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**To provoke what can be: Women's
experiences of sexual encounters they now
recognise as sexual assault**

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Abstract

This research project is a narrative that tells a story of the 85% of women who do not recognise their experience as sexual assault. Remembering with the numerous stories of nonconsensual sex that permeated my peer group as we imagined our sexual freedoms, I became increasingly concerned with how gendered sexual violence becomes so normalised in the conditions of our everyday lives. Following the feminist literature over the past 40 plus years, and despite the knowledge produced through decades of women's storytelling, I recognise that nothing much has changed. How is it possible to resist the normalisation of sexual coercion, contest the hegemony of consent, and open up potential for transforming heteronormativity to begin to talk about ethical sex. The aim of this research is to disrupt the dominant narrative of sexual assault that holds women accountable for the violence committed against them, so that we may narrate what is, in order to provoke what could be. Recognising the singular story of colonial patriarchal heteronormative sexual violence through the voices of those of us who are not recognised in the affective history of knowledge production, I take up storytelling as a process of relational meaning making recognising that stories have the power to move us into action. Hearing the stories of five women, all of whom experienced an untellable sexual assault, I take up a position as a feminist killjoy, to hear, together, loud and quiet resistances to provoke what can be. The analysis tells stories of rape as a young person, online safety, rape and intoxication, sexual assault and silence, and sexual assault and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), in collaboration with each storyteller whose narrative is represented here and shaped into a coherent story. Each narrative brings into view the untellability of sexual violence, and the silencing effects on our affective embodied experiences. I therefore interrupt the stories with insights into the everyday conditions through which the affective forces of misogyny, coercion and consent have rendered our experiences as untellable. Understanding women's stories as gifts and as a relationship in the co-construction of knowledge, the stories are told so that others may gain an understanding, or hear, relate to and be moved by them. And as the process of storytelling continues, a recognition of purposeful re-storying emerges, stories that move us away from blame and shame. And I remember my rage. And as I take up my responsibility of feminist killjoy, I connect with the fury for the misogyny that justifies rape as just sex, and in loud resistance I privilege the knowledge produced through these stories as the route to strong objectivity (Haraway, 1988) to provoke what can be. Understanding misogyny, sexual coercion and sexual violence as the everyday conditions of women's lives enables a hearing of the affective flows of meaning making that hold us responsible, opens the space to provoke us into "wide awakeness", and to find ways to challenge claims to knowledge that make us responsible for our own victimisation. In the final chapter, I return to the impossibility of ethical sex, but rather engage with a recognition for the fury of misogyny. Loud resistances.

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Introduction: A Narrative Disruption

Gendered violence in New Zealand is a complex problem. In the latest population research (Fanslow et al., 2023), the lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence against women was reported as 55.8%, meaning more than half the women in New Zealand reported experiences. The 2021 NZ Crime and Victims Survey (Ministry of Justice, 2021) showed that 35% of women had experienced sexual assault in their lifetime, and only 8% of sexual assaults were reported to the police, while even fewer made it through the criminal justice system. The same survey also suggested that 85% of women do not recognise their experience as a crime. How did sexual violence against women become so normalised that we struggle to recognise it? As I traced the shameful history of sexual violence against women in New Zealand it became clear that this is not a new story. There are forty plus years of feminist research that has reported on women's stories of violence in New Zealand, and despite the strength of the reported statistical evidence, the normalisation of violence against women has persisted in the conditions of day-to-day life. This research is not about the under-reporting of sexual violence, but rather, the struggle to recognise and articulate the experience as an assault.

In 2016 the documentary *Audrie and Daisy* (Cohen & Shenk, 2016) was released, exploring the lived experience of two young girls who, while extremely intoxicated, were sexually assaulted by males known to them. As the documentary follows the assaults of both Audrie and Daisy, it depicts a strong version of events that meet the 'burden of evidence' (Jordan, 2022). The assaults were captured in photographs and videos, which might be understood as irrefutable proof that the assault took place. However, the narrative begins to change when the credibility of the two extremely intoxicated girls is questioned. The documentary describes the response to sexual violence and the many complex ways victim blaming produces a particular normalised social understanding of sexual assault. I recall watching *Audrie and Daisy* in disbelief, not understanding how these young women became targets of social and community bullying. As a woman in my early twenties, their experiences hit close to home. I reflected on how many friends of mine had been in situations like this, remembering the numerous stories that we shared after alcohol-fueled nights of youthful naivete. Nights we spent drinking until we could barely stand, and in the morning, we awoke with no recollection of how we ended up in bed with someone we had previously rejected. We never used the words sexual assault, although now I understand there is no way consent could have been given. As I moved through my graduate studies, the questions around drinking, consent and cyberbullying that stemmed from *Audrie and Daisy's* stories began to make sense through the lens of the patriarchal relation of heteronormativity that produces the conditions through which gender violence becomes normalised.

I became interested in the normalisation of sexual coercion and the contested meaning of consent that women encounter as they make sense of their experiences of sexual assault. This led to further research on how women become responsible for the violence committed against them. I was interested in Jan Jordan's (2001; 2004; 2008; 2011; 2022) extensive research on policing of sexual assaults. I wondered about those women who do not recognise, or do not report, sexual assaults, and how they may have come to understand their experiences through the complex ways society makes the victim responsible for the assault. Early feminist work of Liz Kelly and Jill Radford (1990), for example, suggested that perhaps women minimise their experiences because they are unable to recognise them through the dominant social narrative that rape is an act committed by a stranger, and involves a degree of violence. My research, therefore, seeks to discuss and challenge the power relations that locate women as even the slightest bit responsible for their victimisation. As Jordan (2018; 2023) has consistently argued, there is relief in being able to speak about something that so often feels unspeakable. That is not to say, of course, that women should have to come forward with their stories. Rather I will examine how changing the language around experiences of sexual violence (Kelly & Radford, 1990) could influence discussions away from placing blame on the victim and encourage women to recognise the violence perpetrated against them. Something really happened.

In the post-feminism era, the conflicting representations of women in the media can only be described as harmful. Media coverage is a contributing factor to many women not coming forward with their experiences, as it often perpetuates the already internalised belief that they are at least partially responsible for their sexual assault. The consequences of the media's portrayal of women will be further discussed throughout. Gavey's article (Spinoff 2023), analysing the trial and media coverage of Grace Milane's murder, is an important example of how narratives are manipulated to hold women responsible for violence committed against them. During the trial, the defence lawyers implemented practices routinely employed to hold girls and women responsible for the violence committed against them by making use of the sexual double standard.

The media contributes further harm to society in its presentation of feminism by presenting post-feminist sensibilities as a superficial picture of what it is to be a feminist and the subsequent sexualisation of the female form. The sexual empowerment that is expected of women in post-feminism coincidentally places them in a double bind that positions them in the firing line of rape myths. This idea that "good girls can't be raped" (Jordan, 2023) seems to deliberately place the post-feminist woman in a predicament, where her inevitable sexualization means she is at fault (at least partially) for her sexual assault. The idea that women can have it all, in reality comes at a cost, and this is reflected through casual sex and the double standards in place for women (Farvid et al., 2017).

Jan Jordan and Nicola Gavey's extensive research on heteronormativity that produces the conditions of rape, challenges the hegemony of the patriarchy that structures gendered social power relations. Additionally, Ani Makaere's work focuses on the effects of colonisation on mana wāhine. As Makaere (1999, p.14) writes, "For in the end, it is the imposition of patriarchy which I believe to be the most damaging impact of colonization". Statistically, Māori women's lifetime experiences of physical and/or sexual abuse affects one in two women (57.6%) (Fanslow et al, 2023). As Denise Wilson (2021) reminds us, it is the imposition of patriarchy through colonisation that must be recognised in our understandings of violence.

Concerningly, despite the knowledge produced through decades of women's storytelling, statistics tell us nothing much has changed. We need to talk about our experiences so that we can begin to resist the normalisation of sexual coercion, contest the hegemony of the meaning of consent, and open up potential for transforming heteronormativity to begin to talk about ethical sex.

The aim of this research is to disrupt the dominant narrative of sexual assault that holds women accountable for the violence committed against them, so that we may "[n]arrate what is, provoke what could be" (Fine, 2017, p.14).

Literature Review: To Tell What Is

To create meaningful research, I needed to explore the work of earlier feminists in their pursuit of reducing the prevalence of sexual assault to understand how gendered power relations are deeply entangled with understanding sexual violence against women. To gain such an understanding meant turning to the literature and discovering how sexual assault is understood by experts in the field who have dedicated their careers to making sense of how the conditions of everyday life inform and respond to sexual assault.

The statistical figure of violence against women in New Zealand tells us that more than 50% of women experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and more concerningly, Māori women experience the highest prevalence for all forms of violence (Fanslow et al., 2023). While prevalence studies provide us with useful information to draw attention to the problem of sexual violence in the population, including that over 90% of sexual violence is not reported to the police (Ministry of Justice, 2023), these studies necessarily exclude the stories of the 85% of women who do not recognise their experience as an assault (Ministry of Justice, 2021). As shown, sexual assault is prevalent in New Zealand, but many of those who have experienced sexual violence do not speak up about/do not recognise what they have endured, and they are left alone to make sense of a traumatic event within a patriarchal society that holds women responsible for their own victimisation (Johnson, 2017).

For Māori women, in what was once a community predicated on gender equality, colonisation led to the creation of a patriarchal society in New Zealand. On seeking to understand the *what is* of sexual violence, I attended to the politics of location from which our experiences of sexual violence are informed, enacted, and embodied. Our shameful history of violence is deeply embedded in our history of colonisation. This literature review locates sexual violence against women in New Zealand through the enduring effects of the western patriarchal socio-cultural order that disrupted Māori ways of being and connecting through whakapapa. For Mikaere (2021), whakapapa is the vitality for relational connections that are both powerful and protective. Mikaere reminds us, that in the end it is the “imposition of patriarchy” that has endured in the ongoing process of colonisation for Māori women (p.14). As Wilson et al. (2019) noted, there are multiple historical records that reflect the impact of the protection of mana on the absence of abuse and violence against women and children pre-colonisation. The status of women and the harsh punishments for abuse and violence against women functioned in preventing such acts from occurring.

Recognising the relationship between colonisation and patriarchy is necessary to an understanding of violence against women in New Zealand. As Denise Wilson and colleagues (2019) further argued, these structural power relations formed the conditions for violence against Māori women. The imposition of patriarchy through a colonial agenda that worked to disrupt indigenous collective responsibilities

subordinated displays of sexuality that exceeded the norms of colonial femininity (Wilson et al., 2021). Thus, to better understand violence against women in New Zealand, also requires an understanding of how colonisation has shaped the conditions for sexual violence. Ani Mikaere (1999) draws attention to the colonisation of Māori women's bodies, asking us to remember that the imposition of patriarchy onto women's bodies was part of the colonial agenda that worked to disrupt stories of connection. Therefore, our harmful history of violence is located through the normalisation of western imperialism that subjugates women's racialised and sexualised bodies. Mikaere (1999) reflects on a time before colonisation, where women were equally valued community members who held relational positions of power, which meant that women's sexuality and fertility were celebrated by the whole community. Changing such important narratives encouraged the subordination of women and the domination by men.

As Tolmie et al. (2018) argued, we need to make sense of the intersecting inequities—the relationship between experiences of colonisation, patriarchy and other forms of structural violence—and how they texture the everyday experiences of women's lives, both racialised and sexualised. The imposition of colonial knowledge systems enacted through patriarchal power has produced relationships of sameness and difference, where difference is always understood in the pejorative (Coombes et al., 2016). The call for an understanding of intersectionality is a recognition that understanding violence requires a structural analysis, moving beyond categorisations and measurements of race, gender, class, sexuality and other social categories of our colonial patriarchal gaze to understand the enduring and gendered effects of colonialism. Current knowledge of violence is disciplined through neoliberal individualisation and the responsabilisation of women for the violence perpetrated against them. It is this process of othering, through western knowledge systems, where the objectification of the 'other' is so endemic to misogyny, racism, heterosexism, and other forms of systemic gendered oppression, that our history of violence is embedded in. As Gill (2008) argues, turning a human into an object is the first step in justifying violence towards them, and this objectification has already been done time and time again to women.

This literature review traces some of the moments of recognition of the *what is* to find a deeper understanding of the 85% of women who do not recognise their experience as sexual violence. I begin with making sense of a question Jan Jordan (2022) asks: based on 50 years of feminist activism against violence and rape, how is it that our statistical figures remain so high? How do we make sense of sexual violence as it emerges in contemporary conditions without understanding the logic of patriarchy? And why are women not speaking out? For Jordan, patriarchal strategies of objectification and silencing women work together to sustain what she calls 'rape culture', and Gavey's (2014; 2019a; 2019b) extensive work on heteronormativity that 'scaffolds' the conditions for rape examines the structures of the gendered power relations that operate to normalise sexual violence. As Gavey (2014) notes, "a culture that celebrates the

sexual objectification and humiliation of women provides fertile conditions for committing or enjoying other men's committal of sexual violation" (p. 2).

Before my understanding of the history of the normalisation of gendered violence, and as I processed my response to the documentary *Audrie and Daisy* (as mentioned in Chapter 1), I began to make sense of the intensity of my recognition of shock and disbelief through the conditions of my millennial location, and the promise of gendered equality. Initially thinking that I had not understood that rape was not a clearly defined as I had imagined it to be (it was rape) and I noticed how the outcome disrupted my *sensibilities* of justice. I began to think about my own political location in a context of coercive post-feminism under the conditions of the proliferation of 'girl power' (Gill, 2007) through an intensification of feminine standards of an ideal subject who was freely able to negotiate sexual freedoms (Farvid, et al., 2017). Sex and the body were highly visible through increasing technologies in the commodification of women's freedoms. However, despite this so-called new sexually liberated landscape for women, this idea of sexual liberation does not reflect reality. This new sexual landscape continues to be shaped by the gender dynamics of power and domination of heteronormativity—women remain constrained by sexist norms that prevent us from being able to determine own sexual freedoms (Gavey, 2019b)

While I could not necessarily 'see' equality, the dominant narrative that conditioned my sense-making was that feminism had somehow made it possible, and I was free to make decisions—going out, having fun, wearing what I felt good in, casual sexual encounters and so on. I remember an incident of sexual assault as I was walking along the beach with my mother around 11 years of age, where we were followed by a man who exposed himself. While I remember the lingering fear of assault from strangers, I had no experience to prepare me for drinking too much and being sexually assaulted, What I did not know then was the impossibility of equality, and that consent was highly contestable, and through my studies, I began to make sense of experiences that my friends and I had encountered that disrupted any notion of a singular story. Reflecting on my responses to a friend's experience of non-consensual sex at that time, while supportive, I was confused through her telling and wondered why it was that she did not 'just say no'. I feel shame and regret about this now, as I have come to understand that a yes that is coerced is not consent freely given.

Back in 1990, Kelly and Radford drew attention to the numerous ways that women's experiences were silenced through patriarchal knowledge claims about women and women's sexuality and legitimated and institutionalised through law, medicine, psychology and other disciplines. The knowledge produced, limited what is 'counted' as violence, and rape (and sexual violence) was presented as isolated incidents, in public spaces, committed by a stranger and using force. If women are unable to recognise their experiences as sexual violence through these criteria, how is it possible then to speak about the 'something'

that really happened. Further, as Kelly and Radford (1990) argued, when women say ‘nothing really happened’ they are making a statement about “how much worse it could have been” (p. 51). Knowing the realities that women face, the women are left feeling as though they somehow got lucky. Tolmie et al. (2018) noted that it is not just the initial behaviour that women have to consider but the instrumental effect of that behaviour—the intent to make women aware of the power differential.

Understanding the minimisation of violence as a process of meaning-making also depends on a definition of sexual violence that is inclusive of the range of experiences that threaten women’s sexual freedoms. For Kelly (1988), the widening of our understandings of sexual violence needed to account for the awareness of the *very real felt effects* of experiences that did not meet socially produced criteria. This led to an inclusive definition of sexual violence as “any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced ... at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact” (p. 41). As noted above, while both Kelly and Radford (1990) found that women often articulated their experiences of sexual intimidation, harassment, terror and lack of safety as ‘nothing really happened’, this often included the threat that though ‘nothing’ happened this time, something could happen. The importance of this early research was the creation of knowledge based on women’s experiences within their socio-cultural location, producing new knowledge, new understandings and social recognition of the previously invisible conditions that had kept women’s experiences silenced. Through this, challenges to the ‘myths’ of sexual violence became possible (Kelly, 1999).

Radford and Kelly (1990) connected the patriarchal strategy of silencing to complex processes of meaning-making, whereby to speak of their experiences of sexual assault, women need to be able to recognise them, and in that process make sayable the unspeakable. Jan Jordan (2004; 2018; 2020; 2022; 2023), through her career examining rape culture in New Zealand, also locates patriarchal strategies of objectification as holding in place women’s responsibility for their victimisation. With a focus on the relationship between policing and women who report rape, Jordan (2011) has argued that rape culture is deeply embedded in institutional and social power relations, where the meaning of ‘real’ rape, produced through a singular story of the ‘right’ kind of victim, continues to operate through the legal response to gendered violence. Jordan (2023) argues that the process of objectification of women as sexual objects of the male gaze does not open space for women’s sexual freedoms., Rather, it reproduces the sexualised double standards of western heteronormativity (Gavey, 1989; 2019b), where the idea that “good girls can’t be raped” (Jordan, 2023) seems to challenge post- feminist sensibilities, where a woman’s inevitable sexualisation means she becomes, at least partially, responsible for the violences against her.

Poststructuralism and Post-Feminism

It is not common to bring together post-feminism and poststructuralism in thinking about women's experiences of sexual violence. I now understand post-feminism as a period through which, in the global movement of neoliberalism in the west, (western) women experienced a shift in the gendered cultural narrative through an active process by which the 'gains' of feminism became consumed through an intensification of individualism, beyond feminism, into a space where women are not only free to choose for themselves, but are also responsible for those choices (McRobbie, 2004). Thinking with my sensibilities, the experiences of Audrey and Daisy were not *their* choices, and in that moment, I felt such pain and rage, and what I had understood as a cultural shift in women's sexuality as both active, and pleasurable, became questionable.

Tracing the shifts in the gendered cultural narrative of sexual freedoms and equality through the proliferation of representations of femininity through which women's independence and power are celebrated through consumerism and sexual attractiveness, Gill's (2007; 2008; 2016) extensive research along with fellow authors (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020) on the sexualisation of western culture draws attention to the ways in which empowerment is marketed to produce particular figurations of women as active, intelligent and sexually powerful subjects. What Gill (2007) argues is that the feminism of empowerment, is a post-feminist sensibility, the entanglement of both feminist and heteronormative ideals, seductively entwined as post-feminist freedoms in ways that do nothing to question heteronormativity. The objectification of women's bodies, repackaged as up for it, remains up for it for the male gaze. The figure that is produced through the postfeminist sensibility is also imbued with the neoliberal character in which wider structural inequities are reproduced as individual responsibility as a solution. As Baker (2007) writes, dominant discourses informing our understanding of choice, structure both our sense of reality and our understanding of our own subjectivities. Bartky (1998) argued that in the disciplinary power that inscribes a women's body with meaning until she lives her body for its perception by others, women's practices of self-surveillance as a form of obedience to their own subjectification are reified, and this secures their participation to effortlessly conform to heteronormative demands.

It is at the intersection of a postfeminist sensibility and the forces of neoliberalism that I make sense of the story of Audrey and Daisy, and the responsibility for their dehumanisation attributed to them as freely acting sexualised objects. As Gill (2007) writes, girls and women are 'free' to become a certain version of sexual subjectivity, so long as they actively transform themselves into the subject who resembles the fantasy of heterosexual males that is commonly found in pornography: Turner states "The sexually liberated modern woman turns out to resemble, what do you know, the pneumatic, take-me-now big boy, fuck puppet,

of male fantasy” (as cited in Gill, 2007). The argument Gill brings into view is the movement of porn through the advancement of capitalism into popular culture, normalising male sexual violence.

Understanding the desire to negotiate the demands of heterosexuality, embody femininity and the limits of feminist agency, the simultaneous figuration and scrutinisation of women’s bodies through a gendered power relationship of domination and subordination, reinscribes women’s bodies as objects of male desire and sexual coercion (Gavey, 2019b). In Gavey’s extensive work on heteronormativity as a gendered power relationship that dominates western knowledge claims about masculinity and femininity, embodiment and sexuality become the conditions that both enable and constrain meanings of rape and sexual coercion. This brings an understanding of rape culture as the normative patterns for (hetero)sex (Gavey, 2014; 2019a; 2019b) that not only makes the rape of a woman possible, but also deniable, as just sex, and is reproduced through stories of slut shaming and victim blaming. Remembering Audrey and Daisy and the onslaught of the online world that evidences the visibility of misogyny, and the invisibility of consent, I interpreted the images and experienced the narrative that normalised victim blaming and slut shaming to justify the rape, as incomprehensible. Bringing together an understanding of the high prevalence of sexual assault that does make it into view, and efforts to change outcomes, Jordan (2022) argues that rape culture, despite shifting social and political landscapes, is normalised in and through patriarchal gendered power relations that continue to manifest in the ways misogyny is expressed in the conditions of our everyday lives, including in the framing of consent.

At the same time as Audrey and Daisy, the franchise *Fifty Shades of Grey* (a fictional trilogy) was released. This franchise opens the possibility for a postfeminist figure who is ‘up for it’ (Gill, 2007). It attempts to negotiate the tensions between the desire for heteronormative monogamy and the demand for a sexual relationship of domination/subordination that resembles BDSM. In the films, the dominant/subordinate dynamic is heavily romanticised, and abuse is marketed as awakening women’s sexualities. While the debates about the significance of the story have been well argued, either as an opening up of space for new feminine desires or as the blurring of the boundary of consent within heteronormative culture (Dowling, 2017), women are coerced into performing themselves as ‘exciting’, or as failing in their gendered obligations to their relationship.

There are two important threads of understanding here in relation to this research, and that is how women make sense of experiences of sexual violence within the spaces that they assume to be sexually liberating, and how do we recognise the normalisation of violence so that it becomes visible. The *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy brought to life the figure of a sexually liberated woman, and at the same time, Audrey and Daisy were raped and held responsible because they were intoxicated and had a ‘history’ of sexual encounters, rendering them sexually consenting, willing participants in a (hetero)sexual encounter.

Understanding, through my own location, the freedoms of going out, having fun, wearing what I felt good in, drinking, sometimes to excess, and casual sexual encounters, I began to untangle the tensions between post-feminism, sexual coercion and casual sex through the normalisation of heteronormativity, to make sense of where normal ends, and abuse begins.

Casual Sex and Consent

Casual sex may be understood as liberating in so much as it appears on our cultural landscape as an opening to moving beyond the constraints of heterosexual monogamy. Western cultural representations of casual sex permeate our everyday lives through a range of texts, television shows and in online spaces, often representing women's engagement in casual sex as empowering. Farvid and Braun (2013) draw attention to the landscape of casual sex as an encounter that exceeds the boundaries of a relationship in as much as "they (ostensibly) occur outside the context of a committed, romantic, and longer-term sexual relationship" where it is just about the sex (p.360). Casual sex excludes, in its constitution, romantic feelings, or relationship commitment. What is being contested here, then, is the meaning of resistance to monogamy as a normal practice of heterosexuality. Farvid and Braun found, in the potential of casual sex, the paradox that casual sex is temporary, transient and incomplete, and as a casual sexual encounter, it does not replace monogamy as the desirable heterosexual relationship.

In her extensive research on heterosexual casual sex, Farvid and her colleagues have worked with the tension between the experience of freedom and an active desire for casual sex and the silencing, stigma and sexual double standards women experience if they do not meet the 'rules' of appropriate femininity (Beres & Farvid, 2010; Farvid & Braun, 2013; Farvid et al., 2017). The 'rules' of casual sex operating through the disciplining of women's bodies means that women traverse a fine line that blurs the boundary of the sexually desirable liberated figure and the pejorative figure of a slut (Farvid et al., 2017). Female sexuality is regulated through sexual reputation in a way male sexuality is not and has never been, and this is evidenced in the manner society views and discusses casual sex for men and women. While men are seen as fortunate to get casual sex on demand and encouraged to brag about it, women are seen as giving it (their bodies) away and become associated with negative identity implications, such as 'easy' and 'used' (Farvid & Braun, 2013). Gavey (2014) reminds us that in western culture, where the sexual objectification and humiliation of women is celebrated, the conditions for men's sexual abuse of women, or their pleasures in the consumption of other men's committal of sexual violence, are normalised.

Today, girls and women are pervasively presented as being a part of a new, sexually liberated landscape, in which they can be powerful, sexually agentic and able to make their choices, free from the constraints of structural inequities. However, in reality, this is not the case at all and, in fact, girls and

woman are as constrained by gender inequalities and heteronormativity as they have ever been—society has just developed new disguises, such as the post-feminist sensibility and the neoliberal character, to create the illusion of gender equality and freedom of choice. I would argue that society is asking/encouraging/expecting women to willingly position themselves as a figure that is easier to hold responsible for their victimisation.

Bringing together the figure of the sexually liberated woman and the ‘rules’ of heteronormative casual sex, in the media sensation that followed the murder of Grace Milane, I began to understand gendered patterns of harm within the structural and social relationships that inform the criminal justice system. While this ‘case’ came into view through her death by strangulation, the cultural scripts and narratives about women and sexuality and the meaning of consent also became a focus. Bows and Hearing (2020) drew our attention to the contemporary issue of consent to ‘rough sex’, at a time where narratives such as the *Fifty Shades* trilogy had shifted ideas about ‘normal’ sexual practices. A defence of ‘rough sex’ gone wrong depends on an understanding of consent that is deeply embedded in the gendered cultural narrative that blames the victim and her sexuality, and her sexual reputation becomes the focus of attention. Engaging in an analysis of the trial and media coverage of Grace Milane’s murder, Gavey’s (2023) article in *Spinoff* located the movement of consent from sexual encounters that trouble the boundary between consent to sex and the practice of sexual violence. The patriarchal assumption that men have a right to sex with a woman who demonstrates that she might enjoy sex, or who presents herself as ‘progressive’ in terms of what she is willing to do or might enjoy, is troubling.

Thinking with the notion that casual sex excludes, in its constitution, romantic feelings, or relationship commitments, I wondered, too, about the fury that Gavey (2014) speaks of—the fury for the misogyny that permeates not only some of “the worst expressions of men’s violence” but is also legitimated through the justice system and into the broader cultural narratives of who a ‘worthy victim’ might be. What is this re-emergence of misogyny, and how do we make sense of our fury through the conditions of heteronormative casual sex, where we struggle to find our place in the affective history of feminism (Wetherell, 2015)? How did misogyny ‘fall out of favour’ (Gavey, 2019, p. 230)? As Gavey articulated, there was a visible tension in the shifting landscape of women’s participation in feminisms, including post-feminism(s), and the backlash, or the risk of “being dismissed as excessive”, in academic spaces engulfs misogyny in “the normative affective orientation towards women” (Wrisley, 2023). As Cadwalladr (2024) argued, misogyny is invisible, and is never about all women, just the one singular woman, the one who exceeds the norms of femininity—too loud, too shrill, too disagreeable, too difficult, got the job because she slept with a man, a diversity hire, etc.

I recognise the affective flows of fear through a recognition of institutional acoustics (Waitere & Johnson, 2009), reminding me of Ahmed's (2012) argument, that the critique of neoliberalism feminism brings into view the experiences and interests of white western women's individual empowerment and excludes the multiple oppressions of 'other' women's success. Evoking the figure of a feminist killjoy, Ahmed re-tells a feminist history where women's voices enter "only as troublemakers, wretches, strangers, dissenters, killers of joy" (Ahmed, 2010a, p.573). How does the image of the feminist killjoy permeate the conditions of speaking out about violence, the violence that purchases our silence? The 'one woman' (Cadwalladr, 2024) who articulates the coloniality of our texts? Who speaks of racism, transphobia, sexism, privilege, unethical power relations? I hear Ahmed's call for the need to create disruptions to the affective history of our colonial and patriarchal institutional practices, the technologies that discipline our bodies, the violences of sexual difference that control what can be said. Ahmed encourages women to wilfully take on this position of the feminist kill joy—women must be willing to disrupt, to obstruct, to not allow these realities to be passed over because, as she states, change happens with disruption. If exposing violence and talking about it is uncomfortable and disrupts the singular story, it has the potential to ruin happiness. "If happiness requires turning away from violence, happiness is violence" (2023, p. 262).

This is not a case of false consciousness, as Calder-Dawe (2017) found in her research that brought into view the struggles young women face in the pursuit of their authenticity as individual neoliberal feminist subjects through the normalisation of qualities of empowerment, while at the same time recognising the cultural conditions that produced the inequities they faced in their everyday lives. She found that young women actively resist any location that might configure them as a feminist killjoy, carefully negotiating their experiences of sexism. Calder-Dawe locates their resistance to the feminist killjoy as a force that binds women to the choreography of sexism and polite responses that reminds us of the affective flows in the history of feminism. How, then, can we learn from these affective histories that reproduce the binary between both figures—the killjoy and the post-feminist—that hold us responsible for the violence against us?

I return to the notion of consent, recognising the already impossibility of consent in questions of the forces that exclude our missing narratives of affective histories of meaning-making. With the proliferation of misogyny online, as normalised, for example, in sexual image-based violence for 'fun' in online spaces (McGlynn et al., 2021; Gavey & Faustino, 2022; Meehan, 2022), the focus of attention in prevention efforts has been on women becoming more responsible for their victimisation. Kitzinger and Frith (1999) reminded me that early conversations about consent were located in the context of the prevention of date rape, based on the assumption that women's inability to say no was the problem. What they found in their research was that 'no' was not necessarily always interpreted as a refusal and,

importantly, they excluded the various ways women may refuse or revoke consent. Making women responsible for their victimisation also obscures structural and social gendered power relations, so the landscape of consent becomes unethical. Beres (2014) traced a shift in sexual violence prevention, moving from the recognisable earlier message of the limits of 'no means no', to an active negotiation of the meaning of consent (in legal, academic and social circles) that, at the very least, suggests that consent is some form of agreement to a sexual encounter. Her research results were troubling, as there was a clear separation between willingness to engage in sex and consent. She found that women can and do communicate clearly, and men are capable of interpreting and responding to consent cues. However, as Beres (2010) stated, willingness for sex is not and cannot be the standard for consent and, as this literature review shows, there are many forms of violence that can coerce willingness. Holding consent as the 'gold standard' of ethical sex neglects that although a verbal yes may be given, it is not always in circumstances free from coercion and/or violence.

What the literature has rendered visible is the recognition that the blurry line of consent is the refusal to recognise the sociopolitical conditions that normalise sexual violence against women. How is it possible to speak of sexual violence beyond the systems of knowledge that locate women as up for it and therefore responsible for the violence against them. This research aimed to evoke a conversation with the 'other' women of sexual violence, those who are not recognised in the affective history of the 'data points' of the singular story, to open spaces for conversations that call us into action to move beyond the entrapment of consent towards conversations about ethical sex.

Methodology and Method: It Matters what Stories Tell Stories

Methodology

This research seeks to challenge the singular story of colonial patriarchal heteronormative sexual violence through the voices of those of us who are not recognised in the affective history of knowledge production to open spaces that call us into action beyond the entrapment of consent. I use narrative theory to provoke what can be. The statistical figure of sexual violence in Aotearoa, is shameful. As a researcher, the stories that tell the untellable stories move me with intense emotion that calls me to action. I bring with me the stories of Audrey and Daisy, but also my own memories and those of my social networks – friends, family and those we meet along the way. I also remember the times I said no, but it was ignored because in a heteronormative relationship, consent is assumed given. As I sought to understand the complexities of recognising our experiences as sexual assault, I recognised my fear for the future not in the figure of the ideal victim, but through the insidious normalisation of sexual violence – everywhere and nowhere (Barkty, 2014) – and that efforts in the prevention space reproduce women as responsible to their victimisation. I feel angry, a killjoy, perhaps?

Moved by the stories of others, I draw on narrative theories to mobilise their potential and disrupt the dominant singular story of sexual violence. I have hope that the transformative potential of the movement of stories can shift the conversation from consent toward ethical sex. I also have hope that conversations with others enables us to recognise the gendered power relations that tell the story of our pain (affective histories) and through the telling we connect with each other to provoke change.

Tracing the colonial patriarchal knowledge that holds heteronormativity in place, and renders experiences of sexual violence *untellable*, I am committed to contesting the singular story (Fine, 2017) that produces a particular figure of sexual violence, and coerces us into shameful silence. How stories are told and by whom is a relation of power. As Haraway (2019) states, it matters what stories tell stories, and what stories we tell to tell other stories with. “Who speaks? For what and to whom? Who listens?” (Fine, 2014, p.26). These questions carry with them too, ethical responsibilities and relational obligations, as the process of “passing on stories” (Fine, 2017, p.108) is a relational process of meaning making as we delicately and responsibly engage in *listening, hearing, and re-imagining our potentials, together*.

Narrative Inquiry

Understanding the responsibilities of my location within feminism(s) and psychology to disrupt western knowledge claims of sameness and difference, I recognise my responsibilities to hear stories of

difference, differently, through a process of narrativity that recognises knowledge as partial and relational (Haraway, 1988, Harding, 1992). Understanding stories as situated and embodied, Haraway (1988) reminds us that that scientific objectivity is built on colonial patriarchy and a feminist politics of location engages the conditions of the present, gaining partial but strong objectivity through challenging colonial epistemologies. As a result, all research projects are inherently political, influenced by the sociocultural partial narratives from our own locations (Fine, 1994).

Sools and Murray (2014) draw attention to the mobilising potentials of narrative, reminding us that when we tell our stories, they tell something of the character of our everyday social practices. Telling stories has the potential to evoke empathy and connection and bring the listener(s) into a relationship, emotionally connecting us and directing the research towards certain actions. A move to action occurs when research is able to disrupt the dominant stories that are maintaining the inequitable power relations of the singular story (Fine, 2014). In this way, narrative has the potential to both create social change (Sools & Murray, 2014) and disrupt the legitimacy of Western knowledge systems (Fine, 2017). The stories we come to tell, as researchers, not only to ourselves, but to others, are deeply embedded in the sociopolitical conditions of our everyday lives. Working with feminist knowledge(s), I recognise that the lived experiences of women are accounts of how we come to understand the world. Narrative research that critically attends to the how stories are told with research so that they don't disappear, recognises that stories hold within them the power to move us into action (Fine, 2017) in multiple resistances to structural power relations of domination and subordination that limit what can be told (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2017). In this way, narrative inquiry enables me to attend to the hegemony of gendered power relations and the forceful demands of western knowledges of normativity enacted on our bodies to open new possibilities for making sense of the untellability of sexual violence within our affective and colonial histories, looking inward, situating our stories within our partial locations as we make sense of the multiplicities of experiences, but also radiating out, aiming for provocation of what can be, as we tell stories of both quiet and loud resistances (Fine, 2017).

Storytelling as a process of relational meaning making has the potential to both recognise women's experiences, to hear the affective flows of meaning making in conditions where misogyny, sexual coercion, and sexual violence against women are the conditions of our everyday lives. From my location in psychology, locating myself, politely, as a feminist (killjoy?), who dignifies loud resistance through a process of recognition that the purpose of narrative is not to replicate stories that have been told before, reproducing the refusal to acknowledge the violences of western knowledge claims, but to provoke us into "wide awakeness", to find ways to challenge claims to knowledge that make us responsible for our own victimisation. Recognising that all stories are always partial and incomplete, in any given moment, narrative creates the "conditions for more stories to emerge" (Fine, 2017, p.284). Storytelling evokes movement – a

feeling, a recognition of our painful memory - for the ways through which we make sense of ourselves and each other through our encounters. Fine also reminds us, that telling stories is not new to indigenous women who have long told stories from their subjugated locations, however, they have not been legitimated as knowledge. Research that is responsive to relational meaning making also seeks to decolonise our knowledge claims through a process of disarticulation of our knowledge and of ourselves through a willingness to hear (Waitere & Johnston, 2009).

Waitere and Johnston (2009) also argue that telling stories does not guarantee a hearing within the acoustics of the institution. As Waitere and Johnston wrote, speaking and listening cannot be divided into “productive and receptive modes” because to listen and hear requires active participation through a relational process of meaning making. They argue Māori women are completely aware of the inequities in their everyday lives, however, they are often excluded from the spaces that attempt to resolve such dilemmas—they are “physically present, often vocally absent” (p.6).

From her location as *mana wāhine*, Mikaere (1999) calls us to remember that there is a “chasm between indigenous reality and the coloniser’s perception of that reality” (p.20), and with Waitere and Johnston (2009) and Simmonds (2011) hearing the experiences of Māori women in all its complexities includes hearing the “hegemony of rational, masculine and empirical discourses that continue to marginalise and silence Māori women’s knowledges” (Simmonds, 2011, p.16) to disrupt the view from somewhere, instead telling a story that pays “heed to the dignity of women” (Waitere & Johnston, 2009, p.14) and decolonises patriarchal knowledge claims, creating new opportunities for movement and change. Fine (2017) asks, what do we seek to accomplish as narratives circulate and we as researchers leave our mark on the text?

How do I move with my story and the story of others? I feel a responsibility to use my location in psychology and as a researcher to listen to the narrative processes of connection. Informing my approach to narrative inquiry as a relational process of meaning making, together but not the same, I became interested in how *pūrākau*, an indigenous form of knowledge that embeds stories of *whakapapa* and connection to the ethical responsibilities for living that have meaning and purpose. Historically, indigenous peoples have always made use of storytelling to sustain and protect their knowledge (Lee, 2009), including the Māori practice of *pūrākau*. Methodologically, *pūrākau* has emerged within our institutions, as a response to the harms of colonial methodologies, so that it may also open potentials in research contexts to produce research that is decolonised (Lee, 2009), reclaiming cultural knowledges and practices, in new forms. In this way, *pūrākau* as a methodology is more than a re-telling of stories but is responsive to the conditions of Māori everyday lives, including legitimate ways of representing the affective histories of colonisation. For Woodhouse (2019) *pūrākau* can be mobilised to tell stories of “emotional realities” (p.14), situated

within the indigenous resistance to western hegemonic knowledges, that is relational and connects Māori knowledges through whanaungatanga to the world we inhabit. Returning to Waitere and Johnston's (2009) distinction between listening and hearing, I recognise that the ability to hear is impacted by shared spaces stretched across socio-political histories and theoretical contexts. What I do hear, is that narrative is necessarily relational.

It matters what stories tell stories, and the notion of *telling* as a requisite for a competent narration (even in this research) is troubling. Often linked to traumatic experiences, including narratives of rape, untellability is linked to the “silencing or degenerative chaos producing effect on personal narrative” (Goldstein, 2012, p.184). I draw on the notion of untellability as a recognition of the structural (colonial, patriarchal, individualised, gendered) power relations that limit what can be said. Attending to the chaos of experience and the telling, it is hoped that this narrative research will evoke empathy and insight into the challenges we face in articulating our experiences as sexual violence. Untellability is not the same as silence. But understanding silence as open to multiple meanings, perhaps recognisable as an act of unsaying – an action away from the singular meaning of silence as no voice – provides an opening for a counter story of resistance, a recognition of purposeful re-storying, telling ourselves away from blame and shame (Morgan & Coombes, 2001), and legitimating our stories.

Method

Relational Ethics—Listening, Hearing, and Re-Imagining Our Potentials, Together

Moving with narrative research in the hope of challenging the singular story of colonial patriarchal heteronormative sexual violence through the process of sharing our personal stories, becoming an active participant with the meaning making of those of us who are not recognised in the affective history of knowledge production of sexual violence. I hope to open spaces that call us into action beyond the entrapment of colonial patriarchal heteronormativity, and coerced consent. I use narrative theory to provoke what can be. As a researcher who enters a relational encounter with participants in a research project that is sensitive and may involve traumatic memories (Skinner, Hester & Malos, 2012), I am acutely aware of the responsibility to recognise those moments, reflecting on the responsibilities to speak for, about, or without details of those who share their stories of sexual violence as an important ethical decision.

The relationship between researcher and participants through the process of storytelling evokes an ethical encounter in the process of shared meaning making. The relational process as an ethical encounter carries with it the responsibility to recognise my location including the affective flows of meaning making,

the ‘emotional realities’ that are deeply personal, embedded in the inequities of our sociopolitical conditions. Remembering that narratives are a relationship and a gift (Oakley, 2016) this research with participants is designed to bring our affective histories into a relationship that emotionally connects us, toward transforming the conditions that normalise sexual violence.

The Practice of Relational Ethics

Relational ethics is a research practice whereby the research acknowledges the responsibilities and the obligations of the researcher and the participants, that are responsive to relations of power, including the power to change lives. As Hydén (2020) argues, telling stories, in a flow of meaning making, has the potential to change the position of the storyteller, from not knowing to expert, from the embodiment of blame and shame to important collaborator— so developing a relationship to inform the practice of this research, was a strong motivator for collaborating both in the design of the information sheet, and as a storyteller. I began a process of how to frame the ethical practice, where the experience of sexual violence might have been untellable or even untold until the conversations take place. Skinner, Hester and Malos (2012) wrote that with experiences such as sexual assault, many women feel as though they have to filter their experiences depending on who they are telling their story to—friends and family or even the police receive versions that are embedded in the power relations that limit what stories can be told.

I began conversations amongst my friend group and talked about how our own stories were part of a much larger ‘knowing’ among women, and yet there was a deep understanding amongst us that ‘women need to talk about it’. Together, we came to understand a range of ways through which we minimise our experiences, and the difficulty we have not only recognising them, but also recognising the social sanctions of speaking out loud. We also made sense of the ways through which fear operates on our bodies, made meaningful through stories of blame and shame. What was most important for my collaborators was that we need to talk about it so that we can create change.

As can be seen in the research information sheet (Appendix A), problematic sexual encounters became sensitive to the untellability of sexual violence, where the lack of consent and sexual coercion normalised in our current conditions might prevent women from recognising their encounter as sexual assault, or rape, or any other form of sexual violence, including taking responsibility for our victimisation (Jordan, 2004, 2008, 2018, 2020, 2022, 2023). I wondered about the affective meaning making in how we come to understand our painful memories? Participants were invited to take part in a conversation about their experience of a sexual encounter that they now understand as assault, and with an interest in making sense of how we understand consent and coercion. Importantly, as reminded by Hydén (2020) and Oakley

(2016) that tells us that asking a participant to share their stories of a painful memory without giving something of ourselves, is not a relationship.

After receiving ethical approval (MUHEC OM2 23/52), participants were invited to participate in research that had the purpose of telling a collective story of the processes of recognising how we are embedded in a dominant story of heteronormativity that holds us responsible for our victimisation, with the action to open space for the potential of our knowledge to challenge the meaning of sexual coercion and consent. Returning to my friend group, a relational space of safety in our everyday lives, I circulated the information sheet, and they passed the information on to their wider friend group. Participants who wanted to continue with the project of 'talking about it' made contact with me. Since participation was voluntary and participants' agreement to take part in and contribute to my research depended on the creation of a safe space (Consent Form, Appendix B), Hydén's (2014) teller-focussed research reminds me the informed consent is an on-going process that extends beyond the research in relational practice. Five women consented to their participation in this project.

At the time of our one-on-one conversations about questionable sexual encounters, the five women were aged between 19 and 38. Each of these women were teenagers when they had their first questionable sexual encounter, with the exception of one who disclosed an experience of childhood sexual abuse. Further questionable encounters were experienced by all the women, so, their ages at the time of the encounters ranged from 14 to 28. It is unusual to story the 'demographic' location of participants, however, it is vital to the sense making of this collaborative knowledge as it tells us something of the sociopolitical location, the conditions of everyday life at the time of their assault. The questionable sexual encounters the women storied took place in the 2000s, right around the time that the postfeminist 'up for it' figure surfaced (Gill, 2007), in the 2010s when the influential documentary *Audrey and Daisy* was released and the *Fifty Shades of Grey* films were popular, and during the 2020s, with representations of feminism(s) producing the mind of a child, a sexualised figure in the contested space of desire through the movie *Poor Things*. The consequences of these intersecting alignments blur the boundaries of heteronormative coercion and consent. Three of the five participants described growing up in communities where heteronormative relationships and sexuality were consistently represented through gendered structural power relations sanctioned by religious values, contributing to the normalisation of sexual violence against women. Four of the women were New Zealand European and one participant was a Māori woman, who also wanted to contribute to the action of the research.

As Hydén (2014) wrote, when talking about something as sensitive as sexual violence, participants need support in the process of narrating. The process of storytelling seemed too limited through interviews, with the understanding that narratives, in a process of listening and hearing where empathy, reflexivity and

movement inform relational meaning making (Taylor et al., 1996) help us make sense together. Following Jordan (2018) the relational process that resists the demand to ask questions helps encourages participants to make meaningful connections and become storytellers. Together, Hydén (2014) and Jordan (2018) remind me of my responsibilities to listen to hear the vitality of women's experiences being validated that moves us to contribute to the research.

I met with participants either online or in person to carry out these conversations, working with whatever option was preferred by them. However, their comfort and safety were paramount, and I made sure to continually negotiate consent in as much as I had no expectation for them to tell me anything they did not want to. The participants were free to change the direction of or end the conversation at any time and were given the option of contacting me at any stage before submission of this thesis to have their stories altered, or removed, or talked about in an ongoing relationship. There were no time limits for the conversations, though I generally allowed one to two hours, respecting that the participants had other commitments. With the participants' consent, I recorded our conversations so I could accurately transcribe and reflect back on our conversation. I performed all transcription myself to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Once transcribed, any identifying information was removed. The transcripts were returned to the participants for any changes, additions or negotiation of meaning making (Appendix C).

Method of Analysis

Drawing on narrative inquiry, and interested in the notion of consent, always already recognising its impossibility through the colonial patriarchal power relations that exclude our missing narratives of affective histories, I take up a position as a feminist killjoy – to hear, together, loud and quiet resistances to provoke what can be. The analysis tells stories of rape as a young person, online safety, rape and intoxication, sexual assault and silence, and sexual assault and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), in collaboration with each storyteller whose narrative is represented here and shaped into a coherent story. Each narrative brings into view the untellability of sexual violence, and the silencing effects on our affective embodied experiences. I therefore interrupt the stories with insights into the everyday conditions through which the affective forces of misogyny, coercion and consent have rendered our experiences as untellable. Each storyteller also brings into view the process of recognition that shifted their understanding of sexual violence – knowledge that provides an opening to shift the embodied effects of blame and shame, a counter story of resistance through purposeful re-storying. It matters what stories tell stories. The following chapter invites the reader into a relationship that evokes empathy and connection, making sensible the challenges women face when 'telling' our experiences as sexual violence.

Analysis: Listening, Hearing and Re-telling,

This chapter listens to the painful memories of sexual violence through five women's stories, situated within the sociopolitical conditions of postfeminism. Understanding the women's stories as gifts and as a relationship in the co-construction of knowledge, the stories that follow are told so that others may gain an understanding, or hear, relate to, and be moved by them. In the process of listening and hearing, we might all be moved to consider other possibilities. Remembering with untellability, and the silencing effects on our affective embodiment, these stories represent the loud and quiet resistances of women who are unrecognised in our response to sexual violence.

Each narrative brings into view the untellability of sexual violence, and the silencing effects on our affective embodied experiences. I therefore interrupt the stories with insights into the everyday conditions through which the affective forces of misogyny, coercion and consent emerge. As the process of storytelling continues, a recognition of purposeful re-storying emerges, telling ourselves away from blame and shame.

Rape as a Young Person—Without My Consent

Making sense of untellability through situated knowledge, Kimberley was 13 when she had to make sense of her experience of rape. She was incredibly young and inexperienced when it came to sex, "Yeah, I was too scared. I was 13, I was only just learning about sex and protection, and I was on nothing", a time when she had barely learnt about what sex and sexual assault were and so her journey of making sense of her assault, began with minimal knowledge about consent and coercion.

Kimberly's story of her experience tells us she was immediately aware that what had taken place constituted rape, however it is incredibly relevant that just because she possessed that awareness and knowledge of what rape is and that it can happen, she had a difficult time making sense of the encounter, "like I fully was aware, but I was also like no, that didn't just happen." While she remembered being told about the risks of rape, the reality of it happening to her was beyond her sensibilities. Disbelief. "Yeah, and I remember my mum telling me that when I was young, and I was like well that was back in the old days...". As a young teenager, it was not something that happened. But something did happen. In order to make sense of her experience, Kimberly was forced to transform her subjectivity in the recognition that the something that happened was not only possible, it was a reality. As her story continues, this was not a straightforward transformation.

Further complicating the untellability of sexual violence, were the threats of violence he made against her, "I was a bit scared cause he was messaging me like if you tell anyone, you're dead...Threatening

me, like ‘I will basically beat the living shit out of you so just play it off as normal, do not tell anyone’. So, it took me a lot, otherwise I would have told someone the next day, but I was so scared like this man is going to hurt me.” These threats of violence not only reflect his awareness that what he had done to her was in fact sexual assault, it was intended to keep her silent about the sexual violence he committed against her. These threats also represent the complexities of telling, the assumption that if it was really sexually assaulted, they should report it immediately (Jordan, 2004; 2022). As Kimberley began to make sense of the of the sexual assault, his threats of violence to purchase her silence affirmed her experience.

Telling, however, is also a complex and complicated process that does not necessarily guarantee safety. Stories circulate in and through social relationships through layers of meaning making that systematically configure Kimberley as responsible for the violence against her as she stories the social coercion and violence in the form of bullying. When Kimberley finally has the courage to speak up and share what she has experienced with a friend, that friend immediately tells not only Kimberley’s parents, but their group of friends at school. And as so often the case, the story is told through the social networks in school and Kimberley is subjected to an assassination of her character through social media for speaking up. “I had all these fake accounts made about me, I was dealing with the cops coming over to my house everyday with new questions, asking, I remember I wasn't allowed to have Wi-Fi for a little bit.” Kimberley was having to show up to school every day with the knowledge that nearly everyone in it, peers and staff, didn’t believe her story. “Even with the bullying, they wouldn’t do anything and then the principal at school, I remember having a meeting with him about the bullying and he basically said, “well there’s not much else we can do but you could go to another school.””

The aftermath of Kimberley’s rape features further invalidation from many key figures, through which she is left alone to make sense of and deal with the sexual violence. The police too, discounted her story in their response, invalidating her experience.

R: “Can you expand on that a little bit, when you say you felt, like do you feel like they believed your story?”

P: “I feel like they believed his.”

R: “Okay.”

P: “Yeah. No cause they were basically like there’s not much we can do, then within three months' time, my file was closed. Like there’s nothing else they could have done.”

As reported in Jordan’s (2004; 2008; 2022) research, police work with an understanding of ‘evidence’ that meets the legal criteria that normalises violence. The response by police was experienced

by Kimberley as ‘nothing really happened’ despite her evidence (physical and social media posts) which does not translate to believability within the dominant story and reconfigures Kimberly as responsible for the violence against her, and the untellability of sexual violence continues.

Responses to the violence(s) against her by the school system resonates with the responsibilities women have for ‘leaving’ unsafe relationships. While she has always been certain that her encounter was rape, she was trying to make sense of it through the conditions of everyday life where nearly everyone around her told her constantly that they either didn’t believe her, or that it was her own fault. “I got put out there that I was this liar, even though I had bruises, photos of my bruises, on my hips, on my neck, everywhere, my bum, everywhere.”

The dominant story that blames women for sexual violence is recognisable in Kimberly’s story: “I think, in my opinion, it’s more guys can’t, it sound’s really bad but for me it’s just more that guys can’t help when they feel a certain way about a woman.” This idea that men’s sexual desires are insatiable, and that it is women’s job to protect themselves, is heteronormative coercion that reproduces the normalisation of male (sexual) entitlement and denies women the ability to tell of their experience, ensuring that the contestation between just sex and rape (Gavey, 2019b) is difficult to articulate, making our experiences untellable. There was no consent.

Over time, as Kimberly processes the assault and the complexities of the context within which it occurred, we can hear her forced into occupying a contested space in which she is aware that she has experienced rape, however the conditions of her every day that failed to hear or see her experience as rape have had very real material effects. And yet, her knowledge that it was rape remained strong. Reflecting quiet resistances.

R: So basically, you went through this horrible, horrible ordeal, and then you had to go to school, and people, instead of kind of recognising what you had been through were holding you responsible?

P: Yeah, holding me responsible.

R: Can I ask how that impacted on how you felt about what had happened?

P: For me, I was kind of like I had my mind set, I know what had happened.

The embodiment of rape in the context of untellability meant Kimberly has to shift the affective flows of meaning making, spending many years after the initial rape coming to terms with a loss of her sense of safety. “No, it’s never fully come back, like even walking my dog yesterday around [location],

there was a guy there, and I thought he looked angry, he looked dodgy in my opinion, and I was like uh oh. Any guy I see, if I'm on my own, I lock my car, you know it's just the small things that I don't trust, meeting new family members, meeting my partner's friends, my partner's family, it's definitely like who can I open up to, what can I tell them? Just a lot of what's." And in this telling, I notice the ongoing affective flow that operates as a restriction on her movements in everyday life. Rather than pathologise her experience through individualised fear and anxiety but rather as process of meaning making, Kimberley stays with the affective storying to make sense of her sexual desire in the present, "I feel like since my first rape, I don't have as much of a sex drive as I wish I would when it comes to relationships and I'm more of a romantic person rather than a sexual person. I'm happy in a relationship, sex once a month, I'm good".

But the process of meaning making continues to be exhausting. Adding to the texturing of the untellability of rape, we return to the telling of reporting her rape to the police. By the time her parents are aware and had asked her to consider police involvement, Kimberly had been relentlessly bullied online and at school for her sexual assault. To then experience the responsibility to report her rape to the police so that he can be held accountable and in her telling, already disbelieved and the target of bullying, Kimberley also knew how much more exhausting the long and involved process would be, "Because if he's not wanting to admit up to it, it's just going to keep going on and on." She knew that the legal course of action without any kind of guaranteed resolution would require more time and energy on top of the exhaustion she was already experiencing. The intensity of the telling "well I don't really feel comfortable if he's not admitting to anything because then it puts me in a tough position" and I just said, "I don't have the energy to go through that"" was embodied. The burden of responsibility for 'one' woman to seek justice is too much to bear. Quiet resistances. As a young person, with limited understanding of sex and sexuality, and violence, that she navigated the meaning of her experience, and resisted the coercive demands of institutional justice, is remarkable. Something really happened.

While there are many serious negative consequences felt by Kimberly throughout her story, I feel that what is most importantly contained within her experience is her resistance, recognition and movement within the storytelling process. From the beginning, Kimberly resists the dominant narrative of the single story associated with sexual assault where she knows that even though many others dispute her experience, she was raped. She also resisted threats to procure her silence. Kimberly shows her resistance time and time again by showing up to school every day in the face of overt bullying and blaming, "Yeah, I'm not letting you get to me. I'm not letting you take the best of me." Despite the school culture openly holding her responsible she showed up to prove she knew what had happened. And in her resistance, and the school's refusal to ensure her safety, she was acutely aware of the injustices of responsibility and the inevitable feeling of disappointment, again, in the gut.

P: “Yeah, you deal with this it’s on you. There’s nothing we can do; we can’t kick him out if he’s saying he didn’t do it.

R: That’s so disappointing.

P: Oh, so disappointing, it’s sick.”

As Kimberly shares her story, we are able to perceive a transformation in how she has made sense of her assault and how she makes sense of her experiences. As she grapples with the layers of the complexities in the contest over meaning, Kimberley’s journey from the reality of rape as untellable, to making sense of the power relations that operate in the refusal to listen, and the narrator that stands proud of who she has become. “I am so happy and proud of who I am today”. She has learned some important life skills, “Yeah, and obviously, you deal with the trauma and stuff and that’s still very much there but I’m still very much happy and secure with the person I am now, and I think it’s taught me how to put my foot down when it needs to happen” leading to her participation in this research.

“I wanna really get my story out there and let people know that you know, people aren’t always who they say they are, and just so people are aware, more aware of you know, what can happen.” Kimberley’s participation is a reflection of her process of recognising the power relations that made her experience untellable, so that in her re-telling she was able to articulate her experience as rape, and tell herself away from blame, and shame.

Hearing the affective intensity of exhaustion as Kimberley’s storytelling connected with the burden of responsibility moved me. Kimberly’s story left me with no words, and as with Audrie and Daisy, I heard Kimberly’s story with a sense of disbelief and weariness that this visible, and documented instance of rape and the violent onslaught of digital violence that pursued the victim in the aftermath evidences the visibility of misogyny in our everyday lives and is without our consent. Kimberly knew that what had happened was rape, well before she could articulate it. Yet part of the rape experience was the threat of violence that relentlessly followed as she began to make her resistances sensible. I remembered the fury for the misogyny that permeates men’s expressions of violence (Gavey, 2014), and the legitimization of that violence through colonial patriarchy into the sociocultural narratives of who a worthy victim might be. As she brought together the fragments of her knowledge, she became very strong in her contribution to the ‘fury’ for the misogyny that framed her teenage years. She loudly resisted the dominant story that held her responsible, and she contests the notion of individual responsibility for safety plans. As a thirteen-year-old young person, her safety plan was appropriate for someone of this age spending time with a friend who was not a boyfriend, and not a date. There was no way of knowing in advance, nor were there any recognisable warning signs

(the imposition of risky sexuality) that she could be responsible for. Indeed, part of her friendship was premised on the performance of his socially recognised sexual location. Safety plans in and of themselves allocate responsibility and blame. They are untenable. Loud resistances.

Continuing with the affective flows of meaning making, the embodied effects of the continuation of violence through her sociocultural location as she became re-figured as a liar and a slut, and became a narrative purposefully told to shame her sexual reputation, evidence that she was ‘up for it’. Kimberley endured the multiple violent responses to her telling, and sometimes to the point where she held herself responsible, recognising herself inside a story where her embodied experience couldn’t be heard because it didn’t align with the male standard of happiness (Ahmed, 2010). And it is this knowledge, the refusal to become victim to the burden of responsibility, that is a powerful recognition that the dominant story can be contested through the power to emotionally connect and move us all towards collective action through relationships of recognition, resistance and movement.

Online Safety—Coercive Entrapment and Sexual Assault

Leanne’s story is located in the time where the technologies of social media were rapidly opening spaces for a new landscape of (post-feminist) sexual freedoms, and platforms like Snapchat were relatively new, and the ‘risks’ of sending ‘pics’ were less understood. The untellability of sexual violence as a process of coercion and threats excludes an understanding of the affective flows that situate our stories.

Leanne’s story begins with the memory of the moment that she ‘knew’ something really happened. “Anyway, I remember I sat down on the tiles on my bathroom and just took a cute selfie of me showing of a little bit of my chest and my shorts and sent it to him. And he screenshotted it. And back then you could tell someone had screenshotted it, but I had hit him up about it, as soon as he screenshotted it and this was before taking nudes was an actual thing.” And in that moment, she recognised that something was happening. “Yeah, this was where lewds were like the same kind of level and as risky as nudes. And anyway, I remember as soon as I saw him screenshotting it, or he had screenshotted it, immediately my heart had dropped. I was just like I hate this; I am not comfortable that he has that saved on his phone...”

The ‘knowing’ feeling was first understood as the potential for the image to be spread and someone, including her mother, seeing it. “There was probably no chance she would have ever seen it, but it just didn’t sit right with me”. As a response to her discomfort, she immediately made contact with the man to secure the deletion of the image, “I just remember it making me feel really uncomfortable, and so I messaged him and was like “hey can you delete that, why did you screenshot it?” and he was just like “oh

you know, screenshot it blah, blah, blah, blah it's on my phone now" and I was like "can you please delete it?" and he was like "oh I'll only delete it if you meet up with me"...and I was like "oh no, just delete it, you know, it would be easier", and I don't really remember what I said but I think I tried to avoid it and tried to get him to delete it other ways." When her attempts at persuasion failed, Leanne felt she had no choice but to meet up with him. And through the storytelling I hear the recognition of the embodiment of discomfort that was not recognisable as a tactic of coercion, but rather to the harms that spreading it online might have, that meant she did could not recognise the process of coercion that was beginning to entrap her. And in her memory was the confusion, the interaction between fear and excitement that his attention had stirred. "I wasn't like, at that point I wasn't incredibly uncomfortable, like I still felt a little flattered that someone was paying me this attention, I hadn't had this kind of attention before but at the same time I was like yeah this is not ideal." Without an understanding of the forceful demands that he was making, and with her young age and inexperience, she agreed to meet, with enough knowledge of safety to not disclose the area in which she lived.

Once they had met up in person, Leanne made several requests for him to delete the picture from his phone, "I was like, I remember talking to him being like "hey, I would still really love for you to delete that message", cause I'd obviously not talked about it, I hadn't brought it back up since we were on that bench like a kilometer ago and I was like "look can you just delete it, it'd be good, I've spent time with you, are you happy now?". From her understanding, she had met her obligations to meet and expected his reciprocity. Attention to his happiness, I have done what you asked of me. Something had really happened in that park, understood by Leanne as a (necessary) exchange in the process of negotiating the deletion of the image. "And so, after that I was like oh yeah, I've done enough, he'll probably delete it now." And the process of entrapment continues.

As he and Leanne agree to part ways he strikes again. "He was like "if I drop you home, I'll delete it at your front gate," and I was like, I suppose I trust him, he's not really done anything bad to me," and she agreed, because nothing 'really' had happened. "And I was like yay mission accomplished, this is fabulous, went back inside and went into my room, didn't tell my parents anything about what had happened." The process of entrapment was unrecognisable so there was nothing to tell. And I remember the feeling, and the knowing that it wasn't quite right. And the process of entrapment continues.

Despite their agreement, it isn't long after Leanne walked in her front door that he sent her the picture to show her that he still had it. He demands that they meet again. And she does. And something happens. "He pretty much made me fear for my life to the point that I was having almost a panic attack, and he said, "if you tell anyone about this, I will fucking hurt you" basically, and then he like pulled away

and was as normal as anything”. The threat of violence if she told was at the time inconsistent with her recognition that nothing really happened. “I think he’d known what he did to me was assault, yet I hadn’t realised.” And it was the threat of violence and not the recognition of sexual assault that was tellable. “I shut the gate and went inside and shut the doors, I think, I can’t remember what I told my mum, but I had told her that something had happened, and I was scared someone was going to come after me”

P: And so, she was on guard for 24 to 48 hours sort of thing. I can’t remember what I told her, I know it wouldn’t have been the truth.

R: Did you ever tell her the truth?

P: No, no, no. And like I don’t want to tell her cause I know it will make her feel like she failed as a mother, and I would rather her live with the inkling that it may have happened...

R: Then know for sure.

P: Then know for sure.

And I hear another recognition of untellability, the colonial patriarchal heteronormative figure of the ‘good mother’ and her responsibility to protect her children. I notice the untellable flow of knowing and not knowing in the relationship. Never just one. Carrying the burden of responsibility that her mother had failed and was to blame for the something that happened made her story untellable.

As the story unfolds, and without understanding the processes of coercive control and entrapment, Leanne remembers that she had no ‘evidence’ to recognise it as sexual assault. “I didn’t get a chance to report him, although I didn’t have any evidence it would have been nice to at least have something put down against his name in governmental records or the police or something that I experienced this, and I named him as that”. And I hear the loud resistance, recognition of the affective flow of meaning making through telling that may link her story to that of another. It is never just one. At the time, “I didn’t report it to the police because I didn’t feel like I had met the criteria for what they would consider rape or sexual assault. I had gaslighted myself, I guess, into thinking that what had happened to me was no big deal, that it was all my fault, that I could have gotten myself out of it at any point, which granted I could have, I could have stopped it happening, I could have gotten out of it but the only reason I think that is, is because now I recognize it as assault, and I didn’t back then.”

The process of recognising the boundaries of the allocation of blame and responsibility connects to the affective flows of responsibility that legitimates sexual violence as nothing really happened. “Back then

it was either rape or you wore a skirt that was too short, you know it was very much that black and white mindset of no you didn't get raped...". Without an understanding of sexual coercion, or entrapment and understanding herself as freely making choices, Leanne's experience was untellable.

As the story unfolds, Leanne reflects on her reaction to the sexual assault, and how the embodied affects of his threats and the assault were not sensible to her, "I don't cry when I'm scared, when I'm scared, I ball up, I put something on to distract me, you know, I do not have a crying reaction to that sort of stuff. So, for a while that quite perplexed me, I was like why am I not upset about this? Why am I not crying because I hear of all these girls' that go through this and they're upset and crying you know, I almost felt I probably invalidated myself...". And I hear the singular story of the 'right' kind of victim that is so deeply embedded in our affective sense making. Nothing really happened.

Over time, and now in loud resistance Leanne finds the potential to re-tell her story of sexual coercion, recognising the process of entrapment that shifted her away from the lingering responsibility of blame. "I don't think there was a definitive time, where I recognised it as [sexual assault], I think just slowly I came to the conclusion that I shouldn't have been made to do that, to get a photo deleted." It was not consent.

And in the recognition that consent is never freely given, Leanne too, through the process of storytelling, brings our affective histories into a relationship that emotionally connects us, and in her participation to tell, she seeks to transform the conditions that limit what can be said, including the range of ways through which we minimise our experiences:

"It's one of those conversations that I've always been open to telling and willing to tell because not only does it cover my experience of sexual assault, which I now recognize it to be, it also covers internet safety, and in person safety and just generally being conscious of what you post on the internet and how people can manipulate you so easily through the internet".

And she loudly advocates for talking about it, with teenage girls, so they too can recognise the gendered power relations that coerce them into unsafety. "For me I have always looked on the experience as yes it as scary and yes I didn't want to do it and yes I felt forced to but I've always, always, always, from as soon as I processed it, looked at it as a way to be able to educate and support others, it's never been anything that I've gone, like I've never had that victim mentality of poor me, poor me, this has affected everything else I do going forward, yes it's made me a lot more conscious, but it has put me in a position where I am comfortable and confident enough to tell others what happened, to either help educate them or hopefully show them signs and warnings or things to look out for if it was to happen to them"

And I hear the passion, and I understand this location in prevention work. And I can imagine the spaces where talking with young women about sexual coercion, social entrapment, and consent are possible so that we can re-tell our stories away from blame and shame.

Rape and Intoxication—Intoxication is Not Consent

The untellability of rape is saturated through heteronormative assumptions that women who consent to consuming alcohol are, quite simply, ‘up for it’. As Jordan’s (2004, 2011, 2022, 2023) work has consistently argued, when alcohol and/or drugs are involved, women (not just their account) are discredited as victims, and become responsible for the violence through her choice to drink, loosening her (sexual) inhibitions and ‘asking for’ what happens to her (Jordan, 2004).

Aware of the circular story that blames women for rape, “then that does place, in some people’s minds, place the blame on me, like “oh you shouldn’t have gotten that drunk”, you know”, Julie became caught in the terrain of knowledge that makes rape untellable, both knowing she had been excessively drunk and raped, and also knowing how she would be judged as responsible in any re-telling. The recognition of the conflict adds to the complexities of making sense of our experience. Listening to the affective flow in the storytelling, the feeling of responsibility seemingly continues into the present even though the affirmation of her father’s response was what has meant she knows it is not (her fault).

For the most part, Julie was able to free herself of responsibility for what happened, and she credits the validation she received from her dad, “he told me it’s not my fault, I think if he hadn’t had that conversation with me, in the morning, I probably would have worn more of that at the time and probably still to this day...I was able not to wear too much accountability on myself. And I attribute that to the conversation my dad had with me the very next day. If it wasn’t that soon, then I would have already started blaming myself. But the fact it was the very next morning, and he just kind of reassured me, I mean I feel it would be great if every chick could have someone like that...”, as affirming that something really did something happen.

The situated knowledge Julie had to recognise her experience as both rape *and* as untellable, was not only affirmed by her father’s responsive response, but also informed through his position as a police officer who had worked with rape victims. As Julie shared, it would be great for all victims to receive that validation, especially so soon after the event before the chance to take responsibility for what happened has time to really begin. And yet I am reminded of the limits of tellability.

While Julie felt well supported in her telling, “Oh, it meant so much! And he gave me a big cuddle and he was like “these things happen, it’s not your fault, just know that and don’t wear this”, she wasn’t able to completely absolve herself from the affective flow of responsibility for the rape. “Yeah, but there is a part of you that thinks, oh I could have prevented this from happening if I didn’t get so drunk.” Something really happened was also normalised as a thing that happens.

What I heard through the process of making sense of responsibility was the narrative of rape prevention, whereby we are responsible for the conditions that led to our ‘lack’ of safety because we drank too much. I am again reminded of the misogyny that permeates men’s expressions of violence and normalises sociocultural narratives of who a worthy victim might be. How is it possible to re-tell our responsibilities away from the demands of misogyny within the conditions of normalised violence against women? As Julie makes sense of the affective flows of responsibility, she reflects on the reality of her intoxicated state, “Yeah, especially like because I was really drunk when it happened, that was the main reason I couldn’t get out of it, cause I was almost comatose...And even if you, like in the situation I'm talking about, I definitely didn't give any, I said no many a time, but even if you did say yes, as you were touching on there, you're not really in a position to be making calls like that, cause you’re not in your right mind.” And as the story unfolds, while she was excessively intoxicated, she knows she did not consent and was very clear in her struggle that she repeatedly said ‘no’ and he expressed his violence anyway. Resisting the narrative that intoxication is consent, and clearly saying no, we can hear her entrapment, and the inevitability of his sexual violence.

P: Like in my situation I couldn’t even move, like I remember after it happened, I rolled off the bed, I was so drunk I could barely walk but I could say no and then I went and threw up on his driveway, so he obviously knew that I was....

R: Yeah. Not in a position to...

P: Incredibly intoxicated.

And through the storytelling, Julie resists the story that she is responsible for the violence, clearly drawing attention to the question of individual responsibility for our safety, and challenges how women have become accountable through prevention strategies that reproduce the story of blame through a focus on women’s drinking. And we hear her shift the responsibility for safety toward holding men accountable for the prevention of sexual violence. Fury for the misogyny that permeates men’s sexual violence. “How about you don’t do that when someone is in that state, you know...But really the prevention should lay with

the men, they should be the ones, being told we shouldn't be doing this instead of girls thinking oh if I have a few drinks then it's my fault. Yeah, it's just backwards."

Remembering that Julie too, was a young woman still within the high school system, the counter-story that emerged at school, like Kimberley, became a cultural narrative that produced the non-consensual (yet to be tellable rape) through slut shaming and as in other representations in social media, became a story of just sex. "Yeah. And then he went around talking about, like telling people "Julie" is the best root I've ever had, and it was like, that got back to me, and it made me very upset. I remember I was with some friends when it came back to me, and I got really uncomfortable cause I was like if that's the best you've ever had I'd hate to know what else you've had."

The untellability of her rape becomes the background narrative to how she moves through high school, in an ongoing pattern of knowing and the recognition of affective flows through the isolation that she endures. "You know like, it just, it was like he was trying to paint it to be something that it wasn't." The story of her shameful sexuality endures as the 'truth' that figures her as up for it, and renders her story, her knowledge, as unbelievable. The loss of social connection and unable to escape the circulation of the story that continues the untellability of sexual violence and the endurance of the ongoing harms of limiting her believability—Julie becomes entrapped:

"Yeah, it's pretty bullshit though cause even with what happened to me, it happened at a house right next to school, that I could see from the field, so you're like sitting there with your friends, having lunch, you know on the field, and the house is right in front of you. And I'd have to walk past that street every time I walked to school, and I had to sit, cause his girlfriend joined [high school] for a little bit, she wasn't there for long, but I was friends with, the rapist dude, I was friends with his sister, and she was sitting with me at the table I would be in, in art class, and she would always chat to his girlfriend, and the only thing they had in common was him. So, they'd just talk about him the whole time and I'm just like this is my favorite class, art class, and I've got to sit here and listen to you guys talk about the dude who fucking raped me when I was wasted."

Facing the social sanctions of social exclusion, Julie was unable to reconcile the account of the circulating story with her own experience, and for a time, she attempted to process it while pretending it didn't happen, "I guess it was just easier to try forget about it and move forward, I didn't know how long the process would take and if you'd have to keep, you know going over it and so it was just easier not to do anything. Which is not a great way of dealing with things but you're young. I just wanted to carry on with my life and forget about it." Quiet resistances.

The recognition that there were social sanctions to telling produce the conditions through which silence can be purchased, contributed to Julie's decision not to report her rape. The story circulating intended to harm her reputation resonated with other media stories that harm women's reputations and also informed the untellability of her story. "And people in the media, oh my god, I think this was in the 90s or it might have even been the 80s. But she was all over the newspapers, with people saying, "she's lying", "she's trying to get money off him" and all this stuff, when she was just trying to stand up for herself. Apparently, she was a girl with really good ethics, she didn't want any money from it, she just wanted justice, and she got made to look like a fool. And I think those kinds of situations scare girls from taking action as well." And I hear the deep breath as she resisted the story and endured, quietly, but resisting responsibility for her rape.

As she reflects now, the responsibility of sense making still continued alongside her and as she says, her chosen path after her rape, looking back, "was not the best way to deal with it... Well, I obviously didn't deal with it in the best way..." and the feeling of regret for not having the knowledge she has now that meant she didn't speak up continued to affect her sexual relationships for some time. "And sometimes during sex I would think of what happened, and it was just total buzzkill. And you're still like "oh yeah" and pretend you're into it for your partner... Because it was actually having an impact on my sex life and my relationship at the time. I didn't have an orgasm till like, probably 25. Yeah, and I was getting pissed off man!". And in her story, she tells a story of transformation, as she moves her fury into action and decides to confront her assailant:

"So yeah, I actually ended up contacting this guy because I just wanted to let him know, "you've fucked me up a little bit and I'm not happy about it, and I want an apology". Yeah, so I did. I sent him a message on Facebook actually and he was kind of shook that I had brought it up so late, but he was like "look I am so sorry about that night", and he gave me an apology. Whether he meant it or not, I dunno, because it was followed by "please don't take police action, I have two kids now".

In loud resistance Julie finds the potential to re-tell her story of rape that shifted her away from the lingering responsibility of blame and shame having been affirmed by the perpetrator that he had raped her.

R: When you say that, because he apologised, was that more because it validated what had happened, the way you saw it had happened?

P: Yeah. If he had turned around and said, “oh you were asking for it, it’s your fault, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah”, which a lot of dudes probably do, cause they don’t wanna take accountability, he actually took accountability and said “look, I’m really sorry.”

And I can’t help but notice that while the conversation for Julie was affirmation that she was not responsible, his response also was also a plea not to ruin his happiness.

Julie participated in this research, because she has a passionate interest in informing prevention strategies in schools, “teaching them in school, it would be cool if there was a class that was mandatory in school for men and even women, about consent.” Throughout her storing, she also tells of her first sexual encounter in circumstances that she would also have been able to recognise as sexual assault at the time if she had had the understanding around consent and coercion, “if I’m truly honest with myself, a situation where I’ve pushed it under the rug more than my actual rape that happened, because he did ask me “should we have sex” and I said “yes”, so I was like that’s then my fault and I’ve always just thought, “oh no that wasn’t rape...” We need to talk about it.

But more than that, Julie’s participation is a connection between us of another time. And hearing Julie’s story as commitment to ‘we need to talk about it’, reconnects us here, with the same sadness and anger I remember feeling for her all those years ago, when the rape initially happened. Julie and I were both teenagers when she was raped while extremely intoxicated, and when it came to sexual violence, we had little knowledge of the inevitability of violence in our lives. Julie recognised her rape immediately, and she knew she had said no multiple times, and she also recognised that her level of intoxication created a huge power differential that he used to his advantage. While Julie knew the encounter for what it was, there was still a level of responsibility she held for having consumed as much alcohol as she had and ending up as intoxicated as she was, and this feeling of responsibility had made her story untellable. She knew it was rape and that it should never have happened, but a small part of her held a bit of doubt around culpability. Following this affective movement of responsibility I could hear the weariness, the enduring emotional and physical effects of the rape that led her to loud resistance – to demand an apology. This was momentous, and together we could recognise that she could finally let go of any self-blame as she should have been able to go out on a fun night and drink alcohol and not have to worry about being responsible for sexual violence against her. And together we remembered the two sexual assaults and how we had never used words such as assault and rape, although we did recognise the embodied effects as we tried to make sense of them at the time, the sadness and the unease, the anger and the shame but we had no ability to tell, or language through which to speak. We knew something had happened.

Being moved into action, and remembering with Julie in our recent conversation, we together recognised that there had been whispers about risk but not tangible knowledge about sexual violence, so what really happened was shocking and difficult to reconcile with what we had known before. And we recognise the process of untellability also denies us the embodied experience. It is Julie's storytelling, in a process of remembering together, that the affective flows of meaning making are remembered as embodied and enduring responsibilities. And it was this experience that was the match that Audrie and Daisy lit in my responsibilities as a researcher – talking about sexual violence so we can re-tell ourselves away from shame and blame.

Sexual Assault and Silence—Contesting the Meaning of Consent

Ginny's story begins like many of our stories, as a teenager, spending her weekends hanging out in a group with her friends, having a few drinks, with the understanding that she was freely able to negotiate her sexual freedoms. And as a teenager embedded in the demands of heterosexuality, Ginny was sexuality assaulted by someone she knew. "He was a couple years older, and just everyone thought he was cool, and that was the other thing, he was one of the cool guys. So, you didn't wanna have turned down one of the cool guys, if that makes sense." As the story unfolds, the demands of heterosexuality coerce Ginny to become engaged in a figuration of gendered power that inscribes her body as 'up for it' through sexual coercion understood by Ginny as normalised social pressure to conform. And while she said yes to something, she became increasingly uncomfortable with what was happening. "I think it wasn't even about saying the yes, it was more like, you know going along with it and then saying "oh", kind of trying to back off, but because feeling like there was pressure behind it, I kind of didn't feel like it was heard, or my actions were even kind of read." Something happened, and the process of untellability becomes recognised as knowledge that her shameful figuration as a slut, limits what can be understood as consent.

R: And when you say pressure, was that from him or...

P: Yeah, I guess it was just the whole thing of being young and I'd actually just lost my virginity.

R: Okay.

P: And people had found that out and then I felt like they were, you know...

R: You felt like they were, were people assuming that because you'd done that now...

P: Yeah, I'll do it again. Kind of thing.

The meaning of coercion and consent told through dominant narratives of slut shaming and victim blaming to justify rape also make invisible the affective flows of meaning making where consent becomes

contestable. “Well, I was saying no, and pushing his hand away, like I kissed him and that was all I was wanting to do...”

The contest in the meaning of consent reminds me too, of how our sexual histories become the site of contest over the meaning of consent and depends on an understanding of consent that is deeply embedded in the gendered cultural narrative that blames the victim and her sexual history, and her sexual reputation becomes the focus of attention. And the assumption that men have a right to sex with a woman who demonstrates that she might enjoy sex, or who presents herself willing to do or might enjoy some expressions of her sexuality speaks to the fury for the misogyny that normalises men’s violence.

Coming to terms with the conditions of telling, and knowledge of the gendered cultural narrative that she is responsible for ‘leading him on’ the inevitability of the misogyny that travelled in the aftermath made her story untellable. Like the control that Julie’s assailant had of the narrative that travelled through her social relationships, Ginny’s assailant too, took control of the narrative in their social group, through slut shaming to harm her reputation, and protect his, “which was really horrible afterwards, because we didn’t go as far as what he said, and yeah, it was really horrible actually”. Trying to make sense of the sexual assault, Ginny had to endure the harmful damage to her social location. “No, he told everyone, and he was like “oh yeah, she made me do this.” I’m like “but I didn’t, I didn’t make you do that, you did that.” And I pushed his hand away. And he kept doing it, but he said the opposite, he said I put it there, and I was like “but I didn’t!” It makes you feel real gross, and you’re like argh, annoyed.”

I hear the affective flows of the burden of responsibility to recognise that consent has no protection for the harmful and ongoing effects of slut shaming “because then the fact of, I really didn’t want him to do it, made me look like a slut, who would go and make him do it.” To protect herself from further harm, she did not contest the circulating story. Quiet resistance.

P: Yeah, I didn’t even bother, I was like that’s not true, but I didn’t bother making a massive deal of it, so everyone believed him.

R: It was easier for you to go along with it, instead of making waves about it?

P: Well, I just said it didn’t happen to my friends, but I didn’t confront him or anything.

And I hear the conditions of our location that coerce us into shameful silence, and quiet resistance. To speak out, to become a troublemaker is untenable.

It isn’t until years later that her experience becomes tellable, as she connects with others and they

began to share stories that her experience becomes recognisable. “It was when we all started having kids and stuff. I guess you become a little bit more, as you grow up a bit more, you’re not so conservative I guess and you’re a bit more free to talk and the cool stigma goes away, you know, he’s not cool anymore, it’s not like that anymore. So, I guess, and then yeah it was quite interesting. He just makes us all feel gross now.”

And Ginny and her friends begin a process of re-telling their affective histories, recognising their silence was resistance to being located as a killjoy, and destroying the happiness of the (hetero) group.

R: When it had happened to you, had you heard of it happening to others before you?

P: No, no, nah.

R: But then afterwards more things came out?

P: Only like, probably years later, like we didn’t really talk about it for years...

R: Oh wow.

P: Everyone just kind of kept it...

R: Kept it to themselves, yeah.

And as is often the case in storytelling, in Ginny’s process of making sense of the normalisation of violence and the recognition of the power relations that limit what can be said, I recognised a process of unsaying the silence that opened the potential for a purposeful re-storying away from blame and shame, that recognises, like Julie, the missing affective history of affirmation in our responses to sexual violence.

As a child Ginny was sexually abused by a trusted friend of the family and when she came forward and told her parents she was acknowledged and then silenced. And she began to recognise how such a silence had impacted on her experience of sexual assault. “The next morning, I told my parents, but I never knew that they believed me. So, I didn’t know anything happened after that, so I was about, maybe I was eight or nine, I was quite young, anyway, something happened when I turned 18, and it just kept coming back in my head and I was like I haven’t ever dealt with this, and so I contacted my parents, I rang them and they were like “Ginny we did stuff! We went and we did prayers” and he actually ended up getting sent to a rehabilitation thing, there was heaps of stuff, like heaps of stuff that went on, but I wasn’t involved in it. I did get prayed over, but I wasn’t involved in this rehab or rehabilitation, I didn’t know he got in trouble. Yeah, so that was my whole thing, I didn’t wanna, I was like oh okay, maybe it wasn’t a big deal, I’ll just

leave it, and he's not allowed to babysit again.”

Through the process of storytelling, the silence of the shameful story becomes understood.

R: I wonder if your parents had been like “hey, just so you know, we have done something about this”, it would have validated it to you.

P: Yeah, I think that was the thing, yeah, and then made me feel like my body, you know, cause you don't treat your body right, you've gotta respect yourself. I think it takes a wee bit of respect away.

R: Absolutely it does. Yeah, I definitely think I get what you're saying because if they never spoke of it again, to me I would be like okay I guess we don't talk about that, we just pretend it didn't happen and move on from it. But if they had said to you “hey just so you know, we did something about that, it was wrong, it shouldn't have happened.”

P: And then I'd be like oh yup and empowered...

R: Yeah, and thank you for doing something, it wasn't my fault.

P: Yeah, and make you speak out again and make you more assertive.

R: Exactly, and that's it. I feel like you need that validation, that something happened, if that makes sense.

P: Yeah. No, you do because sometimes you're like did that all happen in my head?

R: Or was it that bad if no one else is reacting to it?

P: Yeah.

Without affirmation that she was not responsible for her abuse within the conditions of shameful silence, Ginny is not recognised in the affective history of meaning making of the sexual violence she has experienced. And as she storied the response to her childhood abuse, it became very evident that validation of our affective embodied experiences matters. Recognising those moments, the emotional realities that are deeply personal in the process of storytelling, have the potential to bring our affective histories into a relationship that connects us, to transform the conditions that limit what can be said, including the range of ways through which we minimise our experiences.

R: We talked a little bit about the minimisation of it. Just because you didn't really say anything at the time, did you downplay it? I know you said that it was painful and that you didn't enjoy it, but did you kind of

tell yourself it's not really that big of a deal, or did you always recognise it for being something that...?

P: Nah I probably did say it wasn't a big deal; I would have definitely done that.

R: And that was to cope with it and just be able to move on from it or?

P: Yeah, that's one of my biggest things that I do, with most things, like "It'll be alright, it's not that big of a deal."

Moving with the normalisation of sexual violence, Ginny participated in this research to re-tell her story of sexual coercion and the implication of consent that attends to the affective histories that have potential to shift our responses from blame and shame to the recognition that we need to talk about it. "Yeah, and I feel like girls are different, I feel like guys, actually I don't know cause I can't really speak for a guy, but I feel like we internalise stuff, and we will think about it and things will come up in our head years and years later. We'll try and get over it, but it's still really damaging. I think just that whole thing I was saying before, being validated, getting the validation, that it is something."

It is the affirmation of her experience that enabled her to begin the process of the affective flows of meaning making that have the potential for opening spaces to talk about the gendered power relationships of domination and subordination that form the conditions that both enable and constrain meanings of rape and sexual coercion, not only as understanding the normative patterns for (hetero)sex but to make visible how these conditions makes the rape of a woman possible but also deniable, as just sex, through narratives of slut shaming and victim blaming. Ginny's story reveals the importance of conversations to the process of recognition, how shared experiences have the power to change your teller-position. And in her re-telling following the affirmation with her parents and later with friends helped Ginny to make sense of her experience of sexual assault.

Sexual Assault and IPV

Making sense of untellability through the conditions of everyday lives, Brooke begins with a story of recognition of the gendered patterns of harm, operating as a form of social entrapment (Tolmie et al., 2018), drawing our attention to the intersectional inequities of colonial patriarchy that have formed the conditions of violence against Māori women.

Brooke's story brings into view the complex relationship between IPV and sexual violence, and the institutionalisation of western heteronormativity through the nuclear family as part of the colonial agenda that disrupted stories of connection. In Brooke's story, I heard the dominant narrative that disciplines

women's bodies and assumes it is a women responsibility to satisfy her husband's demands for sex. And I am reminded too that the separation of romantic love, sexuality and the nuclear family are colonial (Wilson et al., 2021).

Recognising that her upbringing normalised her understanding that sex was non-negotiable, she became responsible for her partners fidelity. "It was and coming from a Christian background, we were meant to please our husbands and it's just like we don't have sex before we're married or whatever but obviously, I did but it's just coming into that they're the only person you have sex with, so you've gotta please them no matter what. So yeah, I think it is assumed. I feel like maybe growing up in a Christian background it is your duty to do the washing, look after the kids, have sex, cook food, have dinner... Wifely duties, and if it's not part of that then it's just like what are you doing, you're not pleasing your husband, where are they going to look? Are they going to look elsewhere, for you it's a whole, even like anxiety over it."

As her story unfolds, Brooke endured sexual violence unrecognised within the broader context of IPV in her relationship, until she found affirmation, and new understanding with the women's refuge listening to her story. "I heard in women's refuge, that is a type of abuse, like if you've said no, and then they don't respect it, and then they get shitty about it, even in a marriage it's not okay. If you say no, it means no." With this new knowledge Brooke was able to re-examine the normalisation of sexual violence and recognised that many of his actions to manipulate her into sex, was coercion, and therefore sexual assault. "And he'd say that quite a lot, like "you don't meet my sexual needs so therefore I have to look elsewhere", and "if you do this for me, if you dress a certain way, or if you do this", like little weird things that maybe I wasn't okay with, yeah then it was he would look elsewhere, like "I have to get hard off porn to have sex with you", or "I have to look at this, to have sex with you", or things like that so I was like okay I'm not enough and then if I said no that would completely, he would just leave for the night and he would go off into town and I would be left wondering if he had slept with someone or if he had not and then me asking that would lead to, arguments, or whatever.":

P: Yeah. And so, most of the time, yeah, I would just have sex with him.

R: It was easier?

P: It was easier than having that anxiety of not being enough or he might have cheated on me

And I recognise in the untellability of sexual violence, that gaslighting, the mobilising of heteronormative coercion and her inadequate sexuality to manipulate her consent and limit her sexual expression. "Like what do I do next time, or what can do I do to make it better for you and then he'd be like

“oh you’re just really shit at this” or “you’re just really crap”, “obviously you haven’t done this a lot”, things like that.” And then on the other side of it, Brooke would be punished for expressing her sexuality, “Yeah, cause I would say something like “Oh I kind of like it like this” and he’d be like “oh you’re a fucking slut.” He’d be like you’ve obviously slept with other people”, and I’m like “no”, and he’s like “no wonder you feel loose”, or things like that.” Brooke was living a constant movement of uncertainty, that in the flow of meaning making that meant she was entrapped in a circle of violence that “makes you feel so low about it, that you’re like maybe I should be more shit at it so I’m more like a virgin. It’s like what do you want from me?!”

Hearing the affective flows of meaning making, I recognise the social conditions that necessitate complex self-surveillance in relation to the contradiction of the transgression of ‘too much or too little’. “Because he was putting me down to do those things, so he could have his way and have sex, but he didn’t get how it affected me”, or withhold sex and shame Brooke for indicating her willingness, “And then sometimes I would sit near him, and he would be like “what the fuck do you want? You obviously want fucking sex from me” and he’s like “I’m not going to give it to you” and I was like “oh okay.” So, it was more of a punishment than too.”

Sexual degradation as a tactic of coercive control, operates within a system of gendered power relations that regulate women’s lives. In the context of IPV, Brooke’s sexual degradation is located in her sexed body, and is explicitly linked to heteronormativity through the way that men assert dominance and accrue benefits as they target women for micro-regulation (Stark, 2010). “Yeah, cause he’d be like “I like you better as a virgin” or” I like you better knowing you haven’t slept with anyone.” And I obviously had but it was just like, therefore I was shit at it, or I was bad at hand jobs, or I was bad at this. And I was always, he always made me feel like that.”

The micro-management of Brook’s sexuality endured, relentlessly shaming and blaming her for her inadequate sexual body. “He was like “you’re so loose, you’ve obviously slept with my cousin, cause he’s got such a big cock” and he spat in my face, and then he was just like “you’re fucking loose”, then he was like “you’re so stretched down there, no one would want you”, and then he was just like “how disgusting, I don’t even feel my dick” and I was just like “okay”...”.

Her first recognition that there was a possibility that these were not her deficits, was in an interaction with a midwife at the birth of their child, who in response to her husband’s putdowns, gave him an education on the anatomy of a vagina. “I remember my Midwife, saying, cause I remember [ex-husband] after I had [child] cause he was so big, he goes “sew her up nice and tight”, that’s what he said. And then my Midwife turns around and goes, “you’re obviously uneducated” and he goes “what do you mean?”, and

then she goes, “because a tight fanny is only when they’re not enjoying sex”, she was like “they go back to normal and then they loosen up if they’re enjoying sex”, and then he was like “oh” and he got fucking shut down. And she was just like “the fucking disrespect for him to tell me to sew you up”.

Having this interaction with her midwife and reaching a new understanding opened up the space for Brooke to reflect on other past encounters in which she was coerced into acts she did not want to do, “Someone said, my ex said, “it’s a tighter hole, so can I try it?” And I was like “oh” and he was like “it’s just cause you’re a little bit loose down there, so can I try that?””. And I recognise again, the narrative of domination and subordination that form the conditions for the misogyny that inscribes our bodies with meaning – as transgressing the norms of femininity, as lack, and therefore responsible for our victimisation.

And in the telling, Brooke recognises that sexual coercion operates as tactics of intimidation and threat, and “that isn’t okay and it’s just like to make them feel like there is an ultimatum, “if you don’t have sex with me then I’ll look other places, or I’ll do this, or I’ll get mad or I’ll, like I can cheat on you.”

As the story unfolds, I recognised the affective flow of meaning making, as Brooke, with support, finds the strength and courage to leave her abusive and controlling relationship, and began a process of learning and understanding the effects of sexual coercion and abuse. Brooke’s marriage left a lot of trauma for her to heal from and over time to begin to rebuild her confidence, she began to start dating.

As Brooke shares, after all the emotional damage, she just wanted to feel desirable again, and she began a casual relationship. And I hear the sounds of post-feminism, casual sex as empowering and is just about sex (Farvid & Braun, 2014), as I recognised the relationship between casual sex and sexual coercion. “I had sex with this guy and he was like, it was quite sore and he was like, with fingers and I was like “ow, that kind of hurts”, and he was just like “you love it”, and I was like “well, ow, can you do it this way cause I actually like”, cause by then I’d probably spent a lot of time by myself so I knew what I liked.”

And as this story unfolds, we recognise the dominant narrative of consent, casual sex is an agreement to have sex, and not only have it but enjoy it. Brooke’s resistance to his intimidation and coercion, was not heard but rather he controlled the narrative to both shame and blame her for changing her mind. “I was like “no that really hurts”, I was like “that hurts” and he was like “you fucking love it”, and I was like “I don’t love it” and then he like pulled it out and I was like “I dunno if I wanna do that” and then I was like “I don’t want to”, and then he was like “nah, don’t be a fucking tease”, and then I was like “oh okay, I won’t be a tease”, and I was just like maybe I’m meant to do this.”

This was not consent, it was violence. Despite the physical evidence of force and resistance, Brooke at the time struggled to make sense of her responsibility for the violence “and so afterwards I was so sore

and I was, even when I went to the toilet there was a tiny bit of blood and I was like what the fuck and I was just like I'm so fucking sore and I had said no to him and then I put it in my head and I was like I said no to him right, but then I was like no but I was teasing because I was flirting with him and I was like leading him on because I wanted to feel desired and I wanted to feel good enough and I'd had kids and I was just like, you know all these things had run through my head and I was just like I want to be good enough, you know like I want that feeling of feeling like I'm hot, like I'm a hot mum or whatever."

And her story too, is necessarily a story of contradiction, embedded in a history of IPV and sexual violence, and in a history of colonial patriarchy where women are responsible for their victimisation. "I didn't want to! I wanted to say no, but I didn't wanna piss him off, because I'd been through this whole like abusive relationship, I didn't want him to fucking smack me or whatever and it was just like I'm scared, but I was like why am I scared, maybe I did want this, but I was teasing and I liked flirting with him, so maybe I do want to have sex. But I don't want to have sex, I'm not even attracted to him, and it was dry, and it was sore. And he was so gross, and I was like what the fuck am I doing? I remember I was like I'll just pretend that I enjoy it..."

While Brooke recognises now, that this was sexual violence, it also challenges the story that casual sex is consent. The affective flow of responsibility for the rape is enmeshed in the normalisation of misogyny in the conditions of everyday life where violence is always possible. And through her storytelling, Brooke recognised that she had been coerced into taking responsibility for her assault. Brooke participated in this research, because we need to talk about it so that our experiences can create disruptions to the story of blame and shame, and where no becomes a full sentence.

And as good storytelling does, Brooke began making connections in the flows of meaning making that made me reflect on the potential of the relational spaces that are enabled when we understand the movement of stories. Recognising that the process of storytelling enables us to be moved in a relationship that bears witness to the painful memories of sexual violence that resist the singular story, I am moved again, when Brooke tells, for the first time ever, that as a teenager, while intoxicated, she was roofied and raped. What had become possible through her storytelling was the potential of stories to open new understandings of how her first sexual assault was connected to how she now made sense of the subsequent experiences of sexual violence.

From Brooke's storying of what happened that night and the immediate aftermath, she was immediately blamed and shamed in the response to her distress, making her experience untellable. "I remember my boyfriend at the time finding me and he was just like "what the fuck have you been up to?" and I was just like "nothing! I was trying to look for you, I was trying to look for you" and then he was just

like “where the fuck have you been, have you cheated on me?” and I was just like “no, no, no, I don’t know what happened, I was just trying to look for you”, and then anyways, I think he broke up with me that night.”

Something happened. And what happened next was that her reputation as a cheat, and then as a slut is deeply embedded in an understanding of consent that is deeply embedded in heteronormative cultural narrative that blames the victim and her sexuality. “My parents kicked me out the next day, they were like “you’re a slut”, they slapped me around the face cause they were like “you’ve got hickeys all over you.” There was no consent to sex. The affective flow of responsibility is located where intoxication and consent are entangled. “Obviously I was so written off drunk, then I’m just like well maybe that’s just what happens when you’re drunk right?” While Brooke knew something had happened, she quietly resists through silence. And together, in the process of making sense, Brooke had the moment to tell ‘out loud’.

P: I was bleeding all down there and I was like I don’t know what the fuck happened, so I’m pretty sure I got raped that night.

R: Did you ever tell anyone?

P: M-mm, this is the first time I’ve told anyone.

P: “But I’m pretty sure I did [get raped], because I was so sore down there, I remember a guy coming towards me and I woke up with all this... So, I was just like, obviously I did, right? But I can’t remember it, but I woke up and I was bleeding, so maybe I did.

R: Maybe you did. I think it’s one of those things...

P: Well, it wasn’t sex, right?

R: And I think that’s it, and that’s really important, how you define sex, like sex is consensual, sex is you being in a state to give consent, and you were not in a state, by any means to give consent.

P: No, I was roofied, I was written off, that’s all I remember but I’m pretty sure yeah that obviously did happen, and I haven’t told anyone that, but obviously clearly, I’ve gotta be dumb to think it didn’t but I probably blanked it out, for how many years now. And obviously it did happen because why else...”

And the flow of responsibility is embedded in affective forces of misogyny and consent. As her story unfolds, the burden of responsibility for drinking to excess is difficult to shift.

P: Obviously I was so written off drunk, then I'm just like well maybe that's just what happens when you're drunk right?

R: And that's what you think now, or that's what you thought then?

P: I dunno, yeah.

And I noticed another moment, another shift in locating responsibility, relocating responsibility away from victim blaming through transforming the cultural conditions that produce rape. "Yeah! And if you're so fucking drunk, it's like can they not get that through their head".

And as I reflect on the process of storytelling, I became increasingly aware of the potentials of movement in ways that I had not anticipated as Brooke and I made sense of her affective history together. Movement as an affective flow of meaning making that shifts and moves us into a relationship, emotionally connecting us as we disrupt the dominant stories enabled us to re-tell ourselves away from shame and blame.

Moving Narratives of Responsibility

All of these women told stories located within the sociopolitical tensions of post-feminist sensibilities and the forceful demands of heteronormativity. The intensification of colonial patriarchy through neoliberal notions of individual responsibility disciplines our understanding of ‘something really happened’. Each narrative brings into view the untellability of sexual violence and through the process of storytelling we recognised the affective flows of meaning making that hold us responsible, and through that process we began to re-story ourselves, with dignity, away from blame and shame.

It matters what stories tell stories, and importantly how stories are told. And yet the notion of telling a coherent story remains troubling in the chaos of the affective flows of responsibility that limit what can be said. Recognising that women’s stories hold within them the power to move us, stories have potential to evoke empathy and connection and bring the listener(s) into a relationship, emotionally connecting us and directing the research towards certain actions. Reminded of the emotional realities that are deeply personal and enacted and embodied in the conditions of our everyday lives, I understand intimately my responsibilities as a researcher that narratives are a relationship and a gift (Oakley, 2016).

Bringing these stories of our affective histories into a relationship that emotionally connects us is not for the faint hearted. Listening to stories of sexual violence does have emotional impacts as we hear intimate accounts of pain, violence, anger and often sadness, according to Keene (2022), these linger in our work and beyond. I remember too, the gasps of breath, the tears, the relief as we made sense together of our affective histories. It is never about one woman.

It is therefore important to consider how stories not only ‘look inward’, reflecting on the ways they ‘radiate outward’ (Fine, 2017), disrupting the what is and the conditions for the misogyny that inscribes our bodies with meaning. And I remember my rage. And as I take up my responsibility of feminist killjoy, I connect with the fury for the misogyny that justifies rape as just sex, and in loud resistance I privilege the knowledge produced through these stories as the route to strong objectivity (Haraway, 1988) to provoke what can be. Understanding misogyny, sexual coercion and sexual violence as the everyday conditions of women’s lives enables a hearing of the affective flows of meaning making that hold us responsible, opens the space to provoke us into “wide awakeness”, and to find ways to challenge claims to knowledge that make us responsible for our own victimisation.

Discussion: To Provoke what Can Be

As I listened to the untellability of sexual violence, the process of storytelling opened spaces for hearing the affective flows of meaning making, recognising moments where something really happened as we began to re-tell our stories away from blame and shame. The storying that connects us with each other was the affective flow of responsibility that inscribed our bodies in ways that meant our experiences could not be recognised as sexual violence at the time. And yet there was a knowing, the not quite right, the repeated resistances, the no, and the violence was enacted anyway.

And I remember. I was 22 years old when I watched Audrey and Daisy, in 2016. And I remember the overwhelming sense of disbelief as I heard the misogyny that blamed and shamed them for the violence against them. Through the women's stories, we make sense of the normalisation of rape as just sex. Both Audrey and Daisy were held responsible for their rape because they had breached the norms of femininity (too much alcohol and being up for it). And as we hear in the stories shared, the affective flow of responsibility meant they did not recognise their experience as sexual violence. And while the 2010 saw the release of Audrey and Daisy that brought the politicisation of consent into view, it also saw the release of the Fifty Shades of Grey franchise, commodifying the very tension of the post-feminist 'up for it' sexualised woman's body and the coercion of heteronormativity. Within the conditions of everyday life, the cultural narrative that was produced blurred the boundaries of consent within heterosex, and normalised sexual violence as just sex (Dowling, 2017). And as I was bringing this research together, my fears for the future were again turned to rage, with the representation of the objectification of the female form in the 2023 film *Poor things*. Bastián (2024) reports that at times it felt like the movie was centered on the ideas of "an early-wave white feminist who believes having sex is the most empowering thing a woman can do", and that "Lanthimos's lens is not interested in the sex lives of women as much as the ways in which a young woman's body can be positioned and used." And I recognise the post-feminist figure (Gill, 2016; 2007) the entanglement of both western post-feminist and heteronormativity, seductively entwined with empowerment in the desires of a masculine gaze, the colonial patriarchal fantasy of a sexual body, the figure of the sexual object that can and should be used for men's pleasure. And in this (young) body is no affect, and no thought (a child). How does this representation imagine consent?

The normalisation of the postfeminist up for it figure through these cultural representations commodify feminist figures who are sassy, agentic and sexually liberated who willingly submit to masculine sexual demands within a heteronormative relationship. And the intensification of submission in *Poor Me*, that produces a child/woman body that can be 'positioned and used' fills me again with the fury for the misogyny that produces rape as just sex. And I feel the fury at the impossibility of consent.

Taking up the responsibility of the feminist killjoy, listening to the power relations that tell the painful stories of sexual violence through our affective histories, this discussion picks up the interruptions that provoke new questions about the everyday conditions through which the affective forces of misogyny, coercion and consent have rendered our experiences as untellable.

I begin with imagining a space where through our process of listening and hearing, we might all be moved to consider other possibilities. How is it possible to imagine consent without understanding sexual coercion? As is well documented and storied by the participants, consent is a slippery concept (Beres, 2018; Faustino & Gavey, 2022) that suggests a form of relational agreement. Kessel (2019) has argued that the focus on consent as a solution to the everyday conditions that normalise rape as sex, is “cruel optimism” (p.361), as it does not attend to the conditions of misogyny, enacted through the structures of colonialism and heteronormativity, that render women responsible for men’s sexual violence. Understanding consent based on the assumption of sexual participants as equally agentic, even where one of the participants is “manipulated terrorized, drugged, dominated, or groomed into submission”, Kessel (2019, p.360) argues, ensures its failure. And while consent as a solution permeates our cultural narratives, its appeal as a definitive answer to the question of rape or just sex, as the women’s stories evoke, consent is a colonial patriarchal tool to delegitimise a dissenting (feminine) individual ‘knowing’ in the affective flows of responsibility. Consent then, limits what can be said, when the harms of coercive and unwanted sex are obscured in the relationship of affective flows of responsibility where the meaning of consent is blurred.

And while efforts in prevention focus on consent, and individual safety, without an understanding of the multiple ways through which the participants in this research were coerced into responsibility, is focused on self-surveillance, and responsibility for our own safety. Kiessel (2019) argues men and boy’s engagement with sexual violence and rape education is not about ethical relationships (or miscommunication as clearly told in the participants’ stories), but rather to avoid accusations. They understand the meaning of no. The cruel optimism of consent is that there is no distinction between just sex and rape in the structural power relations that condition the meaning of consent. And I notice too, the complicity of consent within a postfeminist location, the promise of sexual liberation that fails to address heteronormative coercion. And as this research began as a process of untangling the meanings of consent to open possibilities for conversations about ethical sex, in the process of storytelling what emerged was an opening to attend to the conditions of misogyny – through the stories of the affective flows of responsibility. We are a long way away from conversations about ethical sex.

This is a Misogyny Emergency—To Provoke what Can Be

Loud resistance. It is not one woman. Misogyny is not a property of individual misogynists who are prone to hate women. And I remember. I remember that our location in the tensions in the spaces that engulf misogyny as a normalised affective flow of meaning making, it's fall out of favour (Gavey, 2019) fills me with fury. How is it possible to reclaim misogyny as a critical space of transformation?

Contributing to the backlash that silences misogyny is that it suffers from the problem of the exclusion of misogyny's affective histories, the complex relationships through which it emerges, circulates and reproduces itself. Misogyny is a profoundly affective flow of meaning making. As Wrisley (2023, p.190) writes, if we understand misogyny as "the affective condition" that produces the domination of women under colonial patriarchy, it "is in dire need of a feminist affective analysis". And what this research has opened is the potential to rethink the relationship between knowledge and the affective flows of responsibility in women's experiences of the untellability of rape and sexual violence.

If we understand misogyny through the emotional recognition of hate, the movement of misogyny through the enactment of unethical affective relationships with women open up potential to hear the complex and paradoxical affective flows of meaning making in those moment of recognition that something really happened – fear, love, shame, disgust, pain... – responsibility.

Wisely (2023, p.204) writes that "misogyny in a society defined by a male-dominated gender hierarchy is the normative affective orientation towards women", and therefore we need to radicalise how we think with "equating violent acts like rape or femicide with misogyny" so as to not equate sexual violence with the affective norm. And while feminist research has identified misogyny within heterosexualities' scaffold of rape, and as places to resist, I wonder too about the political, social and interpersonal ethical responsibilities that I have as a researcher, to kill the joy, recognising that misogyny can be paralysing.

So, as I take up the position of feminist kill joy, I recognise my fury for the hatred that contributes to the extensive pain in women's lives, and I recognise that the task is academically daunting. So, what if?

And I recognise the intensification of misogyny in the incoherent coherency through western globalisation in our contemporary times - the exclusion of 'woman' in our sociopolitical spaces - and I recognise the harms here, in Aotearoa now, the affects on the mana of Māori women in particular. And so I resist the traditions of closure here, that mean I conclude with the limits of this research. What I end with is an opening that engages the conditions of the present, gaining partial but strong objectivity through challenging colonial epistemologies. To provoke what can be.

Misogynist affect flows through violent colonial patriarchal structural and social power relations wherever a woman lacks the dignity and respect of personhood and autonomy from subjectification. How does misogynist affect materialise in the lives of women who story experiences of losing dignity and respect for their personhood in heteronormative relationships? We need to talk about it.

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Appendix A



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Women's experiences of sexual encounters they now recognise as sexual assault

Information Sheet

Invitation to participants:

Hello and I hope this finds you well,

My name is Paige Rasmussen and as you may already know, I am currently completing my Master of Arts in Psychology, and this involves carrying out a research project. I have chosen to research sexual encounters in which women felt, either during or after, that something about the interaction was 'not okay'. I am interested in how you made sense of the encounter through conversations about how we take individual responsibility through the processes of minimisation that operate in the contested space of the normalisation of gendered abuse. I am also interested in making sense of how we understand consent and coercion.

My interest in how we make sense of these issues stems from my own experience, and the experiences shared by others in my social network; there is a process of recognising that consent was assumed and taken for granted. I am interested in how we re-tell our stories, and to whom, within a dominant narrative that holds women and girls responsible for their victimisation. I am interested in the movement in our stories as we recognise the embodied effects of our responsibility and what that recognition might enable or constrain for women's understandings of their sexual encounters. In this way, the knowledge we produce through our stories of our own transformation opens up potentials for challenging the meanings of sexual coercion and consent.

Who I will be speaking with:

I am inviting you, and 4 or 5 other women, to participate in one-to-one conversations with me so that our voices can together produce a collective story of the process of recognising how we are embedded in a

Appendix B



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Women's experiences of sexual encounters they now recognise as sexual assault

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study up until I have signed the transcript release form.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
3. I wish/do not wish to have data placed in an official archive.
4. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C



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Women's experiences of sexual encounters they now recognise as sexual assault.

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name - printed
