LITERATE ARTIFACTS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPOSITIONS: FEMINIST ACTIVISM’S COMPOSING, ARCHIVING, AND REVISING OF SOCIAL NARRATIVES

A dissertation submitted to Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE CLOTHESLINE PROJECT

In 1990, the Dignity Memorial Vietnam Wall set up one of its first exhibits among the beaches, lighthouses, and seafood eateries of Cape Cod, Massachusetts.¹ No one could have imagined that it would inspire a small group of its female viewers to create a commemorative event of their own, one which would remain active even today, 25 years later. But one of these women, a survivor of domestic violence and rape, took the initiative to question, “Where is our wall? Where is our memorial?...Where is the wall that commemorates the 51,000 women killed in the war against women?” (Hipple, 2000, p. 168). At that time, the Maryland Men’s Anti-Rape Resources Center (MARS) released information which estimated that

During the 16 years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, a war that claimed the lives of 58,000 men in Southeast Asia, more than 51,000 women were murdered in this country by their husbands, male friends, dates, and casual male acquaintances. (Hipple, 2000, p. 168)

The group of women moved by the Vietnam memorial and this startling statistic then created the Clothesline Project (CP), what they thought of as an “in-your-face educational and healing tool” (“History of the Clothesline Project,” para. 2). The CP, now an international event, invites survivors (and those remembering victims) of violence against

¹ a travelling replica of the original Vietnam Wall
women, primarily sexual in nature, to decorate tee shirts about their experiences; the tee shirts are then hung on a clothesline in a public space, such as university campuses and other community settings. The spread of the Project to 41 states and 5 countries (“History of the Clothesline Project,” para. 7) indicates the continued and pervasive problem of violence against women, as well as organized resistance to that violence.

As of October 2013, the World Health Organization reported that 35% of women worldwide experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. In the United States specifically, the “National Crime Victimization Survey, 2008-2012” revealed that an average of 237,868 people (age 12 or older) are raped or sexually assaulted each year; this number translates to approximately one act of sexual violence every two minutes (“How often does sexual assault occur?”). Narrowing the focus to U.S. colleges and universities, the White House recently issued guidelines to “increase the pressure on universities to more aggressively combat sexual assaults on campus” (Steinhauer, 2014). These guidelines came after President Obama created a task force earlier in 2014 to address the problem; the taskforce reported that 20% of female college students had been assaulted, though only 12% of these students reported the crime (Steinhauer, 2014). Tal (1996) states:

the American woman lives in fear of an enemy who stalks her today. Her enemy is free to assault her on the street, in her place of work, or in her own home. He may attack her once or repeatedly. If she tries to hide from him, he may find her…If she tries to press charges, he [may] be protected by a legal, political and social system that is biased against her. Sociologist Anthony Wilden has emphasized that ‘if there is one class of individuals who cannot rely on their
community for self-defense it is women—and after [women] the teenage girls and children. The reason is that it is their own community that attacks them.’ (p. 20)

Historically, rape (and other forms of sexual assault) constituted a “crime against property,” as women belonged to male family members; following an assault, then, women received the reputation as “damaged goods” and their “owners” suffered criticism for failure to protect or “control” their property (Tal, 1996, p. 155). That we now consider rape a crime against a person, that the President has publicly and formally recognized sexual assault as a critical issue, and that we look to the agency and communicative acts of survivors to educate us about political action is a step in the right direction.

For the past 25 years, many colleges and community organizations have turned to the CP to provide temporary catharsis to survivors of sexual assault and to raise public awareness of the issue. We can understand the activists involved in events like the CP, and the ways in which they position themselves and carry out their objectives, as a “community literacy public” that maintains a necessary understanding of “counterpublics” (Higgins, Long, & Flower, 2006, p. 30). According to Higgins, Long, and Flower (2006), “community literacy publics…are local, drawn together by immediate issues and concerns, and are likely to form, dissolve, and reform with an overlapping set of participants” (p.29). Counterpublics, on the other hand, consist of marginalized publics in a much larger categorization, for example, “feminists” and people associated with a particular race or sexual orientation (Higgins, Long, & Flower, 2006, p. 29). Similar to community literacy publics, CP shirt designers and volunteers convene to address a present concern (sexual violence), forming, dissipating, and re-forming with new and continuing designers and volunteers who must operate amidst the widespread discourse.
of sexual assault and positive and negative responses to it. The forming, dissipating, and reforming of the event and its participants, along with continuous navigation of counterpublics, mirrors what Kantor refers to as “a series of emerging constructions of reality…change [which] is partly a construction of such reconstructions” (O’Connor, 1995). In other words, as participants, volunteers, and the collection of tee shirts changes from year to year, they define and represent the group and its efforts in a particular moment; at the same time, these definitions and representations serve as reconstructions working toward further reconstruction of larger social dynamics as they pertain to the problem of sexual assault. In their efforts to make decisions about effective approaches to the issue, activists must work rhetorically, that is, persuasively, using social narratives about sexual violence, gender, appropriate community and university conduct, and the institutional culture (O’Connor, 1995). For example, the group must remain aware of and be sensitive to an overarching culture (sexual liberation movements, government initiatives addressing (or not) the issue of sexual assault, colloquial language) and local culture (campus or community demographics; physical spaces where shirt designers will create their shirts; attitudes about sexuality and gender violence on campus and in the community). This struggle between autonomy and compliance demonstrates empowerment as inherently “paradoxical” (O’Connor, 1995); this struggle will remain a major rhetorical consideration of the work presented throughout this dissertation.

My work is not the first investigation of the CP, though it takes a more in-depth empirical approach than previous studies. In 1994, just four years after the Project’s inception, Julier compared the CP, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the NAMES
Project as texts and events. As the CP invites witnesses to contribute to the project, it “is a witness to healing and a means of healing, a private act and a work of social activism” (Julier, 1994, p. 255). The CP, then, redefines the discursive space in which people understand violence; the CP achieves such redefinition by employing the following: voicing what has been silenced, creating a paradox whereby individuality is asserted as a means of creating community, and using the tension between “airing dirty laundry” as empowering defiance and rethinking the spaces of oppression and liberation (doing the laundry as a “home” task and clothing as “both intimacy and violation”) (Julier, 1994, p. 255). Julier (1994) also made the leap to pedagogical implications as she argued to allow private texts in academic settings, questioning when calls for the use of “personal voice” and calls for collaboration both lead to the silencing of students. Julier (1994), then, established the CP as a text and asserts its value to scholarly and pedagogical inquiry.

Six years later, Julier (2000) once again revisited the CP as an object of study. Building on her previous work about the CP as a text, she honed in on the rhetoric of tee shirt messages, particularly on how rhetoric represented notions of women’s therapeutic processes. She examined the rhetoric of the CP to determine how women communicate their identities during the healing process, and in what “senses they talk about writing as healing” (2000, p. 362). She discovered that women tended to disclose what happened in “abbreviated elliptical forms,” that they spoke of themselves as “wounded,” referred to an effort to heal, and indicated “the move from private language into public discourse…as

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2 A product of The NAMES Project Foundation, the Names Quilt originated in 1987 and consists of panels dedicated to victims of the AIDS virus (“The AIDS Memorial Quilt”). “Today there are NAMES Project chapters across the United States and independent Quilt affiliates around the world” (“The AIDS Memorial Quilt”).
an act of healing” (2000, p. 378). Many shirts suggested that language was inefficient at communicating traumatic experiences, while others suggested that language aided individuals’ ability to see their experiences in new ways, which assists with the process of healing.

Also in 2000, Hipple examined how the use of tee shirts in and of themselves functioned rhetorically, and how CP participants adapted the shirt to be an object for communication (i.e. using the two sides for “before” and “after” narratives). More specifically, she argued for the disembodiedness of the tee shirts as protection for participants’ identities that “emboldens their speech” (p. 174). Through the shirts, participants attempt to respond to cultural narratives by serving as evidence of the physical and psychological consequences of violence; in this way, the shirts may be perceived as “a uniform that confers legitimacy, decorates casualties of this ‘war against women’” (p. 174). For example, a red shirt reads, “Sweet 16 and never been kissed, but anally raped.” An orange shirt depicts an oversized penis on which a tiny-bodied woman is impaled, nude, blue, and lifeless; it reads “Feel better now, Fucker?” (p. 167). Hipple (2000) further found that the front of shirts often addressed cultural narratives about violence against women, while the backs of shirts responded to those cultural narratives; she argued that this represented that there are two sides to every story.

Gregory and her colleagues (2002) built on prior notions of the rhetoric of the CP and took the first interdisciplinary approach to focus on the political theory of “faces of power.” Faces of power include “explicit uses,” use of “social norms,” “people’s self-understanding” (p. 435), and the “creation of subjects” (people) (p. 436). Gregory and her colleagues asserted that the CP addresses these faces of power by “creating a public space
for political action, offering an alternative communicative medium, educating in a
context of dismissal and silence, and contributing to social and cultural transformation”
(2002, p. 433). They used the CP to further argue that a relationship exists between
emotion and rational discourse, as too much of one without the other will likely fail at
motivating and mobilizing people to act on behalf of those experiencing (or who have
experienced) injustice.

Bex Lempert (2003), seems to have combined elements of rhetoric, politics, and
pedagogy to introduce the CP in a “Family Violence” course. Specifically, she had
students create a tee shirt as a tribute to a woman who had experienced violence (whether
themselves, someone they knew, or someone in the news). From this project, she argued,
the CP “challenges student passivity and disengagement with the learning process while
simultaneously focusing attention on the experiences of victims of intimate, interpersonal
violence” (2003, p. 483). Finally, she made the point that engaging students in the CP
allows them to gain awareness of their own narratives but also to gain awareness of their
narratives in relation to how cultural narratives shape them. Allowing students to
compose anonymously permitted disclosure with some sense of control over how they
subjected themselves to responses, and shed light on the possibility of choosing to not
disclose as an assertion of liberty.

Several years later, Goodnow (2005) became the first person to focus on the CP
as visual rhetoric. She observed the presence of “before” and “after” narratives; the
“before” narratives include the following pentadic terms: “act: the abuse; agent: the
perpetrator; agency: dependent on act; scene: places of previous safe harbor; purpose: to
expose the abuse” (2005, p. 183). Meanwhile, “after” narratives include: “act: surviving;
agent: survivor; agency: empowerment; scene: any place; purpose: to reclaim control of the survivor’s life” (Goodnow, 2005, p. 185). In other words, the “after” narratives exhibit a sense of control and agency on the part of the survivor, whereas “before” narratives tend to place the survivor in a position of vulnerability, taking much of the focus off themselves altogether. Goodnow further concluded that words and images function differently, with words depicting details, and images depicting overall attitudes of participants.

Finally, Droogsma’s (2009) content analysis of CP shirts sheds light on the relationship between society as well as textual and visual rhetoric. Results revealed several themes: society contributing to violence against women, women experiencing double victimization, and survivors being silenced and voicing opposition. Using feminist standpoint theory,3 Droogsma drew attention to how women’s experiences of oppression influence their worldviews, and to how they use their personal lives to comment on social structures and “form a collective experience” (2009, p. 496). “That society plays a role in the epidemic of woman abuse emerged as the strongest theme in [Droogsma’s] rhetorical analysis” (p. 487). While Goodnow looked at the visual rhetoric of the CP, Droogsma also asserted the CP as activist art because it remains collaborative, encourages creative expression, and welcomes community members to get involved. The visuals in the CP aim to change participants and viewers alike.

3 “Feminist standpoint theory calls attention to the knowledge that arises from conditions and experiences that are common to girls and women. This focus on experiences draws on Marxist theory’s claim that the work we do—the concrete activity in which we engage—shapes what we know and how we behave. Thus, feminist standpoint theory is interested in skills and knowledge that are cultivated by typically female activities such as domestic work and caregiving (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).
Following the work of Julier (1994 & 2000), Hipple (2000), Gregory (2002), Bex Lempert (2003), Goodnow (2005), and Droogsma (2009), I chose to investigate the CP as a means of understanding better how current conceptualizations of “active participation” serve (or do not serve) notions of “speaking out.” Active participation is commonly conceptualized as extroverted participation (a noticeable public presence accompanied by verbal contributions to discussions of issues). But such notions are increasingly complicated in a world with unfavorable, sometimes even dangerous, consequences to such displays of participation. To address the issue of participation, I conceptualize my investigation as consisting of two major elements: literate artifacts and psychosocial compositions.

Literate artifacts refer to documents or materials, such as those produced during social action events (protest signs, listserv sign-up sheets, and exhibits). Psychosocial composition is a term I’ve developed to account for what I reveal through this study to be the metaphorical composing and revising of individual participants and society, and the contribution of written and visual texts as an input and output of the relationships between individuals and social culture. Psychosocial compositions include influences on one’s ideology and actions, for example, ways in which literate practices and cultural discourse affect individuals’ participation in and reception of civic engagement. I further understand literate artifacts and psychosocial compositions in terms of how texts mediate trauma and recovery by allowing individuals to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct narratives related to identity (Pennebaker, 1997; Anderson & Maccurdy, 1999; Rose, 1999; Smyth, True, & Souto 2001; Lepore & Smith, 2002; Fiandt, 2006; Sharma-Patel,
Brown, & Chaplin 2012; Lieblich, 2013; and Anderson & Conley, 2013). With these notions in mind, my study responds to the following questions:

1) How does written and visual literacy (see definition in Table 1) function in relation to understandings of female embodiment and violence against women?

2) How can literate artifacts be used as an archive to continue revising social narratives?

Important to this response are many theoretical considerations. My work rests on a particular conceptualization of feminist activist work; I set forth this conceptualization with the understanding that others may perceive and define activism, and feminist activism, differently. Certainly, other researchers have grappled with the complex issue of identifying the criteria that constitute the particular act of engaging in feminist activism. For instance, upon examining fabric arts projects created by women and used for drawing awareness to social concerns, Clover & Stalker (2008) questioned the use of the term “feminist art,” given that the works address more than just women’s issues—though addressed “through the eyes of women” (2008, p. 14).

Another definitional issue in regard to feminist activism comes in the question of whether people pay any mind to the work of women activists. Droogsma (2000) asks, “Do the persons who silenced woman abuse survivors, and therefore remain complicit in their oppression, listen to the Clothesline Project” (p. 494)? In other words, Droogsma questions whether those who dismiss, doubt, or blame, survivors pay mind to their acts of resistance. Moreover, do we define activism based on statistical measures of behaviors and attitudes in society? In regards to the first question (about who pays mind to the CP),
no existing evidence currently supports an answer. But even if the CP fails to reach those who directly or indirectly oppress women, it still has advantages for its participants, and may reach fellow oppressed women.

The second question, about how we define activism, is one that I pose as a follow-up to Droogsma’s question about whether those who oppress women abuse survivors pay attention to the CP. In response to Droogsma, I argue that to define activism based on statistical measures of behaviors and attitudes is to take an overly simplistic view of the objectives of activism. While this may be the desired outcome, we have no evidence to suggest that activist efforts change cultural narratives on a large scale. As I mention earlier, however, activist efforts can help participants revise their own narratives and inspire or motivate fellow people in oppressed positions to seek help or engage in composing about their own experiences. It seems that activism must have the objective of individual healing and satisfaction as much as that of societal or global change, especially if we are to seek evidence of the results of such efforts. Moreover, activist efforts that focus on women, like the CP, have suffered criticism for their exclusion of men (Gregory et al., 2002). We must question the extent to which we might encourage male participation in the communication of experiences primarily affecting women, and determine how that communication influences activist efforts.

My study, then, defines feminist activist work as the effort to bring about social change in regard to rights, equality and/or justice for people in oppressed positions. In this dissertation, that definition pertains to women’s experiences with violence. As for the exclusion of men in many CP events, Julier (1994) considers whether all collaboration serves as “democratic good or whether it merely restructures the sites at which privilege
and control are enacted, thus far silencing individual expression” (p. 258). While I believe that feminist activists should advocate for the equal status of all people (regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities, and so forth), I also think that each of these groups, at times, needs its own space in which to speak for itself and communicate its unique struggles. My ability to speak on behalf of others, and for them to speak on behalf of me, is limited by the different ways we experience similar circumstances. For example, as Julier (1994) points out, having men participate in the CP (or any event addressing offences primarily committed against women) increases the risk that women’s voices (or messages) will get lost among men’s (especially since the tee shirts themselves do not necessarily indicate gender). Of course, the assault of men, especially sexual assault, remains a unique experience for which I, as a woman, would fail to do justice in addressing. Though we have a similar experience, the social construction of our identities as a man or woman likely changes the way we experience differently the same act. Similarly, while I will advocate for self-identifying members of the LGBTQIA community, as a single heterosexual female, I would likely fail to make emotional appeals in regard to the subject the way that a participating member of that community could make.

The same can be said for women of different races or from various economic classes. All subject positions involve worldviews and varying degrees of support systems that influence responses to circumstances. In essence, while some activist events can and should be all-inclusive, all groups deserve their own space in society to express their own identities and the issues that surround those identities. We must remain cautious that, in our altruistic attempt to remain all-inclusive and speak on behalf of multiple groups, we
avoid silencing or interfering with the unique voices of those groups.

Yet another definitional issue with which I must grapple concerns meaning of literacy and “women’s literate practices.” I define literacy as *understanding knowledge and ideas in relation to context*. I define “women’s literate practices as *adoption, production, reproduction, or adaptation of textual or visual forms that respond to the needs of an individual or group of people in such a way that it advances personal and political positions within various forms of oppression*. Moreover, for the sake of clarity, I separate rhetoric from literate practices in that understanding and using rhetorical strategies remains a part of the invention, production, and reception of any literate artifact. Rhetorical situations (situations in which people make arguments) influence the construction of literate practices, as literate practices influence the rhetorical construction of texts. But a rhetorical analysis is only one way to analyze a text. And we can examine rhetorical situations without focusing on the literate artifacts (written or visual documents or materials) within those situations. This distinction is meant to be understood in terms of “interpenetration,” described as “forg[ing] unities between subject and object, ultimately between all subjects and all objects, all subjects and all subjections, all objects and all objects, a total unity—without loss of individual identity” (Dolzani, 2012, p. 27-28). In other words, rhetoric (or rhetorical strategies) remains embedded in composing processes and final documents, as composing processes and final documents remain embedded in rhetorical contexts. But we can have productive conversations about both of them separately.

In addition, the current trend toward increasing visual literacy and visual rhetoric (how visuals get enacted (or not) to make arguments) intersects with my project in a
kairotic manner. For instance, Clover & Stalker (2008) present activists who feel the need to censor their art in order to avoid alienating their audience with the boldness of their message; these activists demonstrate knowledge of their compositions as it relates to audience and purpose. Furthermore, as referred to earlier, Hipple (2000) notes the tee shirt with the impaled woman. Though the artist in Hipple’s study has a right to render her anger and agency in whichever way she feels compelled, it is also important to the issue of rhetoric and the objectives of activism to consider how such work may be received by an audience. At what point does consideration of the rhetorical context become outright censorship? At what points can we identify complex notions of and relationships between seeing and speaking? And what do these relationships mean for rhetorical efforts to create positive social change? After all, rhetorical efforts are collectivist (to the extent that they involve interaction with an audience) and productive (to the extent that rhetoric leads to action) (Miller & Bowdern, 1999).

One classical definition of rhetoric as civic engagement aids a current understanding of transforming ideologies, values, and the meaning of past experiences into political action (Miller & Bowden, 1999). More specifically, Miller and Bowden (1999) argue that “a critical reappraisal of the civic virtues of "the good man speaking well" can help us…because the civic tradition was so concerned with the craft of translating "shared" values into political action (p. 593). This notion of rhetoric as civic engagement finds new meaning in the recent focus on visual literacy, whether visuals take the form of primarily textual or graphic representations of ideas.

Table 1 includes a list of definitions pertinent to the dissertation. I constructed these definitions by considering the purpose of this work and the context in which it was
carried out (current trends toward addressing sexual assault on college campuses, the responses to sexual assault by the university at which the work was carried out, and my role as a survivor and participant and what that allows me to understand).

Table 1: Definitions crucial to the dissertation study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>A physical injustice carried out against a person (While it is possible to assault someone verbally, this dissertation focuses on physical assault.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>“Sexual assault is any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Falling under the definition of sexual assault are sexual activities as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape” (“Sexual Assault”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivor</td>
<td>Though not necessarily officially documented, common practice in activism is to refer to those who have experienced assault but not died at the hands of their assailant as “survivors.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Though not necessarily officially documented, common practice in activism is to refer to those who have been murdered by an assailant as “victims” of assault.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial</td>
<td>Relating to the combination of the social with the mental and emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composing</td>
<td>The written or graphic constructing and construing of representations of our recognitions (adapted from Berthoff’s definition of “literacy”) (Berthoff, 1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial compositions</td>
<td>The metaphorical composing and revising of individual participants and society, and the contribution of written and visual texts as an input and output of the relationships between individuals and social culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Understanding knowledge and ideas in relation to context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual literacy</td>
<td>“the ability to understand and use images and to think and learn in terms of images” (Kaplan &amp;Mifflin, 1996, p.107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate practice</td>
<td>Response to context, audience, and purpose with consideration of content and form of a composition, regardless of medium. Writing or composing a particular product is a literate practice. The conscious or subconscious consideration of the social conditions under which one composes is also a literate practice. What audiences do with a particular composition can be considered another literate practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate artifacts</td>
<td>Documents or materials, such as those produced during social action events (protest signs, listserv sign-up sheets, and exhibits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s literate practices</td>
<td>Adoption, production, reproduction, or adaptation of textual or visual forms that respond to the needs of an individual or group of people in such a way that it advances personal and political positions within various forms of oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric/Rhetorical</td>
<td>The effective use of language and other elements of composition to persuade or influence others (adapted from OED) (“Rhetoric”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism</td>
<td>“The policy of active participation or engagement in a particular sphere of activity; spec. the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change” (“Activism”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social action</td>
<td>“deliberate action that results or is intended to result in a change in the institutions or conditions of social life; an instance of this” (“Social action”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Note: I use Activism and Social Action interchangeably.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>Relating to, or advocating for, rights, equality, and/or justice of all humans. In this work, this refers specifically to women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist activist work</td>
<td>The effort to bring about social change in regard to rights, equality and/or justice for people in oppressed positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>A “rhetorical art” (Glenn, 2004, p. 2), including an “absence of sound” and “absence with function” (Glenn, 2004, pp. 4-10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As briefly mentioned above, I participated in the CP and included my shirt in this study. Doing so allowed me to disclose my experiences anonymously during a time when I wished to avoid publicly identifying myself as a survivor. Such public identification compounds complications of navigating other defining markers faced by women, such as age, gender, appearance, and professional status. For example, in addition to my status as a survivor, my age and gender influence my ethos as a scholar and teacher, especially where students are concerned. Though I now identify as a survivor publicly, I remain

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

5 “Some students may also seek to challenge the authority of (or outright bully) particular categories of instructors, for example young, female, foreign, or minority faculty. This problem can be especially pronounced in some professional and graduate programs where the students may be older than the professor and have considerable experience and expertise themselves” (“Students are Intentionally Challenging the Instructor’s Authority”).
aware of the outlets and contexts in which I do so. I recognize, after all, that I occupy several, sometimes conflicting, subject positions (woman, scholar, educator, member of particular economic classes) associated with my experience of judgment, discrimination, and oppression. All of these subject positions influence my ethos, for better or worse, in various contexts. My status as a survivor only further complicates such dynamics. The CP, however, offers one outlet where women can identify as survivors without risk of marring public identities. During collection of the data presented in this study, I had professional relationships with many of the people serving on the CP planning committee, though I disclosed my role as a survivor to only one person. These relationships, like my choice to compose anonymously, increased the complexity of the work undertaken. I co-founded an on-campus organization with one of the members on the planning committee; I worked in the same department as another; I shared graduate-student status with at least two of them; and I became closer colleagues with one who had a fairly reputable position at the university. While such networking had the potential to serve my activist purposes, it also meant that I had to remain particularly mindful of the reputation that my research earned me across the university.

Matthews and Callahn (1996) noted that women in leadership roles can easily find themselves as outsiders, forcing them to adopt the role of “traveler,” learning the language, interacting meaningfully with the natives, and knowing how to return home (p. 347). Not only did I occupy a leadership role in terms of serving on the CP planning committee, but I also occupied a position as a university instructor, Assistant Writing Program Coordinator, and a member of various academic committees. I had to consider my participation in the CP in relation to all other roles I occupied. Navigating my various
subject positions meant constantly adapting to the elements discussed by Matthews and Callahn (1996). I spoke differently (or not at all) about my experiences, depending on whether I was with particular members of the planning committee, fellow participants in the CP, employees at the Health Center, or my students. Interacting effectively with the audiences in these various locations required me to consider the consequences of disclosure. For instance, I did not disclose to fellow CP participants, as many of them were undergraduates while I was a doctoral student teaching in the Writing Program. I feared that one of them might end up in one of my classes, and that their knowledge of my status might make for an uncomfortable situation, especially if they shared their knowledge with their peers. For me, disclosing to fellow CP participants raised potential issues in regards to ethos.

Moreover, Cushman (Brandt, Cushman, et al., 2001) noted that when a researcher makes her own experiences the focus, or part focus, of her research, she can fall into the role of "butterfly," a role in which she is "exoticized and chased," and put into a box by "butterfly collectors" (p. 45). My researcher-as-participant work meant that I had to traverse my reputation as CP participant, survivor, teacher, activist, woman, and employee at the same institution as some fellow participants. I, therefore, had to remain cognizant of entering others’ territories and of misrepresenting these others. Spaces, or "fields," of work do not exist as isolated spaces; they are intersectional, along with people's identities. My participation also means that I applied reflective feminist practices in my analysis, making clear that, though I participated in the project, I avoid speaking for other participants. My analysis stems from my role as a viewer of the event (except when talking about my own shirt). While I briefly discuss my roles as researcher
and participant here, as a way to introduce the nature of the project, later in this
dissertation, I return in-depth to important methodological matters involved with my
status as a researcher and participant using a feminist research lens.

With these notions in mind, then, I turned to investigating the literate practices
visible within the CP, focusing on how those literate practices participate in a reciprocal
relationship among cultural narratives and individual narratives, and how we examine
them within the framework of literacy studies. Studying writing as social action involves
considering genres, media, rhetorical appeals, and cultural narratives. More broadly,
writing as part of social action comprises psychosocial compositions, or writing which
addresses the metaphorical composing and revising of individual participants and society.
Psychosocial compositions, then, involve creating and changing individuals’ personal
identity as well as social concerns or structures. Although the concept of “psychosocial
compositions” is not found in scholarly literature, it is inherent in the idea of literate
practices such as writing therapy (Bolton, 2004). In fact, a New York Times Magazine
article discussed how talk therapy has declined and writing workshops, which address the
self and life issues, have increased (Almond, 2012). As Almond’s (2012) article puts it:
“literary endeavor has supplanted therapy as our dominant mode of personal
investigation…the refuge of stories, which remain the most reliable paths to meaning
ever devised by our species” (“A Theory More or Less Guaranteed to Rankle Therapist
and Writer Alike,” para. 2; “A Word in Defense of the Writing Cure,” para. 2). Of course,
one can question elevating stories to such a status; but stories with personal and social
significance can affect change. More specifically, such life stories have had a significant
role in creating a line of communication for oppressed individuals and, as such, are
important to scholars in psychology, rhetoric and composition, women’s studies, literacy studies, and pedagogy.

Women and members of other marginalized groups (based on race, disability, and sexual orientation), and their narratives, have traditionally been silenced (Benstock, 1988; Coleman, 1997). Often, those who have been silenced find subversive ways to defy power structures. For example, much feminist activist work takes place within and values silence. Take Back the Night uses silence to create a tone of remembrance; LGBTQ’s National Day of Silence stresses that the more people who join together in silence, “the louder” the message becomes (“Info + Resources”). And the CP advocates for the right of the survivor by allowing an alternative fashion of “speaking out” via decorating tee shirts. Because many women who have experienced assault remain uncomfortable talking about this experience, this project respects their right to silence. Making a physical material statement (a practice in many activist events) functions protectively; it protects the marginalized individual from identifying herself when communicating her story. In this way, composing mediates the activist purpose of “speaking out” and the ethical dilemma of forcing one to be silent or to speak, or to reveal one’s self. By using the clothesline and its connotations, image and space as much as words, women defy dominant discourse:

The admonition not to hang dirty laundry in public defines public and private in ways which preserve the very power relationships that led to dirtying the laundry in the first place: To define incest, for instance, or wife-battering as a private matter is to isolate the experience from the social structures and relationships which give rise to the violence. To define it as private is to dictate the discursive
context within which it may be spoken, and therefore understood. (Julier, 1994, p. 254)

I return, in Chapters 2 and 5, to the discussion of silence as it mediates power and activism.

At present, and as discussed in the following chapter, some research engages and develops the ideas that rhetoric and writing can be agents of social change, as asserted by Ellen Cushman (1996) and other rhetoric and composition scholars (Parks and Goldblatt, 2000; George, 2002; Daniell, 2003; Higgins, Long, & Flower, 2006; Lieblich, 2013). Such research also contributes to work on how composing changes or “revises,” individuals (Rose, 1999) and the larger culture (Fiandt, 2006). As such, investigating the scenes of narratives and silence at a site such as the CP contributes to an understanding of “literacy as a lived experience” (Addison, 2010). In so doing, this project addresses the multiple facets of humanitarian efforts: research, practice, and eventually, policy at the individual, institutional, and community levels.

To enhance understanding this research, I offer the graphic representation in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 depicts cultural narratives, literate practices, and psychosocial compositions all driving one another; as each gear shifts and rotates, it influences the movement of all the others. Moreover, we see the psychosocial compositions component as the largest gear because psychosocial compositions are the main component in that they consist of various functions of cultural narratives and literate practices. We can conceptualize a subset of processes, driven by the processes in Figure 1, as represented in Figure 2. Various understandings and amalgamations of cultural narratives, literate practices, and psychosocial compositions lead to the production of text and visuals; these
discourses then attempt to change the status quo, or change some of the understandings and resulting actions involved in the elements in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Representation of the relationship among main elements of the study
Making connections among composition and rhetoric, psychology, sociology, politics, women’s studies, and history, this research demonstrates the potential interdisciplinarity of writing studies. Moreover, as revealed throughout this dissertation, findings related to women’s activist composing practices reveal writing as a social practice, and the fragmentation and defragmentation of cultural narratives and cultural identity. Findings related to relationships between textual and visual rhetoric also suggest the opportunity to teach more sophisticated understandings of multimodal composing, particularly regarding digital versus material multimodal composing. This study, then, has implications for writing pedagogy, cultural studies, non-profit management and
marketing, and psychology. For example, findings inform understandings of students’ conceptualization of rhetorical relationships between image and text; the symbiotic relationship between cultural narratives and individual identities, and ways that activists navigate dissent and mediation; ways in which survivors’ communication practices might influence how organizations communicate to or with survivors; and, similarly, ways in which mental health professionals might deal with survivors of gender violence, particularly when it comes to creative therapies such as writing and art.

The remaining chapters of this dissertation, then, explore and explicate the dynamics presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature in the areas of literacy studies, visual rhetoric, activist research, and rhetorics of silence; this chapter provides a more thorough, foundational understanding of the scholarly work that has informed this dissertation study. Chapter 3 discusses the intellectual process of carrying out the work; it synthesizes an understanding of tee shirts as literate objects, a collection of tee shirts as the beginnings of an archive, feminist methodology informing research design, and the methods used to analyze data. Chapter 4 presents the results and the analysis of the results, or the findings and the implication of those findings in consideration of literate practices, cultural narratives, and psychosocial compositions. Finally, Chapter 5 accounts for counter arguments, limitations of the study, and considerations of future directions for subsequent studies, within the framework of rhetorics of silence and activism.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 1 communicated my intention to understand: 1) written and visual literacy as it mediates women’s experiences of gender violence and, 2) ways in which textual and visual artifacts help activists make sense of the construction and revision of cultural narratives. My study involves questioning how written and visual literacy function in relation to understandings of female embodiment and violence against women. Therefore, I review literature that situates written and visual composing amid collective and community uses of literacy driven by ideology and tacit ways of embodying social roles. Also, because my study questions how literate artifacts can be used to document, construct, and revise social narratives, personally and publicly, I review literature that suggests a psychosocial understanding of composing. Finally, because silence remains a pervasive component of personal and public narratives experienced by women, I examine work carried out in the area of rhetorics of silence.

Thus, I begin this chapter by looking at literacy studies, as literacy studies lay the foundation for an investigation of the social work carried out by people’s use of writing and visual design; moreover, visual rhetoric informs this dissertation’s understanding of how CP participants use images to make arguments to their imagined audiences. An understanding of particular social uses of composition, such as activism, must be preceded by a broader conceptualization of literacy as a social practice informed by ideologies. A focus on activist composing practices then shapes the design of my study and makes clearer how my investigation takes from and contributes to the writing studies
discipline. Finally, rhetorics of silence contextualize findings in cultural narratives of dominance, informing my argument for an ongoing, reciprocal relationship between personal and public narratives and, therefore, reciprocal composing practices, as evidenced in the dissertation data.

The literature review in this chapter is also driven by the need for an understanding of an ongoing, reciprocal relationship between conclusions drawn in the research of rhetoric and composition scholars and the conclusions drawn in my study. More specifically, the discussion in this chapter provides a space in which to explore and develop knowledge of patterns in activist messages’ content, rhetorical nuances involved in asserting agency from within positions of oppression, affordances and limitations of multimodal composing practices, and activists’ understandings of the functions of and relationships between textual and visual literacy.

**Literacy Studies**

In 1982, Shirley Brice Heath introduced the idea of literacy events, which occur when “a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (2001, p. 445). Heath’s examination of uses of literacy in the Trackton community revealed that its members read and wrote when occasions demanded such acts, but that understanding of written products relied on oral, group-oriented communications. While residents engaged in the same processes used to make sense of print (reliance on the text itself, prior experience related to the text, and creative thinking), increased knowledge of oral communication, particularly in regards to asking questions, would have helped residents further navigate their daily lives. Heath’s point is that oral and “literate traditions,” rather than existing along a spectrum, exist in
interconnected relationships with one another (p. 466). While my own dissertation supports the interconnectedness of literate traditions and ideas of voice and silence, I argue that findings from my study also support the notion of literate traditions (or practices) and ideas of voice and silence as existing along a spectrum. For example, my idea of psychosocial compositions argues that personal composing practices intertwine with cultural definitions of womanhood, which also set limits on what and how women communicate (or should communicate). Cultural traditions in censoring or masking women’s communication (Lashgari, 1995; Tomlinson, 2010) influences individuals’ literate practices, as women’s literate practices influence various understandings of aforementioned cultural traditions. CP participants show, however, that even such interconnectedness exists along a spectrum. Each act of communication is interconnected with current and historical context, but each interconnected act of communication also discloses to varying degrees along a continuum, ranging from complete silence to complete disclosure.

Similarly, Street (1984), in *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, postulates the ideological model of literacy in opposition to the autonomous model. The autonomous model argued for literacy as the root of intellectual and personal development, but treated literacy as a variable that could be studied in isolation from the social contexts in which such development took place. On the other hand, the ideological model suggests reading and writing practices as embedded in ideological, cultural purposes and processes, and opens the idea of literacy to multiple modes (Street, 1984). Therefore, we can think of any act of reading and writing as embedded in cultural processes, yet place it along a spectrum in terms of the degrees to which its mode influences its rhetorical effectiveness.
The use of tee shirts in the CP, for instance, lends itself to such an examination. First, as discussed throughout the dissertation, the androgyny suggested by tee shirts helps defy gender stereotypes and their associated disempowerment (Hipple, 2000); we might think of placing men and women’s clothing along a spectrum, on which tee shirts fall toward the middle and support CP activists’ purpose of defying gender stereotypes. To decorate skirts, for example, might only perpetuate stereotypes associated with victim blaming (women who wear revealing clothing invite acts of sexual violence), and therefore influence CP activists’ communication in a different way.

We might think of the CP as an activist event itself, but also founders’ decision to use tee shirts, as sponsorship for communication that attempts to defy stereotypes surrounding gender violence. Deborah Brandt (1998) introduced the idea of literacy sponsors, defined as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 556). This definition draws attention to dominant groups’ and activists’ stake in explicitly or tacitly creating and using social structures that break or defy communication boundaries for marginalized populations. To investigate sponsors of literacy, Brandt interviewed more than 100 people across the United States and traced influences on attitudes toward reading and writing and its resulting social “stratification” (p. 557). In so doing, Brandt demonstrates the importance of being able to place our findings along a spectrum; the idea of the spectrum helps us explore how cultural narratives and literacy interconnect to place people in particular subject positions with varying degrees of power (and perhaps keep them there). Brandt’s work, then, hints at a psychosocial understanding of literacy.
Three years after Brandt’s work, James Paul Gee (2001) argued that “a new field of study, integrating ‘psych’ and ‘socio’ approaches to language from a variety of disciplines, is emerging, a field which we might call literacy studies” (p. 525). He encouraged examination of the “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations,” more simply known as “Discourses” (p. 526). Gee differentiates the meaning of discourse with a lowercase “d” and Discourse with a capital “D,” conceptualizing discourse as a solely linguistic construction and Discourse as all forms of communication acted out in relation to various identities and social contexts (p. 526).

While my dissertation does not use the term “discourse,” my notion of psychosocial compositions builds on Gee’s idea of Discourses; psychosocial compositions encompass “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” associated with an individual’s dynamic (rather than static) identity, and the influence of various social contexts on such identities (2001, p. 526).

To further encourage investigation of intersections of literacy, individual ways of being, and social context, Higgins, Long, and Flower (2006) introduced the term “community literacy” as a way of thinking about literacy as “the public act of writing and taking social action” (p. 9). Long (2008) later questioned: “What does it take for ordinary people to go public?” (p. 15). My dissertation explores the follow-up question of how people use literacy to go public, taking particular interest in the communication of people occupying multiple oppressed subject positions (women and survivors). To engage in such work, Long (2008) suggested a rhetorical framework that includes identifying: the guiding metaphor (description of the space), context (location and factors that give literacies their meaning), tenor of the discourse (register, affective quality of the
discourse), literacy (practices that comprise how people organize and carry out going public), and rhetorical invention (the process by which people respond to the exigencies that call the local public into being) (p. 16). She further hopes that examination of local publics will lead to “useful generalizations” (p. 18) with implications for understandings of literacy in a variety of disciplines. Correspondingly, this dissertation includes discussion of the CP’s metaphor of “airing dirty laundry”; the context of shirt-making sessions and the larger cultural context; use of emotional appeals; literacy involved in going public; and the possible influence of silencing on invention.

While scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition examined the use of literacy for civic engagement and social change before Long, and have examined such use since Long’s focus on community literacy (i.e. Cushman, 1996; George, 2002; Addison, 2010; Lieblich, 2013), these investigations follow a line of work on the psychological and sociological functions of writing. For example, Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) asserted that identity is created by, and understood within, the cultural narratives amidst which people find themselves. In essence, Rosenwald and Ochberg recognize a symbiotic relationship between one’s narrative, one’s audience, and one’s life. As we find ourselves in constant tension with authoritative discourse and the discourse of all others we encounter, we must deal with persuasion and ideology as “not within us, but between us” (Warshauer & Ball 2004, p. 29). Similarly, Kock and Villadsen (2012) use the term “rhetorical citizenship” to discuss the way in which discourse serves not as a precedent to action but as part of action itself (p. 1). Together, these scholars bring attention to “macro and micro practices” (Kock & Villadsen 2012, p. 6) and their implications.
In contemporary culture, multimodality is pertinent to macro and micro literate practices. The New London Group (2014), one of the most influential groups of scholars in the movement to focus on multimodality, suggests any “semiotic activity” as involving design (available designs, designing, and the redesigned) (p. 194). In their view, discourse both reproduces and changes social conventions; design decisions and products are always historically interwoven with other texts. Likewise, CP participants’ design decisions suggest that the seemingly ubiquitous discourse of digital composition influences understandings and use of composing practices in other modes.

Furthermore, Gunther Kress (2003) asserts that a shift in visual culture requires a move from literacy theories of linguistics to those of semiotics. He argues that semiotic change occurs when the change in mode echoes “the values, structures and meanings of the social and cultural world of the meaning-maker and of the socio-cultural group in which they are” (p. 40). Again, as mentioned previously, the semiotic analysis in my study suggests that the change in people’s preferred mode of communication may be from material multimodal composing to digital multimodal composing. In other words, generally speaking, engaging with the arts at one time involved more interaction with tangible rather than digital materials (i.e. scrapbooking, card making, architectural designing, and drawing) than what may be common today. Of course, all representations are limited in their ability to reflect experiences (Kress, 2003). But while Kress argues that images have supplanted the use of text in communication, my study shows participants relying on text. Therefore, cultural trends related to mode, in some cases, may pertain more to divides between digital and non-digital multimodal composing, rather than to divides between textual and visual composing.
Hocks and Balsamo (2003) write about multimedia, particularly new media, as it relates to women and feminist activism. They claim that women can envision and carry out activism in “technological artifacts” (p. 192). Their project, “Women of the World Talk Back,” involved video recording responses to a video archive of international representatives’ commentary on global women’s politics. With their delivery grounded in technology, they aimed to develop a “virtual public” (p. 195) and use technology to draw attention to feminist issues while also drawing attention to feminist perspectives on technology. They argue

We can ask such questions as: Where are the places within a given formation that the technology is given meaning or shape? At what point is the technology designed to serve certain ends and not others? Who benefits from specific technological designs? At what moments do decisions get made to pursue one technological research program and not another? (p. 201)

These kinds of questions, contextualized within technological articulation, become the points for feminist intervention.

We can ask the same questions of any available (or unavailable) modes of communication and their relation to the situations linked to hegemony and politics. Hocks and Balsamo’s questions of mode are echoed in considerations of the tee shirt as a genre. Scholars have considered how the tee shirt is given new meaning in the context of the CP (Julier, 1994; Hipple, 2000). Chapter 5 of this dissertation also discusses how the physical space of the tee shirt might influence rhetorical invention. This raises issues, then, of how the tee shirt serves certain ends and not others.
Wysocki’s “awaywithwords: On the Possibilities of Unavailable Designs” (2005), also takes up some of Hocks and Balsamo’s questions. Wysocki focused on “how materials have acquired the constraints they have and hence why, often certain materials and designs are not considered available for certain uses” (2001, p. 303). As demonstrated in the CP, these constraints call for composers to understand the spaces on and in which they compose and, therefore, how they might use those spaces differently than an audience might expect (Wysocki, 2001). Moreover, Wysocki argued that a dichotomous conceptualization of “word” and “image” perpetuates other oppositional relationships, such as those between men and women (2001, p. 306). In other words, changing or experimenting with textual or visual composition conventions can lead to changes in social practices and ideologies, which is what Kress suggests, and findings in this dissertation study might also suggest.

Changes in composition conventions and ideologies might, in turn, lead to shifts in the content of images. Kress and VanLeeuwen (2006), in their book, Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design, theorize images as either narrative or conceptual, with the former depicting or representing doing something to or for each other, and the latter “representing participants in terms of their more generalized essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning” (p. 79). Important to the distinction is their idea of “vectors,” or invisible lines that connect people to one another, so that narrative images may not engage in storytelling but form interactions among participants in the images. Conceptual images, then, do not have vectors and rather aim to appear static and acontextualized. Again, though the study of the CP taken up in this dissertation does not adopt the language of “vectors,” psychosocial compositions relate to the idea of vectors. My
exploration of rhetorics of silence situated in cultural narratives also suggest the presence of vectors in both text and images.

Like the invisible lines Kress and VanLeeuwen (2006) conceptualize, Jeffrey Grabill (2010) grapples with the under-established (or unseen) connection between composing and its implications in the public sector. He argues for a focus on rhetoric as “work” that involves collaborating with others and learning to communicate effectively with writing, images, and information technology (p. 193). Grabill (2010) supports the discussion in this chapter and in Chapter 4 about the value of text and image in multiple modes beyond those that are digital. Jefferies (2001) refers to the combination of linguistics and image discussed by Grabill as “scriptovisual” (p. 191) and addresses definitional issues of “feminist visual culture.” More specifically, Jefferies (2001) aligns feminism with politics; she traced patterns in various art forms, which revealed a focus on domestic trends, “the phenomenon of empty garments,” and an intersection between personal and political interests (p. 201). She states:

Such work may not demonstrate the ‘authentic’ agitation of a ‘Sisterhood is powerful’ slogan, nor subscribe to a consciousness-raising collective, but paradoxically it might just conform to a feminist model of rendering the personal within the political; a site where traditional, gendered biographies and identities are loosened by fragments of cloth and fragile bits of sewing. (p. 201)

Similarly, and examined in my dissertation, Jefferies observes how language and art take their status as subversive only in relation to the dominant; in other words, activists must use the language of the dominant discourse even as they critique it. After all, social critique by those in oppressed positions almost always involves elements of disguise (p.}
The issue becomes not whether art depicts the truth but how it came to be, what it conveys, and who gets implicated in it (Coogan, 2010, p. 161). Explorations of visual rhetoric draw attention to the CP as a rich site for questioning materials used in feminist activism and what those materials suggest about dominant culture (Wysocki, 2005); the live audience of an event which includes previously constructed materials by anonymous creators (Hocks and Balsamo, 2003); and the “active” relationships formed among narrative images (Kress and VanLeeuwen, 2006) on CP tee shirts.

The activist research discussed in the following section, in many instances, has been conducted by literacy scholars exploring the role of reading and writing in personal and social change. Therefore, it is a more focused extension of the work presented in this first section.

**Activist Research**

Some scholars have tried to gain a better understanding of how writing leads to action. Tal (1996), Florence (2000); Bazerman (2004); Bremner (2006); Higgins, Long, & Flower (2006); and Clover & Stalker (2008), for example, look at ways in which texts remain embedded within ideological, hierarchal social constructs, and the ways texts may be used to maintain the status quo or change reality.

Tal (1996) wrote the seminal work on trauma and writing, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. In it, she examined the Holocaust, Vietnam War, and sexual violence against women, and identified three means of coping: mythologization, medicalization, and disappearance. Mythologization works to transform trauma narratives from “frightening and uncontrollable” to “contained and predictable”; medicalization
constructs survivors as being able to be “cured” via proper medical and psychiatric care; and disappearance calls into question the existence of violence against women and, therefore, the ethos of survivors (p. 6). If survivors can determine the interpretation of their experiences, they may influence a change in “social and political structure”; but if larger cultural narratives continue to control interpretation of sexual trauma experiences, social and political structures will go unchanged (p. 7). Survivors’ position in relation to larger contexts involving various historical and present power structures, however, influence the control survivors have over their narratives and how they are received (p. 18). Mythologization, medicalization, and disappearance all serve to silence survivors, and yet, lead to activists creating events like the CP, where people can compose within silence. In other words, the limitations placed on women become opportunities for alternative modes of communication. In the case of the CP, also, the tee shirts provide a visual representation of the fact that sexual assault is not an anomaly; women get to see their individual experiences as part of a collective (Droogsma, 2009).

Similarly, while running a writing group, Florence (2000), discovered each participant’s story embedded in her own story, and vice versa. She also found that writing became a “prelude” to critical action, as participants wrote letters to courts, to counselors, and to landlords. She writes, “We learned something about revision not only of our writing, but also of our lives. And as we collaborated with one another, we became both the initiators of and the witnesses to our revisions and transformations, or healings” (p. 447). Writing, then, altered writing group participants’ realities.

Bazerman (2004) also looked at the creation of “new realities” via texts (p. 309), leading to his argument that texts create “social facts [consisting of action through
language or speech acts]…carried out in genres…which arise in social processes of people trying to understand each other well enough to coordinate activities and share meanings for their practical purposes” (pp. 311 & 317). Moreover, these genres shed light on social structures that play a role in people’s subject positions and the justices and injustices associated with them. Like Florence (2000), he implicates intertextuality as an influence on “systems of human activity” (p. 311). An understanding of these processes yields an ability to create anew, both texts and their related activities. Bremner (2006) also addressed systems of human activity by examining creation, description, and reception of texts. He concluded that “goal-oriented” texts (texts aimed at getting things done) remain intertwined with institutional exigency, thereby influencing what and how writers write (p. 420). In addition, his study showed context as continually dynamic rather than static; amidst issues of power, writers had to balance their own needs with the needs and conventions of the institution in which they wrote. The choices composers made reinforced their institutional identity and the status quo of their relationships with others while occupying that identity. Likewise, as CP participants attempt to balance their own purposes for participation with the needs or expectations of viewers, they may also struggle with having their identities as members of marginalized groups (women and survivors) reinforced.

Of course, acts of navigating personal and public needs are not exclusively oppressive. Higgins, Long, & Flower (2006), in “Community Literacy: A Rhetorical Model for Personal and Public Inquiry,” examined how literate practices involved in community deliberation “reproduced certain values, norms, identities, and relationships” (p. 14). They concluded that community literacy efforts rely on both textual and verbal
communication and that texts “work” by “circulating and re-circulating, evolving and changing—even if incrementally—the way we live and work together as a community” (p. 30 & 34). They see problems as beginning in a “problem space,” a more localized understanding than thinking of problems as belonging to particular “subjects” (p. 13). In the case of overarching cultural narratives, it can be difficult to define “problems spaces.” Clover and Stalker (2008) took an international approach. They conducted an international study of 28 fabric arts projects created by women in British Columbia; Ontario, Canada; and the north island of Aotearoa, New Zealand (p. 1). The authors argued for a reconceptualization of women’s fabric arts as “dynamic educative, activist, political, feisty, and subversive tools worthy of study” (p. 5). Four major themes emerged in interviews they conducted with women using art as a form of activist participation; these themes included: expression of passion for reflecting on personal and political issues (p. 6) and passion for the products; self-deprecation (p. 8); external censorship (in Canada) and internal/self-censorship (in New Zealand) (p. 9); and collective work (in Canada) and individual work (in New Zealand). The idea of censorship as it relates to cultural narratives informs my discussions of rhetorics of silence in Chapter 5.

The research discussed thus far notes intersections of personal and public interest, power, and language. Moreover, Kock and Villadsen (2012) note that “discourse is not preparatory to real action but is in many ways constitutive of civic engagement” (p. 1). Likewise, Tal (1996) points out that the meaning ascribed to various forms of trauma is determined, in part, by political discourse that “shapes the rhetoric of the dominant culture and influences future political action” (p. 7). For example, composing “revise[s]” individuals (Rose, 1999) and seemingly omnipresent cultural social narratives (Fiandt,
In the instance of the CP, artists may now “re-vision” personal blame as a social issue (Julier, 1994, p. 253). Payne (2000) states that survivors of abuse “have lost confidence in a stable, knowable reality. Signifiers and signified constantly shift. Thus, reality and one’s sense of identity are deconstructive texts” (p. 151). But Baur (1994) notes that in attempts to fit extenuating circumstances or experiences into a sense of normal life, “language is our main tool for creating and then negotiating what we think of as ‘reality’” (p. 60). Similarly, women involved in the CP “seem to see that language can be amended to reshape experience” (Julier, 2000, p. 373), to rewrite—deconstruct and reconstruct—themselves. On a larger scale, Thiongo (2002) argues:

Our pens should be used to increase the anxieties of all oppressive regimes. At the very least the pen should be used to ‘murder their sleep’ by constantly reminding them of their crimes against the people, and by letting them know that they are seen. (p. 221)

The art of the CP, like other art, tries not in and of itself to solve major social issues related to oppression, but rather to serve as a political act by providing honest accounts of the intersection of such problems with real people (Escobar, 2002). Choosing and engaging with images [and words] instills a sense of autonomy, even over past events (Peacock, 1991). Writing can change power structures (Hyland in Bremner, 2006). Higgins, Long, & Flower (2006) refer to this changing of power as “poetic world making, resisting the exclusionary norms of critical-rational discourse and creating a space for performative, affective, and situated meaning making…” (p. 29). CP participation, then, may contribute to an understanding of individuals’ subject positions as survivors in the larger society, and their relation to fellow survivors, victims, offenders, and cultural
attitudes. CP participants’ work, their rhetorical understandings and strategies, is crucial because, if society “appropriate[s] the trauma and can codify it in its own terms, the status quo will remain unchanged...[and] the penalty for repression is repetition” (Tal 1996, p. 7). In other words, through words and art, survivors take command of what was done to them and make an attempt at taking command of audience members’ internalization of survivors’ experiences.

Fiandt (2006) claims that “just as healing intentions spur art, socio political activist intentions spur art...Every vital social movement immediately begins to generate art, songs, poetry, posters, murals, novels...So, while writing demands action, action can, simultaneously demand art” (pp. 581-82). Previously, Edelmen (1994) made a connection between art and literature, claiming that both forms of expression serve as examples for social action stemming from “personal or collective planning or plotting...psychopathology, or...emotion” (p. 9). From this view, writing and art (or writing as an art) provide illustrations of responses to social and personal experiences. Indeed, people adopt ideologies based, in part, on the visual representations they encounter (Felshin, 1995). Weber (2008) noted how this works with "mundane" images, which provide for a reconceptualization of their representations because people don't have their guard up in response to those images (p. 45). For example, the AIDS quilt exposes viewers to subtle yet transformative ways of thinking; the quilt not only raises awareness of a deadly disease, but raises associations with the home and, in particular, the intimacy of a bed (Elsley, 1992). Those associations bridge the distance between the disease and people who think it has no relation to them (Elsley, 1992). In this way, the quilt—and the CP and other events—support notions of figurative communication in nonverbal forms (Elsley,
Similarly, some artists have used clothing to assert messages about gender, as empty clothing makes suggestions about androgyny and gendered stereotypes, and does so “visually, silently, continuously” (Felshin, 1995, pp. 20-24 & 29). In the case of survivors of assault, women have witnessed assault (in the sense of disembodiment many women experience during physical violence and in the sense of having a first-hand account of violence) and then invited others to witness part of their personal experience, a personal experience which implicates a larger social problem. In other words, Clothesline participants witness violence firsthand and then witness to others with their publicly displayed messages.

Baur (1994), a psychotherapist, alludes to the power of witnessing to others when she cites the experience of a male client whose “putting experiences into words for another person had in a small way transposed his private suffering into a story that could be taken up and acted upon. It returned him to the community—a little” (p. 63). The relationship between stories (or scenes), identity, and environment is symbiotic; one automatically influences the other (Baur, 1994). This dynamic evokes a sense of Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia, “a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other’…Heteroglossic language shifts the focus from individual author to a concentration of voices within and outside of the text(ile)” (Elsley, 1992, p. 191). This interanimiation reflects the notion of “interpenetration,” the idea that various entities can be embedded in one another yet maintain individual characteristics (Dolzani, 2012, p. 27-28). My conceptualization of psychosocial compositions applies these notions of heteroglossia and interpenetration to efforts to create social change and, therefore, change the quality of lived experiences.
Language modifies the lived experience previously embodied as "ephemeral chunks of language" (Daniell, 2003, p. 44); a psychological experience becomes a concrete form through the use of narrative (Lieblich, 2013). Composing allows us to become different, “othered,” so to speak, thereby allowing us the advantages of perspective, relief, honesty, and growth. Davies (1992), in “Women’s Subjectivity and Feminist Stories," explores how individuals take up narratives as their own, how they use language and stories to understand themselves as “whole" or as “both sides of any dualism” (p. 75). Jane Marcus (1988), in “Invincible Mediocrity: The Private Selves of Public Women," makes the same observation when she points out that a sense of double-consciousness makes any writing performed by or for an individual a collective construction. As people write from within, and with awareness of, their multiple subject positions (socioeconomic status, gender, race, education level, relationship status, ability/disability), they put themselves in relation to a variety of social and cultural narratives and, therefore, in relation to their readers in a variety of ways.

The move from the use of literacy for personal growth or healing to the use of literacy as public commentary can be complicated, however. Some women, therefore, draw on non-traditional forms of communication to help make this move. For instance, one woman interviewed in Clover and Stalker’s (2008) research suggested the use of fabric arts for private protest as a way for her to use her hands and "keep her tongue still,” which she found safer than using her voice in a larger social arena; these arts, displayed anonymously and collectively, get to say things that their creators could not say without negative consequence (p. 7). Here again, we see the idea of the construction of the
individual, and her understanding of herself and her place in a particular social structure, but also the construction of an idea, of artwork, of a movement. The above examples demonstrate women adopting literate practices (reading, writing, creating artwork) and using those literate practices to produce their own ideas and responses, to reproduce cultural ideas, and to attempt to modify ideas. Skinner (2009) demonstrates this dynamic when she recounts her experience of sexual assault as an undergraduate student; when confiding in a friend, Skinner (2009) received the advice that, if it happened again, she should try and relax so that would not hurt as badly (p. 178). Her participation in events like “Take Back the Night,” and her act of writing a book, aided the internalization of her new identity and kept her experiences from consuming her (Skinner, 2009).

Some people find such comfort in composing only if done anonymously. Disclosure of identity opens composers to the critiques of their multiple subject positions, perhaps even unjustly placing focus on the wrong aspect of a composer’s experience. The use of traditionally trivial artifacts, like art, allow for social commentary that protects the composer yet does not strip the literate act of its rhetorical nature. Women using fabric arts in Clover and Stalker’s (2008) study reported that they struggled with internal and external censorship, determining what they felt comfortable disclosing even anonymously and how the public would receive the disclosure. Similarly, Dalton (1995) encountered these considerations in regards to a woman writing about her suffering of sexual abuse; the writer noted her awareness of the fact that too vivid a story could alienate a large portion of the audience who might question the graphic nature of the account, or who simply would find themselves unable to relate to such a graphic telling. On the other hand, too subtle a story downplays the brutality of her experiences and the seriousness of
the issue (Dalton, 1995) and, therefore, may fail to mobilize activists.

Literacy includes an understanding of audience, meaning-making, and process; composing activism and its literate artifacts demonstrates and teaches how text, image, and spoken words mediate disclosure and enclosure. Writing or creating artwork about sexual assault can lead to personal and political awareness, even if external circumstances change very little or not at all. Activism involves composing ourselves. Metaphorically speaking, dressing our wounds with words, and letting others dress our wounds with their experiences, still leaves us wounded but with lessons and resources to offer others. We compose activism when we seek meaning from our experiences, seek investment of others in our cause, and act accordingly. The call for attention to how text and, increasingly, visuals get enacted (or not) to make arguments about justice is crucial. These texts and visuals as they are chosen, avoided, used, and received by an audience relate to rhetorics of silence.

**Rhetorics of Silence**

One of the earliest ruminations on silence came in Greene’s (1940) *The Philosophy of Silence*, in which she argued that Silence allowed for exploration of deep levels of consciousness and, therefore, led to knowledge (pp. 209-210).\(^6\) Though she focuses on uses of silence in religious practices, she argues for its application in other fields. Moreover, she argues that Silence fosters emotional and intellectual experiences, enhances the quality of life, and lends itself to critical and scientific examination. What we experience in silence gives “direction and purpose to action” (p. 25). Greene’s work

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\(^6\) Greene capitalizes the word “Silence” when using it in this “advanced, disciplined sense, indicating a silence deeper than the abstinence from words. Thus, where the word refers to the kind of stillness that means great activity on other than physical levels, this profounder meaning is emphasized by the use of the capital letter” (Prefatory Note).
lays the foundation for thinking of silence as more complex than dominant culture tends to portray it, and draws attention to silence and felt experiences. Discussions in Chapters 4 and 5 address the issue of CP participants’ emotional appeals as they relate to women’s silences.

In 1969, Susan Sontag considered silence in relation to art. She claimed that artists use silence to connect with their audience; but in the case of modern art, the “silence” is “unintelligibility” (p. 7). This unintelligibility pushes the audience to refocus its attention on a “perceptual and cultural clean slate,” so that art serves the purpose of “conjuring” rather than “expressing” (pp. 17-18). Sontag asserts silence as useful in renouncing thought (for prayer or meditation), signifying the completion of a thought, enabling thought, and supplementing speech. In all cases, then, silence can foster reflection that leads to intellectual and sociopolitical change. CP participants also produce compositions that, to some extent, are unintelligible; they exclude details that would aid viewers in gaining a greater understanding of what is taking place, where the action is taking place, and who is involved. If we think of this unintelligibility as CP participants’ use of silence for the sake of pushing viewers to engage intellectually with the project, but also recognize ways in which participants themselves might be silenced by dominant culture, we can imagine a paradox worth rhetorical exploration.

Kalamaras (1994) asserts silence as “emptiness that is, paradoxically, full” (p. 1). He argues that Western culture has misunderstood, and therefore discredited, silence. The Western impulse to compartmentalize leads to the placement of speaking and silence on opposite ends of a spectrum. Eastern cultural preferences, on the other hand, lead to ideas of unification, so that speaking and silence are parts of a whole. Kalamaras (1994) also
points out that “natural silence” is not gendered or divergent in nature from feminist theory and praxis; in fact, by allowing for reflection, self-awareness, and experimentation with language, natural silences (as opposed to forced) can foster greater authority when one speaks (p. 5). We return, then, to the idea of the spectrum. As with image and text, perhaps we can reimagine the spectrum not with silence on one end and speaking on the other, but with varying degrees of silence interconnected with different modes. For example, we might think of rhetorical appeals as existing on a spectrum, and place different interactions between silence and speaking at individual points along the spectrum. To some degree, the dissertation does this by examining relationships between disclosure and enclosure, and between text and images, and considering them within the framework of various definitions and acts of silencing.

Moreover, Glenn expanded notions of silence as a form of rhetoric. In Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence (2004), she argues that whether something one does, something one has done to them, or something one experiences, the effect of silence depends on the context in which it occurs. Silence, like speech, can assert power (i.e. giving the silent treatment). Silence remains embedded in institutional power that determines “who speaks, who remains silent, who listens, and what those listeners can do” (p. 23). Glenn contextualizes her arguments in her ethnographic study of American Indians, in which she observed the use of silence involved in the meeting of strangers, courtship, disagreement, mourning, and ceremony. She, therefore, draws attention to “marginalized groups’ typically unnoticed and often prolonged struggle to maintain…rhetorical sovereignty, meaning the right to speak or not on our own terms” (p. 108).
Cain (2012) also considers silence and marginalized groups in contemporary culture. She asserts that Western, and in particular American, culture is dominated by what she calls the "Extrovert Ideal," described as "the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha and comfortable in the spotlight" (p. 12). Cain's research included visits to what she termed “three nerve centers of the Extrovert Ideal”—a Tony Robbins self-help seminar, the Harvard Business School, and a megachurch; she noted the discomfort and struggles experienced by introverts in those environments (p. 28). While she admits that all people must act against their nature at some points, doing so on a regular basis is unhealthy. She therefore suggests that calling for people to speak can, at times, be unhealthy. Her notion of speaking as perhaps unhealthy counters stereotypes of the quiet individual as mentally disturbed and isolated from social relationships.

The subject of silence also lends itself to additional, more complex categorizations than those of only extraversion and introversion. Bruneau (1973), for example, categorized silence as psycholinguistic (silence experienced during the processing of speech), interactive (conversational silence), and socio-cultural (silence used for larger social purposes such as ceremonies, or in particular locations like libraries and museums). He also noted that our internal monologues never permit total silence. Clair (1998) later categorized silence as literal (lack of voice), epistemological (knowing something without being able to articulate what we know), ontological (the Silence of Being, a silence experienced in awe), and ideological (silence as the ways we see it as either oppressive or liberating). Later, Kurzon (2007) categorized silence as conversational, thematic (remaining silent about a particular topic), textual (the silence we use to engage with text, reading and writing), and situational (as in “moments of
silence" for remembrance). Furthermore, Oliveros (2012) conceptualized silence as occurring when we choose to say one thing versus another, use silence in conversation, and choose to remain silent for an extended period of time, either for personal or social reasons (as in remembrance). Each of these scholars attempt to understand the complex dynamics of silence by simplifying these dynamics into categories. These categories, of course, in many cases mirror one another and in other instances intersect with one another. In all cases, however, they refute notions of silence as solely oppressive, and notions of people who are silent as subdued. These scholars build on Bahktin’s notion that silence and speech “disturb one another in intelligible and personalistic ways” (Farmer, 2001, p. 4). Activist events demonstrate and sometimes even rely on this being the case. For example, LGBTQ’s National Day of Silence counts on silence to disturb speech in a meaningful way that may lead to social change.

Still, that voice and silence serve as metaphors for dominance, yet remain largely undefined, demonstrates Western culture’s uncritical acceptance of ideas of silence as oppressive (Reinharz, 1994). Therefore, the discussion must move from broad notions of the functions of silence to the specific ways in which silence contributes meaningfully to exigency and hegemony. Bruneau (1973) points out that the decision to “enclose” or “disclose” is an active one (p. 29). One can use secrecy as an assertion of power or a demonstration of agency; one can inflict silence on another via blackmail or threats; one can choose to remain silent for her own protection; or one can use silence to hold power over another. Moreover, Claire (1998) follows up on Foucault's idea of “self-containing opposites," that is, any moment or experience can be both liberating and oppressive; verbal communication can be silencing and silence can be expressive. For instance, in
movements like the Underground Railroad, people were forced to act subversively and silently, but yet still used that silence as part of their rebellion (Claire, 1998).

The CP embodies many of the ideas presented here about silence and power. The CP, for instance, reflects Clair’s (1988) ideas about trauma survivors and their struggle to put experience and wisdom into words. Also, what Greene (1940), Cain (2012), Kalamaras (1994), and Glenn (2002 & 2004) assert about individuals' inherent inclination to gain and express knowledge, though not the way the larger society wishes, is still a viable and valuable way of being in the world. Survivors of assault rhetorically use modes of knowing and expression other than their voices. As Black (1988) and Glenn (2004) point out, the presence or absence of silence is not the point; rather, whether or not one chooses to speak or remain silent is the issue. This study examines the modes of survivors’ expression, which echo Glenn and Ratcliffe’s (2011) encouragement for rhetorical listening. Rhetorical listening involves knowing not only how speak respectfully but also how to “listen” in such a way that yields reflection on and understanding of non-dominant populations’ navigation of personal experiences.

**Conclusion: A Brief Synthesis of Previous Scholarship and the Dissertation**

A common thread through much of the scholarship on women’s literate practices is the idea of individual fragmentation and defragmentation that yields coalition with others. This thread led to the development of my definition of women’s literate practices as any adoption, production, reproduction, or adaptation of textual or visual forms that respond to the needs of an individual or group of people in such a way that it advances personal and political positions within various forms of oppression. These notions of fragmentation and defragmentation also informed my conceptualization of psychosocial
compositions, which suggests literate practices as recursive: social narratives influence individual composers, who create texts that respond to these narratives. Furthermore, Dorothy Holland and Debra Skinner (2008) noted that a focus on movements to promote literacy acquisition came at the expense of realizing the reverse, how literate practices contribute to social movements. Therefore, Holland and Skinner (2008) argued that “social movements often organise activities around the use of written forms, but these literacy events and practices have received little attention for the roles they play in effecting social, cultural and political change” (p. 849). This dissertation takes up their call to explicitly and methodically investigate possibilities for activist literate practices to effect social change.

I assert that activism serves the purposes of increasing awareness and education of the public in regards to a particular issue. Activism also gives participants a means of expression in regards to an issue they experience as deeply personal. When women tell their stories, or part of their stories, it presents opportunities for both authors/artists and audience members to experience change, in terms of identity and action (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). Of course, activism often addresses painful experiences and presents challenges to balancing the personal with the public and, along with that, voiced and unvoiced expression. Silence as a choice and a right related to “individual freedom of mind” (Bosmajian, 1999, p. 180) is a conceptualization of silence less recognized than the idea of silence as oppressive. But the right to refrain from speaking aloud publicly can become an issue of dignity, personal autonomy, and integrity; calls to remain silent, just like calls to speak, may interfere with self-fulfillment (Bosmajian, 1999, pp. 186 & 195). In a society where women may still be judged by, or reduced to, their status as survivors
of sexual assault, Audre Lorde’s (1984) proclamation that “your silence will not protect you” (p. 41) falls short of realizing that, in many ways, silence does protect. Silence, in some situations, protects one from self-incrimination, vulnerability, humiliation, pain, and responsibility. Yet, if silence is used to protect one from these elements, is it a choice? Glenn (2004) asserts, “The question is not whether speech or silence is better, more effective, more appropriate. Instead, the question is whether our use of silence is our choice (whether conscious or unconscious) or that of someone else” (Glenn, 2004, p. 13).

My dissertation explores the relationships between literacy, rhetoric, and activism. In doing so, it contributes valuable knowledge to how those in oppressed subject positions use literacy publicly and subversively to create social change, whether that change be on an individual level or a larger scale. This research expands upon the long-standing notion that “the personal is political” and sheds light on the complexities of blurred boundaries—how personal reading and writing practices and, in the case of this research, how the researcher’s own experiences of trauma, influence one’s personal and formal role in carrying out activism. This work also sheds light on how paradoxes like “silence speaks” allow for subversive communication in material, visual, textual, “spoken” and “unspoken” forms. This knowledge remains important to developing a culture in which differences become increasingly identified, accepted, and protected. Amidst the critical awareness of how literacy can function in a redemptive and oppressive manner—and, almost contradictorily, amidst work to create “activist” efforts to promote literacy (Holland & Skinner 2008)—it seems important to investigate how oppressed groups use literacy to assert agency or cope with traumatic experiences, to call
for safety, appreciation, and validation of all individuals. Though some work has begun to address the role of rhetoric and various forms of composition in activism (Lashgari, 1995; Cushman, 1996; Florence, 2000; Jolly, 2005; Fiandt, 2006; Lieblich, 2013), an understanding of the complex ways people “speak” during acts of activism remains worthy of further study. I aim to begin to understand such dynamics as literate practices and alternative forms of “speaking” create a call for action in the Clothesline Project.

My work also intersects with and contributes to the current history of rhetoric and composition via its look at the vitalization of discourses and literacies traditionally separated from composition and rhetoric. Ann Ruggles Gere notes that “the authentic is relational,” critiquing the traditional separation of personal and academic writing (2000, p. 33). When Payne (2000) talks about the historicizing of sexual abuse essays, she notes that in colonial times, accounts of sexual assault were held up against set criteria to determine “truths” (p. 139). Later, in 18th and 19th century religious movements, women were allowed to disclose accounts of sexual abuse only because the Bible was the true authority in asserting that such acts were wrong. The 20th century saw the movement toward psychoanalysis, which minimized the seriousness with which such accounts were taken (Payne, 2000). Fifteen years ago, Payne claimed a continued struggle to bring accounts of assault into the academic realm (Payne, 2000). Though many scholars now account for “felt difficulty” and “cognitive dissonance” (Young 1981, pp. 60-61), we still seem to draw distinct lines between what enters personal and academic spaces. Sorsoli (2010) argues that participants’ erasures or revisions could indicate an attempt to not make us uncomfortable. But silence can also be a plea, or a test, to see if we are willing to ask further—and accept. It seems that the same course of action with researchers holds
promise. As a researcher, I can attest to the emotionality of putting forth a public identity that one can never take back. Such work is dangerous, calling into question the relationship between risk and reward. This dissertation explores these relationships (including my own subject position as CP participant and researcher), the feminist methodology and scholarship informing the research design, and the results of a CP archive analysis.
CHAPTER 3
THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Following the review of literature on literacy studies, activist research, rhetorics of silence, and the CP, this chapter discusses this dissertation’s conceptual and methodological underpinning. This work involves understanding the tee shirt as a literate object, theorizing the CP as a potential archive, considering feminist and participant-observer research, and describing the processes of carrying out data collection and analysis.

The Tee Shirt as a Literate Object

Understanding the tee shirt as a literate object begins with considering the psychology of clothes in general. First printed in 1930, Psychology of Clothes asserted three functions of clothing: decoration, modesty, and protection (Flugel, 1950, p. 16). Whereas decoration serves to enhance one’s attractiveness and draw attention to the individual, modesty provides social boundaries for decoration (Flugel, 1950). Perceptions of attractiveness relate, in part, to the features of the decoration, such as fit and color of clothing, as well as to the degree of bodily exposure permitted by particular garments. Clothing may also decorate one with references to her identity (Cornwell, 1990). Tee shirts in the CP, for instance, are decorated with words and images that depict physical and psychological scars associated with experiences of assault and participants’ understanding of their identity at various points in dealing with these experiences. In
addition, as presented earlier in this dissertation, CP shirts may be perceived as “a uniform that confers legitimacy, decorates casualties of this ‘war against women’” (Hipple, 2000, p. 174).

Also pertinent to this dissertation is the idea that clothing protects us from cold, heat, human enemies, accidents, animals, psychological dangers, moral danger, and “the general unfriendliness of the world as a whole” (Flugel, 1950, pp. 68-77). The unfriendliness of the world commonly translates into the idea of the world as a “cold” environment; not only do we see people pulling their clothing tighter around them in response to temperature, but we also see them use warm or comfortable clothing as a form of relief during times of distress or sadness (Flugel, 1950, p. 77-80). In the case of the CP participants, the use of clothing to protect them from human enemies, as well as psychological and moral danger, has failed. Interestingly, the CP uses clothing to comment on these dangers; meanwhile, that clothing protects participants’ identities and, therefore, also protects participants from direct subjection to critique or revictimization, at least with this event.

Female artists have depicted or used empty clothing as a form of opposition to the ways in which women have been objectified by culture (Julier, 1994, p. 165). Such objectification, in which women are seen and valued as objects of sexual desire rather than as dynamic individuals, may lead to psychological issues and disorders, such as eating disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Objectification, then, may alter one’s body and sense of identity. Objectification also “deform[s] [women’s] experiences” (Hipple, 2000, p. 174). CP participants, with their decorated tee shirts, aim to reclaim their experience and perhaps transform experiences of
other women. Julier (1994) notes clothing as “that which stands for the disembodied self, a sign of the body as object” (p. 255); she points out that the use of disembodied shirts represents women’s general “invisibility” and the disembodiment that many women experience during gender violence (p. 171). In regards to the CP, tee shirts represent disembodied bodies of evidence of the physical, emotional, and psychological trauma suffered by participants. In their case, the body has been particularly objectified, and the tee shirts respond to such objectification. We can think of these disembodied bodies of evidence similar to the way in which Black (1988) thinks of a judge’s robe as a form of synecdoche, a class of metonymy, which proclaims the judge synonymous with justice. The tee shirts, pieces of evidence of an attack and pieces of an activist event, are also parts of a whole synonymous with a sense of justice.

Further described, “Each shirt is a voice, a story” (Julier, 2000, p. 378). To some extent, the shirt voices what participants could not voice during an attack, or what they did voice but was ignored. CP participants do not, of course, have full control over how their messages are received by an audience, but as an activist event, the CP allows for acts of communication that are more thought out and more empowering than acts of communication that take place during the chaos and oppression of an attack. Still, as discussed in Chapter 5, the tee shirt, as a disembodied entity, remains incapable of “speaking,” and the content of shirts remains dictated by the unjust experiences of the CP participant (caused by perpetrators and members of society who perpetuate revictimization) and the cultural attitudes that may have contributed to such acts of violence in the first place. Empty tee shirts, then, both reveal and conceal women’s identity, their experiences, and the communication of those experiences.
A more direct understanding of the tee shirt as a literate object comes in studies like those conducted by Hamilton (2000), Cornwell (1990), England (1994), and McNair (2014). Hamilton (2000) and her colleagues studied photographs in newspaper articles about education, politics, sporting events, and neighborhood and bureaucratic conflict. More specifically, they examined how these photographs depicted literacy practices, and discovered themes of literacy as threat (“‘paperwork stress’ associated with money, exam results or legal proceedings”), defiance (use for opposition, as in graffiti and protests), evidence (use in “legal and bureaucratic power structures”), accessory (signifiers of professional status), display (signifiers of identity), and ritual public gesture (use of one’s signature in social transactions) (pp. 20-21). CP shirts may also represent literacy as threat, but in a slightly different way than Hamilton and her colleagues assert. For example, CP shirts may pose a threat to the extent that they can “out” perpetrators (by name if the perpetrator has been convicted) and flawed social and institutional structures that perpetuate gender violence. CP shirts represent literacy as defiance by violating social norms to not air one’s dirty laundry (Julier, 1994). As noted earlier, tee shirts also demonstrate literate objects as forms of evidence of crimes. In terms of accessory, CP shirts serve not as signifiers of professional status, but as signifiers of tee shirt creators who are experts, those with firsthand knowledge that cannot be obtained or understood in the same way by those without firsthand experience.

Finally, as indicated, literacy as display refers to images in which literacy relates to individual or collective identity, with this theme recognized primarily on tee shirts and hats (Hamilton, 2000, pp. 20-21). CP shirts assert the individual and collective identity of survivors or allies associated with gender violence. Hamilton further notes that 28% of
the images collected constituted “literacy on the body” (clothing, tattoos, body painting) and that this form of literacy served as “decorating the human body with a variety of visual semiotics” (2000, p. 30). The themes of literacy she identifies, along with the notion of decorating the body with visual semiotics, share a link with notions of CP tee shirts as literate objects and disembodied bodies of evidence. These findings align with Cornwell’s finding ten years earlier.

Cornwell (1990), in her article, “T-Shirts as Wearable Diary: An Examination of Artifact Consumption and Garnering Related to Life Events,” examined tee shirts according to cultural meaning, ritual behavior, primitive behavior, and consumption symbolism. Her work suggests the cultural value of the tee shirt as representative of people’s pursuit of meaning, rather than pursuit of material objects as is often thought; tee shirts’ pervasive presence in society and their (often) low cost and depreciating value over time suggest they have a greater significance than materiality (Introduction section, para. 6). According to Cornwell, tee shirts function in people’s lives as a form of identification. As labels of cultural categories, tee shirts label people in terms of their relational identity (for example, affiliation with political party, sport or sports team, geographic region, university or organization, or religious group); as indicated on tee shirts, any one of these identities can be removed and changed quickly, and at almost any time (Introduction section, para. 9). In addition, tee shirts belong to rites of passage rituals (such as high school class shirts which list everyone’s name in a graduating class), and also serve as trophies (tee shirts received for participating in sporting clubs or events). Finally, tee shirts can attract people with whom we have commonalities.
Cornwell also examined five “tee shirt diaries,” or entire tee shirt collections of five individuals, and coded symbols, slogans, meanings, acquisition, and grouping. Data were collected via lists, field notes, and photographs. She concluded that diarists “psychic investment ranged from organizing T-shirts by color (a low psychic investment) to T-shirt coordination and integration with specific life events for the explicit intention of evoking a response from a subset of the community (a high psychic investment)” (Conclusions section, para. 1). All diarists thought of tee shirts as trophies and labels of cultural category, but did not refer to them as rites of passage (perhaps related to age of participants). While tee shirts were not reported as attracting like-minded people, tee shirts were reported as “useful in self expression which may indirectly function in the same capacity” (Conclusions section, para. 1). Certainly, activists using tee shirts hope they function in this way, attracting people with similar interests; but rather than keeping at bay those who do not share social interests, activists use clothing to draw attention from those in support and opposition alike. Though Cornwell did not theorize themes within the framework of literacy and Hamilton et al. did not focus their work on clothing in particular, both studies provide grounds for building an argument that tee shirts significantly involve literacy as display, ritual, and identity.

Similarly, England’s (1994) study of lesbian culture and social geography focused on the “spatial fabric of everyday life” (England, 2008, p. 241). In her work, she highlighted sexual identity as constructed, challenged, and defended—processes in which public protest plays a significant role (p. 246). Tee shirts printed with sayings like “DYKE” or “I’m so queer I can’t even think straight” “reclaim meanings [and lead to]
disrupting and challenging the very process of categorizing and labelling” (p. 246). In other words, public spaces are structured for heterosexuals; protests (even on tee shirts) infiltrate that space and tacitly implicate connections among identity, space, and subversion (England, 2008). In addition, McNair (2014) provided another examination of the social activist “work” tee shirts can do. Her inquiry involved asking the following questions about tee shirts used in black protest: “Was a T-shirt created by a grassroots organization to raise consciousness or funds, or was it offered by a strictly commercial venture? When worn in public, does it serve to start a conversation? To preserve history, articulate a struggle or memorialize a martyr?” (Cockrell, 2014, para. 5). McNair observes a shift in the content of shirts; while shirts used to feature images of well-known activists, they now feature images of African Americans like Trayvon Martin, Renisha McBride, or Michael Brown. In this way, McNair proclaims “a moment becomes a movement” (Cockrell, 2014, para. 11). Julier (1994) points out that tee shirts particularly support such activist efforts, given that they are a common, low-cost item in American culture; their availability makes them suitable for public messages, such as those involved in advertising, identifying with particular groups, and expressing ideological beliefs.

Clifford (1992), moreover, describes the tee shirt as “that blank sheet, mystic writing pad, so close to the body” (p. 114). Teachers use tee shirts as a writing pad in the form of “T-shirt literacy”; that is, similar to the CP, some teachers have asked students to

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8 In February 2012, unarmed 17-year-old, Trayvon Martin, was shot and killed by a Caucasian neighborhood watchmen who claimed the shooting as self-defense (“Trayvon Martin shooting fast facts”). Renisha McBride was fatally shot (at the age of 19), after seeking help in regards to a car accident; the white homeowner claimed that he mistook McBride for a possible intruder (Hanna & Sanchez, 2014). Eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was fatally shot by police officers while being placed under arrest; circumstances and the justification of the shooting have been debated (McLaughlin, 2014).
research social issues and create persuasive tee shirts pertaining to their chosen cause (Shankar-Brown, 2014, p. 366). The rationale for such projects is that graphic tee shirts are useful in the teaching of multiliteracies. Shankar-Brown discusses her favorite tee shirt, decorated with the *Schoolhouse Rock* logo; the shirt, as a conversation piece, engages people in the literacies of viewing, speaking, and listening (2014, p. 366).

Moreover, “The words textile and text both derive from the Latin *texere*, which means “‘to weave,’ either through cloth or story” (Hipple, 2000, p. 164). This weaving together of stories through cloth is evidenced across the tee shirts displayed and collected in the CP. Further, understanding the tee shirts as literate objects collected and re-displayed in the years subsequent to their initial composition has implications for understanding the CP as a potential archive, a collection of artifacts that documents and preserves personal experiences, while also attempting to modify understanding of cultural narratives.

**The CP as an Archive**

In collecting, analyzing, and discussing CP tee shirts with planners and participants, I have come to realize the potential for seeing the tee shirts as literate objects and, further, the unrealized potential of treating the collection of tee shirts as an archive. One of the most important issues related to conceptualizing CP shirts as an archive is to modify common ideas of archives as “print records and ephemera” (Schultz, 2008, p. ix) available in a particular location and time. Indeed, archives may consist of “catalogs, yearbooks, literary journals, newspapers, diaries, student essays, letters, class notes, crush notes, census records, board of regents reports, recipes, receipts, photographs, oral histories, magazine advertisements, napkin scrawls, gossip, and Google searches” (“Interview…” 2010). I argue, then, that archives can also include materials such as tee
shirts. The everyday provides a significant window into the past. Time affects the value and meaning of an object, so the receipt for pencils and notebooks someone saved in 1913 becomes much more significant to a scholar of writing technologies in 2015. The shift in time and culture shifts the object’s meaning.

Moreover, authors in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, understand “cultural memory” as archived in theater performances, festivals, monuments, and even city streets (Schultz, 2008, p. ix). Archives, then, may be events, which are to some extent fleeting, and displayed at intervals over time. Therefore, they may also be organized in ways not typically associated with archives. Although materials may not be catalogued or organized, someone saving them as a collection suggests their value as an object for archiving. Davy (2008) writes of her experience researching women’s lesbian theater and her resort to the Lesbian Herstory Archives:

Lacking the resources to properly catalogue its holdings, the staff could do little but point me in the direction of a few boxes marked ‘WOW’ [Women’s One World]⁹ or ‘women’s theater.’ Into these boxes had been tossed, in no particular order, press releases, programs, scripts, copies of opening night reviews, videotapes of some productions, and a smattering of photographs. Archival work in my case resembled more of an archeological dig—mining memories and boxes of stuff, carefully examining disparate bits and pieces of a whole, widely scattered and deeply buried. (p. 130)

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⁹ “WOW, or Women’s One World, began as an international women’s theatre festival in 1980. Soon after, the group moved into its own space and began its tenure as an East Village arts institution dedicated to presenting women’s performance year-round. In 1984, WOW moved to the black box theatre it inhabits today at 59-61 East 4th Street” (“WOW Café Theatre”).
Like the Brooklyn Herstory archive, CP shirts, when not being displayed during CP events, are boxed in plastic bins, in no particular order but neatly folded and stored in the Women’s Center garage. The Kent State Women’s Center is housed (literally) in an old carriage house that has a foyer that serves as an office space for two employees, two private offices, one public restroom, a small kitchen, and a conference room that holds a maximum of 15 people. With such limited space, there simply is no room to organize and display artifacts in the way we would typically think of an archive. The Women’s Center website used to have pictures of the CP event and may have such pictures in the future (after a university transition to new technology). What Schultz (2008) and Davy (2008) point out is that limitations on space or other resources should not dismiss that a collection of artifacts has archival value. Moreover, Myers argues that “the value and authenticity of a document does not depend on its form” (p. 458). I argue that “form” can be considered not only in terms of material and condition, but also in terms of organization and permanent versus momentary display.

Mason and Zanish-Belcher (2013) argue for documenting “how ‘ordinary’ people lived their lives and how their everyday actions affected and were affected by the world around them” (p. 293). Their focus on local rather than state and national collections is referred to as “microcollecting” (Myers, 2013, p. 442). Archivists’ microcollecting enables women in creating their memories but also provides opportunity for women to recreate and assert authority over their memories (Mason & Zanish-Belcher, 2013, p. 300). For example, the CP invites “ordinary” women with a shared (though still individual) experience to document that experience. The CP provides a space (on the tee shirt and on campus) to share memories in a way that may make them more bearable, at least for a
time; to create new memories in relation to their experiences by associating trauma with an act of creativity or activism; and to gain a sense of control over their experience that they did not have in the moments during acts of gender violence.

Moreover, the Women’s Center, some sororities, and Inter-Hall Council all host shirt-making sessions in various locations on campus. These locations offer privacy by covering windows where sessions are held. Through fliers and website advertising of these sessions, potential participants are also made aware that they can create their shirts privately and drop them off at the Women’s Center. Hosts of shirt-making sessions collect participants’ shirts and donate them to the Women’s Center for the event. Though the CP takes place once a year and, as mentioned, shirts are stored in the Women’s Center garage, anyone can have access to them at any point. For example, I was able request access to, and go through, the collection of shirts on multiple occasions. This access further contributes to the effort to reach “ordinary” people, even with restraints on physical space. These intentions align with the notion of the CP as an archive and an event related to social justice.

Harris (2007) wrote extensively about archives as they relate to social justice. He asserts that archivists are, to some extent, products of and contributors to politics; and because of the socially filtered nature of experience and information, information is always under construction. So too, then, are justice and the records associated with it. Harris states that “records are always in the process of being made, they open into (and out of) the future” (p. 254). Archivists, as record makers, should be called on to engage in analysis but also justice, moving beyond “disciplinary and professional boundaries” (p. 256). After all, narratives of archivists and users interconnect with the narratives of larger
society, an interconnection between local and much broader contexts. Context, therefore, is dynamic and “infinite,” and raises the issue for archivists of which contexts to seek meaning in and from, especially as text and context infiltrate one another but remain impossible to understand exhaustively (p. 260).

The CP archive changes with the yearly addition of shirts, while the event changes with the changing of artists and audience. Past and current personal as well as cultural narratives modify the context of the CP. The documentation of the past, the growth of the collection, and the collection’s influence on an understanding of the present allow the CP to be considered a potential archive. Table 2 communicates the elements or processes involved in archiving, as set forth by Danielson (2010); their definitions/criteria; and how the Clothesline Project aligns with these elements or processes.

Table 2: Parallels between archives and the Clothesline Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term/Process Involved in Archives</th>
<th>Definition/Criteria</th>
<th>How the CP meets the definition/criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>The process of “determining which documents have permanent historical or evidentiary value” (p. 48)</td>
<td>I argue that CP artists and writers do this when determining the design of their shirts. In addition, though rare, CP administrators or planners sometimes call the inclusion of particular tee shirts into question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitation, collection development, and documentation strategy</td>
<td>The process of “proactively seeking appropriate collections” (p. 48)</td>
<td>This occurs when planning committee members advertise the Clothesline Project and shirt-making sessions leading up to the event and determine the most promising sites to acquire additions to the collection of shirts. For example, they reach out to particular campus organizations (Inter-Hall Council, the Health Center, Psychological Service, Sororities) and strategically schedule shirt-making sessions based on student behavior and campus events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans and deposits</td>
<td>Loaned or donated artifacts attained from individuals/institutions</td>
<td>CP writers and artists donate their work for the sake of a humanitarian effort. They give full authority over the work to an individual CP event.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accretion, accrual, and increment
The process of adding, or objects added, to a collection
As an annual event that features shirts made for prior events and the current year’s event, the CP archive continuously accrues new artifacts.

Research Value
The contribution the artifact can make to scholarship
Though CP organizers may not think of “research” per se, the CP shirts, and the purposes of the project, contribute to research value within the notion of research as “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications” (The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development). Shirt-making sessions are planned, tee shirts acquired, and the CP event planned in a systematic manner for the purpose of increasing knowledge of the individual, humanity, culture and society and contributing to new applications of such knowledge (such as policy development or civic engagement).

Artifactual Value
The monetary worth of the artifact
CP organizers assess the monetary value of artifacts to be acquired only to the extent that tee shirts and materials must be purchased. The CP itself, and the value of the writing/art on each tee shirt, is not assessed in terms of monetary value.

Furthermore, Danielson (2010) states that archives should be formed and managed according to the mission of the organization housing the archive. The mission of the CP event and archive, in a general sense, is “to address the issue of violence against women” (“History of the Clothesline Project”), which aligns with the mission of the Kent State University Women’s Center (the organization housing the CP discussed in this dissertation):

Kent State University’s Women [sic] Center exists to facilitate the advancement of and to enhance the quality of educational experience and professional life for women students, faculty and staff of all campuses.

The Women’s Center serves as a resource for advocacy by providing education, information and referral programs and services.
The Center is dedicated to promoting dialogue and interaction with all campus constituencies concerned with the pursuit of equity and equality. The Women's Center also provides collaborative outreach and support services to women in Kent’s larger educational and geographical communities (KSU Women’s Center). In other words, the missions of the CP and the Women’s Center both include responding to quality of life for women and providing a space for advocacy and collaboration. The shared mission enhances the integrity of the archive and brings us back to the discussion of social narratives contained in and produced by the CP.

Archives construct narratives (Lerner, 2010), just as narratives construct the artifacts of the archive. For example, the CP both responds to and creates a narrative about sexual violence. Moreover, each tee shirt contains a piece of the individual writer’s or artist’s story, whether that piece addresses the story of healing, reaching out to other survivors, losing a loved one, or navigating structures and discourses of power. Because individuals and their stories are understood within a particular social context, discourse mediates a society’s actions and one’s comprehension of her identity (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). Therefore, this study explores how archival artifacts adopt and revise (or try to revise) social narratives, as evidenced in the discourse of the Clothesline tee shirts. Lynn Bloom (2010) writes:

The deep sea diver, a.k.a. the archivist, is looking for buried treasure. At “full fathom five” [Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*]—or even deeper—lie the coral and the pearls and whatever else may have survived life’s tempests. These relics, shards, fragments constitute the body of evidence necessary for the research at hand. Much has been lost, forgotten, completely washed away. The rest is in danger of
disappearing. Everything that survives has suffered ‘a sea change’ and as a consequence of the catalytic action of time, has become transfigured ‘into something rich and strange,’ more valuable and more beautiful than it was in its original incarnation. It is up to the archivist to search out these materials, convey them to the surface, pluck the valuable materials from the detritus, enriched and enhanced by juxtaposition with other materials in the collection. (p. 278)

Considered in some of Bloom’s terms, the CP commemorates those who have “survived life’s tempests.” Each tee shirt serves as a “body of evidence.” Survivors of sexual assault, and their identity as depicted in their tee shirts, have “suffered ‘a sea change’” and, through “time,” have changed “into something rich.” Dealing with their assault has led participants to the CP and its mission. Researchers must “search out these materials,” the tee shirts, “enhanced by juxtaposition with other materials in the collection.”

When we talk about juxtaposing fragments or materials, we talk about composition, the composition of texts and individual and cultural identity. Lerner (2010) refers to archival materials as “testimonies” given birth to by their creators (p. 196), and says that we must ask: “Who are the people who have played a potential role in the narrative that might be constructed from archival evidence” (p. 204). After all, personal accounts imply an understanding of one’s self in relation to an audience; “In telling our story to another we establish who that other is…as the telling of the tale turns the listener into the audience required by the teller, the storyteller’s identity is reaffirmed or even altered” (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 9). In essence, we must question the social narrative of the past and present: what the narrative was, how it is represented currently,
and how it has been and might be revised.

Again, while archives are commonly considered physical collections of materials, scholars like Schultz (2008) and Davy (2008) characterize temporary and unconventional mediums (theater, city streets) as possible archives. Moreover, not all collections of materials form an archive. What moves the CP from being a collection of tee shirts to an archive is the way in which the CP aligns with archivists’ ideologies and criteria for formation. The CP purposefully and strategically seeks artifacts that contribute to a particular mission (providing commentary on gender violence and supporting the Women’s Center in providing educational, outreach, and support services). Tee shirts are strategically collected and used. Tee shirts may not be strategically displayed as they are organized on Clotheslines during an event, or as they are stored when not in use; but tee shirts are strategically displayed in terms of the location of the CP event itself. For example, the CP used to be held outside of KSU’s Women’s Center, but the CP planning committee eventually decided to relocate the event to the Student Center. Further deliberations came about when considering university policy, inclement weather, ramifications of indoor placement, and resources to be made available at the event.

Seeing the CP as an archive allows for a more systematic understanding of the event as a cultural artifact (composed of material literate artifacts), which sheds further light on patterns of a whole, a collective and purposeful narrative. Seeing the CP as an archive also yields information about cultural narratives over time, for which examining the CP as merely a chaotic collection of tee shirts does not allow. Examining the CP as a potential archive situates the event in narratives of contemporary culture (government initiatives to combat sexual assault on university campuses, cases such as those involving
Steubenville High School football players and Penn State University fraternities, and popular music like Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines”).\textsuperscript{10} Investigations of particular CP events, however, also provide insight to local composing practices. Local research can broaden “historical understanding of American feminism” (Mood, 1996, p. 387), and other political movements. Initial moves toward understanding the CP as an archive, then, allow for an understanding of cultural psychosocial compositions, not just the psychosocial compositions of individuals. Looking at the CP as a whole, and at the way it documents women’s experiences with the same issue across time, allows us to better understand influences on the content and form of women’s responses to social yet personal experiences, and reveals information about effective outreach efforts for survivors of trauma. The CP as an archive provides a collection and a location for nonconventional, multimodal forms of expression.

\textbf{Methodology and Methods}

\textbf{Methodology}

As discussed in Chapter 1, this work is rooted in the idea of literacy as a social practice, with literate practices grounded in prior and developing reading and writing practices and cultural narratives. This research also adheres to feminist and researcher

\textsuperscript{10}In 2014, President Obama launched the “It’s On Us” campaign to combat sexual assault on college campuses (Somanader, 2014). In 2012, a high school girl from Steubenville, Ohio was raped; the attack was videoed and disseminated on social media. Two teens were convicted of the rape, but at least one has since been released and returned to his position on the Steubenville High School football team (Augustine, 2014). In May 2015, Penn State suspended the fraternity, Kappa Delta Rho, for a period of three years. The suspension came after it was revealed that the fraternity had posted on facebook photos of naked women; some of the women appear to be unconscious (Johnson, 2015). In 2013, Robin Thicke released his hit song, “Blurred Lines,” which was criticized for its seemingly glorification of rape. The music video was at one point pulled from YouTube (Mosbergen, 2013).
as-participant methodology.

Chafetz (2004) examines the history of research as conceptualized in four dichotomies: objective/subjective, rational/emotional, concrete/abstract, and quantitative/qualitative. He asserts that the latter, presumably lesser, term in each dichotomy tends to describe feminist research. Feminist research, however, also encompasses “empowering research,” which Addison (1997) defines as “research by, for, and with” participants, rather than “on” participants (p. 107). Such work also involves listening to, documenting, and representing others’ stories, as well as paying attention to the ways we as researchers are implicated in participants’ telling of their stories. When conducting and reporting research, we must be forward with our subject positions and, with critical examination, go beyond a succinct statement of what our work does (Addison, 1997).

Royster & Kirsch (2012) claim that we must begin to approach feminist research with four major principles in mind: critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization (p. 19). Critical imagination refers to our perception of what our research does, does not, and should account for; in other words, imagining the possible (p. x). Strategic contemplation pulls from the work on rhetorics of silence and asserts something to be gained by quiet interaction with a text (p. x). Meanwhile, social circulation calls for a more thorough examination of how knowledge travels: what gets studied, how it gets studied, where ideas originate, where they go, and how people receive them (p. 23). Finally, Royster and Kirsch claim that all of this will lead to a more global, and therefore, feminist approach to research.
Feminist research methodology also sets forth ambitions related to participants. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) discuss action research, which, in some way, aids participants in recovering from or dealing with their circumstances (pp. 597-98). In this way, such research aims to examine community issues and the productive actions that may respond to them. Researchers also have an obligation to participants; “like an artist’s rendering, the stories our participants tell do not need to be fair but they must be faithful to the ‘implacable I,’ to the account as they are certain it occurred” (Bloom, 2003, p. 279). Taylor (1998) notes that collecting individual stories allows us to show a collective story, which prior research has shown to help women heal from traumatic experiences like sexual assault. But Fine and her colleagues (2000) claim that our "scientific voyeurism" may ruin the sanctity of the stories that people share (whether in interviews or text); therefore, we must be prepared to examine the way in which "outsiders" will misinterpret or misuse our findings (p. 123).

Thus, Fine and her colleagues (2000) suggest publishing, as part of the actual research report and not as an appendix, a "Legend of Cautions" which account for the potential (though unintended) responses to our research, the ways in which it may be misread or misused (p. 127). Of course, the issue we run into here is that it can be difficult to determine what constitutes misinterpretation versus alternative interpretation. Feminist research involves "wicked problems," problems which involve a number of participants and stakeholders, and for which there are no easy or quick solutions (Blythe, 2012, p. 277). Still, we must protect
our participants and their artifacts from being misused, to whatever extent possible. We must also be willing to commit to alternate research methods to continue our work as publishing scholars, for instance, by publishing on work in progress and what that work helps us understand about our research processes (Blythe, 2012).

My work with the CP, in fact, required me to revise my approach many times along the way, due to complexities of working with human participants. Original goals of the research included survey, and then possibly interview, data. But the return rate on surveys was abysmally low. It might not be surprising given that the CP is an event involving the anonymous voicing of sensitive, sometimes secret, experience. It was disappointing, however, because although I wanted to have the women speak for themselves, in some ways, this dissertation ends up speaking for them and about them. As I did not have CP participants’ own words about their personal writing practices or their thoughts about the CP as an opportunity for “telling without talking” (Malchiodi, 2008), I was limited in what I could say about the tee shirt data.

I also desired to include data from the CP planning committee, not only the texts they produced, but also audio recordings of the planning meetings and interviews with committee members. While I was able to secure interviews with most of the consistent planning committee members, delays with IRB approval prohibited me from recording planning meetings. A subsequent focus on one particular document, the meeting agenda, ended up also requiring additional data
collection that was once again thwarted by IRB timelines, and led to the tabling of planning committee data altogether (although I intend to revisit the data and its potential in the future). The barriers with CP participants and planning committee members also eliminated the possibility for members checking the analysis presented in this dissertation. Even this data, collected but not reported in this document, however, provided important background understanding and insight into the context in which these tee shirts were supported, developed, and displayed.

The work of this dissertation adheres to activist efforts and feminist methodology in other ways. As discussed, the dissertation accounts for gender perspective, accentuation of women’s experiences, reflexivity, participatory methods, and social action (Taylor, 1998, p. 357). Moreover, it meets criteria of activist research in that I, as the researcher, remain honest about my subject positions in relation to the work; the ideas under examination account for social hierarchies on “an ideological level”; and the research “narrative reveals and invents disruptive images of what could be” (Addison, 1997, p. 221). Because the study includes an analysis of my own experiences (my own Clotheseline tee shirt), the study also relies on “researcher as participant” (Kirkman, 1999), or “participant-observer” research, calling for particular awareness of reflexive practice (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Addison, 1997).

Though participant-observer methods aid research focusing on “small groups or local settings” and questions of “how” (Lichterman, 2002, p. 122), they also require some level of vulnerability on the part of researchers as they relinquish the safety of
traditional researcher/subject/participant hierarchies. Certainly, as a scholar, I run the risk of being reduced to my experiences; but I integrate these experiences with those of other participants in a balanced manner and, therefore, attempt to avoid rhetorically alienating an academic audience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Some scholars will perceive the sharing of personal experiences and personal relation to the research as narcissistic; female feminist researchers may particularly come under attack for engaging in best practices of feminist work (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). But Brueggemann (1996) advocates “work[ing] the hyphen” (p. 19-20), remaining aware of the potential of never being fully as researcher, participant, observer, self, or other, but instead being partially in all of these roles (p. 33).

Participant-observer research also acts as activist research, given that such work involves scholars personally affected by the issues they take up (Naples, 1996, p. 161). Naples reveals that for her:

the decision to go public as a political act was less clear-cut and fraught with fears that it would compromise my legitimacy as a professional… I also recognized it as an opportunity to begin to challenge the separation between activist/researcher and personal/political that so haunted me. (1996, pp. 166-168)

The decision to take on a participant-observer position can be emotionally taxing as multiple subject positions come into conflict with one another. Alcoff and Gray (1993), however, argue for spaces in which the survivors of trauma can serve as both “witnesses” and “experts,” “reporters” and “theorists” (p. 282).
My participation, therefore, also means that I apply reflective feminist practices in my analysis, making clear that, though I participated in the Project, I avoid speaking for other participants. My analysis stems from my role as a viewer of the event (except when talking about my own shirt); therefore, certain types of information and arguments cannot be asserted. Nonetheless, a critical, rhetorical analysis from the viewers’ position, which normally would exclude personal communication with tee shirt creators, offers valuable insight into the CP. The CP, and efforts like it, set out to meet survivors where they find themselves in their journey, and do so in a sensitive, respectful, and just manner. The complex rhetorical and psychological terrain these efforts tread make them worthy of further intellectual investigation. My work aims to serve as one contribution to such endeavors.

Related to this terrain, the role of silence serves as a sub-focus of this investigation, as I identify it as a prevalent issue in activism and the trauma that inspires activist efforts. For example, trauma and silence are connected in the following ways:

- the perpetrator silencing the victim (or survivor) of the crime
- the survivor’s friends and family silencing the survivor
- the survivor remaining silent as an act of power over her perpetrator
- the survivor remaining silent as an act of self-healing
- cultural narratives silencing the survivor
- the survivor “breaking” silence
and anonymity interacting with disclosure and enclosure

In each case, literacy can mediate these dynamics. Field and Belenky (1988), for instance, discovered that women describing their personal development navigated toward metaphors of voice: feeling deaf and dumb, being silenced, being really heard, and perceiving words as weapons (p. 18). Indicators of a relationship between participants and rhetorics of silence suggest that we remain mindful of the ways in which our accounts fit into a larger social canon. This idea of operating within larger social structures mirrors Houston & Kramarae’s (1991) discussion of ways in which women have been silenced (“via ridicule, familial hierarchies, anti-woman education policies, and male-dominated media”) (p. 387). This idea of operating within larger social structures also sheds light on the specific ways in which women have navigated silences, such as use of “trivial” discourses like graffiti; engagement in personal and creative acts such as writing in personal journals and sewing; participation in women-centered support groups and presses; and the creation of names for social problems that never before had a name, like “sexual harassment” (Houston & Kramarae, 1991, p. 389).

My goals for this study include drawing attention to, and serving as an example of, literacies that push against divides between that which is personal and that which is academic. Although many scholars have discussed the relationship between personal and professional investments and objectives, as well as the disclosure of these relationships (Foxwell, 1997; Ruggles Gere, 2000; Payne, 2000), we need to pay greater attention to what researchers say and omit, where we draw the line between one’s right to privacy and advocating disclosure as part of research as a human endeavor, and what our disclosures can do for us and for others. Royster and Kirsch (2012) assert:
With patience and quiet as salient features, the goal with an ethics of hope and
caring is to learn to listen and speak, not just with our heads but with our hearts,
backbones, and stomachs, thus making feminist rhetorical action a fully embodied
experience for both the subjects of research and the researcher (p. 146).

My dissertation aims to fulfill their call for an ethics of hope and care, goals they see as
total to the “critical imagination” (p. 137) and “globalization” of scholarship” (p. 138).

To critically explore the content and rhetorical approaches represented in the
writing and artwork of the shirts, I rely on rhetorical (Foss, 2009) and semiotic analysis
(Silverman, 2011). I use rhetorical analysis to examine text (shirts with only text and
shirts with image and text); I use semiotic analysis to examine images (shirts with only
images and shirts with images and text). Rhetorical analysis aids the exploration of how
writers and artists position themselves in relation to their purpose, audience, and the
larger rhetorical context. Semiotic analysis enables the breakdown of how signs and
symbols function in relation to one another and to text.

Data Collection Process

I took photographs of each tee shirt (front and back, when relevant), assigning
each tee shirt a unique number and organizing them into one digital image collection.
Twelve shirts were created for the 2013 CP event; these shirts were analyzed for a pilot
study of the dissertation. After the 2014 event, I revisited the Women’s Center and took
photographs of the entire collection, 74 tee shirts. In my digital image collection, older
and newer shirts were intermixed and not organized in any particular manner. Given that
tee shirt creators donate their shirts with an understanding that tee shirts will be presented
for public consumption (and the Women’s Center provides a consent form with this
information), this part of my study does not require interaction with tee shirt artists/writers and, therefore, consent of any kind. I examined the collection as a whole, using rhetorical analysis (Foss, 2009) and/or semiotic analysis (Silverman, 2011), and contextualized findings within the idea of the CP as an archive. This approach engages the process of coding as described by Lichterman (2002):

Coding begins when you peruse your first field notes with your initial themes (and theory, if you have one) and expectations in mind. You are looking for anything that might be interesting and relevant: something about what people say, how they say it, or about the setting itself. And you flag these interesting items—descriptions of people, snippets of conversation, sequence of action—with a term that you make up yourself. This search-and-flag exercise is coding…Borrowing from Glaser and Strauss, we can call that name a concept. (130)

After categorizing and coding the 74 shirts in the CP collection housed at Kent State University Women’s Center, the psychosocial composing associated with the CP event was conceived by looking at the coding of shirts within the context of the terms and processes of archival work and larger cultural narratives.

**Rhetorical Analysis**

For the rhetorical analysis, I use Foss’s Fantasy-Theme Criticism to identify characters, actions, and settings. Fantasy-Theme “is designed to provide insights into the shared worldview of groups” (2009, p. 97). Here, “‘fantasy’ is the creative and imaginative interpretation of events and a ‘fantasy theme’ is the means through which the interpretation is accomplished in communication” (pp. 97-98). This approach allows for determining the degree to which a shirt makes personal or public appeals as they
relate to logos, ethos, and pathos. More specifically, my interest in using data to understand divides between the personal and the public meant that I needed to form a connection between personal disclosure of characters, actions, and settings related to a CP participants’ experiences and the rhetorical appeals used to engage the public (viewers of the CP). To do so, I determined what logical appeals with characters, actions, and settings would look like, as opposed to the characters, actions, and settings that might be used in ethical and emotional appeals. In other words, logical appeals would require inclusion of certain kinds of characters, actions, or settings, or different relationships among these elements, than emotional appeals. Logos, ethos, and pathos, though not discussed specifically in the results and analysis, facilitated a finite breakdown of the data, which could then be pieced together to identify larger patterns in and significant contributions to understandings of feminist activism. This initial breakdown of data included the following scheme:

Logos— Appeals to logic involve the least amount of self-disclosure on the part of CP participants (the greatest distance between CP participants’ emotional experiences and the emotional nature of their messages).

- characters: groups of people or 3rd-person pronouns
- actions: calls to public to act
- setting: no setting or large, undefined setting (i.e. “society”)

Ethos— Appeals to credibility involve a balance between logical and emotional appeals. Too much logic (non-disclosure) may fail to meet activists’ objectives to persuade or influence people’s thoughts and behaviors regarding social issues. Too much emotion (disclosure) may alienate viewers or invoke stereotypes of the emotional woman.
Given that the questions motivating my research pertained to how women navigated intersections of the personal and the public, how they “spoke out” and how they were “silenced,” I devised a scheme that made clear distinctions between general and specific information. In my study, specific information alluded to personal details of women’s experiences with gender violence. Given my initial ideas of the rhetorical
nature of the CP, I aligned personal disclosure with emotional appeals; emotional appeals seemed to be the primary work of activist events with the general public (as opposed to with policy-makers, who might rely more on logical information, such as statistics, to influence actions). Emotional appeals, by nature, involve disclosure of tee shirt designers’ experiences of assault (whether they are survivors themselves or knew victims).

Emotional appeals can also address ethos, since they make the case for firsthand knowledge.

The farther tee shirt messages appeared removed from tee shirt creators’ personal experiences, the less they involve emotional and ethical appeals and the more they appeal to logical understandings of the issue (for example, statistics). The most general information puts the most distance between the tee shirt creator, her experience, and her audience. This general information includes: non-specific groups of people and third-person pronouns; calls to the public; and exclusion of a setting related to experiences with gender violence, or inclusion of large and undefined settings such as “society.” On the other hand, placing the audience in closer relation to the tee shirt creator and her experiences includes: people named in specific relation to the tee shirt creator, or first-person references to the tee shirt creator; mention of actions carried out directly against or by tee shirt creators; and references to settings in which these acts occurred.

The closer audience members get to tee shirt creators, via creators’ compositions, the greater opportunity for audience members to experience empathy. Ethical appeals put audience members in closer proximity to tee shirt creators but may or may not evoke an emotional response. For example, my curriculum vitae speaks to my credibility as a scholar but most likely does not illicit deep emotional responses in those who review it.
Therefore, with ethical appeals, credence is given to what tee shirt creators communicate, and put audience members in closer relation to tee shirt creators, with specifically named individuals and second-person pronouns; actions carried out against or by the tee shirt creators in a collective unit, or a specific individual; and public time or place in which actions were carried out in relation to these people. But, again, they do not bring them as close as emotional appeals do, or distance them as much as logical appeals do.

Taken together, these elements create the “theme.” For instance, though most shirts that use “I” appeal to ethos, the credibility of the writer or artist, not all of them appeal to pathos. For example, the front of shirt 26 (in Figure 3) communicates a personal relationship with a boy/man named Zachary, but exclusion of the nature of the relationship and other details keeps viewers from making a more intense connection with the tee shirt creator. Tee shirts’ ethical or emotional appeals are determined by the character’s relationship to the actions and settings incorporated into the shirt. For example, a child-size shirt (seen in Chapter 4) that reads “Mommy please don’t make me go to daddys [sic] house. Please I love you” creates its emotional appeal with the disclosure of the nature of the relationship between the shirt creator and the other characters (mommy and daddy), the actions (make me go), and the setting (daddys house). This kind of analysis allows me to discuss how these themes and patterns in language relate to the idea of psychosocial compositions—how the rhetorical positions these messages, as created by tee shirt writers/artists, subscribe to or resist cultural narratives about assault against women. Figure 3 shows a sample rhetorical analysis.
Semiotic Analysis (for images)

My attempt to differentiate between personal and public messages required me to use a rhetorical method for creating my own coding scheme. Foss’s fantasy theme analysis does not directly shed light on such differentiation. Therefore, as noted above, I created a scheme for fantasy theme analysis that more directly allowed me to examine personal and public appeals. While visual rhetorical analysis is possible, the use of signs and symbols on most shirts (such as an arrow or sign for “female”) lends itself to semiotic analysis. For example, visuals such as awareness ribbons would have been difficult to label as a character, action, or setting.

The rhetorical analysis speaks to psychosocial compositions in that it looks at personal and public appeals of messages as they relate to cultural narratives. Semiotic analysis addresses psychosocial compositions differently:

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek semeion “sign”). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. (Berger, 2011, p. 7)

The visuals acquire meaning as elements related in a system, especially a social system. I was looking for patterns in the visuals’ content rather than features (such as color and placement); as such, traditional notions of semiotics served my purpose of finding the frequency of use of text and image, and the relationships between text and visuals. Thus, extensive development of a scheme was not necessary.

I use Silverman’s (2011) notion of semiotic analysis, which involves examining, signifiers and signified concepts, the autonomous nature of images, the
arbitrary/unmotivated nature of images, and the relationships between images and concepts. Such an analysis enables me to determine how images acquire their meaning in the context of other images, words, and the CP. In this project, then, the semiotic analysis looks at how images and their parts converge and diverge to construct evidence of particular rhetorical approaches within social narratives. In other words, examination of the relationship between signifier and signified shows patterns in participants’ conceptualizations of images’ symbolic meaning. These patterns implicate cultural narratives such as those related to gender communication (i.e. the frequent use of hearts). Cultural narratives are also implicated in the idea of images gaining their meaning from their placement in a system, rather than from an inherent connection. Semiotic analysis includes responding to the following criteria:

1) “Signs bring together an image or word (the ‘signifier) and a concept (the ‘signified’).”

2) “Signs are not autonomous entities—they derive their meaning only from the place within a sign system. What constitutes a linguistic sign is only its difference from other sights (so the colour red is only something which is not green, blue, orange, etc.).”

3) “The linguistic sign is arbitrary or unmotivated. This, Saussure says, means that the sign ‘has no natural connection with the signified’.”

4) “Signs can be put together through two main paths. First, there are possibilities of combining signs…Saussure calls these patterns of combinations syntagmatic relations. Second, there are contrastive properties…Here the choice of one term
necessarily excludes the other. Saussure calls these mutually exclusive relations *paradigmatic oppositions*” (Silverman, 2011, p. 330).

The semiotic analysis allowed me to categorize the frequency of images, and explore what those frequencies suggest about gendered discourse as it relates to activism and understandings of multimodal composing. Figure 4 shows a sample semiotic analysis of tee shirts. On the tee shirt in Figure 4, the hands as a representation of resistance derive their meaning from the context of an activist event bringing awareness to the issue of gender violence. The drawing of hands on a tee shirt without this context, and without the accompanying words, would provide for other interpretations. For instance, given the messiness of the image, we could envision the tee shirt as a child’s art project. Moreover, hands could signify affection and communion (holding the hand of a significant other, holding hands during prayers and vigils), the act of welcoming (shaking a hand upon meeting someone), and labor (working with one’s hands). Similarly, arms could signify these same elements: affection and communion (embracing someone in a hug), the act of welcoming (welcoming someone with open arms), and labor (performing a job or exercising). These many possibilities could easily make the sign arbitrary to viewers, without the context of the CP. In addition, the meaning of the message rests on its placement on clothing. The same image and words placed on a blanket or banner, or as a sidewalk drawing, would fail to uphold the integrity of the message. The image, then, relies on its relationship to the words on the shirt; the context of the CP; and the context of a culture in which wearing clothing is the norm, and tee shirts have particular social value (discussed earlier in the chapter).
Figure 3: Fantasy-theme rhetorical analysis (screen shot of spreadsheet)

| 25 T | Be Strong [AT]
|      | Stand against [diagonal, text R to L]
|      | VIOLENCE
|      | Logos: AD [Greek letters for a sorority: Alpha Phi, possibly]
|      | [We can assume that either the shirt author, or the person in
|      | honor of whom the author created the shirt, is/was a part of
|      | the sorority. But the way the author refers to it here seems to be as
|      | a group of people; there’s nothing specific enough to capture a
|      | viewer’s emotional investment.
|      | actions: be, stand
|      | setting: no setting

| 26 T | Front:
|      | ZACHARY
|      | I LOVE YOU
|      | I AM PROUD
|      | OF YOU
|      | I THANK GOD
|      | FOR YOU
|      | Back:
|      | GOD, grant me the
|      | Serenity to accept the
|      | things I cannot change,
|      | the courage to change the
|      | things I can, and the Wisdom
|      | to know the DIFFERENCE.
|      | Logos: setting no setting
|      | Ethos: characters: Zachary, you, you, you (I put Zachary here but there’s
|      | no personal info. Who’s Zachary? Why is the writer proud of
|      | him?)
|      | Pathos: characters: me, I
|      | actions: grant, accept, change (know?)

| 27 T | You may
|      | tred me
|      | in the very dirt,
|      | But still
|      | like dust,
|      | I’ll rise! [phrase not C]
|      | Logos: setting no setting
|      | Ethos: characters: you
|      | Pathos: characters: me, I
|      | actions: tred, rise

| 28 T | Front:
|      | My
|      | Love is
|      | Too
|      | Beautiful...
|      | Back:
|      | To be used
|      | To be unappreciated
|      | To be stolen
|      | To be disrespected
|      | To be objectified
|      | TO NOT BE cherished
|      | TO NOT BE celebrated
|      | Front: Logos: setting no setting
|      | Back: Pathos: characters:
|      | actions: is, used, stolen, disrespected, objectified, not be
|      | cherished, celebrated, waited for, protected
|      | * Though the above actions might pass for adjectives, I’m
|      | thinking about direct objects (a fairly recent consideration). In the
|      | case of the actions here, the composer’s action or possession
|      | (love) is being acted upon by another person. The effect of this
|      | action still comes back to the designer.
Figure 4: Semiotic analysis of CP shirts

**Signified:** Hands and arms, as located on the chest and upper shoulder part of the tee shirt, signify resistance. In the context of violent crimes, authorities examine arms and hands in search of “defensive wounds.” Arms and hands serve as a natural protector in times of danger. Hands and arms are often thought to protect the head and face; during sexual assault, however, they aim to protect the obvious areas in danger, the breasts and the pelvic area. On this shirt, it appears that hands and arms try to push an attacker off of the body. Furthermore, the color scheme of the visual offers a variety of interpretations: red represents blood, anger, or the warmth of friction caused from the hands fighting against the perpetrator’s body. The color blue may represent sadness and/or figurative death. The activist perhaps mourns the loss of knowing herself and living her life as she had before an assault.

**A non-autonomous entity:** In this composition, the meaning of the hands depends upon their placement on the tee shirt and, therefore, the part of the body that the tee shirt would cover if worn. The hands of resistance also derive their meaning from the context in which a woman created the shirt: an event that brings awareness to women’s personal experiences of assault. The drawing of hands on a tee shirt without this context, and without the accompanying words, would be more difficult to make sense of. For example, we could envision a child doing something like handprints on a shirt, a representation of creating force against the shirt/figurative body in the shirt. The image relies on the context and the words to make meaning. And the viewer relies on all three of these elements (image, words, context) to make sense of the image. For example, imagine reading the text on this shirt without the drawing of the hands.

**An arbitrary linguistic sign:** In a way, this image, this “sign” breaks from Silverman’s description of semiotic analysis because hands and arms innately serve the purpose of resistance. Therefore, their representation here cannot be classified completely as “arbitrary.” Hands, however, could signify affection and communion (holding the hand of a significant other, holding hands during prayers and vigils), welcoming (shaking a hand upon meeting someone), or labor (working with one’s hands). Similarly, arms could signify these same elements: affection and communion (embracing someone in a hug, holding someone you love), welcoming (welcoming someone with open arms), or labor (muscular arms represent strength acquired from physical labor via working out or performing a job). These possibilities could easily make the sign arbitrary to viewers, without the variables that make it a non-autonomous entity. Again, imagine the hands without the words.

**Syntagmatic Relationships:** As discussed, the hands rely on the words for their meaning. They also, however, rely on their color and their “sloppy” representation. Even without the words, these hands would be loaded with rhetorical possibilities with their use of colors (discussed above), but they also appear hasty; the hands and arms are not drawn with straight, perfectly colored-in lines. Without the words, we may think of child’s artwork. But with the words, we think of a hastiness not at all associated with such innocent imperfection. With the example of child’s artwork, we may see something charming in the imperfection. We may even see a lack of concern for “doing it the right way.” But in the context, we realize a complete lack of charm and a great concern for “doing right.” Whether or not the viewer is drawn to the image or the words first, the ultimate sense-making comes in understanding the words; so, we may think that the words “come last.” The meaning of the message rests on its placement on clothing. The same image and words placed on a blanket or banner, or as a sidewalk drawing, fails to uphold the integrity of the message.
Both the rhetorical and semiotic analysis allowed me to investigate how tee shirt creators’ used composing to participate in an activist event, and how those composing practices converged with or diverged from cultural narratives about gender violence and gendered communication practices. The rhetorical analysis focused on distinguishing between personal and public appeals via types of characters, actions, and settings. The semiotic analysis established patterns in visual content within social structures and systems related to violence and activist responses. Furthermore, these two methods enabled me to draw conclusions about the relationship between text and images and to offer implications of such relationships for the field of rhetoric and composition (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5).

**Inter-rater Reliability**

To attest to the reliability of my complete analysis, I engaged a doctoral student (also working on a dissertation related to archives) to code 10% of my data. To ensure equal attention to shirts with visuals and shirts with text only, I had the inter-rater code 10% of each group (5 shirts with visuals and text and 3 shirts with text only), rather than 10% of the collection as a whole. The inter-rater therefore coded 9 visuals and 90 characters, actions, and settings (99 of 897 data points). For visuals, the inter-rater coded visual categories (Depictions of: bodies/body parts, awareness to social causes, emotion, religion/spirituality, natural elements, location, social guidelines, and food); we had a 66% agreement rate. For the text, the inter-rater coded characters, actions, and settings into the categories of ethos, pathos, and logos; we had a 90% agreement rate.
Conclusion

Considering the tee shirt as a literate object makes this dissertation more explicitly valuable to rhetoric and composition scholars, especially with increased interest in multimodal composing. But the tee shirt as a literate object also provides an avenue to explore pop culture materials, which therefore may gain the interest of writing studies students, without necessarily focusing on digital composition. It seems that too often multimodal is overly and narrowly conceived as digital composition. This study highlights drawing, painting, and the use of fabric as other valuable modes. In addition, viewing the CP as a potential archive demonstrates the composing practices of a local community, a community of survivors of gender violence and their allies.

CP participants’ choice to not complete surveys or interviews prohibits me from making arguments about participants’ decision-making processes. Their choice not to complete surveys or interviews also prevented member-checking. While this is a limitation, Gorelick (1996) points out that researchers are obligated to reveal sources of oppression, sources that may go unnoticed by participants (pp. 29-30). The feminist methodology supporting my work also reveals hegemonic structures. As Addison (2010) argues, removing the examination of social relations does not make our research more "objective" as once thought; rather, accounting for the subjectivity of social relations makes our research more objective, generalizable.

Finally, Royster and Kirsch’s (2012) "ethics of hope and care" requires that feminist researchers sometimes need to experience, not do. This assertion counters the research which says that feminist research is about social action, doing in addition to theorizing. But Royster and Kirsch assert that there is something to be gained when
researchers sit quietly with a text and think, slowly (an extension of strategic contemplation). As a matter of fact, they argue that feminist researchers should be "feeling" research, not just with their hearts, but with their stomachs and their backbones. With both the CP tee shirts and my role as a participant-observer, I hope the results and analysis (discussed in the following chapter) address the role of personal investment, disclosure, and feelings in rhetorical understandings of, and approaches to, social issues such as gender violence.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: THE CP ARCHIVE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPOSITIONS

On the afternoon of April 25, 2013, a group of volunteers gathered to hang tee shirts at Kent State University’s Student Center. Some of these shirts had been created recently and some created years ago; but they all address the continuing narratives of thousands of women across the world. The shirts depict screams and tears and music and wings, turmoil and defiance and healing. One participant says she chose the particular design of her shirt because she “wanted to give voice to the many women who are denied that opportunity, for the women who scream with no one to hear them.” And though her participation made her feel proud, empowered, bold, and daring, it also made her nervous; after all, “It's a constant battle. Survivors, we have to be resilient in the face of some pretty terrible memories and echoing voices in our heads.” A closer, systematic examination of such sentiments provides an understanding of the dynamics that yield and perpetuate acts of violence and trauma, and the ways in which those who suffer them also survive them.

To engage in a systematic examination of the way written and visual communication mediate resilience on the part of survivors, I turned to an analysis of a CP shirt collection at a large public university. This CP collection consisted of 74 tee shirts
that yielded 897 data points,\textsuperscript{11} which provide responses to the larger questions driving this study:

- How does written and visual literacy function in relation to understandings of female embodiment and violence against women?
- How can literate artifacts be used as an archive to continue revising social narratives?

The first question explores patterns in linguistic and illustrated content, and how women use the content to position themselves in relation to their experiences of violence. The second question, subsequently, investigates the influence of cultural narratives on CP participants’ design decisions and the way these decisions adopt or counter narratives about what it means to be a woman. The second question, furthermore, conceptualizes the tee shirts and the ideologies they implicate as a potential archive, a collection of artifacts that documents the past, expands the collection, and influences understandings of present society.

This chapter first details results of the rhetorical and semiotic analyses of CP tee shirts. With this data, I argue that women’s activist messages align with patriarchal narratives, even as their activist messages attempt to counter narratives about women’s identity.\textsuperscript{12} This argument is supported by four major findings:

\begin{itemize}
\item Formula for configuration of data points: 1 shirt with visual representation only x 5 points of semiotic analysis =5; 26 shirts with text only x 9 points of rhetorical analysis (characters, actions, and setting x logos, ethos, pathos) =234; 47 shirts with text and visual representations x 9 points of rhetorical analysis + x 5 points of semiotic analysis=658 (5 + 234 + 658 = 897)
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item CP participants receive no instructions for the composing of their shirts other than that they cannot use perpetrators’ names if perpetrators were not found guilty by a court of law. From a legal standpoint, disclosure without an official guilty verdict can be considered slander. All other design decisions are determined by CP participants at their own discretion.
\end{itemize}
• Participants’ messages lack details of experiences with gender violence.
• In their messages, participants invoke the use of the body, rather than the use of literate practices, for social action.
• Participants make covert assertions of agency.
• Participants’ visual messages rely on socially constructed representations of concepts rather than original representations of experiences.

I also argue that activists employ textual and visual messages but rely on text to make meaning. This argument is supported by the fifth finding:

• Visuals’ content show that participants tend to use textual and visual components in their work, but that these components do not function rhetorically in relation to one another. (By “rhetorically,” I mean that text and images do not support one another in messages’ attempt to persuade or influence CP audiences.)

I organize this chapter around the first principal research question and the data that responds to it, presenting the rhetorical analysis of text and semiotic analysis of visuals respectively. Information in this chapter establishes what literate (including rhetorical) practices occur in the CP. Then, the “Analysis” section of this chapter explores the theoretical underpinnings for understanding these results within the framework of composing, revising and archiving social narratives.

13 Rhetorical analysis, in addition to the words used on the shirts, included record of capitalization, underlining, grammar and spelling errors, punctuation, and general position of the text (i.e. AT=across top, BL=bottom left, etcetera). I ceased keeping track of the colors of text. Semiotic analysis, in addition to identification of images, included record of the colors of images, but not the position of images. Because of the scope of this project, however, this chapter discusses only the content of text and images.
Results

Activists’ Textual Messages Lack Details of Gender Violence

Of the 74 tee shirts in the collection, 59 (80%) remove the activist from the setting in which she encountered violence. These shirts either make no mention of setting, or mention large, undefined settings (“night,” “day,” “jail,” “external”) (Figure 5). Shirt 54, for example, introduces the audience to a 3-year-old girl (though her relation to the activist remains undisclosed) and to an action (“it,” which in this context suggests assault). But lack of further details prevents viewers from connecting with elements of the girl as an individual. Similarly, shirt 65 avoids providing a time and place for a powerfully-worded “daddy’s doll.” Shirt 67 takes the reader to a place where “a light came in from outside,” but becomes rather abstract with the notion of “two worlds” and “invisible boundaries.”

Some shirts (66%) do offer details of experiences, such as relationships, but do not offer enough detail for viewers to make full sense of the experience (Figure 5). For example, shirts include a person’s name, but not the relationship of that person to the CP participant, or shirts include acontextualized actions. On the other hand, viewers have enough detail when actions, characters, and settings supplement one another in the construction and understanding of a scene, thought, or sentiment. Shirts that did not offer enough detail made logical appeals, but also included some element of ethos and/or pathos. Elements of ethos and pathos, according to the coding scheme in this research, are more personal than elements of logos. This does not mean, however, that these shirts are, overall, personal in nature or that they disclose vivid details of personal experiences. With shirt 3, for example, the participant seems to label herself a survivor and suggest
that she is “bent but not broken,” but then quickly turns attention away from herself to instruct unspecified others to “speak out.” She focuses attention back on herself, however, by telling the audience about her friend, one of her acquaintances, and a stranger. But she does not disclose who exactly these people are in relation to her. Are these people who have assaulted her, or are these people whom she knows or has heard of and who have been assaulted? Finally, the participant turns attention to a general group of survivors, which she addresses with a second-person pronoun ("you"/ "your").

Similarly, shirt 26 refers to a relationship between the activist and a man named Zachary. But audience members have no idea what relationship the character Zachary shares with the CP participant or why the participant is proud of Zachary. Is he a survivor of sexual assault? Is he a supportive intimate partner, a family member, or a friend to the tee shirt activist? Though the activist refers to herself and her personal relationship, she stops short of letting viewers fully understand the nature of that relationship.

**Activists’ Textual Messages Make References to Using the Body as Active Participation**

About one-third (34%) of all shirts refer to the body, with 82% of these references suggesting that the body is a source of asserting empowerment, whether directly or indirectly (Figure 6). Direct references include statements such as “fight back by speaking out,” “dance and sing,” and “stand up.” With direct references, then, activists make explicit what characters are doing or ought to do with their bodies. Indirect references, on the other hand, include statements of action such as “express,” “we will

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14 15 (60%) refer to the use of the body in relation to the audience7 (28%) refer to the participant herself2 (8%) refer to survivors 1 (4%) refer to men specifically
not be silenced,” and “even though you cut off my wings, I will regrow them.” Indirect references do not specify how one would use her body, but “expressing” and “breaking silence” would require action of some kind (whether speaking, writing, marching, or engaging in other ways). In addition, the metaphorical nature of some actions, such as having wings cut off and re-growing them, makes these actions indirect.

Much like the shirts that eliminate details related to personal experience, these shirts leave much of the sense-making up to viewers. Shirt 1, for example, instructs people to “fight back by speaking out.” But how does “speaking out” stop or prevent violence against women? Additionally, how does “dancing like no one is watching” and “singing like no one is listening” address the issue of sexual assault? And when “speaking out against sexual violence,” what should people say? Viewers unfamiliar with the political issues surrounding sexual assault, or those unfamiliar with activist efforts in general, may need more concrete guidance in regards to what they can do in response to the issue. Ideas that audience members should “speak out” or assert liberation (shirt 44) require overt explanations of what these actions entail, signify, and mean in relation to the issue of sexual assault.
Figure 5: Shirts excluding designers’ personal details
Figure 6: Shirts with references to use of the body as active participation
Activists’ Textual Messages Include Covert Assertions of Agency

Covert assertions of agency\(^{15}\) occur in multiple ways: the use of “you” pronouns, the use of “I” pronouns, a focus on perpetrators’ actions, and a focus on survivors’ healing rather than on survivors’ states of vulnerability. Twenty-eight shirts (38%) include individuals or groups in their messages, which fall into the following categories: survivors (10 shirts); friends, family members, or specific people known to tee shirt activists (8 shirts); perpetrators (7 shirts); members of the public (4 shirts); and others, such as authors and sororities (4 shirts). Eighteen shirts (64%) refer to these characters as “you” (top row of Figure 7). For example, shirt 16 addresses the general public, warning that “You have to know what you stand for, not just what you stand against.” Though the viewer reads this within the context of the CP, the generic nature of the message makes it applicable to anyone. Shirt 31, as determined by the context of the CP, addresses survivors. But eliminating “assault” or “rape” and just saying “Not Your Fault” allows the viewer to personalize the message. The same situation occurs with the advice to “not watch the demons behind [you]” and “miss the angels ahead.” These commands, and the way they are made personal by addressing “you” rather than a larger, more general audience, demonstrate activists’ covert assertions of agency. “You,” as a personal pronoun, puts audience members in closer proximity to the CP participant. CP participants engage in activism by using the “you” pronoun and framing their messages as an empathetic dispensing of indirect advice (i.e. shirts 16, 55, 14), putting themselves in authoritative positions without a domineering stance that might alienate viewers.

\(^{15}\) I define “agency” as an “ability or capacity to act or exert power” (“Agency”).
Moreover, 23 shirts (31%) make first-person mention (“I” or “me”) of CP activists. Some of these personal references include details of women’s experiences with assault, as seen in the bottom row of Figure 7. Shirt 14 discloses that the participant was raped, along with the timeframe of her abuse (though subsequent information becomes confusing for readers, as the activist lists a number of characters but not much else). Shirt 19 makes a rhetorical move to communicate with a child-like voice, with the activist using common youthful appeals to beg her mother not make her go to “daddys” [sic] house; this participant also uses a child-size tee shirt to enhance the rhetorical strategy of connecting with an audience from the point of view of a child, therefore making an emotional appeal. In addition, shirt 49, is perhaps the most vivid shirt in the collection, because it invites the viewer, as much as possible, to experience the activist’s assault from her point of view as the violence took place. The activist discloses the name of her attacker, the position of her body, her view of the setting during the attack, and graphic images of the attacker “ramm[ing]” her. Though these shirts assert agency via activists’ explicit implication of themselves as survivors of sex crimes, they, too, either lack details or present them in a way that makes them, to some degree, inaccessible to viewers. Also, in the case of the child’s shirt, the agency involved in identifying one’s self as a survivor becomes undermined by the activists’ taking the perspective of a vulnerable child.

Finally, 45% of shirts involve assertions of agency by way of implicating actions related to perpetrators. These actions, more specifically, function by building ethos (by citing participants’ personal experience with the issue) or showing activists in a process of healing (Figure 8). Shirt 47, for instance, makes no direct mention of the offender but refers to the murder of M.H. in 2010. In addition, shirt 64 calls for women to “survive”
the acts committed by “those bastards,” to “go through [the] hell” that offenders have caused. Shirt 9, for example, refers to the activist “starting to see and believe the Love [she] deserve[s].” Shirts 27 and 33 assert activists’ control over their lives and emotional well-being, “rising” and once again embodying emotional and psychological strength. To some extent, all actions mentioned on tee shirts refer back to perpetrators; tee shirts, after all, are created within the context of an activist event intended to name and defy gender violence. But shirts in Figure 8 take a more direct approach to implicating actions related to perpetrators.

Nonetheless, these shirts are covert in that their assertions of agency do not occur at the time of their attacks or experiences with gender violence. Such moments, one could argue, would require assertions of agency in the most explicit way and, therefore, with the most aggressive text and images. Capturing the essence of the moments of an attack likely requires graphic imagery and language. Rather than focus on the moments of the attack, activists focus on moments of healing; moments of healing allow activists to avoid imaginatively re-embodying their assault and to communicate with less aggressive images and words and, perhaps, to discourage attitudes of re-victimization within the context of the CP. By focusing on the healing rather than on the attacks, these participants’ accounts demonstrate a sense of agency. A focus on healing also provides a decentering of the assault and places the “self” as emerging as empowered; in this way, participants can reconfigure their bodies as not just having been acted upon but as capable of healing and carrying out positive action.
Figure 7: Shirts that include covert assertions of agency with characters (pronouns)
Figure 8: Shirts that include covert assertions of agency with actions
In many ways, then, women take a protective stance in regards to their experiences and messages. For the most part, they avoid revealing details about their violent experiences, reveal in such a way that limits viewers’ understanding of experiences, and/or assert messages of covert agency and healing. This protection (of themselves or others) is most clearly seen in the fact that, as a collection, 54 of 74 shirts, or 70% of the archive, consists of shirts that make “bumper sticker” messages, messages we would see either on bumper or campaign stickers (Table 3). While some of these shirts (6) contain some references to personal details, most of them do not.

Table 3: “Bumper Sticker” messages in the CP (written as displayed on shirt)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 out of 2 women WILL BE IN A VIOLENT relationship</th>
<th>I DESERVE BETTER</th>
<th>Hands ARE NOT for hurting.</th>
<th>I will Not let One Asshole Influence who I Become...</th>
<th>VA Cares about Military Sexual Trauma...ASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPEAK OUT FIGHT BRAVE</strong></td>
<td>Every 2 minutes some one is Sexually Assailed</td>
<td>...BUT Where there's a monster there's a MIRACLE</td>
<td>Break the SILENCE LOVE should not HURT</td>
<td>TAKE BACK THE NIGHT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/5 of college aged women will be assaulted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You may trod me in the very dirt,</td>
<td>NO MEANS NO.</td>
<td>Dance like no one is watching</td>
<td>This little light of Mine</td>
<td>Got Consent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But still like dust, I'll rise!</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sing like no one is listening</td>
<td>I'M goNNA Let it shine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Love like you've never been hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REAL MEN ASK PERMISSION</strong></td>
<td>NOT ALL SCARS ARE EXTERNAL</td>
<td>WORDS ARE POWERFUL SPEAK OUT Against SEXUAL Assault</td>
<td>SURVIVOR 75% of battered women attempt suicide</td>
<td>Stop the Violence!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stay Strong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Strong Stand against VIOLENCE</td>
<td>NOT YOUR FAULT</td>
<td>( ...) Silence No More</td>
<td>I will love</td>
<td>[Front] Just because your Past taps you on the Shoulder doesn't mean you have to turn Around</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[w/ sorority letters]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Back] I am a warrior.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

105
Activists’ Visual Messages Rely on Socially Constructed Representations of Concepts

Of 74 tee shirts, 47, or 64% of the collection, include visual components in their messages. Just as with linguistic messages, participants exclude detailed representations of experience and instead rely on “bumper sticker” notions of activist communication.

Table 4 provides a categorization of the types of visual representations found in the CP.

Table 4: Visual Representations on CP Tee Shirts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Categories</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Bodies/Body Parts</td>
<td>Stick figures or drawings of people, handprints, happy and sad faces, mouth/lips, “female” symbol (circle with ‘+’)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Awareness to Social Causes</td>
<td>Teal ribbons, purple ribbons, blue ribbons, TBTN logo, peace sign</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Emotion</td>
<td>Hearts and tears</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Religion/Spirituality</td>
<td>Angel wings, candle, cross, demons</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Natural Elements</td>
<td>Flowers, stars, ladybug</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Location</td>
<td>“downtown” buildings, home, and outline of a state, directional arrow</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Social Guidelines</td>
<td>“anti” symbol (circle w/ diagonal line through it)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depictions of Food</td>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows, then, that CP activists tend to gravitate toward common, socially constructed representations of concepts such as happiness, love, awareness, peace, religion/faith, and liberation or healing. Only 2 shirts (24 and 69) depict scenes from activists’ experiences with assault (Figure 9); both of these representations fall into the category of Bodies/Body Parts. These two shirts, then, rely on participants’ imagination to envision moments or scenes from their attack, to determine which moments to
illustrate on their shirts, and to determine how to portray those moments. These shirts may show evidence of preconceived notions about elements such as the symbolism of color, but nothing routinely suggests their meaning based on prior social understandings of their elements. In other words, the images in Figure 9 would likely receive varying interpretations, as opposed to an image of a heart, which would likely be described as representing love. Examples of shirts that rely on socially constructed representations can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 9: Shirts depicting personal experiences
These first four findings focus on a description of content. That participants’ messages lack details of experiences with gender violence, that participants make covert assertions of agency, and that participants’ visual messages rely on socially constructed representations of concepts all suggest the presence of dominant narratives that influence individual composers’ design decisions. In addition, participants’ invocations of the body suggest ways of thinking about activism and action as separate from literate practices. Repeatedly, given the opportunity to say anything, and in any way, CP participants “play it safe.” They avoid profanity. For the most part, they avoid graphic textual and pictorial representations of their assault. And they rely on images such as androgynous figures, hearts, awareness ribbons, and flowers and ladybugs. This evidence suggests that women have internalized culturally normative narratives about what it  

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16 Dominant narratives, or patriarchal narratives, are those that perpetuate the oppression of women and other marginalized groups. The “Analysis” section of this chapter, as well as Chapter 5, present a more thorough discussion of such narratives.
means to “speak out,” either as survivors of assault, activists, or women in general. This evidence is made stronger by the fact that shirt-making sessions are held in private, often with one or a few people attending a single session—and with the shirts being collected over a number of years. In other words, the possibility for groupthink decreases under these circumstances.\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, we are left to look to a larger influence than what the women may have on one another.

The fifth finding, which I discuss next and which deals with patterns in overall usage of text and images, pertains to the collection as a whole and exists across the four points discussed thus far (lack of details, invocation of the use of the body rather than literate practices, covert assertions of agency, and reliance on socially constructed representations).

**Activists’ Textual and Visual Messages Do Not Function in Relation to One Another**

Data suggest that activists see importance in both textual and visual representations. Seventy-three of 74 tee shirts (99\%) present some sort of written message, whereas 48 of 74 tee shirts (65\%) use some sort of visual (even if it is just the use of a heart to “dot” a linguistic “i”). But despite pushes toward multimodal and more visual-laden composing in education (The New London Group, 1996; Kress, 2003; DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill, 2005; Takayoshi and Selfe, 2007), only 1 participant communicated without the use of words. This is in stark contrast to Kress’s (2003) notion that words have been subsumed by visual communications. This one participant, moreover, relied on the awareness ribbon and confetti-looking dots, visuals that already

\textsuperscript{17} Arguments exist for CP participants’ influence on one another in regards to participation (i.e. validating one another and showing the issue of gender violence as more than anomaly). But evidence does not suggest that CP participants influence one another’s design decisions.
offer some standardization of form and meaning.

Of 48 shirts with visual representations, only 8 of them (16% of shirts with visuals) have visuals that render the text no longer sensible, or at least less powerful, if the visual is removed from the shirt. In this case, the meaning of the activist’s message relies on visual composition. For example, shirt 2 presents a rebus; the statement, “One in two women will be in a violent relationship,” uses symbols to represent “women” and “relationship.” Shirt 19 has the words, “MOMMY Please don’t make me go over daddys [sic] anymore. Please! I you”; this message appears on a child’s shirt, used visually to create a more powerful impact for an audience. Shirt 39 is covered by a chaotic presentation of what appear to be random words; viewers can’t make sense of any of their combinations. Here, the meaning of the shirt relies less on what the words are and more on the presentation of the words in this chaotic manner, which may represent the fragmentation of identity or sense of confusion after an assault. Though symbiotic to an extent, with these shirts, activists place emphasis on the visual element to convey meaning.

Moreover, 23 shirts (48% of shirts with visuals) have visuals that would no longer make sense if the text is removed from the shirts. Though these shirts contain visuals, they rely on text to convey their meaning. Removing the text from shirt 1, for instance, would leave us with a shirt with drawings of a heart and a banana. Shirt 22 presents the Take Back the Night (TBTN) logo, along with the phrase “Take Back the Night.” Without the words, viewers would be presented with a picture of a half moon and some stars contained in a circle. While people familiar with the issue of sexual assault or TBTN might recognize the symbol, the general population most likely would not; to reach a vast
audience, then, the shirt relies on the text. Shirt 60 has a purple ribbon with the words, “Stand up [&] speak out against sexual violence.” Similar to the teal ribbon, the purple ribbon might symbolize numerous possible causes. It is only through the words on the shirt that we connect the purple ribbon to the issue of assault. Though symbiotic to an extent, with these shirts, activists place emphasis on the textual element to convey meaning.

Overall, then, with only 1 of the 74 shirts eliminating the use of words altogether, and 23 shirts creating a relationship between text and image that depends on the text to make sense (versus 8 shirts that have a relationship between text and image so that if image is removed, the text no longer makes sense), activists seem to rely on text more than on visuals to communicate their ideas. While 65% of tee shirts incorporate a visual element, 48% of these have visuals that depend on text to make any sense, and only 16% use visuals that are necessary to maintain the meaning of text.

Finally, 16 shirts (33%) have neither words nor visuals that make sense without the context of the larger CP. Messages on these shirts include general statements such as “Speak Out Fight Brave” (shirt 15); “I will take back my strength” (shirt 33); and “Not all scars are external” (shirt 72) (Figure 11). These shirts also suggest the influence of cultural narratives on such designs (discussed in the next section of this chapter).

The next section, then, looks at the results detailed in this chapter from within the frame of psychosocial compositions, including the notion of archives. This archival lens reveals intersections between historical and contemporary cultural ideologies as well as ways in which activists might respond to unjust ideological narratives. Moreover, this
archival lens reveals findings as present across time and, therefore, as linked to larger social narratives. These relationships re-inscribe and revise psychosocial compositions.

Figure 11: Shirts relying on the CP context for meaning
Analysis

The previous section asserted that women’s activist messages align with patriarchal narratives, even as their activist messages attempt to counter narratives about women’s identity. Moreover, that section asserted that results discussed in this chapter served as support for this argument. Here, I explore specifically how each finding is a psychosocial composition, a product of social influences on one’s ideology and/or actions. I also reiterate how the CP mirrors the construction of an archive, and explore how findings respond to psychosocial compositions and attempt to revise cultural narratives, even if on a small scale.

The first major finding, that participants’ messages lack details of personal experiences with gender violence, aligns with larger cultural narratives about what is deemed appropriate for women to disclose (Julier, 1994; Ahrens, 2006; Clover & Stalker, 2008; Droogsma, 2009; Ehrlich, 2014). Women who have suffered gender violence have also frequently suffered “victim blaming,” or re-victimization, the act of blaming women for their experiences of gender violence (i.e. “leading men on” by wearing revealing clothing, emasculating men, etcetera) (Droogsma, 2009; Skinner, 2009). In these ways, women have been encouraged not to reveal their experiences at all, let alone in detail.

When CP participants, however, exclude details, such as setting, they decontextualize the characters and actions they do disclose; this separates viewers from the space in which characters and actions gained their meaning. Inclusion of details would connect an audience to the story or event and reduce viewers’ disorientation, therefore likely increasing the impact of the activists’ messages. Greater understanding allows for greater connection. But while activists attempt to defy expectations placed on
them by larger social narratives, activists in this study, to some extent, do not. Shirts that take this approach provide “appropriate” barriers between people, as exposure to graphic personal accounts may alienate non-survivors by making them feel uneasy (Clover & Stalker, 2008). Also, the non-individualized nature of statistics presented on some shirts (see Figure 12) can put serious social issues into perspective in ways that personal stories may fall short. Statistics establish that a problem exists on a large scale, but their collective nature also provides an element of comfort, taking focus off of the individual and, therefore, allowing her to communicate in acceptable ways.

The second finding, that participants invoke references to the body in their tee shirt messages, aligns with cultural narratives that place people’s focus on the female body (King, 2004; “Statistics from Miss Representation”). In many of these messages, activists refer to using the body to defy expectations (i.e. standing up and speaking out). These uses of the body suggest three ideas on the part of activists: 1) that they see themselves or audience members as able to do something about gender violence; 2) that they think about “action” in terms of physical movement (speaking and standing) rather than in terms of literate practices (such as writing to Congress or city officials), or practices such as bystander-awareness training; 3) that audience members will know how to enact “speaking out” and “standing up,” that they will know how to engage in meaningful responses to the problem of gender violence. What does “speaking out” or “standing up” entail? What does it do or what should it do, and how can viewers engage in those activities? With an activist agenda, such questions remain important; simply drawing attention to injustice remains crucial to activists’ purposes but if creating awareness fails to empower or motivate people to act meaningfully, the status quo will
likely remain (for individuals on a journey to recovery and for society as a whole).

Moreover, as activists attempt to speak back to cultural narratives, they seem to perpetuate the idea that use of one’s body supersedes more intellectual or collaborative pursuits, such as using literacy for social change or volunteering one’s time with relevant non-profit organizations.

Similarly, the third finding, that participants assert agency but do so subtly, speaks to influences discussed in relation to the first finding: hesitation to disclose personal experiences (or to disclose too explicitly) because of definitions of what is deemed appropriate for women to disclose and how women should communicate, and the consequences that come from communicating negative personal experiences. Survivors of assault face re-victimization and silencing from perpetrators, family, and society (Rose, 1999; Ahrens, 2006). Moreover, cultural narratives have communicated to women the inappropriateness of certain types of expression, and expression of certain types of emotions or thoughts (Ruggles Gere, 1997; Droogsma, 2009; Ehrlich, Meyerhoff, & Holmes, 2014), especially in regards to sexual violence as a public versus private matter (Payne, 2000). If CP activists assert agency directly or forcefully, rather than subtly, they risk alienating viewers (Clover & Stalker, 2008) and perhaps making viewers defensive against CP messages.

Covert assertions of agency may also prove more rhetorically effective because of their ability to command action without audience members perceiving such demands as coming from a figure of authority; the more CP activists can connect with viewers, the greater ability to influence them. Using the pronoun “you” may grab readers’ attention, as it appears personal to viewers (even though, upon closer read, it may have nothing to do
with them). While logical appeals make the case that others are part of the issue of sexual assault, the ethical appeal makes the case that “you” and the activist share an experience, an attitude, or a goal. This approach, therefore, lends credibility to CP participants. Activists, then, assert agency via their rhetorical approach to gaining viewers’ attention by subtly aligning their experiences with those of viewers.

Covert assertions of agency draw attention to the use of the body as agentive and to the process of healing that survivors endure (rather than the violence itself). Such assertions meet gendered demands for subtlety or passivity by avoiding aggressive statements. Still, CP participants assert agency with their focus on taking control and moving forward, rather than allowing themselves to mentally and emotionally stay in the vulnerable, frightening position they occupied during the acts of violence committed against them. As mentioned earlier, participants reconfigure their bodies as agents and not the objects they were seen as during an attack, or even still seen as in mainstream culture.

In addition, the use of actions that directly refer to, or create strong associations with, perpetrators’ actions hint at activists’ credibility. The ability to refer to these personal experiences, whether activists themselves or people close to them suffered the actions, makes the argument that tee shirt participants know what they’re talking about. Having been affected, directly or indirectly, by gender violence gives CP participants authority or merit with which to broach the subject. Tee shirts suggest that participants have personal knowledge or experience, and a philanthropic agenda; this information gives viewers reason to take seriously and to trust what CP tee shirts communicate (although, this communication seemingly must occur in certain forms to have this effect).
The fourth finding, that activists’ messages rely on socially constructed representations of concepts, suggests that even in communicating against normative narratives regarding what women should say and how they should say it, activists adopt patriarchal narrative into their messages. Again, activists tend to rely on pre-conceived notions in their representations (happy faces, sad faces, hearts, and awareness ribbons), representations already deemed appropriate by the general public. Hearts, for example, are not inherently or instinctively associated with the issue of sexual assault, and many of the shirts make no direct linguistic reference to the hearts. Therefore, no evidence directly explains why activists made the choice to include them; hearts could, however, represent emotional healing or a sense of victory. Lives become shattered by sexual assault; experiencing happiness, security, and a sense of wholeness—a reconfiguring of identity—requires engagement in cognitive and affective processes which the hearts may represent. The hearts, similarly, may represent a sense of victory, a statement that, though survivors have reason to not trust others or to isolate themselves, they choose to interact with others in ways that make themselves vulnerable, and to believe that positive experiences will come from this effort. Hearts may suggest conflicting emotions toward intimate partners or friends who committed acts of violence against them; acts of violence do not necessarily sever emotional ties to some perpetrators. The use of hearts also suggests something about the ways in which women are “taught” to communicate, however. To what extent do the hearts really represent activists’ experiences and to what extent were they used because they were an appropriate option among other “feminine” symbols and “feminine” messages?
As for the awareness ribbons, they provide another example of communication that considers what might be appropriate for a “public” audience. Awareness ribbons are used in activist communication for many causes; a single color represents dozens of medical and social issues. In other words, national and local organizations and individual activists rely on the same symbol for their own causes, thereby making it an acceptable option for survivors of sexual assault. Because viewers are familiar with the symbolism of ribbons, they serve as a reliable and quick “go to” for people looking to broach a subject. In the case of the CP, activists can rely on the context of the CP, and the way that shirts work together, to construct an understanding of the issue, to bring attention to sexual assault or other forms of gender violence. Creating scenes from experiences, linguistically or visually, makes great demands on the CP participants and the viewers; in such cases, activists must revisit their experiences and try to find a way to put those experiences into words and images. This can be difficult, given that traumas are often referred to as “indescribable” or “unspeakable.” Participants might figure that viewers who are not survivors will not be able to “understand” the experience, regardless of the detail used. Personal disclosure also puts weight on the viewer; the viewer may be disturbed by such disclosure, given the nature of the trauma and/or the fact that the viewer feels helpless in confronting such an event. With these factors in mind, awareness ribbons address issues in impersonal, appropriate ways for public consumption.

Finally, the fifth finding, that activists rely on text to communicate, even when images are included, challenges society’s current emphasis on multimodal and digital communication. Perhaps participants recognize the immediacy that can come with images; images can be quickly recognized in passing and draw a viewer’s attention to
text, or communicate messages in and of themselves. Tee shirts do suggest that participants look to images to communicate (whether that be because they find images easier to work with, to be a better rhetorical strategy for gaining viewers’ attention, or to align with an increased focus on visual communication within the university and global setting). But, almost all shirts used text, and more than half of them used both text and images. Data suggest, however, that participants did not have a developing or developed understanding of how the two modes could be used together to communicate more effectively.

These findings raise questions about the importance of visual communication in our society as it pertains to audiences and communicators, or the receiver versus the sender. Such questions counter Kress’s (2003) notion that visual communication has supplanted linguistic communication. Though technology has allowed people to engage in more visual communication, technology may fail to motivate people to “create” visual forms of communication. For example, Pinterest invites users to choose among photographs to “pin” on their own boards. Facebook allows one to quickly choose a “sticker” that conveys one’s emotions. Instagram allows people to “create” to the extent that users can alter photographs and video. But these tools do not engage users in what I conceptualize as original creating—the kind which the CP allows. The CP invites people to use materials (shirts, paint, markers) to think of and carry out creating a representation, as opposed to choosing from a menu of pre-constructed representations. Participants do not provide evidence that they know what to do with this opportunity. Calling this finding into question implicates not only activist communication but also pedagogical practices related to these issues. Finally, participants’ reliance on text and preconceived visual
representations also raises questions related to work on women’s use of fabric arts (and other art forms) as a means of transgressive communication, rather than for traditional and domestic purposes. In this study, data show that the use of fabric and art remains conservative.

All five of the findings speak to the shirts’ reliance on the context of the CP, and activists in the context of psychosocial compositions. This dissertation establishes a pattern in composing practices of individual women who worked in various settings (private and hall- or group-sponsored shirt-making sessions or isolated settings) and across years of an event. These patterns establish the existence of a dominant influence on composing practices, establish commonalities in personal experience, and suggest influences on the outcome of activist events like the CP. As suggested in Chapter 1, the intersections of these elements are psychosocial compositions at the same time that they are products of psychosocial compositions.

Psychosocial compositions about dominant culture are implicated, since we can take these shirts out of the CP collection and take them to practically any activist event or activist archive and the tee shirts could, arguably, adopt that cause. Due to the generic “bumper sticker” nature of the messages, we only know that the shirts address sexual assault or gender violence because they take their place in the CP among other shirts addressing the same issue. In these instances, CP participants seem to use activism to connect themselves to an experience or a cause, but use composition to remove themselves from an experience. In other words, by choosing to participate in and contribute to the CP, activists connect themselves to the cause and/or an experience with it. But in their acts of composing, they remove themselves from any personal experience;
perhaps composing is the process or medium that allows them to do so, to temporarily remove themselves from the narrative.

While activists adapt cultural narratives to their work, thereby re-inscribing and producing psychosocial compositions, they also attempt to revise psychosocial compositions or cultural narratives about what it means to live as a woman (Figure 12). Shirt 70, for example, asserts that men who ask permission and, therefore, refuse to force themselves (in this context, physically) upon women have character as genuine males. Those men who fail to ask permission of women suffer a flaw that undermines their status as a particular sex and gender. Rhetorically, the shirt appeals to the ethos of what it means to be a man. Therefore, it may appeal to one’s ego and sense of self; generally speaking, one avoids feeling inadequate in a particular role, and the alternative to being a ‘real’ man is being a ‘fake’ one. Activists push, then, to define or redefine what it means to be a man in current culture.

The activist who created shirt 69 uses painted hands to represent a woman fighting off her attacker. Interestingly, she poses a question without punctuation, indicating a statement or request for action, often with an expected or obvious answer. The fact that the activist needs to ask the question, to literally paint a clear picture, implies a lack of intelligence or a flaw on behalf of the perpetrator. In this case, it seems as though the activist makes a demand for society to understand both voiced and silent embodied resistance. Many women’s voices are silenced during an attack (via the use of items like duct tape or via the threat of weapons or harm to loved ones). The argument here is that speaking “no” is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for expressing one’s decision.
The activist of shirt 71 also provides commentary about current culture. On a very basic level, identity gets constructed, in part, through a connection between name and face. By referring to the face (“My eyes are up here”), the activist suggests that she wants viewers to communicate with the parts of her that make her an individual person who can reciprocate communication. Furthermore, the author of shirt 68 appears to comment on how Steubenville’s reputation has been reduced to this particular event and the school/city has become a cultural icon of that event. The take away (figuratively and materially) is the realization of violence and its emptiness (“all I got was this lousy shirt”). Shirt 4 simply states that survivors will not be silent about their experiences; in particular, they will forbid others to silence them. This shirt, then, suggests how the writer understands the ways in which survivors become silenced, intentionally or unintentionally, in current culture. Shirt 2, then, aims to communicate the prevalence of the issue of violence in society, a definite flaw of an apathetic and/or inactive culture.

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

19 This shirt refers to the 2012 rape of a high school girl from Steubenville, Ohio. Captured by peers via electronic devices and posted on the internet, the rape raised awareness of the violent acts committed by offenders, but also of the unjust acts of those committed by bystanders.
Figure 12: Content of shirts providing commentary on cultural narratives

[Images of shirts with various messages]
The way in which these writers and activists position themselves or their work also speaks to social narratives about sexual assault (for example, see Gavey, 2005). Miller and Bowden (1999) argue:

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

What CP participants choose to disclose, and how they choose to disclose it, sheds light on the relationship between literacy, rhetoric, and activism. The tee shirts demonstrate that the activist imagines a particular audience of the CP (though the understandings of these audiences may be influenced by cultural narratives). While CP activists may imagine themselves, perpetrators, fellow survivors, or the general public as their audience, the nature of the CP means that the actual audience will extend beyond the imagined audience; this makes the audience difficult to define. But survivors of assault, most likely, are familiar with dominant cultural narratives pertaining to rape culture (Harding, 2015) and, therefore, double victimization. For example, in March 2014, TIME magazine ran an opinion piece titled “It’s Time to End ‘Rape Culture’ Hysteria,” in which the female author claimed that, “Recently, rape-culture theory has migrated from the lonely corners of the feminist blogosphere into the mainstream…. Rape-culture theory is doing little to help victims, but its power to poison the minds of young women
and lead to hostile environments for innocent males is immense” (Kitchens, 2014, para. 2 & 1). Again, it is unlikely that CP composers are unaware of such attitudes, and, instead, remain highly aware of the fact that, whether their identity is known, their tee shirts will be viewed by people who share rape culture attitudes to varying degrees.

CP tee shirts contribute knowledge to how those in oppressed subject positions—those who occupy subject positions that may conflict with those of the audience—use literacy publicly and subversively to create social change, whether that change occurs on an individual level or a larger scale. In other words, this study shows literate artifacts as they produce, reproduce, and become products of various and competing social narratives. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, I refer to this process as literate artifacts contextualized in psychosocial compositions.

Bakhtin supports this notion of psychosocial compositions, arguing that the “world” and the individual share a symbiotic relationship (Warshauer Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 5). Warshauer Freedman and Ball note:

As we form our own ideas, we come into contact with the discourse of others and those discourses enter our consciousness much as authoritative discourse does.

The discourse of others also influences the ways we think and contributes to forming what ultimately is internally persuasive for us. (p. 8)

CP activists’ shirt designs suggest that the dominant narratives about women influence women’s communication. Scott (1990) claims that individuals learn to act out roles subscribed to them by dominant culture, and that the acted role becomes enmeshed with individuals’ view of themselves. Both the individual and the message are “cultured” (Harris, 2007, p. 261).
CP activists’ approach to their messages speaks to Scott’s (1990) examination of how “resistance is disguised, muted, and veiled for safety’s sake” (p. 137). Such resistance must conceal the message and/or the messenger, and yet, as discussed earlier, must be neither too covert nor too overt (Scott, 1990). Messages and messengers must attract attention but not overwhelm or offend in such a way that attention is diverted, and opportunities for activism diminished. To the extent that CP activists document and display their commentary yet not appear threatening to the status quo in a patriarchal society, they are successful (Scott, 1990, p. 87). Furthermore, CP activists achieve success because Scott suggests that remaining, in a sense, undetected, means that the work of oppressed groups fails to be archived; in the case of the CP activists, however, they achieve the dynamic of making and displaying commentary while avoiding pushback in the very act of creating archival materials.

Not only does the CP meet Danielson’s (2010) criteria for forming an archive (See Table 5), but the CP also engages activists, their literate practices, and psychosocial compositions in the dynamics discussed by other archival researchers. These notions frame archival research as “a lived process,” rather than an isolated examination of isolated documents (Schultz, 2008, p. ix). The tee shirts document past and present individual and cultural narratives, erasure, rhetorical silence, public commentary, personal healing, and activist theory.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term/Process Involved in Archives</th>
<th>Definition/Criteria</th>
<th>How the CP meets the definition/criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>The process of “determining which documents have permanent historical or evidentiary value” (p. 48)</td>
<td>I argue that CP artists and writers do this when determining the design of their shirts. In addition, CP though rare, administrators or planners sometimes call the inclusion of particular tee shirts into question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitation, collection development, and documentation strategy</td>
<td>The process of “proactively seeking appropriate collections” (p. 48)</td>
<td>This occurs when planning committee members advertise the Clothesline Project and shirt-making sessions leading up to the event and determine the most promising sites to acquire additions to the collection of shirts. For example, they reach out to particular campus organizations (Inter-Hall Council, the Health Center, Psychological Service, Sororities) and strategically schedule shirt-making sessions based on student behavior and campus events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans and deposits</td>
<td>Loaned or donated artifacts attained from individuals/institutions</td>
<td>CP writers and artists donate their work for the sake of a humanitarian effort. They give full authority over the work to an individual CP event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accretion, accrual, and increment</td>
<td>The process of adding, or objects added, to a collection</td>
<td>As an annual event that features shirts made for prior events and the current year’s event, the CP archive continuously accrues new artifacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Value</td>
<td>The contribution the artifact can make to scholarship</td>
<td>Though CP organizers may not think of “research” per se, the CP shirts, and the purposes of the project, contribute to research value within the notion of research as &quot;creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications&quot; (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2002). Shirt-making sessions are planned, tee shirts acquired, and the CP event planned in a systematic manner for the purpose of increasing knowledge of the individual, humanity, culture and society and contributing to new applications of such knowledge (such as policy development or civic engagement).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifactual Value</td>
<td>The monetary worth of the artifact</td>
<td>CP organizers assess the monetary value of artifacts to be acquired only to the extent that tee shirts and materials must be purchased. The CP itself, and the value of the writing/art on each tee shirt, is not assessed in terms of monetary value.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Parallels between the CP and Danielson’s (2010) conceptualization of archives
CP activists’ awareness of their subject positions as survivors, in relation to re-victimization and other social narratives about sexuality and assault, make them a “counterpublic;” this counterpublic attempts to modify social beliefs and structures that perpetuate participants’ struggles and the rhetorical ways they approach these struggles with a public audience (Coogan, 2010, p. 161). Conceptualizing the CP as initiating an archive aligns with these considerations and objectives. As a collection of individual compositions, the CP documents the past and present, while also composing the present and (it is hoped) the future. As potential archivists, then, CP activists also participate in the act of record-making as “imposing control and order on transactions, events, people, and societies through the legal, symbolic, structural, and operational power of recorded communication” (Harris, 2007, p. 242). The CP archive aids its creators’ attempt to assert control over their experiences, their narratives, and their identities, but also over cultural attitudes about gender violence; the archive also connects them to a history of activism. The CP, however, aligns with the notion that the “the archive is first the law of what can be said…And when it can be said, how, and by whom” (Harris, 2007, p. 245). The CP activists’ disclosure, or lack thereof, has been established as rhetorical (in that activists attempt to persuade or influence people’s taking action against assault, and that messages suggest consideration of audience and the context of the CP event itself). But the patterns in the approaches spanning a number of years suggest that, though informed, decisions about design may also involve an act of silencing by patriarchal narratives.

I illustrate the ideas presented thus far with an analysis of my own CP tee shirt (Figure 13), which was created prior to any data collection for this study.
My shirt presents an androgynous person (intended to be a woman, however) surrounded by a hazy light. Above the person are the words, “Wish,” “Believe,” and “Create.” The person’s outstretched arms represent a sense of hope, a welcoming of the opportunity to wish, believe, and create despite experiencing sexual assault. The open arms suggest that, even with good reason to remain closed off, she remains open to others. Moreover, the hazy light represents an intermingling of darkness and light, the coexistence of suffering and the strength and insight that it yields. Also on the front of the shirt (and partially on the back) is a quote from Loren Eiseley’s *The Night Country*, a book which holds significance to me as the book that contributed to my development as a creative writer and to my decision to pursue a Ph.D. in English. Upon first read of this book, when I was an undergraduate, I developed a deep emotional connection with the text, as it seemed to say all the things about myself and my life that I could never quite articulate. In addition to the end of the quote, the back of the shirt presents a statistic which, at the time of this
writing, was found on the National Association of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse website, though I remain unsure of where I originally found this information.

Despite my degrees in psychology and composition and rhetorical studies, which might have informed my design decisions in ways that deviate from many CP participants compositions, my CP shirt aligns with the main findings from this study. First, my message lacks a detailed disclosure of my experiences with sexual assault. The quote invokes a memory of the street lights that used to come through the window of one of my childhood bedrooms, one of three places where I was violated. It speaks to the ways in which I have always endured suffering without others knowing, staying true to my value of “bucking up” and “figuring it out”—whatever “it” happens to be. Outsiders, however, even those familiar with my status as a survivor, would have no way of determining, with any degree of certainty, the meaning of the shirt as I conceptualized it.

Second, while my shirt does not call for social action, like other shirts, it does rely on images of the body, rather on the use of literate practices, to communicate action. My message is a metaphor for how I processed my experiences and, though the reference is a literary one, and I did, indeed, rely heavily on writing as a means to cope with my trauma, I make no mention of this anywhere on my shirt. In this way, my design also aligns with the third finding, that activists make covert assertions of agency. To me, the shirt communicates strength, calls to mind a line I once wrote in a creative writing publication about how “I achieve things so great that the world does not notice that I achieve anything at all” (Corey, 2011, section V). Others may perceive the idea of resilience in the design, but even the quote makes the point that no one can see the
invisible boundaries I pass, both because no one can share my exact experience and because I make it a point to protect my experiences from others, as much as I protect others from my experiences.

Fourth, my design relies on socially constructed representations of concepts rather than on original representations of experience. Though my design communicates a sense of hope without relying on images such as candles, rays of sun, or religious imagery, I do rely on a fairly recognizable image of a person. As a matter of fact, the image I chose is a replica of a drawing in *The Night Country*. In addition, the black and white color scheme for the image derives its meaning from a system of what colors mean in our society; generally, the color black is associated with notions of evil, hopelessness, and fear, while white is associated with purity and hope. The black figure relies on the surrounding white aura to make sense in terms of contrasting lack of hope or negative experience with hope and resilience. The white aura by itself would probably suggest nothing more than clouds or smoke. The black figure by itself would be conceived as nothing more than a figure. So, the elements of the image itself rely on each other to make sense in relation to the text. But, like the fifth finding regarding the rhetorical relationship between image and text, the image on my shirt relies on the text to make sense, rather than the text relying on the image to make sense. If the image were removed, the meaning of the shirt would not change. As with most other shirts, the image also gains meaning when taking into account the context of the CP. The ideas presented in this chapter and illustrated with a discussion of my own CP shirt are discussed and synthesized in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.
Conclusion to the Chapter

In a situation that we might think of as relatively ‘free’ or ‘liberating,’ the CP participants revealed very little about their personal experiences. They create short, declarative statements addressing the general public rather than more detailed narratives about personal journeys and relationships. They forgo gut-wrenching accounts of their own suffering and healing, or that of someone close to them. Even if participants choose this approach, in part, based on the convention of tee shirts having less rather than more text, they could still choose to include more explicit or graphic words or images. Participants’ more impersonal approach, however, is as significant as those communicated with more detail. As with much writing, the difficulty comes not in knowing what one wants to say but in struggling to say it, struggling with how to say it, and struggling with the consequences of sharing thoughts and feelings—with others and, in the case of some survivors, with themselves. The opportunity to ‘tell without talking’ anonymously does not seem to lead to expression of catharsis on CP tee shirts. This suggests that larger social narratives inform the narratives of women’s experiences of assault and, therefore, call for continuing efforts to serve survivors, activists, and the broader public. Changing these larger cultural narratives might then also change women’s experiences.

Findings from this study align with findings from other studies pertaining to women’s activist art. For example, Clover & Stalker (2008) conducted interviews and focus groups regarding activism with fabric arts in Canada and New Zealand; they reported one of the themes from their work as “external and internal censorship” (p. 9). The lack of details presented in my study also suggest the role of censorship in messages;
even when activists assert agency, they do so covertly, as if with a sense of caution. I, again, look at this phenomenon in relation to what I call psychosocial compositions, the ways in which messages on CP tee shirts converge with or diverge from larger narratives governing social practices and beliefs. Droogsma (2009) also points to the influence of social narratives on tee shirt design decisions; her work revealed “double victimization” as a theme in a sample of CP shirts (p. 484). Again, double victimization occurs when the first offense is a crime or offense committed against an individual, and the assumption that the survivor or victim is to blame, or the expectation for that individual to remain silent, constitutes the second offense, or the “double” victimization. Ardener (2005) points out:

The voices of nondominant group members often become ‘muted’ not only due to the repression of speech but also by the regulation of what they say, when they speak, how much they say, and in what mode they say it. In other words, muting occurs not due to the ‘voicelessness’ of women and others from marginalized groups but rather transpires when dominant discourses that exclude women’s realities become embedded in many different social spaces. (p. 485)

The covert assertions of agency and lack of disclosure of details suggests such dynamics are at work in the context of CP participation.

Moreover, Clover & Stalker (2008) assert art as a “private protest movement against your circumstances…[art] allows you to keep your tongue still through difficult moments…so it can be quite protective too” (p. 7). Gregory et al (2002) also argue for the opportunities afforded by the CP; specifically, they present four “faces of power”:

“explicit, observable uses of power to control the behavior of others”; “social norms that
keep issues off public agendas”; “people’s self-understanding and perceptions of their own interests, which may be influenced or manipulated”; and “the creation of subjects” (p. 435-436). According to Gregory et al (2002), the CP pushes against these faces of power by providing a public space for political communication, providing a nontraditional mode of communication, informing others about an issue that exacerbates calls for silence, and serving a role in social change (p. 433). The nontraditional communication mode mentioned above allows for women to “silently” and anonymously address silencing of oppressive experiences. Hipple (2000) claims that the concealed identity of the CP “emboldens” participants’ speech (p. 174), similar to what Malchiodi (2008) claims. This study, in some ways, counters these arguments.

While artistic forms and silence offer opportunities for empowerment, evidence in this study suggests that this empowerment remains difficult to navigate. Assertions of agency tend to be covert, as demonstrated with the elimination of personal details; reliance on the physical body rather than more globalized efforts such letters to the government; and the use of pronouns. My work, to this end, aligns with Julier’s (2000) findings that women “tend to tell what happened in abbreviated elliptical forms” (p. 378). The fact that the results in this chapter align with the work of Julier, conducted 15 years ago, further implicates larger social narratives in the activist participation of women and the ways they use communication to support themselves, each other, and their cause. Unfortunately, data suggest that these larger social narratives, to some degree, place limitations on messages, and are persistent in their perpetuation of patriarchal structures.

These psychosocial compositions, as influences on activists’ literate practices and the literate artifacts activists produce, construct the CP as a potential archive. A number
of sources throughout this chapter have established the phenomena of “silencing” or “censoring” women’s communication, in general and as it pertains to gender violence and sex crimes. Additionally, as mentioned above, an analysis of the large data set presented in this chapter (897 data points) yields results that align with Julier’s (2000) research on the CP, as well as Clover and Stalker’s (2008) research on women’s use of fabric arts for activism. That the research taken up in this study yields findings similar to work conducted 15 years ago, as well as to work carried out internationally, attests that the same narratives continue to suggest what it means to communicate as a woman. The CP examined in this study, in and of itself, implicates the same and continuous cultural narratives, given that the 74 tee shirts were accumulated over a number of years, and with artists (for the most part) isolated from one another. In other words, data from the single CP event examined here reveal consistent patterns in women’s communication, despite the fact that shirts were not created in the same time and the same places. The archive, though consisting of artifacts from across time and by a number of contributors, establishes the same historical narrative; the CP traces the same psychosocial compositions of what it means to communicate as a woman, and to do so regarding an issue commonly categorized among “women’s issues.” Results are further strengthened by the fact that they support and are supported by findings revealed globally and over a number of years.

The next chapter more fully synthesizes the results and analysis with feminist methodology, activism, and rhetorics of silence. It also discusses future directions for the work presented throughout the dissertation.
Initially, I viewed the CP as a bridge between the public and the private, serving as a means to circumvent calls to ‘speak’ that disregard the difficulty introverts or those dealing with mental health issues may face in trying to meet such demands. The CP has been described as an opportunity for “telling without talking” (Malchiodi 2008), telling without the loss of anonymity or pressure to censor for the sake of protecting personal or professional identity. But the shirts in this study suggest that participants adopt a more complex understanding and experience of the CP. As it turns out, women approached their task with particular ideas of who constituted their audience and how those audiences should be addressed (perpetrators, fellow survivors, the general public). Audience members, like CP participants, have worldviews embedded in narratives of sexual liberation; virgin/vamp dichotomies; government initiatives and policies addressing (or failing to address) the issue of sexual assault; colloquial language for sexual acts; and gendered communication, including various uses of silence.

The literature on silence suggests many ways women’s silence, in particular, is interpreted and misinterpreted. My study reveals the complexity of women’s communication in that it exposes a cultural place where women assert their voice in ways which resist dominant expectations for women to remain silent. These expectations may involve eliminating communication or calls to communicate within confines determined by setting, topic, degree of disclosure, or mode. The CP and other movements referred to
throughout the dissertation (Take Back the Night, Slut Walk, One Billion Rising) contribute in a material way to resisting the act of being silenced, and are crucial for reconfiguring the cultural narrative of silenced women. My data analysis reveals that while the very existence of the CP engages these dynamics, women’s acts of speaking out involve complex negotiations. In their nuances, the women’s tee shirt compositions are not simply straightforward re-writings of the narrative of silence. They also reveal the same kind of holding back which results from more general silencing. The data might then be seen as evidence of the difficulty of speaking against one’s culture, the challenge in composing work that resists cultural narratives but remains accessible to an audience, the limits of written language, and (to some extent) the presence of tacit genre expectations for tee shirts.

Evidence suggests that cultural narratives silence women even as they attempt to “speak out” and encourage others to do so (Ahrens, 2006; Clover & Stalker, 2008; Fivush, 2010). The categories I identify across all tee shirts could be seen as shared expectations about what the women can, cannot, or should say. For example, though the generic “bumper sticker” messages allow activists to appeal to a broad audience, perhaps even allowing audience members to relate CP messages to a variety of their personal experiences, the generic “bumper sticker” messages also seem to shy away from appealing to pathos, and perhaps limit their effect in that regard. In these ways, participants might comply with the regulations and stipulations society attempts to place on them as women and as survivors of gender violence. Whatever the reason, tee shirts do not reveal what society has deemed inappropriate for survivors to say. The relationship between silence as subversion, silence as a convention, and silence as a result
of coercion is therefore complex.

Aminzade and McAdam (2001) examine the silencing of emotions, despite their importance (especially anger and hope) in collective action. For example, Gregory (2002) argues for the CP as a site that “does not privilege the dominant form of political communication, rational speech” and which therefore increase the emotional effect of the event (p. 445-46). But results from the dissertation study raise questions about where in the process of collective action emotion is a primary motive and how that relates to outcomes for activist events. Without having interviewed CP shirt creators and viewers, I cannot comment on the affective experiences of either of these groups. It is clear, nevertheless, that experiences with gender violence are emotionally charged; but in the case of this study, participants do not make emotional appeals. Similar to the “trope of the angry feminist” (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 1), any emotion expressed by women may serve to undermine women’s arguments. Dominant discourse characterizes women as typically overly emotional in a way that inhibits their ability to think and act rationally; emotion may also individualize any arguments women make, rather than show them as the result of social structures. In addition to their voices, historically, women were even taught to avoid displays of emotion such as facial expressions or gestures that would indicate dissent from authority (Tomlinson, 2010). Gaining information about if, where, how, and why emotions are silenced would further enlighten the work conducted in this dissertation. Writing specifically about anger, Tomlinson (2010) asserts:

We also need to consider the costs of not following a path simply because we have been told not to travel on it. Textual vehemence or anger may appear in arguments of social critique asserting that current or historical conditions and
politics are not desirable or equitable, but damaging, demeaning, despicable, disgraceful, divisive… compelling reasons [may exist] to use textual vehemence or anger as a *strong component of persuasion*. Textual vehemence can convey a sense of moral responsibility—and of moral revulsion—demonstrating the importance of the stakes of the debate. It can operate as a battle cry or rallying cry, drawing together into action those who already agree or who have been swayed by the argument. It can appeal to those who have not been reached by other methods. It can also operate as a site of expressive power: the power of expressing anger—not just to influence others, but also to influence oneself—not spewing forth of emotion, but constructed reflection of anger designed not so much expressively as rhetorically—to communicate rather than to combust. (pp. 83-84)

Noting not only the silencing of emotion but also the consequences of such silencing for others and one’s self, Tomlinson’s arguments contributes to work such as that in Lashgari’s (1995) *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women’s Writing as Transgression*, and informs future directions for activist work.

Given more focused examinations of silence, such as those related to emotion, some scholars have shied away from traditional notions of silence as simply oppressive and related to use of one’s voice. Ahrens (2006), for instance, defines voice as "the right, ability, and means" to express one's self and/or one's will; without even one of these elements, an individual is silenced (p. 263). According to her definition, expression

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20 It can be difficult, if not impossible, to determine if an individual lacks any of these elements. We must therefore exercise caution when determining reason’s for a person’s silence. Personal and social reasons sometimes extend beyond our contextual knowledge.
extends beyond speaking and relates to other issues, such as resources. Moreover, Brown (2012) argues for silence as a “social technology,” mediating between reflexive contemplation and the state of affairs in the larger society (p. 234). For example, he points to the use of silence as remembrance, but also criticizes such uses because, over time, we have come to use silence in this way without other modes of remembrance or events. What happens in this instance is that the act of silence rests upon the breaking of silence. Silence that should aim at resolving differences only suppresses differences and fails to open up further communication (Brown, 2012). The CP seems to embody this idea; the silence of the room when participants are composing, the direct references to silence on tee shirts, and the ways in which participants might be silenced interconnect with the goal of “breaking silence.”

But while Brown points out the inefficiency of silence as a social technology to interrupt social norms, Fivush (2010) asserts that silence is the norm. More specifically, she argues that breaking with social norms often requires speech, as the norm does not need to be spoken to be further established; norms become tacit knowledge. In such instances, the need to speak represents loss of power (non-dominance) and silence represents assertion of power (dominance). Perhaps CP participants embody this notion with an idea that they have personal and potentially influential knowledge, and their power comes, in part, from the fact that they do not share the truly personal nature of their knowledge. CP participants’ motives may align with Jungkunz’s (2012) notions of “democratic silences”: silence used for empowerment (in which the silence itself is the point), protest (in which silence is used to draw attention to another issue, i.e. LGBTQ's
National Day of Silence), resistance (simply choosing not to speak about a particular topic), or resisting (purposely remaining ambiguous about what we are and are not saying) (p. 136). Jungkunz’s notion bridges Brown’s and Fivush’s perceptions of silence, presenting silence as a “norm” in that it is democratic in a democratic society (where the majority rules), but also a tool for civil dissent. We see the CP representing these ideas as it fits within “normal,” civilized standards for carrying out activism (it’s not a riot), yet also interrupts cultural narratives and physical spaces.

CP participants, as participants in any civil activist event, attempt to balance the status quo with subversion so that neither sabotages the other. For example, that participants chose not to disclose personal details might suggest an awareness of the fact that changing, too much, the “status quo” of viewers’ lives may be counterproductive. If CP participants disturb CP viewers with graphic accounts of violence, CP viewers may actually try and put those accounts out of their minds. In addition, invocations to the body and reliance on socially constructed visual representations introduce an element of familiarity to CP viewers. The common display of clichés on tee shirts (such as “Stand up and speak out” or “Dance like no one’s watching”) make CP participants’ calls for change less ominous. The use of common representations of the body (such as stick figures, handprints, and happy and sad faces) also appear non-threatening amidst calls to change reality. Likewise, the covert rather than overt assertions of agency that CP participants employ may also make women appear as though they are abiding by expectations for women to behave in a passive manner. In other words, CP participants align their messages with certain cultural narratives while attempting to undermine others.
Furthermore, Ferguson (2011) argues that because of the diverse ways we can use silence, we cannot assert an “ultimate politics” with which to associate it (p. 12). Therefore, we should not assert ideas, for example, that silence is only oppressive (a conclusion that people seem to jump to without consideration of alternative instances). McIntyre (2013) writes about post-incarcerated women and the complexities of disclosing their experiences rather than remaining silent about them, documenting that, upon incarceration, women often remain silent about their crimes as a way for them to believe in a difference that sets them apart from fellow inmates. In other words, psychologically, the women need to believe that they do not share characteristics or experiences with criminals; they need to believe that they and their experiences are fundamentally different. Not communicating with other inmates, at least about their crimes, increases this sense of difference. Post-incarceration, their motives for silence change, or the focus weighs more heavily on others; they remain silent as a means to protect loved ones from having to face the harsh realities of their crimes and their experiences in prison (McIntyre, 2013).

CP messages might suggest a combination of the elements of CP participants’ believing in themselves as somehow different while also protecting others. More specifically, CP participants’ lack of disclosure of personal details, as well as their focus on healing, might suggest similar notions to those which McIntyre (2013) proposes. Perhaps like the incarcerated women, the lack of detail regarding their experiences, in addition to the focus on healing, allows survivors of gender violence to believe that they are (or are not) fundamentally different from the version of themselves before an experience with gender violence. Both the lack of personal detail in messages and the
focus on healing also suggests the possible protection of viewers (as discussed in Chapter 4).

Survivors of assault (and perhaps other crimes) likely have different motives for “silence” at different times: fear of perpetrators or social consequences of disclosure, protection of loved ones, or a need for reflection or meditation. Fivush (2010) draws attention to silences, assault, and social action when she notes that, in interviews with survivors of childhood sexual assault, interviewees often asked if the interviewer was sure she wanted to hear what they were about disclose. The interviewees mindfully navigated helping the researcher, engaging in activism via telling their stories, and censoring, since they were aware of the power their narratives might hold and the affect they may have on a listener or reader. Women in Fivush’s study demonstrated Droogsma’s (2009) sentiment that, “Although powerful patriarchal discourses attempt to prescribe women’s experiences, women are never fully controlled by these discourses but rather exercise constrained agency” (p. 484).

Therefore, whether or not to encourage disclosure or critique enclosure must take consideration of whose interests we serve in any time and place and with any act of disclosure (Black, 1988) or “enclosure” (Glenn & Ratcliffe, 2011, p. 3). After all, in the case of sexual assault, those close to the survivor may not be equipped to hear survivors’ accounts, leading survivors to feel silenced or use silence to protect themselves and those they care about; support systems can also end up using the voice of the survivor to give voice to their own fears surrounding the issue (Murphy et al., 2011). Trauma survivors ask those close to them to face the reality that someone they care about has suffered; they also ask us to face the possibility of our own traumatic experiences. Negative responses
to disclosure (discussed earlier in this dissertation), then, also lead women to choose silence (Ahrens, 2006), and complicate ideas about freedom and speech, or expression of any kind. Some women experience a great deal of healing with the opportunity to retreat inside themselves and begin to create meaning for their experiences (Motseeme, 2004). In fact, silence sometimes aids in “escape,” physical or mental (Hesford, 2004, pp. 9-10). As long as oppression and subversive action exist, so will the need to escape violent or harmful circumstances. Furthermore, as other scholars have argued (Rose, 1999), pain can interfere with one's ability to produce language; in this way, we must look to “dreams, gestures, tears” and art as ways in which “the mute always speak” (Motsemme, 2004, p. 910). Events such as the CP lend themselves to such investigations.

The interaction between trauma and linguistic expression is difficult to interpret; silence can indicate navigation between old and new identity construction after trauma (Sorsoli, 2010). Silence as it relates to healing and reconceptualizing one’s identity after trauma also raises ideas about objectives for activism. For protest to exist, people must conceptualize injustice not as fate but as a socially constructed circumstance, and believe in the ability of protest to improve injustice (Rucht, Koopmans, & Neidhardt 1999, p. 7). While the public can easily ignore protests or events like the CP, and the impact of protests remains impossible to measure (Rucht, Koopmans, & Neidhardt, 1999, p. 9), such efforts may bear significant meaning for participants (Rucht & Neidhardt, 1999).

Some scholars assert that an individual can have a voice only when those establishing dominant discourse actually listen to women and account for what they say in political arenas (Droogsma, 2009, p. 494). Droogsma (2009) asks, “Do the persons who silenced woman abuse survivors, and therefore remain complicit in their oppression,
listen to The Clothesline Project?” (p. 494). Therefore, do we define activism based on some criteria which actually measures social change? It does not seem that way. If that were the case, the need for activism related to gender violence would have been eliminated long ago. But the difficulty of measuring activist outcomes leaves us with the idea of activist efforts; and activist efforts, as described in the previous paragraph, can provide a means to healing for those in positions of suffering, even in what appears to be the act of silencing women. As a result, it is unclear whether such instances of activism for healing, including using writing for healing, should change what activism means and does. Amidst silence, then, what constitutes “social action” becomes further complicated.

Of course, we must not ignore that silence can and does cause suffering for those who are silenced, and deprives those who are not silenced of alternative, enriching narratives (Rich, 2003). The problems come in part from society’s overwhelmingly common idea that silence is always or primarily detrimental (Cain, 2012). We must pay attention to what we perceive in CP participants’ designs, and the context that influences such communications. Jones’ (2009) notion of psychogeography (p.3) speaks to the CP because—along with events like Take Back the Night, One Billion Rising, Slut Walk, or Walk A Mile In Her Shoes—the CP aims to change ideas via changing physical space, whether quiet and calm or loud and chaotic. Take Back the Night, for example, has women complete a candle-lit march as a representation of working toward a society in which they feel safe to go out alone at night. One Billion Rising involves flash mob dances performed on Valentine’s Day, across the country and internationally, as a way of rethinking Valentine’s Day as a commercialized holiday that fails to address love and relationships in a worthwhile manner. Slut Walks are public marches that protest victim
blaming (i.e. to avoid being raped, you need to first avoid dressing like a slut). During Walk A Mile In Her Shoes, men parade in high heels to make a statement about understanding the unique experiences of women. All of these events disrupt one’s typical experience of a given place and time.

My work, then, addresses Jungkunz’s (2012) criticism of the discourse surrounding silence and speaking. For instance, he argues that to advocate for alternative and equal forms of resistance (other than speaking), we must eliminate the use of phrases like “breaking the silence.” We might think of the examples of homosexual individuals talking about “coming out of the closet”; such descriptions of their experiences enact the very discourse that suggests that they should have been “in the closet” or “closeted” in the first place (Jungkunz, 2012, p.145). We must, therefore, find alternate ways of speaking about our values. Descriptions of the CP as an opportunity for “telling without talking” offer a way to discuss communicating effectively or freely without enacting a dominant discourse of silence. Similarly, Wagner (2012) points out that the marginalized, in choosing to remain silent, open themselves up to others speaking for them; therefore, we must question whether it is not sometimes better to stand with a marginalized person or group of people in their silence (p. 116). For instance, LGBTQ's National Day of Silence embodies the idea that collective silence speaks volumes. These notions of “silence” also allow for more inclusive conceptualizations of composing, protesting, and advocating. Harris (2007) posits:

Can the mainstream ever accurately represent the marginal? How can we invite in what is always beyond our limits of understanding? How can we avoid the danger of speaking for these voices? How can we avoid reinforcing marginalization by
naming ‘the marginalized’? (p. 262)

Wagner (2012) seems to suggest that, to some extent, we can. Investigations of events like the CP help to invite participation from what seems, as yet, to be beyond our limits of understanding.

Moreover, my subject position as a survivor leads me to argue that the mainstream can accurately represent the marginalized, but in limited ways. For instance, the secondary sources in this dissertation often accurately represent the experiences of assault survivors, but only to the extent of documented patterns in research about how assault survivors cope or respond rhetorically to their experiences and to a public audience. The truly personal, tragic, chaotic experiences of traumatic events themselves, and the continuous construction of identity that takes place thereafter, can be represented by no one other than an individual survivor, and perhaps not even by her. Earlier in this work (Chapter 1), I made similar comments in regards to my ability to advocate for, but not make the same appeals as, member of communities like the LGBTQ community or even for male survivors of sexual assault.

Therefore, this work suggests opportunities for future inquiries. For example, further research may involve interviewing CP participants about why they chose the messages they did, especially as messages pertain to emotion. The chaos and pain of feelings of vulnerability that come from assault may keep some CP participants from wanting to re-access those feelings for the sake of their participation. Some CP participants may need to feel and express feelings of control (Bex Lempert, 2003). The incompleteness in many of the messages in my study must be filled by viewers and may exist because of the difficulty of using language to describe experiences that are difficult
to put into words. Alternatively, the context of the CP may empower some women and motivate them to share their feelings or actions of strength. Again, Aminzade and McAdam (2001) note much “silence about emotions” (p.23), and suggest further inquiry into emotional intelligence as it relates to social movements, as well as “dominant emotion rules of the wider society” (p. 25). Given arguments about the gendered nature of emotional intelligence (Aminzade & McAdam, 2001, p. 34), women’s activist events may serve as particularly rich sites for such examination.

Future work may also inquire about the influence of the physical space of tee shirts. Goodnow (2005) points out that the tee shirts leave little room for development of stories about experiences, and that participants’ communication would likely differ if delivered verbally (an issue I address in the next section). Future investigations, then, could undertake CP participants’ understanding of tee shirt literacy, as discussed in Chapter 3. Finally, future endeavors could attempt to account for cultural differences such as race and ethnicity. Smith (2005) reports that:

Some communities enforce victim/survivors’ silence more than others due to the presence of other societal oppressions…. For example, communities of color often ‘advocate that women keep silent about the sexual and domestic violence in order to maintain a united front against racism. (p. 417).

These opportunities for future work, however, must not inaccurately influence the interpretation and value of findings in this dissertation. The next section provides a response to alternative interpretations and the issues with those interpretations. Therefore, the Legend of Cautions that follows addresses Fine and her colleagues’ (2000) call to examine the ways in which “outsiders” might misinterpret or misuse findings (p. 123).
Legend of Cautions

One of the primary explanations for the lack of disclosure on tee shirts comes in the idea of the tee shirt as limited in space and traditionally not conducive to graphic, personal accounts. First, this argument conflates detail with length. Participants could create graphic, personal messages even within the limited space of tee shirts, such as the child-size tee shirt with the plea, “Mommy, please don’t make me go to Daddy’s house anymore” or the shirt that says “I was so drunk my friends were checking my pulse before you carried me into your bed.” As a matter of fact, at times, concision can have greater rhetorical effect than lengthier communications.

Second, as argued in Chapter 3, tee shirts often serve as a way of introducing personal identity in a public space. Tee shirts can inform people of one’s music preferences, political party alliances, religious beliefs, sports team participation or fandom, university or organization affiliations, travel excursions, or coalition with social causes. Moreover, the existence of websites, such as roadkillshirts.com, tshirthell.com, nastyteeshirts.com, foulmouthshirts.com, and schockershirts.com, indicate that the graphic nature of some tee shirts is not only socially acceptable but also desirable. The argument that CP participants adapt messages to normative uses of tee shirt space also becomes undermined because CP participants violate these norms in other ways. Whereas the counterargument claims that women do not disclose because of the limited space that tee shirts provide, women, in fact, often provide lengthy communications about experiences, though these lengthy accounts may be fragmented or impersonal (see examples in Chapter 4). Moreover, the reliance on text (also discussed in Chapter 4) suggests that CP participants do not abstain from disclosure because of the tee shirt
literacy conventions, as tee shirts, generally, rely on limited use of text and extended use of graphics. That participants ignore tee shirt literacy conventions in the ways discussed above further demonstrates the influence of cultural narratives on design decisions.

Another way people might reduce the importance of my findings is to overly simplify any notion of oppression or agency demonstrated in this study of the CP. As discussed throughout the dissertation, evidence shows that women abstain from personal disclosure and emotional appeals and, instead, rely on “bumper sticker” messages related to gender violence. But CP participants also assert agency. The women assert agency in their very act of choosing to participate in the CP to begin with, to comment descriptively or generically. They also assert agency in covert ways, with their use of particular pronouns and their presentation of themselves as having experienced or experiencing some form of healing. Silence and voice both serve as forms of expression and function in relation to oppression, subversion, and liberation, depending on a variety of circumstances, such as audience, access to resources, emotional and psychological development, and individual and collective relationships.

At a conference in New York City, I presented the results of my pilot study of the CP. During the question and answer period, a male audience member expressed his displeasure with the statistic that motivated the creation of the CP in the first place—that during the time that 58,000 men were killed in the Vietnam War, approximately 51,000 women had been murdered due to gender violence (Hipple, 2000, p. 168). The audience member disliked the fact that the statistic failed to recognize the Vietnamese and other soldiers who perished in the war. While his point may be valid in some sense, his focus on the statistic merely distracted from the issue at hand: women and gender violence. In
fact, discussions earlier in the dissertation about victim blaming and rape culture demonstrate attempts to distract from, or even deny, the fact that gender violence is part of the dominant narrative in American culture. Likewise, to attribute women’s design decisions to the material of the tee shirt alone dismisses more profound social influences on such decisions. But to locate CP participants and their messages solely in narratives of silencing and oppression only furthers the injustice suffered by participants. Moreover, to focus only on the agency CP participants have and assert in their messages distracts us from social and political structures of power that, directly or indirectly, lead to gender violence as a cultural problem to begin with. In a legend of cautions, then, we must remain aware of the necessity of categorizing; it is the way we make sense of an overwhelming and complex set of data. At the same time, we must be attentive to how others will use such categorizations to create oppositions where dynamics are much more complex than simple alliances and oppositions.

Related to the issue of simplification is the issue of understanding the plural identities of the participants discussed in this study. We must not reduce women to their experiences with trauma (or any other experiences); doing so assumes an overly-simplified shared identity. Trauma survivors do share an identity to the extent that they frame their experiences in terms of, or as related to, identity. Moreover, they share a cultural identity to the extent that they share a discourse. These assertions about identity are supported by the fact that dissociative identity disorder is often the result of trauma (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research), and many publications have addressed relationships between trauma and identity (re)construction (Eyerman, 2002; Alexander et al., 2004; Seeburger, 2012; Rosenthal, 2015). Phillips and Daniluk (2004)
also note how survivors of childhood sexual abuse progressed through therapy in such a way that developed an understanding of their trauma as one part of a multi-faceted identity, and that it was an “ability to put the abuse into a broader social and political perspective [that] enabled them to start sharing and connecting with others” (p. 179). As many survivors recognize positive outcomes from their trauma and their identities as survivors, Layton (1995) points out that fragmentation can sometimes be glorified for its opportunities to explore and reinvent one’s self. In a doctoral seminar, I once announced my status as a survivor (because it related to the discussion); upon doing so, a fellow student asserted that, despite my experience, I was still “privileged.” To some extent, I would make no argument; but to some extent, I would. At any rate, it was not her story to tell. I have tried to be mindful of my position as survivor and writer in relation to CP participants’ messages. In other words, I have tried to explore the complex ways in which multiple facets of gender violence and multiple facets of identity intersect. As we talk about social phenomena, we must recognize individuality. These notions also arise in my final thoughts on disclosure as it relates to identity and education.

**Final Thoughts**

“Politics” are made of people’s navigation of circumstances in which “the dynamics of power and authority engage with the issue of principle” (Harris, 2007, p. 254); the CP is embedded in such politics. While society may frown upon secrecy or non-disclosure, it also, in many instances, remains resistant to disclosure (Black, 1988). This study brings attention to the fact that while disclosing experiences to others may ease burdens, disclosure also leads to new burdens; when people disclose to others, they must continuously face the possible implications of what others might do with the shared
information. After all, once one discloses to a person or group of people, the individual relinquishes some control over how experiences get told and retold in the future and in different contexts. This struggle between autonomy and compliance demonstrates empowerment as inherently “paradoxical” (O’Connor, 1995, 785-86). The anonymity offered by the CP fails to simplify the harsh reality of trauma that, when put into words, still affects an individual’s thinking, writing, and presentation of those words and experiences to a public audience. The words with which an individual expresses herself, whether publicly or privately, externally or internally, reveal the trauma’s life-altering effects. In the case of the CP, participants create and then, to some extent, relinquish these expressions to a collective narrative (the Clothesline collection), and potentially an archive, with a varying audience. Certainly, my study does not speak for all CP shirts. But knowledge generated from the study aids activism in its efforts to help women express themselves in an effective manner—for themselves and, at times, others. Such knowledge also, then, sheds light on cultural narratives that inform such dynamics and ways in which narratives call for revision.

The results of my investigation shed light on what it means to take agency in communicating our own experiences versus what it means to engage particular dominant discourses in that process. While Greene (1940) asserted that we can use silence to help achieve peace with the outside world and, therefore, to interact with it more effectively, Audre Lorde points out that any “breaking of silence” involves self-naming, an othering (Olson, 1997, p. 63). Perhaps like the incarcerated women McIntyre (2013) writes about, our use of silence disengages us from others so that, when we do engage, we can engage more fully. Lorde’s other assertion, then, that silence only furthers social ends, while
speech creates progress, is flawed in that silent contemplation informs many subject positions and ways in which people choose to engage with the idea of progression.

Indeed, silence can be used to maintain the status quo (Fivush, 2010). But Glenn (2002) understands silence and speech as reciprocal, which she argues allows her to define silence as a form of rhetoric. She notes that silence operates as domination and persuasion but also as a form of ethical listening. Again, speech and silence can disrupt each other in “intelligible ways” (Kalamaras, 1994, p. 4). Therefore, silence and speaking are not opposite sides of a duality, and neither are the uses of silence clearly compartmentalized into one purpose or another, as positive or negative use. The rhetorical nature of silence means it has its limitations, just like speech, art, music or any other form of communication. The results of the CP analysis have demonstrated complex relationships between silence as censorship and silence as rhetorical, between silence as not “speaking” and silence as not “showing,” and silence as doing both of these in alternative, non-traditional fashions. The CP seems to foster “writing [as] a way of learning, a way of looking for allies who are looking for us, a way of winning recognition and resources vital to changing minds and changing social relations” (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 25). As established, we have no way of knowing how the writing and multimodal composing produced for the CP actually changes social relations; as argued earlier, however, conceptualizing the CP as a potential archive enhances the possibilities for educating, gaining recognition, and then possibly influencing the social action of others.
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