirt, the audience the shirt addresses, and the pronouns used. More specifically, table 1 includes shirts with messages that, for the most part, address the general public without personal pronouns (with one shirt addressing fellow survivors). In contrast, table 2, presents shirts which address the general public with the use of personal pronouns.

[4] This is not to exclude male survivors of sex crimes or suggest that they do not face some types of discrimination that women face. The majority of CP participants, however, are women; therefore, I use gendered pronouns in this article.

Table 1

Participant	Shirt	Audience	Pronouns
1		General public	N/A
2		General public	N/A
3		General public	N/A
4		General public	N/A

5		General public	N/A
6		Fellow survivors	N/A

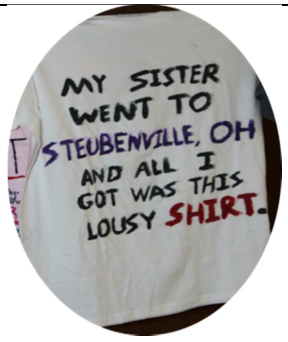
14 The shirts in table 1 contain brief messages which anyone, survivor or otherwise, could have created. Though the last shirt communicates that its creator is a survivor, I include it in this table because the use of a statistic suggests a rather impersonal, common approach to gaining the public's attention. These shirts, then, resemble bumper sticker messages, quite easily mass produced without severe loss of the writers' or artists' 'signature,' the details that connect the text or art to a particular author or artist, even if anonymous. The shirts provide an opportunity for expression without censorship,[5] for participants to address themselves, their offenders, specific survivors or victims, or people who have contributed to their process of coping with their circumstances. The CP participants in this study address a broad, undefined audience. Of the 12 shirts, 9 have no clearly defined audience, 2 address survivors in general, and 1 addresses men (for this I assumed that the perpetrator was male). Regardless of their composing process, the artists do not identify a clear audience, such as survivors of rape or a particular offense, personal relationships related to their journey, particular groups or media perpetuating gender stereotypes or acts of violence, etc. Participants speak to the notion that 'the personal is political,'[6] and they do so by choosing to leave out their personal

[5] The only restriction on participants' content is that they cannot reveal an offender's full name unless the offender has been convicted for the offense.

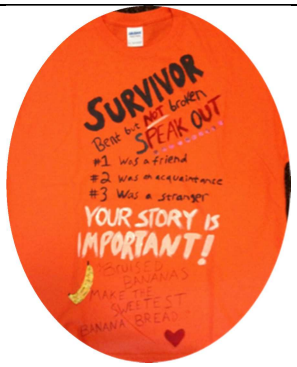
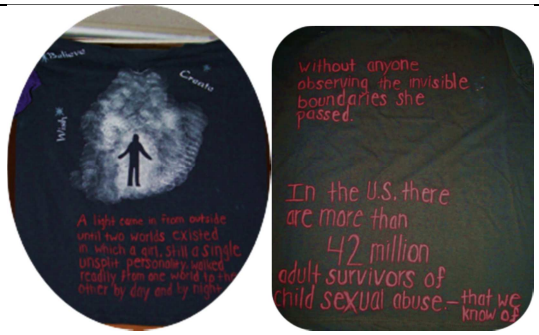
[6] Carol Hanisch's "The Personal is Political" (1970) discusses meeting with women to discover patterns in their responses to questions about their lives. She claimed, "One of the first things we discover in these groups is that

experiences. For example, only 5 of the 12 shirts use first- or second-person pronouns, (two include “my”; one includes both “my” and “I”; one employs “we”; and one uses “your”) (see table 2); and even these shirts practice self-censorship, or silence, to the extent that they avoid detailed, emotional accounts of personal experiences and place a great deal of distance between themselves and their audience.

Table 2

Participant	Shirt	Audience	Pronoun
7		General public	My
8		Men (implied)	My
9		General public	My, I

personal problems are political problems […] There is only collective action for a collective solution” (Hanisch).

10		General public, perhaps offenders in particular	We
11		Fellow survivors	Your
12		General public	N/A

15 Of the four shirts using first-person pronouns (shirts 7-10, table 2), only one attempts to offer the audience some of her experience; the designer who wrote “Does no mean no when my hands are here” (shirt 7) represented the body fighting off an offender, and provides a glimpse into a very personal moment. The participant who wrote “My eyes are up here” with an arrow pointing from the chest area upward (shirt 8), communicates how many people objectify certain body parts. The shirt that says “My sister went to Steubenville OH and all I got was this lousy shirt” (shirt 9) refers to the 2012 rape of a high school girl from Steubenville, Ohio. Captured by peers via electronic devices and posted on the internet, the rape raised awareness of the violent acts committed by offenders, but also of the unjust acts of those committed by bystanders. Shirt 9 also fosters a personal relationship with the writer and her sister and a well-known violent sexual act. But the message remains unclear to some

extent. Is the writer commenting on Steubenville or a specific experience which her sister had with sexual assault while in Steubenville?

16 One shirt uses "we" (shirt 10), a more inclusive pronoun than "My" or "I." Again, it only notes that the artist is a survivor, proclaiming that "we will not be silenced," signing with the signature "survivors." But the artist offers no details about what she recalls of her experience. This artist uses silence, first, in censoring her message through the elimination of personal details, but also by making herself part of a collective; though the voices of many in unison may be loud, it also drowns out the individual for the sake of presenting a united front. Another shirt (shirt 11) uses "your" to divulge personal information. This writer and artist at least provides a glimpse into her past and present psychological state after her assault; she asserts that she is "bent but not broken." She presents a list, "#1 was a friend #2 was an acquaintance #3 was a stranger," which may communicate the relationship between her and offenders, or the relationship between her and other survivors she has met. This lack of clarity, then, accounts for her silence. She tells us about these relationships, but withholds information about them that would allow us to truly make sense of them. At the same time she silences her story (to some degree), she encourages other survivors to tell their stories. Finally, she turns to a baking analogy that seems to shed light on her attitude toward her experience, or worldview; she claims that "Bruised bananas make the sweetest banana bread," suggesting that she has found some purpose in her experience, that she can do or be more, or better, after surviving her ordeal.

17 Finally, my own shirt excludes the use of a personal pronoun but attempts to communicate part of my personal experience, with the story acting as a pseudonym for my own. The shirt reads, "A light came in from outside until two worlds existed in which a girl, still a single unsplit personality, walked readily from one world to the other by day and by night… [front] without anyone observing the invisible boundaries she passed" [back]; this quote was taken from Loren Eiseley's *The Night Country* (196).[7] The idea of light from the outside triggers memories of my abuse. The single, unsplit personality refers to my ability to view myself as 'whole' even in brokenness. I also have an ability to "walk from one world to the other, by day and by night," the fortitude to traverse whatever circumstances I encounter. But who I am in one world, people in the other world will inevitably misunderstand. I have a way of existing in which nobody really recognizes me. I enter and exit intellectual and emotional spaces and challenges and victories that only I will ever know and decipher. Like

[7] I changed "he" and its varying forms to "she."

other artists, I too utilize silence; I silence my own experiences and instead find the words of others easier to use. I disclose, but with imagery and a degree of mystery. I offset my emotional yet censored appeal with the use of a statistic, making it more accessible (and less personal) for viewers.

Discussion

18 Initially, I viewed the CP as a bridge between the public and the private, serving as a means to circumvent calls to 'speak,' regardless of the difficulty introverts or those dealing with mental health issues may face in trying to meet such a demand. Specifically, the CP allows for, in Malchiodi's terms, "telling without talking," telling without the loss of anonymity or pressure to censor for the sake of protecting personal or professional identity. But the shirts in this study suggest that participants adopt a different understanding and experience of the CP. As it turns out, the women approached their task with particular ideas of who constituted their audience and how those audiences should be addressed. Audience members, like CP participants, have worldviews embedded in narratives of sexual liberation, virgin/vamp dichotomies, governmental initiatives and policies addressing (or failing to address) the issue of sexual assault, and colloquial language for sexual acts. In a situation we might think of as relatively 'free' or 'liberating,' the women revealed very little about their personal experiences. They make short, declarative statements addressing the general public rather than more detailed narratives about personal journeys and relationships. They forgo gut-wrenching accounts of their own suffering and healing, or that of someone close to them. Even if participants choose this approach, in part, based on the convention of tee shirts having less rather than more text, they could still choose to include more explicit or graphic words or images. Participants' more impersonal approach, however, is as significant as those communicated with more detail. As with much writing, the difficulty comes not in knowing what one wants to say but in struggling to say it, struggling with how to say it, and struggling with the consequences of sharing thoughts and feelings—with others and, in my case, with myself. Again, without additional data, I am unable to assert that other participants in this study experience such difficulty; I draw only on my own experience and conversations with fellow survivors, some who plan and observe the event. Nonetheless, I offer this explanation as one possible theory.

19 Lifting some of the burden of people's private lives by sharing experiences also means acquiring new burdens about what it means to self-disclose and how to do so as effectively as possible with each individual or group of people. After all, once one discloses

to one person or group of people, the individual relinquishes some control over how experiences get told and retold in the future and in different contexts. This struggle between autonomy and compliance demonstrates empowerment as inherently "paradoxical" (O'Connor 785-86). The anonymity offered by the CP fails to simplify the harsh reality of trauma that, when put into words, still affects an individual's thinking, writing, and presentation of those words and experiences to a public audience. The words with which an individual expresses herself, whether publicly or privately, externally or internally, reveal life-altering effects of the trauma. In the case of the CP, participants create and then, to some extent, relinquish these expressions to a collective narrative (the Clothesline collection) and a varying audience.

20 Personal stories can have a powerful emotional effect and, therefore, lend themselves to activist efforts. We see this with recent television campaigns warning young people to avoid texting while driving ("From One Second to the Next"). We've seen it in campaigns against drinking and driving ("Every Face Tells a Story"), and in efforts to bring awareness to the dangers of eating disorders and bullying ("Stories of Hope" and "'I Choose' Anti-Bullying Campaign"). But if the personal seems 'too personal,' artists risk alienating viewers unable to relate to artists' experiences. Therefore, avoiding potentially risky disclosure, as well as avoiding disclosure because of fear of alienating an audience, involves decisions related to the public and the political status quo. Similarly, though the writers and artists surely could speak of trauma and despair, they lean toward communicating healing, informing, calling for action, and providing cultural commentary.[8]

21 Shirt 2, for instance, presents the argument that violence leaves invisible, internal scars as much as it sometimes leaves visible, external scars. This creates a complex representation in which the experience of violence involves a force on a physical body and psychological life that includes physical and psychological alterations. The survivor has become uncomfortable in her own body, in her own mind, and in her own life. External and internal suffering and healing remain in a dynamic relationship. Shirt 11 shows the survivor declaring that she is "bent but not broken" and that "Bruised bananas make the sweetest banana bread." As noted earlier, this suggests the survivor's sense of empowerment, giving meaning to tragedy and, therefore, gaining some sense of healing.

[8] Though I sort shirts into these categories, texts usually do more than one thing. Categorization refers to what seems to be the primary purpose or more explicit purpose of the shirt, in this case, either healing or informing, calling for action, or providing commentary.

22 Shirts 4, 6, and 12 inform, primarily with the use of statistics. On shirt 4, where the artist refers to people, she avoids words and instead uses numbers and symbols, perhaps serving the purpose of emphasis. The symbols and words, in combination with their presentation in a contrasting color to the less important words in the message, draw our eyes to important subjects and dynamics. Interestingly, the artist avoids letting the word take precedence, or resorting to the common call to use words (in a verbal sense) to communicate a message; instead, she allows word and image to add to one another in a way that provides a complete message. Additionally, though they often have their faults, statistics have a particular way of getting people's attention, lending perceived merit to messages. The artist here seems to recognize this, as she tells us that one of every two women will be involved in a violent relationship. The artist of shirt 6 presents the statistic that 75% of battered women attempt suicide. Combined with her demand to "stay strong," the statistic seems to both inform the general public but also warn fellow survivors of the depression that may befall them. The writer provides a sort of foreshadowing knowledge which, it seems, she hopes may change how survivors deal with their violent trauma. Finally, my own shirt provides a statistic about childhood sexual abuse, which I included because I wanted to make sure that at least one element of my shirt would gain attention; I thought that many viewers might skip reading the longer narrative. In this way, I found the statistic to make the shirt more accessible, to inform in a more memorable way than the story component.

23 Shirts 3 and 5 call for action, with shirt 3 making commands to "stand up and speak out," specifically against sexual violence. Here, the artist calls for using the body to combat people using others' bodies in inappropriate, disrespectful, and harmful ways. While the artist recognizes the valid use of the body in support of a cause (standing up), she still supplements the use of the silent body with that of "speaking." Speaking remains a common, if not favored, form of 'doing,' of creating change. This shirt shows a commitment to such a philosophy, whether consciously or subconsciously. Similarly, shirt 5 asserts that "words are powerful." Even using the written word, she seems to favor the spoken word in her call for others to speak.

24 Finally, shirts 1, 7, 8, 9, and 10 provide cultural commentary (some more overtly than others). Shirt 1 asserts that men who ask permission and, therefore, refuse to force themselves (in this context, physically) upon women have character as genuine males. Those men who fail to ask permission of women suffer a flaw that undermines their existence as a particular sex and gender. Rhetorically, the shirt appeals to the ethos of what it means to be a man. Therefore, it may appeal to one's ego and sense of self; generally speaking, one avoids

feeling like an imposter of a particular role, and the alternative to being a 'real' man is being a 'fake' one. There's a push to define or redefine what it means to be a man in current culture.

25 The artist of shirt 7 uses painted hands to represent a woman fighting off her attacker. Interestingly, she poses a question without punctuation, indicating a statement or request for action, often with an expected or obvious answer. The fact that the artist needs to ask the question, to literally *paint a clear picture* implies a lack of intelligence or a flaw on behalf of the perpetrator. In this case, it seems as though the artist makes a demand for society to understand both voiced and silent embodied resistance. Many women's voices are silenced during an attack (via the use of items like duct tape or via the threat of weapons). The argument here is that speaking "no" is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for expressing one's decision.

26 The designer of shirt 8 also provides commentary about current culture. On a very basic level, identity gets constructed, in part, through a connection between name and face. By referring to the face ("My eyes are up here"), the artist suggests that she wants viewers to communicate with the parts of her that make her an individual person who can reciprocate communication.[9] The author of Shirt 9 seems to make a statement about how Steubenville's reputation has been reduced to this particular event and become a cultural icon. The 'take away' (figuratively and materially) is the realization of violence and its emptiness ("all I got was this lousy shirt"). Shirt 10 simply states that survivors will not be silent about their experiences; in particular, they will forbid others to silence them. This shirt, then, implies the writer's understanding of the ways in which survivors become silenced, intentionally or unintentionally (as discussed earlier) in current culture.

27 The way in which these writers and artists position themselves or their work also speaks to social narratives about sexual assault (for example, see Garvey). Miller and Bowden argue:

> civic tradition in rhetoric and moral philosophy was programmatically political in its effort to teach citizens how to draw on received values to address public problems. While the politics of the civic tradition were often sexist, elitist, and ethnocentric, a critical reappraisal of the civic virtues of "the good man speaking well" can help us assess the opportunities for historical transformation in prevailing ideologies precisely because the civic tradition was so concerned with the craft of translating "shared" values into political action. (593)

[9] This analysis and others are based on an understanding of the tee shirts as representing embodiment, being understood as if embodied at the moment of viewing.

What CP participants choose to disclose, and how they choose to disclose it, sheds light on the relationship between literacy, rhetoric, and activism. The tee shirts demonstrate that the writer or artist imagines a particular audience of the CP. In doing so, the tee shirts contribute knowledge to how those in oppressed subject positions—those who occupy subject positions that may conflict with those of the audience—use literacy publicly and subversively to create social change, whether that change occurs on an individual level or a larger scale. In other words, this study shows literate artifacts as they produce, reproduce, and become products of various and competing social narratives; I refer to this process as literate artifacts contextualized in psychosocial compositions.

28 Though many scholars have focused on the CP (such as Julier, Hipple, Gregory et al., Bex Lempert, Goodnow, and Droogsma), they have not taken a rhetorical approach in the same way that I have. To that end, my study looks at literate practices in terms of rhetorical strategies which represent alternative forms of 'speaking' and civic engagement. My results reveal that, although given the opportunity for uncensored expression, CP participants chose to address a seemingly large, undefined audience by excluding appeals to ethos and pathos via graphic, personal accounts of their experiences. Though the nature of sexual assault, for many people, inherently involves some element of pathos, and CP participants in this study address it via notions of healing or empowerment, they avoid feelings of despair, exhaustion, and confusion. Similarly, participants appeal to ethos simply from their positions as survivors or people who identify with the cause of ending violence against women. As discussed, many of these writers and artists also appeal to ethos via the use of statistics. Interestingly, however, they avoid gritty details that really make them the experts of the topic they address. And without the use of citations, statistics suggest little credibility on the part of the person using them.

29 The opportunity to 'tell without talking' anonymously seems not to lead to expression of catharsis or liberation on CP tee shirts. This suggests that larger social narratives inform the narratives of women's experiences of assault, and as such call for continuing efforts to serve survivors, activists, and the broader public. Certainly, my study does not speak for all CP shirts. Nonetheless, my study has identified that activist communication exists on a spectrum. Such knowledge aids activism in its efforts to help women express themselves in an effective manner—for themselves and, at times, others. Such knowledge also, then, sheds light on cultural narratives that inform such dynamics and ways in which narratives call for revision.

Conclusion

30 This study draws attention to forms of literacies that attempt to break down the division between the personal and public/academic. Although many scholars have discussed this issue, (for example, Foxwell, Ruggles Gere, and Payne), they have not fully addressed the line between one's right to privacy, advocating disclosure as part of research as a *human* endeavor, and the consequences of disclosure. Royster and Kirsch assert:

> With patience and quiet as salient features, the goal with an ethics of hope and caring is to learn to listen and speak, not just with our heads but with our hearts, backbones, and stomachs, thus making feminist rhetorical action a fully embodied experience for both the subjects of research and the researcher (146).

Following Royster and Kirsch, this research extends the prevailing notion that "the personal is political," and demonstrates how activists balance personal investment in social change with public arguments that may influence such change. Additionally, this study accounts for how the researcher's own experiences of trauma mediate research. Finally, it shows how paradoxes like 'silence speaks' allow for subversive communication in material, visual, textual, 'spoken' and 'unspoken' forms. It remains important to investigate how oppressed groups use literacy to assert agency, cope with traumatic experiences, and seek justice. Such investigations call for understanding how people 'speak' rhetorically in various forms of activist composing.

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