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The real F-word: Feminism An exploration of feminism and the female experience on college campuses

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The Real F-Word: Feminism

An Exploration of Feminism and the Female Experience on College Campuses

A Project Presented to
The Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Visual and Performing Arts
James Madison University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by Beatrice Rose Owens

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Accepted by the faculty of the School of Theatre and Dance, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts.

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For all the women who continually inspire me.

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Preface

When I set out to complete this project I found myself becoming increasingly daunted. How could I possibly hope to talk in great detail about feminism on college campuses? Why did I believe that I was worthy of being a mouthpiece of a movement? Did I even understand feminism? I quickly discovered that there was no need for that kind of worry because there was no one telling me that I had to be the spokesperson for an entire movement, I just needed to tell the story that I was inspired to tell.

The inspiration for this project has evolved as often and as entirely as I have in my four years of undergraduate study at James Madison University. I am thankful that I had those three semesters, afforded by the Honors Program, in which to allow each iteration of this project to take its shape and evolve into what is presented here now. As this project developed I discovered that everyone had an opinion. Whether it was from faculty, peers, or the scholarship I was gathering for my research there is an abundance of not only information but also opinion on the subject of feminism and how it relates to young women. I was repeatedly presented with two interesting pieces of advice during my work that greatly influenced where this project ultimately ended up. First, you cannot hate men. Second, do not be a victim.

To clarify, I do not hate men. There are a number of men in my life that have not only supported me but have inspired me in their support of women and feminism. I do hate the men who choose to sexually assault women, just as I would hate anyone regardless of their gender who made a decision to violate another human being in that way. I do hate those men but I do not hate all men, or even most men. What was most astounding to me, however, was being told not to be a victim. This was told to me by a number of people, some whom are even in positions of power here at the university, and I found it shockingly inappropriate. What qualifies another

person to dictate the experience of another? Is it not similarly violating to a young woman, if she has been victimized, to take from her the ability to name the state that has befallen her? Victimhood has been cast into the shadows as something unacceptable, pity seeking, and unproductive. What is the truth, however, of a woman who has been sexually assaulted in her four years of college? She has been victimized. That is just the simple truth and to take that away from her is to take away from her the beginnings of the healing process. It is impossible to move to survivor if you cannot acknowledge the place of victim.

That is where this project was truly born. Born out of the anger and frustration attached to the taboo of victimhood. Sexual assault on college campuses is growing more and more into an epidemic and as much as it is discussed publicly there is very little personal conversation developing amongst faculty, students, and administrators that has allowed women to feel safe enough to come forward about their victimization. For this piece, I refused to negate the victim because it is in allowing someone to be a victim that we take the first step forward towards healing. Through allowing the victim we can all move towards being survivors.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my faculty committee. First and foremost, Ingrid De Sanctis, my advisor and mentor, thank you for not only inspiring me throughout this project but for inspiring me throughout my four years as your student. The passion with which you talk about women, playwriting, and the power of a single voice never ceases to amaze me. To my readers, Meredith Conti and Zachary Dorsey, thank you for your constant support throughout a whirlwind process. Just knowing that you both were there to offer encouragement, advice, and a warm smile kept me working even when I was not sure I could accomplish such a lofty goal. This team reminded me that I am capable of exciting things and that I am incredibly lucky to have such amazing professors and role models within this department.

To Terry Dean and the residents of Wayland Hall, thank you for opening up the Wayland Performance Studio for the staged reading of *Buried (A Feminist Exploration)*. As the creative portion of this project it was vital that I found a time and place for this piece to be heard and the Performance Studio was perfect. Thank you for opening up your residence as a safe place for this art and its first viewing.

To my team of readers: Amy Slothower, Brendan Gaffey, Cullen Herter, and Emma Wellington, thank you. You each brought such power and talent to the roles you read and a powerful sense of collaboration to the performance process. It would not have happened without you. Additionally, thank you to Rachel Jones for recording the performance so that I can keep it as a memory, a learning tool, and a reminder of the work that went into this beautiful final product.

This project would also not have been possible without the entirety of the School of Theatre and Dance and the Honors Program at James Madison University. Thank you for giving me the knowledge, tools, and space in which to succeed in this project and my undergraduate education.

Finally, to my family and friends who constantly support my work, thank you. I am the person I am today because of the love and support of each and every one of you. It is truly a gift to be surrounded by so many people who want to help you succeed and I am grateful to know that I have found those people in all of you.

Abstract

Using third-wave feminism and playwriting as the foundation, this project intends to examine the history of feminism as it influences the current third-wave in the United States of American with a specific focus on the impact it has on college students. This project examines the development of feminism throughout history and asks whether that historical development has contributed significantly to the way in which millennial men and women understand and relate to feminism presently. Through the compilation of research and the creation of a performance piece, performed on April 1, 2016 in the Wayland Performance Studio, this project examines what it means to identify as a feminist on college campuses today, particularly as it pertains to sexual assault and rape culture. While this project identifies that third-wave feminism as a movement is creating space for many young women and men to identify as feminists and voice their opinions it is also apparent that the voices of women are still being silenced, particularly when dealing with assault. It is suggested that this project be a starting point for a dialogue on college-based feminism but that more research and discussion is necessary before drawing any widespread conclusions.

Introduction

In today's society, the act of identifying as a feminist is a radical one. The radicalization of using this identifier has been present since the word's first appearance in English in the 1890s, coming from the French *féminisme*. In 1913, the prolific writer and feminist spokeswoman Rebecca West was quoted saying, "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is...I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute" (Walters 1). West articulates a common issue amongst women (and men) as they wrestle to understand their own beliefs. That to use the term feminism is to often be met with an abundance of negative connotation and disregard. So what exactly is feminism? According to an Omnibus Poll conducted in April 2013, 82% of adults responded yes when asked, "Do you believe that men and women should be social, political, and economic equals?" (Swanson). The Oxford English Dictionary defines feminism as "advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex." Considering that this definition is a direct reflection of the question posed to participants in the Omnibus Poll it is logical to assume that the full 82% would then also choose to identify as feminists, but only 20% of those adults that agreed that men and women should be social, political, and economic equals also identified under the label feminist in subsequent questioning for the Omnibus Poll (Swanson). The final results of the poll revealed that only one-fifth of Americans identify as feminists, even when a majority of them do in fact believe in the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of political, social, and economic equality. There is a disconnect between the word and its meaning. A disconnect that has not only complicated the ways in which Americans understand and relate to the word feminist but also a disconnect that is hampering the feminist's movements progression. Feminism has become a dirty word.

The intention of this project is to, through exploration and research, prove that the notion of ‘feminism’ as a dirty word is not merely an outdated struggle of the movement but rather a current and pressing issue, especially for young women and men on college campuses. This project is intended as an exploration rather than a solid conclusion in which, by way of a staged reading of the original work *Buried (A Feminist Exploration)* and the accompanying research, I can identify where I sit within current feminist culture and how that self-identification may reflect or contrast the larger experience of millennials on college campuses across the country. However, the breadth of work done in crafting an original work and the scholarship compiled on feminism provides a wealth of information upon which I can make the assertion that while the movement has progressed, the negative connotations tied to the word ‘feminism’ is still one of the biggest issues that it faces in its current development.

Religious Roots, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution

Current scholarship on feminism, which is situated in the third-wave, ideologically revolves around “gender feminism,” a title given to the echo left by the radical feminism of the 1980s by Christina Hoff Sommers (McElroy 28). Gender feminism has as its main focus the historically “uninterrupted oppression of women by men that spans cultural barriers,” identifying this societal system of oppression as “patriarchy” (McElroy 28). As such, gender feminism has identified a mission of social reconstruction rather than social integration as a means through which to provide women equal protection and freedom within society.

While much current discourse on feminism begins with Sommers’ gender feminism, it is important to note that even before the first-wave of feminism a major vehicle through which women could claim a voice for themselves and their fellow women was within their religious institutions, namely the church (Walters 6). From a purely historical standpoint, gender feminism is a new development within the extensive history and tradition of feminism. Current feminists often dismiss this unlikely beginning in religion as gender feminism has pushed much of the opinion in the direction that religious frameworks are actually constricting and oppressing to women’s fight for equality to their male counterparts. Nevertheless, women’s connection to God or a spiritual power and their vocalization of that connection through their religious frameworks are where much of the feminist struggle and empowerment begins.

For centuries, in Europe, it was common practice for families to dispose of undesirable daughters within the church, finding them places in a convent where their inability to marry would not be a source of shame to their families. This blatant oppression, while stifling many, fostered an environment in which some women “were able to read and think, and discover their own distinctive voices” leading to the writing’s of women on the subject of religion, God, and

morality as early as the eleventh century (Walters 6). Women, such as Jane Anger in the late 16th century, found their religious framework the ideal platform upon which to begin their argument for equality. Anger, in what has been called “the earliest piece of English feminist polemic,” challenges the previously undisputed position of Adam’s superiority to Eve (Walters 9). From her perspective, observing that God made Eve of Adam’s own flesh a purer substance than his own forgery from the Earth it situated Eve so “that she might be purer than he” (Walters 9). In fact, being made of such pure material as Adam’s flesh it establishes woman as man’s own salvation, the more sacred extension of himself (Walters 9). This deeply religious argument, in which Eve is now seen as salvation as opposed to her more common identifier as the party responsible for the Fall, attempts to resituate women’s value and power within the church. This argument extends past religion into the domestic sphere, in which Anger reminds her readers that it is woman who provides for the health and well being of man within the home.

But even as women found space in which to claim equality within religion, they were also met with the constant need to defend their sex against overwhelmingly negative scriptural depictions of women: “Delilah was treacherous, Jezebel murderous, [and] Eve was directly responsible for the Fall of the human race” (Walters 9). These images plagued the equality of women in a religious context. These biblical female archetypes extend far beyond current religious framework contributing to the common stereotypes of women within the roles of the virgin, the mother, or the whore. But the breadth of negative connotation that infused these scriptural female standards did not hamper the dedication with which many women fought to have their voices heard. The commonality of their arguments appears to lie within the woman’s dominant role of the time: mother. Many arguments were made that God’s love was that of a

mother's love for her children but some, such as Aemilia Lanyer in 1611, would even push it so far as to remind her male peers:

Christ was begotten of a woman, born of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman... he healed women, pardoned women, comforted women... after his resurrection, appeared first to a women. (Walters 10).

The consistency with which these women utilized the religious infrastructure within which they were contained to argue for greater acceptance and equality in their communities echoes the later developments of feminism in its three waves. However, this consistency was met with an equally consistent suppression as the words of women moved away from reverence to those of challenge. Particularly in the seventeenth century, those institutions that rejected the established Church were found to be much stronger proponents of religious freedom for both men and women. This trend would continue, excepted by the Quakers, even into the present day.

The Quakers, unlike many others, "encouraged women to speak out at gatherings, to become leaders in the church and [to] be socially conscious" (McElroy 29). This structure allowed many women the opportunities to be administrators with regular meetings set alongside the men's, these women were finding not only a space in which they could speak freely alongside the men but work alongside them as well (Walters 16). The history of Quaker women's involvement in monetary and political concerns ebbed and flowed, leaning more towards women's control over the feminine matters by the 1680s. This shifted back towards the political during abolitionism in the early 1830s. Many of the prominent women involved in abolitionism came from a Quaker background because "Quakers were in the forefront of the anti-slavery crusade" and offered their women a place within which to support this movement publicly (McElroy 29).

Prior to the Quaker involvement in abolitionism in nineteenth century America, a shift had been occurring throughout Europe in the late eighteenth century. The Enlightenment, “a series of philosophical and political debates in the eighteenth century,” which criticized the religiosity of institutions like the church and the monarchy, favored science above theology, and considered quite optimistically the human potential for reason had crafted the perfect set of circumstances for women to once again voice their arguments for equality (Hannam 18). At the forefront of Enlightenment thought was universal human nature and the ability to reason. These concepts were continually examined, debated, and espoused by the political thinkers and philosophers of the time but the universality of universal human nature “did not seem to encompass women since most writers claimed that there were physical and intellectual differences between the sexes” (Hannam 18). The beginnings of the so-called biological reasoning behind male superiority were born of these prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment. Classifying men as “rational, objective and scientific in their thinking, whereas women were seen as emotional, sensual, lacking in innate reason and a barrier to social progress,” creating the foundation upon which society would define masculinity and femininity well into the nineteenth century and beyond (Hannam 18-19).

This devotion of Enlightenment thought to the definition of gender had a political purpose in which these ideas were commonly “founded on universalist assumptions about the nature of Man which had complex and often contradictory implications for notions about Woman” (“Feminism and the Enlightenment” 265). Even with the abundance of liberal thinking, it remained that the platform upon which these thoughts were being developed and debated was a public one. Women were still largely relegated to the domestic sphere, thus complicating the ability of women to voice their ideas and opinions on the same level as their male counterparts.

Therefore it was crucial that women not merely challenge the voices of the men of the Enlightenment but align themselves with those who expressed views that could support this early feminist fight. John Locke's writings with his "fierce attack on the patriarchal model of political authority" were extended to a criticism of patriarchal power in the family ("Feminism and the Enlightenment" 265). Locke's progressive thought attracted many and was radicalized by the second half of the eighteenth century into a language that espoused "natural equality, government by consent, and the right to depose unjust rulers" ("Feminism and the Enlightenment" 265). While Locke's philosophical arguments were intended more for disgruntled American colonists and religious nonconformists, his work found a home in the arsenal of this early women's movement as an avenue through which they could legitimate their claims using a man's voice.

The Enlightenment period, particularly in Britain and Scotland, "sponsored one of the most far-reaching and innovative enquiries into womanhood in western history" ("Enlightenment and the Uses of Woman" 80). Women were once again finding the same struggle between being a source of purity and a source of vice as they were in their religious infrastructure but now on secular grounds. Nonetheless they continued to fight to have their voices heard and seek opportunities they could use to advance their status. Yet another shift presented itself in the form of the French Revolution of 1789. Tom Paine with his text *The Rights of Man* "epitomized the ideals of the Revolution," but excluded women (Hannam 19). Women demanded to be included in this important textual declaration of the revolution but were once again excluded when the first constitution was drafted including a distinction between active citizens, property-owning men at least twenty-one years of age, and passive citizens, women and domestic servants. Tom Paine, however, was not the only one capable of espousing ideas on the rights and opportunities

of humanity. Within the same circle as Tom Paine was a woman named Mary Wollstonecraft, a fellow revolutionary and peer of Paine's. Wollstonecraft, inspired by Paine's *The Rights of Man*, crafted her own text in which she applied these same ideas to women. The piece, entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, "is considered to be the founding text of British and American feminism" contending that if women were provided equal opportunities in education they would become "enlightened citizens, rational mothers, and, if single, more able to find employment" (Hannam 20-21). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* encapsulated these Enlightenment ideals of the possibilities of an individual and grounded them within the Revolution's context of citizenship. Wollstonecraft grounded her argument in the simple truth that an improvement in women's education and opportunity would only better society as a whole, not detract from progress as so much Enlightenment thinking had implied through their differentiation of the sexes. However, her limited sphere and the continual efforts to tie women to the realm of domesticity left her work largely unacknowledged by the scholars of the time. It was not until the twentieth century that Wollstonecraft's argument for the ability of women to better society through their own betterment would be fully integrated into the feminist fight.

Feminism's Three Waves

As previously mentioned Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* would not be widely discovered until the twentieth century, coinciding with the first-wave of feminism. As mentioned in the previous section, nineteenth century feminism found its catalyst in abolitionism where women were extremely involved. These women began to draw parallels between the quite literal shackles of those men and women enslaved and the metaphorical shackles that they found themselves to be constraining with. In the early-nineteenth century, women were once again being confined within a societally established role of "class based...gentility and refinement" (Walters 41). While most common knowledge of feminism's first-wave identifies it within the suffrage movement and attaining the right to vote, the beginnings of the first-wave were set into motion much earlier. The first-wave, while focused on promoting equality of contract, in marriage, in parenting, and of property rights, was not an organized movement towards attaining the right to vote until much later. Marion Reid in 1843 published a powerful argument, *A Plea for Women*, in which she asserted that this selflessness being put forward as the most appropriate role for nineteenth century women required a dangerous self-extinction of the woman's individuality (Walters 41-42). In this piece, Reid continued Wollstonecraft's appeal for better women's education as a means of bettering society. Reid's stance on the importance of women's education and opportunity was echoed later by John Stuart Mills and tends to characterize the ideology of feminism in the early-nineteenth century.

The start of first-wave feminism as commonly discussed begins "with the meeting in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 and culminating with the winning the right to vote in 1920" and overlaps with the writings of John Stuart Mills (Harlan 77). After repeatedly being rebuffed from the abolitionist and temperance movements, American suffragists focused their efforts on

creating a separate movement devoted to the rights of women (“Woman Suffrage”). The establishment of a suffragist movement for women became a commonality for women across the country, “[highlighting] women’s common interests and [raising] the possibility of a ‘universal sisterhood’” through which women could unite under one cause, one movement (Hannam 49-50). Over 100 people attended the convention in Seneca Falls and while it found supporters within the abolitionist and temperance movements there was an overwhelming negative reaction from the public. These women were branded “the shrieking sisterhood” and characterized as unfeminine and immoral, a direct contrast to what was the societally established image of the desirable woman (“Woman Suffrage”).

The American Civil War created a rift between the suffragist and abolitionist groups. This conflict came to a head in 1868 when abolitionists pushed for a constitutional amendment that would enfranchise “all Americans regardless of race, creed, or color” but with no mention of gender (“Woman Suffrage”). This caused an outrage among the women of the suffragist movement. At this point, the abolitionists had come to believe that the demands of the suffragists might actually be a hindrance to their fight to attain the right to vote for male ex-slaves and thus urged these women to postpone their push for the right to vote for women so as not to complicate the amendment’s passage. Out of this conflict came the establishment of two separate national groups dedicated to the suffragist agenda: the National Woman Suffrage Association, headed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony, and the American Woman Suffrage Association, headed by Lucy Stone (Hannam 50). While both associations shared the same desire for women’s right to vote, Stanton and Anthony pushed for a federal woman-suffrage law while Stone preferred gradual adoption of woman suffrage by states. Regardless of this difference, the two factions merged in 1890 to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association and

worked for woman suffrage on both the state and federal levels. Their hard work would come to a victorious climax in 1919, shortly after the First World War, when Congress approved the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This amendment, which afforded that “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex,” was ratified on August 18th, 1920 marking the end of feminism’s first-wave (“Woman Suffrage”).

The interwar years and the experience of the Second World War in America had provided an opportunity for women’s participation in the war effort, giving women a taste of that equality they so desperately wanted. This newfound female agency was stunted, however, by “a fear of social instability after the upheavals of war” that ultimately “led governments to emphasize the importance of ‘traditional’ gender roles” (Hannam 134). This had not changed the expectations of these women who had served their country, often taking on male roles for those men who had gone off to serve, and this led to the beginnings of the second-wave of feminism. With its impetus in the 1960s the second-wave of feminism “focused on winning pay equity for women, access to jobs and education, recognition of women’s unpaid labor in the home, and a rebalancing of the double workload of family and outside work for women in the paid labor force” (Harlan 77). With so much focus on the traditional, women found themselves locked into the role of the happy housewives and were less than pleased to be there.

The Feminine Mystique, written by Betty Friedan in 1963, “exploded the myth of the happy housewife in the affluent, white, American suburbs” leading to the “click” that is commonly used to describe the shift in mentality of the women’s movement during the second-wave (Walters 102). This “click” that characterizes the catalyst of the second-wave is an epiphany moment in which American women not only understood with greater clarity the extent

of their oppression but also had a deepening of understanding the necessity for change. During Friedan's research for an article that would inspire *The Feminine Mystique* she discovered how many women were thoroughly dissatisfied with their circumstances. In fact, this state of discontent was the common situation of white, middle-class American women. It must be noted that Friedan is often criticized for focusing purely on the white, heterosexual middle-class, a common theme throughout the feminist movement until the push for intersectionality in the third-wave. However, while it was "a women's movement consisting primarily of white, middle-class women" these women were united by a common understanding that their beliefs spanned across all races, ethnicities, and classes (Harrison 192). One of the leading fights of second-wave feminism was the active rejection of the biological explanation for gender roles and a reexamination of these roles as social constructs that if overturned would allow men and women to share all the tasks of humanity equally. Following this belief, Freidan along with other prominent feminist leaders of the time founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. At its core it was an organization dedicated to the full integration of women into mainstream American society as an avenue for reaching their full potential. NOW's mission was to use legal action to gain equality of opportunity in education and employment as well as full civil and political rights and responsibilities as afforded to men but into the later 1960s their mission became radicalized.

From this radicalization emerged autonomous women's group and the women's liberation movement. This was an attempt to form an independent women's culture separate from the patriarchal structure that they identified as overtly oppressive towards women. As a means of acting counter to the systems in place within the United States that these women viewed as extensions of the patriarchy, "they deliberately rejected hierarchies and national

leaders” favoring instead meetings in which individual women could share their own stories about their personal experiences (Hannam 142). From these individual stories women found that their difficulties were not unique to them alone but rather were perpetuated by societal conditions that were widely shared. This realization was the springboard for the ‘personal is political’ slogan that is perhaps the most famous slogan of the second-wave movement. With this new platform of shared experiences from individuals the women’s liberation movement took on issues such as the commodification of women’s sexuality, oppression in the home, and women’s sexual pleasure and desires. With these concepts at the forefront of the liberation movement’s effort the demands of the movement were rather straightforward. There “more conventional demands for equal pay and an end to sex discrimination at work” were set alongside the more radical call “for paid housework, child care facilities, and contraceptive advice” (Hannam 143). A focus on reproductive rights that included access to free contraception, the legalization of abortion, and a woman’s right to choose were defining characteristics of the second-wave. This in and of itself provided a drastic step forward to continue the fight for women’s equality upon entering the third-wave. The second-wave and the women’s liberation movement not only created awareness about women’s political and economic inequality but also fostered the development of a new language with which to discuss the oppression of women. Throughout the second-wave it became apparent that it was not simply the legal inequalities but rather the foundation with which society constructed gender that contributed to the oppression of women and through the actions taken by second-wave feminists the women that came after them, in the third-wave, would enter into a drastically different culture than any of the women of previous movements.

Beginning in the early 1990s the third-wave was a response to many of the shortcomings of the second-wave, namely intersectionality. Intersectionality being the way in which various social identities of one individual are understood and studied as interrelated to that individual's experience of oppression, domination, or discrimination. Furthermore, intersectionality allows a greater understanding of the various related systems in which we oppress individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. The major criticism of second-wave feminism being a movement of middle-class, white, heterosexual women for middle-class, white, heterosexual women inspired the third-wave feminists desire to right this major oversight of the movement and became the driving force behind the current state of the movement.

Additionally, the third-wave is not looking to create a counter-culture in the same way that the second-wave did. There has been a great deal of push back by current feminists to reject the anti-man stereotype that has evolved from the autonomous women's groups of the liberation movement. In fact, the third-wave has become more consistently a movement to counter some of the negative connotations that have surrounded the word 'feminism' after the second-wave's radical action. UN Goodwill ambassador Emma Watson in her 2014 speech to launch the HeForShe movement stated:

I decided I was a feminist and this seemed uncomplicated to me. But my recent research has shown me that feminism has become an unpopular word. Apparently I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men, and unattractive. Why is the word such an uncomfortable one? (Watson).

The third-wave, while focusing on intersectionality, is also a movement towards greater inclusion within the movement. Whereas the second-wave formed autonomous women's organizations in which men could participate, but only in secondary roles, third-wave feminism

is a movement demanding the active involvement of both genders. This involvement of both sexes is not only out of the need to seek more widespread influence but also as a means to free men from socially constructed gender roles that are damaging to the development of the male sex. As the third-wave seeks to reconstruct society, seeing it as the source of patriarchal oppression, it aims to include men alongside women in that reconstruction. Furthermore, the third-wave of feminism by including all genders also aims to free feminists from identifying within strict gender roles, countering the previous movement's exclusion of the LGBTQ community alongside men and persons of color. Additionally, and particularly for young women in the third-wave, the current state of feminism struggles with "the tensions in attempting to balance a redefinition or reclamation of femininity" particularly in popular cultural expressions of women and femininity (Keenan 378). Just as the current movement seeks to free men from the constraints of socially defined masculinity, it in turn seeks to create a space within which women can create their own concepts of femininity and sexual empowerment outside of the earlier feminist construct of the white, middle-class, and heterosexual woman.

As such the third-wave is a movement with a focus not just on sweeping legal issues but smaller micro-politics, the formal and informal uses of power within organizations to achieve influence. Reaping the benefits of the first and second-wave movements, women of the third-wave are able to direct their attention and efforts towards both the political and the social. This frees current feminists from a streamlined focus on the legal implications and allows them to include within their scope the more deeply ingrained patriarchal systems of oppression within the social structure of American society. However, the fight for pay equality and reproductive rights is still at the forefront of the movement, not having been fully achieved during the second-wave. The third-wave is uniquely situated at a time where now women are working through a

redefinition of what 'feminism' is and how they relate to it. The idealized vision of woman that dominated the first-wave and the anti-man, butch vision of the second-wave are too limited and problematic for current feminists and so have sparked an evolution of those who can and should participate in the feminism of the third-wave.

Sexual Freedom, Rape Culture, and Sexual Assault in College

While an understanding of the history of feminism is all well and good a definition of feminism does nothing to help define it within the context of the lives of current young men and women, specifically college-aged individuals. The third-wave of feminism, of which society still currently resides within, is a movement for all men, women, and other identifiers of all ages, ethnicities and races, sexual orientations, and backgrounds. However, for the purpose of this project it was imperative to limit that scope in order to specify that research, as it would pertain to the creative element of the project. Thus the scope was limited to that of college-aged millennials. It is also important to note that female sexual freedom is another dominant theme of the third-wave of feminism in America (Williams 158). With this support of sexual freedom there has developed a culture of casual sexual relationships, particularly amongst college students, which has attracted significant attention both in popular media and in scholarship. The significance of this sexual freedom is under debate with two major opinions emerging. The first, that casual sex relationships are detrimental to young women and are in fact an extension of patriarchal oppression relegating women to merely sexual objects. The second, that casual sex and the freedom it implies is a real sense of power and agency for young women who now have the ability to decide the way in which they choose to participate (or not participate).

While there may not be any overwhelming evidence with which to substantiate either side of those two stances of women's sexual freedom through casual sex relationships one thing cannot be denied, there is a prevalent hookup culture on today's college campuses. This aligns with the third-wave feminist writing that tends to "reject sexual proscriptions and embrace experimentation" as part of freeing women to understand themselves as sexual beings (Williams 159). This sexual exploration contributes to the desire of college-aged women, who are sexually

active, to not limit themselves to a single partner and to seek a better understanding of their own pleasure. But while this sexual freedom is encouraged, there are still concerns about whether or not it actually yields the desired results. A study completed in 2014 on “friends with benefits” (FWB) relationships found that:

These results indicated that women who had a strong feminist identity were less likely to be motivated to enter a FWB relationship for simplicity (i.e. sex) and were less likely to report overall satisfaction with this relationship. Women who were motivated to enter a FWB for simplicity were more satisfied with their FWB relationship both overall and sexually (Williams 165).

This study, which utilized 233 undergraduate students for its data pool, indicates that those women who aligned themselves as feminists find less satisfaction with these casual sex relationships. However, this one representation does not encapsulate the entire female sexual experience in college. Nor is it worthwhile to base the success or failure of third-wave feminism’s sexual liberation ideology on whether or not a woman self-identifies as a feminist. Those women who are finding success in FWB relationships that do not identify as feminists can still be seen as reaping the benefits of what the third-wave has accomplished. While considerable scholarship seems to reiterate the 2014 study’s results and “emphasize the frustration that results from transient sexual encounters, stripped of true intimacy” it is not the entire story and dismisses the way in which female sexual freedom is a vehicle for women’s empowerment and progress where women can free themselves from the shackles of needing to enter into a committed relationship for sexual gratification, often halting their education and career goals in the meantime (Rosin 57). The hookup culture is still largely viewed as a transient phase in the lives of millennials, rather than a permanent refusal to commit to a long-term relationship. In

being temporary it reflects the desire for young men and women to put their education and career plans before marriage and family, which is reflected by the increase in age in which men and women are marrying with “the median age of first marriage in the U.S. [changing] from 22.8 to 28.7 for men, and from 20.3 to 26.5 for women” since 1960 (Harden 258). So the push for sexual freedom in the form of casual sex relationships reflects current trends of young women placing their roles as students and working professionals before their roles as wives and mothers without rejecting those roles as still valuable and desirable. This reflects many of the third-waves ideology until the simple fact that 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted by the time she graduates from an undergraduate institution is presented.

The numbers are staggering. The 1 in 5 statistic has become a household fact, utilized at every opportunity to warn women about the dangers of campus assault, and yet there has not been a significant change in those numbers. Clearly simply educating women about their vulnerability is not effective. In 2007 a report prepared for the National Institute of Justice discovered that:

Nearly 5% of the total sample was forcibly sexually assaulted since college entry. More than three percent of the women experienced forced rape since entering college and 1.4% forced sexual battery since entering college. Approximately 11% of the women experienced sexual assault while incapacitated since entering college, with a higher percentage of women being victims of incapacitated rape than incapacitated sexual battery since entering college. (Krebs xiii)

And while sexual assault is a societal issue that spans past the college campus “the dynamics of college life appear to fuel the problem” with the prevalence of incapacitated assault in which the woman is abused while under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or some other substance (The

White House Council on Women and Girls 14). Furthermore the same 2007 study identified that 58% of incapacitated rapes and 28% of forced rapes took place at a party,” reiterating the impact of college social life on this developing rape culture (The White House Council on Women and Girls 14).

So when does this hookup culture become rape culture? Surely the implications of casual sex relationships are not all violent in nature and yet there are an increasing number of violent interactions on college campuses today as this era of sexual liberation is in full bloom. As women are being empowered to define their own relationship to feminism, to their sexuality, and to men and other women they are also being constricted by this ever-present rape culture on campus. The leading problem that has presented itself in the course of this research on campus rape culture and sexual assault is the manner in which men and women are educated about the issues. Once again citing the 2007 study done for the National Justice Report but this time with a focus on the list of recommendations for prevention, first for women:

- Provide accurate information on legal definitions of sexual assault, the extent and nature of sexual assault among college women, and risk factors for sexual assault (e.g., risky sexual behaviors, multiple sex partners, the role of substances);
- Combine sexual assault prevention education with alcohol and drug education programming (e.g., education concerning how levels of alcohol consumption and use of different drugs, and their interactions, affect cognitive functions; harm reduction messages; education about the impact of alcohol and drug use, especially heavy episodic drinking, has on cognitive functions, which reduces one’s ability to detect dangerous cues and threats, and one’s ability to effectively resist unwanted advances that can arise in common college social situations);

- Stress that even though many sexual assaults involve substance abuse by the victim, this does not imply that women are to blame for their sexual assault. Victimization is committed by the perpetrator, and therefore the sole responsibility for the assault lies with the perpetrator;
- Educate women about different types of sexual assault, especially since there appears to be continuity in the type of sexual assault experienced over time (physically forced or incapacitated sexual assault);
- Teach effective sexual assault resistance strategies to reduce harm, particularly with respect to strategies for protection from men that women know and trust;
- Educate women about how to increase their assertiveness and self-efficacy;
- Convey knowledge about how to report to police or school officials, the availability of different types of services on and off campus;
- Stress the importance of reporting incidents of attempted and completed sexual assault to mental and/or [physical] health service providers and security/law enforcement personnel, and the importance to seeking services, especially given the well-documented negative impacts sexual assault can have on psychological and physical functioning. (Krebs xviii-xix).

The list of recommendations for prevention, now for men:

- Provide accurate information on legal definitions of and legal penalties for sexual assault;
- Inform men that they are ultimately responsible for determining (1) whether or not a [woman] has consented to sexual contact, and (2) whether or not a [woman] is capable of providing consent; and

- Educate men that an intoxicated person cannot legally consent to sexual contact and that having sexual contact with an intoxicated or incapacitated person is unacceptable. (Krebs xix).

The extensive nature of the list of preventative recommendations for women compared with the brief recommendations for men illustrates where sexual freedom becomes rape culture, in the way young men and women are educated. It is not until the third bullet point for women that the responsibility for an assault lies solely with the attacker and that sentiment is repeatedly challenged by the detail with which this report pushes for women's education of their own susceptibility to assault. The recommendations for men are concise, incomplete really, and do not stress the importance of men's understanding past the simple reasoning that it is wrong. It unwittingly reinforces thinking that women are responsible for ensuring they do not become victims because men cannot think past their primal instincts. It complicates the issue for women and oversimplifies it for men, the ones who are perpetrating the assault. It is in fact as much a manifestation of rape culture as it is an attempt to present a solution to it.

There is so little understanding of how college campuses have become predatory in nature, a series of occasions in which a woman may fall prey to the ever present danger of sexual assault. The more research that is done, the more popular media coverage there is, the more society seems to understand that it does not understand. As much as there is a push to educate and support women in dealing with assault there is also a push to name them responsible, blame them for their promiscuity, and ultimately shame them for becoming a victim. Victimization is not something that a woman who has been assaulted creates for herself; it is a state of being enforced upon them by the aggressor.

Greek Tragedy and Sophocles' *Antigone*

As detailed in the following section on playwriting, the process of selecting a proper medium through which to tell the story of college feminism was not an easy one. However, there was one thing of which I was sure; the structure needed to reiterate not only the importance of telling the story but also the importance of witnessing the story. Theatre as a communal experience and as an act of witness provides the ideal setting in which to begin a dialogue about any social issue, but for my purpose the issue of feminism and sexual assault. This focus on community witnessing was easily grounded when I returned back to the foundations of our understanding of theatre, the Greeks.

The foundation upon which Western comprehension of drama originated is the Greeks. Athens in the fifth century, “where the theater played a central role in politics, religion, and society” (Worthen 13), created the tragedy and comedy forms of drama that have evolved and persisted in today’s theatre. These dramatic performances were a part of religious festivals and citywide celebrations, making them a central part of Athenian life and culture. As such a central component of Athenian life, tragedy and comedy took to task major themes from the world that surrounded these playwrights knowing that all of Athens would witness their work and by extension their opinions on whatever topic inspired their work. The importance of this work as being witnessed by the population provided exciting grounds upon which to build the creative portion of this project.

The structure of Greek tragedy differs from contemporary plays, largely due to the role of the chorus in Greek drama. The chorus, “for whom many of the plays were named,” utilized song and dance throughout the formal structure as a means to tell the story (Worthen 18). These plays began with a prologue that was followed by the entrance of the chorus, named the *parodos*

(entrance). After this opening, the sequence of events is presented in episodes broken up by the chorus' odes. These episodes are where the central characters interact with one another and the chorus, while the odes of the chorus are utilized to highlight and extend the important issues of the play for the audience's benefit. As a singing and dancing unit, the chorus' odes are written in "lyric meters different from the meters used for the characters' speeches" (Worthen 18). The play's catastrophe marks a major change in the protagonist's, or hero's journey, that prompts their exit from the stage. Once the hero exits the stage, the chorus presents the exodus, or final song, and departs themselves leading to the conclusion of the play.

This formal structure while informative is superficial as an account for the real power of Greek tragedy, "which arises from an intense and economical relationship between (1) a situation, usually at the point of climax as the play opens, (2) a complex of characters, each with distinctive goals and motives, (3) a chorus used both as character and commentator on the action, and (4) a series of incidents that precipitates a crisis and brings the meaning of the protagonist's actions into focus" (Worthen 18). The persistent level of intensity that pervades Greek tragedy was an ideal basis on which to tell the story of sexual assault on college campuses. The plot begins at the height of a conflict and only escalates further, which is an ideal structure within which to situate the epidemic that is rape culture and sexual assault. Furthermore, there is a purposeful set up amongst strong characters with differing opinions, moderated by a chorus that is made to act within the confines of the play while also drawing the audience directly into the conflict through moments of direct address.

But perhaps most important is how Greek tragedy hoped to spark catharsis in its audiences. At the point of catastrophe the protagonist is said to go through a peripeteia, or reversal, of their current circumstances that triggers a recognition, or anagnorisis, which requires

the central character to respond to this shift in their own being and the world around them. If these are done correctly, it was commonly believed that it would create feelings of fear and pity in the audience leading to catharsis, a purging of those emotions. This purging of the emotional turmoil brought about by the tragedy is where audiences discover a connection between the drama and their own lives and creates a shift in their understanding. The audience, as witness, is changed after viewing Greek tragedy and hopefully for the better. This presented an opportunity to effectively spark a dialogue about women's issues on college campuses by creating a play, modeling the Greeks that would actually lead to an emotional shift for the audience.

Sophocles (c. 496-406 BCE) was a major participant in Athenian civic life though his major contributions were to Greek theatre (Worthen 75). Sophocles is most renowned for introducing the third-actor into dramatic performances, a practice that was quickly adopted by other playwrights of the time. He also expanded the chorus from twelve to fifteen young men. His play *Antigone*, which inspired this creative project, is commonly linked to his two others *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* as the three "Theban" plays. However, these plays were not written or produced as a trilogy by Sophocles but have rather been grouped in that way by contemporary scholars.

Antigone, the first of Sophocles' "Theban" plays, is agreed upon by scholars to have been first produced around the year 441 B.C. This play seems to have both been influenced by and in turn have influenced his political involvement at the time as he "was one of the nine generals elected, with Pericles, for a campaign against the revolt of Samos [an island] in that year" (Knox 35). The overwhelming popularity of this play is thought to have contributed to Sophocles' election as one of the nine generals, which further legitimizes claims to the time in which it was first produced. *Antigone* is situated in a political context, beginning after a civil war headed by

Antigone and Ismene's brothers Eteocles and Polynices. Both brothers perished in the war and Creon, as acting king, has forbid Polynices for receiving proper burial on the grounds that he was a traitor to his country. Antigone refuses to accept this blatant disregard for the gods' burial traditions and buries her brother herself. Antigone is placed in direct conflict with Creon and the larger city-state as the rebel and martyr in the name of religious respect and the gods' decrees. As a tragedy, the play ends with Antigone's death and Creon's recognition of the dangers of power and the error of his actions. The gods support Antigone's decisions and establish what is right and what is a bastardization of power.

The story of *Antigone*, which deals directly with one woman's struggle against a larger, male-dominated society could absolutely be considered a feminist story even with its creation by one of the dominating male playwrights of Athens, and by extension history. As a political text *Antigone* is interesting because it explores the voice of the people in opposition to the voice of authority and ultimately arrives at the conclusion that the voice of authority is too often corrupted. As a feminist text Sophocles' play creates an ideal circumstance in which a single woman must face a patriarchal society and in doing so exposes the systematic corruption that brutalizes women who have a voice that differs from their suspected role.

The Playwriting Process

The creative portion of this project was always intended to take shape through playwriting. However, as is often discussed by playwrights “the hardest thing about writing is getting from nothing to the first draft” (McLaughlin 15) and this certainly held true for this particular creative project. I did not foresee many of the challenges that would accompany the task of writing a piece surrounding issues of feminism and found that my initial thoughts were too broad to be plausible or effective. Once the research was in place the focus became about identifying the specific type of writing and the scope of content that would allow for this project to have the greatest impact on my chosen college audience.

At the onset of the writing process I found myself tied to a structure inspired by Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*. The episodic structure of her pieces, each monologue tackling a different woman’s perspective on her relationship to her vagina and more metaphorically her womanhood as a whole, seemed an ideal way in which to ground this piece in women’s stories. It is important to note that this episodic structure of Ensler’s work is a characteristic structure employed by women playwrights. Additionally as Ensler’s work delivers a multitude of perspectives from women of various ages, backgrounds, and sexual orientations that same concept could be applied to college-aged women. This was extremely attractive because it reduced the fear of lacking intersectionality in the final product, which plagued much of my mentality towards my writing throughout the process. However, as I struggled to produce content that I felt could be of actual use in a final product it became clear that Ensler’s model would not support this project. It was too open-ended in its use of multiple perspectives and a multitude of different stories being told. It is also vital to state that Ensler conducted interviews with actual women and incorporated their stories into her piece. I entertained this idea, knowing it would be

yet another way to spark a dialogue amongst women on James Madison University's campus, but ultimately felt that to do that would be to take Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* structure and merely replicate it with a different set of women as inspiration. While there is no reason a project of that nature could not serve the purpose of understanding what feminism means to college students it did not seem to be as creatively rich as what I had initially expected or ultimately desired.

The failure of the Ensler-based structure revealed a crucial flaw in my writing, I did not have a specific enough dramatic premise. A dramatic premise is work done early on in the writing process in which a playwright "[attempts] to put down on paper – as accurately as you can – what you think you're trying to say with your idea, to state simply and clearly the primary, universal truth you ultimately want to communicate" (McLaughlin 32). The scope of my research had provided me with a greater understanding of where the feminist movement is currently located and, historically speaking, how it arrived at its present state but this was no ground for playwriting. The research had dominated the creative portion of the project to the point that it suddenly became about finding a way in which to tell the entire story of feminism or at least the entire story of feminism on college campuses. Impossible. It cannot be done, or if it can be done it does not lead to a dramatically interesting piece of theatre. There was a necessary narrowing of topic, an understanding that this creative piece was not intended to encapsulate all of the research that had been completed before but rather that the research was compiled as a source of inspiration from which I could pick the content that would be most lucrative. The dramatic premise was focused to investigate how a woman in the face of a sexual assault can be, through her very presence, a source of political action against the patriarchal systems that have allowed her to be victimized.

As mentioned earlier, episodic structure in playwriting is quite characteristic of women's writing and thus was an element that I felt would be important to how this play was structured. However, if Ensler's episodic structure did not work than there had to be another option. In meetings with my advisor, Ingrid De Sanctis, it became clear that the biggest challenge I had been facing was that the pieces I was trying to write were not connected. It was a collection and therefore not a continuous story. I have had a connection with the character of Antigone throughout much of my time as a theatre major at James Madison University, even having performed the role in an adaptation of Sophocles' play entitled *The Burial at Thebes* by Seamus Heaney in the School of Theatre and Dance's first outdoor theatrical production in the spring of my junior year. This connection with Antigone had extended into some of my writing in Ingrid De Sanctis' THEA 347: Basic Playwriting course, a fact that she pointed out to me during our meetings for this project. She discussed with me that to pursue this character, both as I had known her in my schoolwork and as I had written her myself, could be interesting ground upon which I could build this piece. Furthermore, as Greek tragedy follows an episodic structure it seemed to suit the direction this project needed to take perfectly. Now armed with a character archetype that could withstand the trauma of sexual assault and the episodic structure that I desired I was prepared to engage with this story.

As I began writing this piece, now following the formula for Greek tragedy, another discovery was made; this piece would not be performed alone. I wanted to wrestle with sexual assault in this piece and that subject matter required more than just one woman alone on a stage. In my research I had identified sexual assault, as the issue I felt I most needed to tackle on a performative level because the academic platform I had been engaging with it on had not given me enough answers to be satisfied.

The piece that is included in this paper, which is the final piece as presented in the Wayland Performance Studio on April 1st, 2016, went through a total of three major iterations of its development. The first pulled from the Antigone character I had written in THEA 347: Basic Playwriting and worked to expand the pieces that had been constructed in that course. Once I had fully fleshed out this character, which would become Angela in the final draft, I began constructing the story around her. The episodes of plot were developed and assimilated together to create the second draft, a completed story line as opposed to the earlier skeleton. At this point in the process, Ingrid De Sanctis hosted an informal reading at her home for fellow playwriting students and peers to hear the piece aloud and provide feedback. Now the piece had solidified all four characters: Angela (the Antigone character), Charlie (the victimizer, inspired by Creon), and the Male and Female Chorus (whom altered between working separately or as one unit). The major feedback after this read was to push further into the story, allowing it to get messier, and to not justify Charlie's character. This was a struggle for me, I did not want to construct a two-dimensional caricature of the aggressor but wanted him to be a real, flesh-and-blood person who while not innocent is also flawed by patriarchal systems of oppression in his own way. This pushed me into the final edits, culminating in the piece that is the culmination of the creative portion of this project.

Buried (A Feminist Exploration) follows Angela's journey from the moments directly following her rape by Charlie at a fraternity party on a college campus. As Angela attempts to make sense of what has happened to her and seek justice from those around her, she confronts Charlie in front of the Male and Female Chorus. This confrontation results in Angela being confined to a basement closet by Charlie with the assistance of the Chorus and then examines the repercussions of such a drastic attempt to hide the act of assault. The Chorus and Charlie

continue to wrestle with their actions throughout this piece while Angela punctuates their struggle by banging against the door, refusing to be silent. Finally, Angela breaks down the door and opposes her peers. In the final scene, Angela's closing monologue, the issue of being hidden is exposed as the most painful part of the trauma she has experienced that night ultimately leading to the death of the woman she was before she came to that party. She leaves them behind her in that room to emerge a different person, broken but free.

Twice my cast and I rehearsed this piece, in its final iteration, with the second of the two rehearsals being attended and directed by Ingrid De Sanctis. In these rehearsals there was a specific focus on highlighting the Greek tragedy structure, grounding the relationships between characters, and setting basic staging for the reading. As a staged reading, the final performance was done with minimal blocking, an actor's movement through the space, and with script's in hand as is common of staged readings. In choosing this structure the text becomes most important, which was a vital part of this work because the script was what was intended to spark the dialogue not the bravado of a fully realized production.

Buried (A Feminist Exploration) had its premiere production on Friday April 1st, 2016 in the Wayland Performance Studio to an audience of students, faculty, and friends. This staged reading was accompanied by a brief talkback in which I, as the playwright and performer, could hear from the audience about their impressions, questions, and concerns both about the script itself and the larger context within it was intended to be placed. At the conclusion of the performance and talkback it was clear that the audience had been moved, inspired, and surprised by the work that had been presented to them. This is how I classify the presentation of this piece as successful. It did in fact spark a dialogue amongst the audience members about women, sexual

assault, relationships, and how the college campus constructs a unique culture upon which all of this comes to a head.

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

Throughout the creation of this play I made a multitude of discoveries about myself as a feminist, a playwright, and an actor. The title of the play *Buried (A Feminist Exploration)* truly reflects that because this piece was not intended to come to a solid conclusion but rather to act as an explorative tool through which I could grow to understand what it means to be a feminist on college campuses, how individuals deal with assault and the culture that surrounds it, and spark a dialogue amongst others as to how they can begin this exploration for themselves.

The greatest source of feedback I received on which to craft my own analysis of findings was the talkback that occurred immediately after the performance of the creative portion of this project. This was the true test of whether or not this piece reflected to others the ideas that I saw within it about survival, trauma, and justice. First, the Greek structure was clear to my audience and that in and of itself helped to ground many of them in the style with which I approached this content. One of my faculty readers, Dr. Meredith Conti, remarked that while she picked up on the echoes from *Antigone* quite quickly she did not feel they were heavy-handed, allowing the audience to feel smart when they had made that connection. This was important because, like Greek tragedy, this piece did not deal in subtlety of content but to hear from my faculty reader and others in attendance that there was subtlety of structure reinforced that I had crafted the proper format within which to tell this story.

The discussion in the talkback also centered on the metaphors I chose to use with a focus on two. The first, the importance of seeing and witnessing and the consequences that follow either choosing to see and witness or choosing not to and the second, the detriment of being caged or buried and needing escape. Both of these metaphors were crafted out of my research. The importance of being seen and witnessed is a common theme of any equality movement but also

connected back to second-wave feminism's "personal as political" in the importance of not just hearing the issue but hearing an individual's actual story. Angela, as protagonist, continues to fight to be witnessed in her trauma and for that is then locked away in a closet to hide her story from the others around her. Surprisingly, in a positive way, the audience identified that the act of being placed in the closet, of being hidden away, was more unsavory than Angela's actual sexual assault. This echoes the way in which women underreport their sexual traumas because there is so little room to actually be helped. Additionally, if they do report then there is the fear of being told they were "asking for it" or branded as damaged because they allowed a man to assault them. These are both ridiculous concepts but both realities for college women everywhere and so important to represent through this piece.

Finally there was much discussion about Charlie, the antagonist and victimizer in this piece. This is where there was an interesting split amongst the audience that conformed slightly to gender. There was a pushback from the men in the audience that Charlie's character was too evil, crafted as the villain with not much depth beyond that. The women, however, tended to see that as this piece took place after the assault it fit with the story and Angela's perspective to keep him as the antagonist and not let him be justified in his actions. I have a bias, of course, which aligns me more with the women in the room in their understanding of his character. However, Charlie's characterization was the most difficult part of this play to write for me. In the play he does make attempts to justify himself, none of which allow him to escape the responsibilities of his actions, but through the lens of a man who does not fully understand how his perspective on women has been warped through our socially constructed gender roles and flawed education on sexual assault. This was the part of the talkback I was most nervous about but feel was most lucrative

in my understanding of how to tell this story fully and not just from the perspective of a woman if it is to truly spark a dialogue for all college students, regardless of gender.

The culmination of this creative project in a successful discussion with the audience reflected that the research that led up to the writing process and the piece that was crafted in that writing process had been effectively combined. The work I had done for my own understanding of feminism had contributed well into the story I chose to tell through *Buried (A Feminist Exploration)* and it had the intended outcome of starting a dialogue amongst those faculty and students who attended. The piece presented was very strongly a story grounded in sexual assault, which was the topic I had identified as most important to be explored through playwriting and performance, and also was informed by the breadth of research that had been collected throughout my research period. The project as a whole, both the research and creative portions, culminated in a product I am proud of and that has truly fulfilled my hopes of starting a productive dialogue amongst college students and faculty on James Madison University's campus about feminism, and more specifically sexual assault.

Conclusion

One late night while I was working on the script for *Buried (A Feminist Exploration)* I was so overwhelmed with telling this story, I did not think I could do it if I did not cover every possible perspective. Yet how could I hope to tell any story if I gave every voice equal weight? As I was articulating this to a friend of mine she said, “You do not have to be the voice of an entire movement, you just have to let your voice be heard.” It was so simple but so revolutionary in how I thought about this project. What a gift it is to know that I can exist within the feminist movement without feeling the weight of having to speak for the entire movement, that I can speak for myself within the movement and that is enough.

That is what this project is, my voice. From the research I gathered to the play I wrote all of this was through my lens and my perspective because how can I hope to understand how college students relate to feminism until I know how I, as a college student, relate to feminism? This journey has been a deeply personal and challenging one in which I pushed myself to really understand the history that surrounds me and how the choices I make are impacted constantly by that history. I am a third-wave feminist, I am privileged because of who I am as a white, heterosexual woman, and I am still passionate about creating a space for all women and men to talk about how they relate to feminism. This was my goal and this was my journey and I believe that through this I achieved that and found strength in knowing that it is my voice that was given to this piece and those who came into contact with it.

I am not a mouthpiece for the feminist movement; I am a voice within it. How powerful is it to know that coming to the end of this project has taught me that my voice does not need to be perfect, or concise, or even fully formed but that it just needs to be there? Being witnessed, that is what this is intended to do. It is a witnessing of those women who came before me, a

witnessing of those women who currently surround me, and the grounds upon which the women after me can be witnessed. It is an act of defiance to stand up against those who would still have me, and those women around me, silenced. It is the culmination of my feminist awakening as an undergraduate student but it is not the end. It is the beginning of a lifelong journey to grow my voice and use it as a tool for empowerment.

Appendix: *Buried (A Feminist Exploration)* Full Script

Please see the accompanying document to this project that holds the entire script for *Buried (A Feminist Exploration)* as presented in the Wayland Performance Studio on Friday April 1st, 2016. The document has been attached separately in order to maintain proper formatting of both this paper and the play.

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