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GENDERED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE SHAMEFUL FIGURES: A  
GLIMPSE INTO THE SOCIAL NARRATIVES WITHIN THE ME TOO  
MOVEMENT IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand how gendered sexual violence and shame are interconnected, using a feminist standpoint epistemology and contextual narrative methodology that weaves the author's personal and professional narratives through an analysis of contemporary feminist social movements and allows her to map the social narratives within #MeToo NZ and broader institutions within Aotearoa. By focusing on two critical areas of feminist theory, *enactment of sexual violence* and *embodiment of shame*, a cartographic compass of gendered sexual violence and shame is produced to show how the spaces are interwoven and result in harmful and hidden *shameful figures* for women who have been sexually victimised. Using this compass, #MeToo NZ media responses are mapped through the lens of enactment and embodiment. The telling listening and writing circling through the movement are discussed. What emerged were hidden figures of shame in the commodification of women's stories of pain. The narrative of this thesis intends to evoke conversations that enable the use of embodiment/enactment and this compass to change the way we respond to gendered sexual violence personally, professionally, institutionally and through the use of media and social activist movements such as #Me Too NZ. A challenge to move beyond the sharing and marketing of women's pain, to acknowledge the embodied shame, and to find a way for women who have experienced sexual violence to exit the compass is proposed.

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## Chapter 1: Mapping the Research

### A Personal Journey

From a very young age, I remember feeling ashamed of my body. Even now, as I reflect, it is difficult to describe the experience. Still, memories of feeling dirty and disgusted about sexuality and my emerging adult body are vivid. I so desperately wanted to share my struggle with my mother, but I did not have the words to explain what was happening. The truth is I was sexually abused at a young age, and although I had memories of the abuse, it was the feeling of repulsion towards my body that caused the most distress, a powerful and subversive experience represented in early childhood as behaviour. I was described as an oversensitive and challenging child, inadvertently placing blame on me. The reality was that I had no way of telling my parents what had happened or how I was feeling, and they did not know how to respond.

As I entered adolescence, there were no sex talks or discussions about intimate heterosexual relationships. Instead, a book appeared on my bed that discussed puberty and intercourse in anatomical terms, followed by my mother entering my room, asking “any questions?” I had many, but I knew that the correct answer was no. I learnt it was not ok to talk out loud about my body or sexuality. The truth was my mother did not know how to have this conversation, and at age 16, I was to learn why - my mother had also been sexually abused as a child. Throughout my childhood and into my adult years, I watched her suffer as a result of this experience. I saw her go in and out of psychiatric inpatient units but never understood why, as to me, she seemed sad and angry, not unwell. To this day, it is a lived experience my mother has not been able to share or discuss with her family. The first time it was spoken out loud, was when she was face to face with her own daughter's emerging sexuality. During this period of my life, I was witness to the courageous efforts my mother went through as she suffered distress, while the responses from family and mental health professionals seemed unable to offer any comfort. No one asked the question why she was feeling this way, an experience I shared as a child. Like a black cloud, our trauma would sit over both of us and have the power to influence our self-image as women, and as no one asked the right questions, we remained silent.

When I became a mother for the first time, I began to consider how my experiences of sexual abuse may impact on my daughter's emerging self-esteem and confidence. I wanted to shift the image I had of myself as disgusting and unworthy and model a positive self-image. My hope was to witness my daughter grow up to become confident and comfortable with her body and sexuality. At that time, I made a decision to meet with a psychotherapist, and it was in the therapeutic space I voiced my story for the first time. To my surprise, feelings of being ashamed of my body and the impact this had on my well-being became real, no longer fragments of my imagination. I started to envision a life where I no longer felt unworthy, instead, deserving of love and happiness. In this reflective process, I remember the moment my perspective shifted. I recall a session where I learnt about the enactment and embodiment of violence and how this process affects social interrelations and exchanges between survivors and their intimate/close relationships. That is, non-verbal language and emotions associated with sexual violence and abuse could be enacted within social connections and had the potential to become embodied physically and emotionally within our subjectivities, harbouring disesteem. I learnt that I had embodied the disgust as a form of shame, and it was re-enacted within my close relationships as I believed I was not worthy of healthy connections.

I went on to become a therapist specialising in trauma and gendered sexual violence, and I continue to be passionate about social justice, aiming to provide a level of care and respect that ensures women are supported and advocated for in all aspects of recovery and empowerment. I have dedicated the last 15 years of my career, to providing a safe place for women to share their experiences, many of whom had been previously silenced. "Our shameful history reveals that, from the first studies done here on sexual violence in the 1980s, we have known that at least a quarter of all women have been sexually victimised" (Jordan, 2020, p.1). I have been in the privileged position to hear these multiple stories of internal torment and shame that led to mental distress, self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide. Many of the courageous women I have worked with report life-changing achievements after learning about the enactment and embodiment of violence, and bravely co-construct new narratives about themselves and their bodies. However, what became more disturbing were the waves of referrals I received with many more women experiencing distress as a result of sexual violence. I began to feel powerless in hearing the continual stories of humiliation, increasingly concerned that individualised therapeutic interventions were a band-aid for women's pain, and I was troubled by the public and medical

professionals' responses that further victimised women. My clinical and personal experience inspired the next step of my journey, to engage in a masters in psychology that allowed me to conduct research on how to reduce women's experiences of enacted and embodied sexual violence in the context of institutional responses. If knowledge is power, perhaps this is the best place to start.

In 2018, I embarked on the first step of my master's degree and enrolled in the advanced psychology of women course. I remember the contact workshop where we discussed feminist standpoint epistemology, women's situated knowledge, missing voices and socio-cultural narratives of sexual abuse and violence against women. This lecture had a profound impact on how I viewed my past experiences and led me to reflect on my career. I realised even after many years of therapy I still had an innate feeling of not being 'good enough', as if my experience of sexual abuse would be interpreted as a flaw and my professional competency would be questioned. Thinking about this moment, I recognised awareness that I believed it was not acceptable to be a therapist working in the field of sexual violence if I had experienced sexual abuse myself. There was no written rule, it was not in the code of ethics, and it certainly did not come up in my training, yet somehow, I perceived the historical trauma would negatively impact my clinical competency. Even as an educated woman who had been supported therapeutically, I continued to view myself as not 'good enough'. During the class discussions on standpoint theory, I had a light bulb moment when I realised my narratives were not a hindrance, but rather a strength. By adopting a standpoint epistemology, I could be a producer of knowledge and draw on my subjectivities as a therapist and survivor to contribute academically and (possibly) reduce women's experiences of shame in examining the enactment and embodiment of gendered sexual violence.

At the same time as learning about standpoint epistemology, the feminist social movement #MetooNZ made its entrance into the landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand. As a trauma therapist, I was in a privileged position to hear how the counterspace impacted women's understandings of their lived experience of sexual violence. Although some clients voiced they felt more comfortable telling others what had happened to them, and valued the action, many more presented to therapy with quite the opposite view. Women presented to treatment describing feelings of inadequacy, because they could not 'speak up' in a public forum, or were

hurt by public responses to the movement as a ‘witch hunt’ or just another platform for women to ‘complain’. It seemed an incredibly invalidating and painful experience that hindered the therapeutic journey, and interfered in the narrative restructuring of sexual violence as an act of harm, for which they were not responsible. At the start of my research, I planned to interview women who had experiences of sexual violence and examine how they understood #MeTooNZ. Did the feminist social movement provide women with a voice? What about those who could not tell their story on a public forum - did they interpret themselves as unworthy because they could not speak up? In a sense, I wondered whether or not the use of feminist activism such as #MeTooNZ would shift women's experiences of shame associated with gendered sexual violence. However, just as I was about to embark on my thesis journey, humanity was thrown into new territory as we entered a global pandemic. Covid19, a virus with detrimental consequences, put restrictions and constraints on life as we knew it, and it became clear it would not be possible to interview participants. As New Zealand went into level 4 lockdown we were saturated with the slogan “we are all in this together”, however, this was certainly not a reality for many women, the catchphrase failed to acknowledge the layers of oppression in addition to a global pandemic. For me, level 4 lockdown meant I could continue to work surrounded by family, had food on the table, inhabited a safe, warm home free from domestic violence. I became painfully aware this was not the case for many women in Aotearoa. I began to wonder if, in the process of collecting yet more stories, I might further perpetuate a type of re-enactment of violence which may categorise women into shameful positions. It was essential to recognise that due to the stress and hardship many women were suffering economically and emotionally, it would be unethical to expect women to share their stories of pain. As a result of this reflection, the project shifted focus to provide a contextual narrative analysis to examine how sexual violence and shame are interrelated, and find new ways of progressing feminist social movements, that do not require women to story their experiences - yet again.

### **Methodological Framework: Feminist Standpoint Epistemology**

Historians of science, Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding, dismiss the idea of universalising the experiences of women and look to the concept of situated knowledge, whereby women's experiences and meaning-making are specific to her place in the material division of labour and cultural systems (Harding, 2014). Feminist standpoint theory focuses on providing a voice to

marginalised groups and locates fundamental importance on acquiring an understanding of gendered social injustice from those oppressed by social and economic hierarchies (Harding, 2014). In this instance, the aim of feminist standpoint theory is to represent the voices of marginalised groups who have been previously silenced and assert women's sociopolitical position and viewpoints to determine their construction of knowledge, across multiple subjectivities (Hekman, 1997).

Traditional positivist epistemological research has typically excluded and ignored the voices of marginalised persons, and not given value to the production of knowledge or meaning-making connected to their everyday lives and experiences. It is essential that we recognise all women's voices as the source of knowledge (Cabrera, 2019; Harding; 2004; Hekman, 1997). Women, who have been sexually victimised, are just one of the many marginalised groups silenced within a patriarchal society. Feminist standpoint theory shifts the power imbalance by liberating participants to be the driving force behind qualitative studies, empowering women to participate in the production of knowledge in sharing their lived experiences, and how these have shaped their everyday consciousness (Harding, 2004). Feminist standpoint theory is essential in research focused on gendered social injustice, as the approach addresses power differentials to produce meaningful awareness - knowledge that would otherwise be dismissed as subjugated within androcentric studies (Harding, 2004).

In identifying women as overrepresented in statistics for sexual violence (New Zealand Family Violence clearinghouse, 2017), an ethical assumption is made that this research depends upon advocating and promoting legitimacy of women's resistance to marginalisation. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this thesis is based on feminist standpoint epistemology as it recognises historical, cultural and social knowledge is constituted through discursive practice in gender relations (Harding, 1987). This standpoint allows me to enquire about how dominant social norms and the production of privileged knowledge impact women's lives and embody institutional-social oppression and inequality (Hekman, 1997). In practising feminist critical theory, I can analyse knowledge from a situational perspective, making visible the restrictions of gender, class and ethnicity and other categories of exclusion (Cabrera et al., 2020). "Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience

of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism" (Haraway, 1991, p. 155). In attending to the power differentials, qualitative research with a feminist standpoint provides a platform for listening to narratives that would otherwise remain invisible in positivist epistemologies.

### **A Narrative Methodology**

A narrative methodology emerged through the process of ‘doing’ the research as I noticed my personal and clinical experiences became a thread that tied the thesis narrative together. I experienced an emotional transformation that resulted from a better understanding of the embodiment and enactment of violence in my own therapeutic journey. I then used this situated knowledge in my work as a therapist to help women heal, by listening to their narratives and helping them to reframe their experiences through enactment and embodiment. Narrative inquiry is a methodology that attends to stories, and takes into account how we make sense of ourselves as embedded in gendered social power relations (Fine, 2017). The process of sharing narratives, or “passing on stories” is always a process of movement, and we are ethically responsible for the strategies we engage in their circulation (Fine, 2017, p. 109). In this research, a singular story of women's experience is resisted, to open up possibilities for making sense of women's narratives of pain and violence that exceed the single story. This research is a narrative of textured layers of "telling, listening and writing" (Fine, 2017, p.108) through a process of circling in and through various feminist social movements, in conversations with my professional/personal narratives to make sense of the potentials of the social narratives enabled through #MeTooNZ.

“The textured layers of telling, listening and writing” (Fine, 2017, p.108) is a process of circling in and through multiple sites of knowledge production. Examining the rich contextual layers of women's lives through shared narratives of lived experiences allows for the importance of shared meaning-making embedded in the social, cultural, and relational experiences (Bloom, 1998; Riessman, 1993) as research and researcher co-produce narratives of sexual violence. In this instance, it is vital to understand that the subjectivities of the researcher make a difference in the results of their studies, and in their circulation. As I engage in reflexive practice, I "pause to think through the critical elements" of bringing together the complexities of multiple stories that are situated in and across place (Fine, 2017, p. 110). As I co-produce narratives of the

enactment and embodiment of violence and women's affective responses, I am also acting as advocate for my mother, and engaging in therapeutic spaces with women as they tell stories of pain and shame. In the co-production of the narrative, I am also aware that my own location in the social hierarchy can not wholly represent the movement of shared stories of social violence across place. I come from a white, working-class family imbued with intergenerational sexual abuse, all experiences that have contributed towards how I understand sexuality, gender and sexual violence. My life story has the power to shape the way I interpret research and creates a lens through which I understand gendered sexual violence. Any analysis of gendered social injustice must pay attention to layers of oppression across place. Salem (2018) encourages researchers to be reflexive about how intersectionality is utilised in feminist studies, by examining the relationships between assemblages such as race, class, and sexuality, rather than gender as a primary focus as if women can be represented through a singular narrative. In the movement of narratives, it is necessary to challenge methodological colonialism that produces further oppression. Intersectionality is a process of historical activism that engages with relationships of oppression rather than categorisations, the movement exceeds categorisation and engages a narrative of sociopolitical conditions for understanding systems of power that are connected through practices of racism, colonialism, and heterosexism, and other social power relations. Intersectionality then, enables us to attend to the complexity of the diversity of women's everyday lives and provide opportunities for resistances that link us and that move us collectively forward (Salem, 2018; Warner et al., 2016).

As a therapist, I have developed a practice that is informed through humanistic and narrative approaches to the therapeutic relationships, counter to those that are embedded in institutional singular responses to sexual violence. I have developed this approach to practice as resistance to the enactment of the institutional narrative that structured my experience of the mother-daughter relationship. All these subjectivities are in the telling, listening, and writing process of this thesis. In this thesis, I will use the term sexual victimisation as it recognises a process that is the enactment of sexual violation of the sexual relationship spanning men's locker talk, all the way through to child sexual abuse and rape. The specific location in this project is sexual violence and rape against women. At times, during the narrative of this thesis I mobilise my own subjectivities in the telling of the stories of child sexual abuse and the affective processes that materialise shame.

As a part of the analytic approach, I participated in a peer review process with several experienced clinicians who continuously provided feedback on and engaged with the process of telling, listening and writing this thesis, in order for me to ethically engage with meanings outside my own interpretations and integrate interdisciplinary interchanges between theories and practice. It was an opportunity to creatively examine my clinical and personal experiences as a production of knowledge (Squire, 2005). It was during these conversations that I began to question how sexual violence and shame are interrelated. As mental health professionals, we all had an awareness that shame co-existed within women's stories of sexual victimisation, and yet our knowing remained at an individual level. What became evident amongst us was that the interconnectivity between gendered sexual violence and shame, attuned to the material effects on women's bodies and mental health, were not commonly discussed in our workplace context. I became curious about how I could 'capture' my learnings/experiences related to the enactment and embodiment of violence, as a means to demonstrate a reciprocal relationship between sexual violence and shame. In doing so, I hoped to develop a social model to make this interconnectivity visible.

As a therapist, I have had the privilege to see the transformations that occur when survivors no longer enact and embody violence when the process is acknowledged and reframed. It is as if women's bodies once hidden and constrained, can finally begin to express themselves in autonomous and powerful ways, appearing to break free from restrictive rules, labels and criteria expected or demanded of them in institutional and social responses to sexual victimisation. Clients that had once arrived at therapy hidden behind layers of clothing, terrified to talk, slowly began to open up in the therapy space as narratives about sexual violence and affective processes are co-constructed, not as separate phenomena, but as two points on a map located nearby. As a therapist, I began to reflect on my work over the years and what clients told me had made a difference in their therapeutic journey. I have spent many years listening to women's untold stories of gendered sexual violence, I have heard their pain as they negotiate their everyday lives. As a guardian of many narratives, my thesis aims to creatively render visible the multiple stories that resist the single story of sexual violence and shame.

## **Method of Analysis**

In the enactment of gendered sexual violence, I examine rape culture and identify practices that perpetuate the idea that sexually objectifying women is a simple fact of life. An analysis of several feminist theories and narratives allows me to mobilise enactment as a systemic process based on routine behaviours, embedded in institutional and social structures to produce an environment conducive of sexual violence against women. I turn to Gavey's scaffolding of rape to narrate the components of the enactment of gendered sexual violence, and the nuances of victimisation otherwise unaccounted for in mainstream psychological research. This framework enables us to attend to the power relations that constitute rape culture: heteronormativity, sexual coercion and gendered social power relations, which function to enable the enactment of gendered sexual violence as 'normal'.

As I bring understanding to the embodiment of affect, I turn to Probyn's (2005) narrative experience of shame, to skilfully narrate my own subjectivities and demonstrate the material effects of shame, whilst also learning collective stories are necessary for understanding shame as productive and transformative. The distinction between collective and individual narratives allows me to focus on # MeTooNZ mainstream journalist digital space as a site of produced individual narratives. Probyn (2005) argues that it is through the collective voice, the many stories, that transformation of shameful experiences takes place. Through Probyn's understanding of the habitus, shame can be understood as an affective process with real material effects. Shame can be understood, like violence, as embedded and embodied.

In the process of analysing shameful narratives within feminist research and theory, I became interested in the connection between enactment, embodiment and institutional responses to sexual violence. In particular, I was curious about how the enactment of sexual violence may be re-enacted within institutional responses and began to question if the interrelations led to shameful categorisation of women. It was during a supervision session in which I storied New Zealand's shameful statistics as a *misleading figure*, that I began to wonder what other shameful figurations may exist. Here, I turned to Braidotti's (2011) figuration theory, as an emerging methodology which allowed me to demonstrate the social interrelations and exchanges that occur between the enactment and embodiment within institutional responses and capture *shameful figures* that shape women's experiences of sexual violence and shame. By analysing the narratives of enactment of gendered sexual violence and the embodiment of shame, I began to

imagine a map to understand the assemblage between enactment, embodiment and institutional responses to sexual violence against women. I then used this map to provide an analysis of #MeTooNZ's editorial/research, published one year after the inception of the feminist social movement. In this research project, I ask:

- 1) How have feminist social movements contributed to transforming structural and socio-political responses to sexual violence against women?
- 2) How are gendered sexual violence and shame interrelated?
- 3) How does the me too movement respond to women's experiences of gendered sexual violence?
- 4) How do we mobilise feminist social movements beyond narrating women's stories of pain?

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research was assessed as low risk by Massey University Human Ethics Committee - Ethics Notification – **4000022945**. However, this does not imply there were no ethical actions involved. During the process of analysis and writing, I shared my shameful narratives and experiences of witnessing my mother's distress. The act of writing about one's pain highlights the material effects of sexual violence and shame on women's bodies and well-being but also has the potential to evoke distress. Providing a feminist standpoint epistemology and narrative methodology, meant I needed to be continually reflexive. I kept a journal of all my emotional processes as a form of self-care and attended personal psychotherapy throughout the project. The therapeutic counterspace provided an opportunity to not only share my analytic approach but also provided a safe space to address any distress that arose in the telling, listening and writing process. In addition to psychotherapy, I formed a safety network around me with a group of friends and family and had the opportunity to debrief with colleagues and my supervisors regularly.

My research focused on the everyday lived experiences of women who have been sexually assaulted, as a therapist I have listened over and over to women, children and adolescents who have been sexually, physically and emotionally victimised by men. The content of the therapeutic process is sensitive and can be disturbing at times, evoking strong emotions. I recognise that continuing to listen to my client's pain alongside the

research process (reading literature on sexual violence and analysing the shameful narratives) had the potential to impact my therapeutic work. As a member of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) I had a continued obligation to ensure I followed the code of ethics within my professional body. Although there were no interviews conducted, I continued to work as a therapist present to the stories of gendered sexual violence and shame as a mental health professional. "Qualitative research and psychotherapy are both projects of meaning-making" (Hayden, 2013, p. 15) and conducting research while continuing to work as a therapist meant I needed to maintain a safe, competent practice in addition to an ethical analysis of my research. I met monthly with an external supervisor who is a full member of NZAC. Any ethical concerns that arose as a result of my clinical work were discussed regularly using an ethical decision-making model. At times I noted a parallel process and possible transference/counter-transference between my own narrative, the research process and my client group. My supervisor was aware of my mother's history, my journey to support her, as well as my personal experience of sexual abuse. The process of supervision was vital as it is not possible to always be aware of how these experiences may hinder/assist the counselling process. I utilised supervision (in compliance with the NZAC code of ethics) to ensure I maintained clinical competency and continued to provide a safe and ethical counterspace to my existing clients (Crocket et al., 2011).

## Chapter 2: A Literature Review

*"There are no pure theories or pure ideas; they are not born out of thin air without spatial or temporal foundation. Neither can political thought and political theory be neutral, as they too are conceived at a particular point in time and within a specific framework of social relations"*

(Čakardić, 2017, p. 33)

### **Feminist Social Movements: A Cultural Political Action**

Social movements emerge as a result of people coming together to voluntarily influence societal change (McCarthy & Zald, 1973). Their affiliations raise public awareness of a perceived problem by increasing media attention and influencing policy changes to provide better social outcomes for marginalised groups. There is no single theory or political goal in our sometimes-fractious relationship between feminism and psychology. According to Magnusson and Marecek (2017), feminism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century to bring into view an ideology of gender equality. With a history of movements (often referred to as waves), diverse ideologies that reflect socialist, liberal, separatist and Marxist philosophies have attended to the material conditions of women's experience and the sociopolitical structures of oppression. However, Western enactments of feminism(s) have tended towards universalised understandings of oppression, and the knowledge produced in the global north has led to the erasure, othering and pathologisation of women of colour (Bonnzaier & Van Niekerk, 2014). The category 'women' is a socially and politically assembled position founded on the ideology all women share the same disparities and subjugation because of an inherent biological difference with men (Braidotti, 2005; Burman, 2004; Hekman, 1997). The homogeneity of the category 'women' restricts multiplicity between and amongst women with diverse lived experiences and intersections. Feminist theory has been critiqued by Black, Third World and indigenous feminists for locating white, middle-class women as the prominent successors of 'women's knowledge', effectively perpetuating the intersecting oppressions experienced by women outside of the dominant norm (Salem, 2016; Warner et al., 2016).

The association between sex and ethnicity builds a picture of political power. One of the most confronting demonstrations of rape as a political weapon is the act of sexual violence against women in war and the processes of colonisation, whereby the motive is to annihilate women's

ethnicity and culture (Cahill, 2001). Skjelsbaek (2006) highlights how sexual violence was used as a weapon to fundamentally destroy the women of Bosnia by examining the social identities of women raped during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This study indicated intersections of religion, ethnicity and gendered social power relations, using a narrative methodology to understand how Bosnian women made sense of their lived experience of sexual violence. Skjelsbaek (2006) analysed both historical narratives and heard confronting accounts from women who suffered rape as a weapon of genocide, where impregnation of women was an effort to decimate Bosnian culture. In understanding the context of these stories, and the conditions of political oppression, a new position for surviving is produced; 'ethnic survivors' where the rape of women was possible because of their gender and ethnicity. Understanding the intersectionalities of both ethnic and survivor, and gendered and victimised, opens the space for diverse rather than singular stories to emerge at particular locations.

In understanding our geopolitical position, it is vital to recognise the Treaty of Waitangi as the first agreement that acknowledged Māori as indigenous and Pākehā as the early European settlers. Māori women are disproportionately represented in statistics of sexual abuse in intimate partner violence (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2017), and as Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand, experience the textured intersections that marginalise and silence a collective voice of indigenous women. However Māori world views narrate women as a formidable force with sexual and reproductive power, essential to the existence of their people.

It was the arrival of European settlers to Aotearoa New Zealand that introduced patriarchal values and standards for gendered power leading to the decimation and oppression of Māori women. Colonisation generated land alienation, a breakdown of social/gendered structures and violence that continues today in the form of contemporary colonialism seen in systemic, institutional and interpersonal racism (Pihama et al., 2017). In the injustice of colonisation, Māori women became invisible in their own 'stories', written out of cosmology and replaced with Māori men. Māori history became Māori mythology and women were represented in minor roles (Smith, 1992).

In Māori society, women were never viewed as possessions, instead, they were celebrated and received equality and respect as caretakers and nurturers (Mikaere, 1999). In marriage, women would maintain their family name, sex was seen as a regular part of everyday life (not to be punished), and femininity was celebrated. In this world view, women maintained their agency and any violence, whether physical or sexual, were regarded as serious offences resulting in death or exile (Mikaere, 1999).

### **Feminist Social Movements: A Response to Sexual Violence**

Finneman and Volts (2020) have analysed the history of feminist social movements and found two key theoretical approaches that attend to social transformation. In the first approach, the critical feature is the representation of activists who “embody and exemplify the movement” (Finneman & Volts., 2020, p. 865). When the solution becomes incommensurable with new social conditions, a paradigm shift occurs and new movements emerge to compete for legitimacy, as can be seen in the often-cited ‘waves’ of the feminist movement that are defined as separate and competing. Alternatively, the continuity approach highlights a progressive process whereby social activism emphasises “ideological connections between social movements” (Finneman & Volts, 2020, p. 865), arguing that new actions have their origins with historical activism, and as a result, have the potential to inspire and continue societal shifts collaboratively (Taylor 1989; Meyer & Whittier, 1994). It is an approach that opens up the possibility for the interconnections between gendered power and knowledge and the multiple layers of oppression in our complex relationships with coloniality in the conditions of our everyday lives.

Early feminist activism took on various issues that sought to change women's experiences of gendered oppression and shared a common goal to gender the study of violence against women. Feminist academics have provided decades of research to advocate a shift in the political and social landscape for women as a marginalised group. They show a strong commitment to eliminating structured social inequality and its material effects on women's bodies and subjectivities. In the following literature review, I aim to deliver a snapshot of feminist social movements as a response to gendered sexual violence, adopting a continuity approach rather than a paradigm of opposing and competing feminist ‘waves’. In adopting the continuity approach in

this project, I can explore the impacts of feminism, and seek to understand how these shape modern digital activism.

### **The Anti-Rape Movement**

*"The husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract" ( Hale, 1778, p. 629).*

The cultural and legal definition of rape has changed dramatically over the last 40 years, predominantly as a result of a long-fought battle by contemporary feminist movements. Before the 1970s, sexual violence was a phenomenon not openly talked about, and the way society responded or thought about rape was one of acceptance and normalcy (Chasteen, 2010). The 'anti-rape' movement was one of the first feminist social movements which emerged out of the 1960s, as women began to develop conscious-raising groups and organised to act on other gendered social power relations (Rose, 1977). The aim of the anti-rape movement was to eliminate rape from society by revising rape laws and changing traditional attitudes and assumptions about sexual assault that were mirrored in the existing regulations (Rose, 1977). The conventional patriarchal contract of marriage provided a legal and moral understanding of a sexual-social pact between men and women, whereby, women were to submit to their husband's sexual 'needs', consent was not required, and women's sexual desire was ignored (Pateman, 1988). Before the anti-rape movement men had a legal entitlement (conjugal rights) to sex in marriage, as women were viewed as property, therefore without rights. In the eyes of the law and society, marital and/or date rape remained hidden and unpunishable as no crime had been committed (Cahill, 2001; Gavey, 2005). The anti-rape campaign was a political movement that produced legislative changes and located the prevalence of sexual violence against women that was once legitimated.

Brownmiller's (1975) unprecedented feminist research contributed significantly to the anti-rape movement, by challenging rape's prevalence, causes and consequences and providing an alternative framework for condemning and understanding sexual violence, a process that brought rape out of silence and into public view (Chasteen, 2001; Donat & D'Emilio, 1992). In this instance, rape became a social injustice rather than just sex', as a social perspective focused on

how sexual violence could be constructed as harmful (Chasteen, 2001; Donat & D'Emilio, 1992). The reframing of situations as dangerous is a social process, whereby, the public views of particular conditions are shaped through the endeavours of activists and the application of new knowledge (Donat & D'Emilio, 1992; Chasteen, 2001). In terms of sexual violence, the anti-rape movement was influential in shifting public perceptions of rape, by applying the knowledge of rape myths and framing sexual assault as an act of terror and violence, rape became visible as a social problem, of which society is responsible for addressing.

The term 'rape myth' was coined by Susan Brownmiller (1975) and defined in later years as being "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists" (Burt, 1980., p. 217). Although rape myths are present for both men and women, rape myth acceptance tends to be higher amongst men (Nagy, 2016). Some examples of rape myths include: women who do the 'right thing' and behave in a 'certain way' can avoid being raped, it is the victim's fault she was too attractive, she put herself at risk because she was drunk, the perpetrator was mentally ill or unable to control his sexual desires (Nagy, 2016; Edwards et al., 2011; Rickard, 2015). Additionally, heterosexual relationships hold myths which may provide justification for rape, such as, for a man and woman to have a healthy and fulfilling partnership, sexual activity must end in penetration. This concept is known as the 'coital imperative', suggesting it is unthinkable that sex could exist without intercourse (McPhillips et al., 2001). All these ideologies focus on elements of victim-blaming, perpetrator acquittal and justification of sexual violence in heterosexual relationships (Edwards et al., 2011; Nagy, 2016; McPhillips et al., 2001; Payne et al. 1994; Rickard, 2015). The anti-rape movement's main aim was to dispel the common rape myths and portray the message that 'every man' could be a potential rapist, and 'any woman' could be a victim of gendered violence. By breaking down victim-blaming narratives and rape myths, the campaign was able to shift the common sense understanding of rape as a rare occurrence perpetrated by severely pathological men (Bumiller, 2008; Rickard, 2015), to the idea that sexual assault is a common occurrence perpetrated by ordinary men (including intimate partners). The anti-rape movement was successful in promoting marital rape law reforms, and by the 1980s, procuring funding for specialised services for rape victims (Bumiller, 2008; Rose, 1977).

However, the anti-rape movement located itself in gendered social power relations and ignored questions of race and class (and sexuality) and the multiple layers of oppressions women experience. As the movement gained momentum, the real rape (random attack by a stranger) and 'ideal victim' (white- middle-class woman) became singular stories. At the same time, Black feminism and postcolonial movements were questioning the erasure of race in academic and political responses that draw on diversity, without an analysis of power relations (Salem, 2018). Intersectionality, as a critical theory, responded to the anti-rape campaign by questioning the racial power relations of the singular story that black men were the perpetrators of sexual violence against white women. In the movement of the narrative, intersectionality was engaged by "Black, Mestiza, post-colonial, queer, and indigenous feminists questioning the power relations within social movements to recognise previously ignored subject positions and identities" (Tormos, 2017, p. 709). Despite intersectionality emerging from Black and global south feminist traditions, it has travelled to the global north to represent all feminist ontologies and it is this movement that has undermined its radical potential (Salem, 2018, p. 406). The potential of intersectionality is its ability to address relationships of power, including its appropriation within neoliberal feminist research and practice.

### **The Feminist Poststructural Movement**

Weedon (1987) describes poststructuralism as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructural theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (pp. 40-41). Feminist poststructuralism attends to the acquiring of knowledge fundamentally as constructed and reconstructed through power relations, where language, knowledge and power are entwined in social, viewing language as a precondition for thought, and as a form of social action (Gavey, 1989; Rutherford et al., 2015). Understanding the operation of power allows researchers to explore the function of language and the ways it positions subjects in a particular cultural and historical contexts Gendered social power relations are understood as relationships where the binary male/female is organised through power relations of domination and subordination (Davies & Gannon, 2011), whereby, women are subjected to the discursive political and regulative frameworks through which gendered subjects and their social contexts are assembled (Butler, 1992/2006; Foucault, 1980).

Early feminist poststructuralist social movements emerged in the 1980s, where gendered power relations became the site of activism through researching the dominant narrative of a heteronormative script and experiences of sexuality and sexual experiences. Much of this work can be credited to Hollway (1989) whose early research on gendered relations proposed three common discourses: male sexual drive discourse (a discourse that assume men have an uncontrollable strong sexual desire that is legitimated through biological essentialism, and therefore acquits men of responsibility), a have/hold discourse (connected with male sex drive but where women are responsible for meeting the sexual needs of men), and a permissive sex discourse (emerged from sexual liberation movements and assumes women have the potential for sexual desire) (Gavey, 2005; Hollway, 1989). Together, these discourses operate to discipline women's sexual desire as always receptive to male desire. Heterosexuality as a technology of power became scrutinised, to discern how particular discourses work together to sustain systems of social meaning that regulate and control women's sexuality. Poststructural feminism as a social movement began to examine the operations of power involved in heteronormativity (e.g., Butler, 1990/2006; Foucault, 1978/1981) and feminist academia (e.g., Rubin, 1993; Gavey, 1989/2005) to question how the heteronormative sexual script produces the conditions for 'regular' (normal) sex that prioritises coitus as the disciplined goal and purpose of sexual encounters, and as the 'normal' way of expressing sexuality (Braun & Kitzinger, 2001; Braun & Wilkinson, 2005; Gavey, Braun & McPhillips, 1999).

Heteronormative scripts include sexual double standards (men should be sexual aggressors, while women should be passive custodians), gendered dating narratives that assert women's submission (power and force make men attractive to women while sexual attractiveness makes women attractive to men), and gendered approaches to commitment (men prioritise sex while women prioritise emotive relationships) (Kim et al. 2007; Seabrook et al. 2016). With a sexual script that defines 'normal' sexuality, anything that falls outside of this script, including any woman that fails to maintain her feminine position, comes to be viewed as abnormal, dysfunctional or deficient, often requiring expert help.

Gavey's (1992) research examined how the heteronormative script leaves women vulnerable to violent or controlling relationships where women's gendered positions become normalised and the boundaries of consent, coercion and rape become blurred. Gendered power operates through

relations of domination and subordination in a process that Gavey (2005) argued builds a scaffolding of rape through which sexual assault/rape are often understood as 'just sex', and victim-blaming is maintained. The feminist poststructuralist movement allows researchers to explore disciplinary power and the ways it positions subjects in particular cultural and historical contexts and opens spaces for contesting the ways women are subjected to sexual coercion and violence. However, the movement focuses on gendered power and does not necessarily address the complex layers of oppression that women experience.

### **Neoliberal Culture and the Postfeminist Movement**

Neoliberalism is a complicated social ideology and has claimed multiple theoretical understandings as it has travelled through diverse temporal, political and geographical locations (Redden et al., 2020; Wilson, 2018). Its most basic tenet assumes Western economic, political, and cultural initiatives move towards free-market economies, and frame their ideas as 'classical liberalism', emphasising individualism and rights to personal freedoms within democratic societies (Čakardić, 2017; Wilson, 2018).

Neoliberalism values free-market policies, pro-corporation, privatisation, and in particular, the transfer of public services to private organisations' (Bumiller, 2005). Western governance operates through surveillance at an individual level and values individual choice, self-responsibility and self-improvement to reach dominant ideals. Postfeminism as a social movement extends the early work of women's sexual liberation, including gains from the anti-rape movement, and assumes women have achieved sexual equality with men (Bumiller, 2005; Gill, 2016). A tension arises where the institutional response to sexual violence is also enacted through a neoliberal agenda of personal responsibility (Bumiller, 2005).

Postfeminism emerged out of a complicated relationship with narratives of neoliberal achievement. It matches women's expenditure with women's attainment of gender equality, locating free choice as a feminist act (Čakardić, 2017). In the '80s and '90s, television was filled with 'girl power' slogan's, 'girls can do anything' marketing that attempted to shift advertising from representations of young girls and women as objects of the 'male gaze' to independent and capable women who can 'have it all' (Gill, 2007, 2008). Postfeminist narratives provide an account of women's emancipation that rejects the need for ongoing political involvement. One of

the most potent aspects of postfeminist media culture is its focus on the feminine body, representing femininity as a bodily process rather than a socio-cultural and psychological one (Gill, 2007), which has shifted over time. In the past, media portrayed women as caring nurturing mothers; a character that represented what it is to be feminine. However, postfeminist media platforms sought to present the category of 'woman' as 'sexy' and 'powerful', offering the feminine body as both a source of agency, as well as unruly, needing constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and reconfiguring to meet the expectations of feminine attractiveness (Gill, 2007/2008). Here we see postfeminism enables a shift in the way women's bodies are represented from "where once sexualised images of women in the media presented them as passive, mute objects of an assumed male gaze, today women are presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner" (Gill, 2008, p. 42).

The pivotal tenet of the postfeminist social movement was the shift in the commercial world, women were no longer represented as passive objects objectified by man, but active desiring sexual subjects that have the power to choose sexual autonomy and agency, achieved within neoliberal consumerism via a discourse of playfulness, freedom, and ultimately, free choice (Gill, 2008). Attwood (2006) asserts sexuality has changed significantly for women as there was a shift towards sexually permissive attitudes, a visible increase in sexual images of bodies, normalised representations of sex, a focus on sexual identities, values and practices and a reduction in heterosexual gender norms that previously perpetuated constructions of morality and decency. While at the same time, an emergence of new sexual values and practices arose which allowed women to explore their sexuality. The movement produced a sexualisation of culture, whereby, western society became increasingly infiltrated with representations of sex in revolutionary ways, normalising sexual culture (Moran, 2017) and allowing women to have the same sexual rights and freedoms as men (Gill, 2007, 2008). Gill argues that the 'up for it' sexual position offered women a form of pseudo-empowerment, where the commodification of more and improved sex requires women to be both desirable and desiring to satisfy men. For example, research has found that women engaging in casual sex (through choice and liberation) continue to experience tensions between their own construction of casual sex and the regulation of their experiences through double standards (Farvid & Braun, 2016; Farvid, Braun & Rowney, 2016). Through neoliberal norms, women's freedom of choice is legitimated, however, they are also

blamed for the effects of failing the normative standards of femininity, or for making the 'wrong' choice.

### **Feminist Social Movements: A Longstanding Battle**

Through these social movements that interrogate sexual violence, the ongoing victimisation of women and their position as responsible for their own safety, is a process that disciplines women's sexuality. The acceptance that women are responsible for the violence against them, (normalised through rape myths) negatively shaped the ways that not only individuals but systems and policies (legal and social) have responded to women. Researchers have interviewed and heard the stories of women's pain in many forms, and have provided critical theories that have driven feminist social movements across 40 years. From the shifts made in the anti-rape action recognising rape as social injustice, reviewing rape laws and procuring social supports, to a feminist poststructural approach that pays attention to the issues of gendered social power relations as a form of subjugation, to postfeminism's use of neoliberalism to action sexual autonomy and equality for women; each social movement has provided a response to gendered sexual violence that advocates for changes to the heteronormative script.

Despite decades of research and social movements challenging prevailing social norms regarding sexual violence, heteronormativity remains resistant to change. As our social and cultural contexts transform, including the visibility of sex in an increasingly techno-interconnected society, there has been widespread debate as to whether digital spaces enable sexual agency and empowerment for women, including spaces for marginalised women who do not fit the feminine (Western) ideal to negotiate their sexual subjectivities (Rice & Watson, 2016), or whether it reproduces heteronormative practices that regulate women's sexuality through social sanctions (Gavey, 2005; Gill, 2008).

I move now to the digital counterspace to make sense of the potentials and limits of using a feminist hashtag and digital activist space as a platform for social change.

### **Digital Feminist Activism: A Response to Sexual Victimisation**

Feminist digital activism, such as, #MeTooNZ, is the newest social movement to emerge in our sociopolitical landscape, that aims to make misogyny and everyday sexism visible by

participating in social media posts related to rape culture (Mendes et al., 2018). Of particular interest to this research is how women utilise hashtag activism to represent and respond to gendered sexual violence and whether or not these texts produce positions that resist rape culture. To the best of my knowledge, #MeTooNZ has not yet been thoroughly researched. This research seeks to understand if the social movement can help to shift the social injustice of institutional and gendered social power relations that intersect gender, class, ethnicity and layers of oppression as women negotiate their stories of sexual violence. The use of 'hashtag activism' can draw attention to social injustices online by enabling women to challenge narratives reproduced by commercial, news and entertainment media, through their own counter narratives. This form of discursive power is essential for feminist activism a space to challenge the gendered ways popular media enables rape culture as an accepted norm (Xiong, 2019). The advancement of digital technology and online communities has given new life to several feminist actions including: the exchange of ideas, support to women impacted by violence, establishing priorities for social justice and highlighting issues and concerns relevant to the feminist activist cause (Xiong, 2019). Therefore, research that focuses on #MeToo as a global movement provides insight into how feminist ideas, narratives and meaning are shaped in virtual networks.

As mentioned in chapter one, my professional knowledge as a therapist has been to provide a safe environment for women to share their lived stories of their experience of sexual violence. The therapeutic process in itself is a type of counterspace (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019), however, it provides limited opportunities to break down gendered social power relations and rape culture outside of the therapy room. It is also important to note that not all women will present to therapy for numerous reasons including feeling stigmatised or fearful of professional's responses, or prior harmful experiences with social services (Coker et al., 2004). Inaccessibility to support is concerning, as survivors of trauma who seek community assistance (not necessarily by professionals but other friends and family), are less likely to attempt suicide and have better mental health outcomes (Coker et al., 2004). It is common for individuals to utilise the internet to access health services and information. Platforms such as Facebook or Twitter may accommodate a survivor's disclosure, especially for those who may find it challenging to seek support in-person (Bogan et al., 2019), and provide information and advocacy services. Likewise, if survivors experience positive responses in their sharing it is predicted to result in improved psychological functioning (Filipas & Ullman, 2001), reduced self-blame and a sense of

agency in their experience (Orchowski et al., 2013). It is here, where these institutionalised responses to the therapeutic relationship (individualised responsibility to 'fix' the harm) and the context of gendered social power relations are necessary in the production of this thesis.

In addition to providing a space for disclosure, social media is utilised as resistance to rape culture, where women and girls can share their understanding and mobilise against sexual violence in a coordinated manner (Rentschler, 2014). Probyn (2005) stresses the importance of a collective voice in expressing shame. It is through collective stories that women can find ways to understand their "bodies movements, how the body expresses feeling, its affects, and how the body changes in proximity to other bodies or in different places" (Probyn, 2005, p.40). In individual narratives, we will only ever hear snapshots of what it feels like to be 'out of place' (Probyn, 2005). Social media platforms may provide a counterspace to produce a collective feminist response to sexual victimisation that collectively has the potential to transform structural and social gendered power relations.

Social media is one platform many adolescent girls utilise to challenge sexism and has the potential to produce a new face of feminism. Jackson's (2018) research with teenage feminists explored how girls are using and building digital feminist activism, what it means for them to do so and how their digital practices apply to their offline feminism. The analysis found participants had a preference for specific digital spaces when obtaining feminist related content, however, all participants used the private Facebook site 'feminist club' as a connecting hub to link ideas, websites and relevant domains of feminist attention. Many girls highlighted their concerns for posting feminist opinions on an open site, where the public could comment and retaliate against their views and questioned their legitimacy as to whether they were 'doing' feminism correctly. A general theme of 'risk' was developed concerning public digital spaces and the communication of feminist views, and although digital space may be anonymous, young feminists were not immune from vicious backlash. In this study, Jackson showed the importance of a feminist-only site to provide a safe place for sharing of ideas and knowledge and developing ways to conceptualise their views offline, participants did not view online activism as meaningful or as impactful as offline. They privileged offline forms of activism and undervalued their contribution to social change in online spaces (Jackson, 2018). If both types of

activism can be seen as complementary, it has the potential to widen the social voice of women across a diverse age range.

### **The Digital World can be a Minefield**

Digital spaces have the potential to enable and exacerbate misogyny. The traditional gendered social power relations (that position women as submissive and men as aggressive) are not only found in everyday offline experiences but are replicated in the digital world (Sills et al., 2016). Social media may further victimise women who have been sexually violated. Stubbs-Richardson et al., (2018) completed research that analysed accounts of blame and impending shame that is attached to posts of Twitter of rape victims. The study found many examples reinforced the narrative of victimisation and found victim-blaming tweets received more frequent re-tweets than supportive messages. The shame women were experiencing due to online victimisation had such an impact, researchers reported dire outcomes for many young women, including self-harm and suicide—the cold reality of misplaced shame.

Perhaps one of the most confronting and recognisable examples in Aotearoa was from a group of boys who identified as 'roast busters' posting their sexual conquests with young intoxicated girls on the social media platform, Facebook. In 2013, TV 3 news showed actual footage of the boys promoting 'roasting' as a form of sexual conquest with devastating consequences for the young woman, not only as victims, but through a process of identification as their images were plastered across the digital space. The boys vividly described gang rape and humiliation of victims, some as young as 13 years old. The Facebook page operated for five months before a complaint was laid by TV 3, and the site was disabled. For several months the stories of 'roasting' were circulated, while the perpetrators continued to victimise and assault other young girls. What emerged was a conflict in the social media representations that followed, where the boys were either positioned as perpetrators of rape, or were positioned as doing what was on the boundaries of the normalisation of masculinity (boys will be boys) and the acceptance of rape culture that assumes that the girls were to blame for the violence perpetrated against them because they were intoxicated (Gavey, 2013).

While 'roast busters' demonstrates an interaction between sexual violence and a broader cultural tolerance of misogyny within a digital space, it is also important to recognise the institutional

response to this public example. Gavey (2013) highlights police had known about the group of boys and their boasting of sexual violence since 2011, two years before TV3 rendered the Facebook page visible to a wider audience. A moral outrage occurred raising questions about how our legal system was complicit in the narrative. The police response was contextualised through an understanding of a standard of evidence – where the "diverse ways women experience rape trauma" through gendered social power relations and sociopolitical conditions are not embedded in police knowledge of the evidence (Jordon, 2011, p. 243). Police, in their media response, reproduced the dominant narrative that women's victimisation does not meet the standard for sexual violence to become a criminal offence. "The boys have been spoken to and warned their behavior is verging on criminal if not criminal" (Gavey, 2013 p. 3), minimising the violence and enabling the Facebook page to remain active.

Instead, the girls themselves were asked to step forward 'bravely' and make a formal complaint so justice could be served. Gavey (2013) highlights what this would have been like for young women, painfully aware their sexual violation had been publicly posted online, and attending school and coming face to face with peers making judgments about their choices and social /moral character (rape myths), only to be asked by police to step up and share their stories of pain in a legal context. How could they begin to speak in ways they could be heard when one of the perpetrator posts online "Go ahead, call the cops. They can't unrape" (Gavey, 2013). As the story circulated through social media it became an effective warning for young women to self-police their sexual subjectivities and silences. At the same time, the digital space enabled supportive and proactive collaborations and communities in the resistance to gendered sexual violence (Gavey, 2013). In summary, the digital space has the potential to both enable and resist online misogyny/rape culture, while also providing a counterspace for feminist education and activism (Sills et al., 2016).

### **The Original Me Too Movement**

*"This work can't grow unless it's intersectional. We (women of colour) can't do this alone...Until We change (how we interact), any advancement that we make in addressing this issue is going to be scarred by the fact that it wasn't across the board – It's time for all our voices to be heard".*

(Cooney, 2017, from, Orchowski et al., 2018).

The me too movement emerged when Black activist Tarana Burke began a forum to advocate for women of colour, and living in poverty, who experienced sexual violence (Gomez & Gobin, 2020) with the goal to:

Reframe and expand the global conversation around sexual violence to speak to the needs of the broader spectrum of survivors, young people, trans, and disabled folks, black women and girls, and all communities of colour. We want perpetrators held accountable, and we want strategies implemented to sustain long-term systemic change.

You Are Not Alone. (n.d). <https://metoomvmt.org/>

Tarana Burke developed the digital feminist space for Black girls and women in response to the high prevalence of sexual violence against women of colour (see <https://metoomvmt.org/>). At the centre of the movement is attending to intersectionality and advocating for the multiple subjectivities experienced by Black women living in low socio-economic conditions. However, it wasn't until October 15<sup>th</sup> 2017, when Alyssa Milano (white, celebrity) asked Twitter users to tweet #MeToo in response to Harvey Weinstein's allegations of sexual assault, that the movement became a new technology of feminism, (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018; Leung & Williams, 2019), and as it travelled, #MeToo captured social and media attention and became a movement representing the white aesthetic of the global north (Salem, 2018).

### **#MeToo Research**

*"If all women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote; me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem" (@AlyssaMilano October 15th 2017-  
Twitter)*

The following literature focuses on American research analysing #MeToo and the potential pitfalls and promises of the hashtag social movement. Perhaps the most prominent purpose of #MeToo is the use of the counterspace to share survivor's stories. Many women have come forward and used social media posts under #MeToo to disclose their experiences of sexual victimisation, with varying responses (Alaggia & Wang, 2020; Bogen et al., 2019). The process

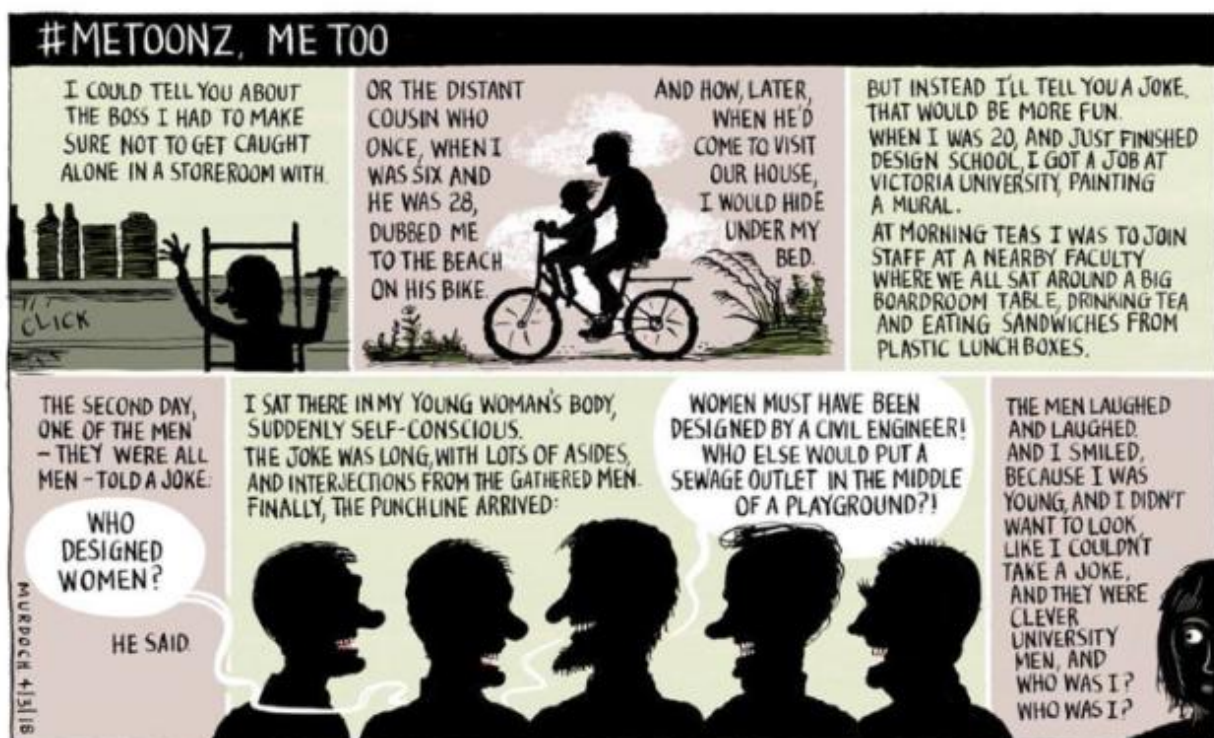
of telling trauma stories is assumed to empower survivor's experience as they begin a process of developing their narrative toward a new narrative that reduces individual pain and blame (Harvey, 2000). A study by Bogen et al. (2019) researched #MeToo to understand the counterspace as a platform for disclosure of sexual assault and harassment. A thematic analysis was conducted on a sample of tweets adopting #MeToo, and researchers found survivors emphasised the 'truth' of their stories in the telling who, *what*, *where*, *when* and *how* as they engaged in collective stories, making links between their experiences and wider knowledge of gendered violence, and advocating for sociopolitical change to the dominant narrative that places blame on women for their victimisation. While the space also provoked backlash that was used to mock or harass survivors, most comments promoted advocacy and support for change. What this study found was that the digital space of #MeTooNZ too became a place that raised questions about institutional and structural gendered social power relations and support for women telling their stories.

A further study by Alaggia et al. (2020) analysed social media posts to determine how sexual abuse was disclosed. Of particular interest, was the determination of reasons survivors used social media rather than other spaces, trends in responses they received outside of #MeToo, and why they did not disclose earlier. A thematic analysis of data from #MeToo on Twitter and Reddit produced several themes, with the most predominant related to the impact that social media and popular press had on their decision to disclose. This finding further supports Bogen et al. (2019) research demonstrating the MeToo movement is a positive space to share lived experiences and a collective voice online (Alaggia et al., 2020). Many women did not even realise they had been sexually violated until they related to the stories told as media representations on the Me Too movement proliferated (Alaggia et al., 2020). The process of recognising their own stories of pain as sexual violence offers space for counter-narratives to emerge that resist the dominant narrative of rape culture as normative.

For women who do not have the privilege of safe friends, families, mental health professionals, or social support, the #MeTooNZ may provide an alternative space to share a formidable voice and challenge the social injustice of sexual violence. This process of recognition is necessary for healing, not through a single story, but through making sense of the sociopolitical conditions for surviving that connects humanness meaningfully (Herman, 1997). This research is specifically

interested in the narratives produced within the Aotearoa social campaign located within a mainstream media platform, to contextualise how the movement became localised and how it transformed the sociopolitical landscape through the collection of women's narratives of pain as they tell their experiences of sexual violence. I focus on the movement of the hashtag into the mainstream media, through a collection of responses that texture the counter narratives that it produces.

### Me too becomes a Part of Aotearoa New Zealand's Social Landscape



#MeTooNZ (Twitter)

### #MeTooNZ: A Journalistic Investigation

Now firmly a part of Aotearoa New Zealand's socio-cultural landscape #MeTooNZ was developed by journalist Alison Mau through Stuff.NZ's media platform to examine sexual harassment in the workplace. Leading a team of journalists who investigate the emerging stories, Mau publishes editorials that are written to shift normalised representations of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace (Huffadine, 2018), and extended the platform for women to share

their lived experiences of sexual violence. This too, is an example of the process of passing on stories as a process of movement circulating in and through multiple sites of knowledge production (Fine, 2017). The American hashtag social movement is located as a social media counterspace for women to share lived their stories of sexual victimisation, with an aim to challenge misogyny and rape culture as dominant knowledge. #MeTooNZ being located within mainstream online media shifts the landscape of media representations, through keeping women's stories of sexual violence in view, while challenging the systemic silencing of women's stories.

Hollings (2020) reported #MeTooNZ was noteworthy for bringing into view widespread systemic cover-up of sexual violence and harassment within several organisations across Aotearoa. Initially, the movement was developed with the idea of exposing celebrity perpetrators, however, the process of naming and shaming individuals met with legal resistance and an increase in non-disclosure agreements through a process that literally silenced women and prevented public disclosures of verified sexual harassment and abuse. The shift enabled the investigation to attend to the gendered power relations that produce the conditions for the systemic victimisation of women within workplace institutions. The social movement was able to undergo a positive transformation and responded flexibly to continue to provide a response to sexual victimisation for women involved in workplace institutions across Aotearoa.

In New Zealand, it has been less about the big 'gotcha' moment exposing famous people's predatory behaviour and more about the structural and organisational issues that prevent survivors getting justice and organisations getting on top of the problem. (Anonymous 2019b retrieved from Hollings, 2020., p. 235).

Feminist digital activism, such as #MeToo movements, have the potential to produce a counter-narrative whereby perpetrators are held responsible for sexual violence, and women who have been sexually victimised are no longer blamed. Still, I am left wondering what attempts have been made to reduce women's experiences of shame and whether there is a way to avoid the 'disclosure' of women's pain as a form of political and social movement. Through the decades of feminist social movements (and recent digital activism) that have opened up spaces for women's narratives of pain and violence as they circle through multiple sites of advocacy and activism; rape myths, gendered social power relations and the role of neoliberalism and postfeminism in

understanding women's subjectivities is well documented in research. However, the coercive process of blame and shame is conspicuously missing from these histories, and excludes a way to account for the relational shame my mother and I share.

I began to understand that feminist activism has primarily focused on the enactment of sexual violence, that is, how it is normalised, and how it is re-enacted within society. In this review, I noticed an increasing number of feminist activist research engaged in social constructionist and poststructural epistemologies to produce a shift in rape culture, as a solution to gendered sexual violence. Still, there appeared to be an absence of narratives that attended to shame as an affective process intricately connected to lived experiences of sexual violence. In the analytic chapters that follow, I will explore the narratives on gendered sexual violence and shame within feminist and social theory to show the reciprocity between the two phenomena. I then provide an analysis of the possible shameful positions women are categorised into within institutional responses, including #MeTooNZ. The aim is to make visible the multiple interconnecting points of the complex landscape of gendered sexual violence, building a social compass that exceeds a singular story.



Figure one: A social compass template.

## **Chapter 3: Analysis & Discussion Part One: The Enactment of Gendered Sexual Violence & Embodiment of Shame**

### **The Enactment of Gendered Sexual Violence**

#### **Rape Culture and Victim-Blaming**

Rape culture can be broadly defined as an environment that is conducive to rape and other forms of sexual violence. More specifically, it establishes a culture in which dominant social norms, condone or enable sexual victimisation by reinforcing the idea that the subjugation of women is a simple fact of life (Bates, 2014). Pearson (2018) adds that sexual assault is justified by historical norms that position men as masculine aggressors, and women as feminine, submissive and subordinate. Popular culture also has a part to play in the use of subversive humour, for example, jokes about rape in stand-up comedy, or popular TV sitcoms (Strain et al., 2016). Feminist theorists identify two interconnecting relationships that enact rape culture and normalise sexual violence: (1) victim-blaming or other narratives that minimise or excuse rape (Lea, 2007; Sills et al., 2013; Weiss, 2010), and (2) dominant knowledge of everyday heterosexual relationships that normalise and excuse male sexual aggression (Gavey, 2005; Pearson, 2018). There is an alarming volume of research that demonstrates victim-blaming and narratives of rape. In the following discussion, I will outline two studies that provide a powerful depiction of victim-blaming across two standpoints: perpetrators of rape, and women with lived experience of rape.

Lea (2007) provides a confronting study which analyses the narratives of sex offenders' participating in group therapy within UK prisons. The treatment program, STOP (which also runs in Aotearoa) provides 35-40 structured meetings, whereby, perpetrators must confront their offences and engage in therapeutic approaches to prevent recidivism and strengthen relapse prevention. In particular, researchers focused on certain offenders who became the exclusive focus of specific sessions, as they provided the rich text for analysis in the narration of their crimes (Lea, 2007) as seen in the following extract:

*She had dressed, and she was advertising the fact she wanted sex, to my mind. Now people say 'well she was dressed that way she was asking for it'. But what is it? She probably did want a sexual relationship with somebody that's what her clothing was saying to me that she was after. But there is nothing wrong with that. She was not asking*

*to be raped and brutally murdered. So, she did nothing wrong at all, but she did lack a bit of wisdom.*

(Lea, 2007, p.506).

This narrative shows a discursive practice that places blame on women and demonstrates the self-preservation of the offender. The narrator (perpetrator) implies men are entitled to take agency from women emotionally, physically and sexually if they present themselves in a particular way. In this extract, we see victim-blaming narratives in action, as he describes his interpretation and 'unspoken' meaning-making. That is, the offender positions the woman as a 'victim' asking to be raped because she was wearing clothing which 'marketed' her body for sex. It was assumed the woman's intention was to find a man and have a casual sexual encounter, implying she was 'up for it'. Here we see a double bind, as the offender indicates that "there is nothing wrong" with wanting to find a man for casual sex, but she "lacked a bit of wisdom".

On the one hand, the postfeminist woman can have casual sex and enjoy the same relationships socially acceptable to men, but on the other, she lacks wisdom as she presents herself as 'sexually available' in a public setting which justifies sexual assault (Lea, 2007). Here we see the operation of modern disciplinary power, where women are to present themselves as sexually desirable wearing makeup and revealing clothing (e.g, short skirts) to attract a man. Additionally, in this instance, we see women must engage in self-surveillance to manage their presentation and adjust it to suit certain social situations (Farvid & Braun, 2013; Lea, 2007). Presenting as physically attractive and 'desirable' to men in a public setting, e.g., a bar, but not while she is walking alone at night, as this implies she is asking to be raped. In the interrelations between disciplinary power and surveillance, we see the suggestion women must change her appearance to meet the social conditions and constraints she finds herself placed in (Gill 2007; 2008).

Lea (2007) concluded the research narratives were driven by sex-role beliefs (e.g. men are aggressors, and women are submissive in sex) and rape myth's (e.g. women who dress provocatively ask to be raped and men cannot control their sexual urges), and found two dominant discourses. The discourse of desire (enacted by offenders) is where the construction of rape relates to the attractiveness of women and men's uncontrollable sexual urges. The discourse of common sense (enacted by paraprofessionals) imply women 'should' know better than to

jeopardise their safety and engage in unsafe behaviours, while at the same time, are not to blame as victims “did not ask to be raped” (Lea, 2007., p509), a confusing and invalidating response to sexual assault. Both of these dominant discourses can be traced back to Hollway's (1989) male sex drive discourse that legitimises a story of normalisation that men are driven by a biological need to seek out heterosexual intercourse, and women are the moral gatekeepers.

In the next section, I turn to McKenzie-Mohr and LaFrance (2011) to examine an alternative standpoint: women with lived experience. In this article, the researchers explore the narrative challenges and possibilities emerging in research programs with women who experienced depression after rape. The research expresses the importance of stories told by women, and the inherent struggles they experience in sharing their knowledge about the impact of sexual violence. That is, women expressed they understood that the perpetrator was responsible for their actions, but they also believed they were partially responsible for their own victimisation.

*I blame myself to a certain extent but very very little. Mostly just being stupid. Believe in somebody, I don't believe in anybody. Don't set yourself up. I should have before I'd gone to coffee with him I should have known him a heck of a sight better.*

(McKenzie-Mohr & LaFrance, 2014., p. 63)

In this storyline, we see the participant is caught in a process of self surveillance. Although she knows she is not to blame for the assault, she still voices a sense of responsibility. She questions her decision to meet with the man (on her own), assuming she could have prevented the assault by getting to know him better. Here we see a binary is produced, self-persecution versus perpetrator responsibility, described by McKenzie-Mohr and LaFrance (2014) as “tightrope talk”. Tightrope talk represents the struggles women feel in trying to balance the tension between power/control and self-surveillance. A severe constraint is enacted, that is, women know they should hold men fully responsible for sexual violence, but the experience of blame leaks through the boundary between knowledge and experience. The enactment of violence and embodied experience of gendered social power relations produce the conditions for blame and shame.

What is interesting in examining these two standpoints, is the familiarity of the discursive processes that story sexual violence and make common sense. In each study, the phenomenon of rape is understood using victim-blaming narratives, for example, Lea (2007) shows reports where perpetrators looked to ‘physical attractiveness’ of a woman and ‘sexual desire’ as an

explanation for why they offended; the woman was attractive so how was he meant to control his sexual urges or desire? Alternatively, in the research by McKenzie-Mohr and LaFrance (2011), the binary of both responsible and not responsible for rape is understood through the narrative of victim-blaming. Participants perceived that their own actions may have increased their risk at the time of the assault, while simultaneously assigning the assailant responsible (McKenzie-Mohr & LaFrance, 2011). Drawing on these two studies enabled me to question how deeply normative the victim-blaming narrative is which forms our understanding of sexual violence. Heteronormativity coerces our complicity in the blurring of the line between 'just sex' and rape, where consent and coercion are interrelated in the process of victim blaming.

### **Heteronormativity, Consent and Coercion**

Women are expected to assert a certain degree of resistance to sexual violence to communicate their non-consent, in contrast, men's persistence in pursuing women sexually is seen as natural and uncontrollable, which, if overcome, proves their sexual power and masculinity. These gendered positions produce sex as something men do to women and normalises rape as an accepted social relationship between men and women. Gavey (2005) asserts that the boundaries of consent, coercion and rape become blurred and stereotypical representations of 'real rape' produces a dichotomy of rape versus non-rape, silencing other forms of unwanted or coerced sex that do not fit within 'normal' sex. Consent theorists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries refer to the idea that women are born free and assert the same power as men; therefore, consent is implied when adults enter an agreed relationship (Pateman, 1988). Identifying women as equal to men allows society to conveniently overlook the fact that men in a patriarchal society are normalised through heterosexual relations of domination and subordination, and legitimised through human rights discourse. Liberal and democratic theorists argued that this question could be satisfactorily answered, and a justification for the exercise of power could be found, by legitimising equality through individual voluntary agreements of consent within relationships (Pateman, 1980).

The relationships that form the meaning of consent are normalised through the 'rules' of participation in heterosexual relationships, that is, women are assumed to consent to the heteronormative script when entering a relationship, and therefore, voluntarily agree to a sexual contract. Consent here is an understanding of a sexual-social pact that exists between men and

women. Gavey (2005) argues that gendered social power blurs the boundary between coercion and consent in understanding sexual violence. Without an analysis of heterosexual coercion, victim blaming has become entrenched in our responses to sexual violence. McCaw and Senn (1998) examined the research based on 'sexual difference' explanations of rape and sexual coercion, which theorise that women's experiences of sexual coercion are experienced by men as consent. In their study it was found that men overestimated women's interest in sex, interpreted women's refusal as something to be overcome, and women showed a reluctance to refuse coercive sexual advances (McCaw & Senn, 1998). It was also found that men knew that they were using coercive tactics for their sexual gratification. Understanding how these 'miscommunications' circle into the narrative of understanding sexual violence opens new processes of movement in date rape culture, however, it reproduces the narrative that victims are responsible for their victimisation. Women are held responsible for the lack of 'real' resistance that is misunderstood by men as consent. Men's coercive behaviours, understood as miscommunication legitimates their understanding of consent. Through this framework, we see how sexual violence operates normatively within interpersonal relationships. Legitimizing sexual coercion is a blatant "disregard of the rights and feelings of one person by another" (Gavey & Senn, 2014. p. 351), sexual coercion becomes an example of 'ethical' sex, leaving women confused in their complicity.

The nuances of consent are a far more complex set of relationships. Beres (2010) conducted a study that examined how young adults communicate with their casual heterosexual partners and how they established and communicated consent. A thematic analysis produced three themes to describe their communication: (a) tacit knowing, implying that it is easy to determine when someone is interested /or not in sex (based on popular cultural representations, or previous sexual encounters), (b) claiming you 'just know' (c) refusing sex, where one person (usually women) overtly express a disinterest, discomfort or refusal to engage in sexual activity, and finally (d) active participation, which focused on "behaviors that indicate that someone is willing to have casual sex" (Beres, 2010 p. 8). Although three clear themes emerged, it did not produce a linear or clear cut process; instead, participants understood consent as complex, difficult to articulate and relied on all three themes operating simultaneously (Beres, 2010).

In the media space, many postfeminist campaigns have been activated to bring the contested meanings of consent into view with slogans such as, “consent is sexy, sex without consent is rape” (Beres, 2018, p. 181). The purpose of these campaigns is to educate men and women as broadly as possible about the nuances of consent and prevent the occurrence of 'miscommunication' in sexual relationships. There is little empirical evidence the campaigns have been successful in reducing the number of 'date' or 'acquaintance rapes' (or other forms of coercive sex). The notion of consent produces the heteronormative sex script, that is, men must seek permission from women who must grant it (Beres, 2014), implying once again, women are the 'objects' of 'men's sexual desire (and women's sexual desire is not accounted for).

Cahill (2014) moves the focus away from consent altogether, and asks readers to examine desire, this focus enables sex to be no longer an act 'done' to women and becomes something that is negotiated and enjoyed (or not) by both participants. Consent, although presented as gender-neutral, is unmistakably gendered in the way it is constructed and implemented (as in online campaigns). Perceiving women's behaviours, such as alcohol consumption, clothing and bodily adornments, and prior sexual experiences (as examples) as implying consent is another production of victim-blaming (Pateman, 1980) as men are encouraged to look for signs of consent.

As a therapist, I have negotiated the meaning of consent with many young women (and men) who are navigating complex sexual relationships (often for the first time). In the process of telling, listening and writing, I have experienced an unsettling feeling that what I have brought to the education relationship with young people has done 'nothing' to reduce sexual violation. I question whether I too have contributed to the “myths and stereotypes about sex and gender that lead people to assume consent or to feel entitled to sex” (Beres, 2014., p. 185). Strictly speaking, in my work with young people on familiarising themselves with notions of consent in long-term and casual sexual relationships, I had hoped to reduce the number of young girls presenting to therapy. Still, the referrals never waned, and many young women would repeatedly revolve back into services as a result of further victimisation. Primarily, sexual consent is constructed in various forms of social media used to educate about sexual violence but does not take into account “the implications of these constructions for understanding sexual subjects, and their connection to violence prevention” (Beres, 2018, p. 185). Instead, heterosexual power relations

are ignored, and there is no change in our sociopolitical landscape. In this sense, a 'grey area' is produced whereby, men and women find themselves navigating a complicated minefield of sexual communication and possible unwanted sexual experiences, the conditions through which the enactment of violence is made possible.

Nicola Gavey has spent decades researching the sociocultural conditions that enable the enactment of sexual violence. She examines the conditions of heterosex that produce the underlying scaffolding to the enactment of rape.

### **Gavey's Scaffolding of Rape**

Gavey (2005) provides an eloquent and reflexive piece of writing in the book *Just Sex: The cultural scaffolding of rape*, as she invites the reader to examine how normative heterosexual scripts formulate a cultural scaffolding of rape and explores how structural components of the hegemony of heterosex serve to make coercive sexual experiences normalised and accepted (Gavey, 2005; Cahill, 2014). Gavey (2005) argues that the boundaries between consent, coercion and rape become blurred in the social political conditions of heteronormativity. In the context of a formulaic 'real-rape' image (a random, violent attack perpetrated by a stranger) a juxtaposition of rape versus non-rape is produced as a singular story and, silences other forms of undesired or forced sex that fall within the realms of everyday heterosexual relations (Gavey, 1989; 1992). A 'scaffolding of rape' is produced, where sexual violence becomes more likely and more normalised.

Gavey (2005) asserts that a grey area exists between sexual assault and sex that is ethically questionable and not warranted. Women indicate something seemed wrong, or at least uncomfortable, but do not associate the experiences with sexual violence (Gavey, 2005; Cahill, 2014). For example, a man applying pressure to a woman without the threat of physical force, or a woman feeling unable to resist sex where a man is aggressive is not consent (Gavey, 2005). Gavey argues that the nuanced uncertainty in these experiences is demonstrated by refusing to categorise them as either ethical sex or sexual violence. For Gavey, it is in this grey area in the norms of heterosexuality, that the cultural scaffolding for rape is constituted:

*These every day taken-for-granted normative forms of heterosexuality work as cultural scaffolding for rape. This is not to say that these normative forms of sex are rape or that they are the same as rape. And it is certainly not to say that all, or much, of everyday sex between men and women, is rape-like. Even the most gender-stereotypically conformist patterns of sex might have nothing in common-for the particular woman and particular man involved-with the experience of rape.*

(Gavey, 2005, p. 2).

In this extract, Gavey highlights behaviours in the grey area are not comparative to rape, and not all heterosex under patriarchy is considered sexual assault. Instead, Gavey refers to the fluidity in power relations that has 'disciplinary power' as it produces and reproduces itself through a set of relations that both permeate and emerge from their construction (Gavey, 2005; Cahill, 2014). This framework produces a nuanced account of power and subjectivity as co-constructed in and through the scaffolding of heterosex. This theorisation of rape is especially important to this research as it seeks to make the sense of the nuances of the structural and social gendered power relations in the process of understanding the potentials of the stories constructed in #MeToo.

Gavey (2005) demonstrates the difficulty in defining not only rape but sexual violence as a singular story. The construction of sexual violence is not necessarily located in individual behaviours, but through a textured and nuanced set of discursive patterns of meaning making in sociopolitical and temporal relationships of gendered power (Hindes & Fileborn, 2019)

that are available to articulate the harm of sexual violence. This analysis renders other ways of making sexual coercion visible, so that women have access to the multiple ways that they experience sexual violence and make sense of their own processes.

According to a feminist-sociocultural approach, the dominant gendered dynamics of heterosexuality shape the conditions for sexual violence (Gavey & Senn, 2014), which have extreme consequences on women and their bodies. #MeTooNZ provides a digital space for women to tell their experience, and the language used within the counterspace plays a decisive role in whether an audience hears the survivor-led approach to the campaign, in their goal to empower their truth claims (Hollings, 2020). It is the interrelationships that occur between rape myths, heteronormativity, and gendered social power relations, that produce and reproduce the

dominant narratives of rape culture. Limiting women's experience through structural processes that constrain the meaning of consent through heteronormative relations of domination and subordination constitute the conditions for the *enactment of sexual violence* continually acting on the bodies of women in their everyday lives.

The enactment of gendered sexual violence has been a focus of many feminist social movements as women continually seek to transform the spaces for women's safety and wellbeing.

Responses at the structural level however, are resistant to change, and therapeutic interventions that 'fix' the harm done to women are unfortunately at a crisis level.

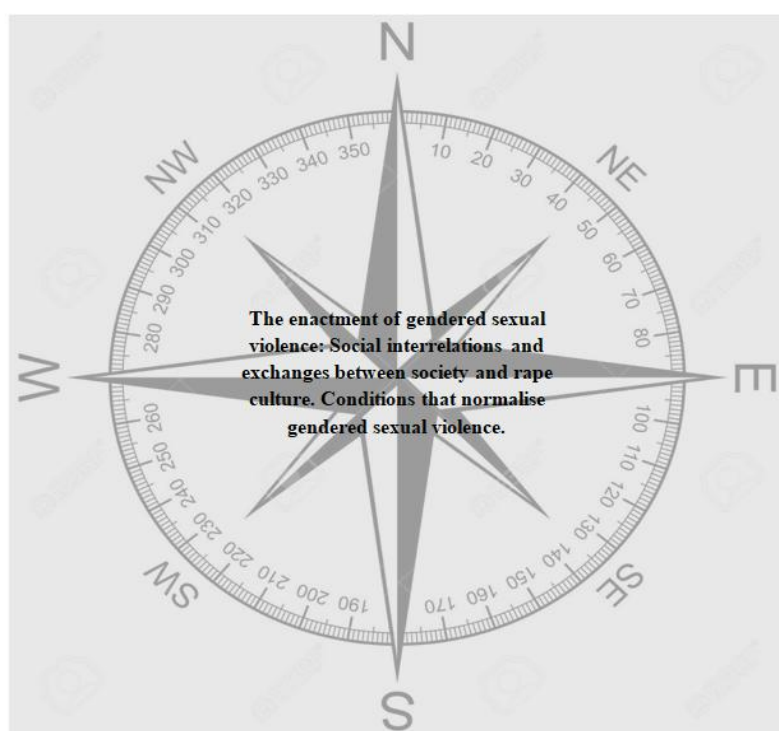


Figure two: The enactment of gendered sexual violence.

Understanding the various contributions of social movements that have circled through the process of knowledge production, we have a strong scaffold through which to make sense of the enactment of gendered sexual violence inscribing meaning onto the bodies of women. I am interested though, in an affective process that takes place in the enactment of violence that is embodied within our subjectivities and becomes understood through the felt sense of shame. In a

sense, discursive research and practice tames affect, categorising its generative force. In the next section, I utilise feminist and sociological theory to bring the embodiment of shame onto the map of gendered sexual violence. In the process, I share personal and clinical narratives in the passing on of stories that highlight the intensity of affective processes in the interconnection between enactment and embodiment; intricate actions on a social compass that is constantly moving.

### **The Embodiment of Shame**

*"Shame is an active and subversive emotion in all situations of abuse. Indeed shame shifts blame onto the wrong person, onto the powerless one – the victim – instead of the offender."*

*(Casey, 1998, p. 225).*

### **A Personal Reflection of Shame**

*The concept of muteness does not imply that women are silent: in every culture, women speak, in a variety of forms and settings, and in almost all cultures, women are important transmitters of language, through their care and teaching of children. However, as muted sounds are audible but softened, women speak in ways that are limited and shaped by men's greater social power and control, exercised both individually and institutionally.*

*(DeVault, 1990, p. 98).*

As a young child, I was described by my parents as 'difficult' as I would often act out in anger, mostly when I felt unheard, yelling and having tantrums. I showed anger towards my parents, anger towards myself and anyone else who would get too close. I expressed my emotions fully and deeply if I was sad, I would show it, cry and ask for comfort. When I was happy, I was energised, and a smile would beam ear to ear. Emotions were raw and real, and there was no filter. However, it was my expression of anger that made the most impact on my relationships and took up space in my early childhood. My mother described it as a type of force that would take over and noticed it coincided with what she believed to be my fears of 'missing out', sharing with me that when she paid attention to other people, I would respond in a rage as though I was afraid she may have forgotten me. I remember the intensity of emotion, and yet even as I reflect on the process now, I struggle to articulate what was happening. In the anger performance, my

sounds were audible but became softer and softer as I learnt the social rules of femininity, that is, young girls don't get angry, we certainly don't hit or fight. Instead, we are expected to tend to the pain of others, be receptive and nurturing and hold onto our own emotions as we are disciplined in our femininity. What it means to be feminine becomes “what girls do”, as emotion is seen as different to masculine rationality (Paecher, 2006).

In my times of distress, often when my mother was in the hospital, I would be left at home with my younger brother and father. My father, one of nine children, came from a busy catholic family and was cared for by his mother and sisters. The gender roles were very traditional, the girls attended to the younger siblings and contributed to the daily domestic tasks. The boys were outdoors, helped out in the yard, sent out to work and brought home an income. My father, a quiet man, struggles to express emotion and finds it even more challenging to respond to it. In times when my mother was absent in her own pain or hospitalised, my father did not know how to respond to my anger. He would avoid it, tell me to ‘stop it’ or withdraw from our relationship, leading to more pain. As the only girl in the home when my mother was absent, I remember caring for my brother, watching him and feeling a great sense of responsibility to ensure he was safe and nurtured. My father didn't talk about where our mother was, when she would be back or how her absence was felt in the home. Instead, he did what he knew, he went to work, making sure our basic biological needs were met and attempted to fill the missing space with activities and presents.

Then one day, my anger left, and a sense of worry took over. At eight years old, fear would rule my life, as every day I would be consumed with thoughts about contamination, fear that if I touched a door handle or any items with a possible contaminant that I would get sick, die, or worse, someone I love would. During this time, my mother was in deep sadness, and the authority to pathologise her distress was enacted. In the process of seeing my mother's pain and the medical response, I interpreted myself as ‘crazy’ - a notion that was reinforced when an occupational therapist turned up to my home to see me. Even now as I reflect on this process of pathologising, I remember the pain of not being able to explain my inner world; the ideas I had relating to my experience of sexual abuse, and the overwhelming feelings of disgust and hate towards myself that I couldn't comprehend.

The visible and prominent sounds of anger were gone, yet I continued to speak compellingly. It was impossible for my family not to see me, I would wash my hands in a ritualistic manner to the point it visibly showed on my body, my mother's distress increased as she watched her daughter's pain, and my father looked on unable to respond, again doing what he knew - to work and provide. As my mother had been pathologised in her pain, so too had I. For both of us, we used what might be termed as excess emotion as an outward expression of our pain

DeVault (1990) provides an eloquent quote that fueled this reflection. I understand my anger and anxiety were ways I could share my experience of shame, and at each point, whether communicated out loud or silently, I was met with responses shaped by gendered social power relations and the expectations of femininity. Women who are positioned in particular ways develop a language of shared meaning and are attuned to versions of 'woman talk' that texture gendered social power relations and layers of oppression (DeVault, 1990). In this narrative, I expressed my pain in the form of behaviour, and found myself 'shoved' into categories: 'difficult', 'crazy' or 'angry'. An interactive collective process occurred, that relies upon interrelations and social networks of exchanges (Braidotti, 2011), and ultimately produced 'labels' that categorised my pain and experience of childhood sexual abuse. Here we see the complexity of shameful positions emerging in circulation of our narratives.

### **Gendered Sexual Violence and Shame**

In the experience of gendered sexual violence, an embodiment of the emotionality of the trauma is expressed through a set of responses felt as anger shame and pain in an ongoing process of survival and wellbeing (Caputi, 2002). Teresa Brennan's theory on the 'transmission of affect' explains the experience of misplaced shame, that is, the masculine figure is produced through transferring his negative emotions onto a feminised subject who bears the burden of the violence in her bodily response, leaving women feeling trashed, drained and 'dirty' (Brenan, 2004; Caputi, 2002). A complicated relationship exists between gendered social power relations, the body and violence perpetrated by men. This approach provides an account of women as passive receptacles in the exchange of violence for sex, as if rape is a singular act on the bodies of women and makes women's stories of the embodiment of shame invisible. My position as a therapist has been to support women once they have already been subjected to sexual violence and abuse, and at this point, shame has well and truly become part of their everyday lives.

Therapy is an intervention that responds as an ‘ambulance at the bottom of the cliff’ effect, and through practices of individualised treatment sets out to reduce the harmful shame narrative and build affirmative narratives for women. The “transmission of affect” is one theory I have used in a therapeutic setting to inform the process of sense making of a client’s experience of shame. Still, it limits a broader social understanding to addresses the everyday material effects of living with shame.

In the therapeutic space, I have met with many women who have struggled to articulate their lived experiences in ways that demonstrate the real impact and material effects of sexual violence. In the stories I have listened to, women are forced to communicate and express themselves within restrictive discourses, grouping their felt sense of shame within emotional discursive practices, that is, through categorisations of their emotions such as anger, sadness, shame so that it can be comprehended. Treatment for women’s excess emotions in relation to her pain does not attend to the process of meaning making, but rather, it measures deficit and reproduces blame. I note the critical aspect of the telling of stories is the relationship between voice and listener embedded in socio-cultural narratives that support the deficit story of women’s excess emotion and constrain, confine and silence women's subjectivities. In the process of identifying categories to measure feelings, the particular meaning-making is lost.

Fischer (2016) describes affect as a means to address the shortcomings of poststructuralist epistemologies. Distinct from emotion, affect captures social processes and interrelationships that exist to move beyond the ‘linguistic turn’ and the domination of theories of language (Fischer, 2016). Instead, “the interest is in the ways bodies are pushed and pulled in contemporary social formations in the engineering of affective responses and how workers and citizens become emotionally engaged and affectively interpellated” (Wetherell, 2015., p. 140). Women who have been sexually violated find themselves within an affective process, that is, in response to sexual violence, an interrelation and social exchange between the enactment of sexual violence and institutional responses to women who have been sexually violated, evokes affective processes of which complex emotion builds upon. Affect often builds and assembles around a sign or figure such as the ‘hysterical woman’, and such figures become a magnet where affects accumulate and cluster, intensifying as it moves and repels between emotive subjects (hysterical women) and affecting objects (enactments of sexual violence) (Ahmed, 2008;

Sedgwick & Frank, 1995; Wetherell, 2015). In this affiliation, affect is produced as an effect of its circulation (Ahmed, 2004). The following quote from Ahmed (2004) is reproduced here as a powerful contribution to our circulating stories:

*What I am offering is a theory of passion not as the drive to accumulate (whether it be value, power or meaning), but as that which is accumulated over time. Affect does not reside in an object or sign but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (=the accumulation of affective value). Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become (Ahmed, 2004, p. 45).*

Ahmed (2004) dissects how cultural discourses evoke emotion in recipients, accounting for ‘emotional subjects’ and ‘affective objects’, inviting the two into a relationship and dismissing feelings as a pure biologism (Ahmed, 2008). I turn to the past tense to demonstrate this in my own narrative process. In the introduction, I made the statement “from a very young age, I remember feeling ashamed of my body”. However, as a child, I did not know what shame was - instead, I have fuzzy memories of thoughts, images and feelings that my body was disgusting, and I needed to hide it. My relationship with my body was filled with fear and distress, and I saw it as an entity taking up space, continually reminding me of my inadequacies. As I have tried to make sense of this process, I link it to memories of sexual abuse which had become embedded in my relationship with my body, and as a young girl, I did not have the available stories to describe what was happening.

The disgust would remain at a low-level hum in the background, reminding me repeatedly that I was a painful mix of too much and not enough. During adolescence there were very few moments without this cloud hanging over me, like a thread, the disgust would weave itself through my life rendering my body unacceptable, not what it should be and therefore, there was something wrong with me. My story is one of childhood sexual abuse. It is not necessarily how other women make sense of their lived experience of sexual violence. However, as a therapist, I have heard many stories from clients who suffered gendered violence whose bodies portrayed them in some way as the experience becomes a part of their subjectivity. Many clients shared the materiality as haunting, it lingers over them and constrains the conditions of daily life in relation to violence.

In this reflection, we see the process of an emotive subject (I) and affective objectivity in responses to my external displays of distress. That is, because shame is about an object it also constructs a subject in a particular way. Correspondingly, the emotion produces the emotive subject as a specific kind of figure, in my case an ‘oversensitive’ and ‘difficult child’, and for my mother a ‘hysterical woman’. Ahmed (2004) argues that an emotion such as hate, love (or in my case shame) arranges its subject as hateful or loveable (or in my case disgusting and unlovable). Here we see the process shapes the emotive subject and provides a ‘performative identity’ and subject position. “The emoter and the object of their emotion become inserted into conventions, canons and histories of meaning-making, formed, shaped, and fixed” (Wetherell, 2015., p. 158). For both my mother and I, we forged an identity of being ‘unlovable’, as we learnt the affective objects (family and institutional responses to mental illness) interpreted our distress as a pathological process, producing an emotive shameful figure of a ‘hysterical women’ and ‘difficult child’. Affect resides within the interrelationships between objects and subjects in ways that make emotional reaction possible and inevitable (Wetherell, 2015).

### **Gendered Shame**

Feminist research has a long-standing interest in the representation and experience of affect on women's lives, with numerous theories and studies conducted to determine how social, political, epistemological, and metaphysical queries can be negotiated when affect and emotions form part of understanding their effects (Fischer, 2018). Of particular importance to the narrative of this thesis is the work of Sandra Bartky, who provides a robust analysis of gendered shame as an affective process that is more intensely felt by women. Characterising it as the “distressed apprehension of the self as inadequate or diminished” (Bartky, 1990, p. 86), shame's intensity is dependent on the social relationships, or context women are engaged with. A confronting example of gendered shame is articulated by Shabot and Korem in their article *domesticating bodies: the role of shame in obstetric violence* (2018). The research was conducted based on Bartky's (1990) argument that shame is understood as pervasive, and a product of the continuous and perpetual disciplining of women's embodied selves by differing forms of oppression that interconnect sexism and racism. Shabot and Korem (2018) assert gendered shame is experienced by women in the labour room, due to the “reifying gaze that transforms women's bodies into dirty, overly sexual, and not-feminine-enough” (p. 384) in the demand of good

motherhood, filled with sacrifice and the interests of others above her own. A woman's body is seen as shameful because they live in a world where they are viewed as objectionable, to serve others and looked at as innately inferior. “Gendered shame objectifies and breaks down women, teaching them that they are not proper subjects, they have no real agency, and if they attempt to gain it, they risk losing their femininity” (Shabot & Korem, 2018, p. 394). Hidden practices of oppression in maternity care effectively produces the condition for silencing women’s experiences of bodily dehumanisation (Shabot & Korem, 2018).

Another prominent writer is Simone de Beauvoir (1997) whose book *The Second Sex* highlighted the close connection between the embodiment of shame told by young girls and their painful experience of shame during puberty. Beauvoir examines the significance of gendered social subjectivity in association with varying experiences of adolescent development through which young women perceive menstruation as a burden. As previously discussed, women are viewed as inferior, and as such, femininity is the symbol of subordination. Beauvoir's research threads together the reoccurring themes articulated in feminist research, that is, the association of shame to womanhood, the body, women's sexuality (Bartky, 1990; Fischer, 2018). Thus, subjectivities are recognised as an extension of a women's organic body, in part, by its multiplicity of interrelations with institutional responses to sexual violence and the shameful positions women are placed into as a result of violence and sexual victimisation by men. Feminist research on gendered shame and embodiment locates disciplinary power and the male gaze as inscribing meaning on women’s bodies, and women’s bodies are rendered a body without organs, disposable and insignificant (Braidotti, 1994). The meaning of shame then, suggests a movement in the enactment and embodiment of sexual violence, and here I turn to Elsbeth Probyn (2005) as a writer in the telling and listening process of social narratives.

### **Probyn’s Social Narrative of Shame**

Probyn (2005) provides examples of personal narratives to understand shame as an affective process, in her book *Blush: Faces of Shame*. This narrative of shame is vital to contextualise in this research, as it provides a social narrative to the complicated process of shame and demonstrates the interrelations and social exchanges that enable shame as a felt experience for women positioned within the enactment of sexual violence. Through my reflexive process, I struggle with the availability to articulate the meaning of shame and the echo of silence remains.

Not only do women struggle with the humiliation they experience, but they are also faced with the difficulty of trying to articulate precisely what the affect is. Probyn sought to understand the politics of shame as a productive and social process, which comes about through an interest in and a connection with other people. Shame does not exist without interest, if a person does not care about the responses of others, shame cannot be felt. In turn, this reciprocity has the potential to build care for the other and community via re-evaluations of the self (Probyn et al., 2019). In respect to the me-too movement, this research is interested in how sexual violence is storied. The media platform has the potential to either reinforce shame as an affect that negatively impacts individuals, or it has the potential to be productive in social justice transformations. Probyn's work on shame adapts a juxtaposition of theoretical ideas with lived situations and her own experiences. As a survivor with diverse subjectivities, it is vital to weave my narrative and draw on situated knowledge as I make sense of her narratives.

### **Out of Place**

Probyn (2005) elegantly narrates a childhood filled with movement, whereby, as a member of an army family, they would unexpectedly be redeployed to countries outside her origin. As a result, she describes a sense of being 'out of place' and an accompanying shame. Probyn provides examples of trying to fit in, such as changing her accent to match the community, however, no matter how much she tried it never led to a sense of belonging and resulted in out-of-place-shame. In reading the chapter *Shame, Bodies' Places*, I was reminded of my mother's stories. I would often hear her talk about 'not fitting in' and describing herself as 'alienated' and on reflection, I have come to realise these periods would usually coincide with distress and memories of her historical sexual abuse. During these times, my mother would be labelled as mentally ill, the more she expressed her emotions, the more she would be pushed away, seen as a crazy woman. The medical model categorised her as mentally ill, confining her excess of feminine emotion to hospital as she breached the norms of femininity, she was not calm, or submissive, or quiet. Probyn demonstrates this process in the following extract:

*The less opposition you encounter, the greater the possibility there is for interest to flourish. But equally, the more interested you are in fitting in, the more you are likely to feel ashamed when the interest is not enough to move smoothly in another culture and place (Probyn, 2005, p. 39).*

Periods of attempting to 'fit in' and push down her emotions, resulted in accolades of support; the more my mother showed interest in the medical professional's answers, the more attention they would show her. However, on the return home, she would continue to experience distress, and her label of mental illness remained, she could not move smoothly into a space/place that viewed distress as an illness. Then there was me, a young girl watching this process unfold. At times of distress, my mother would be unavailable, either in her own isolation or through her confinement to hospital. I have vivid memories of feeling lost and alone during these periods. One memory at 10 years old stands out of my mother trying to explain to me why she needed to go away. "I need to go and have a rest, I am tired". Unable to express her distress was tiring, and, as Probyn (2005) writes, women who express emotion will be dismissed as hysterical. In my narrative, my mother's suffering was labelled as 'craziness'. Mental health services spent many years, via different health professionals, trying to make sense of why she would not 'get better'. A pathological process resulted in an array of diagnostic labels, including: Bipolar Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, and finally, Borderline Personality Disorder, all to contain her mental distress and finally positioning her as a 'hysterical woman'. For my mother, her 'out of place' experience led to feelings of shame and pain, resulting in several suicide attempts, through her self-evaluation of her entire existence, to the point she no longer wanted to exist at all.

During a conversation with my mother in early adulthood, I began to apprehend her story of shame constituted through her medical discourse; a genetic predisposition, a lack of resilience, or behaviour that was intended to be 'attention-seeking'. Through this discursive practice, the story of sexual abuse remained untold. Nobody asked the question, "what happened?" to listen to her story, rather the professionals and family members would try to treat the symptoms. In childhood, my mother learnt that it was not acceptable to talk about her abuse, it was a 'taboo' subject, and my grandmother, raised in a catholic family, found it impossible to discuss sexuality. All these messages become historical and situated knowledge about sexual violence, shame and mental distress.

The habitus is one social theory that Probyn uses in her book to provide an understanding of the complexity of our bodies and social relationships. Our bodies speak of their pasts in everyday actions, gestures, manners and ways of inhabiting social spaces, instinctively knowing when they

are at ease in a situation, when there are rules and expectations and let us know when we clearly do not fit. The rules are predominantly unspoken, but the habitus becomes second nature, incorporating the practices and allowing the body to move quickly in the space of life (Probyn, 2005). As a child with a parent diagnosed with a mental illness and having a lived experience of sexual abuse and shame, I learnt several rules about how to express myself emotionally, that is, to be distressed is to be 'crazy', it must be hidden at all costs. It was not acceptable to expose myself to vulnerability, and I learnt to pack it up and forget about it. My own feeling of being 'out of place' in many ways mirrored my mother's; understood as having an excess of emotion. In this narrative, it is possible to see shame, not as a one-dimensional response to sexual violence, but as a part of many different and intersecting threads. The action of disciplinary power constrained, the reaction from family, the unspoken social rules about affect and mental illness, and complicated mother-daughter relationship through histories of childhood experiences of sexual abuse that were untellable, were all threads in my complex weaving of shame.

The habitus does not tell shameful stories in their singularity, but rather, the theory considers how social structures extend to the body and are incorporated into our ways of being in the world. Historically, socially, and culturally located experiences of class, gender and ethnicity; are layers that texture the tapestry of shame. Probyn (2005) refers to Bourdieu's description of the habitus as the embodiment of history, internalised as second nature. In my narrative, this can be evidenced to describe how I witnessed my mother's mental illness and the complex unspoken rules I learnt to fit in. In using the habitus as a framework and threading my narrative, it demonstrates the complexities in the embodiment of shame.

To Probyn, it is the significance of shame and the way it functions as a kind of ethical touchstone that is critical. In using the narrative of Probyn, I can transpose the intensity and discomfort of shame in my reflections, and understand the embodiment of shame through the lens of the habitus. Probyn (2005) writes "shame demands acknowledgment" (p. xii). It forces the reader to think through our actions and how it may have resulted in the sense of shame, and the possible productive - metamorphosis affect the emotion may evoke. Probyn maintains this is made possible as a consequence of its connection with interest, without which we could not register shame; we simply wouldn't care (Probyn, 2005; Watkins, 2006).

This is where the limitations of Probyn's work arise in the context of this thesis. In purely following the social narratives written through the "*Blush: Faces of Shame*" there is something missing in the understanding of embodiment of violence, when our investment, or at least interest in a relationship with a perpetrator (or responders) to gendered sexual violence is implied. I argue this is not always the case. Gendered social power relations that enable sexual coercion and violence blame women who embody both the violence and shame, and assume that the response needs to be feminised through care. This limitation resonates with the earlier narrative of the "transmission of affect" that lacks a meaningful context in the enactment of sexual violence, and implies women are also responsible. I wondered how Probyn's writing might apprehend the multiple bodily expressions of the affective process that is enacted through sexual violence. What can be heard in the telling for those women who exceed the expected shame response? The habitus does enable us to localise the multiple movements in passing on stories as we engage in the telling, listening and writing of the enactment and embodiment of

violence and shame.

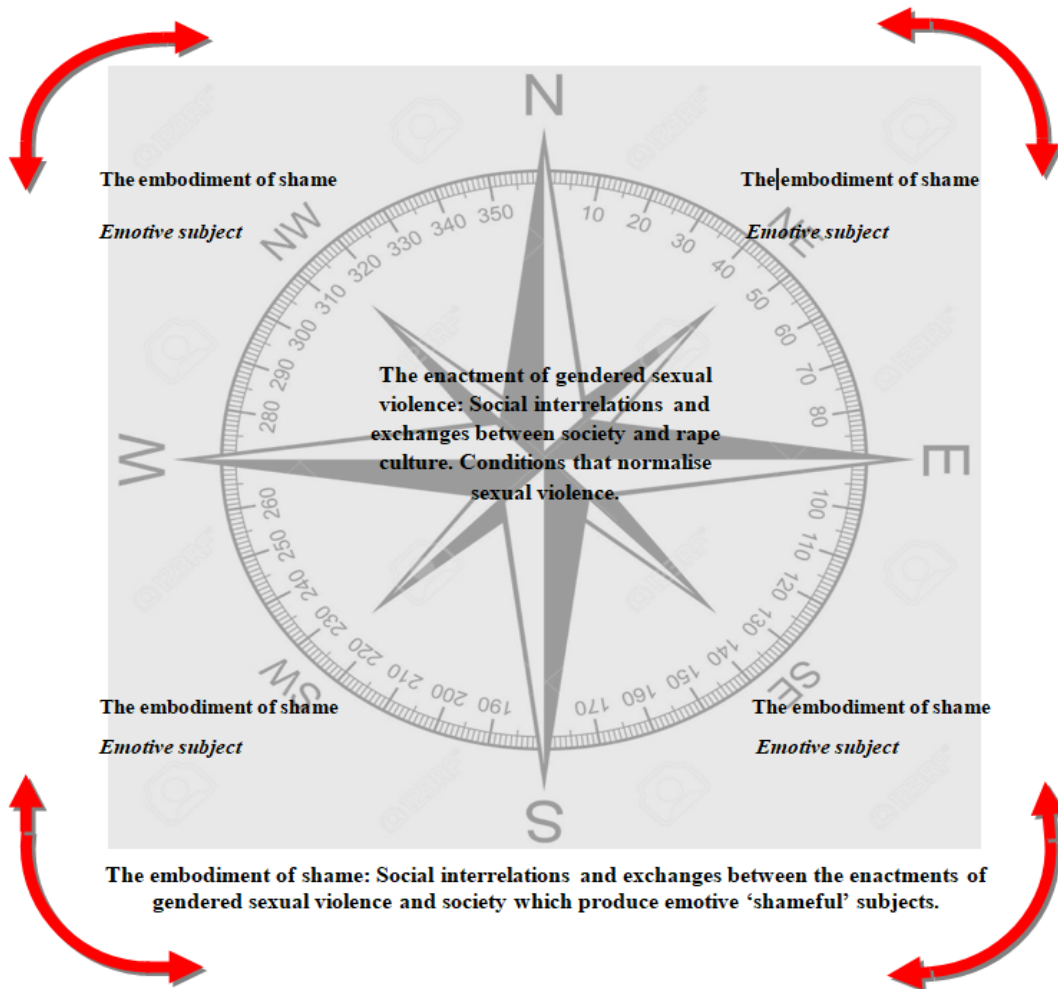


Figure three: The enactment of gendered sexual violence and embodiment of shame interweave.

### **Enactment and Embodiment Interweave**

This research project endeavours to provide a framework for understanding how the enactment of gendered sexual violence and embodiment of shame are interwoven, to develop a narrative that continues the movement to change the conditions of women's lives. In the narrative of this thesis, I seek to understand how sexual violence and shame together produce material effects on women's embodied well-being. As the narrative circulates in and through multiple sites of knowledge production, I produce a social compass as a strategy for circulating the enactment and embodiment as entangled flows in mutual constitutive relations. Each part on the compass flows

in and through women's bodies in the construction of subjectivities (Taguchi & Palmer, 2014). We can begin to see the map emerging with a complex intersection between gendered sexual violence and shame. "Many feminine and feminist interventions have focused on the issue of widespread sexism and commodification of women's bodies in contemporary politics and media" (Bonfiglioli, 2016, p.1). Yet, these interventions have failed to consider how gendered bodies are simultaneously sexually violated and positioned as shameful.

The social compass does not represent existing conditions, rather, it constitutes the production of spaces in between the different narratives that are inherent in understanding the hidden injustice (shame) that exists within the enactment of sexual violence. To address enactment without embodiment is to completely silence the material effects and 'out of place' experiences women embody and report to medical professionals, families or institutions. More often than not, these narratives go on to be misinterpreted or ignored, and the distress associated with shame is seen as 'hysteria', 'craziness' or 'fragility'. In the absence of compassion and/or acknowledgment of the gendered social power relationships, women find themselves trying to express the effects in ways that are detrimental, such as, suicidal ideation, deliberate self-harm, or in my case compulsive rituals. As mentioned in chapter one, the purpose of the research is to demonstrate the complex interweaving of enactment and embodiment as new ideas to possibly put motion back into a social movement. In this instance, I argue that the discursive premise of enactment makes the affective process of embodiment powerful, radical and provides the means for affect to travel (Wetherell, 2012). The critical point to make here is that the relationship between enactment and embodiment is vital in order to examine an affective-discursive social action that deviates from individual responsibility and provides an alternative framework for the advancement of ethical activism. If affect is set up in a singular story, social movements end up with only one part of the picture, and women go on to experience intense shame which has dire consequences. We need to find ways to make the process visible, if not, we risk trying to investigate the unspeakable and women continue to be put in the position of the storyteller to effect change (Wetherell, 2012).

## Chapter 4: Analysis & Discussion Part Two: Shameful Figures Emerge

### Aotearoa New Zealand's Shameful Statistical Figure

Sexual violence is often measured using post-positivist epistemologies that measure the effects of abuse against women through categories that marginalise experience. Institutional responses (e.g. criminal justice system) attend to extreme cases of sexual assault based on constraints, rules and criteria set by an authoritative figure (e.g., law). In the process of investigating the statistics for this research, I noticed a missing voice (mine included) that did not account for the social relationships or conditions that silence women or the complex ways in which women speak about their affective process that form their subjectivities. The following statistical narratives offers a glimpse into the social injustice of gendered violence, quantitatively speaking, and are likely to produce a misleading figure, one which does not account for the varying ways women talk about sexual violence and shame.

Nevertheless, statistics gathered by the Ministry of Justice (2020) indicate approximately 186 000 women are sexually assaulted every year, whereby; only 7% of offences are reported to New Zealand Police (Ministry of Justice, 2020). Without disregarding statistics that indicate women are not the only victims of sexual violence, it is established that 90% of all sexual assault victims over the age of 15 are women (New Zealand Police, 2019), and 82% of all sexual violence offenders (resulting in conviction) are men (Department of Corrections, 2016). Additionally, intimate partner violence perpetrated by men accounts for a high proportion of physical, emotional and sexual abuse against women, with recent statistics showing Māori (29.1%), Pacific (14.9%), Asian (3.8%) and European/other (16%) women had been sexually abused in a heterosexual relationship (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2017). Through these statistical descriptions, we see a clear picture of gendered sexual violence as an epidemic in Aotearoa New Zealand, producing a *shameful statistical figure*.

It was in a supervision session where I termed statistical narratives as a *misleading figure* and began to wonder whether there were other possible *shameful figures* women were categorised into in the context of gendered sexual violence and institutional responses. I experienced a sense of responsibility to 'figure out' how to account for these missing voices, and what other characters may exist in the social interrelations and exchanges between institutional responses,

the enactment of gendered sexual violence and the effects on women's bodies and emotional well-being that result in embodied shame. I take up a contextual 'figurative' investigation to demonstrate how the map of gendered sexual violence 'plays out' within dominant institutional responses. I use the term figure as a metaphor to describe the process in and through which women's bodies are positioned as individually responsible for the enactment of sexual violence, and the ways social interrelations and exchanges shape women's emotive experiences which become embodied. I draw on Rosi Braidotti's (2011) theory on figuration, to introduce some formidable figures, each one moving in and through institutional responses to sexual violence and the production of shame.

Braidotti (2011) describes figures as "materialistic mappings of situated, i.e., embedded and embodied social positions" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 4) that are intricate and impervious to boundaries that restrict or reduce them. In this research, different figures represent the ever-changing institutional manifestations of problematic and alternative subject positions, which have the potential to blame and silence women who have been sexually violated. Critical to this analysis is understanding that figures are "committed to account for the material conditions that sustain these different subject positions" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 11), and provide insight into the complex interrelations and social exchanges that take place in the categorisation of women's subjectivities (Braidotti, 2011).

In this narrative, figures (more than a metaphor) provide a framework to demonstrate the shameful positions women are placed into, and how these spaces may evoke affective processes that produce emotive subjects (e.g., shameful) as women attempt to make sense (or in some cases non-sense) of sexual victimisation. I bring into view several formidable shameful figures in this telling, as they characterise the complicated politics that enable sexual victimisation, and demonstrate the social interrelations and exchanges that maintain women's silence and shame.

Braidotti (2011) constructs figuration as a "politically informed map" (p.5) and in this thesis, it allows the process to take into account the political agenda that may also come into play in a digital counterspace, alongside providing an opportunity to take a glimpse into the social narratives and possible figures produced in the #MeTooNZ movement.

The following section will demonstrate the social activity between enactment and institutional responses to sexual violence to introduce *shameful figures* embodied by women. Braidotti's approach enables me to bring into the process of telling, listening and writing about this counterspace, a collective social voice that is attuned to, rather than focused on, individual stories. This enables us to challenge the practice of categorising women into dominant stories of victimhood, maintained through sociopolitical gender normativity. To achieve a clear picture of the social relationships that allow sexual violence to operate, it is necessary to examine dominant institutional responses to sexual violence and demonstrate the interrelations between enactment and embodiment. The following section provides a contextual analysis of Aotearoa's criminal justice system and the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) - sensitive claims unit that provides therapy to women affected by sexual violence, as both are dominant institutional responses to women's victimisation.

### **Misleading Figures**

During my professional career, one of the most impactful narratives women have shared are the responses they receive after they disclose an experience of sexual violence, whether that is family, friends, colleagues or professionals. However, it is the response from the criminal justice system that has led to some of the most detrimental harm for women who have been sexually violated (Jordan, 2011). Intersections of law, texts and sexuality reveal a process of legal mapping which contextualise and locate women within gendered and sexualised identities that do not easily conform to singular positions (Chatterjee, 2006). In a report written by New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (2019) 23,739 sexual victimisation reports filed to police between July 2014 and June 2018 were analysed to ascertain how many cases proceeded to prosecution, and how long the process took. This type of study had not been conducted in Aotearoa previously, in that; it included all sexual victimisation reported to police across diverse age groups and demographics. Results found that of the 31% of sexual victimisations, only 11% resulted in conviction, and of those 6% resulted in a prison sentence, leaving many cases unable to proceed past the initial stages. Furthermore, the institutional process was long and arduous and only 21% of women were notified of the outcome within six months, 50% waited up to a year, and 87% waited two years (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2019).

Feminist researchers and activists have vigorously campaigned for changes in the criminal justice system, and reviews have come and gone, but women who have been sexually assaulted continue to voice the process as demoralising, long, arduous and re-traumatising (Kingi & Jordan, 2009; Jordan, 2011; New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2019). In Aotearoa, there have been many reviews and amendments made to the process of reporting sexual violence and subsequent prosecution, with the intent to provide ethical responses to women who have been sexually assaulted and increase disclosure of sexual violence (Jordan, 2011; Rowe, 2009). However, our justice system continues to use victim-blaming language (the enactment of sexual violence in action) to defend perpetrators in court and women rarely see their abusers prosecuted, let alone convicted. Within this legal landscape emerges a figure of a woman who meets the criteria as a *real victim* counted as worthy of a response from the criminal justice system. The *ideal victim* and *real rape* are figures that develop as a result of rape culture characteristics, whereby, rape is seen as an act of physical violence, or a forceful penetration committed by a stranger during a random attack in public, against a ‘moral’ subject: white and physically injured while resisting sexual assault (Du Mont et al., 2003). In the legal context, an authoritarian character is placed into a position to determine whether a women’s experience fits within the figuration of criminal law. In this sociopolitical relationship, a figure is produced of the *real victim*: a woman who meets the criteria of a cultural narrative of rape. Conversely, we see configurations of victimisation that then produce an *unworthy victim*, or worse, *deserving victim*. As a result of these configurations *misleading figures* are produced, as women who do not meet criteria are not counted in *New Zealand’s shameful statistical figure*.

Despite attempts to improve responses to sexual crime and encourage women to come forward, women continue to be sexually victimised. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MWA) published findings from a cross-departmental research project intended to examine effective treatment for adult victims-survivors of sexual assault. Prevalence of repeat sexual victimisation emerged as a critical concern showing that 25% of women had experienced more than one incident of sexual violence (Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2012). As a result of that evidence, discussions with government and non-government (NGO’s) agencies were conducted to hear their experiences of interventions and responses to women who had been re-victimised. Conversations indicated outcomes across services were varied but tended to focus on reducing mental distress as a result

of sexual violence, rather than preventing further victimisation. Kingi and Jordan (2009), conducted research that examined pathways to recovery for women who have been sexually assaulted, focusing on experiences of engaging with formal and informal networks, including the criminal justice system. Outcomes found several reasons why women didn't report sexual violence; including fear they would not be believed (49%), the possible negative impact on family/whanau (46 %), shame or whakamā (34 %), fear of the perpetrator (34%) and fear of the nature of the perpetrators retaliation (29%). On the other hand, the most frequently mentioned reasons for reporting to police were to hold perpetrators responsible for their violence (41%) to protect more women being exposed to the risk of sexual assault (38 %), and the fear it would happen again if left unreported (19 %). Through the narrative of the legal response to sexual violence, and in my experience as a therapist with a history of sexual violence, I noticed how the narrative of individualised reporting and treatment of women's pain remained a singular story. Understanding the narrative of individual response in the intervention, there emerges a figuration of a woman who experiences severe distress as a result of sexual violence 'done' to them and constitutes the 'hysterical victim'.

On reflection, I was reminded of a recent conversation during trauma-focused training for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR), where clinicians queried the use of EMDR for clients who were proceeding to testify in court and give evidence against the perpetrator of sexual violence. The question arose, should EMDR start before going to court? On further enquiry from the facilitator, it was clear that the clinician was concerned that EMDR would alleviate the client's level of distress (concerning her past sexual assault), and this would likely impact her 'display' of emotion on the stand. In this instance, the main concern expressed by the clinician was that if the client did not 'act' in a particular way (demonstrate hysteria), she would not be believed. Painting a picture of a *hysterical figure* was mobilized in the story as an identity necessary to show a judge or jury the assault had detrimental consequences, and therefore, must be considered a *real victim*. For a woman to appear in court the figure of a calm, assertive and empowered woman would lead to assumptions 'no harm' had been done, and perhaps in some way, consent was implied.

## Pathologised Figures

In Aotearoa, despite our high rates of gendered sexual victimisation, there is minimal funding for women to receive support, with the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) providing the most funded services. ACC is a government insurance company described as a ‘no-fault’ scheme covering everyone, including visitors, who are injured as a result of an accident in New Zealand (ACC, 2019). The institution provides a set of specific rules to determine whether a person meets criteria for financial/social assistance and is well known for its response to physical injury and medical misadventure. However, it is also the umbrella organisation that provides therapy /financial support for victim-survivors of sexual violence. Through the operation of the ‘sensitive claims unit’, ACC determines who is eligible to access support and for how long. ACC provides a list of acceptable events (acts of sexual violence) under schedule 3 of the accident compensation act (2001) to determine whether or not a client has a mental injury as a result of sexual victimisation (ACC, 2019). ACC sensitive claims data reports that between 1 July 2013 and 30 June 2018, a total of 31,042 claims were lodged to access resources and psychological therapy for victim-survivors of sexual violence (ACC, 2019).

During the initial assessment process, clients meet with a mental health clinician for a series of face to face sessions, to produce an early planning report outlining the ‘event’, psychological impacts, and goals for therapy. Written reports are then sent to an ACC case manager to determine whether or not they meet criteria and receive cover for treatment. Anyone who falls outside the legitimated measure of harm is declined and, except for two closure meetings, receive no further support. Before 2009, funding for counselling/therapy was provided by agencies specialising in sexual trauma, and was reasonably simple to access. What followed was an institutional shift in the meaning of harm that required higher level measurement of psychopathology and disordered harm.

Clients that meet criteria for financial, social and long-term treatment, also have to accept a diagnosis of mental illness, placing themselves at risk of further victimisation and discrimination. (Binning, 2020; Jordan, 2011). Here we see the process of pathologising women's distress as an ‘illness’ and the figure of a *pathologised* woman emerges. Hume (2010) reported counsellors and psychotherapists expressed ethical concerns about this pathway to treatment, due to the possibility of re-traumatising women, as they were now required to recount the sexual abuse

and/or assault to an external assessor, all the while, holding the stress and knowledge that their future support relies on the outcome of this process (see diagram below).

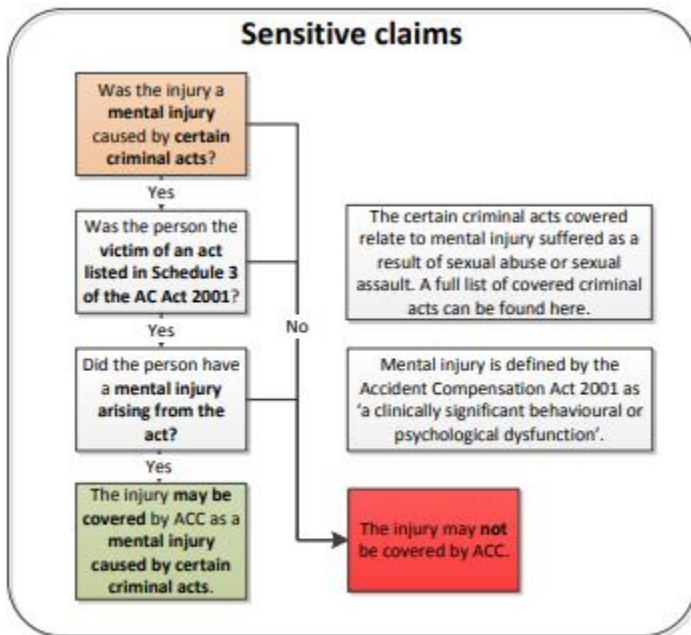


Figure four: ACC sensitive claims pathway to treatment and funding.

<https://www.acc.co.nz/assets/im-injured/21254d3ca5/sensitive-claims-cover-decisions.pdf>

Furthermore, therapists strongly rejected the idea of clients being forced to accept a diagnosis of mental illness for their responses to a traumatic experience (Hume, 2010). As an ACC registered counsellor, I have been a part of this process and have seen firsthand how this approach has the potential to further distress women already struggling with shame, pain and resulting self-harm and suicidal ideation. Although it does not compare to the criminal court process, it does show a similar social relationship within an institutional response to sexual victimisation, that is, once again the victim-survivor needs to justify their reactions and prove they are a particular kind of *victim* to be heard and receive life-saving therapy. As identified in the following media article

*Counselling Services Centre manager Emma Castle said the mother-of-three's claim for counselling for sexual abuse she had suffered as a child was rejected by ACC two months ago on the grounds that she had not suffered a significant mental injury. "The counsellor who submitted the claim made it very clear that sexual abuse was the reason why she had*

*suicidal ideation and was self-harming," Ms Castle said. "It took them six months to make that decision. Four days after receiving notification that the ACC claim was denied, the client passed away".*

(Collins, 2010,

[https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10641028](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10641028)).

A figure emerges of a *pathologised* woman, one that must fit a criterion script and position as mentally ill. Although the 'events' are broader than the confines of the criminal justice system's *real victim*, the social relationship between an authoritarian character, e.g., case manager or ACC psychology advisor (for more complex cases), makes a judgment as to whether clients experiences 'count' as sexual violence and have, in fact, caused a mental injury. The social interaction that occurs here is similar to the criminal justice systems, in that it takes agency away from the client's experience, and instead, produces *missing figures* of women who don't conform to the confines of a *pathologised* medical model, diagnosed as mentally ill as a direct result of sexual victimisation. I recognise myself in the *missing figures*, not mentally ill, in fact, quite the contrary, my experience has led me to a career and tertiary education that has given me many options for economic stability and emotional growth. Does this mean I no longer require a counterspace to continue to understand how childhood sexual abuse impacts on my overall wellbeing and intimate relationships?

In the process of pathologising, another figure emerges of a *broken woman*, one who cannot possibly function or contribute to society. ACC is then able to provide financial and/or social support to women in the process of continual surveillance to ensure they are 'making signs of progress' and meeting the agreed treatment goals. In the event of 'successful' therapy, an endpoint is determined to discharge the client from services. In some instances, this process further enforces the *broken figure* as women fear they will lose the one counterspace they have experienced as validating and 'life-changing' and remain *broken* to ensure they continue to access support. A figure of *wellness* - a woman who is employed and meets the criteria of functioning in everyday life, does not meet criteria for the right kind of victim and they find themselves alone navigating a terrifying adjustment to life without therapeutic interventions. As a therapist, I have seen this process unfold and noticed a dramatic decline in women's overall wellbeing.

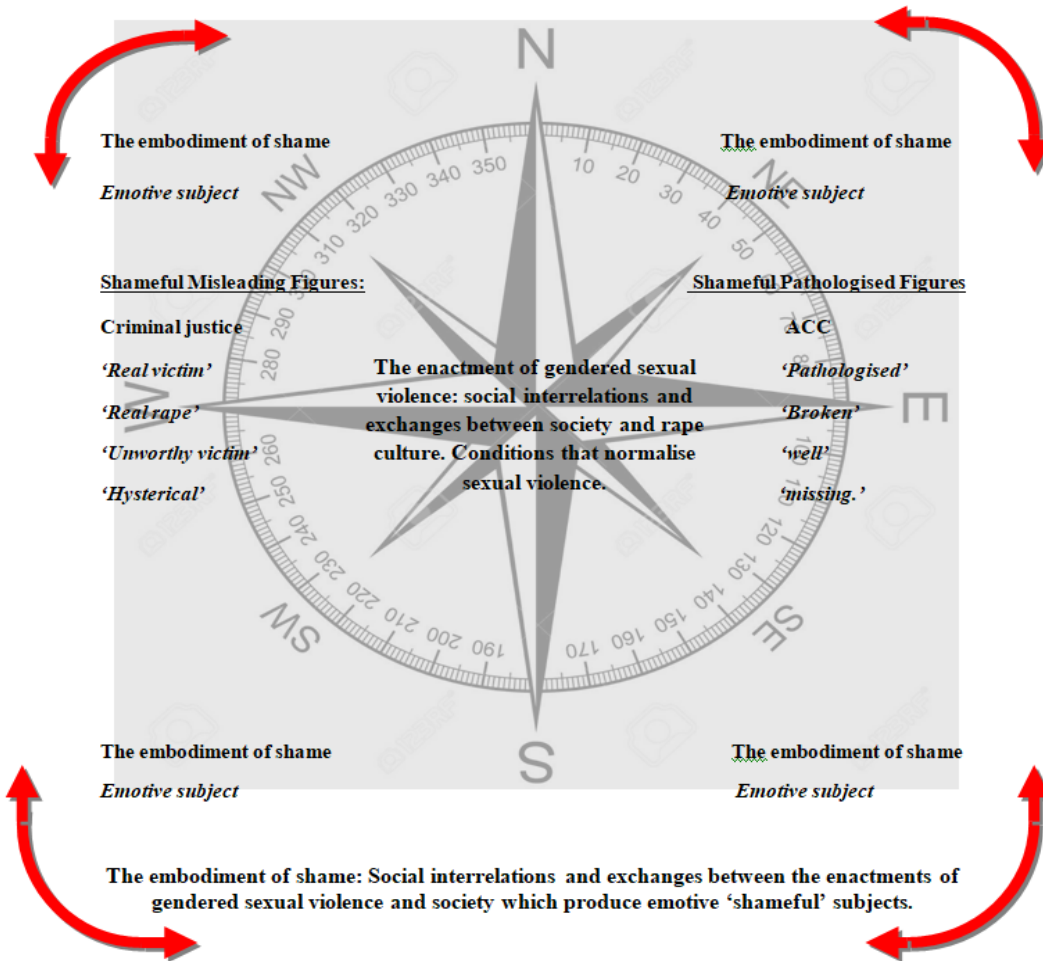


Figure five: The interrelations between enactment, embodiment and institutional responses produce *shameful figures*.

In each of these formidable figures, shame becomes the overall shroud that women embody, as they continue to be identified as individually responsible for the *enactment* of sexual violence. In the process of the enactment and embodiment of violence, lays shame, and women *embody* the emotive product of their figuration (shame). In the cartography of sexual violence, women are not rigidly placed on the social compass they move between different *shameful figures* depending on where they are in the system and the types of institutional responses they receive, occupying multiple places/figures at once. Within the process of *enactment* and *embodiment*, a nomadic consciousness takes place. Nomadic subjectivity is movement, placing bodies in motion, and through the ebbs and flows of the enactment of sexual violence and embodiment of shame. In a sense, women take on a nomadic subjectivity, living in transition, shifting and changing between *shameful figures*. This does not mean that women cannot (or are unwilling) to

develop a stable identity to perform particular functions in any given intersection, but rather through movement, no given identity is fixed (Braidotti, 1994). “The nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessary situated, connections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of national, fixed identity. The nomad has no passport-or has too many of them” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 33). In the process of making sense of women's pain as pathological, they are left feeling ashamed of their bodies and selves, forced into (or accepting) an institutional identity that defines who they are. In using Braidotti's (2011) figuration theory, subjectivities can be articulated through the various formidable *shameful figures* that emerge in an analysis of institutional responses and appear on the social compass (above).

“Transpositions of idea's, norms, practices, communities and theoretical genealogies have to be allowed and even encouraged” (Braidotti, 2006., p. 33). In a sense, the evolving social compass is a new idea that shows the interconnection between enactment and embodiment as a means to make visible the reciprocity between gendered sexual violence and shame. In the process of developing the social compass, the circulation of multiple knowledges enables feminist activism to address restrictive narratives, and possibly reduce women's felt sense of shame. In this analysis, we see dominant institutional responses to gendered sexual violence produce *shameful figures*.

Armed with a social compass that encapsulates social interrelations and exchanges between enactment, embodiment and institutional responses, I now turn my attention to #MeTooNZ as a media response to sexual violence. The media is an institutional response within itself, that is, the platform can produce socio-cultural narratives that can be reframed and comprehended as everyday understandings (e.g., rape culture). The relationship between the media and its audience can provide exchanges of stories for sharing and re-sharing narratives, which over time, become ingrained in culture; unquestionable and accepted as truth. In this project, developing a type of social compass to understand institutional responses, such as #MeTooNZ's journalistic platform, provides insight into how we can further advance feminist social movements. Here I seek to answer the question, how does #MeTooNZ respond to women's experiences of sexual violence?

## **Chapter 5: Analysis & Discussion Part Three: The Social Compass in Action**

*Hundreds of women contacted Stuff as part of our #MeTooNZ investigation. We listened to them. Then we analysed their stories and found a series of pattern, threads that connected one woman to another.*

*This is what workplace sexual harassment and assault looks like.*

*This is their voice*

<https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2019/02/metooz/one-year-on/#section-LPoUAiqe4u>

### **# MeTooNZ: A Response to Workplace Sexual Harassment**

Alison Mau encouraged survivors of sexual victimisation in the workplace to contact a hotline or email and share their stories. In the practices of investigative journalism, the stories were triaged, in a process of filtering verifiable truth that that would make ‘headlines’. If a ‘story’ met the criteria the victim-survivor was allocated a journalist who would make contact, and proceed with an investigative approach to sharing their story (Hollings, 2020). A journalistic perspective was applied to instigate the claims made, seek verification and proof where necessary (to defend against potential legal claims) and provide a chance for any further comments from organisations (e.g., workplaces) including the alleged perpetrator. Once the report was complete and was considered to be “legally safe, accurate, and balanced, it was published” (Hollings, 2020, p. 229). The aim of the editorial was to honour all the (verifiable) women's voices and provide a qualitative analysis of the hundreds of emails, messages and phone calls. Out of the 400 contacts, 180 were selected for further exploration, and approximately 20 were investigated (by 10 different journalists). Up until January 9th 2020, 49 stories have been published both on respondents and broader systemic issues related to sexual victimisation across several dominant institutions including; the defense force, education providers, law firms, sports teams and national politics (Hollings, 2020).

One year on from the launch of #MeTooNZ Alison Mau published an editorial "#MeTooNZ: One year on what has changed?" The publication presents 5 stories from women who had contacted the journalist team to investigate workplace sexual harassment and assault. Each was

given a video clip (with an anonymous actor to represent parts of their interview) and a corresponding article capturing the reoccurring themes on their media site.

*In this series, Stuff explores four major themes we identified as pervasive in women's experiences of sexual harassment. These are: women blaming themselves for what have happened to them and how they dealt with it; a sense of powerlessness and how hard it is to report; being re-victimized by the process of making a complaint, and the long-term impacts on their lives and careers did speak up.*

<https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2019/02/metooz/one-year-on/#section-LPoUAige4u>

As this project seeks to understand how #MeTooNZ responds to women's experiences of sexual violence, I have focused on aspects of the publication that refer to women's stories of sexual violation and assault. It is outside the scope of this project to thoroughly scrutinise the hundreds of articles published by #MeTooNZ, however, this analysis aims to demonstrate the social compass in action and take a glimpse at the potential for the social movement #MeTooNZ. In this section, I attempt to capture embodiment and enactment as an embodied process and the possible emergence of shameful figures. I will draw on Gavey's scaffolding of rape, as it enables me to examine how the movement responded to rape culture. Gavey's work on sexual coercion and Probyn's understanding of the habitus are brought together to make sense of the process of the embodiment of shame – how women's bodies are implicated in everyday actions, gestures, manners and ways of inhabiting the workplace (Probyn, 2005).

In the first narrative, the reader is confronted with the theme "*I've had enough*" which tells the story of women working in the hospitality industry. Erin, a 26-year-old woman with 11 years experience in the field, tells of her anger at the violation of her body repeatedly by men over the years.

*"We hope you aren't going to ogle, stare, touch or make inappropriate comments and even aggressive comments, but when this happens, which is frequently, we are told to get on with the job and 'get over it'." \*Erin*

<https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2019/02/metooz/one-year-on/#section-LPoUAige4u>

This comment demonstrates the ‘grey area’ in action, that is the coercive behaviour’s that are often dismissed as ‘boys talk’ and become an accepted norm within Aotearoa, in the scaffolding of rape (Gavey, 2005). In this instance, we see the counterspace attempts to shift dominant knowledge of rape culture by providing a counter-narrative in the corresponding #MeTooNZ article. The investigation attends to the operation of drawing upon rape myths and self-blame as a strategy in the circulation of narratives, in order to educate the reader on the commonsense understandings of the enactment of sexual violence. By providing a safe and anonymous space, women were able to disclose their stories of sexual violence, some of whom had been silenced for over a decade. The movement opened the doors to a discussion on the ordinariness of sexual violence in the workplace and drew attention to how victim blaming limits women’s resistance, as they inhabit gendered social power relations in their workplaces.

What emerged from the collective stories through the MeToo investigation were the endemic effects of the interrelationship between rape myths and self-blame, where women reported evidence that the processes that were supposed to protect them, were more often more traumatising than the violence perpetrated against them. Four themes are visible: self-blame for the violence and the aftermath, a sense of powerlessness, revictimisation through the complaint process and the long-term impact on their lives and careers. The commonality of themes across the stories resonates with the narrative of this thesis and bring into view the enactment and embodiment of sexual violence and shame. Through a process of figuration, the intersections, social exchanges and political agendas produce further oppressive conditions that circle in and through women’s experiences.

The report constructs a narrative of men’s gendered sociocultural power in the workplace; storied through women’s feelings of powerlessness in a culture where the sexualisation of women is embedded, and men’s actions are protected. Victims felt forced into silence, and at the same time, engaged in strategies to keep themselves safe. Their silence is often the location of self-blame – questioning how they could have prevented the abuse, a complication of rape that intersects with neoliberal notions of individual responsibility, postfeminist sexuality, and the embodiment of shame. The stories that are produced for the report in the enactment and embodiment of sexual violence are confronting. In the passing on of the stories, the #MeTooNZ movement engaged in strategies to circulate women’s resistance into the narrative that challenges

victim blaming in and through women's narratives of pain and violence, in a process of circling in and through multiple sites of knowledge production. For example, Nicola Gavey brings voice to the gendered structural power relations that emerged in the women's stories at the intersections of the enactment of sexual violence and victim blaming, and women's powerlessness that are normative in the workplace.

*\*Auckland University professor Nicola Gavey has highlighted <sup>1</sup> [time and again](#) in her local and international research, gendered norms are ingrained in our society. It's in this climate that a woman can say actually say no to sex - loudly, and repeatedly - and the defence at a rape trial can argue she ["didn't really mean it."](#) "A woman can [vomit and have a panic attack](#) during an alleged rape, and the jury can decide there was reasonable doubt he knew she wasn't consenting. If these high-level allegations are being dismissed, why should any women trust justice to be done, anywhere?*

<https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2019/02/metooNZ/one-year-on/#section-LPoUAiqe4u>

The movement focuses on the stories of women well and truly after the assault has occurred, many of whom embody the material effects of shame through the enactment of postfeminist responsibility and self-blame to make sense of their victimisation. Sharing women's stories as they circulate through an examination of gendered relations of power in the workplace, enabled the movement of women's stories of pain to generate knowledge of the systemic heteronormative operation of power ingrained in our society. As an example of journalist advocacy, the #MeTooNZ movement has brought workplace sexual violence into everyday spaces as it generates a steady flow of significant, powerful and confronting stories that challenged institutional responses to sexual violence complaints. I wondered about the passing on of women's stories of pain (through a rigorous selection process of markers of truth) for institutional change. I have been reflecting here on my use of the term sexual violence rather than the focus of the #MeTooNZ movement as it responds to rape culture in the workplace. How is it women's responsibility to report and tell and complain, and who is excluded if they cannot tell their embodied shameful stories?

### **#MeTooNZ: Discursive Limitations**

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<sup>1</sup> \*Blue highlighted text directs the reader to online articles.

*“I get angry when I think about the insulting comments made when I asked for help. Maybe with the use of media and storytelling, we can start a nationwide movement dedicated to changing this unacceptable status quo.” \*Erin*

<https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2019/02/metoonz/one-year-on/#section-LPoUAiqe4u>

There are significant limitations in constructing women's pain through stories that position women in a victim-survivor dichotomy. Throughout my telling, listening and writing process I have mobilised the victim-survivor relationship. However, it has been a term that I have struggled with both personally and professionally, as it doesn't enable an understanding of the relationship of the embodiment of shame, rather, it has a focus on the enactment of violence. In my role as a therapist, I have noticed narratives are never linear, instead, they have twists and turns that attempt to make sense of our affective response to our experiences, not constrained to the act of violence. As women tell themselves, they also embody their sociopolitical location limited by the constraints of institutional categories of victim or survivor. Within our gendered culture the category of victim is assigned to rape myths, victim-blaming and perpetrator litigation, and narratives of subordination and powerlessness (Nagy, 2016; Edwards et al., 2011; Rickard, 2015). The category of 'survivor' implies women can 'survive' and use 'skills' to move on after the enactment of violence, leading to narratives of strength and resilience (Jordan, 2013). However, not all women have the opportunity to 'survive', many women's lives have been decimated at the hands of men who perpetrate sexual violence against them. In this process of categorisation, women's subjectivities are reduced through the dominant narrative of women's responsibility to move the story from their victimisation through their own resilience. Just as stories twist and turn so too does the movement between victim and survivor. The movement however is assumed to be a linear progression, that women can move from victim to survivor (Jordan, 2013), as if there is an endpoint or goal to be reached and a single story. The embodiment of sexual violence and shame are missing in the story produced.

The #MeTooNZ report represented women as survivors through the telling of their stories, and victims of sexual harassment and assault. Survival was produced through a narrative of storying and empowerment (courageous), and victimisation was produced through stories of feminine vulnerability (broken and fragile). What emerges from this narrative as a material effect is the figure of a 'real' victim through a story of her survival. The process of categorisation

reproduced in the #MeTooNZ report are the set of criteria that must be met for women to be heard. As a researcher, I have had the unsettling experience of realising I too have engaged in these problematic discursive practices. Memories of past clients come to mind, whereby I supported a process to build a story for women through victim-survivor narratives. I reflectively question my position and ask, have I inadvertently misheard, or worse, not listened, to their voice? And yet, the victim-survivor narrative is embedded in our therapeutic understandings of movement and empowerment, where our interventions are organized to ‘fix’ women’s pain. The campaign itself challenges the fixed notion of survivors and victims by locating the action, as the enactment of violence against women, and critically shifts the focus away from women’s responsibility. In and through the movement, participants can shift their narrative construction of current and historical sexual violence, in much the same that occurs in the therapy room.

*However, the emergence of the Me Too movement has brought with it the hope that this is beginning to change. Rape Prevention Education Wellington executive director Debbi Tohill reckons one of the legacies of the movement has been to help women reframe past incidents of sexual violence.*

<https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2019/02/metooz/one-year-on/#section-LPoUAiqe4u>

As seen in my own experience of childhood sexual abuse and shame, part of my healing was in the shift in narrative, that is, I was able to understand the sexual abuse was not my fault and was able to relocate the shame with my perpetrator. However, this process does not shift rape culture itself, nor does it attend to the process of the embodiment of shame as a material effect. This is not to say that women reconstructing their stories to find new counterstories for well-being is not important, but individual changes do little to effect shifts in dominant gendered institutional and social power relations that perpetuate the enactment of sexual violence, as social movements have been attempting to shift this since the 1970s.

### **#MeTooNZ: The Silence of Indigenous Women**

In a study by Mendes et al. (2018) #MeToo is proclaimed as one of the most substantial contributors to feminist digital activism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a process circling in through feminist activism to organise communities of conversation against the entrenched sexism, misogyny and rape culture. However, the movement did not ‘trend’ until it gained widespread

attention through celebrity media power. In acknowledging #MeToo as a successful feminist action, how the movement travelled from African American women's rights activists to the 'hashtag' success is problematic, as the figuration of the 'real' victim of rape is guided by a white celebrity. In the whitening of the counterspace, we observe a postfeminist tsunami as the movement is propelled into a 'viral' phenomenon, while the original movement struggled to gain momentum. Here we see #MeToo has been appropriated as it gains momentum, which marginalises the racialised and gendered voices of indigenous and migrant women. Salem (2018) uses the term 'travelling theory' to articulate changes to the potential of intersectionality across time and space. From its humble beginnings, intersectionality focused on the conditions of indigenous and third world feminism, however, in the process of passing on stories it became 'whitened' over time as focus shifted to feminism as a collective. In this instance, we see #MeToo, through its popularity in online spaces, become a singular story that marginalises the relationships of oppression that texture the everyday lives of racialised and sexualised women. The voice of Alyssa Milano, a figure of ideal femininity who is sexuality active and morally responsible, is a powerful figure to encourage women to call out practices of sexual violence. The figure representing the movement, however, does not represent challenges of ethnicity and gendered harassment/ abuse experienced by indigenous women (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018).

In respect to the #MeTooNZ movement, the face of the campaign Alison Mau; is a white, educated and well-known New Zealand journalist. This is important to the analysis of the social movement, where the potential for Māori women's voices in the community conversations is an ethical obligation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Women's experiences of sexual violence are shaped through multiple figures produced within institutional responses to sexual violence and the interrelations of domination and oppression that exceed gender. Wāhine Māori are not silent victims of gender, but rather, are culturally empowered across numerous contexts (locally, nationally and internationally) spanning many decades (Waitere & Johnston, 2009). In the social platform Twitter, #MeTooNZ make visible a Te Reo hashtag #ahauhoki to represent the voice of Māori, a simple transposition of language expected to represent a marginalised intersection within #MeTooNZ, and therefore fails to figure the layers of oppression in the enactment and embodiment of sexual violence and the embodiment of shame.

The 'ideal' figures represented in #MeTooNZ, are white, working and women. Located within the platform of mainstream media is a practice of the global north's authority over the knowledge produced. When considering this research, I used a feminist standpoint epistemology to enable me to understand the nuances of situated knowledge that had the potential to understand layers of oppression in the gendered social hierarchy. I was hopeful that the #MeTooNZ movement would enable the multiplicity of intersecting narratives to emerge. However, through my feminist standpoint I recognised the emergence of a *racialised* figure, in the shadows of the analysis. Ethnicity is never absent from the rape script, with Black, indigenous and migrant women overrepresented as a statistical figure, but is less visible circling in and through multiple sites of the knowledge being produced. The figure of the *ideal victim*, is located as the *deserving victim* in the singular story. As a collective story, the diversity of women being represented were reduced to categories of work and positions such as service/professional.

Women's collective stories were organised into five publications to represent a common theme or patterns, in the process of activism that collectively has the potential to transform feminist consciousness amongst participants, in a narrative that understands sexual violence as a structural rather than a personal problem. However, not all stories met the criteria of the documents authorisation; the figure of the activist-journalist then, emerges as an *economic figure* as it commodifies women's workplace stories of pain. In this analysis, the organisation of women's stories to communicate the confronting enactment of sexual violence at a structural level produces a singular *ideal* figure and loses the feminist intersection between the personal and the political, where the political fails to recognise the racialised and sexualised intersections of the embodiment of sexual violence. Even within the digital feminist space #MeTooNZ, representations of Māori women's voices became silenced in the narrative of gender in the social hierarchy.

In the further development of #MeToo digital feminist activism, we need to emerge multiple figurations that move the singular narrative that operates through structural and institutional power relations as the only site of violence, to a collective that listens to women's experiences at the intersections. Just as women are positioned in particular ways in response to sexual violence, socio-cultural subjectivities form and reform our life stories and produce varying experiences of inequality and social injustice. Intersectionality theory accounts for women who have been

subjected to prejudice based on association with more than one oppressed group (Leung & William, 2019), including culture, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and age. We live and experience multiple subjectivities (Gopaldas, 2013), as we move in and through relationships of discrimination in addition to sexism.

#MeTooNZ narrates the enactment of sexual violence within systemic workplaces and provides a safe space for 'ideal subjects' to share their experiences of sexual violence in and through understandings of the enactment of violence produced through social power relations that scaffold rape. And while the rape myth is being contested through a figuration of blame, the materiality of shame is ignored. Poststructuralist theories provide an analysis of gendered social power relations in the enactment of rape, and have enabled women to contest their experiences of blame through an understanding of rape myths, and circulate this understanding as a challenge to dominant knowledge. I can't help but return to the missing narrative - the embodiment of shame. What I hear is the repeated retelling of women's stories of pain as they circle in and through the enactment of sexual violence, at the mercy of public responses. In my search for a figuration of embodied shame, I paid particular attention to the report theme 'the aftermath' to emerge shameful figures.

#### #MeTooNZ: Marketing Women's Pain in the Name of Social Justice: Hidden Figures

In the editorial produced by #MeTooNZ, we are invited to watch short video clips of women that tell women's stories of pain in an attempt to educate the media audience how the enactment of violence effects women's mental and emotional health. In the publication 'the aftermath', we see the institutional response (media), representing women as mentally unwell as a result of sexual violence. The video (voiced by an actor) tells the edited story of Sarah who was raped by a co-worker in her workplace (a school classroom). Sarah's description of herself as '*an educated woman*' '*Savvy, I thought I was street smart*' '*I thought I was intuitive*', was analysed to show victim-blaming narratives and rape myths, where somehow Sarah expected to instinctively know to avoid the perpetrator or do something different to avoid being raped, thus the process of the enactment and embodiment of sexual violence is made visible. As the audience continues to listen, the telling of the story organises the aftermath through its effects; '*it's left me dealing with fairly crippling PTSD and depression*' but '*slowly I'm coming back*' '*I'm working again, and I managed to salvage my marriage*'. It stories Sarah's inevitable

distress through a pathological process in which she is responsible for recovering. Sarah's story is told to understand the impact of rape and the process of recovery as if it is a return to normality. The marker of normal assumes neoliberal criteria for femininity, a return to work (independent) and salvaging her marriage (the return to the heteronormative script).

Again, we see the responsibility lies with the individual subject in the narrative trajectory to 'get over' and 'fix' their 'problem'. Sarah can be seen in a transfiguration process across several shameful figures in the social compass; the feminised figures of the *pathologised* and the *well*. We recall the *pathologised* woman is one whose distress fits the criteria for mental illness (in this case, PTSD and depression). A social relationship exists between authoritarian characters (mental health clinicians) to make a judgment as to whether or not Sarah's experience of rape caused a mental injury, in a struggle over the meaning of diagnostic criteria, and understanding distress as a material effect of the affective process of embodiment of pain.

Another subject that emerged in this telling, was that of the nomad, as she also represents the *well* figure as her recovery restores her femininity in the exchange between individualised therapy and her functioning as worker and engagement in everyday social relationships. However, as the story continues the restrictive feminine figures, another voice emerges, the one 'outside' the markers of normality, and these haunt her story as she circulates her affective response into the story "*sometimes I find I'm rooted to the ground, I can't walk, if a dark-haired man walks near me*". But the voice is temporary as she circles back into the *well* figure that is sanctioned - "*But I am alive, this is my story*". In Sarah's story, we see the materialisation of shame in some familiar formidable figures as evidenced on the social compass, the *pathologised* and *well* figures. Even in a counterspace driven by a collaboration of feminist social movements, the stories that were told were unable to render the affective processes haunting the text, that produce shameful figures. The telling, listening, and writing of the aftermath did not find a space for the fragmented figures competing for place in the story. I wonder about our ethical commitment to activism, when the commodification of women's stories may reproduce the same figures of victimisation. In the process of demonstrating the emotional and mental impacts of gendered sexual violence, women are consumed and publicly imagined and represented (figured) as powerless in their responses to institutional systems (workplaces) in their expressions of distress. In examining the social movement's initial editorial, we can see how women's

responses to sexual harm are mediated, and there is a glimpse into the affective process that produces emotive subjects. I almost sense the shroud of shame in listening to their stories of pain, literally materializing women into shameful figures, the ideological-affective made real (Gill, 2007).

In blame, lays shame, but this remains silent in the social movement, and women remain at an impasse. In this analysis, we see the emergence of #MeTooNZ as another mediated response to sexual violence. The campaign has the potential to make transformations in our socio-political landscape; but without an understanding of the embodiment of shame in the enactment of sexual violence, the movement will struggle to shift and transform the conditions of women's lives. There is a missing figuration in the map that has the potential to free women from the confines of restrictive figures. Understanding that pain is embodied, as narratives circulate through the repetition of their painful stories, cannot attend to the material effects of embodied gendered shame. As we re-enter into the circle of telling women's stories of pain, a shameful commodified figure is reproduced.

#### Grace Millane: A Shameful Commodified Figure

In the digital space, I held hope that there would be a shift in rape culture and women could be free from further sexual victimisation. However, representations of sexual violence continue to perpetuate rape culture in modern platforms such as television and social media. Perhaps the most recent media-driven configuration of women's pain in Aotearoa is through the legal process of the rape and murder of Grace Millane, a 21-year-old backpacker from the UK on her overseas experience (OE) in New Zealand by an anonymous man she met on a dating app. The media representation of the court case reported countless examples of how heteronormativity places blame on the victim. In an adversarial justice system that was to decide on the outcome of the process of conviction of the man who ended her life, it was Grace that appeared to be on trial as her photo circulated through countless news websites, television and social media platforms, while the perpetrator of the crime was granted permanent name suppression. The defense argued that her death was a result of an unexpected and unforeseen accident, of sex gone wrong, as seen in the following extract:

*The man's lawyer, led by Ian Bookie, said Grace's death was a tragic accident. They argued Grace had an interest in bondage and sadomasochism and had asked the killer to choke her during a consensual sex game which went catastrophically wrong.*

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/117576391/grace-millane-murder-accuseds-actions-after-her-death-show-compelling-case-of-murder?rm=m>).

The narrative of 'rough sex' provided a framework the actions of the perpetrator. Grace's sexual past, character, what she was wearing and whether or not she was under the influence of illicit substances, produced an account of Grace as an immoral feminine subject. The question of consent is raised, that is, did Grace consent to sadomasochism or 'rough sex', and could this justify her death? Bows and Herring (2019) provide insight into the narratives of 'consent in rough sex' and homicide cases, highlighting that victims are unable to provide evidence of consent, and therefore, it is difficult to challenge in the context of sexual activity, with no witnesses. The narrative of libido and desire is used to frame murder as a sexual act, rather than an act of violence. Grace Millane's case is an extreme example of the legal response to sexual violence reproducing victim blame, even after the #MeTooNZ emerged in resistance to structural violence in institutions.

Despite decades of feminist theory, research and activism (including #MeToo), Grace is represented as a *commodified shameful figure*. The neoliberal digital space transforms her into a depersonalised body, a procession that belongs to the media, and reproduces her as battered, stolen and individually responsible for her own safety, and shamed for her postfeminist sexuality gone too far (rough sex). Here we see the enactment of sexual violence in action, and institutional responses (legal system) produce shameful figurations. While the jury made a decision of his guilt in the act of murder, the media representation as it stands is a "shameful repository of ignorance about the intricacies of sex, gender, power and violence. Sadly, that works against the very progress we need to eradicate patriarchal messages about men's sexual dominance and entitlements that help to create tinderbox men in the first place" (Gavey, 2019). After 40 years of feminist research and activism, women continue to be subjugated to and responsible for the violence perpetrated against them, as bodies without organs (Braidotti, 1994). In the process of the enactment of violence and embodiment, yet more shameful figures emerge in Grace's life and death.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### The Social Compass as an Action for Change

The model of the social compass that comes together in figure six is not intended to account for all subjectivities. Instead, it aims to demonstrate the social exchanges and interrelations between *enactment* and *embodiment* and how women's bodies are figured and reconfigured within institutional/societal responses to produce shameful emotive subjects. In understanding enactment and embodiment as a social compass, we can see the reciprocity between gendered sexual violence and shame through multiple interconnecting relationships.

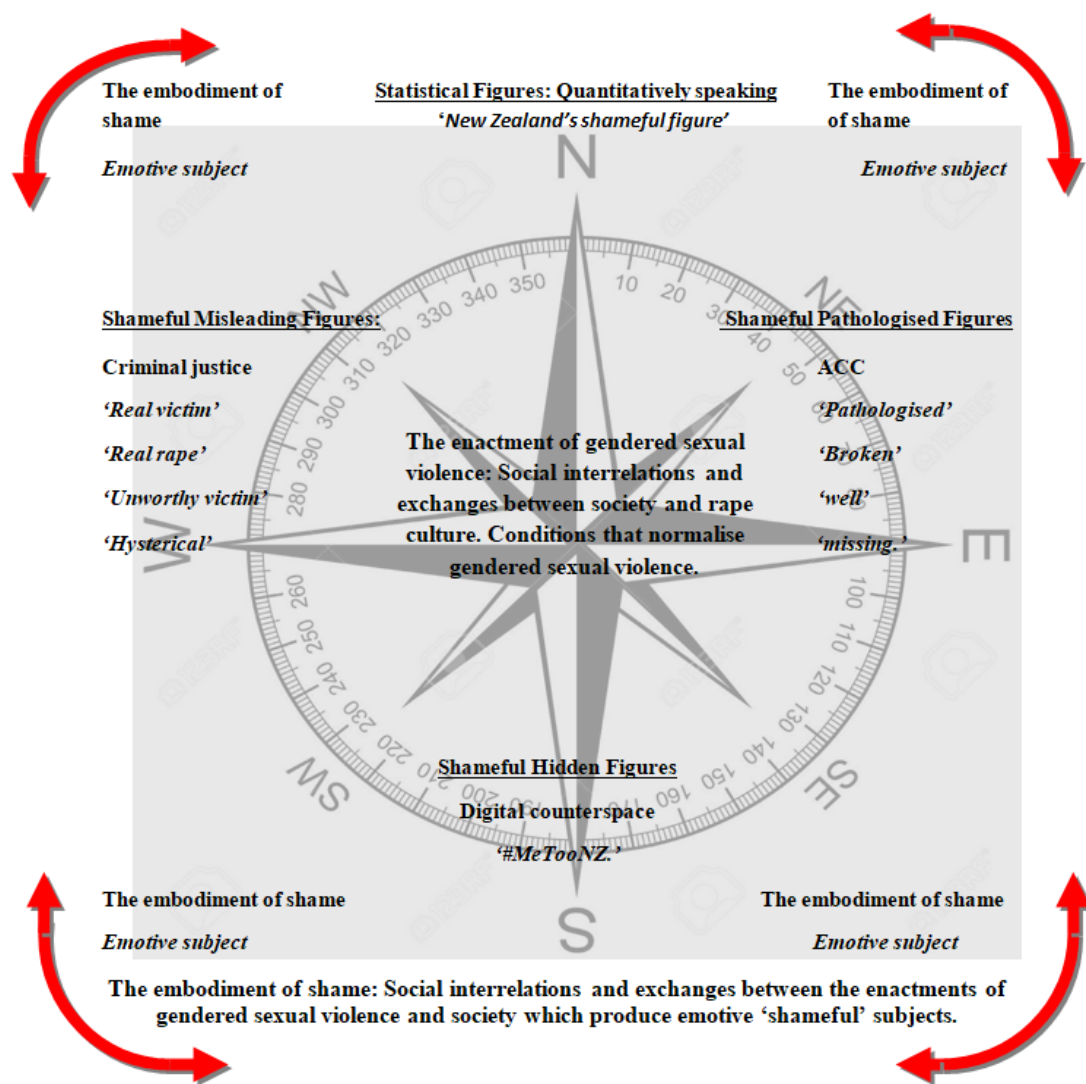


Figure six: A social compass to demonstrate the reciprocity between gendered sexual violence and shame.

In an analysis of feminist narratives, Gavey's scaffolding of rape is a useful praxis for understanding gendered social power relations of domination and subordination through heteronormativity that constitute rape culture. Heteronormativity and the nuances of sexual victimisation circle in and through the enactment and embodiment of gendered sexual violence. As structural and social gendered processes constitute consent and sexual coercion through narratives of normalised violence against women, women's embodiment of violence remains invisible and limits subjectivity. The social compass locates the #MeTooNZ movement in a circle of other movements to understand enactment as a process of interconnections and social exchanges that occur in our shameful rape culture. In #MeTooNZ, the social compass makes visible the transformative potential of the poststructuralist feminist social movement to educate the audience about the enactment of gendered sexual violence to reduce rape culture and sexual harassment for women in the workplace. However, we also see the commodification of women's stories of pain, in repetition of the figuration of their location as victims and responsible for their suffering.

The embodiment of shame is glimpsed in the societal and institutional interrelations and exchanges that occur in the enactment of gendered sexual violence, that produce shameful figurations of women's excess embodied emotion. In the analysis of shameful narratives informed by Probyn's framework, I can make the embodiment of shame visible as a social interaction rather than an individualised response to sexual violence. The social compass provides a visual representation of the embodiment of shame. Creating a social compass through the reading writing of the #MeTooNZ movement, the affective process of shame is missing, and is located in narratives of victim-blaming. Resistance to the location of blame, limits the stories of the material effects of embodied shame as an interactive affective practice. In the institutional response to sexual violence, women's pain is pathologised and other hidden shameful figures emerge.

The social compass allows us to visualise how women are positioned in the interrelations between enactment and embodiment, with limited agency, and in the spaces between, are multiple movements enacting and embodying shameful figurations. It is a privilege to hear the stories of women's pain, and I recognise safe spaces (digital or otherwise) for women to be acknowledged and validated are necessary. Yet, as therapists in institutional responses, we try to

‘fix’ embodied emotions as if they are unruly and require disciplinary practices of institutional knowledge that categorises their distress as mental disorder or feminine fragility. Women are placed in the position of retelling their stories as they circle in and through a re-enactment of gendered sexual violence and embodied pain. It is how we make sense of the *shameful figures* that have the potential to support women to exit the compass of gendered sexual violence and shame, and transform the figuration of women’s subjectivities by alternatively examining the conditions of daily lives, and multiple figurations of women.

Feminist social movements have focused on ‘resistance’ to evoke social change, which relies on women as the narrator of violence, expressing emotion to push back against political views and constraints. In the enactment, we see resistance to rape culture as a pathway to reduce sexual victimisation, however, as a therapist, I have witnessed the continual movement of women and girls’ experiences of the enactment of violence and embodiment of shame, never quite still, as they attempt to take responsibility for their well-being. Braidotti (2010) writes that essential ethical activism is built on oppositional consciousness. Resistance as oppositional negativity, “implies a belligerent act of negation of the present conditions: a double negative that endangers an affirmative” (Braidotti, 2010., p. 142). In the absence of ethical activism, we see women are at risk of being reconstructed as *shameful figures* placing blame and impending shame embodied by women. Braidotti (2010) argues oppositional consciousness is not the same as resistance (negativity) and instead claims activism needs to build strategies to assemble affirmation (Braidotti, 2010).

With the recognition of the embodiment of sexual violence and shame in all its multiplicity, comes agency and respect that empowers women to disentangle from the process of enactment. Without responses that categorise women’s pain there would be no shaping of an emotive subject. Re-figuring ‘woman’ outside of the enactment of sexual violence could perhaps open new spaces in and through which to think about women’s body politics differently, in a perennial networked, ever-expanding digital space.

I seek to navigate an exit to the social compass as a process of ethical activism in its circulation. Again I turn to Braidotti’s (2010) feminist ethics to write the exit. It is vital to de-pathologise the conversations regarding gendered sexual violence and confront it in more visionary terms. That

is, in the ethics of affirmation, it is necessary to believe adverse affects (including shame) can be transformed, even those feelings that immobilise us in pain, terror or mourning (Braidotti, 2010; Probyn, 2004). The social compass of gendered sexual violence and shame is a working document making visible the assemblages between the enactment of sexual violence and the embodiment of shame. I sought to find a way to combine the analysis into a cohesive model of the relationships of power enabled and perpetuated by sociocultural and institutional responses. As I progressed along the research journey, I became hopeful that in gaining an understanding of a social compass of gendered sexual violence and shame, we may gain opportunities to further research how the social compass can better inform institutions, and further develop feminist activism beyond the discursive alone. I created the social compass to show the fragmentation of multiple sites of knowledge in the enactment, embodiment and institutional responses which allowed me to take a more meaningful look at how #MeTooNZ has moved our socio-political landscape. In a sense, I acknowledge, an affective process takes place at each turn, which has the potential to block or create a pathway to produce socially just outcomes for women.

### **Evoking Change**

I set out on this research journey with hope #MeTooNZ would provide a platform for women to engage in a process that affirms their painful experiences, and that might empower women's recovery stories without having to engage in institutional practices that limit what can be said about their embodiment of shame. However, as I progressed through the mountain of qualitative feminist research, I recognised that despite all these years of advocating for justice, women continue to be placed in a position of being individually responsible for sexual violence and re-victimised within institutions that produce shame as a consequence of distress (self harm), a by-product of women's bodily excess of emotion.

In the process of investigating research on feminist social movements, including #MeTooNZ, I became aware there was an absence of literature in Aotearoa New Zealand that considers the reciprocal relationship between gendered sexual violence and shame. As a result, I felt a sense of responsibility to create a project that provides a space to evoke conversations about the social injustices of hidden shame and look to ways feminist movements can begin to shift institutional responses to women's distress. Initially, I had considered interviewing women about their

thoughts on #MeTooNZ to analyse how the movement is transposing across #MeTooNZ. I was particularly interested in whether or not the digital space could attend to women's shame. However, through my own process of circling in and out of the investigative project that challenges rape culture, I wondered about whether it had potential to transform our shameful statistics. As I sought the missing relationship with the embodiment of shame, I allowed myself to imagine what the world would be like if women no longer embodied shame as a by-product of the enactment of gendered sexual violence. As the project took multiple turns, the focus shifted from the shameful statistic toward addressing shame as interwoven with the enactment of gendered sexual violence. I began to imagine what it would be like for women to no longer embody shame, no longer experience feeling 'out of place' and alienated from their bodies and emotional well-being (Probyn, 2004).

By using a feminist standpoint epistemology, I have been able to story mine and my mother's experience of shame resulting from childhood sexual abuse, through the narration of the embodiment of shame as a material effect of the affective process on women's bodies and subjectivities. I was able to make visible the role that institutional responses play in evoking an affective process to produce shame. I wondered if there was a way I could tell, listen and write a project that did not repeat women's stories of pain. Turning to a contextual inquiry allowed me to examine feminist movements and social theories/research to understand the reciprocity between gendered sexual violence and shame. Through Braidotti's figuration theory, I sought to demonstrate the phenomenon (enactment and embodiment) as social interrelations and exchanges which occur within institutional responses to gendered sexual violence, and have the potential to further oppress women, represented as *shameful figures*. In that moment, the project expanded, and I engaged in many conversations about the reciprocity of gendered sexual violence and shame, and the possible differing responses to women's distress. In discussions with my supervisors, colleagues and my mother, I began to realise I had assumed that *enactment* and *embodiment*, as interconnecting moving parts, was general knowledge. However, I began to realise that my situated knowledge and work as a trauma therapist was not identical to other researchers. In this space, I had an opportunity to further develop a social theory as I engaged in reading feminist and social research on gendered sexual violence and shame. What didn't feel right to me was the recognition that women have been continuously put in the position of

biographer; telling their stories of pain over and over again, which has the potential to re-enact gendered sexual violence, and produce more shameful figures. I began to think my thoughts differently without collecting narratives of women's pain. I sought to honour both my mother's experiences of shame and the stories I have had the privilege to care for over my career.

Braidotti's standpoint of ethical feminism brought me hope that I could revolutionise feminist social movements to shift the enactment and embodiment of shame without the need for women to share their pain once again.

As long as I can remember, I have been interested in the experience of shame for women who have been sexually violated and how this subversive affective process becomes part of women's bodies and subjective experiences. Time and time again, I have heard stories of gendered sexual violence, whereby, women feel robbed of their lives and categorised into shameful positions. Shame is an affective process that becomes embedded and embodied within women's daily lives, both mine and my mother's stories are one of the millions that occupy an unspoken injustice, of the epidemic kind. The passion I have in changing social and institutional responses to sexual violence and shame for women is the driving force behind this research narrative. I have a desire for transformation, where gendered sexual violence becomes a rare occurrence, and social services no longer receive copious therapy referrals. I imagine a world in which misogyny is unacceptable in any form. I have imaginative hope. I use that hope to start conversations that evoke different thoughts about the interconnectivity of gendered sexual violence and shame, to understand that as professionals and communities our responses have the power to change women's experiences. The construction of a social compass that depicts intricate social exchanges and interrelations between the enactment of sexual violence, institutional responses and embodied shame can further advance feminist digital activism, including #MeTooNZ.

The knowledge that this research project has produced is necessary to challenge the status quo of reducing rape culture as a solution to gendered sexual violence. In focusing on the enactment of gendered sexual violence as a solution to gendered sexual violence, we miss the material effects of shame and women continue to be placed in a position where the repeated telling of their stories is commodified into the enactment. The (necessarily) incomplete social compass is my small contribution to feminist social activism, which I hope will continue to evoke conversations on the reciprocity between gendered sexual violence and shame. As I come to an end in the

contextual analytic process, I feel ‘incomplete’, but hopeful that perhaps in one small way, one short moment, this research may restore passion in a feminist social movement to reduce gendered sexual violence and shame, without the need for women to market their stories of pain in the name of social justice.

### **Limitations**

Like any other research, this project has limitations. The goals of this research were to demonstrate the reciprocity between gendered sexual violence and shame and examine alternative ways to improve feminist social movements that do not require women to share their stories of pain. I am aware that the narrative produced here is partial and is produced through my own sociocultural location in the social hierarchy. In the process of utilising a narrative methodology, I drew on my standpoint as a survivor, therapist and daughter to show the impact of shame as an embodied affective process. However, I could not possibly provide a voice for all women who have been sexually violated across multiple and diverse intersections of oppression. I did not set out to make broad generalisations about women’s experiences of gendered sexual violence and shame, but rather to gain insights into the interconnectivity between the two phenomena and how social and institutional responses may perpetuate experiences of gendered shame.

As a Pākehā woman, I acknowledge my position in the knowledge economy. In the post-colonial and multicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, gendered sexual violence intersects with race and class to disadvantage women from marginalized communities. For example, Māori women are overrepresented in sexual abuse statistics (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2017). This research is limiting as I did not analyse the narratives that provide a voice for Māori. I note that #MeTooNZ has a ‘white aesthetic’ and in its collective voice, its report tells a singular story. The compass might enable further collaborative research that brings volume to multiple figurations at the intersections of women’s experiences of violence.

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