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"I just wanted to feel heard": An autoethnography of feminist complaint and institutional response

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“I Just Wanted to Feel Heard”: An Autoethnography of Feminist Complaint and Institutional Response

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Abstract

This autoethnography is both about feminist complaint and *is* a feminist complaint. Through embodied, mindful narratives and approaching institutional documents and personal artifacts auto-archaeologically, I detail the experience of being a woman engaging in feminist complaint following an experience of gender-based fear and the subsequent institutional response. In the wake of speaking out about a moment of unsafety in public and being disregarded by the police and publicly humiliated by my university, these artifacts are sites of identity negotiation and assist in memory work. This inquiry demonstrates that negative responses from institutional representatives and official documents are patriarchal in nature, a form of symbolic violence, and a source of secondary victimization. Furthermore, I discuss the ubiquitous feeling of unsafety women feel in public spaces, how that fear is perpetuated by the patriarchal underpinnings of society, and how these misogynistic principles apply to women's wellbeing in online spaces, as well. In response to multiple instances of feeling unsafe, blamed, and disregarded, I share the totality of my anger and embrace the revolutionary power of women's anger and the potential it has to create material change. To this end of creating change, I utilize comic frames to illustrate the absurdity of my interactions with institutional representatives and highlight the space for growth and change with how institutions approach women who have experienced gender-based violence and engage in feminist complaint. I conclude this thesis discussing methodological, theoretical, and practical implications, along with implications for empathy and interfacing with institutions, while acknowledging my positionality.

Introduction

I am in a relationship for the first time where I am willing to put in the work and take on the stress to keep it going. I have let go of being the one who cares less in the name of exerting power. When we flow, being together feels easy and natural, like carefree jellyfish undulating peacefully in the present moment. But when we don't, the air around us feels cold and alienating. Today, the vulnerability and painstaking negotiation of boundaries and trust exhausts me and I crave the warm comfort of a bottle of wine. We've been fighting all day. Long, tedious stretches of time rest between our texts that choke my chest with anxiety. Begging to be seen and heard makes me crazy -- how can this relationship feel so right when I have to plead to be seen? How many times can we fight about the same thing? How many texts must I send and agonize over until my wants and needs are actually visible and respected? I just want to feel her arms around me as we rest, reset, and find our center once again. The only thing that stands between our mirrored heartbeats, the white expanse of her comforter, and the clink of mismatching wine glasses full of a robust red is the wine itself.

I dress myself for just another night. I so want to impress her. I feel like she settled with me, which is just my own insecurity manifesting, but I still feel like I have to look the part of the effortlessly cute, cool girl(friend). I consider donning my favorite powder blue turtleneck sweater and jeans, quickly curling the mop on my head, and winging my black eyeliner to a crisp, sharp edge. I decide against it, opting for comfort and authenticity. The past few days have been riddled with the ebbs and flows of a fledgling relationship and the perils of graduate school that I just want the familiar sense of home and I choose an old sweatshirt my dad bought me. My eyes sweep over the embroidered Las Vegas Golden Knights' logo and I shake my head. This sweatshirt is an

old, ridiculous Christmas gift. I have no connection to hockey, nor this team and I roll my eyes realizing I have no connection to the dad who bought it for me, either. Nonetheless, I settle for what I've got and the small piece of comfort I can manifest for myself. I pull the black hoodie over my head and stare at my body and my messy bun. My figure, ordinary, round, and a site of personal discomfort, shrouded by the too large sweatshirt and my baby hairs flee from my face and any semblance of order. I've always loved the wild, untamed nature of my hair and how it seems to convey the out of control feeling that continuously glows within me. I shrug, pulling my shoulders up to my ears, feeling the tension ripple through my muscles - this is as good as it's going to get. A familiar refrain and resignation. I need to get moving because I'm already running late, as always.

I quickly send a text, "Leaving now! Gonna pick up the wine and I'll see you soon!" "Okay, babe! Hurry!"

I consider which grocery store to stop at. I could go to the one that's familiar and which I know the aisles like the back of my hand but overshoots my girlfriend's house. Or I could quickly run into the store that's more convenient, but unknown to me. But that one is on the way to the place I really want to be. My mind settles for the closer grocery store because I just want to get in, get out, and finally exhale the stress I've been carrying.

I skip out of my room and wave goodbye to my roommates, a new tradition of ours. I never sleep in my room anymore, opting to share slumber with my girlfriend. I've never slept better than when I sleep with her, but I wonder if they talk about me behind my back and wonder why I pay rent for a room that has been repurposed as a closet. What's the point? I push the thought away as I start my car.

I call my sister, my closest and most trusted friend. I guess divorce and an absentee father will do that to a pair of sisters. As I navigate the small city's streets, we chatter about school, relationships, friends, boys, girls, and our plans for the weekend. I complain about graduate school, how I feel like the dumbest person in the room sometimes aching for something to say. She reminds me that I've always been the hardest on myself and it doesn't serve me to put myself down.

"What are you gaining from that? You're not going to get smarter or find something to say the more you fixate on an untrue, unkind thought." She's two years younger than me, and she's always been two times as smart. I don't listen and I still continue second guessing myself and my abilities. Especially now.

I pull into the parking lot -- mostly desolate with an aura of darkness the other grocery store I usually frequent doesn't have. Cars speckle the parking lot -- far from unusual on a Friday night around 7:45 pm. Bubbly college students all around town are getting ready to pack the local dive bars, not grocery shopping for the week ahead. I'm always on the hunt for the best spot in the parking lot, the one that's closest to the door and under a light. I've heard enough stories and read enough cautionary Facebook posts to make these preemptive defensive choices. Just in case. I drive down the aisle and choose the parking spot that's closest to the door, safely illuminated by the parking lot's high lumen lamp.

I sit idle in my car, "Will you just stay on the phone with me while I'm in the store? It'll just be a minute and then I'll let you go? Just in case?"

"Of course, but I only have a few more minutes before we leave."

I do what I've been taught. Lock the doors. Lock them twice, just in case. Look both ways before crossing, scan your surroundings for any signs of danger, even when the parking lot is empty. Travel with a buddy. Maybe this doesn't exactly count, but at least someone knows where I am.

An abnormality in the scan: A white man wearing a dark baseball cap and a red flannel, tall and slender, standing next to the entrance. His eyes linger but not long enough to be considered leering or ogling. I know the feeling of the male gaze - predatory, heavy, and all-consuming but this didn't strike me the same way. It should have been more of a red flag since everyone stares into their screens when they're not immediately occupied. I now know he was indeed occupied watching me.

I didn't know where the wine section was located in the store. But I meandered, still talking to my sister, now about roommate problems. My eyes surveyed the aisles and shelves filled with processed food and the signs that demarcated their categories. I always crave chips and salt when looking for comfort, but I continuously try to resist giving into these desires. My mom loves salt, too. I know she didn't intend to, but she's a part of my strained relationship with food and my body. I remember the shame of waking up at 5 am as a 10-year-old to walk around the neighborhood to help me lose weight. The mornings' cold air and carefully dotted dew seem to shield their gaze as if they feel my embarrassment as I walk past my still sleeping neighbors' homes. I feel the sting of humility every time she wakes me up knowing that who I am and how I look isn't right – something needs to be changed. I need to be fixed. I momentarily relive that embarrassment, feeling pain for my younger self as I see the perfectly puffed chip bags. I'm now tamed by society and the first feeling after the initial craving reeks with stigma.

Shame for craving unhealthy food, shame at what consuming it has and will do to my body. Shame for feeling shame at all.

I've been wasting time and hurry over to the few wine aisles. I know nothing about wine, so I'm easily susceptible to the marketing embedded in the wine labels. I brush past the white wine and peruse the red wine. I find a bottle with a striking label - *Prophecy*. A strong, broad chested man enveloping an ethereal woman graces the label. They stare lovingly into each other's eyes and instead of feet, they have roots plunging into the Earth, grounding them like an enduring oak. They're bound to one another and she almost looks like she's safe and has found solace in his taut, muscular arms. Her expression belies this conclusion - her wide eyes and raised eyebrows paired with straight, unsmiling lips. She may be safe in this singular moment, but she knows that as a woman her fate may change in an instant. Her knees fold gracefully, poised and ready to flee if necessary. She's a woman. She knows.

At the time, the label evoked tenderness and I grab the bottle and head to check stand 7. I hang up with my sister as I get in line. I hate being on the phone when I'm checking out because it's rude. I try to dignify the cashier with my attention and make small talk. As I hang up, I feel someone behind me in line. I inconspicuously look at the patron behind me. I see he's in a red, plaid shirt that's unbuttoned and plastic wrap covers his chest as if he's gotten a new tattoo. He has no groceries, but I think nothing of it. It's not really my business and I'm still on my mission to get in and get out. I pay for my cheap bottle of wine, flash a kind smile toward the cashier, and swiftly walk out of the store and back to my car.

Commence exit safety scan: I see my little black car once solitary under the beam of the fluorescent parking lot light now dwarfed by a large late model blue and grey van. I look at the expanse of the parking lot and see all of the other open parking spaces and I'm annoyed that the driver of this behemoth of a vehicle chose the spot right next to mine. But whatever, it's not a red flag, yet.

I inch closer to my car and see the gigantic van has parked over the courtesy line, rendering the space between the vehicles inconceivably narrow. I peer down this precarious crevice and consider it in relation to the size of my body. Since I size myself up in every space I'm in, I know instinctively I'd have to squeeze sideways between the two cars, my back pressed against the van, my front pressed up against the cool metal of my own car. Looking back and forth between my car and the offending van in my space, this is wrong. This is so wrong. The alarms are going off in my head - think Uma Thurman and the alarm scene in *Kill Bill* - I can't ignore the pounding in my chest and hair standing at attention on my arms. I can't even force myself to venture 8 feet to my driver side door. My head swivels back and forth, looking around for anyone and yet I find no one. I'm alone. I'm in a desolate parking lot at night alone. I feel small and powerless because even though I know something is wrong, I don't trust my instincts enough to handle this alone. I call my sister back via FaceTime so she can confirm what I'm seeing and I don't feel so alone. I show her the van, my car, and the confined space between.

"Look how close this van parked next to me! And look at all the open parking spaces!"

I pan the camera around so she can see all of the empty parking spaces that would welcome anyone, so why this one?

"This is weird right? Like I don't know I'm just getting bad vibes and I don't want to get in on my driver's side. What should I do?"

"Maybe go back inside the store?"

"Yeah, but what if someone is waiting for me? I don't want to be grabbed. I still have a bag in my hands."

"Well definitely don't get in on your side, but what about the passenger door?" I slide in my own passenger side door and lock the doors immediately. It feels weird. I never sit in my own passenger seat. I look across the dusty center console at the empty driver's seat opposite me. I love and prefer being the driver. I love the control of the steering wheel, the tires, and the radio. I'm powerless in the passenger seat. The black leather seat bites at my legs through my cheap leggings and my legs bounce up and down with frenetic energy.

"What should I do?"

" I don't know. Call Dad? Call the police?"

I'm starting to get texts from my girlfriend, "Where are you?" "Is everything okay?" I can't answer them. I need to see my sister's face. She's the only company I have right now and really don't want to/can't be alone. I ignore my girlfriend's texts as my mind races deciding what to do.

"I don't want to drive away because what if I get followed? I don't want them to follow me to Cece's house or follow me home. I really don't want to drive around the city being followed, either. They'll have my license plate."

"What about going into the store now? You've been in the car for a while now."

"I don't know."

"Is there anyone in the van?"

I peer over the driver's seat again and look through two sets of windows, "There's a guy in there just staring straight ahead."

"What does he look like?"

"I don't know! He looks like a man! He's wearing a hat and he's beardy and white."

"Oh, so like every man. No identifying features."

I let out a soft laugh. I detect movement in my left peripherals and look out the window. I track a man in a dark cap and red, plaid flannel as he leaves the store and crosses the parking lot. He slithers between my car and the van and positions himself in the passenger seat mirroring my own seating arrangement.

My heartbeat quickens and thumps, my underarms sweat, and my brain begins to process what I've just seen. I put the events of the grocery store together like a dying character does right before they finally "go into the light" where they relive their memories in flashes. I see the man in red at the entrance as I walk into the grocery store. Fast forward. I see the man in red behind me in line with no groceries. Fast forward. A hulking, creeping van parks conspicuously close to my car. Fast forward. I see the man in red brush past my driver's side door and get into this offending van. I once parked under the parking lot light for safety and now it's a spotlight for hunters keeping an eye on their prey.

"Wait. Someone just got in the van. I've seen him before. Wait. He stood alone at the entrance of the store when I got in. Wait and he was standing behind me in line. Holy shit. Holy shit. Holy shit. Is what I think is happening happening? Did he follow me? Why else would his car be right here when it wasn't here before? Am I making this up? This is weird right? Should I call someone? Should I call Dad? What do I do?"

"No, it's totally weird and you feel unsafe. Just call Dad and do what he tells you."

"Okay. I'll call you back."

"Okay. I love you. Bye."

"Love you, bye."

I briefly wonder if that's the last time I'd hear that from my sister. My mind anxiously cycles through thoughts about the violent delights of men and the violent crimes committed against women. Was I safe even though the door was locked? What if they both get out and attack the car? I push the anxiety away and focus on my task.

Calling Dad.

No answer.

Calling Dad.

No answer.

Calling Dad.

No answer.

Calling Mom.

No answer.

Calling Mom.

No answer.

Really? Alone again, I throw my head back against the passenger seat headrest and begin to cry frightened sobs. I laugh incredulously and look back over at the men in the van, perhaps lying in wait. On the one night that something is actually going wrong and I really need help, neither of my parents answer their phones? What if I were dead!! I push the sick thought away again.

Calling Dad.

I never call him first, so he cheerfully answers, “Helloooo!”

I recount the events of the night as well as I remember, “Dad, I need help. I don’t know what to do. I went to the grocery store to pick up a bottle of wine and I saw this guy at the entrance and I think he followed me around the grocery store because he was behind me when I was checking out but he had no groceries and then I came outside and this big scary van was parked so close next to my door that I couldn’t get in so now I’m in the passenger seat and I’m scared and that same guy just got into the van. What should I do? Am I making this up? Is this weird? Every City has a human trafficking problem, you know. I don’t know what to do. I’m so scared.”

“Call the police.”

“But what if they think nothing bad is happening and I’m making a false report? I don’t want to get in trouble. I’m not sure what’s going on, but I just feel really weird and really off about it.”

“Yeah, call the police. It’s worth them knowing.”

"Yeah but what if it's all a coincidence and it's nothing? Should I call the store? I'm scared to get out of my car. I don't want to get in trouble either and I don't want to leave because I don't want to be followed."

"Call the police and call me back. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Bye."

I'm disappointed with this phone call. Even in this moment of terror and anxiety, he can't muster up any words of comfort or encouragement or validation. He didn't even ask me if I was safe. Thanks, Dad.

The phone call ends and the van abruptly backs up and speeds out of the parking lot. The driver turns left out of the aisle and right onto the East/West cross street. The wheels squeal from turning right so aggressively.

I call the police and run through the series of events for the third time and include that the van had just sped off, along with the direction in which they fled the scene. I'm worried already about being believed and the consequences of a false report. I know that even though it was scary and I'm still trying to take deep breaths to calm myself, it's not necessarily a crime. I discount myself and my experiences before anyone else even has the chance.

The dispatcher asks, "So do you want a unit to respond to the scene or are you good?"

"I don't know. What would you usually do?"

"We can send a unit to the scene and they can take a report."

I thank the dispatcher and wait for the police to arrive. As I look at the cars, or lack thereof, around me I realize that this is the first time I've done this, called the police to come help me. I feel like a traitor. I hate the police. I'm used to calling them a domestic terrorist organization, not waiting like a tulle-clad damsel in distress waiting to be saved. I call my girlfriend back and tell her what happened. That's four times I've detailed my stress and fear now.

"Babe, I'm so sorry. Are you okay? I knew something had to be wrong. You were supposed to be here almost an hour ago."

I start apologizing, "I know. I'm sorry. Yeah, I'm okay. I just need to wait for the police to come, let them know what happened, and then I'll be over. Is there a parking spot open?"

"No, I don't think so. You'll have to park in the parking lot across the street."

"Ughhhh okay. Will you meet me at that parking lot? I don't want to walk alone tonight."

"Oh my god, yeah of course. Just let me know when you're on your way and I'll meet you there. Let's not let this ruin our night, okay?"

"Oh. Okay. The police are pulling up. I'll call you later."

The police arrived on scene 45 minutes after I first pulled into this cursed parking spot. Two units pull into the parking lot about 20 yards away from where I am parked. I unlock the doors and do a quick safety scan before I slide out of my passenger seat. A pair of officers got out of their vehicle and looked around. I take my hands out of my pockets as I walk up to them and say hello loudly, as not to startle them. Just in case.

An Autoethnography of Feminist Complaint and Institutional Silencing

> Students are often warned about making complaints; they are told that making a complaint would damage their reputations, relationships, career prospects, lives. If a complaint is made, it tends to be treated as potential damage, as that which could damage the reputation of an individual or an organization. There is often a concerted effort to stop a complaint from going through the system or to stop a complaint from getting out. (Ahmed, 2019, p. 514)

In this thesis, I use feminist autoethnography to critically examine the institutional silencing of women who make complaints about experiences of gendered intimidation and violence on and around university campuses. My autoethnographic inquiry draws upon not only my own storied experiences, but also draws upon critical analyses of both public and private artifacts to interrogate my complaint encounters with representatives of institutions. Specifically, I trace what happened following a personal experience in which I faced fear for my safety in a public space, as storied in the opening of the thesis. In doing so, I examine and complicate both the identity and organizational implications of the institutional and community responses to my accounts of my experiences and complaints. My experiences within the institutional contexts of policing, public safety, and education are entrenched in broader discourses of gender and the legitimacy of feminist complaint. Ultimately, the institutional responses served to maintain their primary identities, frame my complaint as illegitimate, and ultimately uphold a rather simple understanding of safety. This autoethnographic thesis serves as a counter story and critique that reclaims my identities, explores the power of anger, and takes back my agency over naming my experiences.

Not surprisingly, the interactions following the fear I experienced in the grocery store parking lot moved in and between virtual and face-to-face encounters; my experiences are thus both mediated and institutionalized. My autoethnographic inquiry layers experiences of text messages and phone calls, group chats, Facebook, a Clery Timely Notice, and a letter of complaint, with face-to-face encounters with police, faculty, family, and university leaders. Fox's (2010) auto-archaeology is particularly helpful in making sense of the material dimensions of one's experiences, as it uses "institutional artifacts to interpret how a network of power relations affects identity formation and maintenance" (p. 122). Auto-archaeology is a specific mode of inquiry that connects Foucault's theory of power with autoethnography to investigate "how the structures and discourse of institutions produce and maintain specific subjectivities" (Fox, 2010, p. 140). In this case, the artifacts that mediate the event in varied ways illustrate my experience more vividly and connect the content of the artifacts to the patriarchally informed, institutionalized responses women often face in experiences such as these. Fox (2010) further argues that the foregrounding of personal artifacts situates individual experiences within broader contexts and has the potential to demystify institutional underpinnings and norms.

Forms of Violence and Institutional Response

Naming and defining violence against women are complicated, political, and have material consequences for women. The World Health Organization (2017) defines violence against women (VAW) as an incident of "gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in

public or in private life." However, these common umbrella terms such as VAW and Sex and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) have garnered criticism for the perpetuation of harms regarding the hierarchy of the gender binary and relegating women as victims (Frazer & Hutchings, 2019). The fact is that women are constantly subjected to unique lived experiences related to being female and patriarchal structure that enables male perpetrated visceral violence and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977; Frazer & Hutchings, 2019). Within this thesis, I use the words gender-based violence, as well as gender-based fear, unsafety, and intimidation to describe my experiences, resist the furtherance of the gender binary, and place responsibility on the patriarchal institutions that enacted these varied forms of violence against me.

Broadly, the language of laws and the legal institution reflect heavily masculine styles of language, which calls into question the fitness of these labels and who they benefit, especially considering the fact that most violence that women face is perpetrated by men (Easteal et al., 2012). Easteal et al. (2012) argue the "baritone 'voice' of the legal system" upholds the masculine driven reality and assessment of uniquely gendered crimes (p. 325). The patriarchal underpinnings of the institutional names of and responses to gendered violence have the potential to diminish women's agency, credibility, and voice regarding terrifying, disturbing violent crimes (Easteal et al., 2012). Furthermore, the masculine, predominantly white structure of the legal system and current vocabulary inherently and disproportionately oppresses BIPOC women and gender-nonconforming individuals (K. Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, an inclusive, empowering vocabulary must be created and implemented to acknowledge and validate the many different types of violence women experience, as well as the women who choose to speak out about their

experiences with violence. Although it is outside the scope of this thesis to develop a legal vocabulary for an experience that doesn't nicely fit within masculine developed categories of violence, my aim is to show the need to talk about such encounters. The more often women engage in feminist complaint in response to gender-based violence, the more we create awareness, community, and validation.

In an illustrative Twitter thread, user @DanielleMuscato asks, "'What would you do if all men had a 9 pm curfew?' and answers included activities such as taking walk at night, sitting on the beach alone, late-night grocery shopping without fear, use public transportation, and keep one's car keys in their purse instead of in between their fingers ("Here are the things women would do if all men had a 9 pm curfew", 2018). The replies are telling and communicate the danger women feel in public spaces and the pervasive fear of assault and harassment that can be exacerbated by racial and/or sexual identities (Day, 2001). It is important to note that women are more likely to experience violence in private spaces from known perpetrators than in public spaces, but that does not change the enduring fear of men and sexual violence in public spaces (Day, 2001; Valentine, 1992). Despite this fact, women have been socialized to develop robust vigilance when entering public spaces alone and "violence of any kind, even the most apparently harmless or inconsequential, limits women's freedom of movement in that it carries with it a threat felt over and beyond the moment it occurs" (Condon et al., 2007, p. 101). Condon et al. (2007) interestingly note that the women who are most fearful of attacks in public are still very likely to go out regardless, demonstrating the resilience of women and the need for freedom and mobility. This body of scholarship indicates the presence of pervasive "systematic structural violence" that "serve[s] as a reminder of women's

vulnerability" and continuously demands mental vigilance from women, despite the presence of actual danger, which indicts this culture's constitution of fear regarding gender-based intimidation and violence (Condon et al., 2007; Rodó de Zárate, 2014, para. 3).

Aside from physical and emotional violence, symbolic violence is an intangible form of violence that works to maintain dominance over and exacts suffering upon marginalized groups (Morgan & Björkert, 2006; Schubert, 2008). It is the pervasive normalization of rape culture that perpetuates symbolic violence with regard to gender-based violence and allows for the systematic silencing of women's outspoken experiences of unsafety via institutional gaslighting in the form of credibility concerns (Morgan & Björkert, 2006; O'Neal, 2017). Ultimately, symbolic violence can be just as dangerous and traumatizing as physical forms of violence, especially in the case of corralling and censoring women for reporting personal violence and speaking out against oppressive institutional practices (Bourdieu, 1977). This thesis reveals institutional practices that perpetuate symbolic violence include gaslighting and shaming within official documentation and interpersonal conversations that occur in response to feminist complaint (Ahmed, 2018).

Forthcoming, I discuss the occurrence of symbolic violence within institutional documentation that contains shaming language in the interest of maintaining the university's image. Ashforth et al. (2020) argue that institutions strategically anthropomorphize the organization to create connections with those within it as a method of maintaining and, ultimately, commodifying their image (Benoit, 2006). In moments of crises that may tarnish their image, organizations' top priority is protecting their image as

an asset and minimizing the threat (Benoit, 2006; Smithson & Venette, 2013). Because institutions operate with patriarchal underpinnings, their responses to feminist complaint have the potential to create and enact patriarchally informed symbolic violence and secondary victimization (Angeliqa & Sarwono, 2018; Bourdieu, 2001; Frazer & Hutchings, 2019; Hunnicutt, 2009; Patterson, 2010). As a result, institutions expose themselves to be inherently anti-feminist as they are perpetrators of symbolic violence against women, favoring maintaining their image over protecting their constituents and affirming women's experiences of gender-based fear and intimidation (Bourdieu, 2001; Hunnicutt, 2009; Smithson & Venetta, 2013).

Intersectional Feminist Lens and Positionality

This autoethnography is informed by an intersectional feminist lens as I articulate and critically examine my positionality within both my narrative and the institutional responses to my complaints. According to Cho et al. (2013), intersectionality insists upon a multilateral investigation of identities, frameworks, and elements of difference to holistically understand power dynamics and hegemonic tensions. Crenshaw (1991) popularized this heuristic when examining the intersection between race and gender, specifically how Black women experience the world and are subject to unique violence based on this convergence of racism and sexism. More recently, intersectionality has been expanded to include exploring identities such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and other positions of difference (C. Crenshaw, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

I explore women's anger and how it is expressed, policed, and can be used as a catalyst for social change. It is paramount to acknowledge the anger of white women is more permissible within society and not as heavily scrutinized as Black women's anger.

White women are often socialized to be non-confrontational and learn early in life that recompense is necessary following expressions of anger (Goodman, 2020; Traister, 2019). However, Traister (2019) argues that womanly expressions of anger serve to resist hegemonic constructions of womanhood that require silent suffering through subpar circumstances. Even further, women's anger is often the catalyst for revolutionary social movements but is not often "acknowledged as righteous and patriotic when it has originated with women, though women have often taken pains to mimic or reference the language and sentiments of America's founding while making their own angry demands for liberty, independence and equality" (Traister, 2019, p. xxiv). This discrepancy evidences the pervasive effect of hegemonic masculinity throughout history, used as a means to censor and control women until they could no longer remain silent. The embrace and broadcasting of my anger is in service of not only my own healing, but also the movement toward the comprehensive safety of women, particularly in public and educational spaces (Rawat, 2014).

Given this commitment to intersectional feminism, I must first acknowledge and interrogate my own identities – some marginalized, others sites of unearned privilege – and explore how my position within this social landscape is critical to understanding my behaviors and responses to them, from the initial event in the grocery store parking lot, to the penning of a Facebook post describing the experience, and to how I expressed my anger and feelings to those holding institutional power. As a white woman with size, appearance, and educational privilege, I was afforded the latitude to authentically voice my anger and deep disappointment to the well-loved white male university administrator. In fact, this privilege may have allowed me to secure a meeting with him in the first place

and I know the same cannot be said for all of the women of color who have experienced varied forms of violence within this same institution.

Conversely, a Facebook post I penned that ultimately went viral amassed criticism from strangers in the local community who reprimanded my language and actions in ways that were deeply rooted in patriarchal constructions of womanhood. Furthermore, as a queer femme woman, responses to my complaint felt humiliating and painful; I felt like I was being "outed" because I was in my first lesbian relationship and wasn't yet comfortable enough to come out to all of my family members and friends, let alone thousands of strangers. Both the onslaught of negativity in response to my Facebook post and the identifying nature of a later university circulated Community Alert made me fear for my safety and worry about retribution if someone were to discover my sexual orientation. The intersectional feminist approach serves to unveil the interconnectedness of hegemonic constructions of whiteness and patriarchal understandings of gender and sexuality and the manner in which they inform and uphold one another within institutions (C. Crenshaw, 1997). Thus, it is crucial to embrace my voice as a woman to shed light on the problematic messaging of institutions, universities in particular, and how it is informed by patriarchal structures.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter One overviews autoethnography as the main methodology I use to tell and reflect on my story. I detail the characteristics and evaluative criteria of feminist autoethnography and describe how this project adheres to each of the criteria. I describe my stylistic choices with text on the page, as well as strategically utilized comic frames, all used to evoke specific emotions in the reader Additionally, I describe my use of auto-

archaeology to analyze university and personal documents as they contributed to identity negotiation throughout the process of feminist complaint.

Chapter Two is a comedic institutional interlude that depicts my interactions with the police officers who responded to the scene at the grocery store parking lot. While this is a humorous retelling of the conversation, it serves as an example of secondary victimization that occurs when an instance of gender-based fear is reported and the victim is disbelieved. The comic frame "offers a corrective" to the system that inherently disbelieves women (Demo, 2000, p. 139).

Chapter Three offers the reader my original Facebook post from the night of the grocery store incident and some examples of comments left by strangers in the community. This chapter reveals how unsafe online spaces for women to express feminist complaints. I aim to illustrate the pervasive fear women are forced to contend with in a variety of spaces by foregrounding patriarchy as the key driver for men who commit violence against women. Further, my experience with Facebook commenters reveals the symbolic violence enacted when people have negative reactions to women engaging in feminist complaints (Ahmed, 2018; Bourdieu, 2001).

Chapter Four begins with an embodied narrative about reading ESU's Community Alert responding to my Facebook post. I layer the Community Alert with conversations about relevant literature concerning subjects such as feminist complaint, institutional image, victim blaming, the effectiveness of the Clery Act, and the fear women feel in public spaces. The chapter continues with conversations with my mom, sister, and trusted professor to emphasize the importance of social support following an instance of symbolic violence and trauma, such as this one.

Chapter Five takes place one week after ESU chose to disseminate the Community Alert to the entire community without warning me. Mirroring the previous chapter, I layer an email I sent to ESU's upper administrators expressing my anger about how I was treated with and embodied narrative reflection of my writing process. I additionally include two other ESU Community Alerts to illustrate how poorly I was treated, and the harm embedded within the Community Alert about me. Finally, I include a conversation about literature related to the effectiveness of the Clery Act, the revolutionary power of women's anger and how its expression is policed, as well as the patriarchal foundation of higher education.

Chapter Six revisits the comic frame and the final institutional interlude. This chapter includes real dialogue from a meeting I had with ESU's Senior Administrator and showcases an opportunity for change in how those in higher education approach women engaging in feminist complaint, as well as women they have harmed. I use the feature of masks to highlight gendered nature of our interactions and empathy.

Chapter Seven concludes this thesis with a discussion about the relevant themes and implications. Methodological implications discussed include autoethnography as an emergent experience, furthering use of auto-archaeology as a method, stylistic choices, among others. Practical and theoretical implications encompass feminist complaint, safety on and around college campuses, women's perception of fear, victim blaming, secondary victimization, symbolic violence, and more. Implications for empathy consist of gendered explanations and explorations across multiple disciplines, the patriarchal approach to engaging with women who launch feminist complaints, the effectiveness of the Clery Act, and ends with a call for feminist compassionate, empathetic care in these

situations. The final chapter concludes with the implications for interfacing with institutions. Here, I explore my own positionality and how it affected my interactions with the police and ESU's senior administrator. I acknowledge that because of my whiteness, I was safer to express my anger and engage with both of these institutions. I discuss the violations of my expectations in being disbelieved, as well as white women's relationship with policing, and the tension between gender and race in the context of reporting instances of gender-based violence.

Chapter One: Autoethnographic Methodologies

Autoethnography is the methodological vehicle through which I processed my understanding of myself, feelings, and interactions with institutions and offer a unique understanding to the experiences of feminist complaint. Put simply, autoethnography is "both a process and a product" that seeks to investigate the personal experiences of the author to make sense of broader, cultural truths (Ellis et al., 2011). It is characterized by personal narrative situated within social contexts and illustrated through self-reflexive critique (Spry, 2001, p. 710-711). Autoethnography thus radically resists an objective approach to research and offers a method to interrogate one's position within the social scene and how it affects the interpretation of their experiences and surroundings (Ellis et al., 2011). This method grants freedom to the author to explore personal events authentically, embrace and celebrate the 'I' that is present within all research, and strip away traditional styles of writing and knowing in favor of creative endeavors (Denzin, 2011; Ellis et al., 2011). Even further, "autoethnographers view research and writing as socially-just acts; rather than a preoccupation with accuracy, the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better" (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 746, as cited in Ellis et al., 2011, p. 9). Denzin (2011) offers, "We can only write from the space of the personal, about our own bodies, feelings, hungers, desires, hopes, dreams, fears" and autoethnography grants us the space and method with which to do so (p. 11). Through sitting with and reflexively unpacking vulnerable events, identities, and positions, autoethnography equips authors to contend with the emotionality of feminist complaint, and connect personal ways of knowing to political, social, and structural dimensions of knowing.

Ellis et al. (2011) assert that "writing is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry" and it is through this inquiry where I witness and analyze my own experience of gendered fear, feminist complaint, and complex happenings with and in resistance to institutional power (p. 280). Central to the autoethnographic enterprise is mindful action and reflection through writing. Mingé (2016) argues for the centrality of mindfulness within autoethnography to elucidate the ways in which we engage our senses and impact one another, which in turn creates knowledge, action, and in some domains, change. Mingé (2016) extrapolates:

> The future challenge for autoethnographers is to expand our methodological processes, to do more in our research processes, to expand our knowledges from our personal stories to creating and making knowledges, and to expand not only our research process, but ourselves, in the doing of research. (p. 429)

Mingé's (2016) conception of mindfulness is closely related to the practice of self-reflexivity and intersectionality. Rich, thoughtful explorations of the complexities of identities and ontological inquiry can only be achieved through mindful, internal work, so mindful methodology will be crucial to this autoethnography.

Writing Feminist Autoethnography

As a feminist autoethnography, my critical analysis centers the broader constructs of patriarchy, the treatment of women by institutions, and gendered forms of feeling. Turning the lens inward, I deconstruct and analyze my personal experience of gender-based fears, complaint, and subsequent symbolic violence in an effort to "make good use" of my experience for others (Allen & Piercy, 2005, p. 156 as cited in Ettorre, 2017, p. 359; Denzin, 2011). Ettorre (2016) asserts feminist autoethnography should create and

embrace embodied transitional spaces, make the personal experiences political, be committed to progress surrounding women's issues, and "raise oppositional consciousness" (p. 4).

This project adheres to each of Ettorre's (2016) criteria in the following ways. First, I am committed to an intersectional approach when analyzing the social, cultural, and political contexts of gender-based violence and institutional interactions. Our identities situate our treatment and experiences within society, thus interrogating how my positionality affected the outcomes of each stage of my experiences of complaint is not only pertinent, but imperative (Crenshaw, 1991). Second, I situate my experience of gender-based fear and complaint in the broader context of (dis)believing woman who engage in feminist complaint and speak out about their experiences, subsequent treatment from individuals and institutions, and broader discourse about symbolic violence and secondary victimization at the hands of institutional representatives. Furthermore, by sharing my vulnerabilities I show how removing the boundaries between oneself and broader political discourse is a method for creating connections. Third, via performative writing this autoethnography advocates for safer treatment of women in institutional arenas and a feminist approach to reporting in higher education. Finally, this project aims to expose precarity within both higher education and policing, and the patriarchal frameworks that continue to endanger women who experience gender-based violence. By adhering to Ettorre's (2016) criteria, this feminist autoethnography aims to reveal the misogynist danger in both online and offline spaces that accompanies reporting and speaking out about gender-based fear and violence, as well as the perils of institutional interactions with predominantly white men.

As a feminist autoethnographer, I also demonstrate a commitment to an embodied writing style and performance of being in the moment (Spry, 2001). Throughout this project, I've utilized a variety of stylistic choices to immerse the reader in my narratives, as well as the literature review. In addition to emphatic language within the narratives, I bolded and italicized words, used varied font sizes, and placed some words in superscript and subscript. Not only does this convey how I perceived certain information, using the words on the page creates a visual experience and plunges readers into my headspace. I drew inspiration from Fox (2014), Fletcher (2018), and Metta (2013) when merging autoethnographic narrative with creative text placement and styles that both that grip the reader and evoke certain emotions. A forthcoming example of these aesthetic font choices looks like this: ***UNSUBSTANTIATED***^{unsubstatiated}$_{unsubtaaaaaantiated}$ **UNSUBSTANTIATED.** Using text as performance allowed me to tap into the emotions I felt throughout this ordeal, feel them fully to process all that occurred, and ultimately, heal (McMillan & Ramirez, 2016; Spry, 2001; Stern, 2019).

In addition to stylistic choices with the text on the page, I use comic frames in two institutional interludes. Comic frames were popularized by Kenneth Burke (1984) and frame the targets as fools rather than evil or maniacal. According to Brummett (2017), comic frames poke fun at targets in an attempt to create space for change, rather than outright demonization. Christiansen and Hanson (1996) find that even in unfortunate, difficult situations, individuals have the wherewithal to choose a comedic frame when interpreting reality. I chose to utilize comic frames when detailing my experiences with the police and ESU's Senior Administrator precisely to highlight the absurdity of how they spoke to me. I employed the comic frame by creating caricatures of the institutional

representatives to highlight their folly and include humorous dialogue to underscore the madness of being a woman reporting an instance of gender-based fear and intimidation to older, white men. Focusing on the absurd helps to identify the space for change and growth, rather than each of the institutional representatives' failures. This space for change translates to a call for a feminist approach to engaging with women who have had similar experiences within higher education. As I reflect on these purely human interactions, comic frame allowed me to understand the patriarchal, gendered underpinnings of these interactions without feeling hopeless or demoralized.

Auto-archaeology

A key feature of this thesis is the use of auto-archaeology to facilitate analysis of institutional power and institutional responses to women launching feminist complaints in a patriarchal society. Auto-archaeology works in conjunction with autoethnography because it aids in situating the personal experience within larger, social and political contexts via institutional documentation that comments on the culture from which they came (Fox, 2010). Fox (2010) demonstrates this practice uses institutional documents to make connections between personal experience and the foundations of institutional structures. Institutional artifacts are archaeological and can be used to explain how systems and their unique ways of knowing have the ability to describe, constrain, and enable individuals' identities and actions (Fox, 2010). In this study, I use ESU's Clery Act-mandated Community Alerts in conjunction with personal artifacts I wrote in response to being followed around a grocery store to show the dangers women face online and in public, along with the ridicule we are exposed to from community members and institutional representatives after speaking out about the experience. Specifically, I

use the institutional documents as layered texts alongside my authentic, visceral reactions to present my truth and illuminate the harm perpetuated by ESU's wholly unfeminist actions. The use of institutional artifacts illustrates how ESU is defined by its patriarchal underpinnings that construct and constrain women who engage in feminist complaint, as well as the consequences for behaving outside of the prescribed roles (Ahmed, 2018).

Artifacts: Texts of Auto-archaeology

Auto-archaeology generates memory and emotions throughout the autoethnographic process by connecting institutional documents to lived experiences (Brogden, 2008; Fox, 2010). I have collected both institutional and personal documents to help in understanding the personal lived experience as political, as well as the engagement with institutional representatives. After publicly sharing the experience of being followed around a grocery store and narrowly avoiding an unthinkable fate, I was met with hostility, gaslighting, dismissal, and shame from community members and institutional representatives, including the local police and university administration. Because I am focused on the institutional response to feminist complaint, the following artifacts described are key to this emergent analysis.

The first artifacts are my personal Facebook post and exemplar comments in response to what I wrote. These artifacts first, put the reader in my shoes following the incident at the grocery store, and second, reveal both the backlash and support I received after sharing what happened with my community. Next, I layer the ESU Community Alert with my in the moment reactions. The layered text shows how harmful and problematically written this alert was and how much it pained me to read. Additionally, I include an email I penned to ESU's senior administrators to communicate my anger and

hurt after reading the initial Community Alert. Within this email, I include two other Community Alerts to juxtapose the language and tone. This exercise exposes ESU's attitudes towards women who launch feminist complaints that have the potential to damage their image and reputation. Finally, I include personal texts with my sister to exemplify the importance of validation and being heard after constantly being dismissed and shamed by members of the community and institutional representatives. In sum, these artifacts drive the arc of my story, make my personal experiences political, and illuminate how these particular institutions conceive of women based upon patriarchal underpinnings.

Criteria for Evaluating Autoethnography

Autoethnography is qualitative inquiry and should be evaluated as such (Denzin, 2011; Schroeder, 2017). Based on the word itself, Schroeder (2017) asserts there are three categories of criteria to evaluate autoethnography: *auto* is to lead with the self by using personal narratives and performances; *ethno* refers to the broader social and cultural implications; *graphy* indicates the creative angle of the actual telling of the story. The final three criteria Schroeder (2017) lists are ethics, social justice or transformation, and unclassified criteria such as, critical commentary, thoughtfulness and commitment to theory and method, and personal versus larger impact. Ellis (2000) finds that autoethnographers should aim to have readers "think and feel with the story" and by adhering to the criteria listed above, writers can achieve it (p. 273).

This autoethnography upholds Schroeder's (2017) and Ellis's (2000) criteria in the following ways. First, throughout this process, I aimed to be honest and vulnerable in relaying my thinking, feelings, and behaviors (Mingé, 2016). I painstakingly centered my

body within these experiences and worked to "extract meaning from experience rather than depicting exactly as was lived" (Boechner, 2000, pp. 270-271). I used the meanings gleaned from my narratives to make my personal experience political and highlight the danger of operating institutions based on patriarchal ways of knowing. I discuss how the origins of victim blaming, symbolic violence, and secondary victimization are all borne from patriarchy.

Second, in terms of the story craft, this thesis more so *shows*, rather than tells readers how my personal experience is a microcosm regarding the precarity of women's interactions with society and institutions at large. I strategically use varied forms to evoke emotions within readers and have them *feel with me* (Ellis, 2000, emphasis is mine).

Third, as a writer engaging in critical autoethnographic inquiry, seeking to center relational and social justice ethics, I am transparent about the privileges that are afforded to me because of the color of my skin and other privilege identities (Denzin, 2011). This research also serves to help women who find themselves in a position similar to me. By illuminating the danger that lurks within institutions, I am hoping to educate women about the consequences of feminist complaint, while also showing its merit and necessity. Furthermore, I advocate for a feminist approach to engaging with women who launch feminist complaints to include care, understanding, kindness, and humility, which speaks to the social justice/transformation criterion (Denzin, 2011; Schroeder, 2017).

Lastly, under unclassified criteria, Schroeder (2017) argues that autoethnographies should contribute to existing knowledge and offer multiple layers of critical analysis. This thesis adds to extant knowledge about secondary victimization and patriarchy as symbolic violence in the context of higher education and gender-based

violence. Throughout the discussion, I am careful to unpack my intersectional identity and how it served and worked against me when interfacing with institutional representatives. I further critique the actions of police officers and university administrators and their lack of care as perpetuated by patriarchy when engaging me as I spoke out about a terrifying incident that truly disturbed me. Given these examples, this project adheres to Schroeder's (2017) criteria for an effective, culturally relevant, and social justice-oriented autoethnography.

Chapter Two: Institutional Interlude - Meet the Street Cops

According to Patterson (2010), about half of the women who report rape to law enforcement officials describe their experience as upsetting. These negative interactions with the criminal justice system personnel are termed "secondary victimization" because those personnel are in a position of power telling recently abused women that their stories are improbable or lack sufficient evidence to be thoroughly investigated (Campbell, 1998; Campbell et al., 1999; Madigan & Gambell, 1991; Martin & Powell, 1995; Patterson, 2010). Women who were exposed to secondary victimization later expressed "feeling dehumanized and blamed themselves" (Patterson, 2010, p. 329). Although I was not reporting rape, I reported an incident that diminished my sense of personal safety and the effect of being disbelieved is similarly painful and victimizing as the initial targeting experience. I, too, felt invalidated and questioned my own judgement; Was there anything to even report? What was the point of calling the police? How many mistakes had I made tonight? Am I sure I'm not making this up?

What follows is a comic retelling of my interactions with the police officers that responded to my call. Utilizing the comic frame allows me to make fun of the police officers, as well as the policing institution, and dramatize the error of their ways (Brummett, 2017; Demo, 2000). As I experienced the moment in real time, I felt that these officers had let me down, but in the midst of processing new trauma, I couldn't see all of ways they had disregarded me. Retelling the story comedically emphasizes the ways in which policing institutions continually disappoint and fail women. Here, the police officers are cast as fools, rather than evil individuals, and the "comic frame thus offers a corrective to the inequities of the present system" (Demo, 2000, pp. 139-140). Furthermore, reimagining this experience is a feminist, agentive act where I'm able to

"recast dominant tropes or archetypes as a mean of 'engineering a shift' in the social order" (Burke, 1984, p. 173 as cited in Demo, 2000, p. 140). This exercise shifts the responsibility off of me and on to the institution that claims to protect and serve, but ends up creating and perpetuating harm, particularly against women.

Exterior Scene

Nighttime, dimly lit, sparse parking lot, a young white woman sits alone in her own passenger seat awaiting the arrival of the local police.

Two cruisers enter the parking lot. Two officers exit one of the newer model Ford Interceptors, while the other officer remains in his vehicle.

The woman exits from her passenger side door and we see her take her hands out of her pockets and hold them awkwardly far from her body as she slowly approaches the two officers. She's wearing a mask on her face that says "Determination."

Woman: Hi! I called about the van.

Officer 1: What van? I don't see a van here. Do you see a van here, Mac?

Officer 2: Powerful skills of observation, Sully. No, I don't see a van here either. In fact, I'm not sure what's going on here. Ma'am, what's going on here?

Music plays over their voices. The woman begins retelling the story, detailing everything she saw to the best of her abilities until she realizes that both Officers Mac and Sully have been getting distracted by a moth fluttering around a parking lot light. She cocks her head to the left.

Woman: Uh is everything okay here, Officers?

They look up at her, seemingly startled from their daze.

Officer 2: Oh, yes, ma'am. It's just an awfully big moth. They usually don't get this big around these parts. Anyway, as you were saying…

Her mask, "determination," is slipping off of her face. She removes it, turns it over and it now reads "defeated, unheard."

Woman: Right, as I was saying, the guy from the entrance ended up getting into the van that was parked suspiciously close to me and then they just sat there next to me for at least 5 or 10 minutes. I even got a partial plate. Do you want to hear it?

Officer 1: [Sully looks her in the eyes and questioning] You got a plate from the store? How is that even relevant?

Woman: What? No. I got a partial *license plate* number from the van!

Officer 1: Wait, what van? I don't see a van here.

Woman: It's not here anymore, I was just getting to the part where they sped off, but I was asking if you wanted the partial license plate number…

Officer 2: Yes, of course we do. We're the Police™. Sully, you write it down. It's your day to carry around the notebook and pen.

Officer 1: What? It's not my day with the pen! I gave it to you!

Woman: You guys only have one pen?

Officer 2: [Shrugs] Budget reallocation. Each team gets one pen, one notebook for reports, one armored car, two military grade service pistols, nunchucks, handcuffs, mace, and barely functioning body cams. Anyway, I think we

lost our pen but go ahead and give us the license plate number and I'll keep it safe up in the ol' noggin.

Buzzing noise. Woman starts reciting the plate as Mac gets lost, watching the moth fly around the light bulb once again.

Woman: So anyway, that's the plate. That's what happened. Is there anything you can do? I really just wanted to let you know just in case something like this happened somewhere else or happens again.

She flips over her mask to highlight "determination", but it is barely clinging to a thread.

Officer 1: Well, what do you want us to do? You're safe. I mean look at you, you're whole. You're here and not in any danger and not everything goes bump in the night. There's no van and no one for us to talk to. Everything is fine."

Woman: Alright. Thanks, I guess."

Officer 2: Anytime, ma'am. Always happy to do our jobs and Protect and Serve™."

The woman turns away from the beaming officers and walks back to her car, sitting alone in the empty parking lot. She sidles into her car, and her once determined mask drops off her face and into her lap as she holds her face in her hands. She picks up another mask that makes her meek and nearly invisible replaces it.

Chapter Three: "Taking it" Online

Facebook
4 hr

Last night I ran into the grocery store on East Market St. to grab a bottle of wine. As I parked my car, I took note of a guy wearing a dark baseball cap and a red, plaid jacket standing next to the entrance. And even though I noticed him, I didn't think anything of it. I went about my business, chatted happily on the phone with my sister, and perused the wine aisles. When I was standing in line, I noticed there was someone behind me without any groceries. I thought it was odd, but again I didn't think anything of it. I hung up the phone, paid for the wine, and went back out to my car. When I got to my car, there was a huge, late-model blue and gray van parked so close to my driver's side door that I would have to squeeze through to get in my car. Blankets covered the side and back windows, but there was someone in the driver's seat. There were very few other cars in the parking lot and there was literally no reason for this van to be parked so suspiciously close to me. Alarm bells were going off in my head and I knew there was something seriously wrong. I FaceTimed my sister again and showed her how close the van was parked to me and she had the same reaction I did -- this was just not right. I got into my car through the passenger side door, locked the doors immediately, and just waited. I had waited for several minutes for this van to leave when the guy in the hat and plaid jacket got in the passenger side of the van. It was only then that I put it all together. The guy from the entrance of the store watched me get out of my car, realized that I was alone, signaled to his co-conspirator to park next to me, followed me into the store, stood behind me in line, watched me as I processed what was going on with the van, and watched me long enough to realize that I was not moving from my passenger side. Even after he got into the van, they didn't leave and neither did I because I didn't want to be followed. After about 10-15 minutes, the van backed up and sped off. I called the police and it was only after I talked to the responders in the parking lot that I left.

Every City has a human trafficking problem and even though I reported what happened to the police, they didn't take an incident report, ask my name, let alone any clarifying questions, or if I got a partial plate number -- which I did.

I was a target of opportunity and I didn't realize it until it was almost too late. We all read these stories about close calls and we make mental notes to remain aware of our surroundings, but we think it won't happen to us. But it happened to me and I am so grateful that it is only my sense of peace that has been disturbed instead of an alternative that I don't want to imagine.
Ladies, please, please be safe. Be aware of your surroundings. Consider running errands during the day and try not to go out alone at night. It's disheartening that this is what our world has come to, but please take the extra steps to ensure your safety.

2 shares, 5 comments, and 10 likes

15 shares, 31 comments, and 58 likes

61 shares, 92 comments, and 166 likes

Wow, a lot of people are engaging with this post.

400 shares, 188 comments, 311 likes
Comment: I'm suspicious of this. I'm not buying this story.

718 shares, 276 comments, 467 likes

Is this going viral? I can't stop checking the comments. Why are people so nasty?

2,075 shares, 341 comments, 601 likes
Comment: Don't forget you also have people that will start things for craziness. You know our cops like I do… Do you think they asked nothing??That is the real dead giveaway for me. I keep my weapon close at all times.

Wait, I don't do that. I wouldn't make this up, just ask anyone that knows me. I'm just scared. Should I respond? I don't even know this person…

2,839 shares, 416 comments, 744 likes
Comment: Thank you for sharing. I shared this with my daughters and I'm glad you are okay!

At least one person has been made aware. That's all I ever wanted. I guess this post did some good.

* * *

Are you okay? There's a lot going on here.

Yeah, I guess I'm okay. I still don't understand why people don't believe me. Women are always told to be aware of our surroundings. I did that, maybe not perfectly, but everyone is so mad at me. I just want others to be safe in a way that I wasn't.

Ahmed (2019) offers the explanation that once women complain and criticize institutions, like you did with the police, it opens women up to further harassment. What they're doing, however, is further proving that spaces both online and in person are unsafe for women to inhabit (Condon et al., 2007; Jane, 2014a; Jane, 2014b; Lumsden & Morgan, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2007).

When I read the cruel and delegitimizing comments, I felt the same way I did sitting in the passenger seat of my car. I felt so small, diminished, and like a target of opportunity.

I'm sorry you felt like that. This online space is actually quite similar to feeling unsafe in public. Follow me, here. Walking alone is agentive and purposeful, but have you ever been walking alone and suddenly you become uncertain of the space around you and whether or not you're safe (Ryave & Schenkein, 1974; Watson, 1995)?

Yeah, of course. I end up constantly looking behind me and wonder if I'm being followed.

Most of the time you're okay, but you feel as though there's always a chance of danger. But when something happens to you in public, confirming your fears that public spaces are unsafe, your confidence about venturing alone in the world is reduced, along with your perceived agency and power (Condon et al., 2007). When instances of unsafety occur and women feel like nothing happened to them, there is an added pain and

> burden of being somewhat invisible (Condon et al., 2007). It is these experiences that lay in between physical danger and something else that likely weigh heavily on you and other women because of the socialized resistance to complaining, making noise, and opening ourselves up to further harm (Ahmed, 2018).

I experienced all of these feelings in the aftermath of my own encounter with unsafety in public. I am the woman that walks with purpose and a sometimes unnecessarily urgent pace. I love when my footsteps match up with the beat of the song that I'm listening to; each footfall a drumbeat. My determination is audible and my confidence in my task visible to all. Following my grocery store incident, I immediately resisted crossing the street in a small town I'd lived in for five years to my girlfriend's house, even though I had floated across the crosswalk countless times before without issue. I checked the backseat of my car for intruders, glancing in my rearview after every turn and suspect shadow, even though I logically knew no one was there. My sense of peace had irrevocably been disturbed, the repercussions of which still ripple through me. To this day, I choose not to go grocery shopping alone past sunset. If I do need to run errands alone after dark, I make sure I am not alone. Finally, to Condon et al.'s (2007) point about the invisibility of an experience where "nothing really happened," I have found it really difficult to articulate what happened in a way that does my experience justice in the fear I felt, without seeming over dramatic or taking anything away from women who experience clear cut gender-based violence (p. 120).

The danger that followed me in person similarly hounded me online, making my own Facebook page unsafe for me to visit. I felt so exhausted just trying my best to help out my community learn from the danger that had befallen me, and here I was being

ridiculed for relaying my story as it happened. What these Facebook strangers didn't know is that while I sat in the passenger seat in my car in the grocery store parking lot, I second-guessed myself. *Is this really happening? Am I reading too deeply or overthinking the situation?* Fear clouds and distorts our judgment, and I handled the situation the best way I could at the time.

I was surprised and crestfallen so many people thought I was lying and so highly triggered by my critique of the police. I was accused of lying for attention and people justified this by my Facebook settings saying I lived in California because I hadn't updated my Facebook settings yet. I felt demeaned and these nasty responses felt so unwarranted and deeply personal. I kept reminding myself that those who know me know that I wouldn't make such a thing up but the hundreds of comments flooding my inbox calling me a fraud made me wonder if I was misremembering, said something wrong, or should have censored my feelings about how the authorities handled my situation. The opinions of strangers caused me to second-guess my reality, made me feel powerless.

Not to sound like a broken record, but again you experienced a form of symbolic violence. Lumsden and Morgan (2017) argue that trolling is enacted upon women to perpetuate power, gender roles, and silence women (Bourdieu, 2001).

No wonder it feels so awful. Again, I'm being disbelieved and accused of making it all up.

According to Nadim and Fladmoe (2019), gendered online harassment is an extension of offline behavior and works in unison with corporeal harassment to "restore both women and men to "their place" and reinforce the difference between the genders" (p. 246).

And it's just another way for people, men in particular, to question the experiences of women, right?

Unfortunately, yes. The internet then becomes a site where victim blaming and the perpetuation of rape myths occur, largely by men (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019). Jane (2014b) says victim blaming and rape myths manifest in a variety of ways including gendered criticisms such as "unintelligence, hysteria, and ugliness" combined with violent and sexual threats as "correctives" for their behavior (p. 533).

Can I ask a quick question? Why do you keep reiterating who perpetuates victim blaming and rape myths? I feel like it's pretty obvious that men are the main source of terror when it comes to violence perpetrated against women.

Great questions. Yes, logically, it's obvious, but the language we use to talk about gender-based violence is important. For example, the term "violence against women" is passive voice and removes the responsibility from men and making assault a woman's problem and responsibility (Bohner, 2001; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019). So, even though it's repetitive at times, illuminating men as the responsible party for gender-based intimidation is not only necessary, but a form of feminist resistance (Bohner, 2001; Moses, 2012).

I think naming is essential as we continue to shed light on male perpetrated violence against women. I'm all in favor of every practice that continues to shift the responsibility of violence from women to men. Alright, back to what you were saying about gendered online harassment.

Right, so online harassment can actually be more painful because attackers and trolls glom onto a person's core identity or differences as a basis for their abuse (Chakraborti & Garland, 2015; Herek et al., 2002; Jane, 2014a; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019). Moreover, there are two dimensions contained within online vitriol. The first is harassment responding to the poster that includes name-calling and personal insults, while the second is concerned with the content of the message itself (Chakraborti & Garland, 2015; Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019).

I received comments with both of these dimensions, too. Some of the most painful comments were a mixture of both dimensions. Not only did these posters disbelieve the content I shared and disagreed with my assessment of the police, but they also accused me of making up this story to gain attention from others. As the notifications continued to roll in, these comments echoed louder and louder in my head. Questioning my credibility and insinuating that I was making up this story for clout was painful because that behavior runs counter to my identity as someone with integrity and principle. I felt so misunderstood, vulnerable, and assaulted again.

Jane (2014a) says this is the point of online hate, also called e-bile, to make women feel vulnerable, especially after they speak publicly about being harassed. Furthermore, women subjected to e-bile often report feeling unsafe, distressed, fearful, and violated (Jane, 2014b, p. 536).

This is exactly what Ahmed (2018) says about harassment, too. Speaking out about and calling out those who are responsible for harassment breeds more violence, regardless of medium (Ahmed, 2018). I hate that other women have experienced this and

felt these things, but it's really comforting to know that I'm not alone and that the feelings I felt in response to such intense criticism were normal and valid.

You and your feelings are 100% normal and valid. It's important to remember that this isn't your fault. None of this is your fault. Not the grocery story, not the Facebook comments, not the Community Alert, nothing. This power dynamic between men and women and violence against women perpetrated by men, both on and offline, is continually reinforced in this society (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2019; Wilcox et al., 2007).

Where does society uphold patriarchy and these violent power dynamics?

Oh, my goodness. It's literally everywhere. There is hunter/prey discourse swirling around in forums focused on commercial sex, which has the potential to shape how men conceptualize the roles of women (Bounds et al., 2017). This metaphor of men as predators and women as prey is also prevalent when describing typically heterosexual relationships and can be seen in movies, music, and television shows (Bock & Burkley, 2018). Society and pop culture constantly exposes people to these metaphors that men even start to self-identify as predators (Bock & Burkley, 2018).

The more we're exposed to these roles and these metaphors, the more we operate within them and get accustomed to being treated as prey and men acting like hunters or predators. No wonder it's so hard to feel safe anywhere.

Interestingly enough, safety and community intersect and as one's community is developed, members feel comfortable to share their thoughts, feelings, and

experiences (Adams, 2012). It follows that when the community is infiltrated by dangerous members, the community is no longer safe for women to disclose experiences of violence (Adams, 2012).

Wow, that's so true. When I made my Facebook post public, I increased my audience and allowed strangers into my community, which made it unsafe. These people didn't know me or know my character, yet they felt entitled to renegotiate and assert the truth, as well as demean my character. Thus, my community was unsafe for any and all disclosures, including responding to the commenters to defend myself.

It's so hard to know what to do and how to act when you're the subject of online vitriol and hate. Obviously, you don't want to open yourself up to more criticism but, these strangers have completely mischaracterized you, as well. For what it's worth, I think you've navigated this uncertain, unsafe terrain well and I'm proud of you.

I did the best I could with the knowledge I had and I'm okay with that.

Chapter Four: Unfounded

The graduate seminar room has only one door, solid and heavy – one way in and out of the room. It's a small, windowless room and long, mahogany table that could have communicated an air of prestige sits at its center. In a room no bigger than two prison cells and devoid of natural light the table now feels too large, trying to convince us of its importance rather than truly embodying prominence, renown, and progress. I was in the eighth week of my first semester of graduate school and sitting with at the head of the long table in my seminar in critical theory, relieved at finally balancing the piles of schoolwork with some semblance of a social life. I also had just stopped feeling pangs of anxiety after I spoke in class, torturing myself with thoughts, "Was that stupid? Did that make sense? Do they think I'm dumb?" Call it happy, or at least content enough with my seat at the table.

I'd just challenged one of my classmates' claims when my phone started vibrating incessantly as the light blue and white GroupMe app started accumulating little red notification badges. My colleagues in the program started peppering me with questions and offering commentary in our program-wide group chat:

@Rachel Mangan did u see the email that was just sent to our school accounts… saying the report was false 🤔🙈

@Rachel Mangan I believe you and the wording of that email is super problematic

@Rachel Mangan I can't believe that email

@Rachel Mangan I intend to respond to it but I haven't decided how

@Rachel Mangan I want to send a nastygram to someone

@Rachel Mangan I'm pissed

@Rachel Mangan We could do an open letter together

@Rachel Mangan ...

@Rachel Mangan ...

@Rachel Mangan ...

The messages started blurring together, my heartbeat pounding from my chest up into my head as I tried to make sense of the relentless bzzzzzz notifications bzzzzzz of people bzzzzzz who knew more about me bzzzzzz than I did in those moments. I opened my inbox: one unread email, highlighted and begging to be opened. The subject line read, "Community Alert."

* * *

Community Alert
Every State University
Unfounded Attempted Abduction Report
ECPD Case Number 2019-099276

> The ESU Police Department has become aware through social media of a reported attempted abduction that occurred on Friday, October 11, 2019, at approximately 8:15 p.m., at the Grocery on SC Street. This incident has been thoroughly investigated by the Every City Police Department through extensive use of surveillance video in the parking lot where this was alleged to have occurred and in the grocery store itself. Video evidence indicates there is no criminal or suspicious activity and the report was determined to be unfounded.

Chaos. My mind spins and eyes blur and cross trying to make sense of what I'm reading.

Extensive use of surveillance video *Thoroughly investigated* Extensive use of surveillance video No suspicious activity Unfounded Unfounded UNFOUNDED ***Extensive use of surveillance video*** ***Extensive use of surveillance video*** ***Thoroughly investigated*** ***No suspicious activity*** ***Extensive use of surveillance video*** VIDEO EVIDENCE INDICATES THERE IS NO CRIMINAL OR SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY AND THE REPORT WAS DETERMINED TO BE UNFOUNDED ***Thoroughly investigated*** **Unfounded** **UNFOUNDED** **Unfounded** No suspicious activity UNFOUNDED **UNFOUNDED** ***no suspicious activity***

Do you really think this was thoroughly investigated? I bet ESU is quieting you

down and punishing you for being disloyal and merely suggesting that all is not picturesque and perfect here (Ahmed, 2018). I mean, you can believe that if you want, but if it's me reading the signs, it looks to me like the institution is responding to a feminist complaint like most institutions do – wielding their power to paint you as a hysterical outsider a, "complaining, killjoy, whining, moaning, buzzkill, party-pooper; stick-in-the-mud" female to be disbelieved at all costs (Ahmed, 2019, p. 16).

What? No, of course I don't think this was thoroughly investigated! I was there! I watched the police fall into boredom as they watched me drone on about how scared I was. But I didn't think I was complaining? I was just… sharing and letting others know what happened… It's not even about ESU.

Statements that are made to be informative or personal can be received as complaints (Ahmed, 2018). This happens most often when talking about racism, sexism, and here, it has happened when you criticized the police and cast doubt about the safety of the ESU community (Ahmed, 2018).

Okay, but this isn't right. It feels like their denial about what happened is a thinly veiled victim blaming campaign.

"What is supposed to happen does not always happen" (Ahmed, 2018, p. 15). Women cannot rely on institutions to do the right thing after a complaint is made. In fact, if they can stop your complaint from seeing the light of day, they'll likely do whatever it takes to make it so (Ahmed, 2018).

Oh, wow. That's what I was feeling when I was on the phone with my dad, scared of calling the police, just in case they didn't believe me. It's like even though I was flooded with fear and adrenaline, I

instinctively knew the potential consequences of speaking out and involving institutions. I was scared of making everything worse. And by trying to do the right thing and do what my dad told me to do, I made everything worse for myself.

Unfortunately, those who identify an experience as harassment are often subjected to more harassment (Ahmed, 2019). The institutional response to violence is increased violence (Ahmed, 2019).

How could they do that to me, though? I'm a part of this community! I loved going to college here. I learned and grew so much here. I won awards here. I teach here. I love it here. I am the community. They turned on me so fast I don't get it.

You always have to remember this institution will never your friend. They want you to forget the power they have access to as a well-endowed business. ESU has whole departments dedicated to making you think that they're your friend. They got you. You're the sucker.

Universities are community structures that operate to maintain their power through interactions that reproduce hierarchical, patriarchal, and oppressive modes of understanding (Foucault, 1980; Musolf, 1992). Part of their power is borne from the ability to speak with singularity, which lulled me into a false sense of security and anthropomorphizing this school (Boyd & Nowell, 2017). Anthropomorphizing an institution shifts the inanimate "what" to a personal identity, "who", in an attempt to create connections between the organization and those within it (Ashforth et al., 2020). Through this process, institutions are able to communicate their values and are ascribed

personal emotions and other human behaviors, traits, and identities (Ashforth et al., 2020).

> *Oh, my god, you're right. I am a total fucking sucker. I really believed that ESU cared about me, my education, my well-being. Their spot-on social media presence and indoctrination just lulled me into docility so I would follow the rules. And here I am now dejected, demoralized, and embarrassed after simply sharing what happened to me.*

You have to remember, institutions' curated image is commodified and, when it is well maintained, it is an asset that is to be protected at all costs (Benoit, 2006). Your statement, despite your intentions, tarnished their image and they had to diminish your valid truth, so their recruiting efforts and bottom line weren't maimed (Ahmed, 2018).

I look back down at my computer and continue reading the Community Alert.

> … This incident has renewed false social media rumors of abductions and attempted abductions of college students here at ESU and elsewhere. Though they are unsubstantiated, they serve as a reminder of the importance of taking responsibility for your own safety.

Wait, what? I'm *responsible* for renewing false social media rumors?? The social media rumors are false?? My ears start to ring, and my eyes prick up hot with tears. I am in my own personal Charlie Brown episode where all words around me are bleeding together into a string of wah, wah, wahs. Isn't this something that only happens in the movies?

I reread this section and my stomach churns with nausea as the university's string of words gives me vertigo.

This incident [This incident] has renewed **false**[**false**] social media [*rumors*]*rumors*[*rumors*] ofabductionsandattemptedabductionsofcollegestudentshereatESUandelsewhere. Though they are ***UNSUBSTANTIATED***[***unsubstatiated***]***unsubtaaaaaantiated*** **UNSUBSTANTIATED,** they serve as a reminder of the importance of taking RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY. THEY SERVE AS A REMINDER OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY. THEY SERVE AS A REMINDER OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY.

My body is shaking, fingers hovering over my trackpad tremoring in disbelief. My stomach has flipped so many times, I thought it a patty on a McDonald's grill manipulated by a worker making $7.25 an hour. Am I even reading this correctly? Not only are they accusing me of renewing fraudulent rumors circulating on social media, and therefore engaging in, false reporting, but they're using my experience to teach situational awareness? But, hey, good on me for reminding everyone to take responsibility for their own safety! That's exactly what I did, so it seems as though we are on the same page about something.

You do know what they're doing here right?

Uh, besides directly responding to my Facebook post effectively identifying me to the whole community and calling me a liar? No, please, enlighten me. What are they doing here?

Like Benoit (2000; 2006) mentioned, you're a threat to the brand and ESU is mitigating the damage and trying to repair their "Happiest Place on Earth" mousekateer

cheery image. By refusing to even acknowledge that something made you feel unsafe, they're engaging in simple denial and shifting blame to highlight your responsibility in the situation (Frederick et al., 2019).

And don't forget, they labeled the report unfounded. They didn't even talk to me before sending this out to every person with an @esu.edu email address. They can't indulge the possibility that someone felt unsafe in this community and they made sure to let everyone know that the girl who complained, lied.

Yep. That's classic minimization to reduce the effectiveness of your advocacy (Smithson & Venette, 2013).

ESU utilized minimization to downplay the seriousness of what I experienced by calling reports of human trafficking false. Furthermore, ESU attacked my credibility in two distinct ways, perhaps as a way to reduce the fallout (Smithson & Venette, 2013). First, labeling the whole of the report unfounded immediately undermines anything that follows. It sets the tone of the Community Alert and primes the reader for a brief story about a hysterical woman who was not a victim of a crime. Second, the Community Alert argues that this incident reinvigorates "false social media allegations of abductions here at ESU and elsewhere." Not only does this diminish the stories of others, particularly women, who have publicly reported their experiences of danger, this claim asserts my story is false at its core and contributes to scaring the populace via reckless lies about human trafficking. ESU was more concerned about their image and maintaining their stature than the safety of a student (Benoit, 2000). At the time the Community Alert was

disseminated to the ESU community, no one from the university had contacted me. This report was created and approved in a shellacked office occupied by a man who chose to make a judgement about my experience of fear and insecurity and called me a liar, all without speaking to me first.

> … Students are always encouraged to travel with a buddy and never walk or jog alone, especially at night. Use well-lit and well-traveled areas and avoid dark areas with few people around. Do not approach an unknown car and always be mindful of your surroundings.

We really are on message, aren't we? Did I not end my Facebook post pleading with women to consider running errands with a friend or during daylight hours? Did I not ask women within my community to be exceedingly careful when alone? Am I the only one witnessing the complete hypocrisy of this message? Hello? HELLO? Is anyone else seeing how absurd this is? Why did I ever think posting my story was worth it?

Hey.

Hey.

I'm sure this doesn't surprise you, but you're actually not alone. The road to reporting instances of danger and gender-based violence is fraught with barriers and dissuasions from institutional staff. Because of this, those who have experienced harassment in higher education expect that reporting these instances may negatively impact their "career, confidentiality concerns, lack of confidence in the institution to take action, fear of the perpetrator, and more" (Bull & Rye, 2018, p. 14).

I get it! Why would women ever want to speak out and be honest about incidents of gender-based violence?

Especially when we get treated like this over and over and over again?

I'm not surprised you feel like that. And you're 100% right. only about 20% of assaults committed on college campuses are reported and only 16% of incidents reported end up receiving any assistance from victim support agencies (Moore & Baker, 2018).

I'm realizing more and more that as a queer student and graduate teaching assistant, I am intimately aware of the consequences of speaking out. I realize now that after I shared my incident that I edited out some of the details that may have identified me even more to mitigate any possible blowback. While I did end up reporting my experience with the local police, the aftereffects have strongly dissuaded me from ever reporting again.

> … If something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts and contact police immediately. If you feel endangered or in doubt in a situation, call 911 immediately.

"Trust your instincts and contact police immediately." Trust my instincts? *My instincts?* I did that! I have literally done everything ESU recommends in this boilerplate, Clery Act mandated community alert, and still I am being shamed for doing so! Why? Please anyone tell me why it is so hard for everyone to believe women? And what am I supposed to do now? This community wide email is clearly in response to my Facebook post, now more people are going to come after me for "lying." How could they do this? Why couldn't they believe me? Why couldn't ESU just talk to me before sending this out?? I'm at a loss.

This won't make you feel any better, but the answer is the patriarchy.

It's always, the patriarchy, isn't it?

Yes, a lot of the time, it just comes down to the patriarchy. The structural and pervasive violence against women and subsequent silencing is a feature of the male dominated and female subordinated society we live in (Hunnicutt, 2009). While the power relations between men and women are complicated and should be understood beyond perpetrator and victim, the definition of patriarchy I am working with contends that "gender is the primary mechanism of difference and that violence is patterned along gendered lines" (Hunnicutt, 2009, p. 556).

I feel like this definition is about to trigger the "not all men" advocates and bring them out of the woodwork to stand up for themselves and their buddies.

This defensiveness is the natural response to seeing oneself depicted in a woman's complaint, no matter the context (Ahmed, 2018). This has repercussions that pervade all interactions, including how situations of gender-based violence are viewed, judged, and handled in a variety of contexts.

So, is this where all the victim blaming comes in? Because men can't tolerate being called out for being responsible in the harassment and assault of women?

Yes, exactly. Everything is predicated on male domination and power over women, so when you step out of line and question authority, the natural instinct is to punish that behavior (Hunnicutt, 2009). Victim blaming is the tendency to hold survivors responsible for the assault or crime perpetrated against them (Gravelin et al., 2015). Blaming the victim rears its ugly head in common refrains that perpetuate

rape myths such as, “Well, what were you wearing?” and insinuating that a survivor’s alcohol consumption is responsible for the violence enacted against them (Dawtry et al., 2019).

While I acknowledge what it within the Community Alert isn’t on par with rape, this is what is happening to me, too! First, ESU is questioning my truth but still holding me responsible for what happened and my own safety. Furthermore, by titling the Community Alert unfounded, ESU blames me for filing a “false” report that “renews false social media rumors.” This is ridiculous.

If you can believe it, it gets worse. Want to guess who is most likely to take part in victim blaming within institutions the most?

This is the least fun game we’ve ever played. Well, my first guess is men.

Yes, of course. More specifically, victim blaming tends to come from those within high power positions, often men with authority who experience victimization far less frequently than women (Gravelin et al., 2015).

Wait, this is so unfair. So, these men in high-status positions get to use their power to shame and keep women down? But they don’t even understand what it’s like! There are so many times and ways I’ve felt unsafe in my life and I know for a fact that men haven’t felt this.

> … Remain alert and observant of your surroundings. Trust your instincts. If you sense trouble, get to a safe place as soon as possible. Take notice of any person who does not belong in the area. Thank you and stay safe!

If my jaw could drop and rest on the floor, it would have. I reread the final words of the Community Alert.

> **REMAIN ALERT AND OBSERVANT OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS**
> **TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS**
> **IF YOU SENSE TROUBLE, GET TO A SAFE PLACE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**
> **TAKE NOTICE OF ANY PERSON WHO DOES NOT BELONG IN THE AREA**
> **THANK YOU AND STAY SAFE!**

These words bounce around in my head, bold and unironic. This feels like a sick joke an old nemesis is playing on me because ESU can't be serious. What is the point of even sending this out? Everything I said is "unfounded" and yet, I did everything that ESU implores us to do when we feel like we're in a dangerous situation. Who is this benefitting? Because it's not me, other women, or the community at large.

The Community Alerts the ESU send out are mandated by the Clery Act, which is part of Title IV to received federal financial benefits (Lee, 2017).

Let me make sure I'm hearing this correctly. ESU and other universities send out these Community Alerts because they want money from the government?

I'm sure an ESU spokesperson would tell you that they send out the Community Alerts to keep students, faculty, and staff aware of any crimes going on in the surrounding area and keep everyone safe, but the Clery Act is simultaneously followed so these schools can bring in federal funds (Lee, 2017).

I can't speak for everyone else, but for me, these Community Alerts make me feel more unsafe than anything. Obviously, this one is more traumatic because it's about me, but I

never felt better after reading the other ones about robberies and stalking, either.

So, there's two things going on here: (1) the question about the effectiveness of Clery Act-mandated alerts and (2) the harm that this iteration of the Community Alert caused you. What do you want to tackle first?

Wow, it's actually really nice being asked what I want. Let's start with overall effectiveness of the Clery Act.

Alright, good choice. So, like I said earlier, the Jeanne Clery Act aims to maintain "transparency around campus crime policy and statistics" and promote "equitable and fair treatment for women in higher education" (Clery Center, 2021, para. 1; Lee 2017, p. 60). Despite pure intentions, evidence shows that the Clery Act hasn't increased college students' inclination to report violent crimes (Lee, 2017; Mancini et al., 2016).

What I'm hearing you say is, the policy doesn't do what it was created to do.

Exactly, and beyond that, the crimes reported under the Clery Act misrepresent the crimes that actually occur within campus communities because these are only the crimes that are reported, not committed, such as gender-based violent offenses (Fisher et al., 2002; Wilcox et al., 2007). What's worse is that Clery Act disclosures actually contribute to higher fear of crime, rather than risk, among college aged women (Wilcox et al., 2007).

So not only does the Cleary Act inaccurately represent the crimes committed in university communities, but the reports also contribute to how women perceive the safety of their school?

Right! Furthermore, the language within Clery-mandated reports "magnify stranger violence" while most college-aged women experience violence from people they know (Condon et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2000; Wilcox et al., 2007). When we put this all together, it's clear to see that women not being protected by this law, and the way it's being used increases the perception of danger at the hands of strangers.

ESU does this too! In the Community Alert, they implore students to be careful, remain alert of our surroundings, and take note of any people who might not belong in the area. This language totally makes "stranger danger" feel real and like a threat I have to be on the lookout for, even though it's unlikely. ESU probably doesn't even realize the harm it's perpetuating.

It's unlikely that ESU knows, realizes, or cares to rectify the multiple dimensions of harm they're responsible for. Remember how we talked about how the perpetrators of victim blaming tends to be men in positions of authority (Gravelin et al., 2015)?

Yes, unfortunately, I have not forgotten.

Secondary trauma often follows physical and emotional trauma when others react negatively to these initial incidents (Gravelin et al., 2015; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Official documents like this Community Alert are a way for men in power to invalidate and blame you for complaining (Ahmed, 2018; Ahmed, 2019; Gravelin et al., 2015).

I cannot tell you how seen I feel right now. This is exactly how I felt reading this Community Alert in class. I felt shamed and invalidated, not to mention intimidated into taking my Facebook post down because I was scared of further retribution. This Community Alert made everything worse for

me. The trauma and fear I experienced following the dissemination of the Community Alert was more terrifying than the initial experience at the grocery store.

You experienced another form of violence – symbolic violence. Bourdieu (2001) argues that this less visceral, tangible form of violence is upheld by patriarchy and the very fabric of our society, which is predicated upon uplifting men and leaving women to suffer silently (Angeliqa & Sarwono, 2018).

ESU had to take a swing at me for stepping out of the prescribed gender roles ordered by this society, silence and shame me, all the while protecting their sweet and wholesome image.

It's cruel, but not unusual. Symbolic violence is exacted to maintain dominance over marginalized groups and allows institutions to systematically silence and gaslight women who have the audacity to speak out about gender-based harassment and fear (Morgan & Björkert, 2006; O'Neal, 2017; Schubert, 2008).

I will never forget the ache of being publicly shamed, humiliated, and silenced.

* * *

My eyes continue to hang on the last letter of the Community Alert and I'm thrust out of my head and back into my body. My focus shifts to my shallow breaths, holding back tears. Silence falls on the room and I bolt from my seat, rush out of the cramped room and down the empty hall until I reach the bathroom. My hands rest on either side of the sink and head drops hanging heavy against my chest, and I heave sobs that echo off the tiled floor without worrying about who could hear me. I look up at myself in the

mirror. I hate that I'm wearing the sweatshirt with Every State University embroidered on it. I claw at my chest hoping to further distance myself from my alma mater.

It's an unsettling feeling - crying in public. The catharsis, natural yes, but sharing such an intimate release with strangers whose only bond is the academic halls we walk unnerves me. It was a transgression of norms and these halls once hallowed felt strange and unfamiliar. Every State University publicly put me in my place and prescribed the rules I was expected to quietly abide by.

1. Sit down.
2. Stay quiet.

Your pain is solely yours to bear alone. You're a liar. Your truth, the truth - unfounded.

I blow my nose and look at myself in the mirror again, eyes red, swollen, and brimming with tears. *What just happened?* I walk out of the bathroom, shoulders slumped and dejected, sniffling as I exited the building out onto the quad. I call my mom to tell her what had just transpired. I've called my mom in tears so many times, that I knew how the conversation would begin: *What's the matter now? I'm in the middle of a meeting and I only have a few minutes.*

She quickly realizes these aren't the normal cries that lamented the perils of graduate school and relationships. A mother knows, I'm told. "Wait, what's going on? Are you okay?"

In between frantic sobs, bordering on hysteria, I gasp, "ESU just sent an email to everyone that called my report unfounded. They called me a liar."

"What? What do you mean? What did it say?"

"It just said that my Facebook post was unfounded, and my report of alleged kidnapping wasn't supported and that I renewed false allegations of human trafficking. I don't know what to do."

"Oh, honey. I'm so sorry. I can't believe this just happened. Where are you right now?"

"I was just in class when I got the email and I left because I had to cry and call you obviously. I just feel scared and targeted, especially after all of those negative comments from strangers. I don't know what to do now."

"Well, first let's do something we can deal with in the immediate moment. What do you think about going back to class?" she asks.

I respond definitively, "Oh yeah, I'm not going back. I can't focus on that and I'm not going to cry in front of strangers."

"Okay, so you need to get your stuff. What are you going to do after that? What's your sister doing?" She wants me to have a plan.

"I think I need to go home but I don't want to be alone. I think she's drinking downtown. Maybe I'll meet her."

"That sounds good. Call her. Be with friends. What about the Facebook post? It doesn't seem safe to have it up anymore."

"I'm gonna put you on speaker and delete it now. I feel outed and called out and so exposed what if people can find me through my Facebook profile? It's been shared over 3,500 times."

"I feel like I was just starting to find my footing and get the hang of grad school and now this? I wish I could come home."

"I know. It's been a crazy semester already, but you do have the hang of it. I have to get back to my meeting but do what we just talked about. Did you delete the Facebook post?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to go get your things?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I'll call you back in about an hour and we'll figure out who we can talk to about this. Okay? I love you."

"I love you."

After I hang up with my mom, I return to the seminar room to collect my things. I'm sure I look exactly how I was feeling. My class is on break and my classmates are in the hall. I can feel their scanning eyes, and the pity and anger behind their stares, heads cocked to the sides as they watched my movements. As I grab my bookbag, I have to face my professor and tell him I am leaving.

"I can't fucking believe that email. I don't even know what to say," my professor seems to apologize.

"Well, I guess that makes two of us. But I'm leaving. I've just been crying and on the phone with my mom and honestly, I can't sit through the rest of this discussion. I'm sorry." *I knew I didn't have to be apologizing and that I had nothing to apologize for. But it seems so clear that this is a conditioned response.*

"You can stay if you want. We all care about you and you have a community within this program," he reminded me.

"I'm sure I do, but I'm leaving. I can't be confined in this room right now, I'm sorry." *Again, I apologized in the midst of trauma for just doing the bare minimum in taking care of my needs.*

"Please let me know if I can do anything. I am so sorry."

"I will."

This professor has long been a mentor and I know the depth of his caring, since I have disclosed difficulties with school, work, and life on numerous occasions. Yet, in the midst of kindness, his sad, knowing eyes make me feel that much more vulnerable, embarrassed, and ashamed. I turn to leave and walk down the picturesque quad lined with distinguished columns and limestone to my car, feeling so alone at a university that boasted the quality of the community.

My head is spinning. So much has happened in the last 12 minutes. Nausea. Heart pounding. Head pounding. Anger. Disbelief. Disgust. Fear. Shame. Regret. Humility. Gratitude. Mom, Professor, thank you for seeing me, hearing me, honoring, and validating me.

We love you. We see you. We support you. We know how crucial it is to surround you with support and strength right now.

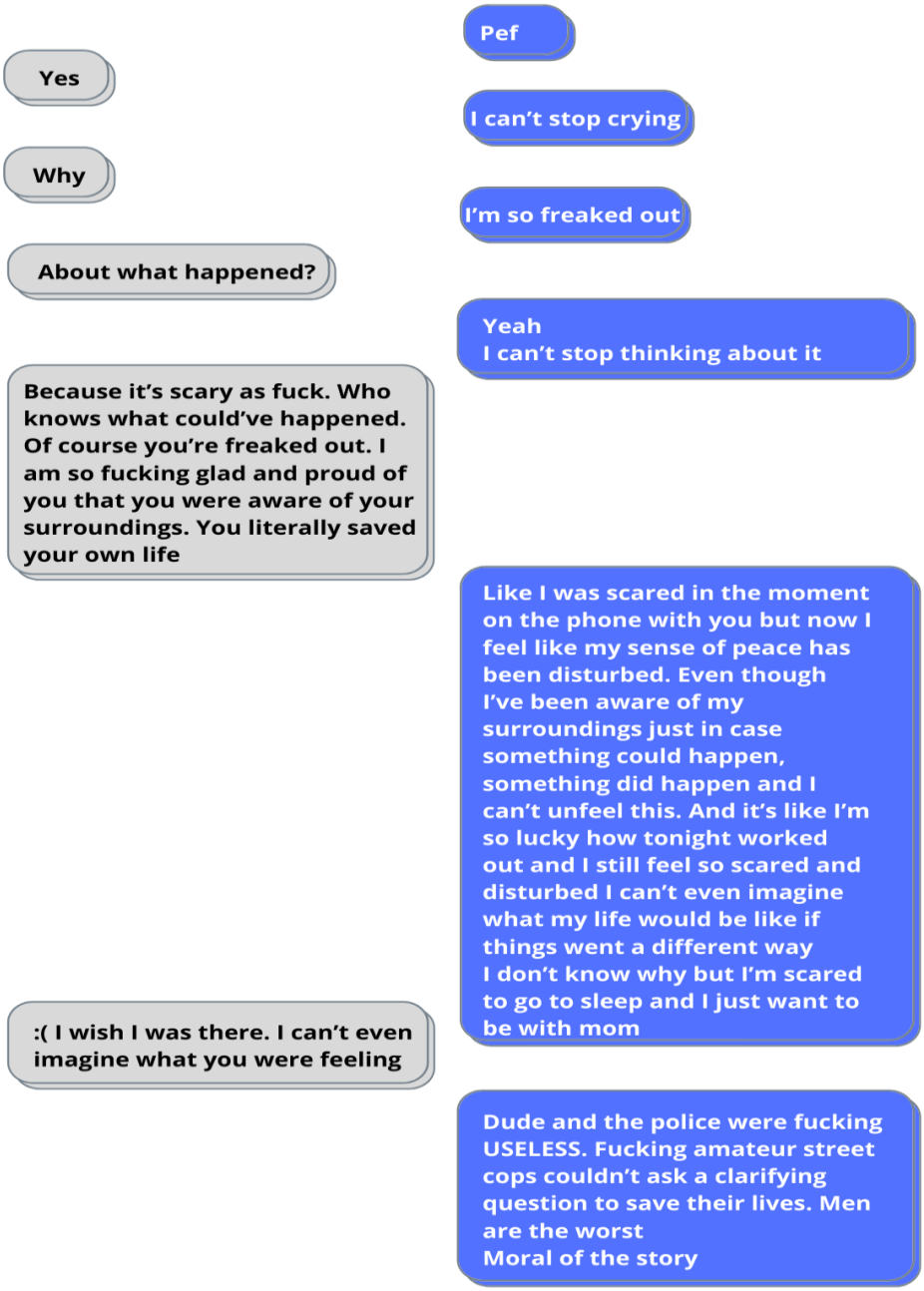
Even though I'm still trying to understand what happened, I know I'm going to be okay.

Social support following a traumatic event is crucial for psychosocial recovery (Bal et al., 2003; Kaniasty, 2011; Lui, 2009; Pruitt & Zoellner, 2008). Negative and neutral reactions to trauma have the potential to contribute to negative lasting affects like PTSD, so it's important that we are able to be here for you and provide positive social

support in whatever way you might need (Pruitt & Zoellner, 2008).

Thank you for being here for me. I need it.

* * *



You're very lucky, you know. Receiving this kind of generous social report likely had a huge role in reducing posttraumatic cognitions (Woodward et al., 2015).

I think so, too. I was quite frightened after the grocery store and uniquely humiliated after the Community Alert came out, but I am okay. I was able to carry on with my life, make sense of what happened, and heal from everything both the visceral and secondary violence.

What you're feeling supports what Woodward et al. (2015) found - that family members in particular have a robust effect on the healing process. This finding mirrors Johnson and Thompson's (2008) findings that suggest familial support is a necessary resource when struggling with PTSD.

I definitely didn't experience PTSD, but I shudder at the thought of having to cope with all of this alone. I'm unendingly grateful for the people I'm surrounded by.

Let me ask you a question. Would you describe yourself as resilient?

Most days, yeah. Why?

Part of that has to do with your individual make up as a person, but Sippel et al. (2015) suggest that resilience is bidirectional.

What does that mean exactly?

It means that not only are you able to face adversity with strength, but those who make up your personal community are similarly resilient (Sippel et al., 2015). So, you and your community contribute to and gain energy from each other's resilient qualities, which is likely responsible for the "absence of psychopathology" and posttraumatic cognitions (Sippel et al. 2015, p. 1).

Wow, that's really interesting. My resilience in influenced from the people I'm most often around and contributes to my psychological and physical health. I'm luckier than I ever realized.

Chapter Five: Finding My Voice

To whom it should concern:

My name is Rachel Mangan. I am the student you did not consult before issuing the timely notice on Thursday, October 17th.

I invite you to read these timely notices about issues that are deemed to be a security threat to students and the community. I ask you to notice the differences between the three. . .

* * *

In the days following the Community Alert, I moved through spaces unanimated and empty. I wasn't myself. My agency robbed from me. My power, nowhere to be found. I showed up to work, sat in my classes, taught my students, but I don't remember being there, being present. All of the color and charisma drained from my face, sallow. My life was pallid until I drank. Only after overindulging bitter IPAs and feeling the torch of cheap whiskey in my chest did any color return to my cheeks. Alcohol was a false companion that felt like a hug in a time when I otherwise withered away. Alcohol served as a cheap succor that temporarily returned my laugh and my teeth to my smile.

For a week, I sit at my computer with a blank document open, saved as "An Email." The cursor blinked expectingly, eagerly awaiting my fingers to type something. Anything. For a week, I sit before my computer, questioning whether or not I should send an email addressing the Community Alert. I pretend I don't know to whom to send the email, in a sad attempt to delay writing a letter that had the potential to open floodgates. What was behind the floodgates, I could only begin to anxiously imagine. I recall the horror stories shared on ESU's campus. The girl who was raped on her study abroad trip

and her rapist found not responsible by ESU's judiciary board because he was a well know tour guide, or so we speculate. I think of her anger, her fear, her dismissal, her rage. I feel my heartbeat quicken underneath the thin skin of my neck. *What if I get a response and they (the White, male upper administrators) dismiss me again?* My hands prick with sweat and start to get clammy. I remember the three or four fraternity brothers that raped a student and ESU expelled them following graduation. Nausea sets in and I lose my nerve. I slam the top of my laptop closed and shove it as far away from me as possible. I fool myself into believing I can't send an email if I physically cannot touch my laptop.

Put simply, I'm so afraid. It took me seven days to work up the courage to finally send an email to ESU's administrators. I face off with the blank document for one last time, cursor waiting for me to say whatever it is I need to say. I remember Brené Brown's Southern drawl from a TED talk I'd watched recently. Her words swirl around me like a warm, spring day's breeze, softly encouraging me to type one word, starting with just one letter: "Vulnerability is our most accurate measurement of courage" (Brown, 2012). And suddenly it's like she's with me as my fingers hover over my keyboard.

I'm scared.

That's okay. Being afraid is normal. You're still going to send the email and stand up for yourself, right?

But I don't know what's going to happen and I don't want to risk being hurt and maligned again. But I also know I need to address this so I can finally get rid of the gray cloud that's hanging over me.

It sounds like you're resisting vulnerability a little bit and you're paralyzed. How does that feel?

So terrible. I feel like there's a weight that's constantly on my chest and I'm constantly in battle with my left shoulder angel and right shoulder devil about what the weight is and how to get rid of it. I want to be brave, but I just feel so small.

There's no bravery or courage without vulnerability (Brown, 2012). Just because you're not in tune with your power right now, doesn't mean it isn't there. You can do this. You deserve to stand up for yourself.

When Brené is right, she's right. I'd been feeling so disconnected from myself, my agency, and my power as a woman, but the recipients of this email didn't have to know that. I bring my computer to my lap once again and I just pretend. I write the email pretending to be one with my strength.

I put the Community Alert written about me in conversation with two other ESU Community Alerts to highlight the differences in language and illustrate how institutional power can vary (Fox, 2010). This practice of auto-archaeology situates my personal experience within institutional documentation to show how the language within constrains and constructs women's identities (Fox, 2010). As Fox (2010) states, institutional documents can be utilized as sites of identity negotiation to "enrich narration and other forms of autoethnographic reflection" (p. 124). Including additional Community Alerts illuminates the inconsistences within ESU's documenting practices, which contributed to some difficult identity negotiation and formation (Fox, 2010). I am angry that ESU's callous indifference to their use of language had the power to make me

question my character and who I was, and through navigating this entire experiences, who I currently am.

Attempted Armed Robbery

> . . . an unknown white male approached two women as they sat in their vehicles talking in the Every City Crossing Shopping Plaza (Home Depot section). The male walked between the cars and pulled out a knife. The male asked if the two females had any money. The two women stated they did not have any money and the male walked off North toward East Market Street. The male was described as a white male in his early 20's, thin build medium height with brown curly hair. The male was wearing a grey hoodie and had an American flag bandana to cover his lower face. Suspect has not been identified or located at this time.

I sifted through my inbox to find past Clery Act-mandated Community Alerts from ESU. The more I read, the more I seethed. The title. The seemingly neutral, fact-based title. “Attempted Armed Robbery.” It was an attempt. Not unfounded. It’s not like the police had any more evidence for an “attempt” than they did when they talked to me. Why was it so easy to simply state what these two women reported here, but impossible to do that for me? My face is warm and flushed. Blood rushed faster and faster to my head as I angrily retyped this annoyingly neutral Community Alert.

Timely Warning: Possible Threat to the Community - Aggravated Assault/Robbery

> . . . a report was filed with the Every State University Police Department regarding an incident occurring in the early morning hours of 7-20-2018. A male reported he was walking from downtown Every City to Republican Road across campus to get home, after having consumed alcoholic beverages. He was

> approached by two females wanting to "hang out." He agreed and began consuming alcohol with the individuals, later blacking out. He awoke the next morning confused in an unoccupied residence hall, not remembering the previous evening, believing he may have been drugged. He was unable to provide any description of the females. He stated that his cell phone and 50 dollars were missing.
>
> POSSIBLE THREAT. *Possible.* It's possible that this is a threat to the Community. It might be a threat to the ESU community, it might not be. How simple. What a simple turn of phrase to describe a possible crime. My fingers pluck the keys, angry at what could have been my story, my situation, my Community Alert. I chose these two Community Alerts because of the differences in tone and language. When the upper administrators read my email, or skim it more likely, their error needs to be abundantly clear. I was trying to manufacture a confrontation between these men who understood nothing about me and the effect their actions have on students. I want them to sweat like I sweat in the passenger seat of my car. I want them to feel ashamed of their actions like I felt shame after reading the alert.

This is the pain and agony of women who fall through the cracks of the system and are harmed by the social structures theoretically designed to protect us (Bowers, 2008). Anger and retaliation become a form a feminist action and resistance to prescribed conceptions of womanhood and feminism (Bowers, 2008; Holmes, 2004; Traister, 2019).

You know what, frankly, I'm done. I don't want to be nice. I don't want to be kind. I'm

mad. More than mad, I'm filled with wrath and with rage. This is so not okay, and I refuse to sit quietly with my feelings. I don't get to be treated like this. And these men will know they've deeply wronged me.

According to Lee (1993), anger is the vehicle in which we start to reinterpret our experiences, redefine ourselves presently, and create our futures. As women this anger is revolutionary, necessary, and shatters patriarchal myths about women's role and utilization of anger, or lack thereof (Lee, 1993; Mueller & Leidig; 1976). So be angry, be livid. Give them hell, show them who you are. Show them who *they* are. Use your anger as a driver to make waves and force change (Traister, 2019; Winderman, 2019; Zerilli, 2014).

Community Alert - Unfounded Attempted Abduction Report

> The ESU Police Department has become aware through social media of a reported attempted abduction . . . This incident has been thoroughly investigated by the Every City Police Department through extensive use of surveillance video in the parking lot where this was alleged to have occurred and in the grocery store. Video evidence indicates there is no criminal or suspicious activity, and the report was determined to be unfounded. This incident has renewed false social media rumors of abductions and attempted abductions of college students here at ESU and elsewhere. Though they are unsubstantiated, they serve as a reminder of the importance of taking responsibility for your own safety.

Here it is. The offending document. Seeing my Community Alert next to the others is demoralizing. I deflate a little, almost losing my edge. Every time I read the Community Alert, I'm thrust back to the moment it appeared in my inbox – racing pulse,

chaotic thoughts, hearing people speak but not comprehending the sounds as words. Before continuing with my email, I consider who I want to be once more. Am I going to be polite and ask nicely for an apology from ESU and a promise that this will never happen again? How will I be seen if I really tell the truth once more? I don't want to be dismissed as irrational or hysterical, but I want, no, I *need* my voice to be heard and taken seriously (Goodman, 2020; Traister, 2019). I mentally recall all of the moments I have been angry, but too afraid to express my feelings honestly, because I didn't want anyone to dislike or dismiss me (Garber, 2018; Goodman, 2020). I feel myself shrinking as I remember the times I didn't stand up for myself or honor my emotions. It feels like my chest is swallowing itself whole and like I'm retreating into myself. With a deep inhale, I remember that this is my opportunity to honor myself, to stand in my power, to be vulnerable, to be brave (Brown, 2012). Scorched earth it is.

The Letter Continues

> . . .The first two notices are objective, state the facts of the incidents, and do not make a judgment about the reports. They are titled "Attempted" incidents. The last notice was titled an "Unfounded" incident, did not list the series of events, and drips with bias. The last notice boasted that the matter was thoroughly investigated. This is patently false because this notice falls under the masthead of Every State University and ESU Police Department, neither of which bothered to talk to me, ask me about my experience with Every City Police Department, and surely did not take the time to watch the surveillance footage. There is no description of the suspect because no one asked me for one. There is no description of the suspicious vehicle because no one asked me for one.

* * *

My blood pressure is no longer a simmer, but a full on, raging, rolling boil. Putting these three Community Alerts in conversation with one another paints me as just another woman who is overreacting and begging for attention on social media in a way that tarnished their image. After I see differences in language – dry, fact-based vs. judgement-laced, I realize that this is not about me personally. Because how could it be? They don't know me. No one from the institution spoke to me before sending this out. ESU is transparently covering for themselves and attending to their image so their reputation remains intact, at the expense of my credibility (Benoit, 2000; Smithson & Venette, 2013). What's more painful than being attacked by my university publicly, is that I internalized this attack and criticism and lost myself.

Is this because I made too much noise?

I don't want to be an **attention whore….**

Maybe I really did make a mountain out of a molehill.

Wait, no, why am I blaming myself??

Well, what if they're right?

They're not right about me. I didn't do anything wrong.

I repeat to myself, "I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't do anything wrong," like a mantra that might save me from this personal hell and transport me to another dimension where I am happy, believed, and don't have to scold the upper administrators of ESU for not taking me seriously. I trudge on, willing myself to believe that I didn't do anything wrong. I keep typing one letter after the other for the

woman I wanted to be one day – strong, powerful, and proud of her anger, the depth of her feelings. I slam the keys for my inner child, who still so desperately wants to be believed.

I cackle with incredulity at the assertion that my experience was fully investigated. I can't believe ESU honestly has the audacity put this in writing when ***no one from the university spoke to me before sending the Community Alert out to the entire community.*** It is true, however, that one officer from Every City Police Department reached out to me on the Tuesday following the initial incident in the grocery store parking lot. Three days had passed since I shared my experience on Facebook and the post had gained considerable traction. Only after comments poured in and strangers started tagging ECPD in the comments did they find it necessary to call me and get more information.

On this crisp Tuesday morning, my phone rang, and I saw a local number I didn't recognize. I don't typically answer numbers I don't know, but my intuition told me to answer it anyway.

"Hello?"

"Is this Rachel Mangan?"

"Speaking."

"Hi, Ms. Mangan. My name is Officer Wiley with the Every City Police Department. I'm calling about a report we saw on Facebook about an experience you had at a grocery store here in town and I'm calling to get more information about it."

"So, what, do you want me to retraumatize myself and tell you about the scariest night of my life over the phone or do I need to come down to the station?"

"Over the phone is great, thanks."

I run through the series of events the best I can remember them. I tell the officer what the man was wearing, what the van looked like, and the partial license plate."

"Perfect. We're going to head down to the grocery store and see if we can see anything on the video surveillance. We'll be in touch."

click

That was clinical. I head to my meeting with hope. I naively hope the police will see what I felt and acknowledge that *something* happened. Twenty minutes later, my phone rings again. I recognize the number this time and don't hesitate to answer. It doesn't seem like enough time for a thorough investigation, but what do I know about policing? Just about as much as the police know about believing women.

"Hello?"

"Ms. Mangan, this is Officer Wiley with the Every City Police Department. I'm calling you with an update about the surveillance footage. We saw you in the store at the time you said you were there, and we didn't see anything suspicious or criminal behavior."

"Well, where did the guy in plaid go after I went in the store?"

"I'm not sure, ma'am, because we were watching you."

"Did you see where the van came from?"

"Like I said, ma'am, we were watching you."

"So, you have no idea where the guy in plaid went after I exited the store?"

"Not at this time."

"Can you just check?"

"No, ma'am. We are no longer at the scene, so we don't have access to the video anymore."

"So, did you find anything at all?"

"Just that there was no suspicious activity."

"Well, thanks for your time, I guess."

"You're welcome, ma'am. Always here to protect and serve."

click

I hate being placated and I hate being called ma'am.

* * *

> . . . Instead, my university decided to send out a shaming and silencing email to the entire community. Because my Facebook post was so widely shared, everyone who received the email knew the post to which it was referring. When I read the email, of which I had no warning, I was scared. I deleted my post for fear of retribution.
>
> I am aware that ESU must send out timely notices when incidents occur within the community in accordance with the Clery Act . . . The sad thing is, I'm used to being disappointed by ESU's response to women's reports of violence, sexual assault, and other dangers that are unique to women. I'm used to seeing men get off with nothing more but a slap on the wrist. I'm used to feeling disgusted that an institution that boasts progress actually promotes regression and misogyny. But this time it happened to me, and you should know that with great institutional power, you are still accountable for your actions and how they affect your student body and community as a whole.

I'm really glad you included this part about how ESU's documents' effects are important and how they impact people is important.

So, you think I should keep it? I just want them to know that what they say as an institution matters to me and it matters for women. I'm doing my best to hold them accountable.

You are holding them accountable! You're showing ESU that every document, both public and private, defines them as an institution (Ahmed, 2007). How this document is written affects how it's received and it's the responsibility of the institution to grapple with differing or negative reactions (Ahmed, 2007).

Do you think it matters that I don't know who actually wrote the thing?

Actually, no. Even when the author isn't clear, the message is from the institution as a whole and it defines those within it (Ahmed, 2007).

This actually makes me feel better. Even though there's no one person to blame, all of the upper administrators who handle situations like these are still complicit in its delivery and its harm. They should be implicated. This is their mess.

Let me ask you a question. Why include the part that you know about the Clery Act?

Hm. I guess just wanted them to know that I've done my research and I'm not stupid. I know that they have to send something out to the community. I think I was trying to safeguard myself in case one of the administrators tried to dismiss me by saying they had to send out the Community Alert in a timely manner to follow the law.

Yeah, I think that's done masterfully and shows that you've put a lot of thought and effort into this email. I also think bringing up the Clery Act again shows another example of how ESU is letting down women. To me it shows that they're uncommitted to actually understanding what women go through, but instead wants to appear as though they care and want to keep the community informed of all goings on.

If you're implying what I think you're implying, ESU just does these little community alert emails because of the federal funding they get for adhering to the Clery Act criteria (Lee, 2017). ESU is the quintessential university that literally just cares about their bottom line and image, all while pretending to care about women (Benoit, 2000).

Unfortunately, patriarchy runs rampant within institutions of higher learning and abuse against women in deeply engrained (Cannella & Perez, 2012; Dlamini & Adams, 2014; Treseler-Golden, 2018).

There's no way ESU truly understands the needs of women or could be there for us in times of turmoil, especially following a traumatic event.

Cannella and Perez (2012) further explain that academia is dominated by white men working to maintain their power and the gendered structures of the academe.

It all just came together for me. Complaining loudly threatens patriarchy, and white men's cushy positions, thus women must be silenced to maintain the social order (Ahmed, 2018; Cannella & Perez, 2012; Eltahawy, 2019; Hunnicutt, 2009).

> . . . You see, you will never understand how scared I felt when I was alone in my car. You'll never hear my teeth chatter or see my legs shake. You'll never hear the fear in my mom's voice when I called her to tell her what happened and you didn't imagine the worst-case scenario if just one thing went differently. You have the privilege as men not to have to think about these things. You have the privilege to be situationally aloof. You have the privilege to keep your keys in your pocket and not in between your fingers as a weapon.
>
> Do you know who is familiar with that incessant fear? Your wives, daughters, nieces, and female friends. Did you consider the fear that could have coursed through your veins and drained the color from your face if it was your daughter that called you crying about a potential kidnapping? Did you consider the anger, dismay, and betrayal you could have felt if you read the email that her university chose to circulate if it pertained to your daughter? It saddens me to no end, that to feel empathy people must think about it in terms of their own families, but again I am not surprised.

I hope that made them feel something. I feel like men only start to empathize with the fear women experience once they think about the women in their own lives.

Their male privilege protects them from truly seeing and acknowledging women's fear (Manne, 2020). It's like acknowledging women's experiences with violent men somehow implicates them personally (Zimmerman, 2014). That precludes men from recognizing how hegemonic masculinity perpetuates unsafe spaces for women in public, in private, and online (Challenger, 2021; Jane, 2014a; Yodanis, 2004; Zimmerman, 2014).

I know exactly what you mean. I didn't think I would be changing their whole approach to male privilege and the harm of the patriarchy, but I wanted them to get a chill down their spine, at least, and have some modicum of understanding about what women go through.

It's incredible in a depressing way how women, from high schoolers to college students to elderly women, have had frightening experiences with men and men still don't believe it (Blum, 2019; Lane et al., 2009; Pain, 1995).

> . . . I urge you to reread the three timely notices above, do some critical self-reflection, and ask yourself if this was the best response. If you had to do it all over again, would you send the email without speaking to the student in question? Are you okay with the message that this sends to women -- that reporting incidents to the authorities will only lead to gaslighting, shame, and institutionally coerced silence? Would you be okay with it if it were your loved one, even though that shouldn't be the standard?

* * *

I sit again in front of the document titled, "An Email." I'm so relieved the document is no longer blank. My heart is beating with increased rhythm, but not because of fear this time, but because of pride. I did that. I really *did* that. I'm so proud of myself for genuinely laying out exactly how I feel. I embraced, my power, my pain and stepped

into vulnerability. I scrolled to the top of the document and read it through once more. I'm in awe of my honesty and courage. I feel as though this is an authentic response to everything that's happened and I'm finally ready to let it all go. I want to feel like myself again. I want to feel like sunshine and walk with purpose. For too long, I've been feeling gray, weak, and like a miniature version of myself. With myself and my best interest at heart, I copy and paste my words from the document and into an email, where I address it to the top three ESU administrators as well as the campus police department. I stare at their email addresses and smirk because they are blissfully unaware of what's coming their way. I read my words one last time, while they still belong just to me.

Are you really going to send that?

You better believe it.

woosh

Chapter Six: Institutional Interlude - The Institution Empathizes

In exploring my interactions with a high powered, Senior Administrator, I introduce the concept of masks to illustrate the power dynamics at play during our meeting. From our genders, to our ranks within ESU, and the very room we sat in I felt at a disadvantage, but I came to this meeting with a purpose – to stand up for myself and demand an apology (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Taylor et al., 2020). I palpably struggle with this tension between feminist determination, a gendered disposition toward politeness, and a fawning response to trauma that can include empathy and fairness at the expense of my own interests and sense of self (Mullany, 2006; Owca, 2020; Walker, 2013). The masks are used as a device to emphasize the pressure I felt juggling self-advocacy with an infuriating, socialized need to be liked that perpetuates patriarchal values (Eltahawy, 2019).

The following section details my meeting with an ESU Senior Administrator, scheduled through his sweet secretary in response to my scathing email. Similar to the previous institutional interlude, it includes portions of real dialogue from the meeting within a comic frame. In this context, the comic framing aids me in interpreting my reality and highlighting, not only the absurdity of the interactions I had with institutional representatives, but the characters themselves (Burke, 1984; Christiansen & Hanson, 1996). Dadlez and Luthi (2018) argue that comedy and tragedy are two sides of the same coin and elicit specifically targeted emotions by "violat[ing] established patterns or expectations" (p. 82). Thus, incongruity is achieved and instead of falling prey to the sadness and demoralization embedded within situations such as mine, the comic frame encourages "laughter, reason, and action" as motivators for change (Christiansen & Hanson, 1996, p. 158).

Exterior Scene

A 20-something woman carrying a large tote bag walks across the quad of a nondescript university toward an equally nondescript building. Her facial expressions communicate feeling concerned, anxious, yet resolute. The golden hour sun shines down on her skin, illuminating the building ahead of her, and reflecting off the windows almost too brightly.

She opens the door and looks around, facing a picturesque building, carefully curated to communicate status and grandeur, unlike any other building on campus she frequents. Freshly picked flowers, crystal chandeliers, and Turkish rugs scream opulence.

A loud pounding heart is played over a loudspeaker. The woman looks around and mouths to the audience, "Is that me?" She pulls a mask out of her tote bag and places it on her face. It reads "strong-willed, feminist" across the top. She turns and looks to the side and says to the audience, "I'm here to stand up for myself, to have my own back". With this mask securely fastened, she climbs the grand staircase that looks like it was copied and pasted from the Titanic.

Scene: Office 1101. Senior Administrator

The office has its own waiting room and an inexplicable bureau of fine China. Yes, what you're thinking is also true. The bathroom does have an attendant giving out mints for tips, too.

The woman walks up to the secretary's desk:

Woman: I have a 4 o'clock meeting with Dr. Friendly.

Secretary: He'll be ready in a moment."

She offers the woman a hot towel, some reading material, and some booties to put over my shoes so I don't track dirt into his freshly Bisselled office, clean lines still visible on the pressed, beige carpet.

Enter - Dr. Friendly dressed up as the school mascot, Ernie the Eagle.

The woman's "Strong Willed Feminist Mask" slips off her face for a quick second, replaced by a look of shock and confusion - showing that she is not convinced of Dr. Friendly's expertise that preceded him. She mouths to the audience, "What am I even doing here?"

Dr. Friendly: Hey there (looks down at his notepad) treasured, valued, important, unique student, please come in! Choose any chair you like.

The woman looks around to see if this is a joke, strong willed feminist mask still slipping off her face. She turns to the audience and speaks: This really is the Senior Administrator dressed as an Eagle. This isn't Punk'd. Ashton isn't here. This unfortunately is my real life.

Dr. Friendly: You look a little shocked. Is everything okay?

Woman: Oh, yeah. I'm just getting settled in.

Dr. Friendly: Oh, I know. You're unsettled by the costume. This really must look ridiculous, but I am just so moved by the spirit of this school. I was in the library motivating all the students working so diligently. Let me make you a little more comfortable.

Dr. Friendly removes the head of Ernie the Eagle to reveal his perfectly coiffed, blonde hair, baby blue eyes, and perfect smile that twinkled in the afternoon sun. He takes a seat across from the woman.

Dr. Friendly: Well, let me just say that I take what happened to you at the grocery store so seriously. So deadly seriously. So incredibly seriously. What happened to you at grocery store was not okay and what the university did to you was not okay. I also wanted to apologize for the experience you've had from ESU and as the person who oversees sort of the student experience, I want to apologize for the experience you've had. I want to take the time to hear what's on your mind, whatever you want to share with me. And remember, I have a Ph.D in higher education studies. Ph makes an "F" sound, F is for friend, and I am your friend, above all,"

Dr. Friendly turns to the audience and his eyes twinkle and teeth sparkle.

Woman: Thank you for... that. I want you to understand that ESU made me feel unsafe. And like this response made me feel unsafe, outed, and identified.

ESU attacked my credibility and made a judgement about the report, which has never been done in the past. If something were to happen to me again, why would I ever tell ESU about it? It's a disservice to me, it's a disservice to women. Honestly, I don't really think it's my job to correct it. I think that should be this institution of higher learning's job. It was completely the wrong move and hurtful for someone all the way from California. And I chose to come back here for my master's degree, so it's disheartening to be treated like this, when all I was trying to do was make people aware, and advocate for situational awareness, and just try to keep other women safe."

Dr. Friendly: Mhmm, mhmm, mhmm. I hear you. I felt that. Wow. That's so awful. Can you walk me through what happened at the grocery store again and what the police said? I don't need you to do the whole thing, but I wasn't there and I haven't talked to you before, so I don't really know what happened. I'm not trying to make you relive anything but I'm still trying to get a sense of what happened.

Woman: They told me there was nothing they could do. But this is larger than me. I have been let down. So many other women have been let down. This has larger implications about how women are treated in this community. And I'm sure you're familiar with ESU's less than stellar track record, with responding to women and their reports of assault and violence and stuff like I don't need to go into all those instances, but it's a disappointing track record. And to me, it felt upheld, yet again.

Dr. Friendly: Well, I inherited a lot of that. What happened here with you is my responsibility, but I can't account for all of those other very unfortunate cases. How the university handled it in the past is squarely in the past. While we did make a big mess up here with you, I have worked really hard to try and fix some of the unfortunate incidents that have occurred during my tenure.

Woman: You mean the various reports of sexual assault and violence against women? And being disregarded by ESU?

Dr. Friendly: Yes, like I said, the unfortunate incidents. And just so you know that I am doing my job, I have met with student groups and they have been very hostile and aggressive about how women have been treated before and since I have been in this position. I still want to hear their stories, even when they're mean to me."

The woman takes off her strong-willed feminist and pulls a new one out of her bag that says, "fawning female" and secures it over her face, yearning to be liked and approved of by a male authority figure doing the bare expected bare minimum.

Woman: Wow. That sounds like it was a really hard thing to inherit and deal with. But it sounds like you're working really hard to right some wrongs and correct course on how ESU handles reports from women experiencing violence.

Dr. Friendly: Yes, of course and I am trying my best. One of the things that has happened to a lot of students in the past that I don't want to have happen to you is they have a love for this place. And they build that love over the years of being here and then things happen through no fault of our own, but they feel betrayed by us, like we let them down, just like you feel like we have let you down. And I don't want you to forget that this actually has been a great experience for you for four years before and two more years. You should feel like you're allowed to love this place despite failings, you should feel secure that we learned from those failings and eventually did better. And we're going to make it up to you over the course of the long term.

The Woman trades her "Fawning female mask for her strong-willed feminist mask, making a triumphant, yet short-lived return.

Woman: So, what do you think is going to change? Since you said things will change over the long term?

Dr. Friendly: I mean I'm not a psychic, so I can't tell you exactly what will change. I mean, this all just happened within the past couple of weeks. Something will change because of your experience. I don't know what yet. But I know that I will think about this differently. I know that when I'm asked, hey, what should we do about this? I will stop and ask more questions and challenge myself and those around me a little bit more than I did. If

nothing else, my approach to these types of situations will be different in the future, because of your experience, and I know this doesn't make your experience feel better. But how I approach these in the future will be different because of what you experienced.

Woman: It does make my experience better. I want to trust you. I want to believe you that something's going to change. That's what matters to me. That's why I penned that email and didn't let it go. I would rather my experience be worth something. So, thank you for listening and understanding me and where I'm coming from. And besides, I'm not a wallower or sufferer and I really appreciate you saying all of that. And I think that, yes, that's exactly right. I just wanted to feel heard. And it's a fact that someone dropped the ball and I appreciate you owning it. Accountability is important. I don't know, that's why I couldn't let it go."

The Woman reaches into her large bag and pulls out her "people pleasing, pick me, accepting the bare minimum" mask. Secures it to her face. The woman turns to the audience, "Told you it was short lived."

Dr. Friendly: Well, thank you for saying that and thank you for coming in and voicing your concerns. It's the very very very very, bare minimum least I could do. It's important to me that you feel like you could come here and feel heard. And feel free to let everyone know how pleased you are with this process and this outcome. I would love for your friends, family,

colleagues, and professors to know how well I handled this and how I fell on the sword when you felt betrayed by ESU. I'm sure you know, I got an email from your mom and, boy, does she have a way with pointed words. Maybe you could tell her how well this went so her needs are assuaged and she's not so angry with me anymore.

Woman: Oh, yeah, sure. I'll definitely talk to her in a few minutes to let her know how it went and just update her that your personal thinking has changed but nothing tangible beyond that. Thank you, again. I really appreciate your time.

Dr. Friendly: You're welcome! Here, for your time and effort, please take this ESU foam finger on me! E-S-U Eaaaaaagles!!"

Woman drops all of the masks on the floor as she walks out of Dr. Friendly's office holding a foam finger.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

This thesis reflects on feminist complaint and *is* a furtherance of feminist complaint scholarship (Ahmed, 2019). It illustrates the complexities of being a woman operating within male dominated institutions and the uniquely gendered consequences that occur when complaining about the conditions that make life difficult. At each stage of my interactions with institutional representatives, I was treated as though I was a burden. I made the choice to notify the police and subsequently, my community, which was interpreted as a complaint and I was swiftly silenced and shamed in order for the institutions to frame my complaint as illegitimate (Ahmed, 2019). This thesis reveals the danger of institutional responses that are deeply mired in patriarchal values, as they continue to denigrate women's experiences and communicate that our feelings of unsafety and exposure to gender-based fear and harassment is unbelievable and unimportant.

My thesis additionally shows how few spaces women are able to exist within safely and the importance of social support following a traumatic event. Studies show that women are more likely to be harmed by someone they know, rather than a stranger in a public place, and yet a pervasive fear of dark, public spaces prevail (Condon et al., 2007; Day, 2001; Lane, 2009; Valentine, 1992). While ESU may think they're promoting safety within the community, this project exposes the counterproductive perpetuation of the fear of public spaces and strangers in their institutional documents (Lane, 2009):

> If something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts and contact police immediately. If you feel endangered or in doubt in a situation, call 911 immediately. Remain alert and observant of your surroundings. Trust your

> instincts. If you sense trouble, get to a safe place as soon as possible. Take notice of any person who does not belong in the area (Community Alert).

Furthermore, this thesis exhibits the danger of women reporting their experiences of violence and unsafety in online spaces. Through a storied examination of exemplar comments I received on my Facebook post detailing my ordeal, I learned that online harassment is just as painful and demoralizing as offline verbal abuse. According to Nadim and Fladmoe (2019) and Jane (2014a), gendered online harassment is just patriarchal, misogynist verbal abuse in a new realm (p. 246). Women field online hate more often than men, and this type of online harassment uniquely targets the identities of the subject to induce vulnerability and "reinforce the difference between the genders" (Chakraborti & Garland, 2015; Nadim & Faldmoe, 2019, p. 246). Unfortunately, in situations such as these, complaining about harassment only breeds more harassment (Ahmed, 2018; Jane, 2014a). The only positive discovery following abusive Facebook comments attacking my credibility was the overwhelming social support from my partner, close friends and family. In the face of trauma and re-traumatization from the initial incident in the grocery store, to the Facebook post backlash, and the Community Alert, the strong presence of my support system allowed me to process, heal, and instilled resilience within me (Sippel, 2015). Their unending support reduced my likelihood of experiencing negative posttraumatic cognitions and maladaptive behavior in the months following (Kaniasty, 2012; Lui et al., 2009; Maheux et al., 2016).

Ultimately, this is also a thesis showcasing the power of women's anger in the face of hardship and how the embrace and broadcasting of this emotion is agentive, healing, and a driving force for change. Female anger has long been a threat to the social,

patriarchal order - radical and subversive (Goodman, 2020; Traister, 2019). Traister (2019) argues that women's anger possesses revolutionary power with the potential to resist hegemonic constructions of femininity, as well as the binds of patriarchy. I felt that power and urge for change in my bones as I unleashed my rage in the letter to ESU's senior administrators. Embracing and honoring the totality of my emotions and directing them toward the institutions who had humiliated me, I reflected on the women bound by the institutions around us that pressure women to quash their own anger (Garber, 2018; Goodman, 2020). The systemic racist, sexist structures of society create obstacles for so many women of color and other women in the expression of their truths and in being believed (K. Crenshaw, 1991; Easteal et al, 2017; Griffin, 2012; Patterson, 2010). I recognize that role of racial privilege in my own liberation of the inexorable expectations of women's emotions with very few material consequences.

Methodological Implications

This thesis demonstrated a range of methodological choices to showcase the impacts of feminist complaint and the absurdity of institutional power that seeks to silence women. I made stylistic choices with the text to provide a window into how I experienced each of the events storied, how I processed them towards sensemaking, and how I interface with the scholarly literature. Utilizing tapering fonts, boldness, italics, superscript, and subscript was a method to make sense of how I was experiencing reading ESU's Community Alert and the comments under my Facebook post. I sought to jar the reader, make them uncomfortable, and force them to sit with the chaos and lack of control I felt when I read words written in response to my trauma and fear. I gained inspiration from Fletcher (2018), Fox (2014), and Metta (2013) and their remarkable

work using embodied forms of writing and creative methods of text on the page to jolt the reader into feeling specific emotions. Using these disjointed, chaotic styles helped me tap into the emotions and contributed to memory work, and create an embodied, emotional, and mindful autoethnography.

In addition to using words on the page in a nontraditional way, I used auto/archaeology to layer texts to allow the reader to experience these personal and institutional documents as I have (Fox, 2010). Layered within these texts are moments of intrapersonal processing of what the content means, how the content affects my self-perception, as well as how outsiders perceive me. Fox (2010) argues that gay autoethnographers are experts for negotiating systemic construction of gay identities. Thus, I assert that women similarly occupy positions to interrogate how institutions "constrain and enable" the identities of women (p. 124). As a woman complaining about a gender-based incident I am able to highlight how the policing and educational institution work in lockstep with one another to quickly dismiss my story because it called into question the veracity of their commitment to keep women safe. The layered method includes the reader in this process by removing temporal barriers as I negotiate my identity within institutional, mediated, and personal documents. My reaction to being accused of false reporting, and subsequently questioning whether or not what I feel happened, is visceral.

In lieu of a traditional literature review, I opted to dialogically layer the literature within the texts to illustrate how I interact and converse with these grounding ideas (Frentz & Hocker, 2010). As I researched and found guiding literature, I found comfort in understanding the principles and academic explanations for what happened to me. It is an

act of self-love and healing to explain these underlying concepts to my past self who felt so misunderstood, confused, and alone. Dialogue is used as a way to "generate social and personal knowledge" as I reflected on what was happening on gendered and institutional levels (Frentz & Hocker, 2010, p. 621; Goodall, 2000). In these dialogic vignettes, the "me" on the left side of the page is the academic representative explaining the fundamental concepts to the right side of the page "me," who is still immersed in emotion, exhausted searching for any explanation for *why*. Mingé (2016) supposes that our realities and knowledges are "messy, complex, and multiple," and in my case, they can exist like this within the same person. The more I absorbed the extant literature and dialogically explained it to myself, the more both present and past me are able to make sense of each step of this odyssey (Frentz & Hocker, 2010; Mingé, 2016). In autoethnographic writing, dialogically presenting the relevant literature may further situate the author within their texts, have emancipatory potential from hegemonic constraints, and provide a method for embodied ways of knowing (Spry, 2001).

In the face of injustice, I employed Burke's (1984) comic frames in the institutional interludes to poignantly reflect how I view these interactions presently – as absurd, laughable moments in my life that are better characterized as comic, rather than tragic. Individuals interpret their reality as it fits them and the comic frame has aided me in illuminating the space in which institutions have for growth, rather than their abject failings (Burke, 1984). For example, by making the Senior Administrator a caricature who claims to care about women's issues yet blames student groups advocating for women's safety for using a harsh tone with him, we see a disparity in value statements of the university versus the experiences of the individuals therein, especially when women's

anger threatens their patriarchal position (Cannella & Perez, 2012; Eltahawy, 2019; Hunnicutt, 2009). Again, the use of the comic frame acts as a sensemaking mechanism for me and also as a way to shape the reader's interpretation of the institutional actors. I want readers to feel amused and embarrassed for the police officers and Senior Administrator, not feel pity for me in this instance (Burke, 1984; Dadlez & Luthi, 2018). Moreover, not only does the comic frame offer levity in pointing out the irrationality and absurdity of the institutional representatives, but it also has agentive properties in that the frame allows me to resist prescribed roles and identities I'd previously been occupying (Christiansen & Hanson, 1996).

One important narrative feature within both of the institutional interludes is the concept of "masks." I use masks as devices to demonstrate identity negotiation and grappling with who I perceive myself to be (a courageous, outspoken, authentic woman), along with how others see me, and how I *want* them to see me. In my interactions with the police and ESU, I felt most affected by the identities these institutions had prescribed for me, so I "wore masks" to prove that I was different than what they had constructed me to be (Fox, 2010). Alternatively, or simultaneously, perhaps, I wore masks to help me to feel confident in moments where my power and agency escaped me, so I could once again be the woman I thought myself to be (Fox, 2010). A facet of this mask wearing is certainly gendered. Young et al. (2005) find that patriarchy is so deeply ingrained in women that we occasionally act against our own self-interest for men's approval. When I assert to the Senior Administrator that "I'm not a wallower," I now ask myself whether this is true for me at the time, or whether I diminished how hurt I had been in an attempt to foster connection. Reflecting back in the present, it is clear that I again wore a mask to

construct an identity in which I am "not a wallower" and thus more likable in a man's eyes because it is less of a feminine trait (Young et al., 2005). In sum, including masks as a narrative device within the institutional interludes aided my sensemaking in terms of understanding how I created my identities under institutional constraints, especially when interfacing with male administrators.

Implications for Theory and Practice

In terms of praxis, this thesis serves as an example of the complications and injustices that arise when women complain about mistreatment within an institution of which they are a part. Women are so often discouraged from reporting and complaining about instances of gender-based violence and other forms of harassment, relegated as potential damage for the complainer, as well as the institution (Ahmed, 2018; Fernando & Prasad, 2019). This knowledge, upheld by male-dominated rules and values, pervades women's decision making when deciding whether or not to report or speak out about an experience of violence, resulting in abysmal reporting rates on college campuses (Moore & Baker, 2018). Even when I was hyperventilating in my own passenger seat on the phone with my dad, I asked him, "What if they don't believe me?" In the midst of my fear, heightened heart rate and breathing, actively putting together the pieces of what had just occurred, I was concerned with whether or not I would be believed. This demonstrates how disciplined women's fear of being disbelieved is. On the scariest night of my life thus far, I was concerned with whether or not the police would believe me and if there would be consequences for me if they didn't.

My preoccupation with being believed is illustrative of the secondary victimization and symbolic violence that looms over women who consider reporting or

speak out about their encounters with gender-based violence, harassment, and fears for their safety in public and private spaces. Personally, being immediately placated by the police, victim-blamed and talked down to in my Facebook post comments, and later publicly identified and shamed by ESU was more painful and difficult to navigate than the original incident at the grocery store. Secondary victimization, which commonly occurs within the policing institution, can occur when a victim is disbelieved and made to feel unreliable following a disclosure about gender-based fear and intimidation (Campbell, 1998; Madigan & Gamble, 1991; Martin & Powell, 1995; Patterson, 2010). Secondary victimization manifests as emotional trauma accompanied by the negative reactions of others and can be a form of patriarchal symbolic violence because it serves to constrain and control women and certainly, stop them from complaining about violence at the hands of men (Angeliqa & Sarwono, 2018; Bourdieu, 2001; Gravelin et al., 2015).

Exploring these experiences has revealed that secondary victimization is an important aspect of feminist complaint when it occurs within patriarchal institutions and requires an institutional response. Even further, institutional documents that respond to feminist complaint have the potential to perpetrate secondary victimization (Ahmed, 2018; Ahmed, 2019). In my experience, ESU strategically diminished my character and credibility in public documents circulated to the entire university community, an act of symbolic violence constraining my actions as a woman, which resulted in significant secondary victimization. Scholars have raised questions about whether or not the Clery Act is achieving what it was created to do and my experiences reveals that not only is it ineffective in promoting reporting of crimes, but that the ways in which universities adhere to the Clery Act causes real, material harm (Lee, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2007).

Ultimately, there is space here to expand feminist complaint inquiry to include secondary victimization and symbolic violence inflicted by institutions.

Following this assertion, feminist complaint, as it has been used in this thesis, may be used as a method for institutional critique. Through the lens of feminist complaint, the university reveals itself to be a public relations machine more concerned with its image, rather than the safety of women who choose to publicly detail their encounters with gender-based feelings of terror and unsafety. As a response to my Facebook post, ESU chose to ignore my fear and perceptions of unsafety and instead, focus their energy on discrediting me and labelling my truth unfounded via a Clery Act mandated community alert meant to keep individuals safe (Lee, 2017). First, this choice is representative of ESU's priorities and reveals that its image is more of an asset to be protected and more important than their students' safety (Benoit, 2006; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Second, ESU's response shows disregard for the intentions of the Clery Act as it perpetuates symbolic violence which functions to disincentivize speaking out, creating the experience another form of gender-based violence (Bourdieu, 2001; Lee, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2007).

What made this experience especially painful is my previous relationship with ESU that were full of great experiences, which made them feel like a friend (Ashforth et al., 2020). Institutions such as ESU go through painstaking lengths to operate with singularity via anthropomorphizing to create connections between the university and those within it (Ashforth et al., 2020; Boyd, 2017). These practices ultimately shirk ESU's responsibility to their students and make an attempt to shroud the patriarchal, oppressive happenings within the university, especially with regard to women voicing

their complaints. In this context, feminist complaint praxis allows scholars to review institutional documents disseminated in response to women speaking out, highlight how these documents operate to affirm institution's images, while simultaneously shaming women for owning their truth publicly (Ahmed, 2007; Ahmed, 2018; Benoit, 2006). Lastly, in regard to the Clery Act, feminist complaint scholarship provides a window into critiquing universities' handling of reported gender-based unsafety and assault to determine the effectiveness of their approach to engaging with women.

Implications for Empathy

For too long empathy, comprised of "imaginative projection, awareness of other's emotions, and concern," has been relegated as trait relevant and pertinent for females only (Strauss, 2008, p. 432). Cross-disciplinary literature, however, shows that there may be not be a biological difference between sexes regarding capacity for empathy, yet the stereotype is furthered by cultural norms, discourse, and behavior (Chodorow, 1997; Christov-Moore et al., 2014; Strauss, 2008). While there are not biological differences in the ways men and women think and feel, the discourses surrounding empathy exacerbate how these differences are perceived (Christov-Moore et al., 2014; Strauss, 2008). Difference feminists argue that women's socialization to be nurturing and empathetic has shaped women's moral judgments and extension of compassion toward others (Gilligan, 1982).

I am proud of the depth of my own and my fellow women's caring and the lengths we are willing to go through to understand another human being. However, my reflections on my meeting with ESU's Senior Administrator revealed that in a situation where I should have been the sole subject of his empathy, there were moments in which

the roles were reversed and I was instead empathizing with him. With this action, wearing this empathy-laced mask, I betrayed my own interests to comfort a man and connect with him, despite the harm he'd perpetrated against me (Young et al., 2015). Simply accepting that women are more compassionate and empathetic perpetuates the burden of emotional labor and consequently reduces the onus and responsibility that falls on men when engaging in sensitive topics such as gender-based harm and violence. Frankly, we need to demand more understanding, empathy, and care from the men in leadership positions who are responsible for the safety of women. Women not only deserve more, but need more in order to live more well-rounded, secure lives and I assert that a feminist practice in empathy will lead to change in higher education practices surrounding feminist complaint (Watson et al., 2013).

As noted in the previous section, this thesis has called into question the effectiveness of how universities approach and engage women who choose to be vocal about and/or report gender-based intimidation and harassment. ESU's response exposes a complete lack of empathy and understanding of not only my experience of danger and fear, but the pervading sense of unsafety to which women must attend (Condon et al., 2007; Day, 2001; Lane, 2009; Valentine, 1992). While I eventually received an apology from a Senior Administrator at ESU, it came only after I embraced every ounce of my rage and fury to enlighten him and his colleagues about their errors in judgement. To say this conduct is unacceptable is an understatement. ESU's actions are indicative of hierarchal, patriarchal, and oppressive approaches to gendered issues and affairs that are unique to women (Ahmed, 2019; Canella & Perez, 2012; Foucault, 1980; Musolf, 1992).

As such, my experience and this thesis have revealed a deep need for a feminist approach to interfacing with women who have experienced gender-based fear and are making the choice to report it to the university. I so deeply wish that ESU had the foresight to understand what they were putting me through when they proclaimed I was a liar, contributing to and "renewing false social media rumors" about trafficking. It is still so difficult to fathom how anyone thought that course of action was right, affirming, or safe in any way. However, I then remember that higher education is dominated by White men and it becomes clear how victim blaming, shaming, and symbolic violence can be part of ESU's modus operandi when addressing women who have dealt with gender-based violence and harassment (Cannella & Perez, 2012; Frazer & Hutchings, 2014). Crucially, this thesis has identified space for growth and change within universities to be more circumspect and mindful about their practices when dealing with complex, nuanced situations what warrant care and empathy.

Implications for Interfacing with Institutions

Institutions are sites where positionality dictate one's experience, especially when interfacing with institutional representatives. I've written this autoethnography from the position of a White, queer, educated, upper middle-class woman. I am the recipient of privilege I never earned and because of this societal born privilege, the interactions I had with the police officers and the ESU Senior Administrator were safer than what women of color and folks with other marginalized identities are likely to have experienced. If my identities were different, if I were a woman of color or if I had grown up in an area of lower socioeconomic status, it is highly unlikely that I would have made the same choices throughout this ordeal. My identities have shaped my perceptions about who to

call when I feel unsafe and how I am able to express my anger and to whom. What follows is a discussion of identities and privilege, and how mine both aided and negatively affected my treatment while I navigated different interactions with ESU staff and the local police department.

I was uncomfortable calling the police for political reasons, but on a subconscious level, I knew that this institution was built to protect me. My whiteness is not seen as a threat to police officers, and I assumed that they would help me because of my skin color. Phipps (2021) explains this assumption relates to the paternalistic underpinnings of policing institutions and the 'damsel in distress' trope only further "evokes a protective response" from usually male police officers (p. 84). In news stories involving white, female victims, there are more sympathetic themes and tones as opposed to stories involving Black or Latina women (Slakoff & Brennan, 2020). Due to the tendency to see White women's plight as sympathetic, I willingly followed my father's advice to call the police. In doing so, I perpetuated raced, hegemonic femininity by playing the damsel and allowing the police roll up in their squad cars, playing the white knights here to rescue me from the threat.

Importantly, this is not the case for all people who encounter violence and are faced with a choice about whether or not to call the police or involve their university. The presence of police does not necessarily lead to lower crime incidence and in their presence, Black people are more likely to be arrested and brutalized (Avakame et al., 1999; Kleck & Barnes, 2014; Ortner, 2020; Small, 2018). Low income, people of color are far less likely to call the police than white people with resources (Small, 2018). Thus, a woman of color in my position would have been unlikely to call the police in the first

place, in an effort to avoid escalating the situation in any way (Schwartz, 2020). In the context of higher education, it is paramount to note that, female students of color are far less likely to formally report their experiences of assault than their white counterparts (Spencer et al., 2020). Similarly, LGBTQ+ students are more likely to be victimized on college campuses than heterosexual students and only report these experiences 6% of the time (Eisenberg et al., 2021). These statistics suggest that the reporting infrastructure is not designed to service students with diverse identities, and instead privileges those with dominant identities, as they are informed by racist, sexist, and homophobic foundations.

The privilege of my white skin is in tension with more marginalized treatment that comes with being a woman. The policing institution is inherently patriarchal and racialized, and as such, women who report instances of gender-based intimidation or assault (Ortner, 2020). After telling the street cops what happened and returning to my car feeling emptier and more confused than before, I called my dad and told him that they didn't even write anything down. He replied, "Well, what did you expect?" While this response is frustrating, it highlights the fact that it is a privilege to even have my expectations violated in this context. I expected my whiteness to assist the police in believing me. However, women are rarely believed when reporting gender-based violence, rape, and other violent crimes and are told their cases don't warrant further investigation (Campbell et al., 1999; Patterson, 2010). The "baritone 'voice' of the legal system" continually dismisses the validity of uniquely gendered crimes and blames women for the crimes committed against them, which perpetrates secondary violence against women which is equally dehumanizing its own right (Easteal et al., 2012, p. 325; Patterson, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, victim blaming isn't experienced equally. The hazards of reporting instances of gender-based violence affect Black women more heavily than White women (Patterson, 2010). George and Martinez (2002) found that Black women are seen as less credible victims and their reports of rape are "less uniformly judged as 'definitely rape'" (p. 110). Increased perception of culpability elicits lower levels of humanity of reporters and willingness to help the women disclosing instances of violence, which may lead to future violence (Baldry et al., 2015). Women are also constructed as unreliable through the minimization and outright denial of their experiences, which leads to the natural questioning of whether their truth matters (Henning & Holdford, 2006). In contexts such as the criminal justice system and university judicial processes, the minimization of women's disclosure of sexual violence perpetuates the hierarchical pyramid that consistently disempowers women (Henning & Holdford, 2006; Triplett, 2012). Because of this, it is crucial to resist patriarchal precedent in all forms and institutions to affirm, celebrate, and believe women to promote confidence and empowerment (Rawat, 2014). To that end, the telling of stories about gender-based fear and violence and the dismissal by institutional representatives is necessary for creating community, understanding, and ultimately, change.

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