

London School of Economics and Political Science

*'Give me myself again':*  
Sexual violence narratives  
in popular music

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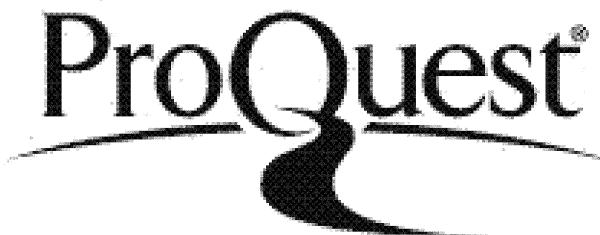


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## Declaration

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the relationships between popular music and experiences of sexual violence. It is situated at the intersection of trauma theory and cultural studies. Though a great deal of feminist work has been done on representations of sexual violence in the media, these reflections have either ignored music as a medium, or focused on it only in terms of misogynistic lyrics in rap and hip-hop. Similarly, contemporary trauma theory has addressed rape narratives in literature with regard to how these have interacted with lived experiences, but has not looked at these possibilities within music.

There are two distinct ways in which this thesis approaches the topic: narrative analysis of the songs themselves, and survey work done with the audience of one particular iconic artist in this area, Tori Amos. The first chapter of analysis focuses on songs narrating experiences of domestic violence, and situates these within a wider feminist context of activism and social awareness. The second narrative analysis chapter examines songs concerned with sexual violence, and seeks to explore whether or not the diversity of experience narratives lacking in other popular media can be found in music.

The two remaining substantive chapters in the thesis utilise audience research in order to explore issues of authenticity, understanding and healing. In examining the multiple audience responses to Tori Amos' part-fictionalised, yet autobiographical, rape narrative, 'Me and a Gun', a picture emerges of authenticity as a far more complex notion to listeners (and other receivers of art) than more widespread media representations seem to suggest. Finally, in examining the narratives of Amos' listeners, with regard to their own experiences, it becomes clear that Amos' music, Amos herself, and Internet communities built up around Amos, are vital sources of support for those who have been traumatised by sexual violence.

# Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Declaration .....   | 2   |
| Acknowledgements .....  | 3   |
| Abstract .....  | 5   |
| Table of Contents .....   | 6   |
| Preface: Hearing Voices, Seeing Candles, Writing For Ears ..... | 9   |
| Chapter 1: Music, Media and Sexual Violence .....               | 13  |
| Introduction .....  | 13  |
| 1. Media, Feminism and Sexual Violence .....                    | 16  |
| 2. Music, Gender and Sexual Violence .....                      | 38  |
| Conclusion .....  | 49  |
| Chapter 2: Trauma: Memory, Identity and Narrative .....         | 51  |
| Introduction .....  | 51  |
| 1. Trauma theory and memory .....                               | 52  |
| 2. Trauma and ineffability .....                                | 56  |
| 3. Trauma and narrative .....                                   | 57  |
| 4. Trauma and identity .....                                    | 64  |
| 5. Cultural and collective trauma .....                         | 72  |
| 6. Representations of trauma and memory through the arts .....  | 75  |
| Conclusion .....  | 78  |
| Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology .....                        | 80  |
| Introduction .....  | 80  |
| 1. Research questions .....                                     | 81  |
| 2. Research methods .....                                       | 83  |
| 3. Methodological Concerns .....                                | 91  |
| a) Choice of text .....   | 91  |
| b) Translation and interpretation .....                         | 92  |
| c) Fans and academics: 'low' and 'high' culture .....           | 96  |
| d) Sexual violence: insiders and outsiders .....                | 100 |
| e) Using experience narratives to create knowledge .....        | 101 |
| f) The ethics of researching sexual violence: .....             | 107 |
| Conclusion .....  | 109 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Chapter 4: Thank you for hurting me? An understanding of domestic violence through mainstream pop music from 1962-2009 ..... | 110 |
| Introduction .....   | 110 |
| 1. Pre-second wave feminism: .....   | 112 |
| 2. Phase 1: Behind closed doors .....  | 115 |
| 3. Phase 2: Brave but bruised: .....   | 128 |
| 4. Phase 3: Better than ever .....   | 131 |
| 5. Phase 4: Domestic what? Getting as good as you give... .....  | 141 |
| Conclusion .....   | 146 |
| Chapter 5: 'Tell me it's all an illusion': insider understandings of sexual violence, and its aftermath, in song.....        | 150 |
| Introduction .....   | 150 |
| 1. 'Grey areas' and 'accepted' narratives of sexual violence .....   | 154 |
| 2. Images of Childhood and meaning-making.....   | 163 |
| 3. Aftermath .....   | 177 |
| Conclusion .....   | 190 |
| Chapter 6: 'Me And A Gun'? Tori Amos and authenticity.....   | 192 |
| Introduction .....   | 192 |
| Authenticity in musical artists and performance .....  | 194 |
| Autobiographical songs .....   | 198 |
| Authenticity in literature: testimony, memoir and fiction .....  | 199 |
| Issues arising from the 'limit cases' in literature.....   | 207 |
| 'Me And A Gun' as an authentic rape narrative? .....   | 209 |
| 'Me And A Gun' as inauthentic because of the changed details .....   | 212 |
| 'Me And A Gun' as authentic despite the changed details .....  | 214 |
| Would the real Tori Amos please stand up? .....  | 217 |
| Controversial 2007 Chicago performance of 'Me And A Gun' as 'Pip' .....  | 219 |
| <i>Figure 1: Richey James Edwards '4 Real'</i> .....   | 225 |
| <i>Figure 2: Tori Amos as 'Pip' in Chicago</i> .....   | 225 |
| Conclusion .....   | 227 |
| Chapter 7: 'We'll get there together': learning, healing and progressing .....   | 229 |
| Introduction .....   | 229 |
| 1. Rape myth acceptance in Tori Amos listeners .....   | 233 |
| 2. Support from Tori Amos .....  | 238 |
| Shannon Lambert and Pandora's Aquarium .....   | 240 |
| Lindsay's narrative .....  | 242 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| What Shannon and Lindsay's narratives have to say about Tori Amos and support after sexual violence..... | 245 |
| Conclusion: Life after Tori?.....  | 248 |
| Conclusion: when all is sung and done.....   | 251 |
| Introduction .....   | 251 |
| Domestic violence narratives and postfeminism .....  | 251 |
| Diversity and variability in sexual violence narratives .....  | 252 |
| Additional representations of sexual violence in the media .....   | 253 |
| Audience findings.....   | 254 |
| Additional issues raised in the course of the research .....   | 254 |
| Closure.....   | 255 |
| Bibliography.....  | 257 |
| TV, Film & Radio .....   | 270 |
| Music .....  | 271 |

## Preface: Hearing Voices, Seeing Candles, Writing For Ears

*Sometimes  
I said sometimes  
I hear my voice  
And it's been here  
Silent all these years*

Tori Amos ('Silent All These Years')

The genesis of this project can be traced back to my first two experiences of seeing Tori Amos perform live. At the first show, in 1998<sup>1</sup>, I was struck by the difference in the audience, and the reaction of the audience to her, to that I had witnessed at the many other gigs I had attended over the years. When thinking about a collective audience experience at a pop concert, perhaps most people's thoughts would turn to 'Beatlemania'<sup>2</sup> or something similar: a collective (and often sexualised) frenzy at being so close to the performers. This is not the collective experience I observed at Tori Amos concerts. In terms of what actually happens, there are similarities: people rushing to the front of the stage, leaving gifts, and hoping to be touched or noticed by the performer. But not only did the audience gender demographic differ from most 'serious' pop/rock<sup>3</sup> concerts (which tend to have a much higher percentage of men than women), but that female majority seemed to be part of something quite different to the

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<sup>1</sup> Amos performed (with band) at the Royal Albert Hall in London, on Wednesday, June 3, 1998, as part of the tour to promote her album *From The Choirgirl Hotel*.

<sup>2</sup> A term that has been applied almost exclusively to the response of teenage girls to 'boy bands' from (obviously) the Beatles and Bay City Rollers in the 1960s and 1970s through to New Kids on the Block, Take That and Westlife in the last 20 years. A notable exception to this male usage would be the example of the Spice Girls, who certainly inspired a similar sort of mania in young girls. I talk about notions of fandom more comprehensively in Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use words like 'mainstream', 'lightweight', 'indie', 'serious', 'pop', and other words that may be most broadly associated with 'genre', in a relatively unproblematised way. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the majority of music writers, academic and otherwise, use these terms as common-sense or self-evident distinctions. Secondly, while classical music can use dates to distinguish 'Baroque' from 'Renaissance' (even if there are overlapping or borderline cases), there is no such exact science for non-classical music. Though there have been many attempts to define hundreds of music genres and sub-genres, there is no definitive list on which to rely. Thirdly, with so much else to do in this thesis, I do not want to be detained in problematising each genre, or genre-related word, as they arise. However, it is important to note that genres define and influence each other through constant interplay, and are themselves the product of ongoing dialogue and dispute with regard to the ways in which 'centre' and 'periphery' are defined at particular cultural moments. As Borthwick and Roy write in their introduction to 'Popular Music Genres', "Whereas overarching metagenres such as rock or pop transcend historical epochs, others, such as progressive rock, or Britpop, do not. Such genres (or subgenres) are intrinsically tied to an era, a mode of production, a *Zeitgeist* and a set of social circumstances that effectively ensures their demise, or at least mutation into other forms. Genres have a degree of elasticity, but there invariably becomes a point when they split under the pressure of some force or another – be it musical, technological, commercial or social." (Borthwick and Roy, 2004, p. 3)

Beatlemania image of women music fans we are so accustomed to seeing in the media. When Amos left the stage before coming back for the encore, many of these women rushed to the front of the stage to be near her when she came back on. But their movements were not accompanied by screaming or giggling, nor did the women appear to know each other as a large group. Rather, the event seemed more akin to a religious ceremony than a pop concert, almost as if they were coming forward to be healed.

More than a year passed before I saw Amos perform again<sup>4</sup>, and her opening song brought together those feelings I had had about the audience at the last show in a clear and visceral way. She walked onto the stage, alone, and sang her *a capella* rape narrative, 'Me And A Gun'. Though the performance itself was simultaneously transfixing and wrenching, looking around the audience had an impact just as powerful. Everywhere I looked, there were women crying, or shaking as they watched Amos. Some were holding onto each other, but most stood alone, absorbing the impact of the song. The effect was of many candles being lit simultaneously, and it occurred to me again that for many, this seemed to be, if not a religious experience, certainly a sacred one. Though the song narrates an experience both terrifying and isolating, that clearly resonated with so many in the audience, I felt a strong sense that this experience – this moment of watching Amos sing this story, and feeling strong emotions about her experience and their own, while standing beside others who seemed to be doing the same thing – was, while incredibly intense and personal, also a source of collective support and community for people. It was as if those individual narratives, spearheaded by Amos' own, were coming together in this moment, to create a form of group catharsis, or healing.

The possibility of this happening within a pop concert, rather than in a therapy session, lent itself to all sorts of questions. What was this experience providing that might have been missing elsewhere for these women? Was there something about music itself that enabled this to happen in a way that might not have been possible in another form? What did it mean for someone like Tori Amos to hold not only her own experience of sexual violence<sup>5</sup>, but also those of thousands of other women, in a public format, and on a nightly basis? Were other performers doing similar things? Did these audience members form supportive relationships with each other having met through this music and going to these shows? How

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<sup>4</sup> Amos performed a one-off solo show at London's Royal Festival Hall on Friday, October 29, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> I use 'sexual violence' as a catch-all term, which includes any sexual or gendered violence, including domestic violence, throughout this thesis

were those people in the audience who had *not* had this sort of experience affected by this? Did they have a better understanding of sexual violence because of this music or their involvement in this community? These questions form the basis of my thesis.

Though I would not have chosen this topic were it not for my own appreciation of Tori Amos and her music, this project is also firmly rooted in the values I have developed in my career up to this point. Prior to undertaking this PhD, I spent five years working for NGOs<sup>6</sup> in a part-time voluntary capacity in Cambridge (while completing my undergraduate and masters degrees) and five years working full-time for NGOs<sup>7</sup> in London before starting this PhD. I began to realise that most traumatic experience have gendered dimensions, and eventually, how inextricably linked mental health issues and sexual violence are, especially for my female clients. As a result of this, the last three years of my full-time work in London were spent with the POPPY Project, a feminist organisation working with women trafficked into the UK for prostitution. It was through the POPPY Project that I became more immersed in feminist literature about the structures of gendered violence. Though I remain committed to the importance of direct (grass roots) work, and deeply respectful of, and grateful to, those who continue to work in this incredibly difficult and demanding area, I knew that I wanted to attempt to make a different type of contribution to the field. Years of feeling as though I was stemming the bleeding of the endless wounded on the battlefield left me with a desire to take a step back from the case-by-case work and see that battlefield as a whole, in order to make a 'big picture' contribution.

Because of my grass roots background, this was only a project I wanted to undertake if I could keep it accessible enough to say something back to those about whom I was writing, and to be understood by people with little or no theoretical background. This has involved an ongoing process of translation from academic and therapeutic terminology into distilled themes and summaries, a process requiring a great deal of discipline and thought. There were many occasions on which it would have been a great deal easier to use the technical language used by academics and practitioners in order to explain particular pieces of the theories underpinning this research – however, in order to keep the work accessible, I have tried to write about these concepts in ways that keep them reasonably easy to read and understand. In her earlier days as a performer,

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<sup>6</sup> The Samaritans and the Eating Disorders Project

<sup>7</sup> The Richmond Fellowship (Hounslow Supported Housing Scheme) and the POPPY Project

Amos actively avoided using the word 'fans', referring instead to the people who go to her shows as 'Ears with Feet'. The image is one that has sustained me. As I write, I try to remember those I am writing about, and for, as listening individuals, hoping to hear something that resonates with, and matters to, them. As with any project taking place over a number of years, it is inevitable that circumstances change, both within the subject and the writer. As well as writing this thesis, I have also taken on other writing projects, both academic and journalistic, during this period. Writing book chapters and newspaper and magazine articles on aspects of popular culture other than music (especially comedy and TV shows) has inevitably broadened the lens through which I see this project. This is highlighted in the range of relevant references I am able to bring out in the course of this work, and adds to the scope of this project, especially in terms of follow-up research that could be done in this field. Since beginning the research for this project at the end of 2004 and completing the thesis in 2009, Tori Amos has released three new studio albums and announced other side projects. The survey I used to collect my data was done in the middle of this time, and as such, will always represent a static moment in lives (both Amos' and the audience's) that are constantly evolving. However, the questionnaire stands as the most comprehensive survey done on Amos' fans to date, incorporating over 2000 responses and representing 71 different countries. Though the fact that the response was so much greater than I anticipated caused some practical issues (and a much heavier workload!), it certainly supported my premise that this topic was important to many, and worth exploring in detail.

There is a clear political motivation to this project: that it will be of use in the long and complicated journey of understanding sexual violence. Though agendas may differ for grass roots workers and activists; academics working in the fields of trauma and pop culture; and individuals dealing with the themes explored here in their personal lives, I believe this thesis provides some common ground for others to build on.

This project is dedicated to all of those voices that were heard during this process – and all of those that were not – in the hope that it stands as an extra candle in that crowded and darkened room.

# Chapter 1:

## Music, Media and Sexual Violence

*There is fiction in the space between  
The lines on your page of memories  
Write it down, but it doesn't mean  
You're not just telling stories*

Tracy Chapman ('Telling Stories')

### **Introduction**

In November 2005, in one week alone, the following front page newspaper headlines greeted me as I took my seat on the tube:

**7/7 VICTIM WAS GANG RAPIST<sup>8</sup>**

**WOMEN WHO FLIRT 'DESERVE TO BE RAPED'<sup>9</sup>**

**BINGE DRINKERS CAN'T CRY RAPE<sup>10</sup>**

Leaving aside temporarily the impact and (ir)responsibility of these headlines, there is no doubt that stories about sexual violence are everywhere. They exist in every form of media: in fact and fiction and at every point in between. When representations of sexual violence are so pervasive, sexual violence itself becomes a natural and very real part of not only our everyday world, but also the fears, fantasies and desires that constitute that world – that is, "*rape discourse is part of the fabric of what rape is in contemporary culture*" (Projansky 2001 p.2). A thesis concerned with sexual violence narratives in popular music is, first and foremost, a thesis about stories. Stories do not (just) reflect the world, but actually construct it. What is reflected is the dominant ideology that allows those stories to be recognisable, authenticated and accepted. As such, perhaps the primary question we would like to ask about the narratives I explore – are these stories *true*? – necessarily remains unanswerable. However, throughout this

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<sup>8</sup> Evening Standard, Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2005

<sup>9</sup> Metro, Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Evening Standard, Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2005

project, I ask, unpack, and try to answer the questions that underpin that question:

- What are these stories?
- What do they tell us?
- Who is telling them?
- How are they being told, and in what context?
- Why are they being told?

Focusing on both popular music and sexual violence makes this an interdisciplinary project, rooted in both cultural studies and trauma theory. As such, I review the literature with regard to each field in separate chapters, even though it will become clear that there are strong connections between the two. In Chapter 2's discussion of trauma theory, I explore the idea of trauma narratives in depth, with particular regard to notions of memory and personal identity. The psychological need to 'speak out' about traumatic experiences and be heard by a sympathetic audience is one that has clear resonance for a project concerned with people who write and perform songs about experiences of sexual violence, and also introduces the idea of the listeners, who I surveyed for the empirical part of my study. Chapter 2 addresses the concept of cultural or collective trauma, which is will be important to bear in mind later on, in Chapter 7, when discussing the online communities, built around Tori Amos, which provide support to survivors of sexual violence. Finally, Chapter 2 explores the very idea of making art from trauma, and addresses some of the ethical issues that have been raised about creating something (potentially) beautiful from an extraordinarily negative experience.

However, before any of these topics can be uncovered, it is vital to establish the cultural framework within which a project on sexual violence and pop music takes place. This chapter sets out to examine two distinct areas, and as such, is split into two halves. In the first part, 'Media, Feminism and Sexual Violence', I focus on the media's relationships with sexual violence, and explore the most recognisable cultural stories about sexual violence. In order to do this, I first look at the prevalence of sexual violence itself and examine some statistics, especially from the UK, as well as highlighting some of the current debates taking place. Secondly, I briefly outline some of the most well known and controversial feminist

and postfeminist responses to sexual violence, such as work done by Susan Brownmiller (1975), Robin Warshaw (1988) and Katie Roiphe (1993)<sup>11</sup>.

Although wide-ranging in their views, most feminist scholars agree on the existence of 'rape myths'<sup>12</sup> in society, and in news reporting of sexual violence, so these will be explored in detail in the next section of this chapter. Rape myths construct societal understandings of who is raped, who rapes, what causes rape – and of course, whether or not rape has actually happened, and these are the categories used to unpack them more carefully. Given that stories about sexual violence are not just told in the news media or in court, this section is also an exploration of sexual violence narratives in different kinds of media talk that might loosely be grouped together as 'art', or 'creative talk' (other than music).

Although an overview of sexual violence stories in each media type would be fascinating, and a useful point of comparison to those in music, it falls well beyond the scope of this project. As such, I chose to focus on the most well-known sexual violence storylines in (predominantly UK) soap operas as well as in US crime procedural *Law and Order: SVU* (1999-), in order to explore the content of the rape myths, as it seemed that these were the most likely to have seeped into the public consciousness in order to form part of the understandings of rape that Projansky suggests. However, I do also reference film and literature throughout this thesis, as well as TV (and of course music), so it is worth briefly noting that due to the differences between the media chosen, there are particular issues arising specific to each. For example, a long-running soap may have ten or twenty years to develop characters – a luxury not afforded to film – in which case we need to ask whether or not a sexual violence storyline and aftermath was in keeping with that particular character or relationship, or whether or not the same 'types' of characters are selected for these storylines. A television show has multiple authors, whereas a song or a book (usually) only has one. This means that any personal history of sexual violence on the part of the songwriter or book's author is perhaps more significant than that of one of many television writers, producers or actors. This is a theme that I return to in Chapter 6, in which I discuss the concept of authenticity in detail.

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<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on the most 'famous' feminist and postfeminist responses in order to give an overview of the widest understanding of feminist responses to sexual violence. Other scholars, such as Liz Kelly and Judith Herman, who are omitted here, but whose work on sexual violence is substantial and vital, are referenced throughout this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> 'Myth' is used, rather than 'untruth' because it refers to a structure underpinning conceptions of sexual violence, rather than simply being an easily corrected mistake. See Bourke (2007), p.24

Although I devote a whole chapter to issues connected with authenticity later on in the thesis, it is useful to at least note at this stage the ways in which authenticity is absolutely central to both aspects of my research: pop music and trauma narratives. The 'unanswerable' question I raised at the beginning of this chapter – are these stories *true*? – is asked in both cases. Being 'real', 'true' and 'authentic' is expected of performing artists and of those narrating traumatic experiences alike (though in some significantly different ways). The places in both areas in which the lines between fact and fiction break down, and (self-)therapy and autobiography are blurred will be explored in Chapter 6, with regard to some literary 'limit cases' and, in the main, to Tori Amos' rape narrative song, 'Me And A Gun'. It is worth bearing the issue of authenticity in mind in both this chapter and those that follow, as it is one of the primary notions that connects both fields, as well as being considered important by the survey respondents.

In the second half of this chapter, 'Music, Gender and Sexual Violence', I turn to popular music itself. As a project concerned with an extremely gendered form of violence, it is inevitable that my work will have many points of connection with 'women in music' literature more generally, of which there is a great deal. Although I cannot do justice to the field in full, I try to give an overview here in which to situate my research. Because many of the song-narratives I explore have a distinct 'agenda' of a feminist (or postfeminist) perspective on sexual violence, and because music has often been a weather vane of political protest and social change, I also look at the history of the connections between pop music and politics (noting especially some of the ways in which gender has been made either invisible or extremely controversial in these movements). Though this project focuses on trauma narratives created and performed by female artists, I also explore some relevant issues specific to male artists in this chapter. This takes two parts: men who write songs about trauma, and also what I term 'perpetrator narratives', that is, music made by male artists' which has been critiqued as sexually violent, misogynistic and homophobic etc. Having established a gap in the literature with regard to specific work on sexual violence narratives created by women in pop music, I conclude the chapter by introducing the female artists whose narratives of sexual violence I explore in this thesis.

## **1. Media, Feminism and Sexual Violence**

### **a) Sexual violence: prevalence, literature and feminist approaches**

Before discussing the ubiquity of sexual violence narratives and of cultural representations of sexual violence, the ubiquity of sexual violence itself must first be acknowledged. According to a study based on fifty surveys from around the world,<sup>13</sup> at least one out of every three women has been forced or coerced into sex, beaten, or abused in some other sexually violent way in her lifetime. The Council of Europe cited domestic violence as the primary cause of death, disability and ill-health for women aged between 16 and 44, overshadowing cancer and traffic accidents (PACE 2002). Looking at the UK alone, in 2004-5, the Home Office reported 13,322 counts of 'rape of a female'. It is widely accepted that official government or police statistics such as this represent a very small proportion of total rapes, as so few acts of sexual violence are reported. This is reinforced by Jaffe's findings that women are assaulted on average thirty-five times before reporting domestic violence to the police (Jaffe 1982). A perhaps more accurate estimate with regard to the ubiquity of sexual violence is to be found in the survey showing that one in four UK women have experienced rape or attempted rape (Painter 1991). Malamuth and Check's (Malamuth 1983) US-based study found that 26% of college men admitted to having made at least one attempt to force a woman into sex which caused noticeable distress to that woman (e.g fighting, screaming, pleading or crying). Over 30% of the men surveyed said that they would rape a woman if it could be guaranteed that they would not be caught. In a similar study several years later, 39% of male students surveyed believed that if a woman was drunk or stoned, it was "all right" to force sex (Pirog-Good 1989).

With statistics as shocking as these, it is no wonder that sexual violence has been at the forefront of so much feminist theory. Feminist discussions of sexual violence emerged from the insight that both liberal and conservative *non-feminist* approaches seemed to miss something crucial about the wrongness of rape: liberals by focusing on rape as a straightforward violation of rights, akin to any assault, and conservatives by describing it in the patriarchal language of honour, purity and sexual virtue. Feminists quickly realised that it was impossible to understand rape without contextualising it in an ongoing culture of oppressive and often violent patriarchy.

Theorising sexual violence has meant continually unpacking and re-assessing the intricate connections between power, domination and objectification that have

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<sup>13</sup> Taken from Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/svaw/vaw/global.shtml> (last accessed 5/5/06)

characterised sexist society, even as these continue to shift and develop. Feminist debates over the nature and meaning of sexual violence are thus theoretically complex, multi-faceted and – importantly – ongoing. Given the constraints of space, it would be futile to attempt anything more than a rough outline of some major developments in feminist theorising about rape. Here, I focus on three 'moments' in the ongoing narrative that spans more than three decades: the first is represented by Susan Brownmiller's classic second-wave text, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975). Brownmiller's text remains, arguably, the standard recognisably 'feminist' position on rape and sexual violence. It also captures the insight expressed by second wave feminists, namely, that 'the personal is political.' In other words, second wave feminists claimed, we only begin to understand deeply personal experiences of rape trauma when we see them as political acts, and situate them in their broader political context.

The second 'moment' I describe – symbolised here by Robin Warshaw's *I Never Called It Rape* (1988) – is an expansion of, rather than a challenge to, Brownmiller's framework. Once feminists took up 'the personal is political' as a rallying cry, the personal lives of girls and women were subject to increased theoretical and political scrutiny. This scrutiny quickly revealed that not only was sexual violence more prevalent than had been expected, but that it occurred at the hands of someone known to the victim. The personal may have been revealed to be political, but it was – nonetheless – still personal and often intimate.

These early 'moments' in feminist theorising sought to emphasise the seriousness of sexual violence by concentrating on it as just that: a violent and pervasive form of domination. One result of their theoretical focus was that the victims of sexual violence were theorised as exactly this: victims. The third, 'postfeminist', moment I describe arose because of unhappiness with this characterisation. In emphasising the prevalence of rape and violence, postfeminists such as Camille Paglia and Katie Roiphe claimed, feminists risked negating the agency of women altogether. Here, I assess the postfeminist critique of feminist theorising about rape through an analysis of Roiphe's *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (1993).

### i) Susan Brownmiller

*"Rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear"* (1975 p.15)

Brownmiller's 1975 classic inscribed, for the first time, the claim that rape was not about sex, but about violence and power. Brownmiller asserts that rape is politically motivated, on two counts – with regard to male/male conflict, and male/female marriage. In the first instance, this takes the form of a woman being raped in a (male) war context because she is the 'property' of the enemy, and this will hurt the enemy. In the second, rape is used as a terrifying motivation to push a woman into marriage – an institution denying her independence, individual power and status, and even her own identity - in order to be protected from it. In both cases, the individuality and attractiveness of the female victim are totally irrelevant. The result of the rape is that woman is denied agency, and the desires of the rapist, which are not immediately physical or focused on the woman as individual, but rather concerned with political or social status, are realised.

Although Brownmiller's work rightly remains one of the standard feminist texts on sexual violence, it has been critiqued for several reasons. It takes as its assumption that women have no social or political agency, nor (potential) influence in these areas (Cahill 2001 p.25), which ironically serves to perform just the function Brownmiller argues that rape performs in denying agency to women, and her section on women's ability to 'fight back' at the end only goes some way towards offsetting this. In addition to this, its lack of focus on the embodied woman as an individual with a personal, traumatic experience takes away from the sexual, embodied nature of rape, focusing only on its violence and power dynamic. That rape was personal as well as political would be made clear in the 1980s with what follows.

## ii) Robin Warshaw

*"I hoped to let women who had been raped – by their friends, dates, neighbours, church associates, co-workers, classmates, former lovers, and others – understand that they had experienced the most common form of rape, albeit rarely disclosed or discussed"<sup>14</sup> (Warshaw 1988 p.xi)*

Robin Warshaw's examination of what was then known as 'date rape', *I Never Called It Rape* (1988), took as its basis the famous *Ms.* magazine survey from

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<sup>14</sup> Although this section (and Koss/Warshaw's work) focuses on one specific type of acquaintance rape, I use this section to represent more widely the case that most sexual violence is committed by someone known to the victim. This of course includes sexual violence perpetrated by family members on children, and what are sometimes known as 'power-rapes' – that is sexual violence committed by someone in a position of authority over the victim, e.g. a teacher, doctor or vicar etc. Judith Herman's book, *Father-Daughter Incest* (1982) is a good starting place for a fuller exploration of issues specific to this type of sexual violence.

1982. The survey came about after *Ms.* had published an article in 1982 suggesting that rape between men and women who knew each other was more common than the 'stranger rape' believed to be the 'standard' rape up to this point. The magazine received so many responses from readers confirming that these were their experiences that *Ms.* approached the US National Institute of Mental Health for a grant, which they received, to undertake a three year national study on this topic. The primary researcher, Dr Mary Koss, and her team surveyed over 6100 undergraduate students<sup>15</sup> (of both genders). The statistic most often quoted was that 1 out of every 4 female respondents had had an experience that met the legal definition of rape or attempted rape (*ibid* p.11). However, other noteworthy findings included the following: 1 in 12 male respondents had committed acts that met the legal definition of rape or attempted rape (*ibid* p.21); 84% of the women raped knew their attacker (*ibid* p.11); 57% of the rapes took place on dates (*ibid* p.11), and 41% of the women raped said they expected to be raped again (*ibid* p.64).

Faced with such shocking statistics about the severity and prevalence of rape, it is perhaps unsurprising that some would rather deny the problem than deal with it, and this will be the subject of the next section, which focuses on Katie Roiphe's (1993) postfeminist approach. However there are some more subtle critiques of the Koss/Warshaw work worth exploring in this section. The first of these is borne out of the statistic that only 27% of the women whose experiences met the legal definition of rape identified themselves as rape victims in the survey (Warshaw 1988 p.26), hence Warshaw's title, *I Never Called It Rape*. However, in redefining a woman's experience in a way that the woman herself did or would not, Koss, Warshaw et al run the risk of claiming 'false consciousness' and denying the woman's agency to narrate her own experiences in a way that seems fitting to her. Secondly, the focus on 'how to avoid acquaintance rape' towards the end of Warshaw's book has been critiqued for laying the responsibility for being raped or not being raped once again at the door of the women who are victimised by rape, rather than the men who perpetrate it. However, although there are elements of this in Warshaw's book, they are outweighed in both volume and prioritisation by the sections on the importance of educating children (of both genders) about sexual violence, and the responsibilities of parents, teachers, lawmakers etc in this area. Warshaw's book does slightly oversimplify some of the more complex data from the Koss research

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<sup>15</sup> The focus on university campuses was a requirement of the NIMH grant, not the choice of the researchers, who believed that the problem was far more widespread than this.

and reflects her role as journalist, rather than academic. However, the book remains extremely popular, and was reprinted in 1994 with an introduction in which Warshaw addresses some of the critiques found in the section below.

### iii) Katie Roiphe

*"There is a grey area in which someone's rape may be another person's bad night"* (Roiphe 1993 p.54)

Katie Rophie (1993) coined the phrase "*rape crisis feminists*" (p.84) to describe the sort of anti-rape movements she believes force women into a passive sexual role and deny female agency. Her understanding is that "*rape is a natural trump card for feminism*" (p.56) because its heightened emotional status allows it to be used as an authority, backed up by suffering, to win other feminist arguments. This, Roiphe argues, is extremely damaging for those women who have learned to interpret their own negative experiences of sex as sexual violence, or have had those experiences interpreted that way for them by others. 'Date rape' gives young women a language for what may more accurately be described as 'bad sex', at a time when they are most open (vulnerable) to new ideas and frameworks – college. Inspired by Columbia University's director of peer education, Marjorie Metsch's approach, Roiphe argues that by avoiding bringing up the word 'rape' when someone begins a narrative that might otherwise include it (if talking to a 'rape-crisis feminist' for example), we can avoid "*injecting everyday college life with the melodrama of the rape crisis*" (p.82). Roiphe believes that people who enjoy melodrama are more likely to be opposed to this view. While Roiphe's suggestion that many people need "*an absolute value placed on experience by absolute words*" (p.82) is valid, it seems somewhat naïve to suggest that as long as nobody bring up the subject of sexual violence, we will avoid living in a world coloured by it. Roiphe's own assertion that 'date rape' cannot be happening with the sort of regularity suggested by the *Ms.* survey because she personally does not know anyone it has happened to, is surely – given her suggestion that the issue should not be not raised – something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ironically, by taking this position, Roiphe does exactly what she seeks to avoid – that is, threatening the progress that has already been made, and returning to the "*rigidly conformist fifties*" (p.83) – by silencing women's actual and potential narratives of sexual violence, which in itself must surely have an effect on the female sexual agency Roiphe so passionately wants to defend. Warshaw quite

reasonably accuses Roiphe of having deliberately misinterpreted the '1 in 4' statistic to make it sound ridiculous – "sex is, in one in four cases, against your will" (Warshaw 1988, p.xxiii), and points out that Roiphe's assertions have been mainstreamed by the media as feminist social science research, when in fact Roiphe wrote the book as a graduate English student. Without doubt, Roiphe's position has been received by its non-feminist audience as the most socially palatable of the three examined here, as it is the least invested with a need to fundamentally change anything about gender relations, and therefore, like other postfeminist texts, has received a disproportionate amount of media acclaim<sup>16</sup>.

Together, these three texts reveal far more than three decades worth of debate. In tracing the narrative they represent, we can see the initial feminist insight that sexual violence represents something wholly different than 'bad' (dishonourable, immoral, non-rights-respecting) sex. This was something that even the best intentioned of non-feminist liberals had missed, by assuming that most heterosexual sex was non-problematically consensual, equal, freely *chosen* and pleasurable. In re-inscribing sexual violence as just that, an act of violence, second wave feminists like Brownmiller did much to challenge that liberal complacency. Theorising rape as violence emphasised the seriousness of the violation, did much to remove the danger of victim complicity or culpability (the burden of proof – that she did not 'ask for it' – does not lie with an assault victim), and allowed feminists to widen their theoretical lens, revealing rape as a patriarchal (violent) tool for maintaining power over women.

Yet problems with this theoretical framework eventually emerged. As the empirical work of Warshaw demonstrated, feminists had to understand the scope as well as the meaning of sexual violence, learning to see it in homes and schools and offices, as well as dark alleyways. And the postfeminist challenges of Roiphe, Paglia and others reminded feminists that theorising about violence, oppression and domination must leave theoretical room to recognise and articulate women's agency in general, and their sexual agency in particular.

Furthermore, theorising rape as 'mere' violence was also politically unsatisfying to feminists. It became important not to wholly divorce sexual violence from sexuality more generally: the use of sexuality as a weapon of violence and domination is part of the *wrongness* of rape. That, feminists claimed, is what is

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<sup>16</sup> For a fuller analysis of the ways in which postfeminist texts have become mainstreamed as a feminist voice in the media, in line with the rise of 'laddism' and irony as excuse, see Whelehan (2000), Gill (2007b), Finding (2008a) etc.

wrong with claims like Michel Foucault's, that "*there is no difference, in principle, between sticking one's fist into someone's face or one's penis into their sex*" (*Discipline and Punish*, 1988, p. 200). If rape is best understood as an act of violence, it is always already an act of political violence, feminists responded, as demonstrated in this quotation by Catherine MacKinnon,

*"I actually think that what is wrong with rape is inextricable from what is unequal about it. Meaning, if men were raped equally with women, which I am not recommending, I might even get interested in what is wrong with rape apart from its inequality. But so long as sexual assault violates women as women and keeps them inferior, it is an act of inequality, by interpretation"* (Catherine MacKinnon, "Freedom from Unreal Loyalties: On Fidelity in Constitutional Interpretation" *Fordam Law Review* 65 (March 1977) p. 1777.)

If violence is an attack on another person's body, rape is an attack on a feminine – or feminised – body. Rape as a tool of inequality, feminists have more recently argued, is a threat to feminine bodies. This is why rape of male bodies, as an act of feminisation, is also an effective tool for domination and humiliation. Recent work by feminists such as Ann Cahill continues to explore the phenomenology of rape as violent attack on feminine (and feminised) bodies (Ann Cahill, "A Phenomenology of Fear", *The Feminist Philosophy Reader* 2008, 824)

Where does this leave contemporary feminist discussions of sexual violence? Feminists continue to explore how individual acts of violence express and reinforce wider social constructs of gender inequality, sexual domination and convoluted social attitudes to feminine bodies, women's agency and female sexuality. In the first place, rape remains an important and thorny topic in feminist theorising. While there is no one slogan encompassing feminist approaches to sexual violence, the overlapping theoretical frameworks described here are necessary for deconstructing social, non-feminist attitudes to rape and sexual violence – and in particular, how these manifest in a series of 'rape myths': harmfully distorting narratives of what rape is and how it happens that are nevertheless familiar from popular culture.

### **b) Rape myths**

Although there are many rape myths, and most theorists analyse them individually, for the purposes of this chapter and this project, I separate them into four groups, according to the content of each myth. The first and second

groups are concerned with who the victims and perpetrators of sexual violence are, respectively. The third group examines what causes sexual violence, and the fourth group looks at whether or not sexual violence has taken place at all. In all of these groupings, I focus on the ways in which particular TV representations of sexual violence have been theorised and critiqued. I also look briefly at the notion of feminist wish-fulfilment (with an example from cinema) as a possible explanation for misrepresentation of sexual violence facts and statistics. Finally, I look at the problems that rape myths cause, with reference to court cases, public opinion surveys and TV shows, and feminist work already done in this area.

While it may be the case that representations of sexual violence – as cultural discourses – are central to our narratives of ourselves and one another, the limits of those discourses are themselves limiting. Much of the work that has been done on where these ideas come from focuses particularly on media representation of both real and fictitious sexual violence. Feminists such as Projansky (2001), Cuklanz (2000) and Horeck (2003) have done an excellent job in showing us how film and television tend to rely on very limited and sexualized narratives of sexual violence (the violent rape perpetrated by the stranger in a dark alley) as well as certain tropes (the victim crying in the shower, cutting off her hair, changing the door locks etc.) used as shortcuts to show women's standardised post-rape responses: i.e. feeling guilty, shameful, dirty and (often) in some way responsible. It is very rare to be shown the more mundane acts of sexual violence – the friend who doesn't hear the 'no' (in whatever form it takes) in the shared bed, the older mentor who takes advantage of the power imbalance in his relationship with his protégé, or the father who relies on the shame and silence of his daughter to protect him. If these sorts of stories are not made widely available, is it possible that, on the rare occasions that they are seen or heard, they will not be recognised as sexual violence? It seems that there are very strict parameters that must be adhered to if a narrative of sexual violence is going to be accepted as such by the media, and that this lack of multiple sexual violence narratives is not only misleading, but also damaging in terms of justice being done in reporting, investigating, prosecuting and convicting in rape cases.

### **1. Question: Who is raped?**

**Myth: Rape victims are white, 'innocent/pure' young (often children) females<sup>17</sup> likely to be also killed by the rapist**

The cultural archetypes we hold for victims of sex crimes are, on the whole, dominated by those who did not survive them – especially children. In the UK, Sarah Payne, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman (and at the time of writing, potentially, Madeleine McCann), and in the US, Jon-Benet Ramsay and Megan Kanka, are all 'poster children' for this myth. They are white, predominantly blonde, aesthetically-appealing children. This is not to say that there is not also an awareness of adult victims of sexual violence, although as we will see, race and age play a significant part in their representation too. There is also a tendency for these adult (and sometimes even child) victims to be portrayed as either virgin or whore – the former is explored in this section, but the latter more so in the section on the third rape myth – that women's behaviour can often 'cause' rape.

In US crime procedural *Law and Order: SVU*, which represents "sexually motivated offences", and often claims a 'ripped from the headlines' approach, Britto, Hughes et al (2007) found that 60% of the victims represented were dead by the end of the episode<sup>18</sup>. Britto, Hughes et al. took statistics from the Manhattan Uniform Crime Reports of 2004 and the National Crime Victimization Rates from 2005 in order to compare the real profile of sexual violence in New York City with that portrayed on *SVU*. In terms of the victim profile, they found that while female victims outnumbered male victims by 89% to 11% in the statistics, on *SVU*, this percentage had been cut to 61% to 39%, giving a much more weakened version of the gendered nature of these crimes. There was, as might be expected, an over-focus on children, representing them as 44% of victims, as opposed to 23% in reality. White victims made up 62% of the victims on *SVU*, compared with 47% from the real profile. African-American females were almost completely absent in *SVU* as rape victims, despite being the group most at risk for sexual assault according to the statistics (p.47). Minority

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<sup>17</sup> Though this thesis focuses on sexual violence as gendered violence perpetrated on feminine (and feminised) bodies, it is not my intention to imply that sexual violence does not happen to men and boys. Though I refer to women, and 'women's experiences' throughout, this is a reflection of the gendered nature of these experiences, rather than an attempt to be exclusionary. I return to this issue in the conclusion, in which I specifically address the omission of the sexual violence experiences of Tori Amos' gay male listenership as a separate category.

<sup>18</sup> The strength of this connection between murder and sexual violence cannot help but feed into the fourth rape myth I will examine, in which people doubt rape really took place unless there are substantial physical injuries (or death) to go along with the narrative.

groups were also marginalised in more subtle ways, such as being portrayed in groups rather than as single victims, or being shown only in photograph form, or remaining nameless for the entire episode (*ibid* p.47).

Sexual violence in the UK soap *Eastenders* (1985-) has been a storyline in the lives of three female characters<sup>19</sup> - Kathy Beale, Kat Slater and 'Little' Mo Slater. In 1988, three years after *Eastenders* began, it ran its first rape storyline, in which Kathy Beale was raped in The Dagmar pub, by bar owner James Wilmott-Brown. Wilmott-Brown was sentenced to three years in prison for the rape, and in 1994, it was also revealed that he had also been imprisoned for the rape of another woman. Kathy's sexual violence storyline was not limited to her experiences with Wilmott-Brown, as it was also shown that she had a daughter, Donna, who was the product of a rape Kathy experienced as a fourteen-year-old girl. Little Mo was the subject of a long running domestic violence storyline, during which she was beaten and raped by her husband Trevor. Later in the show, Little Mo was also raped in the Queen Vic pub by customer Graham Foster. She became pregnant as a result of this rape, and kept the baby, Freddie. Her marriage broke down as her husband Billy was not able to accept the baby. Finally, Kat Slater - Mo's older sister - was revealed to have been abused as a child, by her uncle, Harry. She became pregnant at 13, and the baby, Zoe, was brought up by the family as Kat's sister until Kat revealed the truth about Zoe's conception in order to stop her going to live with Uncle Harry. Both child abuse storylines took place off-screen and are only retrospectively dealt with. The rapes that take place on-screen are perpetrated on (relatively) young, white women. However, in both Kathy's case and Little Mo's cases, what is represented is much closer to reality; women who are sexually victimised when younger are more likely to be sexually victimised again when older.<sup>20</sup>

Making the rape victim less stereotypical and more complex is not always an easy task. For example, in the UK soap *Brookside* (1982-2003), the long-running storyline of the Jordaches and their experiences of child abuse and domestic violence had three female victims: Mandy, and her daughters Beth and Rachel<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> A fourth is currently scheduled – see the next section for a note on this.

<sup>20</sup> See Herman (1981) for an exploration of this. This issue was presented, but not explored in the show, which, given its complexity, is problematic, as it could lead to a kind of victim-blaming, if these characters were perceived as the 'type' to be raped, as it happened more than once.

<sup>21</sup> Although Mandy was shown to be repeatedly abused by Trevor, pressure from Channel 4 'hierarchy' meant that both Beth and Rachel were only shown to have been raped by Trevor on one occasion each, leaving open the option that this was an 'abberation' on Trevor's part (quoted in Henderson p.71). Obviously, this in no way reflects the reality of childhood sexual abuse, at the hands of a father, usually ongoing and long-term.

*Brookside* made UK television history when they screened the first lesbian kiss between Beth and her girlfriend Margaret. However, as Henderson points out, whatever the producers' intentions, the *Brookside* audience was unable to distinguish between Beth's history of sexual abuse and her lesbianism (see Henderson, L 2007 p. 69). However, in other types of shows, the audience is given more credit for understanding potential complexities. In the first season of cult US TV show *Veronica Mars* (2004-2007), one of the first things we learn about the eponymous heroine and teen detective is that she was "roofied<sup>22</sup> and raped" at a classmate's party, and that she still does not know who the perpetrator is. Although the season-long mystery is not about Veronica's rape, but about uncovering who murdered her best friend, it is made clear that her transformation from in-crowd happy student to mistrustful (yet witty) detective is informed in part by her experiences of rape, betrayal and not-knowing.

## **2. Question: Who rapes?**

### ***Myth: Rapists are black, lower-class, monstrous strangers***

Put most simply, this myth states that the rapist is Other<sup>23</sup>. This has historically taken the form of black men being blamed for 'spoiling' white women, leading to lynchings by white men<sup>24</sup>. Black men were considered to be 'savage', 'rapacious' and 'primitive'<sup>25</sup> (Bourke 2007 p. 95), and therefore were the most likely perpetrators of rape, a crime also fitting those descriptions. Since the civil rights movement, this kind of racism has taken less obvious, more insidiously widespread forms. Reports of rape continue to be infused with fears of outsiders, but applies not just to black men now, but anyone considered a 'racial outsider', especially (in the UK at present), asylum seekers<sup>26</sup>.

Warshaw's work on acquaintance rape attempted to debunk the widely-held belief that only stranger rape is 'real' rape, showing the multiple ways in which women

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<sup>22</sup> Given GHB (the 'date rape' drug) without her knowledge

<sup>23</sup> Feminist, queer and critical race theory all look at the ways in which images and ideas of the 'self' are produced through 'othering' practices, i.e. the production of self/other binaries. These binaries, such as white/black, man/woman, homosexual/heterosexual, western/non-western' are always produced through exclusions and relations of antagonism. Much of this theory has its origin in the phenomenological and existential work of Heidegger, Satre, De Beauvoir and others, as well as the generation of philosophers inspired by the Holocaust (and World War II more generally).

<sup>24</sup> 'Warning' adverts like 'The Black Plague', printed in a Georgia newspaper (The Thunderbolt 1969, reprinted in Bourke p. 95) depict a black man with a knife hiding in a tree, with a picture of a clock at the bottom, and the text, "Every 30 minutes...a woman is raped somewhere in the USA".

<sup>25</sup> Problematically, black women were also seen to have these attributes, therefore were less likely to be believed as victims of sexual violence, but placed in the category of 'unrapeable', along with prostitutes.

<sup>26</sup> See Tyler (2008) for an exploration of the ways in which 'the asylum seeker' is presented as a figure of fear.

are abused by partners, friends and colleagues, among others. Current sexual violence theory continues to support Warshaw's conclusions - for example, Bourke points out that a typical 21<sup>st</sup> century rapist would drive the victim home after the rape, framing the experience as a romantic one, or a 'date' of some sort. This is far from the image of the 'monstrous stranger' (who is always 'othered' in some way, whether racial or not) we are presented with in most media coverage of sexual violence. Following Soothill and Walby (1991), Rosalind Gill argues that despite some (highly selective) reporting of 'date rape' (i.e. those in which someone famous was involved, either as victim or perpetrator), other rape reports in the press feed off the horror of each other (Gill 2007b, p. 144). They do this by attaching a particular name to the rapist, often associated with the place of the rapes, or the method used to kill the victims (e.g. 'Yorkshire Ripper', 'M42 rapist'), and by referring to him as a 'sex fiend' or 'sex beast'. This serves to separate those who rape from the rest of 'us', and creates a false notion that sexual abuse is not happening in our midst, because there is no easily recognisable monster to perpetrate it<sup>27</sup>.

Returning to the examples of sexual violence in *Eastenders*<sup>28</sup> discussed in the section above, we can see the ways in which the perpetrators fall into this category, even though at face value, they may seem not to do so. Even though Trevor is Mo's husband, he is coded as distinct from other characters on the show through his Scottishness and his outsider status (Henderson 2007 p.68) and therefore it is easier to see him as Other and/or monstrous than if he had been introduced at the same time as the rest of the family and shared the community's accent and status. Wilmott-Brown is similarly Othered, although in his case it is by his double-barrelled surname, 'posh' accent, wealth and upper-middle class status. Uncle Harry is perhaps the least obviously Othered of the three because he is a family member; however he is portrayed as deeply 'excessive' (he is obese, red-faced, and favours very loud Hawaiian print shirts) in comparison with the rest of the family, and he lives in Spain, rather than in Walford.

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<sup>27</sup> The *Brass Eye* paedophilia special (2001) satirised the UK's 'moral panic' about this issue, and is an excellent reference point for the 'othering' of sex crime perpetrators that was taking place at the time, e.g. in the *News Of The World's* 'name and shame' campaign which ran from July to August in 2000 as a response to the murder of eight year Sarah Payne who was murdered by known paedophile Roy Whiting

<sup>28</sup> At the time of writing, a further sexual violence storyline is reported to be forthcoming in *Eastenders*. One (or more) of long-term character Bianca Jackson's children will be shown to have experienced sexual abuse at the hands of her father; Bianca's ex-partner. Although not yet cast, it is known that the father will be coming out of prison, and will be a new character on the show – therefore also fitting the pattern of being Othered. We can also see how this storyline fits into the first rape myth, as the victim of sexual violence is once again, an 'innocent' (white) child.

*Brookside* took a slightly different approach in casting Bryan Murray, an actor known for his 'nice guy' roles to play the part of Trevor Jordache, as they wanted, similarly to the film *Sleeping With The Enemy* (1991), a charming man who people would not suspect as a perpetrator (Henderson 2007 p.66). However, Trevor was still an 'outsider' in that he was brought in specifically to play out this abuse storyline. Although producers acknowledged that it would have been more realistic and hard-hitting to reveal that a long-term character on the show was abusing his children (Henderson p.74), viewing figures and potential audience alienation concerns took precedence, and they decided to bring in a new character.

There is one final 'other' to discuss in this section – the female perpetrator of sexual violence. As a figure, she too is skewed through media representation. For example, as might be expected, the Manhattan crime figures showed that 95% of perpetrators of sexual abuse were male, and 5% female. However, on *SVU*, 37% of perpetrators were female, compared with only 63% men (Britto, Hughes et al 2007 p.47). Cuklanz and Moorti have shown that in the first five seasons of *SVU*, the numbers of abusive mothers and abusive fathers were almost identical. Describing this phenomenon as the 'monstrous maternal'. Cuklanz (2000) and Moorti (2001) rely on Kaplan's (1987) suggestion that abuse by men is far more socially acceptable, and is punished less harshly in court<sup>29</sup>, because they are not held to the same standards of care, gentleness and self-sacrifice as women. When women commit these sorts of crimes, they are seen as 'doubly deviant' and are 'doubly damned' (Lloyd 1995), because they have transgressed against not just the law, but also against what it is supposed to mean to be a woman.

### **3. Question: What causes rape?**

#### ***Myth: Uncontrollable lust, often brought on by the woman's actions***

The idea that men's lust is simply uncontrollable is a common rape myth. If they have been 'led on' too much, then they reach a point of no return and are simply unable to stop. According to this myth, a woman raped in this situation has been very naïve if she claims not to have known that saying 'yes' to dinner / coffee / nightcap / kissing etc. is the equivalent of 'yes' to sex. The 'too turned on to stop' approach is fairly easily dispelled with a simple example used by Shapcott (1988).

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<sup>29</sup> Note the difference in press coverage of Rose West to Fred West, or Myra Hindley to Ian Brady, and, most recently, of Maxine Carr (who was not even a perpetrator) to Ian Huntley. A similar example in Canada is that of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka.

As Shapcott points out, in a situation where a young couple are having sex at her parents house, and the parents unexpectedly return, it is far more likely that they will walk in to find the couple doing something seemingly innocuous (albeit slightly ruffled), than to find them still engaged in sex with the man explaining to the parents that he is simply too turned on to stop (p. 31-32). Similarly, if a gun was held to the man's head and he was ordered to stop whatever sexual activity he was engaged in, it seems unlikely that he would claim to be past the point of no return, and take his chances with the gun.

This myth is employed in relation to stranger rape, and even murder. In a case in which a man raped and killed a female hitchhiker, Soothill and Walby (1991) and Gill (2007b) point out that *The Sun's* headline coverage of this - '*Hitchgirl Spurned Sex*' – does imply that in any normal situation, the hitchhiker might have been expected to have sex with the stranger on the road. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that the woman was engaged in potentially 'risky' behaviour, and therefore again could be thought to be naïve in thinking this would not lead to sex or rape.

One of the first episodes of Australian soap *Home and Away* (1988-) showed the rape of Carly Morris, a wayward foster teenager, while hitchhiking. Although she initially hid her assault, she later spoke out about it because of the local residents' debates over whether or not her reckless behaviour made her culpable for the rape. After the rape, Carly's descent into alcoholism and further reckless behaviour was shown, but it was ultimately the rape and the response to it which made her address those problems which had been there prior to the rape. The rape was portrayed as a point of self-realisation, and Carly turned from 'bad girl' to 'good girl' because of it. This redemptive function of rape has been used before – most notably in one of the most notorious rapes in soap: the rape of Laura by Luke Spencer in the US's *General Hospital* (1963-) in 1979. The rape itself was not particularly noteworthy – Laura was waiting for her husband to pick her up one night from the disco where she worked, when her boss Luke, who was in love with her, and drunk, pulled her to the floor and raped her – however, what happened afterwards was. Laura told friends about the rape, but not the perpetrator, and to avoid suspicion falling on Luke, she continued to work at the disco. During the next year on the soap, Luke and Laura were shown to be falling in love with each other, and married in 1981. The rape is, in some senses, shown

to be redemptive, as it 'tames'<sup>30</sup> Laura, just as the *Home and Away* rape 'tamed' the wayward Carly<sup>31</sup>. It is only after he rapes her that Laura develops feelings for Luke, and these feelings are not explored in psychological terms related to her trauma (e.g. Stockholm Syndrome), but rather shown to be a natural progression of their relationship. As the characters became more popular, and it became clear that the relationship would be long-running, *General Hospital* tried to back-pedal the rape by referring to it as a 'seduction'. Luke and Laura continued to be the 'poster couple' for the show for the next twenty five years, and although eventually the rape was revisited via the devices of telling their child and also court subpoena, as late as 2007, it is the 'true love' nature of the couple which permeates the show, not the rape.

To return briefly to the *Eastenders* rapes mentioned, both of the non-intimate partner rapes (Wilmott-Brown and Graham) take place in pubs, late at night, drawing – however unintentionally – on fears connecting women's 'risky behaviour' (in these cases - late nights, alcohol<sup>32</sup> and being alone with a man) with sexual violence. Women's 'reckless' or 'risky' behaviour, and therefore culpability for rape, can take many forms. These include (but are not limited to): what a woman is wearing; her sexual history; whether or not she was walking alone and whether or not she fought back. Shapcott (1988) offers the following scenario to demonstrate how nonsensical this type of victim-blaming sounds when applied to a different crime, especially one with a male victim:

**Lawyer:** *Mr. Smith, you were held up at gunpoint at First and Main?*

*Mr Smith:* Yes.

**Lawyer:** *Did you struggle with the robber?*

*Mr Smith:* No.

**Lawyer:** *Why not?*

*Mr Smith:* He was armed.

**Lawyer:** *Then you made a conscious decision to comply with his demands rather than resist?*

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<sup>30</sup> The original instance of this particular narrative is, of course, Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, (1592) in which Petruchio marries Katherine and takes her home against her will, before torturing her in various ways (burning her clothes, not allowing her to eat or sleep) until she finally becomes an 'obedient wife' and extols the virtues of being so.

<sup>31</sup> There are many more examples of this sort of redemptive rape. Perhaps the most famous is Rhett Butler's rape of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With The Wind* (1939), in which he "humbled her, hurt her, used her brutally through a wild mad night and she had gloried in it" (Margaret Mitchell, quoted in Bourke 2007 p.306). It is only after the rape that the two can be happy, after Scarlett has been 'broken in' like a horse now willing to accept the saddle and bridle.

<sup>32</sup> As Bourke points out, a double standard is at work with regard to alcohol and rape (p.57). Alcohol is seen to make the woman who is raped *more* responsible, but the man who rapes her *less* responsible.

*Mr Smith:* Well, yes.

**Lawyer:** **Did you scream? Cry out?**  
*Mr Smith:* No, I was afraid.

**Lawyer:** **I see. Have you ever been held up before?**  
*Mr Smith:* No.

**Lawyer:** **Have you ever given money away?**  
*Mr Smith:* Yes, of course...

**Lawyer:** **And you did so willingly?**  
*Mr Smith:* What are you getting at?

**Lawyer:** **Well, let's put it like this, Mr. Smith. You've given away money in the past. In fact, you have quite a reputation for philanthropy. How can we be sure that you weren't contriving to have your money taken by force?**  
*Mr Smith:* Listen, if I wanted...

**Lawyer:** **Never mind. What time did this hold-up take place, Mr. Smith?**  
*Mr Smith:* About 11p.m.

**Lawyer:** **You were out on the street at 11p.m.? Doing what?**  
*Mr Smith:* Just walking.

**Lawyer:** **Just walking? You know it's dangerous being out on the street that late at night. Weren't you aware that you could have been held up?**  
*Mr Smith:* I hadn't thought about it.

**Lawyer:** **What were you wearing at the time, Mr. Smith?**  
*Mr Smith:* Let's see. A suit. Yes, a suit.

**Lawyer:** **An expensive suit?**  
*Mr Smith:* Well, yes.

**Lawyer:** **In other words, Mr. Smith, you were walking around the streets late at night in a suit that practically advertised the fact that you might be a good target for some easy money, isn't that so? I mean, if we didn't know better, Mr. Smith, we might even think you were asking for this to happen, mightn't we?**

- Shapcott (1988) p.25-26

As Shapcott points out, if robbery victims were treated in this manner, then we would in all likelihood see a substantial drop in the number of people who felt safe enough to make an official complaint about it, as well as stricter selection of which cases to prosecute by the police and the CPS, just as is the case with sexual violence.

Finally, a lack of understanding with regard to the ways in which men and women are socialised to communicate differently has led to what might be called the 'Just Say No' issue. The understanding is that men may press ahead with whatever sexual activity they wish to pursue, unless and until the woman clearly and forcefully says, 'No!', at which point they must stop, or the activity will be known to be non-consensual. If the woman has not clearly and forcefully said, 'No!', then she bears the weight of responsibility for what happens, as she has sent mixed messages at best, and at worst, has wanted the sex, but then 'cried rape' later. The issue of 'crying rape' will be discussed in the next section; however the reliance on this clear and forceful, 'No!' must be addressed here.

Wilkinson, Kitzinger and Frith have done several pieces of conversation analysis work (1997, 1999, 2000) that show plainly that women, on the whole, do not say, 'No!' to things. For example, if we are invited to a party we have no wish to attend, we are unlikely to say, 'No!' or even 'No, thank you' to the host, but rather to express some regret and offer some practical reason as to why we cannot attend. This common experience is theorised by Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1999), who found that while a positive response to a question or invitation was offered immediately and clearly, there was a whole indirect process to refusal. Firstly, there is a delay (a filled silence, such as 'hmm') and a hedging remark (such as 'well...'). This is followed by a softened compliment to foreshadow the refusal ('that's very sweet of you' etc.). Finally the refusal is explained by a reference to a prior commitment (e.g. 'but I don't think I can as I have to wait in for a delivery'). The word 'no' is never used, and the process conveys an inability, rather than an unwillingness, to accept the invitation (p.563). Kitzinger and Frith (1999) looked more specifically at young women who want to refuse sexual activity and found that saying 'no' was so difficult for these young women, (for a number of reasons including: not wanting to hurt the other person's feelings; worrying that they should have tried to refuse the sex at an earlier juncture and that they therefore have forfeited the right to say 'no'; not wanting to be labelled 'frigid' etc.) that they did all they could to avoid having to say it, including having sex when they did not want to (p. 296-297). When faced with this evidence, the 'Just Say No' assumptions are not as damning as they may first appear, and perhaps we might conclude that other measures are needed to test whether or not a woman is happy with particular sexual advances.

#### **4. Question: How do we know a rape really took place?**

##### **Myth: It probably didn't**

This myth relies on three main (and often contradictory) assumptions. Firstly, rape will cause significant, visible, physical damage to the victim. Secondly, rape is an (almost) impossibility, because it cannot be perpetrated upon someone who is not willing. Thirdly, women are far more likely to lie about rape than they are to actually be raped.

Firstly then, 'proof' that rape took place must often take the form of physical damage to the woman's body. For example, the three rapes that take place on-screen in *Eastenders* (Kathy and Wilmott-Brown, Little Mo and Trevor, and Little Mo and Graham) are all violent enough to cause visible damage (bruising, black eyes etc) so that we do not doubt that the assault took place. Even bruising is not enough in many cases, as consensual 'rough sex' can be claimed. Britto, Hughes et al's (1997) findings that 60% of the victims represented in *SVU* were dead by the end of the episode serves to highlight that although the most extreme violence is associated with rape, emotional trauma and 'lesser' physical injuries may not be enough to convince a jury who are saturated by these connected representations. Cuklanz and Moorti (2006) laud *SVU* for not depicting sexual violence in graphic detail in a way that objectifies the woman (p. 307), and this is certainly, as they claim, a step forward from previously established frameworks of prime-time rape representations. However, I am reluctant to attach too much feminist kudos to this decision, as it seems that it is taken on the most practical terms: if we see the assault happen, then we know the who/where/when of it, and there is not much mystery to be unravelled in the episode, and this unravelling often takes the form of revealing that the assault did not really happen, or, if it did, not in the way it was claimed to have done<sup>33</sup>.

Secondly, we turn to the 'can't rape the unwilling'<sup>34</sup> theory. Bourke's thorough history of rape (2007) from the 1860s onwards makes several mentions of this approach to sexual violence. She finds many uses of the phrase 'impossible to

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<sup>33</sup> Also, show creators do not hesitate to show violent assaults in the other *Law and Order* franchises (e.g. *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* 2001-), when the storyline is not dependent on 'uncovering' the truth of the assault itself.

<sup>34</sup> When I was a student at Cambridge, I was taking a taxi to the station one evening, when apropos of nothing, the cab driver asked me, 'Why is rape a myth?'. Stunned, I made no response, at which point he informed me, "Because a woman with her skirt up around her waist can always run faster than a man with his trousers round his ankles!", and guffawed loudly. He then told me he used to be serial killer Dennis Nielsen's personal driver. You might imagine I was pleased to arrive at my destination.

sheath a sword into a vibrating scabbard' (p.24) in medical and legal textbooks, the understanding being that if a woman were to resist, it would not be possible for a man to penetrate her. Similarly, it was understood not even to be physically possible to rape a child (p.25). In the 1890's, the textbook *Medical Jurisprudence, Forensic Medicine and Toxicology* (Witthaus and Becker 1894) advised lawyers that a 'certain class of woman' would often 'make a point of a show of resistance before yielding' (ibid p.25), and therefore "if only slight traces of a struggle are found on the thighs and breasts", they should assume that the woman had not used "all her strength in her defence", and had not, therefore, been raped.

Unfortunately, the understandings that prevailed over a hundred years ago still seem to bear some weight today. On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999, the Court of Cassation, which is Italy's highest appeals court, overturned a conviction of rape with regard to a driving instructor and his 18-year old student, on the grounds that she must have consented to sex. Their justification for this was that the young woman was wearing jeans, which would have been 'impossible' for a rapist to remove if the woman had resisted with 'all her strength'. In 2008, a similar overturning took place in the Seoul High Court in South Korea. In this case, the 'coherent testimony' of the victim, which had left the initial court "no grounds for doubt" (Korea Times, Ji-sook 2008<sup>35</sup>) about the veracity of the young woman's claim of attempted rape, in addition to the fact that she jumped from a sixth floor window to escape and subsequently needed five months of medical treatment, was overturned on the grounds that her 'skinny' jeans were folded neatly by the bed. Although the judge in the High Court stated that "*lots of things pointed to the accused attempting the rape*", he went on to add, "*but a pair of skinny jeans and underwear found by the bedside neatly folded and the fact that such denims are hard for another to take off beg clearer evidence to prove him guilty*". The assumption was that only the woman herself could have folded these jeans, as a (male) rapist would not have been capable of such a complex act. If it is really the case, as these two examples seem to suggest, that it is impossible to be raped wearing jeans, then it is surprising that women ever wear anything else, and that the mark-up on denim is not significantly higher, given these magical properties. Choice of clothing ends up being something of a lose/lose situation for women in rape trials: if they were wearing a skirt, they were asking to be raped and are therefore culpable, and if they were wearing jeans, they cannot really have been raped at all.

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<sup>35</sup> [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/04/117\\_23019.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/04/117_23019.html)

The belief underpinning these conclusions brings us to the third element of this rape myth: that women are more likely to falsely claim rape than they are to actually experience it. The 'false accusation' plot is one that appears far more in film and TV than it does in real life. According to Cuklanz (2000), these storylines in primetime narratives follow the 'limited variability' rule (p.44). The formula the plots follow is that of a teenage girl who makes a claim of rape against a man in a position of power over her (usually a teacher or a father). The man's life is then shown to be in tatters as he loses his job and his family, or these things are thrown into serious disrepair, until finally, the girl comes clean or is exposed (often by the accused's dogged quest to prove his innocence).

A large scale Home Office study from 2000-2003 initially concluded that 9% of rape accusations were false (quoted from Bourke 2007 p.393). However, the researchers then realised that in those 9% of cases marked down as 'no evidence of assault', most of them were a result of someone other than the woman making the allegation (e.g. a passer-by seeing a distressed woman with ripped clothes), which the woman then explained away. There were also a few cases in which a woman had regained consciousness, either at home or elsewhere, and had gone to the police - worried about having been assaulted but unable to remember - to ascertain whether or not she had been. Once these cases were removed, only 3% of cases could be categorised as 'false accusations' - far fewer than popular understanding would have it.

### **c) Why are rape myths so important?**

The recent run of UK television programmes exploring issues surrounding rape and consent<sup>36</sup>, with actors playing out the story, but 'real people' making the decisions, either in a jury format or by public vote has brought the issue of rape myths further into the open. In all of these programmes, the public audience or jury seemed to think that it was more likely that the woman was making a false allegation of rape, and look for evidence to support that, than for her to have actually been raped. They also made distinctions between 'real rape' - the type that tends to happen in a dark alley with a stranger, and 'unfortunate incidents' - those involving alcohol, miniskirts and misunderstandings. It also seems unlikely that these juries represent a blip in wider public opinion on sexual violence; Amnesty (ICM, 2005) found in 2005 that a third of the people surveyed thought a woman was partially or totally to blame for rape if she had flirted, more than a

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<sup>36</sup> *Consent* (2007), *Tonight with Trevor McDonald: Consenting Adults* (2006)

third thought she was partially or totally responsible if she was drunk, and a quarter thought she was partially or totally responsible if she was wearing sexy or revealing clothing. This is borne out by researchers' findings that those who believe in rape myths are far more unlikely to be able to identify sexual violence, and frequently blame the victim (e.g. Varelas & Foley 1998, and Estrich 1987), as well as findings that jurors in rape cases are more likely to rely on popular understandings of rape (e.g. those they find in media representations and rape myth 'talk'<sup>37</sup>) than on legal definitions (Epstein & Langenbaum 1994).

#### **d) Feminist wish fulfilment?**

There are cases in which the fictional representation of sexual violence goes the other way, in that it represents the support system for victims of sexual violence, and the conviction rates, as much better than they really are. For example, on *SVU*, reporting sexual violence is certainly worthwhile, given that 100% of reported incidents result in arrest, and 92% end in conviction (Britto, Hughes et al 2007 p.49), compared with 49% and 51% respectively from NYC's statistics, and compared with 5% of rapes reported in the UK ending in a conviction.

Taking a more specific incident, The 1988 film *The Accused* (Kaplan) was based on a real-life rape that had taken place five years earlier. In 1983, in the Big Dan tavern in Bedford, Massachusetts, a young Portuguese woman was gang-raped for two hours on the pool table, while the rest of the men in the bar watched and cheered. No one called the police; Big Dan's remained open, and when the woman was finally able to get away and to the police, they took her back to the bar, where two of her rapists were still there. Charges could not be brought against those who had spectated and cheered, as the District Attorney stated, "*Mere presence during a crime is not enough to make someone an accessory. You must have participated*" (Press 1983 p.79, quoted in Horeck 2003, p. 72). However, as many editorials, theorists and activists pointed out, these men were not 'innocent bystanders', but had in fact actively participated in the rape by cheering for it, and therefore sanctioning it. Horeck points out that it was the woman, not the rapists and spectators, who was cast aside by her local Portuguese community. The community seemed to feel that the woman's case, rather than the actions of the men themselves, cast the entire Portuguese community in a very negative light. The young woman fled the community and

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<sup>37</sup> See also Soothill & Walby (1991), Benedict (1992), Greer (2003) and Gill (2007b) for further analysis of the deployment of rape myths in news reporting of sexual violence.

moved to Florida, where she was killed in a car accident shortly afterwards. Kaplan's film has been viewed as 'feminist wish fulfilment' (Horeck 2003, p.100) because the ending is changed: the men who watched and cheered are prosecuted and convicted, and the young woman, Sarah Tobias, is (eventually) believed and vindicated. However, there are other details that are changed which might give cause for concern. Some of the racial elements of the crime are retained (some of the rapists are Portuguese) but some are not (the young woman is not Portuguese, but white<sup>38</sup>). In addition to this, in the film, Sarah Tobias' case is 'saved' by the actions of one of the men who was in the bar (the young white student, Kenneth Joyce), who calls the police, and eventually testifies to the rape. Leaving aside the fact that a man eventually comes to the rescue, when this did not happen, it is problematic that the rape is actually narrated and validated by Joyce in court – it is his voice we hear, and not that of Tobias. This example highlights some of the potential advantages and disadvantages of changing the details of a 'real-life' case, which we return to in Chapter 6 when I discuss the issue of authenticity.

## **2. Music, Gender and Sexual Violence**

In the second half of this chapter, I turn to the media and theoretical attention that has already been given to sexual violence and music – i.e. music containing 'perpetrator narratives' or portraying women in a misogynist fashion. I then go on to examine how 'male emotion' has been portrayed in music, as well as some of the ways in which male artists have dealt with issues of sexism and gendered violence. Addressing issues of politics or social injustice through music has a long history, and I explore this briefly in order to understand some of the relationships between pop and politics and also to explore the ways in which gender has played a part in determining how those interventions have been received. Finally, I turn to what could broadly be classified as 'women in music' literature in order to situate my research within the wider context of existing work on 'male music' and 'female music', and on female musicians' relationships to gendered violence. I conclude the chapter by introducing the artists whose narratives of sexual violence I focus on in my thesis.

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<sup>38</sup> The young woman, played by Jodie Foster, still suffers prejudice, as she is coded as 'white trash' – however, simply swapping one marginalised location for another does not mean that the original event is still represented in terms of its complexity.

### a) Rap(e) narratives: music and male sexual violence

In the last decade, music has come under the spotlight due to concerns about misogynistic, homophobic<sup>39</sup> and violent lyrics and demeaning videos. There are many lyrical examples to choose from here however most could be adequately described as falling into the 'bitches and hos' way of describing women. On a non-lyrical front, it is worth highlighting the awareness of the dehumanisation of black women through their representations in hip-hop, which came with the release of Snoop Dogg's album *Doggystyle* (1993), the cover of which featured a naked black woman in a dog-kennel with only her bottom and legs visibly protruding. While feminist outrage at this, and other similar examples, may have been entirely justified, it is worth noting the racist subtext to these media debates, in which debates about misogyny and violence in music have been largely confined to rap or hip-hop (predominantly made by black musicians), despite there being much to complain about in other music genres. For example, 'Brown Sugar' by the Rolling Stones, about a white slave owner's pleasure at raping and beating his black female slave<sup>40</sup>, or The Stranglers' 'Sometimes', explained by Hugh Cornwell as "*about a bloke hitting a woman as a protest against her behaviour – putting her back down under his domination*" (quoted in Reynolds and Press 1995, p.34) give just as much cause for concern<sup>41</sup>. We might also note that Nick Cave's fascination with murdered women spans his solo work and his early work with The Birthday Party, as well as his more well known work with The Bad Seeds – including the album *Murder Ballads*, whose sole focus is the murder of women. Reynolds and Press have astutely pointed out the disturbing nature of Cave's fascination with the Madonna/whore complex, which infuses his 'dead women' songs, and Bannister (2006) describes Cave's persona as "*that of a psychopath who is absolved of worldly responsibilities by his artistic vocation*" (Bannister 2006, p.141). However, the most controversial of all is the man George Bush referred to as "*the most dangerous threat to American children since polio*" (quoted in Blecha 2004, p.120), and whom any thesis concerned with music and sexual violence would be remiss not to mention: Eminem.

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<sup>39</sup> Although this thesis does not deal specifically with homophobia, it is worth noting the parallels in terms of media attention. For example, the banning in the UK of performances by Sizzla (whose lyrics include lines such as, "Shot a battyboy, my big gun boom") was a result of media attention, and gay-rights campaigning, focused on Jamaican reggae artists. However, the undeniable heteronormativity found in every other genre of music is rarely mentioned.

<sup>40</sup> e.g. "Scarred old slaver know he's doin' alright / Hear him whip the women just around midnight"

<sup>41</sup> See Finding (2009a) on this theme with regard to the controversy over French rapper OrelSan.

In Eminem's songs, 'Kim' and '97 Bonnie and Clyde', (to cite a small sample on this theme), he fantasises about killing his estranged wife Kim, in front of their daughter, Hailie<sup>42</sup>. In 'Kill You', Eminem appears to address all women when he says. "*Bitches too / You ain't nothing but a girl to me*" and "*Girls neither / You ain't nothing but a slut to me*". The threat to 'kill you' in the title is repeated throughout the song, but is also described in more specific ways (e.g. "*Slut, you think I won't choke no whore / 'Til the vocal chords don't work in her throat no more?!*") In the final three seconds of the four-and-a-half minute song, he laughs and says "*I'm just playing, ladies. You know I love you*", as if to suggest that the whole song has been ironic. Keathley (2002) suggests that "*due to Eminem's status as a white rapper masquerading within a black genre but supported by a predominantly white recording industry, his murder rap songs simultaneously serve the fantasies of white men and deflect blame for their regressive gender politics onto the putative violence and lawlessness of the black urban culture that engendered hip-hop*" (Keathley 2002 p.2). Put simply, it allows white men to engage with fantasies of sexual murder, while blaming the social problem as a whole on black men<sup>43</sup>, who are the stereotypical perpetrators described in the second rape myth.

The media attention given to Eminem has been a phenomenon in itself. The release and response to songs such as 'Kim' and '97 Bonnie and Clyde' created a media furore. More column inches were devoted to this debate than to any actual act of sexual violence taking place at that time<sup>44</sup>. The fact that gun and knife violence, sexual violence and gang conflict are tropes of rap and hip-hop does not necessarily tell us anything about the rap/hip-hop artist's personal experience. We can no more extrapolate a confession of rape and murder from a narrative of rape and murder by a rap artist than we can conclude that all country artists have seen their dogs shot; had their partners cheat on them, and finally become alcoholics. 2006 saw the release of *Who Needs Actions When You Got Words* by Plan B (Ben Drew, a hip-hop/acoustic artist from Forest Gate touted by

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<sup>42</sup> 'Kim' is addressed to Eminem's wife Kim, and contains lyrics like "*Sit down bitch - If you move again I'll beat the shit out of you*" and "*We'll be right back - well, I will, you'll be in the trunk*". '97 Bonnie and Clyde' is addressed to his daughter Hailie, who he makes a co-conspirator in the murder of his wife with lyrics such as, "*Dada made a nice bed for Mommy at the bottom of the lake. Here, you wanna help Dada tie a rope around this rock? We'll tie it to her footsie then we'll roll her off the dock*"

<sup>43</sup> The character of Nancy Botwin in US TV show *Weeds* (2005-) functions in a similar way. By using a white 'all-American mom' character in the role of an emerging drug dealer who gets caught up in progressively more violent and ethically unpalatable situations, the show opens up an accessible 'fantasy' along the same lines.

<sup>44</sup> This is reminiscent of the media outrage surrounding Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) (a play depicting rape, torture, murder and war), which happened at the same time as the actual rape and murder of a teenage girl in the UK. Kane said, "*The thing that shocks me the most is that the media seem to have been more upset by the representation of violence than by violence itself*" Sierz, A. (2000).

many as a 'British Eminem'). The album contains songs told from the perspective of murderers, rapists and other violent characters<sup>45</sup>. Citing films such as *Irreversible* (2002) and *Baise-Moi* (2000) (in his lyrics to 'Sick To Def'), Drew argues that he should be treated in the same way as those films' directors and writers – as a storyteller and narrator of disturbing events, not as a confessing criminal. In this case, Drew takes an outsider's perspective on violent and traumatic situations. In the section that follows, we will see what happens when male artists use an insider's perspective on trauma.

### **b) Boys don't cry? Men and 'emotional music'**

Although the premise of this thesis is that music dealing with personal trauma (especially sexual violence) originated with, and belongs to, women, this is not an easy position to (re)claim. The very act of writing songs about trauma at all has recently been declared an entirely male phenomenon, with the emergence of 'emo' (short for 'emotional') as a musical genre. Emo has its roots in late 70's punk, but comes into its own as a genre in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Characterised by bands such as Dashboard Confessional and Jimmy Eat World, emo is a teen-centric genre that embodies the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' that took place at that time. Williams (2007) argues that the change in musical style from punk to emo reflects "*one articulation of the adjustments and redefinitions that masculinity must experience in the face of numerous social shifts, from consumer culture to feminist backlash*"<sup>46</sup> (Williams p. 146). When male emotion was limited to the one-dimensional stereotype of "sexual frustration and aggressive, violent masculinity", the musical signifiers of this were clear: "*pounding, violent guitar distortion, extreme dynamics and gritty, hostile vocal timbres*" (ibid). By changing the form of the music to a more introspective version, and literally slowing down the repetitive guitar chords and insistent drumbeats, so that the vocalised pain comes through more coherently, the 'emo effect' is that of less anger and more angst, or as Williams puts it, "*the frustration of a world built on misunderstanding its non-conformist youth*" (p.157).

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<sup>45</sup> The startlingly violent opener, 'Kidz', is based on the murder of Damilola Taylor, and also in part on Larry Clark's controversial film *Kids*. Other songs take underage sex, honour killings, domestic violence, parental abandonment and substance misuse as their subject matter.

<sup>46</sup> There are other examples of this prior to emo. For example, Middleton (2007) points out that the macho conventions of John Lennon, "*those vocal qualities – the driving, sneering, stage-centred cockiness – [which] run parallel to similar traits in the behavioural persona he constructed for himself*" are contravened when he sings the traumatic songs that resonate with his childhood, 'Mother' and 'My Mummy's Dead'. (Middleton 2007, p.105)

Andy Greenwald's book *Nothing Feels Good: Teenagers, Punk and Emo* (Greenwald 2003), like other writing on emo, focuses, without exception, on men as the artists who are able to produce 'emotional' music. To say that only men produce music that incites emotion is patently ridiculous; however, no one has come up with a concrete definition of emo that entails anything other than this. The appropriation of emotion, as though it had just been discovered, by writers on this genre seems somewhat bizarre. Greenwald even tries to explain that although there are no female artists in this field, this ultimately may not matter, as "*the unifying appeal of emo may be just that, at heart, emotional devastation knows no gender*" (Greenwald 2003). Greenwald is clearly not taking into account emotional devastation brought about by sexual, gendered violence in this analysis.

Perhaps a more interesting question to ask is why there seems to be something more socially acceptable about men singing about trauma than women. Writing about Nirvana<sup>47</sup>, and in particular, Cobain's lyrics concerning his emotional problems and his terrible childhood, Bannister (2006) notes that while such experiences are not exclusive to men, "*male mental dysfunction has aesthetic status; women are simply 'crazy'*" (p.157). Returning briefly to Eminem, the rapper often utilises a (female-associated) 'confessional' account to talk about some of his personal issues in song, and his narratives are often domestic tales, or 'kitchen sink drama' of the sort thought to be the provenance of women. For example, 'Cleaning Out My Closet' deals with Eminem's abusive childhood at the hands of his mother, who had substance misuse issues<sup>48</sup>, and articulates his feelings that he would make very different choices to his mother in order to ensure that his daughter has a better childhood than he did<sup>49</sup>. Bannister argues that in (white male) indie rock, being 'fucked up' is a prerequisite for being considered authentic (p.137), and cites feminism as the reason behind the themes of male guilt and apology found in songs such as Beck's 'Loser', Radiohead's 'Creep' and Nirvana's 'All Apologies'. He suggests that male artists have internalised feminist anger about "*sexism and bad male behaviour*" (p.136), which, in turn, leads to the sort of gendered depression that theoretical work on emo, such as Greenwald's, describes.

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<sup>47</sup> Although I mention Nirvana, Eminem and Radiohead here, it is not my intention to try to redefine them as emo artists, confessional artists, or as belonging to any homogenous group – simply to draw attention to some of the different ways in which male artists have addressed emotional or traumatic issues in their music.

<sup>48</sup> e.g. "*going through public housing systems / victim of Munchausen's syndrome / my whole life I was made to believe I was sick when I wasn't*"

<sup>49</sup> e.g. "*Even if I hated Kim, I'd grit my teeth and / try to make it work with her at least for Hailie's sake*"

While Bannister's theory that male artists internalised feminist 'negativity' about the actions perpetrated by those of their gender is certainly borne out in the case of the artist I am about to reference, Elliott Smith, it would be disingenuous to imply that this was somehow done unwillingly. Many male artists have given consideration to the positions of gender-power that allow their songs to be heard and accepted in a way that does not happen for their female counterparts, even if this has been painful for them on a personal level. Having absorbed theory by Catherine MacKinnon in particular, Smith said, *"I really took it to heart, and it just kind of drained all my energy away. I didn't want to do anything. If you're a straight, white man, she made it seem impossible to live your life without doing something shitty, whether you knew it or not. So I was convinced that I was just constantly making an ass out of myself and bothering someone just by being me"* (quoted in Nugent 2004, p.32). However, despite his concern that the music industry was *"probably one of the most sexist areas I could possibly wander into"* (ibid), Smith navigated his way past all the 'sexist jock' stereotypes he feared would be an inevitable part of a musician's life, and instead proved to be a careful lyricist and introspective songwriter. Interestingly, Elliott Smith is one of the only male artists to have written a song about his own experiences of sexual violence. 'Some Song' documents, albeit obliquely, Smith's abuse at the hands of his stepfather, Charlie. Smith set up and the charity Free Arts for Abused Children, and this continued to be financially supported (along with other child abuse charities) after Smith's suicide, through donations and memorial concerts etc.

Though not addressing their own personal experiences, there are other male artists who have addressed the problem of sexual violence through their music. For example, Nirvana played two benefit shows in 1993: the first to raise money for the Tresnjevka Women's Group, aiding rape survivors in Croatia, and the second, 'Rock Against Rape', which raised money for First Strike Rape Prevention, an NGO providing self-defence training for women<sup>50</sup> and Nirvana's songs 'Polly' and 'Rape Me' take the narrator position of rapist and raped, respectively<sup>51</sup>. There are many, many examples of male artists singing about sexual violence

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<sup>50</sup> Both Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love performed at this second benefit show. It is well accepted that Love, whose work (including songs such as 'Violet', 'Jennifer's Body' and a cover version of the Crystals' 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)') is only omitted in depth in this thesis due to space constraints, greatly influenced Cobain's awareness and understanding of sexual violence.

<sup>51</sup> However, just as with Eminem, Plan B et al, whatever the intention (gender-power relations, upsetting the victim/victimiser binary etc) behind a song like 'Rape Me', which we cannot assume knowledge of, the easily sung along to chorus of "Rape me, my friend / Rape me again" and "Hate me / Do it and do it again" is problematic, especially given a live performance context, in which the male audience vastly outweighs the female audience.

perpetrated on a woman from a third-person perspective, but as this thesis concentrates on first-person narratives only, they are not included here. However, it is worth noting that the Tender campaign in the UK, which aimed to promote awareness of sexual and domestic violence by getting a song about the topic to do well in the charts in January 2008, used male singer-songwriter Daniel Rachel's third-person song, 'Let It Be Mine', instead of any number of first-person narrative songs by (more well known) female artists<sup>52</sup>. This may have been due in part to the difference in reception of male and female artists in talking and singing about political issues, which is the focus of the next section.

### c) Mixing pop and politics

There is a strong history linking music, politics and social change. One only need think of songs as powerful and well known as 'We Shall Overcome'<sup>53</sup> and 'If You Miss Me From The Back Of The Bus'<sup>54</sup>, to see the place that music has had, and continues to have, in social and political protest. The suffragette movement was as much characterised by marching and singing<sup>55</sup> as it was through bra-burning, and there are many examples of songs being used to protest and critique social injustice<sup>56</sup>, including, most recently, those used to critique US foreign policy after 9/11<sup>57</sup>.

The front cover of *Time* magazine, on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002, asked 'Can Bono Save The World?' (Tyrangiel 2002). On September 15<sup>th</sup> 2001, a *Time* article asked 'Can Rock 'N' Roll Save The World?' (MacLaughlin 2001) and a *New Statesman* (4<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> In a similar vein, the 'Song For Italy' (a Saturday evening live voting TV show) in (1988) brought awareness of sexual violence to the forefront, as the winning song 'L'Amore Rubato' (The Stolen Love) was a first-person narrative of rape from a woman's experience – however it was written and performed by a man (Luca Barbarossa).

<sup>53</sup> There are many early versions of this song, dating back to black churches in the 1800s and white coal miners in the 1900s. Pete Seeger's recorded version is credited with popularising the song and making it a protest anthem for the civil rights movement, and the song has since been covered several artists, including Joan Baez and Bruce Springsteen.

<sup>54</sup> Lyrics written by Charles Neblett of the Freedom Singers (to the tune of 'O Mary Don't You Weep', a song of the genre still known as 'Negro spiritual'). The verses of this song are myriad and diverse, depending on the occasion and the issue being protested. However, the song always begins, "If you miss me from the back of the bus / And you can't find me nowhere / Come on up to the front of the bus / I'll be riding up there", referencing Rosa Parks, and includes "If you miss me from the cotton fields / And you can't find me nowhere / Come on down to the courthouse / I'll be voting over there", to keep the song in its roots as a civil rights protest and celebration song.

<sup>55</sup> See Danny Crew's wonderful collection of these songs and chants, *Suffragist Sheet Music* (Crew 2002), as well as some (hilarious-in-hindsight) anti-suffragist songs, such as 'Mother Come Home', which contains the pleading lines, "Why is it Daddy says there's no buttons on his clothes? / Why does he often vow that to other lands he'll roam? / Why Mother, it is your fault, you should stay at home" (Howard, quoted in Crew 2002 p.57).

<sup>56</sup> See Phull (2008) and Peddie (2006) for a general overview. For a more in-depth analysis of the history and power of one song, see Margolick (2000) on Billie Holiday's 'Strange Fruit'.

<sup>57</sup> See Hohenstein (2009) on Bruce Springsteen and Steve Earle, and Finding (2009b) on Ani DiFranco for further discussion of this.

July 2005) feature by Billy Bragg was titled, 'Can We Save The World With Songs?' (Bragg 2005). All of these articles discuss particular artists or event organisers who have used their music and celebrity status to push for social and political change. For example, the lead singer of Coldplay, Chris Martin, has long been an outspoken advocate of Oxfam's 'Make Trade Fair' campaign, and has persuaded many other artists (e.g. REM, Razorlight, Jamelia) to support, and perform in aid of, the cause. On 16 May 2006, *The Independent* was edited by Bono, and half of all proceeds went to fight AIDS in Africa. Glastonbury Festival was groundbreaking in its insistence on the use of certain fairly traded products as a condition of contracts for food and drink vendors, and it, along with most other music festivals, chooses particular charities to support during the event<sup>58</sup>. There have also been many festivals and events set up specifically with a political purpose in mind – for example Rock Against Racism (1976-1981), and Love Music Hate Racism (2002-current). Of course, the most famous examples of this are the events and releases co-ordinated by Bob Geldof. The Band Aid single, 'Do They Know It's Christmas' (released in 1984, re-released in 1985, re-recorded and released in 1989 and re-recorded and released in 2004) has raised over £8 million in total for African aid. In 1985, Live Aid, which had been hoped to raise £1 million for famine relief in Ethiopia, actually raised £150 million. 2005's Live 8 concert, connected with the Make Poverty History campaign set out to raise awareness rather than money and resulted in 30 million people signing the 'Live 8 List', an online petition urging Tony Blair, as leader of the G8, to take action in terms of better aid, fairer trade and debt relief in Africa.

However, politics and pop have not always combined in an uncontroversial way. Many felt that Sting's campaigns for environmental causes, including the creation of the Rainforest Foundation, were rather undercut by his regular use of Concorde and his participation in adverts for Jaguar cars; Damon Albarn (of Blur and Gorillaz) publicly called Radiohead hypocritical for claiming to support the anti-globalisation movement and environmental causes such as Friends of the Earth and then undertaking lengthy stadium tours that leave a huge carbon footprint; and Bob Geldof was widely criticised for overwhelmingly white lineup of performers at Live 8, an event focused on Africa. However, the most vitriolic responses to the combination of pop and politics seem to be reserved for the

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<sup>58</sup> However, it seems Glastonbury's commitment to fairness and equality does not extend to the sexes. In 2008, organisers announced that its festival headliner that year would be Jay-Z, whose biggest hit, '99 Problems' contains the chorus, "If you're having girl problems, I feel bad for you son / I got 99 problems, but a bitch ain't one". Although it is highly doubtful that feminist outrage, rather than three preceding years of appalling weather, was the reason, for the first time in ten years, tickets did not sell out before the beginning of the festival.

occasions when female artists have spoken out publicly about political issues. The most common response has been the contradictory edict 'shut up and sing', and has often taken even more violent forms. After Dixie Chicks singer Natalie Maines said, at a concert at Shepherds Bush Empire on the eve of war against Iraq, that she was ashamed of sharing the same home state as George Bush, most US country music stations boycotted the band; Republican (ex) fans staged public burnings of their CDs, and the band members received death threats<sup>59</sup>. In 1992, Sinead O'Connor was booed offstage and unable to perform in America after appearing on *Saturday Night Live* (1975-) (to sing an *a capella* version of 'War' by Bob Marley to protest against sexual abuse) and tearing up a picture of the Pope while saying, 'Fight the real enemy'. Although the level of vitriol may be more to do with the subject matter that the artists have chosen to speak out over, rather than concerned with their gender *per se*, it may not be entirely unrelated to the idea of popular/political music as male territory, which ought not to be transgressed. Discussion of the transgressive nature of women in music at all has formed the basis of much 'women in music' literature, which I now turn to, in order to give an overview.

#### **d) Play like a girl**

A great deal of 'women in music' literature has focused on the difference in styles between 'male music' and 'female music' (Whiteley 2005). Before discussing what some of these might be, it is important to note that these perceived differences are not limited to popular music but also appear in classical music. Exploring the difference in 'male' and 'female' musical conventions, Susan McClary (1991, p.9) quotes from the 1970 Harvard *Dictionary of Music*'s entry on 'Male and female cadences':

*"A cadence or ending is called 'masculine' if the final chord of a phrase or section occurs on the strong beat and 'feminine' if it is postponed to fall on a weak beat. The masculine ending must be considered the normal one, while the feminine is preferred in more romantic styles"* (quoted in McClary p.9)

The correlation between femaleness, weakness and romance is well explored and

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<sup>59</sup> As a result of this, the Dixie Chicks found a new fanbase in the anti-war movement in the States; were invited onto the Vote For Change tour and found much more mainstream success. In 2006, they released a single about their experiences, 'Not Ready To Make Nice', in which Maines asserts "*I'm not ready to back down / I'm still mad as hell*" and asks, "*How in the world can the words that I said / Send somebody so over the edge / That they'd write me a letter / Saying that I'd better / Shut up and sing or my life will be over?*"

critiqued elsewhere<sup>60</sup>, however, it is on the notion of masculinity as 'normal' that I wish to focus here. As we have seen in the section on male emotional music, 'authentic' music is considered normatively male. Phrases such as 'cock rock', 'power chords' and 'moshpit'<sup>61</sup> all conjure up particular images of (rock) masculinity. As such, when popular music literature focuses on female artists, it is often to speak about their transgressive status in the male-dominated music industry – the 'woman in a man's world' phenomenon, or as Liz Phair would have it, the 'Exile In Guyville'. McCarthy argues that "*there is a sense in which simply by picking up a guitar, women musicians are committing the kinds of gender trespass that feminist theory celebrates*"<sup>62</sup> (McCarthy 2006). The artists themselves are classified as 'disruptive divas' (Burns 2002), 'rebels' (Gaar 1992), 'revolutionaries' (Dickerson 2005), or in some other way rewriters or subverters of the male standard or status quo.

Female appropriation of forms considered particularly 'male', such as thrashing guitars, screamingly unintelligible vocals, and a general sense of taking up space and making noise, has been noted in much work on the Riot Grrrl movement. Because this is the only area of music in which women who address sexism and male violence in overtly feminist ways that has been theorised extensively<sup>63</sup>, I have not focused on it in this project. However, when female artists have not utilised the normatively 'male' forms of music and performance, this too can be used as a point of criticism. The simplicity of dance/pop and its popularity with a wide audience (especially of young women and gay men) means that its form is considered particularly 'female' and necessarily 'inauthentic'. Susan McClary notes this with particular reference to Madonna:

*"Her enormous commercial success is often held against her as evidence that she plays for the lowest common denominator – that she prostitutes her art (and by extension, herself). Moreover, the fact that her music appeals to masses of young girls is usually taken as proof that the music has no substance, for females in our culture are generally thought to be incapable of understanding music on even a rudimentary level."* (McClary 1991 p.154)

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<sup>60</sup> Again, see Modleski (1982), Gill (2007b), Ang (1986) and Radway (1991) for work on 'feminine' forms of entertainment, such as romance novels and soap operas.

<sup>61</sup> See Schippers (2003) and Ambrose (2001) for an exploration of gender in the moshpit.

<sup>62</sup> This kind of 'gender trespass' is not limited to female musicians, but also female fans. See Mimi Schippers' (2002) excellent analysis of 'gender manoeuvring' in the often sexist and homophobic culture of alternative hard rock, by female fans whose dress, speech and putdowns define their own community in positive ways, as well as in opposition to the politics and practices they dislike.

<sup>63</sup> See Leonard (2007), Kearney (1997), Gaar (2002), O'Brien (2002), Bayton (1998), Reynolds and Press (1995), Blasé (2004) among others for history, contextualisation and analysis of the Riot Grrrl movement.

Even when the form might be considered a 'serious' one, there are other traps for female artists. For example, Whiteley (2005) has noted the ways in which the 'little girl' voices of artists such as Kate Bush, Tori Amos and Bjork have undermined their credibility and allowed an easy media characterisation of them as 'kooky', 'pixie-ish' and in other ways girlishly feminine – a characterisation at odds with the complex and serious musical output of these artists. That this is also noted with regard to more 'lightweight' pop should therefore come as no surprise. Writing on the difference between music she respects for its originality, excitement and breath-takingness, and music she does not, Padel (2000) concludes that much of this respect is due to how the voice sounds:

*"Voices I respect sound themselves<sup>64</sup>. In women's voices, PJ Harvey, Sinead O'Connor, Tori Amos, k.d. lang, Shirley Manson, Kristin Hersh and Liz Phair sound fine, strong, themselves. But an awful lot of pop girl voices at the moment (I can't bring myself to name them) sound like marzipan. They are using only the Tinkerbell part of their range. Sonic Barbie: aural Kate Greenaway. A voice with deliberate little-girl breath in it, fine-edged with glitter. A tinsel cloud."* (Padel 2000 p.5)

The double bind here is plain to see. When female artists utilise 'male forms', they are transgressing by aping men, or inauthentically using something that does not belong to them, and when they use 'female forms', they are necessarily insubstantive, inauthentic, and less worthy of 'serious' consideration. This is one example of gender inequality at work in the music industry. However, there are also examples that target the particular artists in very personal ways, as well as the form and style of their music. One of these is, of course, the experience of sexual violence, which I focus on in this project and on which there is no specific literature, but there are others. There are certainly detailed references to a level of gender inequality in other areas that are violent in physical and gendered ways in the existing literature. For example, Negus (1997) notes how Sinead O'Connor spoke about becoming pregnant while recording her first album and encountering a great deal of pressure from the directors of Ensign Records (Nigel Grainge and Chris Hill), as well as from the company doctor, to have a termination. O'Connor said (on a US TV show), *"I went back to the doctor, he said to me that I shouldn't have the baby, in fact that I couldn't have my baby because my record company had spent £120,000 on my album and I owed it to them not to have it. At the same time another man on the same label, his girlfriend was having a baby, and nobody said to him: 'You can't have your baby, we've spent £120,000 on your album'"* (Negus 1997, p.63). In writing on the 'sexploitation of the young' in her

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<sup>64</sup> I return to this notion in Chapter 6 when discussing authenticity

book on popular music, age and gender, Sheila Whiteley reminds us of former child-star Lena Zavaroni's death at the age of 36, weighing 3 and a half stones, having developed anorexia at the age of 13 when her agent told her she was "too fat" (Whiteley 2005, p.36)<sup>65</sup>. It is vital to bear in mind the general atmosphere of gender inequality at work in the music industry as well as in the culture surrounding the artists I examine, and their reception, throughout this thesis.

## Conclusion

Music created by women about experiencing sexual violence is a recognisable phenomenon (if one that has not yet been recognised), spanning both the mainstream and independent industries, multiple genres, and containing artists with large followings and instant recognisability, as well as those who may be considered more obscure, yet with still-significant audiences. The music these artists create is often based, at least partly, on their own experiences of sexual violence, and as such is written in the first-person.

The style of music, mode of address and tone differ with each artist, as do the stories they tell. Though the style, tone and musical content have been addressed by some theorists, as well as a historical contextualisation, the stories themselves have not. For example, I made reference in the preface to Tori Amos' performance of 'Me And A Gun' – her song based on her own experience of rape. Both Whiteley and Burns & Lafrance (2002) have analysed the performance, vocal style and musical phrasing of the song<sup>66</sup>; however, no one to date has written on exactly what it is Amos is *saying about rape* in this song, contextualising it with reference to other artists' narratives and feminist theory and activism. It is here that I situate my thesis. This project asks *what* women are saying (singing) about their experiences of gendered violence, as well as how this is being done.

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<sup>65</sup> The pressure on young women to conform to extremely rigid conventions of beauty, and sexual performance, combined with the popular, lightweight, 'female' forms of music have combined since the late 1990s to produce what has been commonly nicknamed 'paedo-pop'. Though we can see its roots in performers like (early) Kylie Minogue, this trend really comes into its own with the advent of Britney Spears and her sexualised-schoolgirl anthem '...Baby One More Time' (1999). The lollipop-sucking, pigtailed, too-short-uniformed look was neither confined to Britney Spears, nor the USA. Former filmmaker and child psychologist Ivan Shapovalov, dreamed up the conceit that turned into the band t.A.T.u. after looking at porn sites and deciding that his musical "underage sex project" should feature lesbianism (quoted in Walker 2003). As such, faux-lesbian Russian teenagers, Lena Katina and Julia Volkova dressed in school uniform and kissed each other to the year's catchiest pop single, 'All The Things She Said'. I return to the oversexualisation and 'pornification' of female artists when discussing the shift to postfeminism in musical narratives of domestic violence in Chapter 4.

<sup>66</sup> Although I focus very little on the musical style of the songs, I reference throughout my analysis the other theorists who have done so with (some of) these artists.

I split the narrative analysis of the songs into two parts: Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. In Chapter 4, I focus on narratives of domestic violence in pop music, in order to show the shifts taking place between pre- and post-second-wave feminism, and then to postfeminism<sup>67</sup>. In doing so, I examine songs by: The Crystals, Tracy Chapman, The Beautiful South, 10,000 Maniacs, Suzanne Vega, Heather Nova, Christina Aguilera, Jamelia, The 411, Kate Nash and Florence and the Machine. In Chapter 5, I look at narratives of sexual violence with particular reference to the rape myths and limited variability narratives I explored at the beginning of this chapter. The artists I focus on in this chapter are: Tori Amos, Alanis Morissette, Sheryl Crow, Ani DiFranco, Tasmin Archer, Alice Marie, Heather Nova, Suzanne Vega, Bananarama, Jano Brindisi and Amy Fix. In seeking to explore whether the narratives of gendered violence might be more diverse than the narratives found in other media (which we have seen critiqued as restrictive and deterministic), I highlight the possibility of music as a vital microcosm of media 'good practice', which could be adopted by other media to effect some political and social change in this area.

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<sup>67</sup> Though for the most part throughout this thesis, I reference only first-person songs, there are three songs written from a third-person's perspective in one section of the chapter. This is necessary in order to show the awareness of domestic violence and thinking at the time, which was primarily an 'outsider' perspective, which tended to 'other' the victim. This is also the only place in these two chapters that a song not written by a female artist occurs ('Woman In The Wall' by The Beautiful South)

## Chapter 2:

# Trauma: Memory, Identity and Narrative

*Come into my solitude, welcome to the wheel  
Come into this wonderland of wounds that will not heal  
Walls that do not speak, steps that do not sound  
Come into my solitude, burn this building down*

Janis Ian ('Breaking Silence')

### Introduction

Janis Ian's song about father-daughter sexual abuse, 'Breaking Silence' appeared on the Grammy award-winning album of the same name in 1993. The album also contained a song about domestic violence ('His Hands') and a song about the Holocaust ('Tattoo'). Ian also chose to come out as a lesbian at the same time as the album was released (in consultation with the Gay and Lesbian Alliance, to gain as much positive publicity as possible). Although Ian was no stranger to controversial topics<sup>68</sup>, and this was not the first time any of these topics were covered in song (nor was she the first woman in music to come out), *Breaking Silence* (1993) was still groundbreaking for the sheer fact that all of these things happened at once. The combination of sexual violence, the Holocaust, 'coming out' and 'speaking out' (through an art form) may seem an unlikely one, but is one which sets out the themes for this chapter on trauma, memory and narrative.

In the preface, I outlined the interdisciplinary nature of this project, positioning it in both cultural studies and trauma theory - both interdisciplinary fields in and of themselves – as well as explaining the genesis of a project on sexual violence narratives in popular music. I have divided the literature and themes of this project broadly into two sections: memory and narrative with regard to trauma theory, and sexual violence and popular music with regard to narrative theory. The second section was the subject of Chapter 1. In this chapter, I give an overview of current trauma theory and its intersections with the study of memory. This involves a brief history of theorised trauma and memory, beginning with Freud, but mainly focuses on the work done since 'trauma theory' became a

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<sup>68</sup> Her first single, 'Society's Child', which she wrote at age 15 about an interracial relationship was refused by her original record label, banned by several radio stations for its 'taboo' content, having to be released 3 times over 2 years before it became a hit.

recognised and independent field. I look specifically at two of the primary subjects of trauma theory<sup>69</sup>: on one hand, the Holocaust<sup>70</sup>, and on the other, sexual violence, and at the ways in which the two have been theorised in and through each other, in similar terms. In the second section of this chapter, I draw attention to trauma narratives themselves, asking what they are, what types we might encounter, and what functions they might perform. This typology naturally introduces the focus of my third section: the possible ineffability of trauma, a theme that I develop in reference to both the Holocaust and sexual violence. In the fourth section, I explore the relationship between trauma and (personal) identity, with special reference to feminist responses to personal identity philosophy, and theories of embodiment. I question whether there is an identity-defining process of 'coming out' as a victim or survivor, and 'speaking out' about traumatic experiences. Both Holocaust theory and sexual violence theory have focused not just on individual trauma and memory, but also on how these experiences might be construed as collective or cultural trauma and memory, and this is the focus of the penultimate section of this chapter. In the final section, I take up the idea of collective and cultural trauma and memory, with reference to artistic representations of trauma. I explore the ways in which trauma theory has relied on the arts, as well as at the various theories surrounding the ethics and affect of 'trauma art'. I conclude by looking in detail at Susan Sontag's notion of the 'memory museum', in order to question the potential place of popular music, both as an art form for dealing with trauma, and as a potential candidate to fill a memory museum for sexual violence.

## **1. Trauma theory and memory**

Trauma, from the Greek for 'wound', originally referred to any experience of violence, injury or harm done to the body. However, since Freud's *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1922), it also - and more commonly in popular usage – refers to a wound inflicted on the psyche. This type of wound, unlike the physical trauma, will not heal until the event that caused it is fully remembered, understood and integrated by the person who experienced it. In trauma theory, the word is used to describe negative experiences so significant that the

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<sup>69</sup> Since 2001, the events of 9/11 in the USA have become another primary focus of trauma theory. 9/11 has become (somewhat problematically) the new iconic example of trauma, with aftershocks across the world. Although the specifics of 9/11 trauma theory are beyond the scope of this paper, I do return to it in the fifth section of this chapter, on cultural and collective trauma and memory.

<sup>70</sup> Although 'genocide studies' is now the preferred term for use in trauma theory, recent studies of genocide in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda closely follow work done on the Holocaust, and as the Holocaust is still seen in many ways as the iconic example of genocide, I choose to use it throughout this chapter as the precursor to work on sexual violence in trauma theory.

individual is marked, altered or even shattered as a result.<sup>71</sup> Although the independent academic field of trauma studies has only existed since about 1990, the roots of trauma theory can be traced back much further, and its interdisciplinary branches include psychology, literature, history and gender studies.

The bulk of the work done on trauma and memory is to be found in psychoanalysis, both past and present. Here, I briefly outline some of the theories that have remained key in trauma and memory work, and highlight the ways in which they have been applied to work done on both sexual violence and the Holocaust. These include: remembering a traumatic memory, giving an account of it, and integrating it.

Freud (1896) argued that the memory of trauma can be made unconscious through the operations of a defence mechanism, which protects us from the trauma; in other words, the person can experience a full range of traumatic effects even while unaware of the triggering experience. Freud's theory is still widely-employed in both clinical theories of trauma and the practical treatment of trauma. These memories might be recovered through regression or long-term therapy, or they may surface on their own, either when a significant event takes place in the person's life, or through flashbacks and snippets which can then be pieced together. Popular work on trauma (Bass and Davies' 'survivor manual' *The Courage To Heal* from 1988 being the iconic example) often describes traumatic memories as somehow independent of their host, even appearing to operate with a 'will' of their own, conflicting and disrupting the bodily integrity and desires of the individual:

*"Few survivors feel they have control over their memories. Most feel the memories have control of them, and that they do not control the time and place a new memory will emerge. You may be able to fight them off for a time, but the price – headaches, nightmares, exhaustion – is not worth staving off what is inevitable."* (Bass and Davis 1988 p.79)

The notion of unconscious memory with regard to sexual abuse is highly controversial because of the suggestible nature of memory and the devastating effect of sexual abuse claims (on all sides)<sup>72</sup>. However, despite the controversies,

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<sup>71</sup> This is explored in depth in the fourth section, which deals with trauma and notions of identity.

<sup>72</sup> It is not my intention to give a comprehensive account of the history of recovered memory and false memory theories here, nor to reproduce the debates and controversies. However, an excellent overview of both is provided in *The Recovered Memory/False Memory Debates* (ed. Pezdek and Banks

books such as that by Bass and Davis, which utilise the theory that memory is recoverable, and relies primarily on collections of women's experiential narratives for its knowledge, remain extremely popular.

Lacanian theory describes the disruptive function of traumatic experience and memory somewhat differently. Lacan suggests that trauma is that which has not been integrated into the realm of the symbolic (what is public, linguistic and meaningful, and can be described, discussed, analysed and communicated), which is why the person who has experienced it is unable to talk about it, or refer to it in any way other than as being external to that person:

*"Trauma, insofar as it has a repressing action, intervenes after the fact. At this specific moment, something of the subject becomes detached from the symbolic world that he is engaged in integrating. From then on, it will no longer be something belonging to the subject. The subject will no longer speak of it, will no longer integrate it. Nevertheless, it will remain there, somewhere, spoken, if one can put it this way, by something the subject does not control." (Lacan 1988)*

This differs from the idea that traumatic memories can be discovered, understood and dealt with through confrontation or reconstruction. It is only through the layered associations of language, or as Lacanian psychologist Annie Rogers phrases it, "*the coded poetry of the unsayable*" (Rogers 2006), that we can see beyond the signifiers to what it is that cannot be said or represented<sup>73</sup>. I return to the notion of the unsayable or ineffable in the third section of this chapter.

Although Lacan described his work as a return to the meaning of Freud, this overview of trauma theory and memory would not be complete without reference to Janet, often also considered the 'true' founder of psychoanalysis. In his early studies on trauma and memory, Janet believed that "*the giving an account by the subject of the difficulties he had met with and the sufferings he had endured in connection with these happenings, would bring about a signal and speedy transformation in the morbid condition, and would cause a very surprising cure*" (Janet 1976 [1919], p.672). The potential of narrative as 'talking cure' is explored in the second section of this chapter, so here I will focus on the memory distinctions Janet makes in order to get to the point of giving an account, and

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1996). This issue is returned to in detail in Chapter 6, where I discuss some part-fictionalised memoirs with regard to the Holocaust, drug addiction, and, crucially, sexual violence experiences.

<sup>73</sup> See Rogers (2006) for a clear and thought-provoking analysis of her Lacanian approach to her psychoanalytic work with a girl who had experienced years of sexual violence.

look at the ways in which they have been taken up in both Holocaust and sexual violence writing.

Janet made many attempts to interrogate the differences between traumatic memory and narrative memory (Janet 1928). Traumatic memory is not socially structured: it takes a long time to articulate, is not addressed to anyone, does not require a response, is inflexible, and can occur at any moment (where there is a trigger to the original event). Narrative memory, conversely, is socially structured: it can be a short response to a question; it can be a request for help; it does not necessarily take on any qualities of the traumatic event, and is flexible and adaptable. One can only move from traumatic memory to narrative memory after the traumatic event has been integrated and made sense of. Trauma, Janet believed, resists the transition from experience to representation through narrative, due to its extraordinary nature. We therefore only speak of 'traumatic memory' for convenience, as memory is inextricably linked with the narrative of the event that we cannot make.

Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo's distinction between 'sense' or 'deep' memory and 'thinking' or 'narrative' memory is very similar to Janet's. Writing specifically to 'you' (quoted in Langer 1991), Delbo requests that we do not confuse her descriptions of her Holocaust experience, which are clear, well-ordered, rational and somewhat dispassionate (thinking/narrative memory) with the embodied and painful ways in which she constantly re-experiences the past in the present (deep/sense memory). She locates 'deep memory' in the realm of dreams, or nightmares, even though she is aware that those memories are reality, rather than metaphor.

Writing about her own sexual violence experiences, Roberta Culbertson also uses the notion of metaphorical or fantasy memory as in some sense being more 'real'. She complicates rather than simplifying or trying to 'answer' the question of her abuse memories. She argues that the abuse narrative she would rather give, the one involving "*black cloaks and talons and knives and witches and my own white knights*" (Culbertson 1995 p.189) feels more authentic to her, closer to the truth, than the factual, linear narrative she must give as an adult in order to be believed and understood. On her relationship to that 'adult' or factual narrative, she says:

*"The fact is that what I remember is much less organised. It is, for me, not quite true, because I never knew it in this way. But it is what others*

*need. And so it is what I need to be believed, even to understand, if not believe, myself.*" (ibid p.184-185)

The issue of authenticity and part-fictionalisation of trauma narratives is explored in much greater detail in Chapter 6, when I compare Tori Amos' song 'Me And A Gun' with Dorothy Allison's part-fictionalised account of her childhood abuse, *Bastard out of Carolina* and Benjamin Wilkomirski's (later debunked) Holocaust 'memoir', *Fragments*. I also explore the responses of my research participants to fictionalised or part-fictionalised accounts of sexual violence. I do not include it in my discussion of the translation of trauma to narrative in the third section of this chapter, but rather refer to the points made in this chapter in the detailed analysis of this area in Chapter 6. However, before moving on to a discussion of trauma narratives, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that trauma may not lend itself to narrative at all.

## **2. Trauma and ineffability**

There is a strong argument that trauma narratives, by their very linguistic nature, always fall short of truly being able to express the experience of trauma. There is an apparent paradox here, which Gilmore summarises neatly when she says, "*Language is asserted as that which can realise trauma even as it is theorised as that which fails in the face of trauma*" (Gilmore 2001). There are non-linguistic ways to express the experience of trauma of course, for example, art, violence or tears<sup>74</sup>. There are even findings that the mode of writing affects a person's stress levels when narrating a traumatic experience<sup>75</sup> (Brewin 1999). However, there is so much pressure on language as the medium in which trauma must be expressed in order to be processed – literally, the 'talking cure'. This sits uneasily with the idea that trauma is too great for language, that it resists representation. "*Trauma emerges in narrative as much through what cannot be said of it as through what can.*"<sup>76</sup> (Gilmore 2001, p.46) This contradiction leads to the imperative to tell something that can never be put into words. Phrases like 'there are no words to describe the horror' and 'too terrible for words' etc. indicate that language must fall short of ever being able to describe trauma accurately. There is, especially where the Holocaust is concerned, sometimes an ethical stance that one should not even attempt to represent the unrepresentable. For example,

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<sup>74</sup> Freud's notions of 'the language of dreams' and 'free association' – both ways to help allow the unconscious to communicate directly – could also be explored here.

<sup>75</sup> Brewin and Lennard found that writing about a traumatic experience longhand produced a greater negative effect than typing, and led to more self-rated disclosure.

<sup>76</sup> This is certainly borne out when looking at sites of Holocaust memorial. Space and silence are often preferred over a specific exhibit or structure.

"Auschwitz has no appropriate narrative, only a set of statistics" (Diner, 2000, p.178)<sup>77</sup>.

Psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub suggests that actually witnessing the Holocaust at the time was not possible, because in order to be a witness, one has to be able to transcend one's own traumatic experiences (Felman 1992). To be able to comprehend the Holocaust, which exists outside any other frame of human reference one might have, at that time, was beyond the capability of any human. Judith Herman, writing on trauma more generally, also believes that the traumatic experience happens without a context for the person experiencing it, and therefore, although the person may be left with flashes and images, the fragments of traumatic memory without narrative structure are all one can 'hope for' in such a situation.

Waxman (2006) refutes these arguments, suggesting that both Laub and Herman have made an error in only seeing the traumatic event on a purely conceptual level rather than in addition to being *personally* experienced. Their analyses therefore remove agency from those who have experienced trauma. In not allowing people even the possibility of negotiating their traumatic experiences, and making some sort of sense out of them, the potentially radical acts of survival that may only have taken place on a very basic and mundane day-to-day survival basis can be lessened.

There is no doubt that survivor/victim narratives of what might previously have been thought of as 'unspeakable', are more popular than ever before. Predominantly ghost-written trauma memoirs, usually of familial sexual abuse (such as Constance Briscoe's *Ugly* or Dave Peltzer's *A Child Called It*) have dominated bestseller lists in the UK since the turn of the century. It seems that the unspeakable has become less so, and that more people are comfortable with a narration of their traumatic experiences. The forms this narration might take, and functions it might perform, are the subject of the third part of this chapter.

### **3. Trauma and narrative**

In chapter 3, I give a brief overview of narrative theory, and the ways in which I use narrative analysis in my work. In this section, however, I focus on trauma

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<sup>77</sup> I return specifically to this idea with reference to representation through the arts in my final section.

(mainly sexual violence) narratives, asking what they are and who they are for, what limits, if any, they might be subject to, and what potential functions they might perform.

### **What are trauma narratives, and who are they for?**

The attempt to articulate a traumatic experience, in any way, is what will here constitute a trauma narrative, with special reference to narratives of sexual violence. As I outlined in Chapter 1, sexual violence stories are ubiquitous and the connections between cultural representations of sexual violence and sexual violence narratives themselves are significant. Projansky's assertion that "*discourses of rape are both productive and determinative*" (Projansky 2001, p.2) is compelling. These discourses are neither entertaining fictional stories nor objectively factual conversations. Rather, they are "*functional, generative, formative, strategic, performative, and real*" (ibid). Discourses of sexual violence can therefore not only inform about the past, but also inform and embody the future, both in terms of physical actions and in terms of discourses about those actions.

Before discussing the potential functions of trauma narratives, it is primarily important to note that any discourse or narrative does not take place in a vacuum. In the main, narratives are constructed for an audience. Even with apparent exceptions such as diary entries, which were always intended to remain private, a listener is implied (the future, or anterior self). If any account, even a private one, always invokes someone to whom the experience is accounted and recounted, then "*my account of myself is never fully mine*". (Butler 2001). Butler uses psychological terms to describe the nature of this relationship between the 'I' and the 'you' in the narrative, saying that transference takes place. She argues that the 'you' is often a default structure, an imagined, rather than specifically targeted audience<sup>78</sup>, and this would certainly fit in well with the ways in which songs are presented and narrated, most frequently to an unspecified 'you', or in the words of Ani DiFranco, in her song 'Dilate', "*Every song has a you – a you that the singer sings to*". Brockmeier argues that the "*teller and listener are not stable and permanent positions but moments of an interplay whose outcome remains open*" (Brockmeier 2002). Brison (2002) goes further and argues that in order to survive sexual violence, whoever the listeners are, they must be both willing and able to hear the narrator's story as she intends it to be

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<sup>78</sup> This need for the existence of a listener is also the subject of *Happy Days* (Beckett 1960)

heard. Any potential unwillingness to listen, or inability to understand, makes the narrator vulnerable, and in turn this makes the narrative itself vulnerable<sup>79</sup>. As Butler similarly explains, "*My efforts to give an account of myself founder in part upon the fact of my exposure to you, an exposure in a spoken language and, in a different way, in written address as well.*" (Butler 2001) If this is the case, then however carefully constructed the narrative is, it will not help the narrator in terms of dealing with the trauma unless there is an appropriate audience for that narrative.<sup>80</sup>

Even before the 'you', an 'I' is posited. Ricouer (1983) examines the distinctions between concepts of 'self', 'identity' and 'I' in his explanation of his title, *Oneself As Another*. He claims, in opposition to Butler's (later) argument, that the 'I' can be posited in two ways, either with no reference to another (which he calls 'absolutely') or 'relatively', that is, in a way that requires another. This is not to say that the 'I' is a fixed or known concept. Crossley argues, in her book on narrative psychology, that we should think of ourselves as strangers, with our lives as some sort of mystery story in which we "*bumble along like second-rate detectives, fitting the pieces together as we go, but invariably failing to pull it all together*" (Crossley 2000). Caruth (1996) brings these ideas into trauma theory, arguing that it is at the point where knowingness and unknowingness intersect that the language of literature (or study of fictional narratives) and the psychoanalytic theory of trauma meet.

### **Potential limitations**

The vulnerability of the narrative does not just allude to the possibility of the story not being told at all, or of it being withdrawn, but also of it being changed, part-fictionalised, or entirely re-written in order to fit in more with the standard trauma narrative that the narrator knows will be recognised. This has been the case in Holocaust testimony. Waxman (2006) argues that the existing testimony, the well known and common Holocaust narratives, can make it difficult for those who experienced the Holocaust to discuss anything that does not quite fit in with it. As a result of feeling 'outside' accepted narratives, witnesses may feel obliged to remain silent about those parts of their narrative that do not fit. This in turn prevents us from challenging the existing and accepted narratives, or adding to

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<sup>79</sup> This is explored in depth in Chapter 6 when I examine listeners' responses to Tori Amos' rape narrative 'Me And A Gun', in terms of its authenticity.

<sup>80</sup> The ways in which people listen to trauma narratives is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is important to say that this idea of 'appropriateness' in the audience for the narrative is not necessarily defined by the (potential) verbal reaction of that audience to the narrative.

them with new and diverse information. It is my hypothesis that exactly the same thing takes place with regard to sexual violence narratives – i.e. that the well known narratives we receive through our news media, and the accepted tropes of sexual violence in film and television, actually prevent women from giving a full account of their experiences. The concealment or augmentation of parts of their narrative that women must employ in order to fit in with the accepted narrative results in women both not being believed at all, and also in them not being able to negotiate and assimilate their entire experience, with all its complexities and grey areas. I examine the issue of authenticity and part-fictionalisation in greater detail in Chapter 6.

A fruitful analogy for the kind of limit that these parameters impose can be found in Judith Butler's notion of grievability: "*Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What makes for a grievable life?*" (Butler 2004). I ask what sexual violence stories count as sexual violence stories and get public sympathy? It seems to be, as Butler argues, only those we identify with and understand with whom we can have empathy. And just as she argues that as long as Iraqi deaths are not dealt with by the media, only American lives can and will be grieved, I argue that as long as we only have one standard sexual violence narrative in the media, narratives differing from that will not be understood or believed. Butler refers directly to this imposition of norms in her paper 'Giving an Account of Oneself'. She argues for the existence of a social norm that establishes the conditions of a recognisable account: "*And there can be no account of myself that does not, to some extent, conform to norms that govern the humanly recognisable*" (Butler 2001). The risk involved in negotiating these norms is that if the negotiation consists of too much of a deviation, my account is invalid, even unrecognisable. The lack of understanding or belief of narratives differing from the norm could potentially impact all the way across the chain of sexual violence – from those who have experienced it to those who continue to perpetrate it, and from the criminal justice system to continuing representations of it. It is possible that sexual violence experience has become locked into a narrative that not only fails to represent everyone, but indeed may hardly represent anyone.

### **What are the possible functions of trauma narratives?**

Here, I suggest several possible functions, or reasons for people to construct and use trauma narratives<sup>81</sup>:

- a) To inform people who need to know, e.g. for practical reasons, or in order to seek justice/revenge/retribution
- b) To understand and incorporate the trauma on a personal level and repair the damage to the cohesion of personal identity
- c) To "speak out" in order to help others, both personally, and politically, and to effect social change

Cohesion of the self and personal identity are the subjects of the fourth section of this chapter, so in this section, I focus primarily on a) and c). I turn first to a), and look at sexual violence narratives which inform and must be repeated.

Repetition of sexual violence narratives often takes place for mundane and practical reasons. When I worked with female survivors of sexual violence, this was particularly apparent. Women have to have 'their story' to hand all the time, being asked by psychiatrists, benefit agencies, housing officers, nurses, etc. etc. To re-live the experience each time would be emotionally devastating. Using the words 'I was raped', although potentially shocking for the audience, probably by the time of the telling to that audience, will have little effect on the woman herself. These narrations are important; it is vital that the story is heard in the way it is intended.

Saying a set of sentences over and over again is less traumatic than actually reconstructing it each time. Because they have been said in the same way many times, they are somehow stripped of their meaning, or at the very least the potency of that meaning for the speaker is diluted. No one could relive their trauma each time they were asked to articulate it and maintain their mental health simultaneously. These repetitious narratives are a way to safely articulate experiences that have been anything but safe. This leaves us with a set of trauma narratives that are untraumatic to the speaker at the time of the telling, in opposition to Gilmore's assertion that there is no trauma narrative that is easy to tell (Gilmore 2001). So when a woman says 'I was raped' under these circumstances, she is able to use this as context for another statement, rather than have it be the entire focus of the conversation. For example, the statement,

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<sup>81</sup> Arthur Frank (1995) splits illness narratives into three main types: restitution, chaos and quest. I go into these with regard to sexual violence narratives in greater depth in Chapter 7.

"I need to have a Freedom Pass<sup>82</sup> because I cannot afford to pay for public transport, and I am too afraid to walk alone after being raped" could take place in a conversation about a grant application, transport or rape<sup>83</sup>.

To use an example from popular music, in an interview with NY Rock (Gabriella 1998), the artist Heather Nova<sup>84</sup> was asked, "Did it bother you to talk about one of your songs? Previously, you've stated that it sometimes feels like rape talking about your songs..." She responded, "*Sometimes it really felt that way, but I think I found a way to talk about my songs, to talk about the lyrics without digging too deep. Without going where it really hurts*". This is just one example of navigating a potentially traumatic narrative, and finding a way to make it untraumatic. Finding the 'untraumatic trauma narrative' is the way to narrate an experience, yet still function and go on with life at the same time.

Although this focuses attention on the artist, it is also worth noting that songs are the epitome of repetitious narratives. They are carefully constructed, and every time they are heard, it is exactly the same words, same intonation, same phrasing, etc<sup>85</sup>. One song may have a different impact (or none) on two different people who hear it, of course. Might it also have a different impact on the same person on two separate occasions, or even upon every listening occasion? Is it possible that it also does what the individual narrator can do with repetition – providing a safe way to articulate an experience of sexual violence, even if the specific details of that experience are not the same as the listener's own? These questions form the basis of much of my empirical research.

In the days following the London Underground attacks in 2005, I was struck by the ways in which people constructed their narratives of survival, of near-misses and of their experience of these attacks in general. I noticed in myself, my friends and people speaking on television, repetitions of certain narratives – almost word for word – when asked certain questions. This seemed to be a way to receive validation and also to attempt to understand what had happened and construct some sort of clarity. This did seem to imply that repetition is vital in and of itself.

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<sup>82</sup> Free London transport given to those who fulfil certain social need criteria.

<sup>83</sup> This may seem an unlikely example. However, as a support worker, I often had to mention women's experiences of sexual violence in Social Fund applications in order to procure them seemingly unrelated (and everyday) items such as refrigerators and chairs.

<sup>84</sup> Nova's domestic and sexual violence narratives in song are explored in depth in Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>85</sup> This is different when live performance is taken into account. In the course of my research, I discovered that many Tori Amos listeners had passionate attachments to particular instances of a song, which they would identify by location and year of performance, mentioning any new parts of the performance which differentiated the song from either the recorded version or a 'normal' performance of it (e.g. 'Pancake' with 'Ohio' bridge, Tulsa, 04)

("*Those who don't understand the past may be condemned to repeat it, but those who never repeat it are condemned not to understand it*") (Hoffman, 1989, p. 287). Shoshana Felman argues for an rewriting of Paul Valery's statement, "*Our memory repeats to us what we haven't understood*" as, "*Our memory repeats to us what we haven't come to terms with, what still haunts us*" (Felman 1990).

The structure of conscious controlled repetition can replace the chaos of unconscious and uncontrollable reliving. Brison sees this difference as being due to choice: with the former there is no choice – emotional and perceptual flashbacks feel as though they are being externally imposed and passively endured (as Janet and Delbo etc. suggest); however narratives take a more internal and active form – they are the result of choosing who to tell, what to tell, how much to tell etc. When someone is narrating trauma for the first time, or among the first times, she may choose to tell certain parts to a particular person but omit other aspects. This may be a deliberate tactic of self-preservation, if the narrator is aware that the person she is speaking to has understanding or empathy with regard to certain issues but not others. This would fit in with Bakhtin's notion of utterance (Bakhtin, Emerson et al. 1986), which recognises that the speaker makes judgements about the listener and frames the language of the narrative in order to fit in with that specific listener (i.e. not an imagined Other) and the expectations they might hold. This creativity with regard to the narrative interplay works both ways – as Brockmeier argues, "*narrative imagination is pivotal in probing and extending real and fictive scenarios of agency*" (Brockmeier 2005). However, it may be that the person does not want to 'surrender' her entire narrative to one person yet, as she may feel that this will make her too vulnerable, which is again a tactic of self-preservation. Brison warns that a straightforward contrast between conscious and unconscious repetition may exaggerate the level of control the narrator has over her story, "*the telling itself may be out of control, compulsively repeated*" (Brison 2002). Nevertheless, control may arise gradually with regard to first the narrative, and then the meaning of the memories themselves, in some form of process.

If there is a 'process' to trauma and narrative that guarantees a satisfactory end result, as suggested by psychoanalysts, it might be structured something like this: Trauma -> Narrative Construction -> Repeated Narratives -> 'Integration/Understanding/ Healing' ->'Better' (Integrated) Narrative. Obviously, this is a very simplistic construction. However, if this is roughly accurate, then, as Brison suggests, we should not take "out of control" to be read in an entirely negative

light. It is a phase or a part of the trauma-telling process that must be gone through in order to become closer to a place of peace or understanding, or whatever the desired goal is.

There are many women who, after experiencing sexual violence, are unable to maintain or create any emotional boundaries. This unguardedness often leads to telling in what would generally be considered to be unsafe or simply inappropriate in the circumstances. This could be due to having not been heard when telling in the past, or never having received the reaction or response the woman needed. However, as those who have experienced sexual violence are also encouraged to repeat their trauma narratives for reasons of mental health, in order to lead to an eventual reconciliation of the self and the trauma, we must first examine the idea that the self is somehow at risk through trauma.

#### **4. Trauma and identity**

Wanting to understand a trauma is not simply about wanting to place it in a particular context, but is often about understanding how it has shaped, altered or even destroyed a life. People tell stories in order to make their lives understandable and coherent to others and to themselves. This is especially true with sexual violence narratives, whose tellers' very sense of personal identity may have been fragmented as a result of their experiences. As Suzette Henke (1998) says, writing in *Shattered Subjects*, "*It seems likely that marginalised individuals, both male and female, tend more frequently to invoke subversive and subvocal iterations to re-member the fragmented subject and regain an enabling sense of psychic coherence.*"

The issue of 'psychic coherence' (consistent and coherent sense of self) comes up time and time again in accounts of sexual violence. In this section I ground the issue by reflecting on personal identity. I draw on some of the philosophical background to personal identity and focus on the three approaches to personal identity that have the most relevance to the topic of trauma and sexual violence: 1) the physical approach, 2) the psychological approach and 3) the dualist approach. I look at feminist responses to these approaches, as well as to the issue of personal identity with regard to sexual violence.

## Personal identity

The nature of personal identity has a long and respected philosophical heritage. I approach the debate with some caution; philosophers have tended to choose strategies and examples that are particularly extreme and far-fetched (e.g. brain transplants, travel to Mars). Feminist philosopher Susan Brison is right to note that “given philosophers’ preoccupation with personal identity in extreme, life threatening, and possibly self-annihilating situations, it is odd that they have neglected to consider the accounts of actual trauma victims who report that they are not the same people they were prior to their traumatic transformations” (Brison 2002)<sup>86</sup>. Failure even to consider the effects of social and physical location on personal identity is particularly problematic for a project concerned with gender, and – especially – sexual violence. Despite this oversight, there is much in the philosophical literature that may be applicable to the more realistic question of identity disintegration and renewal in the face of trauma.

### a. The physical approach

The physical approach to personal identity states that Person 1 at Time A is identical to Person 2 at Time B, if and only if they are physically continuous, though not identical in all physical minutiae. Proponents include Wiggins (Wiggins 1967) and Olson (Olson 1999). In other words, my spatial and material continuity guarantees my singular identity; I retain my identity as a (one-time) foetus into the present, and would do so even were I in a vegetative state, without conscious memories or psychological states at all. The individual in such a state is still *me*. This approach has been credited by feminists for recognizing the significance of bodily identity, something often ignored in philosophy. Adrienne Rich argues that before we can locate ourselves in any other way, we must first locate ourselves within our own bodies (Rich 1987). Certainly, any theory of personal identity after trauma that did not take on board the connection of the body to post-rape identity would be insufficient.

Yet the minimalist approach to bodily identity described by Wiggins and Olson appears to miss the individual permutations of how we inhabit our bodies. How the body informs personal identity may vary from person to person; each individual locates their sense of identity in their bodies differently. For example, if

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<sup>86</sup> I return to the notion of ‘being who you really are’ in the discussion of authenticity in narratives in Chapter 6.

I lost some fingers of my left hand in an accident, I might suppose that although aspects of my life would change, I would still feel like the same person in essence. However, a left-handed person who identifies primarily as a painter, and only finds joy in painting may have an entirely different perception of how that accident would affect identity.

In treating 'bodily identity' as synonymous with 'spatially continuous', this philosophical theory of identity also fails to account for the socially determined aspects of embodiment. Judith Butler notes that not only is our personal identity located in our bodies, but also our political and social identity. The body, she claims, is central to identity "*as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed*" (Butler 2004). Our vulnerability comes in part from "*from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure*" (ibid). In other words, a purely physical account of personal identity cannot wholly describe even what it is for us to be physical, embodied persons. A politically and socially informed account of bodily desire and vulnerability is required in addition.

#### b. The psychological approach

At first glance, the psychological approach to personal identity is better equipped to incorporate such a socio-political dimension. According to this approach, psychological rather than physical continuity is both necessary and sufficient for identity. John Locke is the philosopher most frequently cited as establishing the contemporary framework of the contemporary personal identity debate. Locke was certainly a proponent of the psychological approach, describing a person as, "*a thinking intelligent being with reason and reflection that can consider itself as itself, the same thinking being in different times and places.*" (Locke 1690) According to Locke, whatever is most essential in a thing, is what must continue for that thing to retain its identity. Since a person is essentially a particular consciousness, consciousness is what must continue for any individual person to retain their identity. Memories are the psychological states that determine continuity of consciousness.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> "And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and 'tis by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done". Locke, J. (1690). An essay concerning human understanding.

Locke's theory of memory continuity is problematic for any number of reasons. One early critic, Reid, noted that we gain – and lose – individual memories throughout our lives; our memory set is not identical over time (Reid 1785).<sup>88</sup> Of course it is not clear that Locke insists on an *actual* rather than possible memory set. He does describe the criterion as 'can be extended backwards' in memory rather than 'is currently extended backwards'. The relevant set of memories is those you are capable of recalling, not those you may happen to have in mind at any time. They are latent, rather than conscious.

Indeed, recent proponents of the psychological view have adapted a far more flexible description of the psychological criteria. Noonan defines psychological continuity as "*the holding of overlapping chains of such direct psychological connections*" (Noonan 1989). Shoemaker (Shoemaker and Swinburne 1984) suggests that the connections may in fact be causal; I am the same person at two times if I have the psychological features I do in part because I had the psychological features I did, in fact, have at that earlier point.<sup>89</sup> Marya Schechtman (Martin and Barresi 2002) argues for a variation on psychological continuity, which she terms 'empathic access'. She focuses on situations "*where the original psychological make-up is, in an important sense, still present in the later, psychologically altered person. The earlier beliefs, values and desires are recognised as legitimate, and are given, so to speak, a vote in personal decision making.*" (Martin and Barresi 2002) This is a milder variant of the psychological approach in so far as we need not be so much identical with, as closely related to, our former and future selves. My psychological states at any given time must, presumably, share only a family resemblance.

While a discourse around memory is helpful for discussions of trauma, there are a number of assumptions that limit the usefulness of the psychological approach. In the first place, the memory criteria laid out appear to assume that time is

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<sup>88</sup> Reid describes this in terms of "brave officer" paradox. There are three particular events in the brave officer's life. Firstly, as a young boy at school, he is flogged for robbing an orchard. Secondly, when he is older, he takes the standard required for military entrance. Finally, when he is older still, he is promoted to general for acts of bravery. When he took the standard, he had the memory of being flogged as a boy, and when he was made general, he had the memory of taking the standard. However, when he was made general, he no longer remembered being flogged as a boy. Under Locke's theory, the man in the first scenario is numerically identical with the man in the second scenario, and the man in the second scenario is numerically identical with the man in the third scenario – but the man in the first scenario is not numerically identical with the man in the third scenario. This is, of course, a logical contradiction because it cannot abide by the syllogism A=B, B=C, therefore A=C.

<sup>89</sup>The causal connection cannot itself be a sufficient criterion, of course: I may be sad at Time 2 because my roommate was angry at Time 1, and took it out on me. Shoemaker's causal account is a) part of a broader dualism (psychological and physical continuity) and b) is meant to supplement a pre-existing account of psychological continuity and resemblance; indeed, in the philosophical tradition of thought experiments, he couches it in terms of a brain/body transplant.

always experienced as linear. But as we will see throughout this project, this is not the way sexual violence is remembered by those who have experienced it, which is one reason why the legal system may view victims as 'bad' witnesses. Survivors of sexual violence may have an experience of memory that is both 'more' and 'less' than what philosophers describe. On the one hand, flashbacks and constant 're-living' of trauma represent an interesting departure; a 30 year old survivor may not simply remember being 10, she may actually 'skip back' to it, feeling that her violent experience happens again and again in the present. Is she actually her 10 year old self (as a strict memory criterion would suggest) or, if not, what is the 'family resemblance' between the original psychological experience and her traumatic repetitions? Equally, a trauma survivor may experience a total 'break' in her memory and her sense of self. Like, and yet unlike, the permanent amnesia most often favoured as an example by critics of the psychological approach, narratives by women who have experienced sexual violence describe their previous self as inaccessible, and unknown. In *Lucky*, Alice Sebold (Sebold 2003) differentiates 'before' and 'after' her rape by saying, "*My life was over. My life had just begun*".

The difference between those who have permanent amnesia and those who experience a life division after sexual violence is that in the latter case, women know there was a 'before', that somehow they lived without having had the experience of sexual violence but equally, that this 'before' is no longer available to them. Nancy Venable Raine (1998) speaks of continuing reading the book she had started reading before the rape. She says,

*"I thought that if I could pick up where I'd left off, I could bridge the rupture in time that had just occurred, and get back to the woman who had not been raped."* (Raine 1998 p.42)

Of the effect of this rupture on her life, she expands,

*"I had no recognisable identity, nothing inside at all, and no sense of a future, although I was somehow performing actions that seemed to suggest I would have one. I knew that I was imposing on my friends, but my friends were no longer real to me. I was observing them from another dimension. They lived in the Great Before, a place I could never return to."* (ibid)

Violence survivors may even speak of the break in identity as the death of an earlier self, and employ 'posthumous' language. Susan Brison talks about her post-rape forensic examination as 'an autopsy', and goes on to say,

*"This was just the first of many incidents in which I felt as if I was experiencing things posthumously. When the inconceivable happens, one starts to doubt even the most mundane, realistic perceptions. Perhaps I'm not really here, I thought, perhaps I did die in that ravine. The line between life and death, once so clear and sustaining, now seemed carelessly drawn and easily erased. For the first several months after my attack, I led a spectral existence, not quite sure whether I had died and the world went on without me, or whether I was alive but in a totally alien world."* (quoted in French, Teays et al. 1998)

Of course, the 'death' of sexual violence takes place at the hands of another.

In her chapter, 'Rape as Social Murder', Cathy Winkler (Winkler 2002) states that "rapists are identity murderers who desire to crush and annihilate the existence of their victims".<sup>90</sup> In sexual violence, a previous self is not simply 'lost'; it is actually taken. Certainly, it seems clear more notice should be taken of the high proportion of sexual violence narratives that contain 'I died' or some similar variation, as something that may have more than metaphorical meaning. When so many narratives speak of the person carrying on with life as a 'shell', we must ask who is it that carries on, and who is gone. In this way, reconciling the self and the trauma is not unlike a kind of mourning. The person who has experienced the loss cannot choose not to have experienced it, or the trauma itself. Dealing with this lack of choice can often lead to a denial, which is discussed in the next section.

### c. The dualist approach

If there is philosophical precedent for an understanding of the self as divided, it may well be found in the tradition of dualism, in which the human person is already two things: both mind and body. While there is an obvious religious overtone to this understanding of the self, traceable to neo-Aristotelian and scholastic discourses on the soul, contemporary theorists like Shoemaker and Hick have argued that we cannot be solely material things, given that we can

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<sup>90</sup> Winkler argues that the rapist achieves 'murder' in five ways. The first is the isolation and silencing of the victim, which can include stalking and threatening. Secondly, an attack is made on the victim's self esteem, whereby the rapist may assert that the attack is happening because of the victim – that it is her fault. Thirdly, she maintains that the rapist uses a 'discourse of contradictions' in order to confuse and alienate. She gives examples of the rapist both defining himself as the boyfriend and the rapist of the woman, or of beating her, then expressing concern. This mixing of violence towards and support for the woman during the attack may make it difficult for her to distinguish between abuse and care in future. The fourth point is that control of the victim's movements and decisions is taken over by the rapist and is therefore out of the woman's hands. Finally, after the rape, the victim's pain and hatred allow the rapist to continue his control over the woman's perception of reality. Ultimately, the structure of the woman's self-perception and her perception of how relationships work and how the world operates are indelibly altered. I return to these ideas in Chapters 4 and 5 when examining the narratives of sexual and domestic violence in songs.

conceive of ourselves in non-material, or disembodied states (Shoemaker and Swinburne 1984). In other words, the western philosophical tradition already supports at least one theory of the self that is non-unified. Of course, in typical philosophical treatises, this division is treated as a matter of ontology, and not individual experience; mind and body are different, incommensurable substances that cannot be reunited. But what if the division were not represented as absolute? What if it were conceived, instead, as a contingent by-product of a particular individual's history and experiences?

Certainly, women who have experienced sexual violence speak not only of a death, but a division of the self. Many psychologists (e.g. (Herman 1994; Terr 1994) claim that traumatic events that threaten to overwhelm the personality cause the mind to divide. This process of mental 'splitting', also sometimes referred to as 'dual consciousness,' protects the individual from intense distress because it results in one part holding the memory, which is not conscious to the other part<sup>91</sup>.

Survivors may also account for the division of self in terms of an intrinsic centre of the self that the rapist could not touch, or they may describe that as the thing that has been destroyed:

*"The rapist had stolen something at the centre of what I had known as myself. It was gone with the cash, credit cards, jewellery, underpants, and whatever else he took. All these things that meant nothing to me might be recovered by the police, but how could this missing self be retrieved? The rapist himself might be caught, but he could never produce the woman who had not been raped." (Raine 1998, p.26)*

Sometimes, the division described by survivors is the same mind-body split described by philosophical dualists. The most well-known self-help book for survivors of sexual violence, *The Courage To Heal* (Bass and Davis 1996), includes sections encouraging women not to leave their bodies, or suggesting ways in which they can get back inside and stay inside their bodies, even 'exercises for connecting with your body'. The body is, once again, the site of sexual violence. Yet the division here is itself traumatic; the implication is that the self has *become* two things which may be in need of reconciliation, rather than the dualist claim that the self is, and always was, two disparate elements.

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<sup>91</sup> Reminiscent of Delbo's dual memory, and also her claim that "*without this split, I wouldn't have been able to come back to life*" (Langer 1991, p.6)

Sexual violence narratives and the experiences of survivors problematize memory, the body and the unity of self in ways that aren't easily explicable by any of the traditional philosophical theories. Can this very challenge be incorporated into the philosophical debate? Brison ultimately rejects the thought experiments used by philosophers, yet I wonder if there is some value in recasting them in light of violence and trauma, from an overtly feminist perspective.

For example, when applied to the issue of sexual violence, the brain/body transplant example becomes much more interesting. Let us imagine an operation in which the brain of a woman who has been raped is transplanted into the body of a woman who has not been raped. Has the resulting woman been raped, even though her body has not? Let us also imagine the opposite situation in which the brain of a woman who has not been raped is transplanted into the body of a woman who has been raped. Has the resulting woman in this situation been raped? Not only does this change of detail in the example pose a different question for personal identity, but also raises interesting questions about the pervasive nature of rape, as something that potentially infiltrates, and perhaps even defines, identity<sup>92,93</sup>. It's not clear that there are stable, or even recognizable, psychological or physical criteria available, challenging proponents of both strands of philosophical thought.

In these 'brain one into body two' types of examples, or in Hollywood versions of this story, where the person who receives the transplant becomes in some way the person whose organ they were given<sup>94</sup>, most people intuitively feel that it is the mind (thought processes, memories, feelings etc) that defines the person. When adding this to the common perception that 'sex happens in the mind', perhaps we would want to say (without equating sex and rape) that the woman with the mind of the woman who was raped is the one who will experience the post-traumatic effects of rape.

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<sup>92</sup> This is examined in depth in the narrative analysis chapters concerning the music and those concerning the listeners.

<sup>93</sup> However, not all feminist theorists adhere to this view that sexual violence must be so overwhelming that it has the power to break and create identity. Kilby (2006) suggests the possibility that such an experience could be underwhelming, an idea she calls (with reference to Arendt) "the banality of trauma". So immersed is this field of literature in the idea of trauma as shattering, deeply significant and necessarily life-changing, that there is something simultaneously blasphemous yet liberating in Kilby's suggestion. In suggesting that sexual violence is such a common experience that it ceases to be either shocking or powerful, Kilby opens up the possibility of an entirely new way of theorising sexual violence experiences and victim/survivor identities.

<sup>94</sup> For example, in *21 Grams* (2003), a man who has had a heart transplant becomes obsessed with the wife of the man whose heart he was given, and similarly in *Return To Me* (2000), a romance develops between the recipient and the partner of the donor.

However, whether or not we believe that rape happens in the mind, there is certainly no doubt that it happens to the body. Testimonies of those who experienced sexual violence who self-harm often speak of the need to 'cut out' the abuser (Kilby 2003). Many women speak about feeling as though their bodies do not belong to them anymore, and that the rape, and by extension, the rapist, lives in their body. This might be manifested in an obviously physical way, such as a pregnancy, or a sexually transmitted disease, but more commonly, it might be a physical response to sex, or issues with relationships and trusting others. These 'side-effects' or aftermath-issues of sexual violence are explored in much greater depth in Chapters 5 and 7, when I examine some of the diverse narratives of sexual violence found in popular music, and some of the stories that survey respondents told about their experiences.

## 5. Cultural and collective trauma

Alexander defines cultural trauma as that which occurs when "*members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.*" (Alexander, 2004, p.1) He applies this definition to New Yorkers in light of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and there is no doubt that action-based communities and support groups have emerged as a result of people feeling they had common trauma after the events of 9/11. In just one of many UK examples, 'Rachel North', who wrote for the BBC website following her experience of surviving the bomb attacks in London on 7 July 2005 went on to create a community of support, both online and in person, for those who had been involved<sup>95</sup>. Kai Erikson (Erikson 1995) has spoken of a "city of comrades", a "democracy of distress", a "gathering of the wounded" and a "community of sufferers" in his work on Buffalo Creek flood survivors. His definition of collective trauma is as "*a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communal*ity" (p.189).

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<sup>95</sup> North founded Kings Cross United, a support group for people who were on the Piccadilly line train that the bomb went off in. The group is primarily social and supportive, but they have also had meetings with various government officials and pressed publicly for an official inquiry into the attacks.

Erikson argues that while trauma alienates individuals from those who have not experienced it, it also strengthens the group in which all the members have experienced it:

*"So trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the centre of group space while at the same time drawing one back. The human chemistry at work here is an odd one, but it has been noted many times before: estrangement becomes the basis for commonality, as if persons without homes or citizenship or any other niche in the larger order of things were invited to gather in a quarter set aside for the disenfranchised, a ghetto for the unattached."* (Erikson 1995)

Estrangement and commonality are discussed further in chapter 3, when I posit the existence of an epistemic community (or subculture) of sexual violence survivors. However, also worth mentioning here is a sort of generational estrangement through trauma. In Holocaust trauma theory, much has been made of the fact that Holocaust survivors often did not tell their children about their experiences, but did tell their grandchildren. There are practical reasons for this – the emergency stage of finding safety, rebuilding a life, learning a new language etc. may well have left no space for either narrating experiences or analysing them, or the trauma had not yet been 'processed' into (integrated) narrative form. Whatever the reasons, there has been much work on the estrangement between the first generation and the second generation. However, there are now third-generation Holocaust support groups, for example, where people can talk about the trauma experienced, not by them, but by their grandparents. The idea of being a second or third generation survivor also has resonance with regard to sexual violence. The 'cycle of abuse' that takes place in families is perhaps spoken of less often, but it is certainly explored through women's narratives in Bass and Davis (1988), and it is a commonly accepted practice in therapy to deal with the traumas or unhealthy relationships that parent has passed on to child, for example<sup>96</sup>.

Finally in this section, I turn to the idea that a person may still experience trauma even if they did not experience it first or even secondhand, with regard to sexual violence. In her article *Not Outside The Range*<sup>97</sup> Laura Brown convincingly argues for what Maria Root has called "insidious trauma" (Brown 1995). She argues that most women (her analysis focuses on North America) are aware that they may be

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<sup>96</sup> It is also common practice for some individual traumas to be dealt with in a more systemic fashion, e.g. family therapy for anorexics or substance misusers.

<sup>97</sup> So called because PTSD is only diagnosed when the person has experienced an event that is outside the range of human experience – and Brown argues this is not the case with sexual violence because it is so pervasive.

raped at any time and know someone quite like themselves who has been raped, probably by someone that person knew. As a result of this, many women who have not actually been raped themselves still have symptoms of trauma from living with the toxicity of a society where sexual violence is so prevalent, such as being hypervigilant to particular cues<sup>98</sup>, avoiding situations they have sensed could be high-risk, and going numb in response to approaches from men that may be friendly, but may also represent the first step in a sexual assault. Although mainstream trauma theory has now begun to recognise the intergenerational nature of post-traumatic symptoms (in the case of the second and third-generation Holocaust survivors), it has not yet accepted that it could possibly be cultural – spreading through an entire social group, which is oppressed by its constant and lifelong risk of exposure to sexual violence. The acceptance of vertical transference of trauma (representing the temporal move from generation to generation) is not matched by equal recognition of its horizontal, cultural contagion.

As a result of the prevalence of sexual violence, even those women who seem to be operating as 'outsiders' to it may well not be. Police officers taking statements, doctors undertaking post-rape examinations, and counsellors may all have either first-hand experience of sexual violence, or the kind of second-hand trauma that Brown discusses. It goes without saying that "some people occupy multiple positions, even in regard to the same traumatic events – experiencing the trauma, listening to others who have experienced it, reporting the trauma, and attempting an alleviation of its aftermath"<sup>99</sup> (Larrabee 2003). In Chapter 7, I focus in particular on some Tori Amos listeners who occupy just such positions – having encountered part of their own healing through Amos and her music, and subsequently going on to help others who are experiencing similar trauma-related aftershocks. Because my focus is music, in the final section of this chapter, I turn to the relationship between trauma and the arts.

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<sup>98</sup> This is the subject of Ani DiFranco's spoken-word song 'Parameters', which begins, "33 years go by, and not once do you come home to find a man sitting in your bedroom – that is, a man who you don't know, who has come a long way to deliver a specific message, 'Lock your back door, you idiot. However invincible you imagine yourself to be, you are wrong.'"

<sup>99</sup> Rachel North is an excellent example of someone who occupies all of these multiple positions, having also experienced a rape and attempted murder, therefore dealing with both traumas as well as trying to support others and lobby for political change.

## 6. Representations of trauma and memory through the arts

### Trauma theory and the arts

As I alluded to in the introduction of this chapter, literary - and, more generally, artistic - representations of the experience of trauma have had a long history. Caruth (1996) takes up Freud's use of Tasso's 'Gerusalemme Liberata', for example, while both Valery and Mehlman read Baudelaire's writing on pain through the lens of Freud (Valéry 1962, Mehlman 1974). More recently, Baer (2000) has expanded on Valery's work to contrast Baudelaire's poetics of suffering with Celan's post-Holocaust expression of individual pain. While Baudelaire was prepared to attribute an expressive and even representational function to language, in relation to individual suffering, for Celan, suffering is the limit to which language can only gesture. As we will explore in detail in Chapter 6, Gilmore (2001), Doane and Hodges (2001) and Cvetkovich (2003) have all used Dorothy Allison's 'Bastard Out of Carolina' to theorise traumatic memory/autobiography with regard to sexual violence. Given the undeniable connection between trauma and the arts, it is worth exploring the theories behind this connection, and the art forms that are, and are not, included in those theories.

### Representing trauma through art

There is, of course, an ethical issue of whether or not trauma should be represented through the arts at all. Adorno's 1949 assertion that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz is probably the most famous example of a fairly common stance:<sup>100</sup> that is, that there is something intrinsically wrong with creating art from trauma. Susan Sontag has talked about "the inauthenticity of the beautiful" (Sontag 2003). Sontag notes that certain pieces of trauma art have been criticized for the artist's attention to what is aesthetically pleasing, when the subject matter is so horrifying. Sontag rightly raises the question of whether the beautiful can express the abject. Examples of this include Steven Spielberg's use of the uniformly beautiful naked women in the shower scene, and the little girl in the red coat in the otherwise black and white<sup>101</sup> film *Schindler's List* (1993), and

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<sup>100</sup> Actually, Adorno suggested that, after the Holocaust, we must be more careful with artistic response to trauma – that we do not give up on art, but become more rigorous in our approach to it. However, I use his phrase here as emblematic of a particular argument, even though it was not his intention to make this argument.

<sup>101</sup> Not the grainy black and white of newsreel, but highly textured black and white

Sebastiao Salgado's cinematically composed photographs concerning the effects of war.

Despite these concerns, trauma art is still held to be valuable by many theorists. In the last section of this chapter, I look at the different values ascribed to it: political importance because of its marginality (Tal 1996) and its ability to provoke empathic unsettlement and vision (LaCapra 1994 and Bennett 2005), which in turn can lead to protest or other action (Sontag 2003); personal importance in terms of validating an experience (Levi 2001), and collective importance in terms of cultural memory (Sontag 2003).

Kali Tal (1996) suggests that much like African-American or feminist literature, literature concerned with trauma falls into the category of 'marginal literature'. Issues of marginal location and situated knowledge are explored in depth in Chapter 3, when I discuss the methodology of my research, however, even at this stage it is worth noting (as in the previous section on collective and cultural trauma) that people who have experienced trauma may occupy many (not always necessarily marginal) subject positions, even within the trauma experience itself. So, when there is art whose subject matter occupies more than one socially marginal location, or more than one trauma location, we can ask if the art is 'about' a particular trauma, or if it belongs to a particular group.

Jill Bennett's work on trauma, affect and art (Bennett 2005) is fascinating in its suggestion that memory through 'trauma art' may actually be able to move the trauma from the body into a distinctive (and potentially global) political framework. In her analysis, which draws heavily on postcolonial theory to explore our interconnectedness, she suggests that in realising a particular way of seeing and feeling, trauma art may allow certain critical and affective interactions to take place, which in turn constitute what she calls 'empathic vision'.

This interaction of affect is reminiscent of Deleuze's notion of 'the encountered sign' (Deleuze 2003), in which the art manifests itself in our senses, emotions or bodies, and this experience pushes us into an intellectual inquiry. The imperative to take action as a result of representations of suffering is a common response to trauma art, even if that action is not a physical protest or practical relief of someone's suffering, but rather an active remembering, like the post-Holocaust mantra 'never forget'. As Sontag says,

*"Let the atrocious images haunt us. Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing – may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don't forget."* (Sontag 2003)

Sontag asks what it would mean to protest suffering, as opposed to simply acknowledge it through art (she focuses primarily on photography) and questions whether or not there is a moral charge attached to such representations. Sometimes the question asked by a piece of trauma art is simply, 'can you bear to look at this<sup>102</sup>?', inviting us to either play the role of the voyeur or the coward. In Sontag's analysis, this is reflective of the ways in which torment happens, and is represented, in that the trauma is happening, watched by some and ignored by others, and it cannot be stopped – something that is reinforced by this combination of those who look and those who do not.

Bennett's 'empathic vision' follows on from Dominic LaCapra's notion of 'empathic unsettlement' (LaCapra 2001), from his work on representing Holocaust experiences, which he defines as an aesthetic experience in which 'I simultaneously *feel* for the other, *and* am aware of the gap between my perception and the other's experience. The trauma I experience, as a secondary witness, through the art form, is necessarily muted. However, LaCapra is cautious about the ethical status of providing this experience. This is partly because the experience is not limited to a secondary witness – i.e. one who did not experience the trauma, but is also available to those who did (primary witnesses). LaCapra's concern is borne out in his reading of Claude Lanzmann's 9-hour Holocaust film, *Shoah* (1985) in which Lanzmann's treatment of a primary witness, forcing him to remember and relive certain events, does in fact seem to re-traumatise him. In LaCapra's analysis, not only does the artist potentially reignite the trauma for the primary witness, but this outcome is also one of the aims of the artist. The artist must, therefore, be held ethically accountable for the ways in which the trauma signifiers function in a piece of art.

If it is reasonable then, to focus on the individual's experience of the art, as well as on the traumatic events or experiences that inspired the art, then we might ask some questions as to the importance of that experience (whether for a primary or secondary witness). Of Paul Celan's concentration camp poem, 'Todesfuge', Primo Levi said, "*I wear it inside me like a graft*" (Levi 2001). In later

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<sup>102</sup> Or, in terms of some of the stark sexual violence narratives we will encounter in Chapter 5, 'can you bear to hear this?'.

chapters, I examine similar statements made by people about their relationship to songs about sexual violence. The question of personal significance is one to be answered through my empirical research, but for the purposes of this chapter, it is enough to raise the possibility that trauma art, like trauma itself, can be, (in Jeanette Winterson's words) 'written on the body', and incorporated into the self, to such an extent that it resembles the graft Levi suggests.

### **The memory museum**

The title of the final part of this section comes from Susan Sontag's work on photographs of suffering, 'Regarding the Pain of Others' (1993). Sontag believes that certain photographs are so familiar to us that they build our sense of the present and of the (immediate) past. They become emblematic, representing certain causes and becoming the focus of sentiment with regard to that cause. An image that a society recognises therefore becomes an intrinsic part of what that society chooses to think about. Although Sontag is careful to say that she does not believe in collective memory, believing instead that memory is unreplicably individual, she does suggest that what we have instead is 'collective instruction' (p.76). This means that an ideology is created with regard to a certain issue or event, punctuated with images and narratives, coming together to form an archive of what is significant – a common story that can then trigger predictable responses in those who see, hear or read it.

She defines the memory museum as "*a temple that houses a comprehensive, chronologically organised, illustrated narrative of their sufferings*" that enables people to both visit their memories and refresh them (Sontag 1993, p.78). The things in the memory museum are subject to a perpetual recirculation, to make sure that their content is not forgotten. They act as a witness to both the trauma itself, and to the possibility of surviving it. In this research, I ask whether popular music concerned with the experience of sexual violence could be an appropriate 'memory museum' to the diverse experiences of sexual violence. I ask what importance, if any, songs concerning sexual violence hold: on an individual basis, a political basis, and at the level of the memory museum.

### **Conclusion**

In focusing on popular music concerned with sexual violence as 'trauma art', I ask the same questions as those raised here about other art forms, on

theoretical, individual and collective levels. Can we find the empathic unsettlement, the encountered sign and the trauma signifier in these songs? Do the songs that shock serve only to shock, or is there more to them than that? Is this music helpful to those who have experienced sexual violence, or does it serve, as LaCapra suggests Holocaust art might, to re-traumatise them? Is there a possibility of these songs leading to the sort of 'empathic vision' that might provoke political action? In examining songs about domestic violence in Chapter 4, sexual violence in Chapter 5, authenticity in Chapter 6, and affect in Chapter 7, I hope to answer these questions.

However, before this can take place, it is vital to examine the methods I use to attempt this, as well as some of the theory underpinning those methods. In Chapter 3, I examine the questions asked in my research in greater detail, and explain the decisions made around which questions to ask my research participants, and of course, why I chose particular groups as those research participants. I also set out my criteria for categorising certain songs as 'trauma art', and my reasons for including some songs and not others. I also focus in particular on dilemmas of 'fan' and 'academic' identifications, and look at the relationships between the researcher and the researched in some detail.

## Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

*I am not be prepared to be patronised  
to compromise,  
to sanitise my ugly tongue, cold eyes  
And baby, you know you'd better watch those incriminations  
Watch what those fingers do  
'cause life has a funny way  
of pointing those fingers back at you*

Thea Gilmore ('People Like You')

### Introduction

Due to the interdisciplinarity inherent in this project, the first two chapters were used to set out the two different fields of literature discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 explored narratives of sexual violence with reference to the media, and more specifically, music, while Chapter 2 dealt with trauma theory generally and its relationship to memory, identity and narrative. Through these chapters, the academic space in which my research takes place has begun to take shape. In this chapter, I seek to define that shape in more practical terms, by discussing my methods and methodology. There are three main sections to this chapter: research questions, research methods, and methodological concerns.

The first section of this chapter sets out the research questions that have arisen through Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, as well as those I first raised in the preface to this thesis. The research questions are divided into 'music' and 'listener' sections, to separate the textual analysis part of this project from the empirical research. The questions in the music section deal with language, form and diversity, as well as situating the song and artist within their industry, and within the discourses of sexual violence, and a feminist context more generally. The 'listener' questions focus mainly on listeners who have experienced sexual violence, and seek to explore the functions and uses of the songs and the Internet communities, but also ask how those listeners without these experiences interact with the narratives of sexual violence found both in the songs and the forums.

In the second section of this chapter, I set out the actual process of undertaking this research, which once again I split into 'music' and 'listener' sections. In the music section, I explore the reasons behind the selection of particular artists and songs for discussion. I also draw on the work already begun in Chapter 1, in order to expand on the use of narrative analysis as an appropriate tool for this research project. In the 'listener' section, I describe the process of finding my research participants and the online communities. This section concludes by briefly explaining the use of the questionnaire for data collection, as well as raising and addressing potential pitfalls when using the Internet as a source for research.

The final, and most substantive section of this chapter looks at methodological concerns. In this section, I address some of the issues arising from both the project itself, and the methods I have used to collect my data. Firstly, I turn to the music analysis part of my research, and address three potential methodological critiques. The first of these concerns my text selection and my language and genre limitations. The second issue to address is that of translation and interpretation, in which I ask what it means to treat a song as a text, and how the author's stated intention for a particular song interacts with my own analysis and the response of the listeners. The third potential critique concerns my own prior relationship to some of the music, and the boundaries between the fan and the academic.

In the second half of this section, I look some methodological issues in my empirical research. The first issue is that of insider/outsider status when it comes to researching sexual violence, and what impact either position might have on the research and the research participants. Secondly, I look at the potential critiques of using individual experience narratives to create knowledge, with particular reference to standpoint theory and its critics. Finally, I turn more generally to the ethics of researching sexual violence, and show how I addressed concerns regarding care for both the researched and the researcher in the process of collecting and analysing the data.

## **1. Research questions**

In the preface, I began by discussing the origin of this research project: my experience of seeing Tori Amos perform 'Me And A Gun' to an entirely silent

(predominantly female) audience, and watching people cry, hug each other, stare at the ground, or in some other way react to the song and the performance. My initial question - *what's going on here?* - has since expanded and become more complex, but remains at the heart of the project. I have six research questions to be addressed during the course of this project, which have arisen from the gaps in existing scholarship I described in the previous two chapters, and of course, from the process of actually being involved in the research. Three of these questions are about the music itself, and three are about the listeners. They are as follows:

a) Music

- 1) How much diversity is there in the sexual violence narratives found in popular music?
- 2) How are these narratives constructed? What rhetorical strategies, metaphors and tropes are used?
- 3) How have the artists engaged with the issue of sexual violence in intertextual ways outside their songs (i.e. in interviews or by aligning themselves with specific organisations such as refuges)? Does this context bear a relation to particular social phenomena or feminist theory?

b) Listeners

- 1) How do Tori Amos' listeners interact with 'Me And A Gun', knowing that it is based on, but not an exact narrative of, her own experience of sexual violence? Do their understandings of 'Me And A Gun' have anything to say about the notion of authenticity more generally?
- 2) How do Tori Amos listeners with experiences of sexual violence connect and/or identify with Amos and her songs? In terms of internet communities set up around Amos, do these provide support?
- 3) In the case of people who have not experienced sexual violence, yet still engage with this sort of music, how do they interact with the music, the artist and the forums? Does the music affect the way they understand sexual violence?

## 2. Research methods

In this section, I set out the methods by which I collected the data for my research. Although ethical or theoretical issues may be raised by each, those are saved for discussion in the third section of this chapter, and so in this section, the methods are described, rather than analysed. As in the previous section, I have divided the methods into two sections: those used to collect data for the textual (music) analysis section of the project, and those used to collect data about the listeners themselves.

### **Music:**

In order to answer the research questions about music, I chose several artists, who I knew to have written songs about sexual violence, and whom I hoped would provide a varied sample. Soon after beginning this project, I realised that a comprehensive analysis, or even overview of songs concerned with sexual violence was impossible. As a result, many artists have been omitted (with regret<sup>103</sup>). Omission and inclusions are, of course, subject to critique, and this is explored further in the final section of this chapter. Given the limitations of a thesis, I decided to only include first-person experience narrative songs. This excluded many third-person songs, the analysis of which could constitute a fascinating study on 'witness'/'bystander' roles in sexual violence narratives. Also excluded, as I alluded to in Chapter 1, are the 'perpetrator' narratives that have garnered more media attention than anything else in this field. My focus is, therefore on some of the 'victim'/'survivor' first-person narratives of sexual violence found in popular music.

Though I use 'sexual violence' as a catch-all term for experiences of gendered violence, I do categorise them slightly differently in the two chapters in which I analyse song narratives. This was partially done because a division had to be made somewhere in order to split the narrative analysis into two chapters, as there was so much to be done. The particular division I chose was to split narratives of domestic violence from narratives of sexual violence (rape and childhood sexual abuse). However, the division was also chosen because, as I

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<sup>103</sup> In particular, Sinead O'Connor, Fiona Apple and Courtney Love – all of whom would have made fascinating additions to this project with more time and space.

began the analysis of all of the songs, it became clear that something specific was taking place with regard to those narratives concerning domestic violence, i.e. I began to see the ways in which those narratives mapped onto different phases of feminist theory. As such, Chapter 4 takes narratives of domestic violence in pop songs spanning a 37-year period (from 1962 to 2009) in order to track transitions from pre-feminism to second wave feminism to postfeminism. As a result of this new focus, I also included several songs that took a third-person perspective, which I had not planned to do, because they also exemplified what was happening at the time, and/or were particularly significant at the time of their release. I chose thirteen narratives to include in this analysis in total. They are:

- He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss) – The Crystals (1962 single)
- Behind The Wall – Tracy Chapman (from *Tracy Chapman*, 1988)
- Woman In The Wall – The Beautiful South (from *Welcome to the Beautiful South*, 1989)
- What's The Matter Here – 10,000 Maniacs (from *In My Tribe*, 1987)
- Luka – Suzanne Vega (from *Solitude Standing*, 1987)
- Island – Heather Nova (from *Oyster*, 1994)
- I'm Alive – Heather Nova (from *Siren*, 1998)
- I'm OK – Christina Aguilera (from *Stripped*, 2002)
- Fighter – Christina Aguilera (from *Stripped*, 2002)
- Thank You – Jamelia (from *Jamelia*, 2003)
- On My Knees – The 411 (from *Between the Sheets*, 2004)
- Foundations – Kate Nash (from *Made of Bricks*, 2007)
- Kiss With A Fist – Florence and the Machine (2007 single, from *Lungs* 2009 album)

Chapter 5 is concerned with the possibility of diversity in sexual violence narratives in music, as well as examining the construction, language and other narrative techniques at work, which make the songs effective. I split the chapter into three sections, according to the three themes that particularly arose from the available narratives. Those themes are: 'accepted narratives' and 'grey area narratives' of sexual violence; childhood sexual abuse, and the aftermath of sexual violence experiences. I analyse fourteen narratives in total in this chapter. They are:

- Me And A Gun – Tori Amos (from *Little Earthquakes*, 1991)
- Hands Clean – Alanis Morissette (from *Under Rug Swept*, 2002)

- What I Can Do For You – Sheryl Crow (from *Tuesday Night Music Club*, 1993)
- Gratitude – Ani DiFranco (from *Not So Soft*, 1991)
- In Your Care – Tasmin Archer (from *Great Expectations*, 1992)
- I Was Seven – Alice Marie (from *Angels Near*, 2005)
- Shaking The Doll – Heather Nova (from *Oyster*, 1994)
- As A Child – Suzanne Vega (from *99.9 °F*, 1992)
- Bad Wisdom – Suzanne Vega (from *99.9 °F*, 1992)
- Robert DeNiro's Waiting – Bananarama (from *Bananarama*, 1984)
- 11th Commandment – Jano Brindisi (from *Certain Things*, 1996)
- Crucify – Tori Amos (from *Little Earthquakes*, 1991)
- Blue Black – Heather Nova (from *Oyster*, 1994)
- 48 Hours – Amy Fix (from *Spoon*, 2001)

In both of these chapters, I chose narrative analysis as the most appropriate method for working with interviews, and songs-as-texts. Much of Chapter 2 focused on the functions and constructions of narratives, which I do not intend to replicate here. However, in terms of actually describing narrative analysis as a method, it may be useful to give a brief overview.

### **Narrative analysis:**

Narrative analysis is one form of discourse analysis, and certainly, this research project is located within the wider discursive tradition. However, as narrative is more usually thought of as a way of dealing with something, or presenting a story, *over time*, it seemed more appropriate to use it here. Looking particularly at the order a story has been told in, as well as its constituent parts, is particularly relevant when analysing the musical output of an artist over a number of years and albums. Of course, the 'story' is one which has a long process of unfolding – that may or may not yet have an end, and what we might think of as one event today could become by next week the first part of a completed story. The narrative must come over time, because events and lives happen over time. As Louis Mink observed:

*Stories are not lived but told. Life has no beginnings, middles or ends; there are meetings, but the start of an affair belongs to the story we tell ourselves later, and there are partings, but final partings only in the story. There are hopes, plans, battles and ideas, but only in retrospective stories are hopes unfulfilled, plans miscarried, battles decisive and ideas seminal.*  
(Mink 1970, p557)

A narrative, therefore, may provide us with information that each individual event or life experience cannot. What is included and what is omitted, and the reasons for this, were explored in Chapter 2, as was the idea of a narrative breakdown, or the notion of narrating a life that is interrupted and disrupted. However, although a narrative is a story over time, it is also important to note that the ways in which we interact with narratives are not necessarily linear. Often, an early part of a narrative can be challenged or critiqued by knowledge of a later part. For example, a child who has heard the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* ten times will not let her storyteller forget that Goldilocks breaks Baby Bear's chair, or falls asleep in his bed, otherwise the story's dénouement will not make sense. And although this is a specific story, it is perhaps not too much to suggest that we recognise certain types of narratives, and that part of their pleasure is being able to recognise and follow along with their constituent parts. We would be surprised if, for example, in the middle of watching a romantic comedy at the cinema, the two protagonists were shot, and the rest of the film focused on their murder case, because of what we know and expect about the structure of a romantic comedy<sup>104</sup>. *We know the end at the beginning*. The issue here, as in Chapter 2, is that of the *recognisability* of narratives. Structure, language and context all contribute to the recognisability or otherwise of a narrative, and by analysing those constituent parts, hopefully a picture will begin to be built about how a sexual violence narrative in music works. Each individual narrative is broken down into its parts, but also situated within a wider context, i.e. just as I look at each song or interview as part of a narrative for that particular artist, so too am I attempting to create a larger narrative, encompassing both artists and listeners, to make sense of 'sexual violence narratives in music' as a cohesive topic.

This larger narrative scope joins together the research on music and the research on listeners. Before moving on to the specifics of the listener research, it is important to note that the narrative analysis in both sections is underpinned by an understanding of narrative ethics. Narrative ethics can be traced back to Aristotle, but its applications to the field of medical ethics, where it is used

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<sup>104</sup> Though I do not address the issue of genre directly in this project, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which genre expectations function, and therefore infuse research such as this. Describing genre as the place "*where reading and writing meet*", Eaglestone (2004) suggests that all the signs (both textual and extra-textual) associated with a particular genre form a "*horizon of expectations*" in which the individual piece of work is framed, understood, and shaped. (p.38) This genre-context can cover discrepancies not associated with the genre, in the same way as the limited variability narratives we discussed in the first two chapters, but it is impossible to look at an individual work or text without associating it with (at least one) genre.

extensively, have made it particularly relevant here. Rita Charon (1994) has suggested that the study of narrative can contribute to the trustworthiness of medical ethics. She argues that people can be most effectively helped by their care-givers when the care-giver: a) recognises a narrative coherence in the person's life (however obscure it may seem), b) understands the different narrators, audiences and interpretations of the person's narrative, c) examines the contradictions in the story, conflicts between narrators and listeners, and the ambiguities inherent in the events themselves, and finally d) helps anyone else involved with this person to appreciate this meanings (Charon p.261). Although this project does not deal with illness, it seems that Charon's suggestion could easily be applied to the field of post-sexual violence care<sup>105</sup>, and so it is mentioned here to situate this narrative research in a wider, ethical context.

### **Listeners:**

I chose to focus my empirical research solely on the Tori Amos community. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, it was the community with the most online activity. Internet forums of this kind provide online spaces for fans to come together and discuss the music and the artist; to share bootlegs<sup>106</sup> or rare recordings; to meet new people, or for people to keep in touch with those they might have met on tour etc. However, they are also places where people may discuss politics, news, celebrity gossip or anything else, as well as the far more personal issues that provide the basis of this thesis. The number of active forums, engaging with 'serious' issues or debate<sup>107</sup> was far greater in the Tori Amos online community than that for any other artist, therefore there was a much richer vein of material for analysis. Secondly, Amos' status as spokesperson on sexual violence, and her well-documented relationship to her fans with regard to their sexual violence experiences and her own, made her the obvious choice for a case study.

In 2005, I contacted Molly Knight, a New York-based journalist who writes a blog (Knight 2003-) (in which Tori Amos features heavily), and explained some of my research. She was interested and offered to help me make some contacts. She came to the UK a few weeks later for work, and also to attend part of the UK leg

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<sup>105</sup> I also use Arthur Frank's (2001) work on illness narratives to illuminate part of the work on a sexual violence narrative by Tori Amos in Chapter 7.

<sup>106</sup> Unauthorised live recordings

<sup>107</sup> There are plenty of Christina Aguilera forums, for example, however the content of many of these is concerned far more with what Aguilera was wearing on particular TV appearances, for example, than with personal disclosures or analysis of the music or lyrics.

of Amos' tour. She took on the 'gatekeeper' role of classic ethnographic research<sup>108</sup>, both providing access and smoothing the way for me. Through her, I was able to meet most of the tour 'regulars', that is, those people who will attend as many shows as possible on any given tour. For some of these people, that meant hundreds of shows over a number of years. Because I was travelling with Molly, I was immediately afforded the 'insider' status that meant that people talked to me freely and without suspicion<sup>109</sup>, and also that I was invited to join a private online community. This community, 'Nooooforums', which has a much wider scope than just Tori Amos (although virtually every member of the community is connected to other members through seeing Tori Amos shows together) gave me a large number of diverse research participants, and also allowed me to make far more 'friend-of-a-friend' contacts on other forums. This meant that by the time, I posted my research questionnaire<sup>110</sup> on all the major Tori Amos forums<sup>111</sup>, all the forum administrators had been contacted by someone they knew (in real life) to vouch for me and my research.

Between 2005 and 2009, I read all of the forums regularly, and participated in Noooooforums<sup>112</sup>. I also travelled with several of the 'regulars' on Amos' tour, both in the UK and the US in 2005<sup>113</sup>, and in the UK in 2007<sup>114</sup>. The questionnaire was available for access on the forums from May 2007. The timing of the release of the questionnaires was chosen to coincide with the release of Amos' album, *American Doll Posse* (2007), as the maximum levels of activity on the forums take place with an album release and tour announcements. The questionnaire was available for two months, and as well as being available on the forums, was also available and highlighted on the primary (unofficial) website for Tori Amos information<sup>115</sup>. It contained both qualitative and quantitative sections, and sought to provide a detailed context for respondents, as well as to address my research questions.

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<sup>108</sup> e.g. William Whyte's *Street Corner Society* research (1955), in which the leader of an Italian gang not only gave Whyte access to the gang, but also ensured that he would be able to have access to the whole district.

<sup>109</sup> Many of the 'regulars' are reluctant to talk to 'outsiders' because of experiences of journalists who purported to be writing about one thing, and gained interviews, but then actually articles characterising Amos' fans as crazy and/or obsessive

<sup>110</sup> See Appendix 2 for a copy of this

<sup>111</sup> These were: Afterglow, @forumz, Damaged Twinkles, Noooooforums, Pandora's Aquarium, Toriforum and Yessaid/Toriphorums

<sup>112</sup> Although I participated in music discussions and other general chat, I avoided the more politicised discussions, and tried to keep my online persona relatively inconspicuous / neutral in order to avoid both personality clashes and seeming to have an agenda.

<sup>113</sup> 'Original Sinsuality' and 'Summer of Sin' tours in support of the album *The Beekeeper*

<sup>114</sup> In support of the album *American Doll Posse*

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.undented.com> (This website took over from the previous primary source website, which was one of the first of its kind to exist - The Dent - <http://www.thedent.com> and whose interview and tour archives have been extremely useful to me during this research project.)

Having observed the forum participants for quite a long time before designing my questionnaire, I concluded that making the questionnaire quite long and involved would not put people off completing it. On the whole, forum participants seem happy to speak at great length and explore their relationship to the music and communities in complex and in-depth ways. Even so, I did not expect the overwhelming response to the questionnaire I received. I had hoped for between 100 and 200 responses, but received well over 2000, from respondents representing over 50 different countries. I also used material from the forums for analysis, where relevant. In terms of the open forums, this information is available to anyone with an Internet connection – however, in terms of the private forum; I contacted the people I wanted to quote individually, and then only used information where permission was given.

One of the great advantages of using the Internet for research – that it allows you to have access to research participants who you do not meet or have any individual contact with – is also one of its potential disadvantages<sup>116</sup>. In undertaking this research, I was aware that, within the Tori Amos online community, there is a great deal of ‘trolling’<sup>117</sup>. However, I had access to the IP addresses of several known ‘trolls’, and was therefore able to identify their multiple responses to my questionnaire under separate identities, which have not been included in my findings.

### **Listener demographic**

Though I received responses from 2313 listeners from 71 different countries, the majority of respondents (63.21%) were from the USA. The UK represented 7.96%, Australia represented 5.06%, and Canada represented 4.45% of all respondents. The only other countries to represent more than 1% of total respondents were Germany, the Netherlands and France (1.99%, 1.77% and 1.04%, respectively).

Of the 2313 respondents, 57.33% were female, and 42.67% were male.

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<sup>116</sup> Although this discussion might be filed under ‘methodological concerns’ rather than ‘methods’, I have kept it in this section because of its more practical content.

<sup>117</sup> A ‘troll’ is someone who posts inflammatory, abusive or libellous content on Internet forums. Once the forum moderators ban that username, they then re-register under a different name and post again. Despite the multiple identities, ‘trolls’ can usually be identified by their IP addresses as well as by the content of the posts.

17.51% of respondents described themselves as educated to high school level, 61.26% to college or university level, and 21.23% to postgraduate level, meaning that 82.49% of respondents were university-educated.

In addition to taking advantage of their opportunities for higher education, the majority of respondents were also left-leaning politically:

- 83.61% were 'against' the war in Iraq. 3.48% were 'for', with the remainder choosing 'neither/not sure' or 'prefer not to answer'.
- 81.05% described themselves as 'pro-choice' on the issue of abortion. 7.79% described themselves as 'pro-life', with the remainder choosing 'neither/not sure' or 'prefer not to answer'.
- 87.30% of respondents were 'for' gay marriage, with only 2.72% 'against', and the remainder choosing 'neither/not sure' or 'prefer not to answer'.

For almost all of the respondents, music – and Tori Amos specifically – represents far more than just a pastime, or a pleasant background noise. 98.47% of respondents said they considered music to be a form of emotional support, and 93.45% said there was a particular Tori Amos song that meant a lot to them on a personal level.

### **Forum descriptions**

Though I sent the survey into many of the forums built up around Tori Amos listeners, and I use data from survey respondents who participate in all of them, I focus particularly on only two: Pandora's Aquarium and NooooForums. The reason for selecting Pandora's Aquarium as a specific focal point is that it was deliberately set up to support survivors of sexual violence. As I explore Pandora's Aquarium in detail in Chapter 7, alongside comprehensive narratives from both its founder, Shannon, and one of its participants, Lindsay, I will not give a specific overview of it here. However, it is worth doing so for the second forum, NooooForums, because although it is not specifically linked to sexual violence, I selected it to focus on because it contains the strongest links to those who are the most deeply entrenched in Amos' music, interactions with her as a person, and the communities surrounding her.

NooooForums comprises many of the Tori Amos tour 'regulars' (those who know each other from attending many shows on each tour over the years<sup>118</sup>), and various others. It is a closed forum, which means potential members must be approved by other members and administrators before they gain access to the boards. Anyone considered too 'fannish', for example someone who might state that every Tori Amos album is equally wonderful and that she and her work are above criticism, would not be welcome on the forum. This is in part to avoid 'drama' (bickering between members on the boards, or in 'private messages'), and in part to offer members a space to criticise certain aspects of Amos' work without having to justify their standing as a fan or ex-fan of Amos. Several of the members are journalists who sometimes write about or interview Amos, and would therefore not want their comments to be public property on the internet. In addition, though most people on the forum know each other through a Tori Amos tour connection, the forum is not a Tori Amos fansite, and any member who only posts on Tori Amos-related news is regarded somewhat suspiciously. In fact, out of 17 sections on the forum, only one of them is dedicated to Amos. Bjork and Charlotte Martin each have a section, and there is a general music section, and the others comprise such things as discussing TV programmes, celebrity gossip, recipe-swapping etc.

### **3. Methodological Concerns**

Susan Krieger (Krieger 1991) wrote, "*The pot carries its maker's thoughts, feelings and spirit. To overlook this fact is to miss a crucial truth, whether in clay, story or science.*" In this section, I examine some of the issues that arise from my research methods, which can be categorised broadly as exploring the ways in which the researcher affects the research, and vice versa.

#### **Music:**

##### **a) Choice of text**

Lorraine Code points out in her essay *Taking Subjectivity Into Account* (Code 1993) that evidence for a research project is selected and not found, which means that those selection procedures can and should be examined and

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<sup>118</sup> Some of the people who participate in NooooForums have seen Amos in concert hundreds of times each. Many more have been to at least fifty shows, and it would be rare to find a participant on the forum who had not attended at least 10-15 Amos shows.

critiqued. There is no definitive list of artists who write songs about sexual violence, and even if there were, it would be constantly growing at a rate that would be impossible to keep up with. There are many artists who sing about sexual violence who are independent or unsigned. Without the marketing and availability that comes with major labels, it is harder to find these artists, and although many of them are represented in this project, it is inevitable that many have also been left out. Also omitted, due to my own language and cultural restrictions, are songs that do not have English lyrics, classical music, jazz, opera and any non-Western music<sup>119</sup>. This is not to say that these have nothing to offer on the topic, merely that I do not have the required skills or knowledge base to include them.

### **b) Translation and interpretation**

Although up to this point, I have used 'text' and 'song' interchangeably, I am keenly aware that they are very different. Saying something is not the same as singing about it – in this way music and lyrics are, to all intents and purposes, acting as a different language. In using narrative analysis, I am not simply analysing printed song lyrics, but the songs themselves. To bring them back into text, and academic text at that<sup>120</sup>, is enough of a recontextualisation of the original to warrant examination as not just interpretation, but translation. The idea of translation is not to reproduce exactly the same thing, even if this were possible. Instead, the act of translation should create something else, something that is qualitatively different, through developing the text and creating a new meaning. For the purposes of this project in particular, to translate a piece of music is not just to provide a critical interpretation of it, but to listen, interpret and translate it into another form, understanding that that form might be different from the original. Translation is then, the process of making something real in another language, genre or context. Just as the translator moves between languages, each of which is an independent but fluid network of signs and meanings, I must move between various narratives, genres, discourses and

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<sup>119</sup> Although I am very grateful to the friends and colleagues from other countries who have provided me with information about songs about sexual violence. Special thanks to Marina Franchi, who also wrote out a translation of a significant Italian song, which I would not otherwise have found.

<sup>120</sup> There is a political point to be made here as well. In translating from song to academic interpretation, a very different voice is being used. Feminist academics have often been criticised for using "*the master's tools*" (Lorde 1984) in order to be heard within the dominant framework. There is no doubt that "*language is a place of struggle*" (hooks 1990), but in the context of this project, it is the only one available. This conflict was put into poetry by Adrienne Rich: "*This is the oppressor's language / Yet I need it to talk to you*" (Rich 1971).

media, which are also stable but fluid networks of meanings and significations. Understanding this method of analysis and interpretation as a kind of translation recognises the independence of each 'language' and their mutual irreducibility, while simultaneously allowing for the possibility of translated meaning from one to the other.

Spivak (Spivak 1993) argues that in order to translate, you should at least have a working knowledge of the original language. There are some ways in which I think this will be upheld in my work, and other ways in which it will fail. As I have mentioned, I am only going to examine songs with English lyrics, so a literal translation is not necessary. However, I am not a musicologist or a songwriter, nor have I any significant knowledge with regard to the structure and meaning of musical composition. While the musical form of the songs will be addressed, it is likely to be at a fairly basic level, and not perhaps as rigorous as Spivak might like<sup>121</sup>. Even attempting discourse analysis with music, at first seems daunting, having with it the potential to misinterpret or to leave out vital details. However, Spivak contends in that it is not necessary to know everything about a text and its context before translating or interpreting it. Rather, the most important thing is to give the text time and attention.

Spivak's process of translation begins with translating first at speed by diving into the text and 'surrendering' to it – perhaps similar to initially listening to a song in order to get a sense of it. To sit down and read the lyric sheet alone would arguably be to do the song and its writer a disservice. The song was not made to be read, but to be heard. If the songwriter includes lyrics in an album sleeve, they will provide clarity as to the words of the song, but are clearly not meant to be wholly independent from the accompanying CD; otherwise the artist could have released a book of poetry instead. Above the lyrics on the album sleeve of their *Different Class* album, Pulp even went so far as to write, "*Please do not read the lyrics while listening to the recordings*". While this is hopeful at best – once a text is placed in the public domain, there can be no control over how it is approached – to only read the lyrics and claim an understanding of the song and songwriter would be akin to reading a screenplay and claiming to understand the film and filmmaker's intentions. The act of listening and re-listening to the original song must be as much a part of interpreting it as reading and re-reading the lyrics.

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<sup>121</sup> However, I do make reference to musical analysis that other scholars have made on particular songs, where appropriate.

Spivak's claims that "*translation is the most intimate act of reading*" could be just as easily applied to listening. There are many different ways in which we listen to music, possibly more than there are ways to read. It differs from reading a text in that it does not need to be the primary task at hand. For example, listening to music can be done alone or in groups. It can be used to create or enhance other states or activities, such as dancing, sex or sleeping. Songs evoke memories in people in the way that certain smells do – they can immediately take the person back to the time they heard a particular song, if that time held significance for them. This might be something like your first slow dance with someone or your first kiss, but it could also be something less pleasant, such as whatever was on the radio when you crashed your car, or were raped. Writing on the autobiographies of black women, Joanne Braxton (Braxton 1989) says, "*I read every text through my own experience, as well as the experience of my mother and grandmothers*". Similarly, when reading or listening to accounts of sexual violence, it is impossible not to (consciously or unconsciously) reference and involve other accounts of sexual violence that I have been exposed to, both in personal and professional contexts and in different media forms. Given then, that no two people will ever have the same experience in the act of listening and that listening to something is not a (value) neutral activity, it stands to reason that no two people will 'translate' a song in the same way.

Although a 'good' translation is usually thought of as one which stays as close to the original as possible, and carries the spirit of the author's intention, if not an exact translation of the words. However, authorial intentionality has been criticised as irrelevant as well as unobtainable. Barthes argues against incorporating any biographical knowledge about authors or their intentions in interpretations of their texts. To do otherwise is to make a simplistic assumption that there is one correct interpretation and imposes a limit on the text<sup>122</sup>:

*"The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us".* (Barthes and Heath 1977)

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<sup>122</sup> On reading Jane Caputi's (Caputi 2003) paper, which interprets the song 'What Doesn't Belong To Me' by Sinead O'Connor (2000) as a rejection of the transmission of affect through sexual violence, I originally discounted her analysis as 'wrong' on the grounds that I had read an interview with O'Connor in which she categorically states that this song is about removing attributes that have been ascribed to God by various religious practices. However, Caputi's 'mistake' led to a fascinating account that I, in adhering to the stated intentions and background of the artist, would not have been able to create.

Applying this deconstructionist approach to music, the actual lyrics of the song can be thought of as 'dead', as once they have been written down, they are fixed and cannot change in and of themselves<sup>123</sup>. Even if the artist were to say, 'You have misinterpreted my song, actually I intended x', or even, 'You have interpreted my song correctly, in exactly the way I intended it', this would bear no more weight than anyone else commenting on the text. It merely adds an extra interpretation to the existing interpretations, rather than altering the text itself in any way. In this way, the reader's interpretation is no less significant than the artist's. Some artists are comfortable with the idea that they do not necessarily have the 'best' interpretations of their own songs. For example, R.E.M. singer Michael Stipe, in defending the band's refusal to elaborate on the mysterious and often undecipherable lyrics and its policy of not printing the lyrics with its albums, said listeners often had better interpretations of his words than he had (Buckley 2002 p.88)<sup>124</sup>. This places the power of interpretation solely on the listener (the artist may interpret too, but only as another listener), and one might paraphrase Barthes' famous phrase to assert that "*the birth of the listener must be at the cost of the death of the songwriter*"<sup>125</sup>.

However, I am not quite ready to discard either authorial intentionality or biographical information as irrelevant or unknowable for the purposes of this project. This issue will be taken up much more fully in Chapter 6, which deals with the notion of authenticity, and the importance for some listeners of knowing that the story being narrated 'really happened'. It is, of course, not necessary to know that Tori Amos was raped in order to produce a valid and interesting interpretation of 'Silent All These Years', but if you do approach the song with prior knowledge of this, you may have a fuller understanding of the artist's motivation for writing a song about the silencing of a woman's voice<sup>126</sup>, and may then be able to go back and read more into the text. Although an explanation from the artist may serve to silence a wider variety of interpretations, perhaps this is intentional. It may well be the case that on some occasions, artists want everyone to know the political or personal reason behind a particular song, in order for that song to have the greatest impact.

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<sup>123</sup> Although this does bring up an interesting question over whether a live performance of a song with altered lyrics would constitute a new (dead) text, or would be just one more interpretation of the original text.

<sup>124</sup> In 1998, REM's policy on this changed, when, after 18 years of the band's history, they decided to print the lyrics for their 11<sup>th</sup> studio album *Up* (1998)

<sup>125</sup> "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (Barthes and Heath 1977)

<sup>126</sup> Tori Amos' 'Silent All These Years' has lyrics such as, "I hear my voice/ And it's been here/ Silent all these years / I've been here/ Silent all these years".

A slightly more grey area in this particular debate concerns cover versions of songs, because then there are two versions of the song (or more), both with the same lyrics, but each with a separate intention in the mind of the artist. Cover versions raise some fascinating theoretical questions, which sadly are outside the scope of this project. However, it is worth including one brief example in order to demonstrate that there are ways of taking this act of translation as creating new meaning even further – such as taking the text and actively going against the initial intentions of the artist. On her 2001 album, *Strange Little Girls*, Tori Amos received a great deal of attention for her cover version of Eminem's '97 Bonnie And Clyde', a song in which he fantasises about having killed his wife and driving, with his young daughter, to throw her body in a lake. Amos does not change the lyrics at all, but rather sings the same song in ghostly tones – from the perspective of the dead woman in the boot of the car. In explanation, Amos said, "*'97 Bonnie & Clyde' is a song that depicts domestic violence very accurately, right on the money. I did not align with the character that he represents. There was one person who definitely wasn't dancing to this thing, and that's the woman in the trunk. And she spoke to me. She grabbed me by the hand and said, 'You need to hear this how I heard it.'*" (vanHorn 2001). Although Amos did not change a single word of the song, she translated its meaning entirely, repositioning the song as a feminist attack on men who perpetrate violence against women<sup>127</sup>.

### c) Fans and academics: 'low' and 'high' culture

In the preface to *Disruptive Divas* (Burns 2002), Burns and Lafrance assert,

*"Regardless of what conventional positivists may maintain, however, we argue that when one is studying music – an object of inquiry that communicates in intensely personal and often unconscious, unknowable ways – one must not be indifferent to it."* (Burns 2002)

No one would suggest that one should choose a research topic that one has no interest in, on the very grounds that one has no interest in it. In order to research one thing for at least three years, it seems vital to have not only a sustainable interest in it, but also on some level an emotional investment in seeing the project through, and contributing something of note to the chosen field at the end of the research.

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<sup>127</sup> Although according to Eminem's 'The Real Slim Shady', "Feminist women love Eminem".

A false distinction between the researcher and the researched has long been a problem in academic work concerning popular culture, and is summed up neatly in this passage from Matt Hills' 2002 book *Fan Cultures*:

*"It is necessary to reflect on the ways in which media and cultural studies closes its seminar room doors on the figure of 'the fan' as an imagined Other, thereby constructing what is to count as 'good' academic work. Of course this is only half the story. It is equally important to consider the place of 'theorising' within fan cultures, and to consider what boundaries are imagined around 'good' fan practices."... "The categorical splitting of fan/academic here is not simply a philosophical or theoretical error, but is also produced through the practical logics of self-identified 'fans' and 'academics'."* (Hills 2002)

My project is not concerned with fans as a group per se, but rather those who engage with the themes of sexual violence presented by those artists. However, there is undoubtedly a substantial overlap between the two, and as many of the same concerns will apply, it is worth raising some of the issues that 'fandom' creates in this project.

Much of the music in my research is music with which I have some sort of prior relationship, whether positive or negative. Although 'fan' is the term most commonly used for a person who likes, and is to some extent invested in, whatever form of popular culture it is, I am reluctant to apply it to myself, perhaps because of the commonly-held idea of fans as obsessive or irrational<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> During the course of writing this thesis, two incidents took place in which this label was publicly applied to me somewhat against my will. The most recent incident happened in September 2009, when, alongside writing up my PhD, I was also working as a freelance journalist. Knowing my academic connection to Amos' work, a local newspaper editor commissioned me to write a preview and a review of two of Amos' live shows at the Hammersmith Apollo. Though I submitted these, like any other journalistic work I undertook, in the 'objective journalistic style' (and indeed, the review was quite critical of Amos' performance), having heard that I had some other connection to Amos, the sub-editor of the paper, introduced the piece, when it was published, as having been written by 'Superfan Deborah Finding' instead of a simple byline. Though I was furious to have my journalistic credibility compromised, and my academic work misrepresented, in this way, there was nothing to be done about the application of this label, after the fact, other than to note here how easily the focus on a particular cultural icon can be mistaken for fandom of it.

The second incident, while far less annoying, is still noteworthy. While touring with Molly Knight and some of the other 'tour regulars' during the course of this research, in 2005, I attended one of Amos shows at Hammersmith Apollo, on June 4<sup>th</sup>. Outside the show, a photographer approached me, and one of the 'regulars', Elyse Pasquale, and asked if we would mind being photographed for a book on music fans. We both agreed to take part, and the result was our inclusion in James Mollison's 2008 book *The Disciples*. Though being labelled a 'disciple' by association is not something I would have chosen, Mollison's book is quite beautiful and actually underlines many of the points I make in this thesis (especially in Chapter 7) about the importance of the communities and sense of identification that a musical artist can provide. The images in Mollison's book focus on physical similarities between music fans of a particular artist (for example, Marilyn Manson fans with dyed black hair, wearing black leather and black eyeliner – as Manson himself does – are photographed together, and older men with long coats and scarves are photographed outside a Bob Dylan show). Of the Amos show, Mollison writes (somewhat inaccurately) that the audience was almost entirely female, but notes, "There was a reverent atmosphere as they filed past us, and I imagined them anticipating an emotional, cathartic experience. They didn't have a particular look, but I was amazed just how many women had sandy, caroty, red or auburn hair, like Tori's, so we focused on that" (Mollison 2008)

As Barry Divola writes in *Fandom* of his identification with the fans he interviewed,

*"Being a fan is not about being reasonable. It's about obsession and blind devotion. Each person I talked to for this book spoke with an emotion and enthusiasm that I could relate to. Yes, even those bright-eyed fourteen-year old girls who earnestly claimed they would love Boyzone until the day they died." (Divola 1998)*

Perhaps my own reticence to accept the label is less to do with a fear of being aligned with Boyzone fans<sup>129</sup>, and more is due to a concern that my work will somehow be held as less academic or worthwhile because I enjoy the medium I am discussing. However, as discussed at the beginning of this section, some form of emotional investment seems not only acceptable, but necessary to undertake and see through a sustained research project such as this. Academics themselves have their favourite theorists, some of whom have what might be described as cult status. In addition to this, academics also devote time, money, energy and long-term commitment to their chosen field – some of the characteristics alluded to when talking about the obsessive nature of fans. As Henry Jenkins points out, *"Would these same practices (close attention, careful re-reading, intense discussion) still be read as extreme if they were applied to Shakespeare instead of Star Trek, Italian Opera instead of Japanese animation, or Balzac instead of Beauty and the Beast?"* (Jenkins 1992). It is then a perceived difference in the worth or quality of the text that is at stake here, or broadly speaking, the idea that while one might reasonably study so-called 'high culture', there is nothing to be gained from engaging with supposed 'low culture'.

The blurring of the boundaries between low/popular culture and high/legitimate culture has been a task for many theorists (Seabrook 2001; Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002; Radway 1991, 1988; Ang 1985; Brunsdon 2000; Hermes 1995; Modleski 1982) ever since Bourdieu's (Bourdieu 1984) empirical findings that despite the apparent freedom of choice in the arts, the genres of music people are drawn to (rock, classical etc.) strongly correlate to their social status. 'Low' culture is often associated with 'feminine' – for example, romance novels (Modleski 1982 and Radway 1991), soap operas (Ang 1985) and talk shows (Kilby 2001b), but these theorists have argued that these texts have both a personal and a political significance for women.

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<sup>129</sup> Although let us not underestimate that particular fear.

The spectre of high/worthy and low/unworthy cultural texts is not just one that is externally imposed. Even within my research project, I am confronted with and struggle with the idea of 'good' and 'bad' texts<sup>130</sup>. While I may feel comfortable revealing that I study artists such as Ani DiFranco and Tori Amos, who are not particularly mainstream and are generally known as 'serious' or 'political' artists, with the more mainstream artists, I tend to say, 'and even artists like Christina Aguilera and Jamelia', while coughing or at least feeling slightly embarrassed. However, a so-called 'bad text' might be extremely useful (not least in attracting a very wide audience), no matter how simplistic or internally flawed its lyrics are.<sup>131</sup> In what might broadly be called the alternative music scene, mainstream and popular has always equalled 'sell-out', or at the very least, unable to provide the edge and control that independent artists have. While a lack of censorship is certainly politically important when singing about sexual violence, there are other equally important political considerations, such as actually getting the message heard. There is no doubt, for example, that Christina Aguilera's 'I'm OK', Jamelia's 'Thank You' and The 411's 'On My Knees'<sup>132</sup>, all released within two years of each other, brought the theme of domestic violence to a young, diverse, mainstream audience, who would not be reached by a hundred Ani DiFranco albums.

Making peace with a role as both listener and researcher means that my relationship to the songs has developed, and become a motivating factor for interpreting both the texts themselves and the multiple responses to them. In her paper on writing academically about something of which one is a fan (in her case the TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), Sue Turnbull (2003) writes of an almost identical motivation:

*"Indeed, acquiring skills in textual analysis may be precisely the way in which to understand one's own reactions and relationship to the text. Extrapolating from this, once we know how we ourselves are moved, then maybe we can begin to understand how this might be true and in what ways one is 'moved', not necessarily so one can become 'unmoved', but in order to better understand for others, without projection or condescension." (Turnbull 2003)*

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<sup>130</sup> Much like the high/low culture distinction, 'indie' is often seen as more worthy than 'mainstream', and political more worthy than apolitical. However, throughout the course of this project, these distinctions become blurred, and remain largely unhelpful categories.

<sup>131</sup> I am grateful to Jane Kilby for helping me reach some clarity on this point with relation to my own research after a paper she gave on sexual violence narratives on talk shows.

<sup>132</sup> These particular artists are examined much more fully in Chapter 4, where the themes found in the more 'mainstream' music are analysed and compared to their 'indie' counterparts

*In New Rules of Sociological Method* (Giddens 1993), Anthony Giddens concluded that researchers always influence what they research, and as if the bias cannot be removed, it must be studied in and of itself. Acknowledging preferences, bias and emotional responses to the research material is not just important with regard to the music aspect of this research, but also with regard to sexual violence, which is the focus of the next section.

### **Listeners:**

#### **d) Sexual violence: insiders and outsiders**

In the Methods section of this chapter, I examined the ways in which being given 'insider' status gave me access to more material and research participants, as well as removing some of the fear or suspicion respondents might have had about my motivation as a researcher. In this section, I ask whether or not it matters if I am an insider or an outsider in terms of sexual violence experiences. My definition of what constitutes a sexual violence narrative encompass the whole spectrum of sexual violences – rape, sexual assault, street harassment, childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence etc. Very few, if any, women will be excluded from having had experiences somewhere in this broad spectrum of sexual or gendered violence. Therefore, my own experiences become less significant, because they do not mark me out as 'other' but rather merely place me in the category of 'woman' or at the very least 'most women'.

The question then becomes that of whether or not I explicitly include my own experiences. If so, how much of them I include, how much weight I give them, and whether or not I explicitly mark them out as my own. As Elspeth Probyn (Probyn 1993) asked, *"Is there a way of using the self that does not condense into a privileged moment of 'me'?"* Many sexual violence researchers talk about their own experiences in the context of their research, many more, I suspect do not. There seem to be pros and cons on both sides.

One concern when using a 'confessional' account is that it could potentially act to close discussion on a topic. It is, arguably, for example, harder to critique Susan Brison's philosophical insights on rape (Brison 2002) when they are interspersed with her detailed narratives of her own rape and subsequent experiences, than it

would be if we knew nothing of her personal history and assumed the text to be written by an 'outsider' to the topic. There is a sense in which we might be afraid that to critique her theory is to criticise her responses to her experiences.

However, if a researcher cannot pretend to stand outside the topic she is researching, then why not 'out' herself and explicitly state her position as an 'insider'? A decision not to locate the researcher or include her own experiences at all is potentially problematic for several reasons. It can act to keep the researcher 'in the closet', and in the course of this project, reinforce the idea of 'otherness' for women who have experienced sexual violence. It could be argued that the researcher has a responsibility to be 'out' when talking about something that can be hidden, because there is no choice in terms of some locations or identities ('race' and ethnicity for example). In terms of sexual violence, this has political importance as well, in that it states that sexual violence is not 'something that happens to other people', and because of its extremely widespread and emotive nature, also not a topic that lends itself to objectivity.

Whether the outsider/insider distinction should matter to research participants or not is a separate question to that of whether or not it does. If my research findings are, for example, that many feel a strong sense of connection, not just to Tori Amos' music, but to Amos herself, because they believe that she understands, that she will speak for them with sensitivity and without selling them out, because of her experiences, then it is possible that they might also feel this way about a researcher purporting to represent them.

#### **e) Using experience narratives to create knowledge**

As this project takes as its basis for knowledge (where the empirical research is concerned), the narratives of sexual violence experiences provided by the respondents, it is important to end this chapter by grounding my reasons for doing so within a theoretical feminist perspective, which means drawing on standpoint theory in its various incarnations.

In brief, standpoint theory, or the theory of "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1991), argues that those who are disenfranchised and marginalised from political power may have more epistemological insight and access regarding the dominant

structures that disempower them than someone who is privileged within the dominant framework. The idea that experience provides in some sense, a better knowledge, is one put forward by feminist theorists such as Sandra Harding (Harding 1993) and Nancy Hartsock (Hartsock 1983). Hartsock argues for a political theory that allows the marginalised 'other' into the centre, a centre that will then look very different once it is occupied by groups who have traditionally been oppressed. More specifically, standpoint theory is usually used to put women together as the marginalised group who will have a greater understanding of a patriarchal system, and as Alison Wylie argues, "*standpoint theory is an explicitly political as well as a social epistemology*" (Wylie 2004). Feminists no longer have to choose between 'good politics' and 'good science' – standpoint theory would argue that good politics can produce good science.

The basic premise of standpoint theory has been criticised for a number of reasons, the main one being that women do not fit neatly into one category. A black woman's experience of oppression is going to be different from a white woman's, a lesbian or bisexual woman's experience will be different from a heterosexual woman's, and so on. Even within the boundaries of 'race', ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. there will of course be marked differences in women's experiences. Taken to its logical conclusion, there would be as many standpoints as there are women, so "*how can we talk about accounts of the world at all if the multiplicity of standpoints is, quite literally, endless?*" (Hekman 1997). Hekman argues that standpoint theory is intrinsically flawed because it is looking for the existence of a truth/reality where none can exist. She also criticises Hartsock's position of moving the marginalised into the political centre, because to have a centre implies also the existence of a periphery, therefore other groups will be 'moved out' and marginalised instead.

Joan Scott summarises one of the arguments against experience: "It is precisely this kind of appeal to experience as uncontested evidence and as an originary point of explanation – as a foundation upon which analysis is based – that weakens the critical thrust of histories of difference." (Scott 1992). Some theorists acknowledge this but still try to retain the basic grouping, e.g. Dorothy Smith (Smith 1987) maintains, "*To begin from (women's) standpoint does not imply a common viewpoint among women. What we have in common is that organisation of social relations which has accomplished our exclusion.*" Scott argues that expressing the history of power relations as well as their current configuration is essential for any research project utilising experience. Maria Mies

agrees, saying that the term 'experience', "denotes more than specific, momentary, individual involvement. It denotes the sum of the processes which individuals or groups have gone through in the production of their lives; it denotes their reality, their history" (Mies 1991).

Despite the widespread criticisms of standpoint theory, I would argue that it can still be used, but rather than maintaining 'women' as the group, it should be broken down into smaller categories, for example initially 'women who have experienced sexual violence'. This is still open to exactly the same criticisms, which I will address, but before doing so, I will explain the reasoning behind wanting to retain standpoint in some form at least. It seems to be obvious that there are things to be learned from an insider's perspective. Not many would argue that women who have been raped have nothing to tell us of the nature of rape and its aftermath. Hilary Rose argues, on a related point, that women's responsibility for their bodies gives them a distinct perspective on their own bodies and what happens to them. (Rose 1983) This point seems almost too simple – that women can provide information on their bodies because they know what it is like to inhabit them and suffer through them – yet, these perspectives have too often been ignored. Women have been the objects of academic and scientific inquiry, however the knowledge was not for the women being researched, but rather to be used within the context of, and for the benefit of, the dominant framework. 'Women who have experienced sexual violence' is as open to the criticisms of standpoint as 'women' is as a group. No one narrative will provide us with an answer to the question, 'what is it like for a woman to be raped?', and every woman's experience of sexual violence is different. However, discounting any woman's experience-narrative of rape because she cannot give every woman's experience of being raped seems counter-productive. In order to theorise or press for any political or social change, there has to be some form of grouping. However, it is vital that within that group ('women who have experienced sexual violence'), the voices we hear must not all be saying the same thing, and they must not all fit into one category (e.g. white, heterosexual women's accounts of sexual violence).

There will be groups within the group 'women who have experienced sexual violence' that have pieces of information and knowledge that are very specific to that group. For example, Black women may speak of the misrepresentation of black women's bodies as sexually voracious, prostituted women of the media perception of them as 'unrapeable', or lesbian women of the trauma of an act in

which the rapist repositions them as heterosexual. All of these specific-to-group accounts need to be heard, as do conflicting accounts, even within those smaller groups. To hear one account is not to infer identical accounts. As Doris Sommer (Sommer 1988) argued, "*the singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole*". Standpoint theory can take account of multiplicity, as evidenced in Patricia Hill Collins' work on black feminist epistemology and "oppositional consciousness" (Collins 1986). Collins argues that if, rather than conforming to the roles expected of them, Black women used all the resources and roles they have access to, such as creativity, church input, parental roles and friendship networks, this varied and everyday behaviour would become a form of activism in placing them across several different standpoints at once. Haraway is also critical of the search for a full or total standpoint from any privileged or subjugated position. One cannot speak only or completely as a lesbian, or a working class woman, or a white woman, when it is possible to occupy all three positions at once. She calls the search for such a solo and complete position "*the search for the fetishised perfect subject of oppositional history*"(Haraway 1991).

Speaking from a position of marginality, of Otherness, and of powerlessness, might not only provide knowledge, but can also be, bell hooks argues, agreeing with Hill Collins, an act of political resistance, and strength rather than victimhood:

*"Silenced. We fear those who speak about us, who do not speak to us and with us. We know what it is like to be silenced. We know the forces that silence us, because they never want us to speak, differ from the forces that say speak, tell me your story. Only do not speak in a voice of resistance. Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain."* (hooks 1990)

Harding has also tried to take account of the criticisms with regard to experience, difference and diversity, by suggesting that it is necessary to talk about "*the development of standpoint theories, plural*" (Harding 2004) and about both women's standpoint and feminist standpoint. She also notes that despite virtually every theorist having some difficulty with some part of standpoint theory, it still seems determined to exist as a "*seductively volatile site for reflection and debate*" (Harding 2004).

The use of standpoint theory in the project is based on the fact that experience is valued as central by the respondents, and is potentially the defining characteristic of some of the groups in this study. This is a common feature in groups, that "*the articulation of experience (in myriad ways) is among the hallmarks of a self-determining individual or community*" (Lugones and Spelman 1983). It is clear, as we will see in Chapters 6 and 7, that the respondents believe there is a difference between having had an experience and not having had it. If no one has experienced rape, there would be nothing to know about rape, and so it would seem that experience is a better starting point than anything else. Those who have not experienced rape, who have important insights to provide on rape (counsellors, police, etc<sup>133</sup>), would not have access to those insights unless primarily other people had first had the experience of being raped. As this is the primary experience of 'what it is like to be raped', it stands to reason that it should be the first thing we turn to for our knowledge, even if it is not the only thing. Out of respect, someone who has had that experience has the right to the floor of a debate on sexual violence, first and foremost.

This is not to say that every experience narrative will be treated uncritically, or seen in some way as untouchable. Bloom (Bloom 1998) calls this trap the "*fallacy of assuming the transparency of the narratives*" and Pels reminds us that "*the standpoints of the subjugated are never innocent*"<sup>134</sup>; *they do not provide immediate vision*" (Pels 2001). Although collecting women's life narratives is a vital feminist project, in interpreting them, we cannot forget that people are invested in presenting themselves in order to be perceived in very specific ways, and therefore to be uncritical or idealistic about those narratives would be to assume that narratives are able to give us 'the truth' about a person or an experience. Accounts will differ in every way imaginable, from understandings of the causes of sexual violence to understandings of its effect, both on the individual and society as a whole. Clearly there is not 'one truth' about sexual violence, and there will always be conflicting experience-narratives. One experience narrative can never provide 'the truth' about sexual violence, and a song, or indeed any rape-narrative, will never furnish us even with full knowledge of what that individual's experience was like. Even an incredibly personal and detailed song such as Tori Amos' 'Me And A Gun' (which is part-fictionalised in any case) can only give us a sense of the experience. This is partly to do with the

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<sup>133</sup> I am speaking here of their knowledge as counsellors or police officers only, not implying that they might not also have personal experience and knowledge through occupying a number of standpoints.

<sup>134</sup> Once again, the use of a term like 'innocent' when talking about sexual violence narratives is problematic because of the associations of guilt and sin with the experience of sexual violence.

<sup>136</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1. Part-fictionalisation and authenticity is also the subject of Chapter 6.

constraint of the medium – how could every detail about an experience be included in a four-minute song? However, even in extremely detailed rape-narrative texts, such as Nancy Venable Raine's *After Silence: Rape And My Journey Back* (Raine 1998), or Alice Sebold's *Lucky* (Sebold 2003), details will necessarily be left out, either because the person did not want to include them, or did not think to include them, or forgot that those details happened at all<sup>136</sup>.

Experience is not 'more true' by itself, but is a form of knowledge that is not otherwise validated. The validation of that experience is central to this community and identity. This means that even though standpoint theory has been critiqued for its framing of 'truth', and that these critiques are valid, it is still both plausible and important to take account of experience because of its importance to the community I am researching. I would argue that the critiques of standpoint have overfocused on experience *per se* and underfocused on its importance in politics and community, and it is on these aspects that I utilise it in my research. As Scott says, "*Experience is at once always an interpretation and is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political.*" (Scott 1992) Whereas standpoint theory argues that experience-narratives are needed in order to effect political or social change, but are not intrinsically valuable, I argue that for the purposes of this project they are useful in and of themselves. In Chapters 6 and 7, I show how the listeners value experience over other forms of knowledge production – whether this leads to political and social change, or only affects the individuals who are validated or supported by it. Any archaeology of this community must take account of this epistemological position in order to understand the knowledge produced by it. Despite the critiques of experience and the lack of objectivity, there are community patterns of knowledge productivity to be studied.

The epistemological position of this project then, is that the lives, experiences and political struggles of women who have experienced sexual violence should be prioritised in terms of being heard (including the artists as well as the listeners). Interpretations of the music, and the usefulness of it, are determined by those listeners, their experiences, and their responses to it. The researcher's interpretations of their experiences and responses must take place across both differences in privilege and similarities, and individual voices must be heard with what Sonia Kruks (Kruks 2001) calls a "*respectful recognition.*"

**f) The ethics of researching sexual violence:  
care for both the researched and the researcher**

In this section, I examine the ways in which my research project might affect, firstly, my research participants, and secondly, myself as a researcher.

As a researcher, I was aware of the power dynamic inherent in a situation in which people would tell me personal things about themselves, and I would interpret them and choose how I presented and represented them. The vulnerability of narratives discussed in Chapter 1, and my own previous professional work with women who had experienced sexual violence, meant that I was very conscious of the potential for harm when someone is either misrepresented, or in some other way not heard when they speak about trauma. In order to keep the potential for harm to a minimum, I chose a format for collecting data that I considered the least intrusive, made sure that respondents knew that their information would be kept confidential, and finally, provided some links to support.

Even though confidentiality clauses and data protection sections are assumed in a research project of this kind, I nevertheless made these very clear to my research participants. When I contacted the forum administrators to ask them to post my questionnaire on their sites, I also asked them to post my email address, so that anyone with any concerns about being identified in any way could contact me. At the top of the questionnaire was a section stating that all respondents would be given pseudonyms, and that any potentially identifying details would not be used in conjunction with any part of the response that was particularly personal<sup>137</sup>.

The questionnaire a tool for collecting data was not chosen simply because of its accessibility to those in other countries, although that was one factor. I felt it was more appropriate than face-to-face interviews when discussing sexual violence with a research participant. The questionnaire format allows the respondent to take as much time as she needs, stop if things become difficult, or abandon the process altogether without feeling compelled to continue for the sake of the researcher present in the room. Of course, the format itself does not guarantee that respondents will not be upset or in some other way affected by the process

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<sup>137</sup> In Chapter 7, I use two extensive narratives. Both women gave their permission for me to use their real names.

of answering the questions. I considered asking the forum administrators who posted the questionnaires whether they might also set up a small area of the forum where people could discuss the questionnaire or receive support. However, I rejected the idea on the grounds that this might affect the data, or that people might feel pressured into sharing what they had written in the questionnaires in a more public space. Instead, at the bottom of the questionnaire, I included a small section containing links to various support mechanisms, and websites containing support telephone numbers.

In addition to thinking about how to undertake the research in ways that care for the research participants and treat them with respect, it is also important not to forget the potential for harm to the researcher herself when working on a distressing topic. Those who engage with narratives of sexual violence are open to compassion fatigue (a type of secondary traumatic stress). Charles Figley (Figley 2002) summarises "*that people can be traumatised without actually being physically harmed or threatened with harm. That is they can be traumatised simply by learning about the traumatic event.*" Symptoms of secondary traumatic stress are very similar to those experienced by the person who has actually experienced the trauma, and can eventually lead to 'burn-out'.

In *Emotionally Involved: The Impact of Researching Rape*, Rebecca Campbell (Campbell 2002) argues from her research team's experiences that secondary traumatic stress is just as likely to affect women researching sexual violence as it is to affect those who provide direct services to women who have experienced sexual violence. This view is consolidated in the *Sex In The City* report (Dickson 2004), mapping prostitution across London, in which researchers spent months immersed in adverts for women and sexually explicit reviews of (often stated to be unwilling) women by men who had bought sex from them. The report's author and primary researcher, Sandra Dickson reported all the signs of secondary traumatic stress, and requested clinical supervision, in line with requests made by those in the project doing the direct work with trafficked women.

These effects can change how the researcher feels about carrying out the research, and can also materially change the research – for example, if certain texts or interviews are too distressing, they may be avoided. It is therefore very important to examine the transference in both directions in order to be aware of the impact on the research, and also to ensure that the researcher is supported. As these effects on the researcher can be anticipated, support or coping

strategies can be planned at the outset, as can ways to minimise their effect on the balance of the research. Linda Stoler writes,

*"Emotional reactions and personal needs do not just vanish because one has declared oneself a researcher. Ignoring them is unrealistic and deprives us of the opportunity to examine them rationally and take steps to reduce their bias in our work and their impact on our lives and emotional wellbeing."* (Stoler 2002)<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have aimed to give an account of my research methods, and make those processes as transparent as possible, in order to situate my research in a fair and open way. Although there are potential pitfalls in undertaking this type of research, as I have articulated here, I hope I have given considered responses to each, and shown how my community research can take place, if not quite organically, at least a way that causes the least disruption possible. Wanting to provide a space, in which the voices of the listeners could be heard, alongside the voices of the artists, was one of my primary objectives in beginning this project, and one that fits with the notion of 'speaking out' that has arisen in each chapter so far. Chapters 6 and 7 focus entirely on the voices of the listeners, in the ways discussed here. Before that, however, I return to the songs and artists themselves, which, as set out at the beginning of this chapter, are the focus of the next two chapters.

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<sup>138</sup> Some of the strategies she employed in her work on childhood sexual abuse included ending her working day with 'painless tasks', i.e. those that did not evoke emotional reactions, such as organising references, or symbolically transferring her mental experience to a ceramic figure she kept on her desk.

## Chapter 4:

# Thank you for hurting me? An understanding of domestic violence through mainstream pop music from 1962-2009

*Just trying to understand  
I've given all I can  
You've got the best of me  
Borderline, feels like I'm going to lose my mind  
You just keep on pushing my love over the borderline*

Madonna ('Borderline')

### **Introduction**

It is easy to read the Madonna quote at the beginning of this chapter through the lens of domestic violence, just as it is easy to attach other, more common, interpretations to it, such as a cheating partner, or one who takes the narrator for granted in some way. Physical damage is so often used as a metaphor for emotional damage – the most obvious example being that of one person 'breaking the heart' of another – that it is easy to forget what is actually being described. In pop music, where this particular metaphor is overused to the point of cliché, songwriters look for new ways of expressing the same sentiment. Many kinds of physical damage, in varying degrees of explicitness, are therefore described in lyrics in order to convey the age-old emotional turmoil of romantic relationships in trouble. Consider the following recent examples:

*"My heart's crippled by the vein that I keep on closing / You cut me open / And I keep bleeding love"*  
- Leona Lewis, 'Bleeding Love', 2007 (*Spirit*)

*"Every time I hold your hand / I feel like I'm drowning / Every time I let it go / I feel vertigo"*  
- Rachael Sage, 'Vertigo', 2008 (*Chandelier*)

*"You were still breathing but wouldn't move / Ok, ok, what a thing to choose / This one's gonna bruise"*  
- Beth Orton, 'This One's Gonna Bruise', 2002 (*Daybreaker*)

*"You're frozen / when your heart's not open / If I could melt your heart / We'd never be apart"*  
- Madonna, 'Frozen', 1998 (*Ray Of Light*)

Taken literally, the narrators of these songs (or the objects of their affection) would be in severe (and often quite bizarre) physical danger<sup>139</sup>. I include these visceral examples not to mock the songs, or their creators, but to highlight how inextricably our understandings of love and the emotions, both positive and negative, connected with love and relationships, are bound to physicality. There are some obvious reasons for this: love is not just emotional, but physical too. Not being able to eat or sleep are common manifestations of the 'in love' feeling, and in sex, love is given a physical expression. Given that we feel love through the body, as well as the mind, it is a short step to assume we also feel the absence of love, or its betrayal, through the body as well, hence the physical damage metaphors. But does our use of these metaphors to talk about love inevitably romanticise domestic violence? What happens when *actual* physical damage is being inflicted on one partner by another? What words are left in the songwriting vocabulary when we want to describe domestic violence in song, rather than use some of its images as metaphor<sup>140</sup>?

This chapter charts the presentation of physical abuse in relationships in songs from 1962 to 2009. I argue that this presentation has taken three distinct phases over this time, and suggest that the way may be open for a fourth.

I begin by discussing the period before the first phase, which I will broadly categorise as 'pre-second wave feminism'. I discuss one pop song from this period, 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)' by The Crystals (1962), and show the ways in which domestic violence is presented as a potentially good thing for a relationship.

In the first phase, marked out by second wave feminism, I argue that domestic violence is presented as an unequivocally bad thing, and those who suffer it are very clearly given victim status in the song narratives. I use five songs to represent this phase. Three of them (Tracy Chapman's 'Behind The Wall', from 1988, The Beautiful South's 'Woman In The Wall', from 1989 and 10,000 Maniacs'

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<sup>139</sup> These strange physical metaphors are, of course, not limited to song. Here is an example of one being used (and noted for its strangeness) in the cult US TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003):

*Angel*: I could see your heart. You held it out before you for everyone to see, and I worried that it would be bruised or torn. And more than anything in my life I wanted to keep it safe, to warm it with my own.

*Buffy*: That's beautiful. [thoughtful pause] Or... taken literally, incredibly gross.

*Angel*: I was just thinking that too.

(*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Season 3, Episode 12: 'Helpless', first aired Jan 19, 1999)

<sup>140</sup> Also worth noting as potentially problematic in this context is the use of 'hit' or 'smash hit' to describe a commercially successful song. I continue to use them here, for lack of a viable alternative, however, I do so with a certain degree of discomfort.

'What's The Matter Here?' from 1988) describe scenes of domestic violence from an observer's perspective. The other two (Suzanne Vega's 'Luka', from 1987 and Heather Nova's 'Island', from 1994) are written from the perspective of the person suffering the violence.

The second phase charts the transition of the status of the person who has experienced domestic violence (which is still presented as unequivocally bad) from victim to survivor, in line with the feminist debates around agency which came out of both second-wave feminism and the Refuge movement. The two songs chosen for analysis in this section are 'I'm Alive' by Heather Nova (1998) and 'I'm OK' by Christina Aguilera (2002), and as evidenced by the titles, both are first person narratives of survival.

The theme of survival is amplified in the third phase to the extent that it is taken to mean 'even better than before'. This not only presents the person who has experienced the violence as a survivor, but also attributes some positive qualities to the abuse itself. To discuss and problematise this phase, which I broadly categorise as postfeminist, I use Christina Aguilera's 'Fighter' from 2002, Jamelia's 'Thank You' from 2003, and 'On Your Knees' by The 411 from 2004. The songs themselves can all be read as acts of revenge, which I discuss with reference to work already done on postfeminist representations of victimisation and violence.

Finally I discuss two later songs: 'Foundations' by Kate Nash (2007) and 'Kiss With a Fist' by Florence and the Machine (single 2007, album 2009), which I argue do not belong in the third phase. In discussing the new elements that these two songs bring to the discussion, I suggest the possibility of a fourth phase, differentiating between the early postfeminism of the third phase and the logical journey it takes in this section.

#### **1. Pre-second wave feminism: domestic violence as good for the relationship**

##### **1962: The Crystals – 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)'**

The Crystals were a manufactured girl group, created by Benny Wells and signed and produced by Phil Spector. Their output and image was completely under

Spector's control<sup>141</sup>. While their biggest hit, 'Then He Kissed Me' (1963), established them as the epitome of Spector's 'Wall Of Sound' era, this section focuses on their controversial song of a year earlier, 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)'. Although the song was not a hit, it became very well known, partly because of its inclusion on Phil Spector's 'greatest hits' box set *Back To Mono 1958-1969* (1991), but primarily because of its notoriety<sup>142</sup>.

The lyrics depict a jealous man who hits the narrator when he learns of her infidelity: ("He couldn't stand to hear me say / That I'd been with someone new / And when I told him I had been untrue / He hit me"). The narrator, however, claims that not only did she did not feel abused ("He hit me / And it felt like a kiss / He hit me / But it didn't hurt me") but that it actually made her happy because it was proof that he loved her ("If he didn't care for me, I could never have made him mad / So when he hit me, I was glad"). Physical violence, rather than being a betrayal of love, becomes the only method by which the strength of those loving feelings can be communicated and reciprocated ("He hit me / And I knew he loved me"... "He hit me / And I knew I loved him"). It is also the way in which her partner puts his 'stamp' on the narrator as his possession, which is something she also approves of: "And then he took me in his arms / With all the tenderness there is / And when he kissed me / He made me his". The elision of 'hit' and 'kiss' throughout the song ensures that when we hear, "And when he kissed me / He made me his", we know it is the 'hit' as well as (or even instead of) the 'kiss' that makes the narrator 'his'.<sup>143</sup>

'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)' was written by songwriting (and married) partners, Carole King and Gerry Goffin. Goffin wrote the lyrics and melodies to songs, while King created the harmonies and instrumental arrangements. Although Warwick (2007) may be right when she generously suggests that the unsettling sounds and harmonies created by King were an attempt to problematise Goffin's lyrics, there is no question that those male-penned lyrics

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<sup>141</sup> Group member Dee Dee Kennibrew reported: "We were never allowed any say in what we did at all. We were very young, of course, but we were teenagers making teenage music and we would have liked, you know, some input. But no way! There was nothing we could do: Phil Spector was our record company, our producer, our everything" (quoted in Wilson p.66)

<sup>142</sup> That Spector himself went on trial in 2007 for the murder of his female partner, B-movie actor Lana Clarkson adds a chilling dimension to this discussion. The jury was split and the judge declared a mistrial. He was retried and found guilty in 2009, and sentenced to life imprisonment. However, this was not the first time Spector had been accused of violence towards his female partners. When his wife Ronnie (of the Ronettes) divorced him in 1972, she claimed that he had kept her locked in his mansion, threatened to kill her if she ever tried to leave him, and said, "I knew that if I didn't leave at that time, I was going to die there" (Gaar 1992, p.42)

<sup>143</sup> We might hear a reflection of this sentiment in Britney Spears' first huge chart success from 1999, '...Baby One More Time' ("When I'm not with you / I lose my mind / Give me a sign / Hit me baby, one more time")

still leave us with a song that romanticises domestic violence for The Crystals' teenaged girl audience<sup>144</sup>. Warwick herself points out that the backing singers represent a supportive community of female friends (and, I would argue, perform the same function as the chorus in Greek tragedy), encouraging the narrator to stay with the perpetrator, and "*promoting the oppressive notion that love will redeem suffering*" (Warwick p.69)

Warwick hesitantly argues that the song *could* be understood as an articulation of the trap that domestic violence victims face: the process of denial and rationalisation that enables them to suffer the abuse and remain in a relationship with the abuser. It would therefore be a narrative on behalf of young women in this position; a "*compassionate performance of the unhealthy logic that makes abuse tolerable*" (Warwick 2007, p.69), rather than the straightforward romanticisation of domestic violence it first appears to be. Such an interpretation is very generous given the musical and social contexts in which the song was written.

'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)' was released in 1962. Other songs making their way up the charts in and around that time included unproblematised<sup>145</sup> narratives sexualising young girls<sup>146</sup>, as well as countless songs in which adult women are infantilised and described as passive (but beautiful) possessions to be passed from man to man<sup>147</sup>.

It would be another two years until the Married Women's Property Act<sup>148</sup>; five years until the Abortion Act, six years until the Divorce Act and seven years until the Equal Pay Act. Women would not have equal rights with men to be the guardians of their own children until 1971, and it was 1975 before the Sex Discrimination Act was passed and the Equal Opportunities Commission established. Women were not able to get injunctions against their violent husbands until 1976, and it would be twenty-eight years before rape in marriage would be considered a crime. The first refuge for women was not established until

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<sup>144</sup> Goffin later claimed that he and King were inspired to write the song after hearing 'Locomotion' singer Little Eva explain her black eye as proof that her boyfriend loved her (Gaar 1992, p.42)

<sup>145</sup> And exclusively heterosexual / heteronormative

<sup>146</sup> For example, 'Young Girl' by Gary Puckett (1968), 'Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen' by Neil Sedaka (1961), 'You're Sixteen, You're Beautiful and You're Mine' by Johnny Burnette (1960) and covered by Ringo Starr (single 1974, album 1976)

<sup>147</sup> For example, "Once upon a time / That little girl was mine / If I'd been true / I know she'd never be with you / So take good care of my baby / Be just as kind as you can be / And if you should discover / That you don't really love her / Just send my baby back home to me" (from Bobby Vinton's 'Take Good Care Of My Baby', single 1961, album 1968)

<sup>148</sup> This Act gave married women a legal right to half of any savings they had managed to make from their 'housekeeping allowance'

1971, and was immediately so overcrowded<sup>149</sup> that it posed serious health and safety risks to the women and children staying there - who still preferred to take their chances sleeping on the floor among the rats than return to their violent partners (Pizzey 1974). Social services considered any women leaving their violent partners as having made themselves 'intentionally homeless' and would therefore not provide housing. The police would only rarely attend scenes of domestic violence, seeing it as a private matter to be resolved without intervention. It was still socially acceptable for men to joke about beating their wives. There was, in short, a huge lack of, and need for, practical and structural support for women and children suffering domestic violence. As such, it very difficult to attach a knowing interpretation of 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)' as a sophisticated understanding of the cycle of domestic violence<sup>150</sup>.

## **2. Phase 1: Behind closed doors**

### **Domestic violence as a social problem as well as an individual trauma**

By the late 1980s, the significance and scale of violence in the lives of women had been emerging for two decades. More refuges had followed (and been immediately filled) that first one from 1971. The issues that prevented women accessing help, including the lack of help actually available, were a strong focus of feminist theory at that time. It is no surprise then, that the songs from this period are infused with some understanding of, and frustration with, these issues, as will be evidenced in this section<sup>151</sup>.

#### **1988: Tracy Chapman – 'Behind The Wall'**

'Behind The Wall' is a short *a capella* first person narrative of domestic violence<sup>152</sup>. The narrator is not the direct victim of the violence, but is a very

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<sup>149</sup> Founder Erin Pizzey reports women coming to the refuge who had been beaten for decades by their partners, but had nowhere to go. (Pizzey 1974). When the refuge moved to 369 Chiswick High Road (a three storey Victorian house), Pizzey was licenced by Hounslow Council to house 36 women there, but reported that there were more like 130 women there at most times. (ibid p.44)

<sup>150</sup> If one is to read 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)' retrospectively from a feminist perspective, I would argue it is far more compelling to follow Ien Ang (1985) and Tania Modleski (1982) (in their readings of Dallas and Mills and Boon, respectively) and suggest that the song provides a fantasist escape. If a woman is unable to escape her situation, then a fantasy in which her abuse actually places her and her abusive partner in the position of these romantic leads may make the situation more bearable. In this sense, the song would not provide an articulation of the victim's flawed logic for outsiders to understand, but rather a constructed fantasy for the victim to escape into.

<sup>151</sup> In terms of songwriting, it is no surprise that this is the most prolific period. More songs are written about social or political problems when the problems have been identified but solutions have not been attempted. See Damico and Quay eds. (2009) on songs about 9/11 and Iraq, Crew (2002) on suffragist music, and also Ward (2006) on the civil rights movement and music.

<sup>152</sup> The *a capella* style and first person narrative used here are explored in greater detail in Chapter 5 with regard to Tori Amos' 'Me and a Gun'.

close observer, either living in the same house (and therefore possibly a child of the couple) and hearing it from the room next door, or a next-door neighbour (from the song's title, 'Behind The Wall').

The song is structured very simply, with four verses and no chorus. It begins:

*"Last night I heard the screaming  
Loud voices behind the wall  
Another sleepless night for me  
It won't do no good to call  
The police  
Always come late  
If they come at all"*

All the verses begin "*Last night I heard the screaming*" and begin an octave above the place they end, in order to convey the shock of the screaming and the disturbance caused by the abuse. The line "*another sleepless night for me*" situates the narrator as a regular observer (not seeing, but hearing) of the domestic violence going on 'behind the wall'. The sleepless night could be the terrified wakefulness of a child, or the less personally involved concern (and possibly irritation at yet more disturbed sleep) of a neighbour. The narrator has experience of the police being called to attend the situation, whether she made the call or not. She knows that sometimes they will not even come to the scene, but if they do, it will not be in time to 'catch him in the act' and the damage will already have been inflicted on the woman<sup>153</sup>. It also potentially gives the man enough time to calm from his violent rage and be pleasant and helpful to the police. This verse stops after "*If they come at all*", implying that in this instance, the police did not come.

The following verse is identical (indicating another night just the same as the last one), except in this case, it continues after the line "*If they come at all*". We see in this case, they do attend the scene:

*"And when they arrive  
They say they can't interfere with domestic affairs  
Between a man and his wife  
And as they walk out the door  
The tears well up in her eyes"*

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<sup>153</sup> Whiteley notes that an extended melisma is used for the phrase 'always come late', which "lengthens the sense of anticipation before the resignation of the final phrase". (Whiteley 2000, p.179)

The line "*They say they can't interfere with domestic affairs / Between a man and his wife*" provides us with a familiar situation, yet one worth examining closely. The woman is presented as the property of her partner ("a man and his wife") because they are married. At the time this song was written, rape perpetrated on a woman by her husband was not recognised as such in the law, and this attitude certainly permeated other areas of violence between married partners. Domestic violence was seen as a private matter – something to be resolved in the home, between the couple, without the intervention of outsiders (Hanmer, Radford and Stanko 1989). "*They say they can't interfere with domestic affairs*" could be read in two ways. One utilises the position just described, i.e. the police not taking the situation seriously because it is a private matter, not one for the police<sup>154</sup>. The other reading is slightly more sympathetic. They may want to help the woman, but cannot because their hands are tied by the law. Either way, "*as they walk out the door / The tears well up in her eyes*".

The police appear in the story (and film narratives we are exposed to as children) as the people who turn up and help the people in trouble by taking away and punishing the 'baddies' who would hurt those people. In this narrative, the police are presented as either disinterested or impotent to help and protect the victim. The woman is left alone, and "*the tears well up in her eyes*", because no one is able to save her by removing either her or the perpetrator from this situation, which she knows (and we know, from the narrative up to this point) will continue in exactly the same way. The woman suffering the domestic violence in this narrative is entirely without agency. She is dependent on being rescued by others (which does not happen) and is unable to help herself. She is not even the narrator of the song, and is therefore literally voiceless. While this serves to underline her powerlessness in both physical and social/structural terms, it does leave her as a somewhat two-dimensional character who exists only as a victim in someone else's story.

What has been presented to us in the song so far is a cycle of abuse in which all of the characters in the song are trapped, and from which there seems to be no possibility of things getting better. It is still possible, however, that things can get worse, which they do, as the next verse demonstrates:

*"Last night I heard the screaming*

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<sup>154</sup> Amina Mama (1993) has noted how this problem is amplified when the victim and perpetrator are black, due to police racism, especially the stereotypical attitude that violent behaviour is 'normal' between black people.

*Then a silence that chilled my soul  
Prayed that I was dreaming  
When I saw the ambulance in the road  
And the policeman said  
'I'm here to keep the peace  
Will the crowd disperse  
I think we all could use some sleep'"*

The narrator's fears have been realised: the woman has been hurt so badly that an ambulance has had to be called. We see that, in a way, the screaming has been a comfort to the person behind the wall, because it has confirmed that the woman is alive. When it is gone, the "*silence that chilled my soul*" does so because it opens up the possibility that the woman has been killed<sup>155</sup>. The police attend the scene with the ambulance and give the impression to the crowd that they are in control of the situation. The policeman's statement '*I'm here to keep the peace*' is presented as deeply ironic: if the police were able to 'keep the peace' in this situation, the woman would not be in the ambulance at all. He asks the crowd to disperse, and we get the impression of an officious caricature ('nothing to see here, move it along' etc) of a policeman who has no real understanding of the situation, and is unable, due to ignorance or the law, to intervene in any useful way. When he says, '*I think we all could use some sleep*', we are aware that although the policeman, who clearly wants to wrap up the situation quickly, will go home and sleep soundly, the people who really could 'use some sleep' will not get it. The narrator is unlikely to sleep after witnessing this traumatic event, despite her many 'sleepless nights', and the woman in the ambulance is certainly not sleeping.

However, if we understand 'sleep' as 'respite', there is a sense in which the woman in the ambulance is receiving this: as long her injuries are severe enough to remain in the hospital, she will be looked after and her partner will not be able to hurt her. The narrator too, will not be experiencing the abuse second-hand, as long as the woman is in hospital. If the song had ended here, the audience may have felt respite too. There is hope at this point that the woman's injuries are serious enough for *someone* (police, hospital staff, social services, friends, family etc) to take action, and either remove the woman, or her abusive partner, from their home and this situation. There is also hope that the severity of the situation will jolt the abusive partner into realising what he has been doing and to stop doing it. However, the song continues:

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<sup>155</sup> As Whiteley notes, the line "*Prayed that I was dreaming*" is delivered right at the top of Chapman's vocal range, a straining that reflects the desperation in the narrator's voice. (Whiteley 2000, p.179)

*"Last night I head the screaming  
Loud voices behind the wall  
Another sleepless night for me  
It won't do no good to call  
The police  
Always come late  
If they come at all"*

This is identical to the first verse, underlining the seemingly hopeless cyclical nature of domestic violence.

### **1989: The Beautiful South – 'Woman In The Wall'**

Although this song did not make a significant impact in the same way as the Tracy Chapman song (although it was released as a single), I think it is important to include it for several reasons. Firstly, the song is an entirely male creation<sup>156</sup>, marking it out from every other song discussed in this chapter; secondly, it focuses specifically on the perpetrator of domestic violence; and thirdly, it clearly references the Tracy Chapman song, and therefore it is important to read them together.

The song begins, *"He was just a social drinker but social every night / He enjoyed a pint or two or three or four"*. This situates the object of the narrative as having a problem with alcohol, but one he denies. He describes himself as 'a social drinker' and someone who 'enjoys a pint'; however, Heaton makes it clear to us that this narrative is unreliable by adding the end of each line as though it was a separate voice (even though the lines are not split in any way). The female character in the song is then introduced with the line, *"She was just a silent thinker, silent every night"*. Her silence could be real or metaphorical, indicative of several explanations either way. She may have a quiet personality, introspective rather than social. She may be depressed or have some other problem that means she does not speak to her partner; or it may be an enforced silence because she has no one to talk to (he is drinking and she does not have friends). It may be that she has learned that silence is best when faced with her

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<sup>156</sup> Paul Heaton has tackled many feminist themes throughout his career. For example, The Beautiful South's *36D* is a critique of 'Page 3 culture' and the men and women who participate in it. 'Perfect 10' (The Beautiful South 1998) rejects socially imposed beauty standards, especially those to do with women's weight. As a solo artist, Heaton's 2008 song 'Everything Is Everything' takes both of these themes further, as well as providing an extremely pithy critique of postfeminism ("feminism's fast asleep with a cock in either hand").

partner coming home drunk, and that this is her way of avoiding, or coping with the violence he inflicts. Finally, it is possible that, at this point in the narrative, the woman is already dead. The next line is, "*He'd enjoyed the thought of killing her before*", which implies either than he is enjoying the thought again now, or that he has already killed her.

The second verse begins much like the first: "*Well, he was very rarely drunk, but very rarely sober / And he didn't think the problem was his drink*". The verse ends, "*But he only knew his problem when he knocked her over / And when the rotting flesh began to stink*". At this point we know that he has killed his female partner. Although shocking, this revelation is presented entirely in terms of the man's experience of it – i.e. that this act illuminated his addiction. We are left to imagine him in an AA meeting, saying, 'well, I realized I had a drink problem when I murdered my wife'. The 'rotting flesh' beginning to 'stink' is a visceral image. He has not called the police or ambulance, nor has he disposed of the woman's body. She has been reduced to her most unruly physical terms<sup>157</sup> – he may have attempted to control her physically in life, but he cannot contain or control the fact of her physicality in death.

The chorus runs:

*"Cry freedom for the woman in the wall  
Cry freedom for she has no voice at all  
I hear her cry, all day, all night  
I hear her voice from deep within the wall"*

"*Cry freedom*" is a reference to the film of the same name (Attenborough 1987) examining a mixed-race friendship under apartheid in South Africa. Referencing apartheid when singing about domestic violence is a strong narrative technique. The audience can immediately draw parallels between disempowered groups suffering violence with no recourse to structural support<sup>158</sup> or compare the ways in which both different races and different genders are presented as different species with differing rights and abilities. '*The woman in the wall*' is literally in the wall – this is where her partner has put her body. However, she is also 'behind the wall' to the narrator, just as in the Chapman song. The image of the wall holds other significance too. It can represent the domestic sphere ('these four walls') and it can also be a structure separating one person or family from

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<sup>157</sup> See Kathleen Rowe (1997) on the unruly woman and Margrit Shildrick (2002) on 'leaky bodies'

<sup>158</sup> However problematic it may be to draw those parallels – i.e. to elide race and gender

another, and in some cases, one society from another<sup>159</sup>. The wall also provides an excuse for outsiders to not have intervened in the domestic violence situation – they may have ‘known’ but they did not ‘see’ it<sup>160</sup>. Similarly, ‘she has no voice at all’ holds dual meanings: literally, she has no voice because she is dead, but figuratively because there was no structure in place to support her, so she has no societal or cultural ‘voice’ by which she can complain about her treatment. This reminds the listener of the narrator’s description of the woman as ‘a silent thinker’.

The line, “*I hear her cry, all day, all night*” is reminiscent of the Chapman line about the narrator’s sleepless nights. However, it might also be guilt over, or preoccupation with what is now known or assumed to have happened to the narrator’s neighbour. In the same vein, “*I hear her voice from deep within the wall*” could also represent the narrator’s attempt to ‘hear’ the woman’s plight. Even if it is too late for the woman herself, the narrator has been changed by the knowing and the hearing, and now accepts domestic violence as a reality and a social problem.

In the next verse, we learn that the perpetrator “*made a cross from knitting needles / Made a grave from hoover bags / Especially for the woman in the wall*”. This once again references the woman’s place in the domestic sphere (as does the next verse’s revelation that “*she’d knitted him a jumper with dominoes on*”). On a simply storytelling level, it is now clear that he has buried her in the wall, lining it with hoover bags and trying to make it an ‘appropriate’ burial with the improvised cross. He wears the jumper that she made for him “*every day in every week*”, signifying his regret, and the deterioration of his mental state. This is underlined by the next lines: (“*Pretended to himself that she hadn’t really gone / Pretended that he thought he heard her speak*”)

Some time then passes, and we learn that the man had begun to rebuild his life, but then was viscerally reminded of his crime:

“*Then at last it seemed that he was really winning  
He felt that he had some sort of grip  
But all of his new life was sent a-spinning*

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<sup>159</sup> And in this context of domestic violence, one gender from another. Women are separated from the rights and power that their male counterparts hold, even when these men are abusive.

<sup>160</sup> This image is played out powerfully in Lars Von Trier’s film *Dogville* (2003) in which the set is only demarcated by lines, rather than any actual buildings. Nicole Kidman’s character, Grace, is raped by one of the villagers in his house. The rest of the villagers do not ‘see’, even though because of the set, it is literally happening in front of them.

*When the rotting wall began to drip"*

Here, the spectre of what he has done is given physical form. He will not be able to continue with his new life: once his new partner discovers the woman in the wall, everything will unravel and his secrets will be discovered.

**1988: 10,000 Maniacs – 'What's The Matter Here'**

This is a song I will only address briefly, as it is concerned with child abuse, rather than the more specific gendered domestic violence that is the focus of this chapter. However, it contains so many parallels to the previous two songs that it is obvious that the themes and techniques we see present in this phase are also applicable to child abuse.

Once again, the victim is not identified in any way other than with regard to his victimisation, the first line being, "*That young boy without a name*". Merchant<sup>161</sup> positions the narrator as a neighbour ("*We live on Morgan Street / Just ten feet between*"). The abuse takes place behind closed doors, however the narrator sees enough signals to be concerned: ("*I've seen him run outside / looking for a place to hide / from his father / The kid half naked / And I've said to myself / What's the matter here?*")

It seems from the song that both parents are abusing the boy. The narrator hears the mother's "*screams and curses*", which amount to assorted threats to her child: ("*Threats like 'if you don't mind / I will beat on your behind / Smack you / Slap you silly'*"). We already know that the father is abusing the child, but we also hear his threats: ("*If you don't sit on your chair straight / I'll take this belt from around my waist / And don't you think that I won't use it*").

The song is different from 'Behind The Wall' or 'Woman In The Wall' in that, although the narrators of those songs were clearly sympathetic to the victims and unhappy about the crimes, Merchant has written much more explicitly judgmental lyrics to critique both the crime and the 'observers' who do nothing<sup>162</sup>. Addressing

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<sup>161</sup> 10,000 Maniacs lead singer and songwriter, Natalie Merchant, who is now a solo artist

<sup>162</sup> The song is critiqued by Reynolds and Press (1995) as being 'matronly', and "a blunt attempt to grapple with the issue" (p.252). However, as the other songs in this section could all fall into the description given by Reynolds and Press of Suzanne Vega's songwriting style, preferring to "imagine the worldview of the victims of oppression through vignettes rather than overt proselytising or protest" (ibid), it seems to me that there is room for Merchant's approach as well here.

the parents directly, the narrator accuses them of the abuse and demands an explanation,

*"Answer me  
Take your time  
What could be the awful crime  
He could do at so young an age  
If I'm the only witness to your madness  
Offer me some words to balance out what I see and what I hear  
All these cold and rude things that you do  
I suppose you do because he belongs to you  
Instead of love and the feel of warmth  
You've given him these cuts and sores  
That won't heal with time or age"*

The narrator clearly accuses the parents of neglecting their duty of care towards the child. Although the child is being 'punished', it is clear than the punishment vastly outweighs the crime, as the example of the 'awful crime' given is not sitting up straight. Just as in the previous songs, we see the position of power and sense of ownership that the abuser has over the abused ("he belongs to you"). The line is deliberately jarring, much more so than Chapman's more subtle "man and his wife". It invokes discomfort in the listener that any one person can 'belong' to anyone else, especially if this gives them *carte blanche* to abuse them. This is underlined when the narrator asks, "But who gave you the right to do this?"

The narrator is "tired of the excuses everybody uses" to not intervene. These excuses are presented as "He's their kid, I stay out of it" and "He's your kid, do as you see fit". This is reminiscent of the line in which Chapman's narrator describes the police as not being able to 'intervene with domestic affairs'. In this case, however, the narrator will not stand for it, and proclaims, "But get this through / That I don't approve of what you did / To your own flesh and blood". In this, the narrator clearly steps outside the social boundaries that prohibit 'outsiders' from commenting or intervening in domestic abuse situations. This seems progressive on many levels: the neighbour-narrator is empowered, the abuser is confronted, and the victim's situation has been acknowledged, if not resolved. However, somewhat disappointingly, it is revealed at the end of the song that the narrator's confrontational comments are only fantasy, and those social barriers remain intact: "I want to say / what's the matter here / but I don't dare say / what's the matter here / I don't dare say". Although the possibility of intervention has been raised and explored, it is only in the mind of the narrator, which (taken alone) will not help the person suffering the abuse.

### **1987: Suzanne Vega – 'Luka'**

Based on a little boy she observed who appeared 'different' from the others in her neighbourhood, Vega wrote 'Luka' from the perspective of an abused child, and this is also made clear in the music video for the song<sup>163</sup>. However, the song is often referenced as being about domestic violence, and if the song is taken as it stands, the narrator could just as easily be an adult (female) victim (even the name is gender-ambiguous). The use of 'Luka' by domestic violence charities, supporting women fleeing abuse, underlines this. As such, I try to read 'Luka' as ambiguously as possible in what follows, in order to leave both interpretations open.

'Luka' takes on the now-familiar neighbour scenario, but this time giving the voice (and a name) to the person suffering the violence, rather than the observer: ("*My name is Luka / I live on the second floor / I live upstairs from you / Yes I think you've seen me before*"). The first-person narrative provides not only agency to the victim, but also an immediacy to the whole situation. In this case it is the neighbour who does not have a voice in the narrative – however, the neighbour's comments and questions are made clear to us by way of Luka's responses (e.g. "yes, *I think you've seen me before*"). The next lines position *Luka* as a plea to both ignore and not ignore the violence that is taking place: ("*If you hear something late at night / Some kind of trouble, some kind of fight / Just don't ask me what it was / Just don't ask me what it was / Just don't ask me what it was*"). Luka takes on the phrases that a concerned neighbour would use as euphemisms for having heard something they know to be domestic violence – 'something'; 'some kind of trouble' and 'some kind of fight'. If no one names the abuse for what it is, then everyone concerned will be able to continue pretending it is not happening.

Luka goes on to suggest some ways in which s/he might be to blame for the abuse: ("*I think it's because I'm clumsy / I try not to talk too loud / Maybe it's because I'm crazy / I try not to act too proud*"). This leads into the lines, "*They only hit until you cry / And after that you don't ask why / You just don't argue anymore / You just don't argue anymore / You just don't argue anymore*". It is

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<sup>163</sup> Whiteley is right to note that the position of *Luka* on Vega's album *Solitude Standing*, themed as it is on isolation and lack of support reinforces its position as "focused social observation within a framework of alienation" (Whiteley 2000, p.171)

clear from these lines that Luka is powerless, and that the abuser is looking for a particular reaction (crying). The conversation with the neighbour continues into the next verse: "Yes I think I'm okay / I walked into the door again / Well, if you ask that's what I'll say / It's not your business anyway". Walking into a door is the stereotypical excuse given by abused women in order to explain their bruises to enquirers, when they need to conceal the abuse. It is also consistent with Luka's self-definition as 'clumsy'. Luka then expresses a wish for peace: ("I guess I'd like to be alone / With nothing broken, nothing thrown / Just don't ask me how I am / Just don't ask me how I am / Just don't ask me how I am"). S/he is holding it together, emotionally, but with a kind word, or too much probing from the neighbour, this façade might crack. Then just as in 'Behind The Wall', Vega finishes the song by repeating the beginning part again (the first verse and the chorus) in order to underline the continuing cycle of violence.

#### **1994: Heather Nova – 'Island'**

Occasionally dedicated at concerts to Nicole Brown Simpson, and almost always included on Nova's set list or encore<sup>164</sup>, 'Island' is a six and a half minute journey into the narrator's experiences of domestic violence at the hands of an intimate partner<sup>165</sup>. It is taken from the album *Oyster*, which contains other narratives related to gendered violence<sup>166</sup>, including 'Blue Black', which will be discussed in Chapter 5. It is worth noting that this song was released in 1994, five years after any other song in this phase, yet it is the first narrative told in the adult first-

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<sup>164</sup> In an interview with the Swiss magazine *Open*, Nova was asked which of her songs was her favourite and why, to which she replied, "Island, because I risked so much with that song" (quoted in Sanja Vidackovic 2007)

<sup>165</sup> In an interview with NY Rock (Gabriella 1998), Nova was asked, "Did it bother you to talk about one of your songs? Previously, you've stated that it sometimes feels like rape talking about your songs..." She responded, "Sometimes it really felt that way, but I think I found a way to talk about my songs, to talk about the lyrics without digging too deep. Without going where it really hurts." Given these comments, it is unsurprising that Nova has never explicitly talked about her experiences of sexual violence in interviews. She has spoken about sexual violence more generally - although clearly drawing on her own experiences. In the Rolling Stone interview of December 14 1995, by Steve Appleford (available at <http://www.heathernova.com/articles/?article=rs>), she states, "[domestic violence] goes on behind closed doors, and it's often difficult to go for help because it's a situation tied up in all kinds of things - like feeling it's your fault, being scared and dependent. There's such a loss of self esteem that you feel you deserve it in some screwed up way." Despite Nova's reticence to talk explicitly in interviews about her own experiences, she does say, "All my songs are inspired by real life. I need to write from my own experience." (ibid)

<sup>166</sup> Even the placement of 'Island' on the album is interesting. It follows 'Heal' in which Nova claims in the chorus, "Just a little breath on the water now is all we need / Just a little strength in our hearts / Enough to heal / Enough to heal". After 'Island' comes 'Throwing Fire At The Sun', which contains the verse, "If I listen there's something deeper that speaks / If we reach out maybe we could make a little peace". The feeling of *Oyster* in general is of someone going into the depths but finding an inner core of strength, thus reflecting the title of the album.

person<sup>167</sup> about domestic violence. Although it clearly belongs in this phase, it also paves the way for the phase to follow, with its strong focus on the narrator as a complex and strong agent.

As with her earlier song 'Shaking The Doll' (which I analyse in Chapter 5), the narrator references the separation of herself into parts, some of which are her abuser can access and some he cannot. She defiantly focuses more here on what she keeps for herself with the song's opening lines, "*There are parts of me he'll never know / My wild horses and my river beds / And in my throat, voices he'll never hear*". This also situates her abuser as someone who could not understand her dreams and passions (the 'wild horses') or the depths of her personality (the 'river beds').

The first verse continues, "*He pulls at me like a cherry tree / And I can still move but I don't speak about it / Pretend I'm crazy, pretend I'm dead / He's too scared to hit me now - he'll bring flowers instead*". "*He pulls at me like a cherry tree*" provides the image of the tree (standing in for the narrator) being shaken, and perhaps losing some of its fruit (usually a metaphor for sexuality, with the cherry usually used to stand for virginity<sup>168</sup>) or pale blossoms (innocence or purity).

When she sings, "*I can still move but I don't speak about it*", two meanings are possible. The first is that she has been beaten by her abuser and has stopped resisting. He may think she has been knocked out, or is in some other way unable to resist. This is not the case, but she does not want to let him know that for fear he will hit her again. The other meaning possible here is that the narrator is able to move, to go and tell someone what is happening to her, but she does not. This fits in well with the secrecy attached to domestic violence.

"*Pretend I'm crazy, pretend I'm dead*" seems to be a reference to the narrator's reaction to the abuse for her partner's benefit. Whatever she does seems to work, at least temporarily, because she continues, "*He's too scared to hit me now - he'll bring flowers instead*". Nova is using a situation very common in domestic violence – that of the partner who appears contrite about the abuse, and tries to

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<sup>167</sup> Although 'Luka' clearly can (and does) perform this function, one cannot ignore either Vega's interviews or the music video, both clearly directing the listener towards an interpretation of the song as the narrative of a young boy.

<sup>168</sup> Nova has used this image before. In 'Bare' from the *Glowstars* album, she sings, "*Like a cherry seed / Let me learn to bleed / Breaking open / Like the sun*". In 'Bare', she repeats "*Why do I keep fucking up?*" three times, before singing (again), "*Just living day to day to day to day*". The final minute of the song is taken up with a child talking, providing further motifs of innocence.

make amends, in this case with flowers. Here, however, the narrator is under no illusions about her abuser truly being sorry; she realises that he is simply 'too scared' at present to continue with the abuse. This could either be because of the narrator's 'crazy' reaction – he may think she will leave him, or tell someone, or lose her mind entirely as a result of the abuse, or because of her 'dead' reaction – he may think that this time he has gone too far, that she could have been seriously hurt or killed as a result of his actions, and this scares him.

The chorus, "*I need an island, somewhere to sink a stone / I need an island, somewhere to bury you / Somewhere to go*" references the narrator's need to get away from her abuser. An island can often be an image of paradise, or an idyll of some sort. In this case, the idyll is internal as well as external. She wants to be somewhere where she can metaphorically bury the abuser, and put the abuse to rest. This could refer to a desire to repress what has happened to her, to forget it, but this would mean not dealing with the abuse, which does not fit with the rest of the song.

After the first chorus, she sings, "*And the dogwoods shimmer in the October sun, 'Oh sweet thing' he sings to me, 'you're the only one'*". On the surface, this is a presentation of a very romantic situation. However, the narrator is no longer taken in by it, or she can no longer pretend that the good times with this man make what he is doing to her acceptable or bearable, as she moves from this description straight back into the chorus.

After this chorus comes an anguished cry, "*And I don't know why I can't tell my sister*". The narrator seems to be saying that her sister is someone she could tell anything to, but something about the situation she is in means she cannot. This may be because of shame or guilt on her part, or it may have more to do with her sister's relationship to the abuser. Either way, it seems that this secrecy is hurting the narrator as much as the abuse itself.

*"He spat in my face again, and I don't want to die here"*, reminds us that this she is in very real danger from this man. It could also be an expression of her desire to not spend the rest of her life in this situation. She continues by referencing a common dream experience: "*You know that dream where your feet won't move*". The narrator addresses the listener directly here, believing in a shared experience, and presumably by association, hoping that the listener will understand how hard it is to leave an abusive situation, even if you desperately

want to, as is the case in the dream. That line continues, "you want to come but your body won't let you. He steals it from me. He steals it from me". Many women who have experienced sexual violence are unable to respond sexually in the way they would like to. It is unclear from the line whether this narrator is unable to orgasm per se, or whether this is a result of her being fearful of her abusive partner, or a comment that he is also a selfish lover, even during his 'nice' periods. Nova still uses the shared 'you' here, indicating a desire to be understood by listeners with experiences in common. The line "He steals it from me", indicating having something taken from her during sex could mean an act of rape, or it could mean that she blames her abuser for having taken away her ability to experience sexual pleasure – something she sees as hers. The next line is, "It shines like sweat, like jewels, like something that has died too soon", which Nova delivers in a desperate, breathless voice. This and the following line, "He fucks with the beauty" could either refer to her abuser stopping her from experiencing sexual pleasure, or to his abuse of her in general.

"A kiss, a kick, a kiss, a kick, a kiss kiss kick kick kick" reminds us again of the cycle of domestic violence – on one hand the caring and attentive partner, and on the other hand the violent abuser. She repeats "He steals it from me" again then desperately screams, "It's out of my hands again" – possibly indicating that her abuser has come full circle and is now in the part of the cycle where he is abusing her again. The song ends with her repetition of the chorus and the need to escape.

### **3. Phase 2: Brave but bruised:**

#### **Domestic violence as a bad thing from the narrator's past, which negatively impacts on the present**

In both of the songs analysed in this section, the abuse is presented as something that has happened in the past – something that was terrible, but has been survived. Although both narrators relate stories of victimisation, neither is positioned as a victim. Rather, the songs are testament to the narrators' strength and ability to survive, and this is highlighted in both song titles ('I'm Alive' and 'I'm OK'). This shift from 'victim' to 'survivor' in these music narratives reflects the shift that took place in feminist analysis with regard to these terms, which came about as a result of the testimony and self-identification of the women who had been abused (Macleod and Saraga, 1988).

## **1998: Heather Nova – 'I'm Alive'**

*Oyster*, which 'Island' was taken from, is a much darker album than its follow-up, *Siren* from which this song is taken. 'I'm Alive' is the only song on *Siren* to deal explicitly with this topic, and although Nova once again addresses experiences of domestic violence, this time they are placed in the past, and the narrator situates herself as a survivor rather than a victim. To place this song in context, it is perhaps helpful to think of 'I'm Alive' as the follow-up song to 'Island', with the same narrator. It is for this reason that I have included these songs back-to-back, albeit in separate sections<sup>169</sup>.

The narrator describes her abuser as "*half charmer, half snake*", encapsulating both her own experiences and that of most domestic violence cases. It is very common for victims of domestic violence will say that their perpetrator was like two different people, the lovely, caring partner and then the violent abuser<sup>170</sup>. Perpetrators are also often described by outsiders to the abuse as 'charming', so this line works on several levels. The line is also reminiscent of the lines, "*He's too scared to hit me now / He'll bring flowers instead*" and "*A kiss, a kick, a kiss, a kick, a kiss kiss kick kick kick*" from 'Island'.

She follows the line, "*You were half charmer half snake*" with, "*I lived in dreamtime*". Again, it is quite common for women who have been subjected to sustained sexual violence to describe themselves as not quite living in the real world. Rather they exist in a sort of half-life, where they get through their lives on a day-to-day basis, but cannot afford to engage with the world fully as it would mean having to really come to terms with what is happening to them. It is similar to the earlier discussion of separating out body and mind/soul/spirit in order to have a part of the self that the abuse is happening to, and a part that cannot be touched by it.

She gives more of an insight into some of the details of her life with her abuser with lines like, "*Your hands were covered in paint/ The pillow smothered my cry*"

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<sup>169</sup> The fact that I discuss two songs from the same artist (and later, with regard to Christina Aguilera, even from the same album) in different sections of this chapter is indicative of the flexibility of the phases I have used. These phases are meant to be generally indicative of patterns and shifts taking place, rather than rigidly adhering to particular dates, historical moments, or artists.

<sup>170</sup> This image was utilised in a recent UK police poster campaign aimed at getting more women to report domestic violence. The poster depicted a man with flowers in one hand, while the other was clenched into a fist – with the tag line 'you never know which one he'll bring home'.

and "Some nights I'd sleep in the car/ Just to escape you". However, this song is about the survivor, hence the chorus: "But I'm alive / I survived you / And the bitter taste, the years I wasted / All the hate is gone / 'Cause I'm alive". There is some self-blame in evidence here when the narrator talks with a 'bitter taste' of 'the years I wasted', with her abusive partner, but she claims to no longer hate him (and perhaps, herself) when she says 'all the hate is gone'.

Although it is clear that the narrator has physically escaped from this man, this does not mean that he cannot still affect her. She sings, "I still have visions of you / I still have nights to get through." The narrator also appears to be describing flashbacks to the abuse when feeling vulnerable with another partner when she sings, "And when the trust isn't true / I have these visions of you"<sup>171</sup>. Despite the descriptions of the abuse and the 'visions', it is clear from the chorus and the title of this song that this is very much about the narrator coming through the abuse and having survived it, and it is a celebration of her inner strength that she is alive.

### **2002: Christina Aguilera – 'I'm OK'**

At the beginning of the song, the narrator refers to herself in the third person as she describes her childhood experiences, "Once upon a time there was a girl / In her early years she had to learn / How to grow up living in a war that she called home / Never know just where to turn for shelter from the storm"

Though she describes her home life as a 'war', it is not an equal one, but rather one stronger, more violent force establishing dominance over the other party, as she sings, "Hurt me to see the pain across my mother's face / Everytime my father's fist would put her in her place"

Though the majority of the song describes the abuse perpetrated on the narrator's mother (she also mentions 'bruises', 'yelling' and 'all the lines you left along her neck'), as the terrified child cries from a distance ("up in my room / hoping it would be over soon") it is also clear that sometimes the narrator was subject to the violence in a primary, as well as secondary, capacity ("I was thrown against cold stairs"). She also sings about being afraid while at school in

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<sup>171</sup> This is reminiscent of an earlier song on the album, 'Blood of Me', in which Nova also explores mistrust and the inability to be open with a new lover due to previous violent experiences, even when openness and trust are wanted and warranted: ("I don't believe you / When you tell me / I don't believe you / When you hold me / I don't believe you / You're my medicine / I don't believe you / When you fuck me")

case her father kills her mother ("And every day I'm afraid to come home / In fear of what I might see next")

The narrator sings about the long term effects of living a childhood characterized by violence, which include guilt, flashbacks and difficulty in establishing trusting relationships:

*"I often wonder why I carry all this guilt  
When it's you that helped me put up all these walls I've built  
Shadows stir at night through a crack in the door  
The echo of a broken child screaming "please no more"  
Daddy, don't you understand the damage you have done  
To you it's just a memory, but for me it still lives on"*

Children who witness their mothers being abused by their fathers often feel a sense of guilt that they were not able to protect their mothers, even if they know rationally that it would not have been possible for a small child to stand up to a powerful and violent man in this situation. The flashbacks to the violent incidents stay with the narrator as an adult, as does her need to protect herself by putting barriers up between herself and others. This is something she feels her father should take responsibility for, but instead the burden is left with her. There is a bitterness in the narrator's voice as she accuses the perpetrator of being able to move on, while simultaneously putting her in a situation where she cannot.

The chorus of the song underlines the long term emotional effects of domestic violence, years and years after the physical effects have worn off ("Bruises fade father but the pain remains the same / And I still remember how you kept me so afraid"). She elevates her mother (making it clear that she lays the blame entirely with her father, and not at all with her mother) for being able to love her and take care of her as a child, despite the abuse that she was subjected to: "Strength is my mother for all the love you gave". The final lines of the chorus (and the song) present the narrator as someone who is still experiencing the effects of the abuse, but ultimately, is a survivor of it: "Every morning that I wake I look back to yesterday / And I'm OK / I'm OK".

#### **4. Phase 3: Better than ever**

**Domestic violence as a bad thing from the narrator's past, which positively impacts on the present**

In this section, I look at three songs ('Fighter' by Christina Aguilera, 'Thank You' by Jamelia, and 'On Your Knees' by The 411), and have chosen to look at the first two of them together, and then the third separately. Though the first two songs bring individual things to the discussion of the third phase, there would be a great deal of overlap, were they to be analysed individually, rather than as a pair.

Before discussing the songs themselves, it is important to have some context for them in terms of how the three acts were presented, as this differs significantly from the days of Tracy Chapman / Suzanne Vega etc. who were much more independent in terms of their presentation. All three of these songs are mainstream, upbeat, 'pop' songs. Jamelia and The 411 are British acts, and both songs reached the top 5 in the UK, and gained significant press attention. However, their impact is limited, as neither act is well known outside the UK, whereas US performer Christina Aguilera is internationally known, and the album that her single is taken from, *Stripped*, is one of the most successful in the decade. In discussing presentation, I refer here exclusively to Aguilera, as she is the most recognisable of the three, and the example is most extreme in her case, though it is seen (to a lesser extent) in the other two acts as well.

Aguilera's album, *Stripped*, was perhaps the most overtly feminist mainstream pop album of recent times, despite never being described as such. 'Can't Hold Us Down' is a straightforward feminist anthem, challenging sexual double standards and restrictive gender expectations; 'Beautiful' challenges the beauty myth with its 'just the way you are' theme, as well as reaching out to girls and young women who feel, or are told, they are not good enough; 'I'm OK', as we have just seen, is a narrative of the domestic violence Aguilera grew up with, and 'Fighter', which we are about to look at, is about being stronger because of the abuse. But the first single to be put out was 'Dirrty', which had Aguilera writhing around in her underwear, and sets the scene for the type of sexuality Aguilera would exemplify throughout the promotion of the whole album. Even the title of the album, *Stripped*, presents this conflict as clearly as anything else: Aguilera is being laid bare, both in terms of singing about some extremely personal issues, and in terms of her almost-naked body while doing so<sup>172</sup>.

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<sup>172</sup> Though the example of Fiona Apple applies more to rape than to domestic violence, it is worth mentioning here, as she makes this link explicit. Apple was offered a recording contract with Sony (Columbia), and her first album, *Tidal*, was released when she was just 19. Raped at age 12, and bullied at school, many of the songs on Apple's debut deal with her isolation and difficulty in forming healthy relationships, as well as more specifically about her rape, such as this extract from 'Sullen Girl'. "- *"They don't know I used to sail the deep and tranquil sea / But he washed me ashore and he took my pearl/And left an empty shell of me"*. However, the lure of Apple's teenage vulnerability and conflicted sexuality proved too great for Sony, the marketing team and the media. As Otto Luck's NY

Postfeminism marks feminist critique out as no longer applicable to the over-sexualisation of women, because this is something women are choosing for themselves as a mark of empowerment and sexual agency, rather than something that is being done to them. In these case, being empowered means *always* consenting to the sexual imagery and roles presented – such as lap dancing and pornography<sup>173</sup>. As Levy summarises in her book, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, “*Because we have determined that all empowered women must be overtly and publicly sexual, and because the only sign of sexuality we seem able to recognise is a direct allusion to red-light entertainment, we have laced the sleazy energy and aesthetic of a topless club or a Penthouse shoot throughout our entire culture.*” (Levy 2005 p.26). McRobbie argues that withholding critique of these concerns is actually a condition of the freedom attributed to ‘the new female subject’ if she is to count as “*a modern sophisticated girl*” (p.260). The 411, Jamelia and Aguilera are presented in their videos as agentic women, and in Aguilera’s case, this has meant her ‘chosen’ expression of her empowered sexuality (through her extremely powerful record company) has meant wearing chaps and bra-tops, mud-wrestling, pole dancing and sharing a three-way faux-lesbian kiss with Madonna and Britney Spears.

In thinking about the three songs in this section, it should be noted that the notions of ‘rescuing’ we explored in the first phase were absent in the second phase as narratives moved from those of describing ‘victims’ (for the most part in the third person), to expressing a ‘survivor’ identity (someone who has been able to, on some levels, rescue herself). In this third phase, the agency represented by the survivor identity is continued and greatly strengthened.

The negativity of the abuse itself is still highlighted, but rather than the narrator having managed to survive in spite of the abuse, there is now a sense that they

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Rock article, ‘Fiona Apple Suffers For Her Sins (And So Do We)’ put it, “If the husky, lovelorn voice doesn’t get you, if the waif-like appearance and the big blue eyes don’t melt your heart, well then, the much-publicized account of her rape at age 12 certainly will. It’s a formula made in heaven. The record execs at Sony must be coming in their Calvin Kleins over this one.” Sony chose ‘Criminal’ (a song about feeling guilty over having more power in a relationship and hurting the other person) as the first single from Apple’s album. Their choice for the video was at best incongruous with the song, and at worst completely exploitative. Apple had serious doubts about doing it (before eventually being talked into it). She said, “*The first time I saw the script, it was like ‘Fiona in her underwear in the back of a car’ and I was all What? I mean, I don’t even walk around the house in my underwear. I can’t even stand to see myself in a mirror. But then the director said, ‘It’s tongue-in-cheek’, and I got it. I decided if I was going to be exploited, then I would do the exploiting myself*” (Spin 97). In the same article, Apple said she believed the ‘choice’ she made to go ahead with the video was a mistake.

<sup>173</sup> See Gill (2003) and Finding (2008) on the ways in which feminist critique is actually invoked in various media forms in order to be presented as out-of-date and irrelevant, thus precluding actual feminist critique from taking place.

would not have been such strong people without it. This puts the narrators in the somewhat strange position of having to be grateful (in the cases of the Jamelia and Christina Aguilera songs) for the experience of being abused because it enabled them to turn into strong, feisty, independent women, able to make their own choices about life, relationships and sexuality etc. Their only 'weakness' is to have trusted someone not to abuse her – however, it is clear from both songs that this trust was not unrealistic; that one should be able to trust someone in a relationship not to be abusive. All three of the narrators make an effort to present themselves as being stronger than their abusers. It is the perpetrator who betrays that trust who is presented as weak, pathetic, and to be pitied, for example in Jamelia's 'Thank You', the narrator presents the perpetrator as "*such a joke to me*", and understands that he abused her "*to make yourself feel like a man*". Although the narrators are presented as empowered, agentic women, rather than victims, the songs do not shy away from describing the abuse, or situating it as abuse.

**2002: Christina Aguilera – 'Fighter'**

and

**2003: Jamelia – 'Thank You'**

Aguilera's 'Fighter' gives the fewest details of the abuse of the three, painting the situation in very broad strokes instead. Examples of this include the following: "*all you put me through*", "*all of the stealing and cheating*", "*all that you tried to do*", "*all of your backstabbing*", "*all of the fights and the lies*", "*all of your torture*". By contrast, Jamelia's narrative is much 'grittier', with its bridge beginning, "*You hit, you spit, you split, every bit of me, yeah / You stole, you broke, you're cold*", and her description in the second verse of "*My head, near dead / Just the way you wanted it / My soul, stone cold / 'Cos I was under your control*".

Though the two songs differ in their representation of the violence experienced, they narrate an almost identical message of the conclusion the narrator has reached about it in their choruses. Aguilera's chorus runs:

*"Makes me that much stronger  
Makes me work a little bit harder  
Makes me that much wiser  
So thanks for making me a fighter  
Made me learn a little bit faster  
Made my skin a little bit thicker  
Makes me that much smarter*

*So thanks for making me a fighter"*

and Jamelia's, in a similar vein:

*"For every last bruise you gave me  
For every time I sat in tears  
For the million ways you hurt me  
I just wanna tell you this  
You broke my world, made me strong  
Thank you  
Messed up my dreams, made me strong  
Thank you"*

There is a strong sense in both songs that the perpetrator has done the narrator 'a favour' by abusing her, because she is now stronger than she ever has been – something which she would not have been able to attain without the abuse.

Aguilera's narrative notes the counter-intuitiveness of this position in the introduction to the song: "*After all you put me through / You'd think I'd despise you / But in the end, I wanna thank you / 'Cause you made me that much stronger*". By addressing the potential critique right at the beginning of the song and explaining it away, it does not allow the critique to easily rise throughout the rest of the narrative (ref inbuilt critique of postfeminist ads etc in footnote).

Both narrators position the abuse as 'a blessing in disguise', though towards the end of both songs, the justification for this position slightly diverges. In Aguilera's case, it remains firmly with the strength and feistiness of the narrator: "*'Cause if it wasn't for all that you tried to do / I wouldn't know, just how capable / I am to pull through*", and "*'Cause if it wasn't for all of your torture / I wouldn't know how to be this way now / And never back down*". However, Jamelia's narrative concludes that because of what she has gone through and learned, she knows now that she will never be in another violent relationship again: "*Yeah, you taught me some lessons / Those are my blessings / That won't happen again / Thank you*".

Both songs present a value judgement in their 'rising above it' response.

Aguilera's narrator addresses the perpetrator, saying "*You probably think that I hold resentment for you / But uh uh, oh no, you're wrong*". The implication is that the narrator is now not only a stronger person than she was before, but also a stronger and better person than the perpetrator, who would 'hold resentment', were he in her position. Similarly, Jamelia's narrator is positioned as 'above' her perpetrator, when she says, "*You're such a joke to me, yeah*". Though she did not

know how he was controlling her at the time ("So young, so dumb / Knew just how to make me succumb"), she now realises that he was putting her down in order to bolster himself as a weaker person ("But I understand / To make yourself feel like a man").

It is difficult to criticise songs identifying women as 'fighters' in the face of abuse, and narrating the strength and positive self-image they have come to. On the surface, it seems to be the desirable conclusion of second wave feminism and the gains made in the first and second phases discussed in this chapter. However, I believe that a "*double-entanglement*" (McRobbie 2004 p.255) is taking place here. McRobbie refers to postfeminism as "an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined" especially through certain elements of popular culture, which are "*perniciously effective in regard to this undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism*" (McRobbie *ibid*). It is through the lens of this definition of postfeminism as a "*double-entanglement*"; something that gives with one hand but takes away with the other, that I read these two songs. There is no doubt that both acts brought the issue of domestic violence to mainstream attention through the songs, the interviews they gave at the time and their involvement with women's refuge movements in their respective countries (UK and US). Though Aguilera is without question the more famous of the two, both made a significant impact in telling their personal stories. In Aguilera's case, this entailed talking about her violent father and the household characterised by domestic violence she grew up with. Jamelia's story was one of domestic violence in her own marriage, and she spoke in interviews about still feeling terrified, especially when the song came out, that her ex-husband would come after her. However, the 'package deal' - of public recognition of the problem, and the strong, feisty identity the narrators represent – is inseparable from the restrictive 'free' sexuality identified at the beginning of this section, and the uncomfortable conclusion that the abuse was, in some ways, a good thing for the narrators' individual personal development.

### **2004: The 411 – 'On My Knees'**

The 411, at first glance, looked like a manufactured copy of the All Saints, and their debut (and only) album *Between The Sheets* reflected this as their target market. However, their first single, 'On Your Knees', told a story based on the

domestic violence experienced by one member of the band, Carolyn Owlett. This song is unusual in that it gives voice to both the perpetrator of domestic violence and the woman experiencing it. As the woman's voice is sung by the three women who make up the 411, and the perpetrator is voiced by an outsider to the band (Ghostface Killah from the Wu Tang Clan, who has had some personal experience of domestic violence<sup>174</sup>).

'On My Knees' charts the entire relationship, from its happy and hopeful beginning to its violent and heartbreaking end. The first verse narrates how the couple met ("it was on the train"), exchanged phone numbers ("you said give me a call"), and fell in love ("pure bliss from above"). The end of the verse introduces the disharmony in the relationship ("now all we seem to do is fuss and fight"), but this is not yet presented as one-sided violence.

It is the second verse that establishes this relationship as abusive by painting a typical domestic violence scenario. The couple is "*home alone / you were on the sofa / I was on the phone*". When he hears that she is talking on the phone to a male friend, he "*went crazy, started going insane / grabbed the phone from my hand / backed me against the wall*". She tries to explain that it is "*just a friend*" she is talking to, but he does not believe her and "*that's when all the madness began*". At the beginning, the 'madness' is confined to verbal abuse and accusations ("*you kept yelling wild I fell to the floor / crying these tears, can't cry them no more / I knew you had a temper / I wish I didn't see it / you wanted me to be faithful / I told you I could be it*"). However, it is clear that however much she agrees with his demands and however upset she appears, that there is no way to stop the progression to physical abuse from this point: "*But that didn't stop you from putting your hands on my face / you simply said you had to put me in my place*". The verse ends hopefully, with the narrator realising that there is something better than this, and that she has to get out of this relationship to find it ("*at the end of every tunnel there's always a light / and the door.. it sure looks right*").

The dialogue between the woman and the perpetrator is made explicit at the beginning of the song, with the two parts interspersed, though not interacting with each other (perpetrator's voice in bold):

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<sup>174</sup> Ghostface Killah has said that his mother was a victim of domestic violence. He has also admitted hitting women when he was much younger, but has said that now he respects women and wants to speak out against domestic violence. These remarks were given in the context of an interview about Chris Brown's assault on Rihanna (2009), and can be seen here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OskXIykTiek>

*"I can't fall down on my knees  
I thought you loved me  
and apologise to you  
If you really loved me you would've stayed with me  
And apologised to me that's all I asked for  
coz that ain't my style"*

This is the only point in the song at which the two voices appear at the same time. After the introduction, both voices are present, but are on their own, except as we will see later, when the female voice has the support of her friends (and the assumed voice of the audience).

The third verse is made up entirely of the perpetrator's voice, and re-tells the story, told in the second verse by the woman, from his perspective. It runs:

*"And yo', I asked you to calm down  
asked you who was on the phone put the horn down  
you had a glass of wine, a Versace night gown, a lime green one  
that I bought you for your trip from the cruise you won  
I don't approve of those male friends  
I told you back then when we first got together  
I don't trust those men  
and you did it again  
I lost my temper blinked out and wrecked the house boo  
that's all I can remember, I'm sorry"*

He presents as reasonable his demand to know who she is talking to on the phone, and does this by situating her, sexually as his with his reference to the fact that she is wearing a nightgown while talking on the phone, and it is an expensive designer one that he bought for her. He reminds her that he has already told her that he does not approve of her having male friends, and that he does not trust them. Again, this removes any agency from the woman – it does not allow her to choose to be faithful to him, but rather assumes that she can be 'taken' from him by other men. Any 'discussion' of whether it was appropriate for her to have male friends seems to be limited to him having 'told' her before. The issue now is that she has gone against his demands ("you did it again"). He follows this with an admission that he lost his temper, and though he admits violence against the property ("wrecked the house"), he does not reference the fact that he hit her, instead saying that he "blinked out" and cannot remember doing anything else, for which he apologises.

Before moving onto the response of the narrator (and chorus) to this, it is important to note that though the band (as the voice/s of the victim) is made up of white women, the perpetrator's voice is unmistakably black. Even if Ghostface

Killah (real name Dennis Coles) was not well-known, the language (and accent) used is highly racialised (examples: "And yo', I asked you to calm down", "blinked out and wrecked the house boo", "come back to the crib"). Though there is no doubt that domestic and sexual violence exists in couples where the man is black and the woman is white (and that this comes with its own problematic power dynamic), we should also bear in mind the rape myth explored in Chapter 1 in which the majority of perpetrators are assumed to be black men, and the majority of victims white women or children.

The middle 8 of the song acts as a Greek chorus, in which all three members of the band sing together to describe and interpret the situation and prescribe advice:

*"He's got you begging on your knees  
crying in your sleep  
making you believe him  
but you're stronger  
than you'll ever know girl  
you control your own world  
no need to take no more"*

Though the perpetrator gives reasons and excuses for his behaviour, these are not accepted by the female narrator. This stands in contrast to the narrative we saw in Suzanne Vega's 'Luka', in which the narrator had neither the outside support or the internal emotional resources to stand up to the abuser. We see that the female narrator of 'On My Knees' has both. The other female voices act as a supporting chorus, and she is able to say that she will not apologise for her behaviour ("I can't fall down on my knees / and apologise to you"), as she did nothing wrong, simply because he is bullying her to do so. She is even able to assert a feisty identity while doing this, saying that apologising in a situation like this "ain't my style". The title of the song is also significant here. Although he has physically pushed her around and she has ended up on the floor as a result of his violence, and her distress, she is 'on her knees' only in a physical sense. The other meaning of the phrase in the context of the song is that of suppliant, a woman who would accept her treatment and fate at the hands of this man. But this narrator refuses to be bowed, and expresses her resistance, even while in the violent situation. The way the Greek chorus identifies the woman as a survivor differs slightly from the way it is done in the Aguilera and Jamelia songs. In this case, the identity is closer to that we saw in the second phase (inner strength despite the abuse), rather than positioning her as being stronger because of the

abuse. However, there is a definite reference to a much more postfeminist notion of identity and agency in their narrative as they say "*you control your own world*", which we return to in the conclusion of this chapter.

After the song got to number 4 in the charts, band member Carolyn Owlett gave an interview to the *Guardian*, in which she said, "*It's not exactly how I wanted to make a name for myself. But it's good revenge. He [the ex-boyfriend] called me up after it was a hit and said, 'That's about me, isn't it? Damn right it is.*" Owlett was in the relationship from age 17 to 19, and she says the song is "*actually a very sanitised version of what it was like*". When asked why she didn't leave the relationship, she said, "*It's much easier said than done. He was always saying sorry. Because you love them, you take them back and forgive and it goes on.*" (quoted in Simpson 2004)

This notion of song-as-revenge is not new. People have been 'getting their own back' on lovers, friends and family in song lyrics as far back as pop music goes, and we only need take an example like Carly Simon's ode to Warren Beatty, 'You're So Vain', to see just how effective it can be. However, in the case of these three songs about domestic violence, this seems more to do with getting over the experience, and personal development, than simply 'having a go' at someone.

Coulthard argues (in her analysis of 'justified revenge' in Tarantino's 'Kill Bill' films) that in a postfeminist world, "*a new emphasis on 'postvictim' feminism has transferred attention towards debates about the presence of violent women in cinema and popular culture and away from women as victimized subjects to violence*" (Coulthard, in Tasker and Negra eds, 2007, p. 154). Though Uma Thurman's character, the Bride, in *Kill Bill* (Tarantino 2003,4) is unequivocally violent, holding her own among, and doing better than, all the other violent characters, including the men in the film. However, she has also undoubtedly been victimised. The audience is left in no doubt that she has been repeatedly raped during her years in a coma (as well as having been shot and almost killed on her wedding day, and separated from her daughter). This justified motive for her (admittedly extreme) violence allows us to read the Bride as a Sara Thornton<sup>175</sup> figure, rather than as an intrinsically violent woman. Though none of the female narrators of these songs get revenge in a violent way, it is interesting

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<sup>175</sup> Thornton was jailed for life in 1989 for killing her violent alcoholic husband. Her incarceration provoked outrage in many UK feminist groups working against domestic violence, who argued that her act was one of self-defence, and the only option left open to her, given that she was not protected in any other way.

to see the notion arise in this phase for the first time, as it, and its potentially more physical aspects, will be explored more fully in the next section.

## 5. Phase 4: Domestic what? Getting as good as you give...

I would like to take Coulthard's analysis of 'postvictim' feminism one step further and suggest that we have now entered an era in which representations suggest to us that the very concept of gendered violence is incompatible with postfeminist sensibilities.

In two songs from 2007, Kate Nash's chart number one, 'Foundations', and Florence and the Machine's debut single, 'Kiss With A Fist', the themes explored in the third phase are continued but taken to an extreme. Both songs present relationships that contain violence, or the promise of it, but in neither case is this presented as domestic violence. The narrators in both cases are presented as agentic, and the relationships are presented as equal in terms of power.

### **2007: Kate Nash – 'Foundations'**

In the Kate Nash song, an immature relationship is presented, in which the two people involved do not treat each other with much respect or kindness. It begins:

*"On this Thursday night, everything's fine, except you've got that look in your eye  
When I'm telling a story and you find it boring,  
you're thinking of something to say.  
You'll go along with it then drop it and humiliate me in front of our friends.  
Then I'll use that voice that you find annoying and say something like  
"yeah, intelligent input, darlin', why don't you just have another beer  
then?"  
Then you'll call me a bitch  
and everyone we're with will be embarrassed,  
and I won't give a shit."*

Nash narrates a very clear picture of a relationship that is young, classed<sup>176</sup>, and dysfunctional. The narrator knows that the relationship is not a healthy one, and that she should probably leave. The chorus runs:

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<sup>176</sup> Though there are markers in many of the songs here to indicate working class characters in the songs (for example, neighbourhood observation and involvement in all of the songs in Phase 1), Nash's song utilises the 'chav' culture so often referred to in other media at the same time. For

*"My finger tips are holding onto the cracks in our foundation,  
and I know that I should let go, but I can't.  
And every time we fight I know it's not right,  
every time that you're upset and I smile.  
I know I should forget, but I can't."*

Though Nash gives her narrator the knowledge that she 'should' leave, but 'can't', this is not set in the context of domestic violence, but rather of the relationship being 'not right'. Though it could easily be called abusive, it is mutually abusive. There is an assumption of equality in terms of the relationship's power dynamic, in which the narrator is able to give as good as she gets. This is disrupted only once in 'Foundations', where it is acknowledged that the threat of violence is there, (but it is not taken too seriously):

*"Yes, it was childish and you got aggressive,  
and I must admit that I was a bit scared,  
but it gives me thrills to wind you up."*

The 'childish' provocation that is given is that, after being called 'bitter' by her partner, the narrator said she would rather be with his friends than him ("*because they are much fitter*"). The song continues with descriptions of equal provocations and general dissatisfaction with the relationship. However, that sole disruption does allow us to read a (mainly unspoken) inequality into the relationship. If both participants are equally powerful and abusive, why would the narrator be 'a bit scared'? There is a seeming awareness that the narrator could, with enough provocation on her part, step into a world in which they would not be equally powerful, and that she would lose (if the fight became physical). But as the song returns to, and ends with, the narrator's dilemma over whether to stay in, or leave, this mutually unhealthy relationship, the fiction of their equality is re-established and maintained.

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detailed analysis and critique of this phenomenon in the UK, read Tyler's (2008) *Chav Mum, Chav Scum*, and also Finding (2008) on its application in TV comedy show *Little Britain* (2003-).

## **2007: Florence and the Machine – 'Kiss With A Fist'**

Both the title of this song and its content recall nothing so much as the Crystals' 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)', from 45 years earlier, and the focus of the first section of this chapter. The official UK Amazon review (Amazon 2009) calls 'Kiss With A Fist' "a jokey celebration of mutual domestic violence", and the complaints after the song was aired on radio led its creator (Florence Welch) to refute these claims. However, before we look at Welch's comments, we will first turn to the song itself.

'Kiss With A Fist' begins,

*"You hit me once  
I hit you back  
You gave a kick  
I gave a slap  
You smashed a plate over my head  
Then I set fire to our bed"*

This verse is repeated a further three times throughout the song. The relationship between the couple is presented as mutually violent, or 'tempestuous'. Neither fear nor pain are referenced, though it seems impossible that neither could be present in the situations being described in the song. The violence is presented without consequence, other than as a demonstration of passion and equality between the couple. When the narrator sings, "Then I set fire to our bed", it provides an image that conflates passion, violence and sex, given the reference to the bed, and the double meaning of 'on fire'.

Though there are physical results of the violence between the couple, these are presented as inconsequential:

*"My black eye casts no shadow  
Your red eye sees nothing  
Your slap don't stick  
Your kicks don't hit  
So we remain the same  
Love sticks  
Sweat drips  
Break the lock if it don't fit"*

Welch takes a 'Punch and Judy' approach to the relationship she narrates. The mutual domestic violence is cartoonish: both participants get straight up after being hit/slapped/punched and give back as good as they got.

Much like the Crystals' song, the violence is presented as potentially healthy for the relationship, and certainly preferable to not being in a relationship at all. This is most evident in the chorus, which runs:

*"A kick to the teeth is good for some  
A kiss with a fist is better than none"*

As the song continues, the violence becomes even more extreme:

*"I broke your jaw once before  
I spilled your blood upon the floor  
You broke my leg in return  
So sit back and watch the bed burn  
Love sticks  
Sweat drips  
Break the lock if it don't fit"*

The song is short (2 minutes, 15 seconds) and ends with the repeated chorus. It is a high-energy song, as is the accompanying music video. Welch is dressed in a very 'girly' fashion - in a flowery top, short skirt and heels, with a heart-shaped wreath of flowers round her neck - somewhat at odds with the violent lyrics she is singing - and as the song continues, the wind blows up her skirt to reveal her black suspenders and red frilly knickers. As she sings, she dances around, or lies on the bed she "set fire to". The video, like the song, is upbeat, and definitely presents Welch as having fun as she dances. We also see a man in the video who gets punched in the face (though seems to bear no ill-effects of this), but we do not see Welch receive any of the same treatment, despite the mutual violence of the lyrics.

As previously mentioned, there were some complaints when 'Kiss With A Fist' was aired on radio, on the grounds that the song was condoning domestic violence. Songwriter Florence Welch was quick to address this on her MySpace blog. On 7<sup>th</sup> June 2008 she wrote:

***"Kiss with a fist is NOT a song about domestic violence. it is about two people pushing each other to phsyiological [sic] extremes because they love each other. the song is not about one person being attacked, or any actual physical violence, there are no victims in this song. sometimes the love two people have for each other is a destructive force. but they cant have it any other way, because its what holds them together, they enjoy the drama and pushing each others buttons. the only way to express these extreme emotions is with extreme imagery, all of which is fantasism and nothing in the song is based on reality."***

*leona lewis's bleeding love isn't actually about her bleeding.*

*this isn't really about punching someone in the face. thank you and goodnight. x"* (Welch 2008)

Welch argues in this blog post that because her song is not narrating a literal experience, it cannot be about domestic violence. She differentiates her song from a domestic violence relationship because the (metaphorical) violence is mutual ("*the song is not about one person being attacked*") and no negative consequences are presented ("*there are no victims*").

While the point she makes about Leona Lewis' song 'Bleeding Love' echoes the point in the introduction to this chapter, she exhibits a great deal of naivety in her assumption that simply saying that "*this isn't really about punching someone in the face*" will stop a reading of domestic violence into a song narrating punching someone in the face in the context of a relationship. And while the phrase 'bleeding love' is easily understood as a metaphor because it has no literal meaning, the same cannot be said for, "*You hit me once / I hit you back*". In a subsequent interview (Garvey, Woman's Hour, 2009), Welch said that she had written the song when she was 16, when she had 'no understanding of domestic violence'. (ibid)

The lack of understanding around domestic violence in pop music right now (2009), despite media attention of particular incidences<sup>177</sup>, is not limited to Welch and her song. At the time of writing this section (July 2009), the two top selling artists in the UK (other than Michael Jackson, who died a week before this chart) are Florence and the Machine and La Roux. La Roux (real name Elly Jackson) was asked in an interview (Turner 2009) for her "stance on the way that female musicians either choose to or are forced to use a sexuality that's essentially just designed to appeal to men?" Jackson replied:

*"It's really patronising to women. I know that there's far more ways to be sexy than to dress in a miniskirt and a tank top. If you're a real woman you can turn someone on in a plastic bag just by looking at them. That's what a real woman is, when you've got the sex eyes. I think you attract a certain kind of man by dressing like that. Women wonder why they get beaten up, or having relationships with arsehole men. Because you attracted one, you twat."*<sup>178</sup> (Turner 2009)

Though this does not invisibilise domestic violence, it certainly returns to the pre-feminist days of 'asking for it' characterised by the jokes about wife-beating and

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<sup>177</sup> For example, of US pop star Rihanna's beating at the hands of her partner, Chris Brown

<sup>178</sup> Thanks to Mike Gray for drawing my attention to this interview

the acceptability of Punch and Judy, and plays into the rape myths we examined in Chapter 1 by making women responsible for the crime they have experienced.

Perhaps, in the case of 'Kiss With A Fist', and Welch's explanation of it, it is the use of domestic violence imagery as standing in for something else that is most significant. This song does not stand alone in this. There was controversy when (hipster band and NME favourite) the Crystal Castles had their band T-shirts printed up with artist Trevor Brown's image of Madonna with a black eye. Giving mainstream music culture (of which Madonna is one of the primary symbols) a metaphorical black eye, by choosing 'alternative' music instead is a clear, if not terribly sophisticated, message. However, in all the potential layers of meaning of both the t-shirt example here, and 'Kiss With A Fist', it seems easy to forget the original recognisable meaning of the imagery, which I argue in the conclusion, is an inevitable outcome of the developing postfeminist consciousness.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter shows, in many ways, a full circle in terms of the representation of domestic violence in pop music. The lack of understanding of the causes and impact of domestic violence we saw in the Crystals' song 'He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)' from 1962 is echoed nowhere through the songs in this chapter until we reach 2007, and get to 'Kiss With A Fist'. However, if we read all of these songs through the lens of the transition from pre-feminism to second wave feminism to postfeminism (and beyond its advent), this sudden regression seems not so sudden at all.

As I outlined many of the legal and political changes that occurred in the transition between the pre-feminism representation and those found after the changes second-wave feminism was able to bring about, I will focus instead here on the later transitions: second-wave to postfeminism, and earlier postfeminism to later postfeminism.

While critics of some of second wave feminism's approaches to domestic violence were right to point out its categorisation of the woman involved as an 'othered' victim, without character or agency of her own<sup>179</sup>, this transition towards a 'postfeminist moment' seemed to overcompensate in this area. The move towards

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<sup>179</sup> As well as criticisms of the heteronormative, racialised and classed approach in which more powerful white feminists claimed to speak for all women.

'agency' was not characterised only by women's ability to no longer be a somewhat two-dimensional 'victim', but with an individualism that permeated every area of popular culture, including music. As Gill (2007c) writes:

*"Notions of choice, of 'being oneself', and 'pleasing oneself' are central to the postfeminist sensibility that suffuses contemporary Western media culture. They resonate powerfully with the emphasis upon empowerment and taking control that can be seen in talk shows, advertising and makeover shows. A grammar of individualism underpins all these notions - such that even experiences of racism or homophobia or domestic violence are framed in exclusively personal terms in a way that turns the idea of the personal as political on its head. Lois McNay (1992) has called this the deliberate 'reprivatisation' of issues that have only relatively recently become politicised." (Gill 2007c)*

It was this 'reprivatisation' of domestic violence that led to the problematic 'thank you' to the abuser in the third phase of songwriting we explored. When the personal development of the individual (and her feistiness, sexuality and inner strength) is paramount, the politics of the issue become irrelevant, as do the cultural influences that may have led to what Gill describes as the "relentless personalising" of all aspects of life, including violence.

The 'choices' that came with the focus on agency and individualism were also not as varied as the notion of 'free choice' might suggest they would be. Levy's conclusion that the expressions of sexuality are somewhat uniform in their 'red-light' approach is certainly supported by the music videos and performances of female artists in this phase. Postfeminism, characterised by the TV show *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) et al, made it socially acceptable for women to consent to sex with multiple partners, go to strip clubs, take on the Aguilera-esque sexual identity in terms of dress etc<sup>180</sup>. and, I would now add, to 'give as good as they get' in terms of violence (in any form) in relationships. It is a logical conclusion that feminism must confer on women the right to behave as badly as men have traditionally done, however disappointing a conclusion this seems in light of the sacrifices that were made to achieve it. However, it seems from both McRobbie's and Levy's work that women's empowerment does not include the option to either criticise or, more simply, not engage in these things, if women want to be seen as anything other than hopelessly out of date and prudish:

*"There is quietude and complicity in the manners of generationally specific notions of cool, and more precisely an uncritical relation to dominant commercially produced sexual representations which actively invoke*

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<sup>180</sup> See Gill (2007a) for further work on this issue

*hostility to assumed feminist positions from the past in order to endorse a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure, free of politics*" (McRobbie p.260)

I would argue that the two songs analysed in the last section of this chapter represent the inevitable conclusion of postfeminism – the erasing of gendered violence. If we have achieved gender equality, then how can a violence based on an unequal power dynamic between the sexes exist? Projansky argues that

*"postfeminism's version of feminism assumes that anti-rape activism is no longer necessary, ultimately holds women responsible for responding to rape, often recenters white men in the name of feminist anti-rape activism, and perpetuates a long-standing tradition of excluding women of colour, particularly Black women, from rape scenarios in ways that negate rape's complexity and frequency in their lives"* (Projansky 2001 p. 232).

Though never funded enough to work at optimal potential, organisations like Rape Crisis have been forced to close many of their branches over the last ten years due to a major shortfall in funding. Projansky's interpretation of postfeminist representations of rape (in film and television) from 2001, is taken to its logical conclusion at the time of writing (2009), with regard to music. Anti-rape activism is no longer necessary, if we live in a world without rape. Though I have not divided the chapter which follows (which analyses songs narrating rape) into the same sections with regard to time periods, if I had, it would be clear to see that no significant songs narrating sexual violence have been written in the last five years. As rape, by its very definition, cannot be presented as 'mutual', it cannot fit anywhere into this framework.

Of course domestic violence and rape still continue, but the erasure of the media narratives of them is necessary if the fiction of postfeminism is to be maintained. I began this chapter by referencing some of the physical metaphors used to describe sexual relationships in songs, and noted the potential oddness of them despite their ubiquity (and the oddness of our not finding them odd, possibly *because of their ubiquity*). Though the images that the Florence and the Machine song has utilised have jarred with some, it seems that there are far more who have accepted the use of domestic violence as metaphor without question. We must ask how this can be the case, when we do not live in a utopia in which the original referents for these domestic violence metaphors are somehow 'long gone' or behind us. However, it seems that these later postfeminist representations would like us to respond as if this were indeed the case. It is certainly easier to perpetuate and accept images of female agency, sexuality and choice if there are

no roadblocks, such as power imbalances or gendered violence in the way. There is also no doubt that this is a world view most would rather accept, as it is much more pleasant to not have to think about the alternative. However, if it is not true, those 'free choices' begin to look less free. Alternative UK band The Indelicates addressed this in a song which could be read as a direct rebuttal of 'Kiss With A Fist' and Welch's fun, 'girly' video accompanying it, and it is with their words of dissent that I conlude this chapter:

*"Let's just be pretty, it's more fun that way  
Let's just be pretty  
Let's just be beautiful  
Let's just be retro and disco and twee  
We don't know the song so we can't sing along  
And our daughters will never be free"*

## Chapter 5:

### 'Tell me it's all an illusion': insider understandings of sexual violence, and its aftermath, in song

*See, sometimes anger's subtle, stocked in metaphor  
Full of finesse and dressed in allure  
Yes, sometimes anger's subtle, less rage than sad  
Leaking slow through spigots you didn't know you had.  
And sometimes it's just... fuck you. Fuck you.  
You see, and to me, that's poetry too.*

Alix Olson ('Subtle Sister')

#### Introduction

In *High Fidelity* (Hornby 1995), Nick Hornby's protagonist Rob Gordon asks, "Did I listen to pop music because I was miserable? Or was I miserable because I listened to pop music?" On many occasions, I have been asked similar questions about this project: e.g. 'How do you explain the number of female artists singing about sexual violence? There are so many! Do you think it's because women who have experienced sexual violence are more drawn to expressing themselves through the arts?'. Though the last part does lend itself to an interesting debate<sup>181</sup>, the question on the whole, though well meant, seemed mostly to be based on a belief that the number of women singing about sexual violence is disproportionate to (i.e. higher than) the number of women experiencing it. A brief return to the statistics we encountered in Chapter 1 reveals that there is no such bias, and, taking the 'one in four' statistic into account, as well as the obvious fact that not every artist who has experienced sexual violence writes a song about it, it is clear that the first-person sexual violence narratives we encounter in music show a significant *under-representation*.

There are some artists who have spoken out about their experiences outside the context of their music, or have had them documented in biographies. For example, Billie Holiday's history of childhood sexual violence is well known, despite her not having sung about it<sup>182</sup>. Similarly Connie Francis' experience of rape does not present itself in any obvious way through her music, although she

<sup>181</sup> See 'She Who Was Lost Is Remembered' (Wisechild 1991)

<sup>182</sup> Billie Holiday reported being raped at ten years old, which led to her being sent to a Catholic reform school. At thirteen, Holiday's mother found their neighbour, Wilbert Rich, raping her daughter. Rich was sentenced to only three months in prison.

has spoken of it in public<sup>183</sup>. When Michelle Shocked's album, *Short Sharp Shocked*, was released, the press blurb that accompanied it listed some of Shocked's identities, one of which was 'rape victim'<sup>184</sup>, and although Shocked did not address the rape specifically on the album, she did say in an interview that the experience had made her more aware of other issues, such as racism, because she had been victimised purely on the basis of being a woman<sup>185</sup> (Elisabeth Lopez *The Age*, Melbourne, Australia, 15 December 1989). Similarly, not every artist who has written a first-person narrative of sexual violence has spoken out - in a non-musical way - about their personal experience.

However, while I initially thought I might be able to give a reasonably comprehensive overview of songs containing a narrative of sexual violence, I soon realised that the number of songs that could be counted as such was overwhelming. In order to do some justice to the wide range of available narratives, I take a thematic approach to this chapter. On studying the songs, it became clear that many of them fitted specific themes that arose in Chapter 1 (rape myths and 'accepted' narratives of sexual violence) and Chapter 2 (meaning-making and the aftermath of sexual violence), and so it is these themes that I focus on specifically here. Though I split the analysed songs into these three categories in this chapter, it will be clear throughout that each song would have something to say about each category.

We saw in Chapter 1 the ways in which 'rape myths' form our (mis)understandings of sexual violence, and explored some of the ways in which various media forms have perpetuated or challenged these myths. Although it is not the case that there are no 'stranger in a dark alley attacking a woman in a short skirt' narratives of sexual violence in music, these appear to be in the minority, rather than the majority, of stories. Rather, what emerges in many of the narratives is a much more nuanced account of the incidences of sexual violence that get talked about far less: the older mentor taking advantage of his

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<sup>183</sup> Connie Francis was robbed and raped at knifepoint by a stranger in a motel after her performance at Westbury Music Fair in 1974. She subsequently successfully sued the motel owner for lack of appropriate security at the motel (including incorrect door locks and no lighting in the parking area). On an appearance on the *Larry King Show* in 2002, Francis revealed that she did not speak the word 'rape', nor did she work again, for seven years, until an appearance on the *David Hartman Show*, after which she received hundreds of letters from rape victims, which made her go on "a real crusade". When asked by King how she recovered from the rape, Francis said that she had not: that she had never slept in a room alone since the rape and that she still experienced flashbacks in the night, leaving her crying and hysterical.

<sup>184</sup> Others included 'squatter', 'feminist', 'anarchist', 'Texan' and 'pirate radio DJ'

<sup>185</sup> Shocked described her assault as having occurred while Shocked was travelling around, protesting nuclear bases: "Then some guy offered me a ride to Rome, raped me and offered me money for it afterward. That drove me to a women's separatist commune." (quoted in Lopez 1989)

young protégé; the father relying on the fear and shame-induced secrecy from his daughter, and the women who crucify themselves in the aftermath of sexual violence long before and long after attempts to do so by the justice system or the media. In the first section, I focus in particular on four songs that have something different to say about rape myths than the media representations we examined in Chapter 1.

The second section of this chapter will examine five narratives that focus specifically on the narrator's attempts to make meaning from their formative experiences of sexual violence in childhood. The reason for selecting narratives of childhood sexual abuse here is twofold. Firstly, these narratives represent a significant portion of the sexual violence stories being told through pop music, and as such, it is important to look at them as a category in their own right. Secondly, there are specific issues which arise when discussing childhood sexual abuse, which are not discussed in detail elsewhere in this project, such as the role of the bystander (in these instances, usually either a parent or the audience), the use of a totem on which to project the experience (in all of these narratives represented by a doll), and the isolation children experience from both family and childhood friends when they are subjected to an alien, 'adult' experience that they must keep secret.

In order to explore these issues, it is vital to examine the framework in which children make sense of their own lives, given to them by the (reassuringly formulaic) stories they are exposed to, in particular here: fairy tales, children's books, and Bible stories about God. Here, I draw on work by Bettelheim and Culbertson in order to engage with the importance of these narratives for children. This section then looks specifically at abused children's (dis)identification with these narratives and their protagonists, in light of the comparison with their own personal experiences. Having rejected the usual childhood narrative fare, these narrators are left to write their own narratives in order to attempt to process their experiences and formulate an understanding of the world in which they live.

Although the factual and fictional media representation of sexual violence tends to focus solely on the incident or incidences of violence, this renders invisible the aftermath of such experiences, which we might liken to the tail of a comet<sup>186</sup>. A comet's tail is formed, not just of the debris attracted to trail after the comet at

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<sup>186</sup> Thanks to James Mackenzie for suggesting this analogy

its formation, but also as it travels, picking up dust, gas, ice, stones and boulders, which all attach themselves to it. The tail of the comet can end up being millions of miles long, in comparison to the hundred or so miles of the actual comet. Likewise, the comet's tail of sexual violence encompasses all sorts of emotional and physical debris: substance misuse, eating disorders, self-harm, mistrust in others, dysfunctional sexual relationships, depression, and even suicide. This is well understood in the trauma literature we examined in Chapter 2, and even reflected in titles such as Brison's 'Aftermath' and Rothschild's 'The Body Remembers'. In this chapter, I suggest that, unlike those film and TV representations that were discussed in Chapter 1, many songs concerned with sexual violence move away from the tropes of the hot shower and the hair-cutting, and even from the event itself, in order to engage fully with the comet's tail of the experience.

In order to look at the aftermath, I refer to the major research contributions made by Judith Herman and Liz Kelly in their work with survivors of 'father-daughter incest' (Herman 1981), and rape, domestic violence and incest (Kelly 1988). Both Herman and Kelly asked their research participants to comment on the ways in which their experiences of sexual violence had coloured their attitudes to men, sex, themselves, and many other aspects of their lives. In examining five songs (from different genres), I hope to be able to show the ways in which songs are able to reflect the long-term impact of sexual violence. Though this section will deal with the more observable aftermath of sexual violence (many forms of self-harming behaviour and inability to form subsequent healthy sexual relationships, for example), it is also important to note the internal turmoil and changes that can take place in the moment of, and in the aftermath of, sexual violence, as referenced in Chapter 2.

Finally, I suggest some notable differences between the narratives explored in this chapter and those discussed in Chapter 4, and place these in the context of media representation of sexual violence in general.

## 1. 'Grey areas' and 'accepted' narratives of sexual violence

### a) Tori Amos – 'Me And A Gun'

The most significant song about sexual violence, in terms of its impact, is undoubtedly Tori Amos' 'Me And A Gun'; an *a capella* account of rape, based on Amos' personal experience. Not only was it the first time that rape had been presented quite so starkly, and by a woman who was prepared to talk about her own experience of it as well, but the thousands of stories of sexual violence Amos was hearing from her audience members led her to - in 1994 - co-found RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), the only national helpline in America for people who have experienced sexual violence. The song is very closely modelled on Amos' personal experience, a fact which will be explored in Chapter 6's discussion of autobiography and part-fictionalisation with regard to Amos and this particular song. Because of this closeness, though I have tried to refer to 'the narrator' of the song, there are certain aspects of the song which are able to be more fully analysed alongside extracts of interviews Amos has given about her own experiences.

The narrator of the song is raped by a stranger, which we might interpret as fitting in with the limited narratives of sexual violence. However, as the song progresses, we see that the narrative is much more complex than those described in Chapter 1. Though this analysis will focus on the lyrics, it is important to mention two aspects of the song's presentation: the *a capella* nature of the song, and the fact that the experience is described in the present tense. Both of these qualities render the song immediate, unsafe, and uncomfortable to listen to.

The song is essentially a descriptive narrative, without a great deal of room for interpretation. For example, the first lines, "5am / Friday morning / Thursday night / Far from sleep / I'm still up and driving / Can't go home / Obviously / So I'll just change direction / Cause they'll soon know where I live / And I wanna live / Got a full tank and some chips" set the scene of the assault. She continues, "It was / Me and a gun / And a man on my back / And I sang "holy holy"<sup>187</sup> / As he buttoned down his pants". So far in the song, we are being told a story, being given the physical, observable details of what happened, including the narrator singing during the assault.

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<sup>187</sup> Though it is not explained in the song lyrics, the line about the narrator singing has close resonance with Amos' personal experience. She has stated in interviews that her attacker (a fan who she gave a list home to after a show) ordered her to sing as he held her captive.

The next lines give us some insight into the narrator's internal experience of the assault: "*You can laugh / It's kind of funny / The things you think / At times like these / Like I haven't seen Barbados / So I must get out of this*". Many people who have experienced some sort of life-threatening, or suddenly serious incident, whether it is an assault or a car accident will know the ironic laughter the narrator reports here. No one knows how they will react or what they will think in such a situation, and as a result, the thoughts can seem very random in retrospect. In this case, the narrator latches onto places she has never been as a reason she must stay alive (the recurring motif in the song is Barbados, but later she also mentions "*Carolina / Where the biscuits are soft and sweet*"). The realisation, "*I wanna live*" is perhaps stronger for her in a situation where that is threatened than it has been previously, and suddenly the narrator knows that there is much more she wants to do in this life.

The narrator invites the ironic laughter but then stops it short by returning to the very physical description of the assault, and then back to the random thoughts. This is best illustrated with the lines, "*These things go through your head / When there's a man on your back / And you're pushed flat on your stomach / It's not a classic Cadillac*". When Amos sings the line "*And you're pushed flat on your stomach*", she emphasises 'flat' in a way that makes it sound as though she is being pushed down at that moment. She also uses 'you' to its greatest effect here, making the listeners have some of her experience for themselves. It is a lot easier for the listener to be included in "*the things you think at times like these*", than it is when the narrator changes "*a man on my back*" to "*a man on your back / And you're pushed flat on your stomach*". Whether the listener likes it or not, Amos is taking them into the depths of that experience with her narrator. How the listener reacts will of course be affected by whether or not they have had their own experience of sexual violence, but if this is not the case, it could be a deeply shocking insight<sup>188</sup>.

Although the song stands mainly as a personal narrative, there is one overtly political (feminist) comment about the politics of sexual violence:

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<sup>188</sup> This insight is what Amos hoped for with 'Me And A Gun'. She said, "*I was kidnapped and sexually violated. You feel like your boundaries have been crossed to such an extent that there is no law anymore, that there is no God. You feel like the Mother in you will do anything to protect the child in you from being shredded before your very eyes. You're thinking 'I gotta get out alive, I gotta get out alive.' With 'Me And A Gun', I hope that attackers as well as victims are listening. As well as judges, as well as lawyers. I want you to taste in the back of your mouth what it was like to be in the car with that pervert.*" (quoted in Jackson 1994)

*"Yes I wore a slinky red thing  
Does that mean I should spread  
For you  
Your friends  
Your father  
Mr. Ed?"*

The narrator is specifically refuting one of the rape myths we explored in Chapter 1, by saying that however provocatively she was dressed, she did not deserve to be assaulted<sup>189</sup>. Yet though Amos' narrator seems to believe this, the 'slinky red thing' and Amos' sexual performance style are included in the reasons Amos herself gave for not reporting her assault ("With American law as it is and the fact that I'm an entertainer and the kind of performer I was – like Michelle Pfeiffer in 'The Baker Boys' - I knew I was going to be set up<sup>190</sup>")

The song takes a religious theme for the first time with the lines, "And I know / What this means / Me and Jesus / A few years back / Used to hang / and he said / "It's your choice babe / just remember / I don't think / You'll be back / In 3 days time / So you choose well". Amos' relationship to Christianity is well documented and 'a few years back' seems to refer to the narrator's time living at home with her family and all the church-life she experienced then. 'Used to hang' has an obvious double meaning – on one hand the narrator is talking about her past relationship with Jesus, and, on the other, it is a reference to the crucifixion. It seems as though the remainder of those lines refer to a time when the narrator felt like killing herself – but chose not to, as her death would have been permanent, with no resurrection on earth.

*"Tell me what's right / Is it my right / To be on my stomach / Of Fred's Seville?"* With these lines, the narrator once again uses wordplay. 'Tell me what's right' is asking the listener what the morals of this situation are, but then 'Is it my right' [to be raped] throws up some interesting questions along the same lines as the 'slinky red thing' part of the song. It is a strange question to ask – 'do I have the right to be raped?', it is more likely that someone would ask, 'don't I have the right not to be raped?', and it is not clear that these two questions share the same sentiment. Just as these words jar, once again, the narrator moves from the more abstract discussion of right and rights, straight back into the very physical nature of the assault, "To be on my stomach / In Fred's Seville", lest the

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<sup>189</sup> The response of Amos' audience to this particular rape myth is explored in Chapter 7.

<sup>190</sup> quoted in Jackson (1994)

listener reach a place of comfort in these more cerebral questions. The song ends with as much discomfort as it began. The final lines, "And I haven't seen *Barbados / So I must get out of this*" leave us stranded with the narrator in the car, not knowing whether she gets out alive or not. The story is unresolved and the experience remains currently happening every time the song is played. The power of the song is undeniable.

Amos' song takes an accepted form of sexual violence (stranger rape), but still challenges rape myths from within that narrative. Further challenges can be found in songs that take as their base a form of sexual violence that does not fit the standard mould. Here, I draw on two songs by mainstream (yet not quite pop) artists, Alanis Morissette and Sheryl Crow, and one song by Ani DiFranco, who is completely independent. Both the song by Alanis Morissette and the song by Sheryl Crow are narratives of sexual exploitation of a young girl at the hands of an older man in the music industry. Ani DiFranco's song explores sexual approaches from a man who had promised not to make any, in a situation in which the young woman being approached is vulnerable and dependent on his good will. Though all three songs are similar, I will analyse the first two together, as they utilise the same narrative technique, and then move onto the third afterwards.

**b) Alanis Morissette – 'Hands Clean'**

**c) Sheryl Crow – 'What I Can Do For You'**

While Morissette's song follows the first-person narrative in the chorus, the 'voice' in the verses, and in the whole of Crow's song is that of the abuser, not the abused. Though this does not strictly fit the parameters of the study, I have included them here for two reasons. Firstly, the songs are very similar and looking at them together allows for the techniques used to describe the people involved in the story and the relationships very well. Secondly, and most importantly, though the narrator's voice speaks the male perpetrator's words, the combination of the fact that is sung by a woman, and the choice of words used in the song, implies that the listener is hearing a woman's recollection of the words spoken to her as a girl by the older, more powerful man. Therefore, although the narrator appears to be the perpetrator (saying unpleasant things about himself), it is in fact, the victim of the experiences remembering and (re)interpreting them.

'Hands Clean' by Alanis Morissette begins,

*"If it weren't for your maturity none of this would have happened  
If you weren't so wise beyond your years I would've been able to control  
myself"*

We learn immediately that something sexual has happened that really should not have done, something that would be disapproved of. The blame is laid with the girl, though with the perpetrator acting as the unreliable narrator, we do not really believe the reasons he gives. Maturity and wisdom "*beyond your years*" are compliments given to a girl to make her feel good and 'grown up', in order that she would want to agree to (grown-up) sex.

'What I Can Do For You' by Sheryl Crow begins in an almost identical way, with the unreliable narrator flattering the young girl in question, as being better (more fun / wild) than the other girls he works with:

*"I'm so glad you're awake  
That you're not like the others  
'Cause they're so straight-laced  
And no fun"*

Sex is immediately introduced into the song (the narrator has obviously gone into the girl's room at night), and confirmed as the opening lines are followed with:

*"Gosh that's nice  
That lingerie  
Makes me feel like  
...oh, I don't know"*

Once again, the man's sexual feelings towards the (too) young girl are explained as having been caused by something external to him and his control – in this case, the nightie that the girl is wearing. The verse continues with further flattery ("*You're a very pretty thing / You remind me of someone*"). Describing the girl as a "*very pretty thing*" works both to objectify her, and also to situate the narrator as a much older man.

In the Sheryl Crow song, the girl appears to resist or have concerns about sex with this man, which he acknowledges when he says, "*You must have heard / Some awful nasty things about me / but...*". Interestingly, he does not deny the 'awful nasty things', but rather focuses on why the girl should ignore her reservations – because it will be good for her career. He is the only one, he claims, in the chorus, with the power to really help her:

*"What I can do for you  
There's no one else  
On God's green earth can do  
Just ask anybody  
They'll tell you that it's true  
There's no one else on earth  
Can do the things that I can do for you"*

Although he is talking about her career, the words also carry an undertone of sexual prowess, implying that the narrator will give the girl a much better sexual experience than someone her own age. That the career is the focus, however, is apparent in both songs when the narrator puts the girl down by saying that she would be nowhere in the industry without him:

*"If it weren't for my attention you wouldn't have been successful  
and if it weren't for me you would never have amounted to very much  
(AM)*

*You're never gonna make it  
All by yourself  
You're gonna need a friend  
You're gonna need my help (SC)"*

Though in both cases, the narrator makes it clear that the girl has a choice between sex and career help or no sex and no career, the 'offer' is presented in a more threatening way the Sheryl Crow song:

*"I have so much to offer  
If you just be nice  
If you do what I say  
And don't make me say it twice"*

The phrase, "don't make me say it twice" is laden with potential punishment for the girl if she does not immediately comply with the narrator's sexual request. It is in the girl's interests to "be nice" (agree to sex) because if she is not, then either the career help will not be forthcoming, or the sex will happen either with or without her consent. The narrator's coercion of the girl continues in a way that makes it clear he is now touching her in a way that she finds uncomfortable:

*"Do you mind if I just  
Rub my hand up thus  
Come on, just my hand  
Come on, just my hand"*

The repetition of "come on, just my hand" situates the narrator's request to touch

her as reasonable, and the girl's reluctance to allow this (allegedly minor) touching as unreasonable or immature. The coercion continues as the chorus is repeated, along with the words, "*You gotta understand / I'm gonna be your man / I'm gonna be your man / You're gonna need me*". As listeners (and as the woman remembering the experience through the perpetrator's words), we understand that his offer to be her boyfriend and champion is not genuine, but a further attempt by the narrator to say anything that will get the girl to agree to sex. By playing on her ambition and naivety (with both men and the music industry), he is able to take advantage of the girl sexually without any consequences.

The notion of consequences is one that runs throughout the Alanis Morissette song, and is reflected in the title, 'Hands Clean'. The chorus (narrated primarily by the adult woman looking back) runs:

*"Ooh, this could be messy  
But you don't seem to mind  
Ooh, don't go telling everybody  
And overlook this supposed crime  
We'll fast forward to a few years later  
And no one knows except the both of us  
And I have honoured your request for silence  
And you've washed your hands clean of this"*

The narrator kept the sexual relationship silent, but the consequence of this silence is that there are only two people who know about it, and the man involved seems to be pretending that it never happened at all. This is confirmed when the narrator asks,

*"What part of our history's reinvented and under rug swept?  
What part of your memory is selective and tends to forget?"*

That section of the song concludes with the line, "*What with this distance it seems so obvious?*" referring to the amount of time that has passed and the fact that now the narrator is an adult, she can see that what happened was patently wrong. The narrator is keen to explore the psychological reasons behind this experience – both her own, and those of the man involved. She concludes that the man was turned on by her lack of power, her vulnerability and her youth:

*"You're essentially an employee and I like you having to depend on me  
You're kind of my protege and one day you'll say you learned all you know from me*

*I know you depend on me like a young thing would to a guardian  
I know you sexualize me like a young thing would and I think I like it"*

The final line of this verse allows for some agency on behalf of the girl, who it is implied, 'fancied' the older man, and probably flirted with him. However, although this is mentioned, it is clear that the narrator believes that the responsibility for this experience falls only on the shoulders of the man involved – he was the older, more powerful one, and it was his responsibility to behave appropriately with his young charge. His culpability is confirmed with his 'request for silence' from the girl, which is repeated, and also made explicit in these lines:

*"Just make sure you don't tell on me especially to members of your family  
We best keep this to ourselves and not tell any members of our inner  
posse"*

The flattery found at the beginning of both songs is then repeated, but it is made clear that the man's appreciation of the girl is conditional on her remaining young, slim, attractive and well presented:

*"I wish I could tell the world cuz you're such a pretty thing when you're  
done up properly  
I might want to marry you one day if you watch that weight and keep your  
firm body"*

It is made clear in both songs that the man in question is sexually interested in her precisely because she is young, vulnerable and under both his managerial control and some sort of emotional thrall. Neither narrator calls what happens rape, but it is clear that the sort of consent that may have been given is not informed, adult, free consent. What is also clear is that as adults, both these narrators are angry about this experience in retrospect, and perhaps like Carolyn Owlett from the 411 intimated in 'On Your Knees', which we explored in Chapter 4, they are ready to 'name and shame' the act and the perpetrators, refusing to keep their silence any more.

#### **d) Ani DiFranco – 'Gratitude'**

Ani DiFranco's song 'Gratitude' is also about the type of so-called 'grey area' that tends to go unchallenged and unpunished with regard to sexual violence. In this song, the narrator says is grateful to her benefactor for the food and shelter he is providing,

*"thank you for letting me stay here  
thank you for taking me in  
thank you for the beer and the food  
thank you for loaning me bus fare  
thank you for showing me around  
that was a very kind thing to do  
thank you for the use of the clean towel  
thank you for half of your bed  
we can sleep here like brother and sister,  
you said"*

It is clear from this first verse that the narrator does not have much money, and is staying in a strange place with someone she does not really know – perhaps a friend of a friend – who has offered to show her around, and let her stay there for the night. The man seems to understand the concerns of a young woman traveling alone. Though he does not offer her a bed or couch of her own, he promises that she can sleep in his bed with him without any fear that he will make any sexual advances towards her ("*like brother and sister*"). However, this turns out to be untrue in the chorus:

*"but you changed the rules in an hour or two  
and I don't know what you and your sisters do  
but please don't.  
please stop."*

Though the narrator makes a joke ("*I don't know what you and your sisters do*"), she is angry and scared at the situation she suddenly finds herself in. Though "*please don't. please stop.*" seem to be the only words spoken aloud, the narrator continues with a stronger and more overtly feminist statement to end the chorus:

*"this is not my obligation  
what does my body have to do with my gratitude?"*

Just like the young women in Alanis Morissette's song and Sheryl Crow's song, the narrator is being asked for sex as 'payment' for favours, which up to this point, she assumed were being given out of kindness. The man continues to touch her sexually, and says something to her (off-camera as it were) about what he is doing and why. The narrator responds, seemingly internally,

*"look at you, little white lying  
for the purpose of justifying  
what you're trying to do  
I know that you feel my resistance  
I know that you heard what I said  
otherwise you wouldn't need the excuse"*

The man is well aware that the young woman in his bed does not want the sexual attention he is attempting, yet he continues anyway. The song ends with the repeated chorus, and so, like Tori Amos' 'Me And A Gun', we are left not knowing if the narrator managed to convince the man to stop or not. The man is in a position of power: it is his bed, his house, his city, and the narrator is totally at his mercy. If the narrator is raped, we know from Chapter 1, that she would be extremely unlikely to see any form of justice, having eaten, drunk alcohol, and agreed to share a bed with the man. But by showing us the narrator's internal thoughts during the experience, like Tori Amos, we can see that this is not a consensual sexual experience, however it could later be portrayed. It is also important to note here, with reference to Chapter 1's discussion of rape myths, that the 'moral' of this song is not that young women should not travel alone, or even stay with strangers, but rather that men who behave this way, having promised otherwise, are doing something very wrong.

## 2. Images of Childhood and meaning-making

### a) Tasmin Archer – 'In Your Care'

Tasmin Archer's debut album, *Great Expectations*, was released in 1992, following the huge success of its lead single, 'Sleeping Satellite'. This song is taken from that album, and begins:

*"the light is fading from my room  
as night time comes around too soon  
I'm so afraid  
swollen eyes portray my pain  
as tears fall like the summer rain  
I'm so alone"*

The line "*the light is fading from my room / as night time comes around too soon*" gives us two meanings in which to situate the abuse. The first is that the abuse takes place in her bedroom, at night (which situates it sexually as well). The second refers to a metaphorical light, or hope, fading. The hope is that tonight the abuse will not happen, and this hope is gradually replaced with the knowledge and fear that it will, increasing with the darkening of the sky. Her abuser can be under no illusions of the abuse being in any way consensual, with her fear and pain etched on her face, evidenced by her eyes, red from crying. Like the other

songs we will examine, the narrator expresses a sense of isolation, which will be referenced throughout the song.

The second verse and bridge run:

*"I pull the covers to myself  
drink and smoke upon his breath  
I close my eyes  
again I pray to god above  
what have I done to lose his love?  
am I to blame?"*

*"when I am dreaming  
I can call out  
no one hears  
Father  
I'm falling from your heart in tears"*

In this section of the song, the narrator closes her eyes, so she does not have to see the abuse as it happens, and also so she can pray. In both the second verse and the bridge, Archer deliberately confuses the abuser and God by referencing 'father' and using the male pronoun ambiguously. We see here that sexual violence can create a chasm in spiritual relationships as well as familial and sexual ones<sup>191</sup>. If one cannot trust the earthly father, as is the case in Archer's song, then the father metaphor of a loving God does not work, and in fact serves to act as a double betrayal instead.

This ambiguity carries through into the chorus, which most obviously seems to be directed towards the abuser, but could also be read as a rebuke to God:

*"son of a bitch, you broke my heart  
I need a little loving  
to take away the pain  
how could you let me down?  
when I'm in your care"*

She knows, as an adult, that her father should have been looking after her and trying to do the best for her, but instead, he was the person causing her pain. Similarly a God who is expected to look after children<sup>192</sup>, has also let the narrator, who gave herself into his care, down.

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<sup>191</sup> This will be explored in more detail in the third section of this chapter, as it is the primary focus of Tori Amos' song 'Crucify'.

<sup>192</sup> For example, consider the words to this well-known children's night-time prayer, "As I lay me down to sleep / I pray the Lord my soul to keep / Thy angels watch me through the night / And keep me safe 'til morning's light" in light of this type of abuse.

The final verse explores some other themes common to father-daughter abuse:

*"hush little baby don't you cry  
daddy's going to sing you a lullaby  
to show he cares  
but you must keep our secret safe  
is this love or is this hate?  
I feel so scared"*

In this verse, we see how confusing abuse can be to a child when it is mixed in with acts that signify love or comfort. That the narrator's father sings her a lullaby and comforts her when she is crying "*to show he cares*" is, of course, vastly undermined by the fact that he is the one who has caused her crying, and suffering, in the first place. This is one of the reasons that stranger-abuse is often easier for children to process and heal from than familial abuse: the abuser cannot be presented in the child's mind as unequivocally 'bad', some sort of fairy-tale monster. There will usually be times where the child will turn to the abuser for love, comfort and protection, and will receive it. As such, they have to reconcile the two seemingly-incompatible sides of their abuser, as well as guilt and shame over what they might later perceive (however unreasonably) as their own complicity in, or enjoyment of, the abuse. The verse ends "*but you must keep our secret safe / is this love or is this hate / I feel so scared*". The black and white understandings children can have of love and hate are confused by sexual abuse. Having learned that physical intimacy is equated with love, and causing physical pain to someone is equated with hate, to be hurt in an intimate way such as this (especially by a family member) is the ultimate mixed message, and it is therefore no surprise that the young narrator feels '*so scared*'.

#### **b) Alice Marie - 'I Was Seven'**

On Alice Marie's website, the lyrics for the whole *Angels Near* album (which she describes as her 'hope opera') are printed. Although lyrics for every song apart from 'I Was Seven' are presented in the traditional format, 'I Was Seven' is written entirely in lowercase. As this seems to be a deliberate choice, underlining the fact that this song is about a seven-year-old child, I have retained the formatting here. The song begins:

*"i never had an attic  
i never had a basement  
but i had secrets, i had secrets"*

She references the attic and the basement as places where children might traditionally hide their secret playthings, or scraps of paper with written-down thoughts. Here, the attic and the basement are physical places, but we might also think of them as metaphorical, emotional places where memories of abuse could be stored and hidden away, as was discussed in Chapter 2. By repeating "*i had secrets*", she underlines the importance of those secrets, and the importance of keeping them secret. She continues:

*"i never had a best friend  
i never had a childhood  
but i had secrets, i had secrets"*

We begin to see a clearer picture of an abused child: separated from potential friends by her internal turmoil, and the gulf in their experiences; experiences that constitute a 'stolen childhood'. The loss of childhood is a common metaphor when talking about child abuse – of course, the child still experiences childhood in a physical, aging sense, however, some of the core elements understood to make up childhood, such as the maintenance of the child's innocence, and protection from the bad things in the world, are missing. We are left, at the end of the first verse, with an image of an isolated child, keeping terrible secrets, and trying to understand them herself.

The narrator's coping mechanisms are revealed in the prechorus:

*"hiding in books about amityville  
reading tales darker than mine  
making my bed with sheets full of dread  
pretending that everything's fine"*

The first two lines perform two functions. One is the function the narrator describes – that reading about situations worse than hers gives her some comfort, or at the very least a feeling that she could be in a more horrifying situation than the one she is in. Children revel in tales of monsters and evildoing – however, it is quite understandable that the standard fairy tale 'baddies' would not be enough for a child who is suffering at the hands of the real-life versions. Seeking out tales of murder and paranormal terror<sup>193</sup> would allow the child some

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<sup>193</sup> In 1974, Ronald DeFeo shot dead six members of his family while living at a house (112 Ocean Avenue) in the village of Amityville, NY. The next occupants of the house left after a month, claiming to have been terrorised by ghostly phenomena in the house. These events were famously novelised by Jay Anson in 1977, and made into several films subsequently.

understanding of 'evil' and perhaps the confirmation she needed that what was happening to her was 'wrong' and should not have been happening. Secondly, it performs a function for the listener, who is taken aback to hear of a seven year old reading about Amityville, which under 'normal' circumstances, would obviously be deemed unsuitable material, due to it being 'too dark'. The very notion of 'unsuitable material' underlines the ideal of maintaining childhood innocence, and leads the narrator to the conclusion that the unsuitability of books about Amityville pales into insignificance when held up against the unsuitability and darkness of the experiences she is being subjected to.

Neither of the narrator's parents are mentioned during the song, so when she references making her own bed, we are led to imagine not a child who has been asked to learn certain chores and routines as part of growing up, but rather one who must do most things for herself. The "*sheets full of dread*" make explicit what had only been implied up to this point – that the things she must keep secret happen to her in her bed. She must go about her day "*pretending that everything's fine*" in order to be able to function in the world – referencing the compartmentalisation process that was discussed in Chapter 2.

The chorus runs:

*"nancy drew, what's wrong with you  
can't you stop this intrusion  
nancy, please bring bess and george  
tell me it's all an illusion"*

Nancy Drew solves every mystery she comes up against. The 'bad guys' are always punished, the 'good guys' are vindicated, and the people in trouble are rescued. This follows the format of all fairy tales, adventure books, and stories written for children. As Bettelheim writes,

"Consolation is the greatest service the fairy tale can offer the child: the confidence that despite all tribulations he has to suffer (such as the threat of desertion by parents in 'Hansel and Gretel'; jealousy on the part of parents in 'Snow White' and of siblings in 'Cinderella'; the devouring anger of the giant in 'Jack and the Beanstalk'; the nastiness of evil powers in 'The Sleeping Beauty'), not only will he succeed, but the evil forces will be done away with and never again threaten his peace of mind" (Bettelheim p.147).

However, the narrator of 'I Was Seven' is in the middle of a story that is not following this format, and therefore feels let down by these books. A hero has not

turned up to rescue her, or to bring her perpetrator's actions into the light, and the narrator cannot understand why not ("*nancy drew, what's wrong with you?*"). Though the narrator has had to learn the hardest of ways that these tales do not represent the reality she knows, she still holds onto hope that it is the fairy tale world, not her own, that is the real one ("*nancy, please bring bess and george*<sup>194</sup> / *tell me it's all an illusion*").

The next verse places the narrator in a more adult context, reflecting on her childhood experiences:

*"i never saw it coming  
i never had a clue  
i was seven, i was seven  
i never called for help  
i never said a damned thing  
i was seven, only seven"*

There are elements of self-blame in this verse. By saying, "*I never (saw it coming / had a clue / called for help / said a damned thing)*", she implies that somehow she should have done these things, and the fact that she did not makes her in some way culpable for the continuation of the abuse. However, by repeating "*I was seven*" or "*only seven*", the narrator tries to reinforce the idea that however agentic she remembers herself as being at that age, she is able now, as an adult, to look at seven year olds and realise just how small and young they really are – defenceless in the face of such a physical and emotional onslaught as sexual abuse represents. This verse acts as an internal conversation between two parts of the narrator – the adult who knows, on a rational basis, that she could not have been expected to see these experiences coming, or to have been in any position to stand up to the abuser who was stronger and more powerful than her in every way, and the ashamed and guilty child who feels in some way that what happened must have been her own fault.

The bridge of the song runs:

*"i closed the door, but it wouldn't lock  
thunder protected his footsteps  
we had the prettiest house on the block  
lightning would visit again and again and again and again"*

When the narrator sings, "*I closed the door, but it wouldn't lock*", the listener is

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<sup>194</sup> Nancy's friends and sidekicks

able to see how futile the attempts of a seven year old to stop an adult male who wants to abuse her are. She is not protected by her bedroom door, nor even her front door. There is also a sexual meaning attached to this line, as the image of the door can be used to represent the vagina, and the narrator had no lock, physical or emotional, to keep her intruder out<sup>195</sup>. The narrator sings, "*thunder protected his footsteps*", implying either that general noise meant that his actions were not heard, or that he was protected by divine intervention. The fact that they "*had the prettiest house on the block*" means nothing in terms of her protection, and it is not clear whether the narrator sees beauty (either the house's or her own) as an inducement to the abuse, making it more tempting, or simply another thing she might have expected to protect her, which will not.

In the final line of the bridge, Alice Marie relies on the listener's knowledge of the phrase 'lightning never strikes the same place twice', which means exactly what it says in reference to the physical phenomenon, but is also used to refer to the assumption that the same bad thing will not happen twice in exactly the same way. This assumption is often false, as it is in the case of the narrator. She underlines the repetitious and seemingly inescapable nature of the abuse when she sings "*lightning would visit again and again and again and again and again and again*". The beat at this point becomes louder and more insistent, representing the thunderstorm. We then hear the sound of heavy rain, and the vocal becomes quieter (and sweeter) again, as she sings the final verse:

*"this man he had a daughter  
this man he had a son  
across the hall, across the hall  
the son took after daddy  
the son went after me  
that same fall, where's my doll"*

The song is left unresolved as the narrator goes on to experience further sexual abuse at the hands of her abuser's son. We see the cycle of abuse perpetuated here, as the son learns how to abuse from his father, and the listener is left to wonder about the relationship that the son and father had, as well as the sort of abuse the daughter may have been subjected to by both perpetrators. When Alice Marie refers to "*that same fall*", we can make an interpretation of either being abused or abusing as the 'fall'. She ends with, "*where's my doll*", reminding us that the narrator has been denied the comforts of childhood, both in their

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<sup>195</sup> This line is also reminiscent of the sexually violent line "*Break the lock if it don't fit*" from the Florence and the Machine song 'Kiss With A Fist' analysed in Chapter 4.

physical form and their emotional form.

### **c) Heather Nova – 'Shaking The Doll'**

The doll is a motif of childhood that recurs throughout this section. Its use as the title of this song, alongside with the other primarily-referenced motif in the song, fairy-tales, indicates right from the start that this song is about abuse as a child. This is confirmed when the narrator adds (later), "*And somewhere, back there / I didn't understand / Man and woman, woman and man*", referring to being 'innocent', i.e. at a young enough age that she still did not really know about sex.

The song's opening lines are, "*Oh I won't be your pretty baby / I won't eat from your hand again*". These lines situate the narrator as someone looking back at the abuser and refusing to play the part of the 'good girl' who will do whatever the abuser wants, as someone he, in the past, had 'eating out of his hand'. However, the line "*I won't eat from your hand again*" could also indicate that the abuser is someone who provided for the narrator as a child, the figure who 'puts food on the table', most obviously (and most commonly in childhood sexual abuse cases) a father. That line could also have a more literal interpretation in that the abuser may have put his hand over her mouth during the abuse to keep her quiet, meaning it would physically look as though she was eating from his hand

The first verse indicates that the narrator contemplated suicide<sup>196</sup>: "*And the man in the white says it's alright / He says, come on girl give up the fight / You'll go to sleep, there will be no pain*". The 'man in the white' probably refers to a God or angel figure, although it may be a reference to a doctor, or even her abuser. The narrator ultimately rejects the pull she feels to kill herself in 'Shaking The Doll', saying, "*I want to live with myself again*". The phrase 'live with myself' is usually preceded by 'can't' and refers to guilt – a common post-sexual violence feeling, which the narrator wishes to eradicate.

One of the characteristics of childhood sexual abuse is that it remains hidden, even when it should be obvious that something is wrong. The irony of this is

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<sup>196</sup> The temptation the narrator feels to kill herself is also similar in content to lyrics Nova wrote earlier on *Glowstars*, in 'Shell', in which the narrator describes herself as a shell, and says of her body, "*So much inside and it's all been broken*". The description of the self as hollow and/or broken is extremely common in women who have experienced sexual violence. She then says, "*Look at me, I'm out on the edge / Put your hand here / See I'm bleeding / I can't get it, get the light out / I can't seem to tear out the feeling*" and follows this with the chorus, which begins, "*You know, it's just one step, it could all be over*".

pointed out in the second verse when Nova sings, "Well, where we *lived* there was a lighthouse / Throwing a white beam into our house". Although there was a physical light shining in this childhood bedroom, no metaphorical light shone into the darkest corners of what was going on, illuminating the abuse to those who would be able to stop it. This is also the second time the word 'white' appears in the song. White usually indicates innocence, purity or death – in the case of this song, all three are relevant. The verse continues, "Over my body when I was sleeping / Over the secrets I was keeping" which reminds us that child abusers often tell their victims to keep the abuse secret<sup>197</sup>.

Many women who have experienced sexual violence claim that in order to survive the abuse they suffered, they had to metaphorically leave the body it was happening to, thus separating body and the soul/mind/spirit part of the self that the abuser cannot touch or abuse. This recalls Chapter 2's discussion of personal identity with regard to sexual violence. It is generally accepted that healing from sexual abuse is, in part, the reconnection of these things (Bass & Davies 1988 etc). Nova recognises this when she says, "I want to be with my body again / You can't make me hollow again". This is also echoed later in both 'Island' (which we looked at in Chapter 4) and 'Blue Black' (which we look at in the next section).

After the first two verses, she repeats "I'm digging up" six times, and then sings, "I'm digging in the earth", followed by the closest thing to a chorus in the song, which begins, "I'm looking for signs / And I'm shaking the dolls / And the fairy tales lied". The narrator has questions about what has happened to her and is 'digging up' the past in order to try and get some answers. It is also possible from these lines, especially given the reference to the earth that the narrator is referring to a perpetrator who is now dead. We may be reminded of this interpretation when we hear a later line in 'Blue Black', when she sings to her abuser, "You can't take it with you" – a phrase which is commonly used about death.

The image of 'shaking the doll'<sup>198</sup> is an interesting one, with several possible interpretations. Firstly, it draws to mind the re-enactment of experiences that children do with their dolls. Though this normally takes the form of feeding,

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<sup>197</sup> In 'Truth and Bone' from *Oyster*, Nova's narrator sings to a lover, "My mouth is full of secrets I'm too afraid to tell", referring to her fear of telling her lover what has happened to her in the past.

<sup>198</sup> This is not the first time Nova has used the image of a doll. In 'Flying As She Falls', from her early *These Walls* EP, she sings, "She would like to run and hide / She's wrapped up in confusion / She unfolds like paper dolls". That song begins with the lines, "The leaves have turned and she has known / And she tells me she can't let him go", which the later 'Island' will echo slightly.

dressing, or pushing in prams, children who have been abused often act out what has been done to them through their interactions with their toys (and in fact, this is a technique used by child psychologists to uncover the details of child abuse). The doll as stand-in for the child is commonly used, and in the situation of abuse, we see how this is reversed, and it is the child who comes to stand in for an object to be used for someone else's play / pleasure / torture<sup>199</sup>. No answers will come from the narrator's dolls in this song; they are inanimate objects, although as a child, the narrator may have wished for them to come alive and save her. They may also have been the only witnesses to the abuse, so she may be shaking them until they back up her story of what happened to her. It may also be a reference to the narrator wanting to hurt something the way she was being hurt, and perhaps the only thing smaller and more vulnerable than her was her doll. The image also draws an obvious parallel with childhood sexual abuse – the perpetrator is bigger, stronger and more powerful than the child (doll), who is helpless and cannot fight back.

Also worth noting is the line, "*the fairy tales lied*". As with Alice Marie's song, this narrator feels let down by her childhood stories. There is no 'happy ever after' here, no hero to come to the rescue to show that good always triumphs just in time. Children who are abused realise sharply that this is not always the way of the world; that bad things and unhappiness can stay with good people, and that sometimes people who do bad things do get away unpunished.

#### **d) Suzanne Vega – 'As A Child'**

On Suzanne Vega's 1992 album *99.9°F*, she includes two songs back-to-back, 'As A Child' and 'Bad Wisdom', which deal with the theme of child abuse. As the songs are placed together, and both strongly utilise the themes already explored in 'I Was Seven' and 'Shaking The Doll'<sup>200</sup>, I look at them both one after the other here. Firstly, 'As A Child', which begins:

*"As a child  
You have a doll  
You see this doll*

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<sup>199</sup> Though I do not discuss it here, Sinead O'Connor's song 'Fire On Babylon' is of particular interest here. A narrative of O'Connor's well-documented abuse at the hands of her mother, 'Fire On Babylon' also uses doll imagery. When O'Connor sings, "*I watched her torturing my child*", the accompanying image in the music video is that of the adult holding the child's doll underwater in the sink. In addition to referring to the narrator's abuse as a child/doll, it is also used in conjunction with other lyrics referring to the abuser having "taken everything".

<sup>200</sup> Though it ought to be noted that Vega's songs were written / released prior to the two already analysed in this section.

*Sitting in her chair  
You watch her face  
Her knees apart  
Her eyes of glass  
In a secretive stare  
She seems to [X3]  
Have a life"*

Vega's description clearly applies to both doll and child here. In physically positioning the doll ("sitting in her chair", "her knees apart"), Vega discomforts the listener with the notion of a (sexually) pose-able child. Just as in 'I Was Seven' and 'Shaking The Doll', the child / doll is withdrawn and secretive. The doll's inanimate nature stands in for the child, who is emotionally frozen. The only 'life' she can 'seem to have' must be an internal one. The doll (as child's toy) provides no comfort to the child; she cannot help and, more than that, her stare makes the child think that even her doll must be having a (better) life, where the child cannot.

The song continues:

*"Pick up a stick  
Dig up a crack  
Dirt in the street  
Becomes a town"*

Something is wrong in this situation ("a crack"), which can be poked and prodded, until it is unearthed. However, the risk in doing so is that "*dirt in the street / becomes a town*"; i.e. that what appeared to be 'a crack' is actually a whole network of 'cracks', an interdependent web of people, places and circumstances that have either allowed the abuse to happen, in varying degrees, or would be greatly negatively affected by its uncovering. This is confirmed in the next verse and chorus:

*"All of the people  
Depend on you  
Not to hurt them  
Or bang the stick comes down  
And they seem to  
They seem to [X2]  
Have a life"*

This verse utilises the (false) burden that is so often placed on the victims of child abuse: keep quiet or hurt a lot of people. The irony of course is that it is the child who should be able to depend on "*all of the people*" not to hurt her, but this is yet

another inversion that occurs in cases of childhood sexual abuse. The line "*or bang the stick comes down*" could refer to these negative consequences for "*all the people*" or it could be a more specific punishment threatened against the child herself – either a physical punishment from the abuser, or a promise that if she does tell, she will be punished by not being believed. By saying nothing, and the people not knowing, they are able to go about their lives as normal ("*they seem to have a life*").

The song ends by referencing the child more specifically (i.e. not under the doll metaphor, though the verses are similar):

*"As a child  
You see yourself  
And wonder why  
You can't seem to move  
Hand on the doorknob  
Feel like a thing  
One foot on the sidewalk  
Too much to prove  
And you learn to  
You learn to [X2]  
Have a life"*

Vega personalises the last verses and chorus by making the narrator 'you'. Like the child sees the doll and wonders what is going on internally, so "*you see yourself / and wonder why / you can't seem to move*". As we discussed in Chapter 2, the freezing response is a common one to abuse, and its image is utilised here, with regard to why the narrator did not/could not leave. "*Hand on the doorknob / feel like a thing / one foot on the sidewalk / too much to prove*" paints a picture of a child desperate for escape but with no idea where to go or what to do. In being objectified, the child has not been able to establish a strong sense of self other than outside her abuser's use for her. Finally, whether through lack of options, or a need to discover her inner resources, the narrator learns to exist within the abusive situation ("*you learn to have a life*"), and – potentially – after it.

#### **e) Suzanne Vega – 'Bad Wisdom'**

'Bad Wisdom' deals with two primary themes: adult silence and complicity when faced with child sexual abuse, and the 'aftermath' issues we will explore in the final section of this chapter. The first verse runs,

*"Mother, the doctor knows something is wrong  
Cause my body has strange information  
He's looked in my eyes and knows I'm not a child  
But he doesn't dare ask the right question"*

There are immediately two adults here who might be expected, above all others, to act in the child's best interests – her mother and her doctor. By addressing her mother throughout the song, 'Bad Wisdom' stands as a narrative of 'telling' sexual abuse, and the consequences of that telling. The doctor is able to physically tell (from the body's "*strange information*" that the child has had experiences she ought not to have had in childhood. However, whether through cowardice at naming the act, or fear of consequences if he does, he "*doesn't dare ask the right question*", and the child's chance of having her experiences uncovered and validated is lost.

The second verse continues the theme of the child's isolation:

*"Mother, my friends are no longer my friends  
And the games we once played have no meaning  
I've gone serious and shy and they can't figure why  
So they've left me to my own daydreaming"*

Because the narrator has been pulled into the world of adult experiences, she can no longer inhabit the innocent world her childhood friends enjoy. Their games seem meaningless to her because she has to live in a harsher 'real' world. They, in turn, cannot understand her personality changes, because they do not know about the sort of experiences that could make one of them go "*serious and shy*". As a result, they just leave her alone in her own internal world, and she is isolated even further.

In the third verse, the narrator explores the fact that mother has given her a narrative of law, justice and protection that would comfort most children:

*"Mother, you've taught me the laws are so fine  
If I'm good that I will be protected"*

However, she is not comforted by this, because she knows she has not been protected:

*"I've fallen through the crack and there's no getting back  
And I'll never trust whoever gets elected"*

"Whoever gets elected" here stands for anyone in a position of power, but especially those making and enforcing these justice and protection laws. The narrator has 'fallen through the crack', and finds her experiences in direct conflict with these 'official' lines and promises.

The narrator then turns specifically to her relationship with her mother as she continues to address her in this verse:

*"Mother your eyes have gone suddenly cold  
And it wasn't what I was expecting  
Once I did think that I'd find comfort there  
And instead you've gone hard and suspecting"*

Though we might have expected the narrator's mother to be reassuring and comforting, especially when the narrator tells her she has been hurt, this is not the case. Many memoirs of childhood sexual abuse tell a story of double betrayal: by the father, or step-father who perpetrates the abuse, and by the mother who either stands by (wilfully not-knowing) and does nothing, or actively blames the child. This might take the form of jealousy over her male partner's sexual relationship with 'another woman' even if that 'affair' is not with a woman at all, but her own child, or it may simply be a desire not to lose the male partner and therefore choosing to believe his story over the child's<sup>201</sup>.

*"Mother I'm cut at the root like a weed  
Cause there's no one to hear my small story  
Just like a woman who walks in the street<sup>202</sup>  
I will pay for my life with my body"*

The chorus of the song runs:

*"What price to pay for bad wisdom  
What price to pay for bad wisdom  
Too young to know  
Too much too soon  
Bad wisdom, bad wisdom"*

There is a seeming contradiction in the title, 'Bad Wisdom'. Wisdom is usually presented as an unequivocally positive attribute, and children in particular are

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<sup>201</sup> In Chapter 6, I explore this narrative in more detail with regard to Dorothy Allison's child abuse narrative, *Bastard Out Of Carolina*.

<sup>202</sup> Though there is not space in this thesis to discuss themes of prostitution with regard to sexual violence, it is important to note that this theme does not just figure in Vega's song, but in the songs of other artists analysed in this thesis as well, most notably in Ani DiFranco's song 'Letter To A John', which specifically links a history of childhood sexual abuse with work in prostitution as an adult.

taught that learning is both good and vital. This song posits the notion that not all wisdom is something to strive towards. The 'knowledge' the abused child comes to have would be better avoided. This 'bad wisdom', that one can come to after abuse, is the focus of the final section of this chapter.

### **3. Aftermath**

Judith Herman's research with women who had been sexually abused as children, by their fathers, looks specifically at the 'comet's tail' of abuse I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In a section she calls 'The Daughter's Inheritance'<sup>203</sup>, (1981 p.96), she describes finding that every woman she interviewed felt 'branded' or 'marked' by their experiences. They felt different to the others around them, and many attributed this to an innate evilness in their character, which either caused, or was caused by, the abuse. Many of them connected this supposed 'evil' with sexuality, referring to themselves as 'bitches', 'witches' or 'whores'. Some embraced this sexual identity with pride, believing that their early initiation into sexual knowingness has given them almost magical powers of seduction (which had started with their fathers as the helpless seductees). These self-identifications held strong, even in the face of evidence of their powerlessness in both that initial relationship and other, subsequent, abusive relationships with men.

In order to unpack the consequences of this too-early sexual knowledge (whether through child abuse or rape as a young adult) a little more carefully, I turn to five songs: 'Robert DeNiro's Waiting' by Bananarama, '11th Commandment' by Jano Brindisi, 'Crucify' by Tori Amos, 'Blue Black' by Heather Nova, and '48 Hours' by Amy Fix<sup>204</sup>.

#### **a) Bananarama – 'Robert DeNiro's Waiting'**

The inclusion of a song from the Stock/Aitken/Waterman period of pop may seem surprising. It stands alone in this chapter as the only 'pure pop' song to represent sexual violence, and as such, it is easy to miss the lyrical meaning alongside the

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<sup>203</sup> Like 'wisdom', we see here how 'inheritance' can have extremely negative connotations when applied to sexual abuse.

<sup>204</sup> Though Amos, Brindisi and Fix have all explicitly stated that their songs concerning sexual violence are autobiographical, I again refer in the analysis of all of the songs to 'the narrator', rather than to the authors by name. This is to differentiate between the story and the storyteller, as discussed in Chapter 2, but also to foreground some issues of authenticity that will be discussed in Chapter 6.

catchiness of the song, and assume that it belongs in the same category as the rest of Bananarama's songs (that is, fairly 'lightweight' songs about relationships). However, this song was written by Siobhan Fahey<sup>205</sup> "about date rape – the girl in the song was raped, so she didn't trust anybody afterwards" (quoted from interview in Evans 1994, p.130), though Fahey acknowledges that this was never widely known because of the type of (mainstream, pop) band Bananarama was:

*"But you'd never know it. Nobody gets it! And I tried to say in an interview once that it was about rape, but Sarah and Keren<sup>206</sup> just wouldn't have it."*  
(ibid)

However the song was received and (mis)understood, once we examine the lyrics, the sexual violence narrative does become clear. The song begins:

*Hope's dashed to the floor like shattered teenage dreams.  
Boys living next door are never what they seem.  
A walk in the park can become a bad dream  
People are staring and following me.  
This is my only escape from it all:  
Watching a film or a face on the wall.*

*Robert de Niro's waiting, talking Italian (X4)"*

Hope and teenage dreams are conflated here: much like the dismantling of the fairy tales we explored in the last section, the narrator here has had her teenage dreams smashed by her experience, and, as such, also the hope that those teenage dreams might represent some sort of truth about life.

The people who are 'staring' at and 'following' the narrator, are either people who know about her sexual assault and are interested in her because of that, or they are other men who seem to be sexually interested in her. Feeling trapped, she finds her only escape in watching films and being drawn into the fictional world of, in this case, *The Godfather Part II* (Ford Coppola 1974), where Robert DeNiro is 'waiting' for her, and 'talking Italian'. He is waiting for her, in that she can put the video on whenever she wants, and the reassurance of the film will be there for her. The chorus also functions in the same way a Bridget Jones character might say, in response to the question 'what are you doing this evening?', "I've

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<sup>205</sup> Widely considered the most 'credible' member of Bananarama, and its primary songwriter, Fahey went on to have a successful career as one half of late '80s-early '90s band, Shakespear's Sister (band name taken from the title of a Smiths song), best known for their huge number one hit, 'Stay' from 1991.

<sup>206</sup> Dallin and Woodward, the other two members of Bananarama

got a hot date with a bottle of wine, a box of chocolates and George Clooney", to imply an evening at home 'indulging' in a movie and comfort food. The choice of Robert DeNiro, as opposed to other actors, to fulfil this role is worth briefly exploring. Of course, it situates the song firmly in the 1980s, when it was written, when DeNiro still enjoyed a heart-throb status and before his turn towards comedy acting. DeNiro played a succession of 'hard men' in films such as *Raging Bull* (Scorsese 1980) and *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976), as well as *The Godfather Part II*. The second verse begins: "*I don't need a boy / I've got a man of steel*". Though the sentiment 'I don't need a boy, I need a man' is well known as a put-down of male immaturity, there is more to the line, "*I don't need a boy / I've got a man of steel*" than this. It is not just because Robert DeNiro's fictional character is older, more mature, or stronger than the boys of her acquaintance that the narrator prefers him, it is precisely because he *is* fictional. As a fictional character, he cannot physically touch her or ask too much of her. He is the safest choice she can make in the wake of her sexual assault. Her desire to keep flesh-and-blood men at arms' length is further explored in the rest of the verse:

*"Don't come any closer  
I don't wanna feel.  
You're breathing  
you're touching  
but nothing's for free  
I never want this to happen to me.  
Don't try to change me  
you're wasting your time  
Now I've got something much better in mind."*

This verse does not refer to her assault, but rather to a man who is trying to become intimate with her afterwards. The narrator knows that there are sexual feelings within her, but she does not want to experience them, as she does not believe they will lead anywhere positive. The line "*you're touching / but nothing's for free*" suggests that while the potential lover is being physically intimate with her now in a way that she likes and feels ok with, the price of being touched in a way she likes will be being touched in a way she does not like and pressure on her to do something she does not feel comfortable with sexually. She does not believe that a situation can exist in which she will be able to go as far as she wants, sexually, and then stop, and have the other person listen to that and be fine with it as well, so she does not give him the opportunity to either let her down or prove her wrong.

Eventually, she tries to put the potential lover off altogether by saying, "*I never*

*want this to happen to me / Don't try to change me / you're wasting your time".* Because she believes that she may never be comfortable with the idea of having sex, she advises him to look elsewhere. She does not allow for the possibility that he may genuinely care about her, and want to help her through this, but rather assumes that any kindness he is showing towards her is due to his ultimate agenda of wanting to have sex with her. Experiencing sexual violence gives a skewed view of sexual relationships<sup>207</sup>. In this case, we see that because one man has used the narrator for his own sexual pleasure without any regard for her feelings or desires, she assumes that this is what sexual relationships mean in general.

### **b) Jano Brindisi – '11th Commandment'**

Although Jano Brindisi is not well known at all, I include her here because the content and presentation of her song, '11th Commandment' make it too important to this topic to be excluded. Acknowledging similar on her website, she writes:

*"SO yea I haven't had a lot of commercial success, but my life has been a wonderful unfolding of feelings and experiences and steps towards freeing myself from fear and standing with honor and gratitude I don't think there is a category for that at Wal Mart." (Jano MySpace 2007)*

Brindisi sounds like an early Ani DiFranco in terms of her confrontational-folk guitar style. In the song I am about to discuss, her vocal is closer to a speaking voice than a singing one, although this sets '11th Commandment' apart from her other songs, in the same way that Tori Amos' *a capella* delivery of 'Me And A Gun' sets it apart from the rest of the *Little Earthquakes* album. It is as if Brindisi's subject matter is too harsh to be softened by a singing voice and, instead, the words must be presented as harshly and clearly as those acts of abuse were presented to her.

She begins her narrative by situating herself as a very young child, as well as naming her perpetrator and the type of abuse, which, in the first six lines of the song, we learn included forced vaginal, oral and anal sex:

*"When I was three years old, my father put it to me*

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<sup>207</sup> Bass and Davies (1988) devote two chapters to exploring this, 'Sex' and 'Intimacy'.

*One hand clamped over my nose, the other round my throat  
Whenever he was drunk and stoned and feeling kind of horny  
I learned to do it real good so's I wouldn't choke*

*Sometimes when he wasn't feeling quite so friendly  
He'd beat me up and throw me down and do a little Greek"*

The tone for the whole song is set up in these first six lines. There is no respite from the facts here, and although Brindisi's bleak humour and mocking inflection takes over phrases like 'quite so friendly' and she modulates her voice upwards on 'Greek' to indicate surprise, these techniques only serve to underline the narrator's horror, rather than soften the reflection in any way. In the reference to oral sex, when Brindisi says, 'I learned to do it real good so's I wouldn't choke', she is not only referencing the narrator's physical survival technique, but also introducing a problem faced by those who experienced abuse as children: that of learning how to 'do' sex from an abuser. Associating particular acts with the learning of them through abuse can create myriad sexual problems, and as discussed in Chapter 1, self-help books such as *The Courage To Heal* or *The Survivor's Guide To Sex* dedicate a great deal of their content to overcoming these problems.

The song continues,

*"At first I screamed and cried out but no one ever answered  
I guess they couldn't hear me. I guess they were asleep"*

At this point, Brindisi breaks the format of the song and brings in a different voice to comment (between verses), "Nice try, kid". The narrator is looking back as an adult to the justifications she made as to why no one came to her aid while she was being abused. As an adult, she realises that those justifications – that either people did not hear her, or they were sleeping too soundly – simply do not hold up against the noise of a screaming child crying out for help, and this means that those 'bystanders' (including possibly a mother) also have to take responsibility for the narrator's abuse.

Going back to the format and voice used originally, she continues:

*"When I was sixteen, I finally made it out of there  
I took off, running, and I didn't look back  
I kept it locked up, I kept it quiet  
With smack and speed and booze and lots of sex"*

The narrator escapes the abusive home in this verse, but that escape does not fill the listener with much hope for the sixteen-year old narrator. For a start, she keeps the abuse 'quiet' and 'locked up', internalising the feelings, as explored in Chapter 1. She was only able to keep it inside in this way with drugs ('smack and speed and booze') and sex. After the last line, Brindisi again changes her voice and format to comment, 'Fucked up'. Again, Brindisi is complicating the demarcations of abusive sex and post-abuse sex. Brindisi's elision of sex and drugs as coping mechanisms, and ways to avoid dealing with the pain of abuse, are made explicit here.

The fourth verse of the song moves into the present tense:

*"Now it's in the papers and on the talk shows  
Now we address the problem, right?  
Now it's ok. Now it is no secret, it happens all the time  
Well, at least now I know I'm not the one to blame"*

In this verse, the narrator addresses the supposed changes that have taken place in society with regard to understanding of childhood sexual abuse. She acknowledges that it is now far more visible in the media (papers and talk shows), but although she says, "Now we address the problem", it is followed by, "right?", delivered in a sarcastic tone indicating that the narrator feels this is not the case. It is perhaps a further dig at the media representation when she states, "Now it's ok". Clearly, having media visibility of childhood sexual abuse does not make that abuse 'ok', and the narrator seems angry because this step is not enough. Although the talk shows may help in ending the silence and allowing people to feel they are not alone ("Now it is no secret, it happens all the time"), and even telling the victim that they are not to blame, it is not enough. Too much damage has been done to be fixed by a ten-minute appearance on a talk show. This time when Brindisi makes the voice/format change, it is to say, "Still feel ashamed" telling the listener that the changes that may have happened in the external world have not affected her internal experience of responding to the abuse. She may know logically that she is "not the one to blame", and yet this does not remove the ashamed feeling the narrator has.

The final verse reveals the narrator's position:

*"So change the laws, and change the system  
But please don't waste your time telling me they're sick  
The cure is very simple, and really quite efficient"*

*A gun behind their heads, my friend, will get it over quick"*

The narrator admits that there may be some good to be done in changing the laws and the systems in place that deal with sexual violence (though she does not speculate on what those might be). However, she has no interest in understanding the perpetrators and has no sympathy for the notion of paedophilia as a type of sickness. Her solution, favoured by many on hearing of cases of child abuse, is to kill the perpetrators. This time, there is no disconnect between the final line of the verse, and the comment spoken in the different voice, which in this case is, "*Bang bang, you're dead*". The two voices have come together to push home the message that this narrator will not expend any of her energy on understanding or forgiving. It is not worth it to her. She wants her abuser, and other abusers, dead. They have transgressed in a way that means they should not be allowed to live<sup>208</sup>. The transgression is made apparent when Brindisi finishes the song by slowly saying, "*Honour thy children*", which the listener then realises is the point of the title, '11th Commandment'.

### **c) Tori Amos – 'Crucify'**

Amos' debut album *Little Earthquakes* opens with 'Crucify'<sup>209</sup>. It is obvious from the title of the song that this will be a song containing both Christianity and punishment as themes. The song opens, "*Every finger in the room is pointing at me/ I wanna spit in their faces/ Then I get afraid of what that could bring*", and it is as yet unclear as to whether the narrator is perceived to have done something wrong and this is why she is being pointed at, or whether she is attracting this attention for being different or standing out (or up) in some way. She wants to respond to this unwanted attention by spitting in their faces, but she does not, afraid of retribution, or perhaps more attention.

The first verse continues, "*I got a bowling ball in my stomach / I got a desert in my mouth / Figures that my courage would choose to sell out now*". These lines

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<sup>208</sup> Though I do not analyse it in this thesis, Tori Amos' song 'Smokey Joe', is an interesting reference point with regard to this theme as well. Amos splits the vocal of the song into two sides of one 'character' (from her *American Doll Posse* concept), Pip. By referring to Pip I and Pip II as the 'vocalists', she verbalises the narrator's internal conflict over her feelings of murderous revenge towards an abuser: "*If I kill him, there are complications*". The narrator cannot decide whether she is too afraid to kill the abuser: "*Maybe it terrifies me – you through black ice at the bottom of the river*", or whether she does not do it because death would let him off too easily - "*It's too easy to wish you harm*" – when the suffering of his victims is long-term.

<sup>209</sup> Burns and Lafrance include an excellent analysis of 'Crucify' in *Disruptive Divas* (2002). Though they do not approach the song from a sexual violence perspective, Lafrance's analysis of 'agency and resistance' in 'Crucify' and Burns' more musical reading of 'containment and resistance' in the song both move away from a personal interpretation of Amos' work, and towards a more structural analysis of its position as "manifestation of emergent gender consciousness" (p.65).

examine her lack of response to her accusers. She has a heavy feeling in her stomach (the bowling ball) and her mouth is dry (the desert), signs of nervousness or fear. There is irony in "*figures my courage would choose to sell out now*" – implying now of all times, i.e. the point at which she really needs courage.

The chorus begins, "*I've been looking for a saviour in these dirty streets / Looking for a saviour beneath these dirty sheets*" While the 'dirty streets' could imply homelessness or an unfamiliar or unfriendly place, the 'dirty sheets' have more sexual overtones<sup>210</sup>. The link between sex and guilt is one that is explored throughout the song, although at this stage it is unclear whether the narrator is looking for salvation through the sexual acts indicated by the 'dirty sheets' or because of them. The chorus continues, "*I've been raising up my hands / Drive another nail in*" in a direct reference to the crucifixion<sup>211</sup>, however it is clear that the narrator is a willing participant in her own crucifixion here<sup>212</sup>. The fact that it is an unnecessary crucifixion is supported by the following line, "*Just what God needs / One more victim*". The crucifixion has already happened – with Jesus – therefore there is no need for it to happen again. The sarcasm in this line highlights how many 'victims' there are: either those who are victimised and turn to religion, or those who are victimised by religion itself.

The narrator continues to question along this theme in the chorus, beginning, "*Why do we crucify ourselves?*" and then admitting that this is a personal question for her: "*Everyday I crucify myself*". She continues, "*And nothing I do is good enough for you*" – the 'you' referenced is most likely God, but could also reference either a Christian family or even herself and her own impossible standards. She has tried to fit into the shape of a particular ideal character but has failed, never quite measuring up to it. This leads to her assertion, "*My heart is sick of being in chains*". The heart represents the part of the person capable of love, and is also often used to reference the core of a person. This essence of her is chained – incapable of being freely expressed.

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<sup>210</sup> Whiteley (2000) notes a similar play at work in the music of this song, suggesting that "although the song might suggest the penitent, the sensuous vocal tone denies any real desire for redemption" (p.202).

<sup>211</sup> The crucifixion is, of course, also explicitly referenced with the previously discussed 'Me And A Gun', which appears later on Little Earthquakes. Once again, the narrator aligns herself with Jesus and his choices: "*Me and Jesus / A few years back / Used to hang*".

<sup>212</sup> Whiteley notes that throughout the song "there is a sense of tormented self-recognition, a realisation that the relationship between God and the victim is one of reproach" (Whiteley 2000 p. 202). This theme of 'being on the same level' as God, in terms of having conversations or causing mutual pain, is a recurring theme in Amos' work. Other examples include 'God' from *Under The Pink*, 'Muhammad My Friend' and 'Father Lucifer' from *Boys For Pele*, and 'Pancake' from *Scarlet's Walk*.

In the second verse, she asks, "Got a kick for a dog begging for love?" Here, the narrator situates herself as the dog (an animal usually used to represent loyalty, friendship, faithfulness and a trusting nature) who is subject to this abuse and unjust punishment. She follows this up by explaining, "*gotta have my suffering so that I can have my cross*", and it becomes clear that in the previous line she is inviting the kick, in much the same way as she raises up her hands willingly for the nails to be driven in. This notion of "*gotta have my suffering so that I can have my cross*" is a complicated one, not least because at first glance it appears tautologous – suffering and cross (in this context) usually mean the same thing, e.g. when someone talks of having a cross to bear, they are referring to some sort of suffering or hardship to be gone through. However, given the iconic status of the cross, and of course, Jesus, it is worth looking in greater depth at why the narrator might want her cross. There are many who believe that a person has to suffer in order to be redeemed, or more generally that people learn and grow through painful experiences. Amos may be suggesting a sort of purgatory that the narrator needs to complete before being able to come out the other side, having worked her way through it, as 'clean' or 'good', like Jesus. Another interpretation is that as Jesus died on the cross, the narrator is asking when she will be allowed to die. If she had contemplated suicide before, then the suffering she has gone through since then could make those thoughts more acceptable to the listener.

The narrator references the specifics of the crucifixion with, "*I know a cat named Easter*". The verse continues, "*He says 'Will you ever learn? / You're just an empty cage girl if you kill the bird.'*". The bird is a common symbol for the soul or spirit, and just as the cage is an empty vessel if the bird is killed, so the body is an empty vessel if the soul or spirit is killed. Given the specific reference to Easter just before the 'empty cage' line, it could also be a reference to the empty tomb that Jesus no longer inhabited after the third day of Easter. However, the idea of the bird living in the cage is not unproblematic, especially given the last line of the chorus, "*My heart is sick of being in chains*". The bird is not free to fly when it is caged, as the narrator here is not free to be herself when her heart, or essence, is chained by sexual and/or religious guilt. The narrator is struggling with conflicting ideas around death and freedom. She seems to be considering escaping her pain through death at times, but does not know where that would lead her spirit. Like many women who have experienced sexual violence, she

differentiates between the body and the spirit/soul – she cannot escape the body the assault happened to, and cannot feel ‘whole’.

As with ‘Me And A Gun’, there is irony present in ‘Crucify’. The most sarcastic lines come at the ends of the verses. The first, already discussed here, is “*Just what God needs/ One more victim*”. The next is, “*Got enough guilt to start / My own religion*”. Amos makes fun of herself and of organised religion in general very neatly here. The final line in this set is, “*Where are those angels / When you need them?*” – the angels who intervene to save people in a *deus ex machina* sort of way, that the narrator probably heard stories of in her childhood, are nowhere to be seen. Without them, the narrator has to make her own decisions – and she does, ending, “*Never going back again / Crucify myself again / You know / Never going back again to / Crucify myself / Everyday*”

#### **d) Heather Nova – ‘Blue Black’**

From the title of the song, implying bruises, to the lyrics throughout, this is a very explicit song about sexual violence. It begins, “*There’s not much left, just my red dress / Just this feeling that I got / You made me a victim in your Christmas kitchen*”. Here the narrator is identifying herself as a victim of sexual violence. The red dress may be noted here because she was wearing it at the time of the abuse (like Tori Amos’ “*slinky red thing*” in ‘Me And A Gun’) – many women who have experienced sexual violence attach particular significance to what they were wearing at the time – or it may be to draw attention to the narrator’s current appearance (more on this later). The fact that the narrator claims ‘there’s not much left’, other than the dress and a feeling, has a double meaning. Though on a straightforward level, it could refer to her abuser having removed some of her clothing, it also functions to tell the audience how much the abuser and the abuse has taken from her.

The ‘Christmas kitchen’ situates the abuse (as in ‘Shaking The Doll’, an earlier song which I analysed earlier in this chapter) in a family context. It does not necessarily infer a blood<sup>213</sup> relative, but it must be someone who is closely

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<sup>213</sup> Nova uses blood imagery repeatedly in her songs to represent pain, connection, and family. At the end of ‘Throwing Fire At The Sun’ (from *Oyster*), Nova sings, “*Blood is a river, ties you to me*”, which implies the narrator is addressing a blood relative in the song. Earlier in the song, she addresses this person as, “*You’re the one who showed me how to touch myself*”. Although I have not addressed this song more fully here, it would be interesting to look at it in more depth. For example, the idea of ‘throwing fire at the sun’ is interesting, and taken literally, seems to be as redundant an exercise as ‘shaking the doll’.

connected enough for the narrator to spend Christmas in his house. The verse ends, "It's my memory, it's your loss". The first part, 'it's my memory' is fairly unproblematic – this is the narrator's memory of her abuse. However, the second part, 'it's your loss', taps into a recurring theme throughout this song – that of the abuser having 'missed out' on the narrator and a real relationship with her.

The chorus consolidates this: "*Blue black, maybe you got something / But the flowers grew back*". Nova gives her narrator both victim and survivor status in this song. Her abuser has taken some things away from her, but not everything. This is reminiscent of the parts of 'Island' (analysed in Chapter 4) where the separation of body and mind/soul/spirit was implied, and will also be reflected in 'Shaking The Doll'.

She draws attention to the importance of the next verse by making it shorter, only containing two lines: "*And was it familiar when you touched my sister / God I don't think there's a word for that*", before going back into the chorus. There is a play on words when she sings, "*And was it familiar when you touched my sister*" as in addition to the obvious meaning of 'familiar' as 'recognisable', she also implies an incestuous family connection. By utilising both meanings of this word, the narrator paints a picture of her sister being abused at some point after (or at the same time as) her own abuse. She goes on to sing, "*God I don't think there's a word for that*", expressing more horror for what has been done to her sister<sup>214</sup> than what has been done to herself. Later, in the song, she describes her abuser as having committed 'the sin supreme', which appears to refer to both.

Though the title of the song, 'Blue Black', seems to have more to do with the type of violence more associated with intimate partner abuse, rather than sexual violence perpetrated on a child, the context of the song leads the listener to an

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On the album *Siren*, there are two explicit references to blood. The first is on 'Blood Of Me', when the chorus runs, "You're the blood of me / You're the truth that hurts / You're the memory / You're the drug that works". This may refer to a blood relative, and using truth and memory again here references those past narratives about these experiences, or alternatively, one might interpret the song as the narrator singing to a current lover who has helped her get over those past experiences ('You're the drug that works'). The middle section of the song describes the narrator's difficulty in trusting in love from someone else as a result of her abuse. That section runs, "I don't believe me when you tell me / I don't believe you when you hold me / I don't believe you. You're my medicine / I don't believe you when you fuck me". The second reference on that album is 'Ruby Red', a song in which Nova examines the narrator's desires (these include desires to die, to live, to be free from her abuse and to have a child). The first verse contains the lines, "I've got a ruby red desire / I've got to hear the red bird sing / I've got to rip this cord / And rinse this lazy blood". It ends with the line, "I want to live", repeated three times.

<sup>214</sup> We might remember that a sister is also referenced in 'Island', when the narrator sings of her domestic violence experience, "And I don't know why I can't tell my sister".

interpretation of metaphorical, rather than literal, bruises. The following verse situates the song firmly as a narrative of child sexual abuse:

*"I gave it away, whore for a day  
It's so ugly, I'm still breathing  
But you never got my virgin heart  
It stayed locked up, it's still beating"*

This verse is followed by the chorus, and this time we know a little more about the 'something' that the abuser got. The phrase, '*I gave it away*' would usually refer to virginity, which is supported by the narrator's comment that the abuser could not touch her '*virgin heart*'. The fact that the narrator refers to herself as '*whore for a day*' alongside the phrase '*gave it away*' implies that there may have been some sort of (problematised) consent involved.

'Blue Black' ends with Nova's repetition of, "*I never felt so clean, you did the sin supreme / You never had a clue, you can't take it with you*". This sort of language, 'the sin supreme', or the idea of the worst crime imaginable, is usually reserved for sexual crimes against children. In this line, it seems that although her abuser may have tried to make her 'dirty', Nova is refusing to take that upon herself, recognising that she is 'clean' of any blame. Instead she is putting the blame back where it belongs, with her abuser, who has committed (in Nova's eyes) the worst sin possible. "*I never felt so clean*" is reminiscent of the 'better than ever' phase we discussed in Chapter 4, in which the narrator is somehow *improved* as a result of the abuse. This also fits in with the line, "*Eat your heart out*", a phrase usually used to show someone what good thing they are missing and cannot have (primarily this is used to refer to a sexual relationship). The phrase 'you can't take it with you' most commonly refers to death, and it is possible that the narrator is looking back on an abuser who is now dead. This idea of him not being able to have a relationship with the narrator also ties in with the line 'it's your loss', and also possibly with the image of the narrator in the 'red dress' – another reason for someone to 'eat their heart out'. The narrator's presentation of herself and her abuser in 'Blue Black' indicates that she feels more powerful than her abuser at this point in her life – she knows she is the better person<sup>215</sup>.

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<sup>215</sup> Note that this song is from 1994, and fits in with Chapter 4's 'better than ever phase' in many ways that would be repetitious to discuss here, but were discussed fully in Chapter 4 with regard to the emergence of postfeminist ideals and domestic violence.

### **e) Amy Fix – '48 Hours'**

Amy Fix is a New York singer-songwriter who is not at all well-known. However, I include her here because of her explicit political and social agenda with regard to sexual violence. Fix has released one album, *Spoon*, which contains several songs about Fix's own experiences of "being mercilessly abused and rising above and beyond it like a phoenix from the fire" (taken from Fix's website: <http://www.amyfix.com>) In addition, Fix is also a keynote speaker at sexual violence conferences, gives talks in schools, churches and other arenas. Her primary focus is on the possibility of healing from abuse, which is also the theme of the song I analyse here.

Amy Fix's short narrative of mother/daughter sexual abuse is, like 'Me And A Gun', also presented in a *capella* style<sup>216</sup>. The song begins, starkly,

*"I never thought I'd take an interest in suicide  
Until the memories of incest started to visit me day and night"*

Fix situates memories of her childhood abuse as things that have come to her later in life, rather than having been aware of them throughout her life. She implies that she had been a reasonably happy person until these memories surfaced and began to plague her, but the memories, like the abuse, come unbidden and unwanted, intruding into her life, to the point at which she contemplates suicide to avoid them. As I explored in Chapter 2, these flashbacks can take on a status independent to the person experiencing them, rendering that person totally out of control over what images, sounds and smells are being presented in their mind. The 'interest in suicide' may well be an exploration of ways to take control of these flashbacks and stop re-experiencing the abuse. However, after two days of feeling this way ("But now, 48 hours after nothing to look forward to"), the narrator realises she has survived at least this long ("I am alive, I am awake").

*"I came and I listened and I saw  
In the way that the shadows of her hair  
Fell gently across her face  
This is why I want to be alive  
And the butterfly thoughts came back to me  
And her voice shattered the pain  
Like green shoots cracking up through the sidewalk"*

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<sup>216</sup> '48 Hours' has more 'tune' than 'Me And A Gun' and is a *capella* from the beginning until the line 'for the sun', when the accompaniment joins in.

### *Reaching for the sun"*

Although the tune in this verse is the same as in the first verse, Fix holds each note for longer, making the song sound much softer. She also blends the words into each other more, as opposed to the very distinct sound of each word in the first verse. This makes the narrator sound less fragile, and more connected.

Unlike Amos and Brindisi, Fix offers a more positive outlook on her experiences by saying (in the song) that the narrator has 'come out of the other side' of the abuse<sup>217</sup>. She does this in order to encourage others, who are listening to this narrative, that this is possible for them in relation to their experiences as well:

*"I've been down and I've been scared  
And I've hugged myself on the edge of the storm  
But I want you to know that I made it through  
And I want you to know that you can too  
And I want you to know that healing is possible for you, too"*

Fix's narrator goes into detail about the things that have helped her recover from the abuse – for the most part, different forms of artistic expression:

*"I sing and I dance and I play my violin  
I paint and I draw and I write in my journal  
These are the things that saved my life  
These are the things that I have passion for  
These are the things that my healing is blossoming from"*

We will return specifically to the notion of healing in Chapter 7, where it is the major focus of the final chapter. However it is important to note that although healing is not discussed in detail here, it is a significant theme, and that not all aftermath must be entirely negative – indeed one after-effect of sexual violence can be that of healing from it.

## **Conclusion**

In the last two chapters, I have explored the ways in which gendered violence is represented in pop music. Though the conclusion of the previous chapter was quite negative in its finding that a full circle seemed to have been reached with

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<sup>217</sup> Unlike some of the domestic violence narratives we examined in Chapter 4, Fix does not utilise a 'better than ever' approach in her narrative. Though her song has a positive message, it is clear that its primary focus is one of the possibility of survival, and of having a life after abuse, not of somehow being 'improved' as a result of it.

the advent of postfeminism in narratives of domestic violence, the tale this chapter tells is somewhat different, and rather more positive. If we were to base an understanding of sexual violence on the fourteen songs that have been explored in this chapter, this would give a much deeper insight than that provided by the media forms reliant on rape myths that were explored in Chapter 1. The 'grey areas' of sexual violence are narrated in ways that make it clear that these cases are still instances of sexual violence, with an identifiable (and malevolent) perpetrator, and a negatively affected victim. The narratives of child abuse function to provide the listener with an understanding of the ways in which the real horrors of abusing children sexually are found in the betrayals of family members and decimation of traditional childhood securities and joys, rather than in the salacious details of the abuse itself often found in the tabloids. Finally, the songs that explore the aftermath of sexual violence show both the depth and breadth of aftermath-possibilities, exploring the effect of sexual violence on relationships, personal identity (in both mind and body), and self-esteem. We must conclude from these findings that either there is something specific to popular music, which makes it capable of providing a diversity of narratives that other media forms cannot or, more simply, that pop music seems to function as a microcosm of 'good practice' in popular media with regard to sexual violence.

## Chapter 6:

### 'Me And A Gun'? Tori Amos and authenticity

*There's the wind and the rain and the mercy of the fallen  
Who say say they have no claim to know what's right  
There's the weak and the strong and the best that have no answer  
And that's where I may rest my head tonight*

Dar Williams ('Mercy Of The Fallen')

#### Introduction

'Keeping it real' has become overused to the point of now only being employed in parody. But why has this phrase become such a cultural touchstone? The notion of authenticity is one that pervades almost every element of popular culture, and yet it is most noticeable by its absence, that is, we know it when we *don't* see it. In recent years, we have seen controversies over phone-ins<sup>218</sup> and competition lines<sup>219</sup>, misleading TV editing<sup>220</sup> and news 'noddies'<sup>221</sup>. The public feeling of being duped through being misled over 'what really happened' or who someone 'really is' has dominated not just popular culture, but also more 'serious' news, such as MPs expenses<sup>222</sup>, the faked abduction of Shannon Matthews<sup>223</sup> and the 'death' and subsequent re-emergence of the 'conman canoeist', John Darwin<sup>224</sup>.

But it is with two elements of popular culture that this chapter's focus on authenticity with regard to Tori Amos is concerned: what makes an authentic musical artist, and what makes an authentic trauma narrative in music? In the survey, I asked respondents how authentic<sup>225</sup> they felt Amos was with regard to each of her albums in turn. I also asked whether or not they found her rape-narrative song 'Me And A Gun' less authentic if they knew that some of the details had been changed from Amos' actual experience of rape. Finally, I gauged

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<sup>218</sup> e.g. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1557841/BBC-staff-suspended-over-phone-in-scandal.html>

<sup>219</sup> e.g. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/sep/26/television>

<sup>220</sup> e.g. <http://www.thefirstpost.co.uk/7763/opinion,whos-been-faking-the-queen>

<sup>221</sup> e.g. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/sep/07/bbc>

<sup>222</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newtopics/mps-expenses/5572694/MPs-expenses-the-20-worst-cover-ups.html>

<sup>223</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/dec/04/shannon-matthews-kidnap-mother>

<sup>224</sup> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article2994946.ece>

<sup>225</sup> The question qualified, "if authentic means 'being true to yourself', 'being honest about your experiences and beliefs' and 'being real'"

responses to one atypical performance of 'Me And A Gun' by Amos to see if further issues of authenticity arose<sup>226</sup>.

These questions were foregrounded in the first two chapters of this thesis. In Chapter 1, I explored the issues arising from the combinations of gender and music, and pop and politics. I return to some of these as I introduce the notion of authenticity in popular music and its development with regard to the ongoing commercialisation of music, 'brand awareness' and reality TV shows. I also look at some of the ways in which locatedness and authenticity are inextricably linked, referring to some of the theory that has been done on musical authenticity and race and class.

In Chapter 5, I analysed Tori Amos' rape narrative song, 'Me And A Gun', in terms of its content: i.e. what the song was *saying about rape*. In this chapter, I ask whether or not we can consider the song to be an authentic trauma narrative. In order to do this, I first turn to the notion of the autobiographical song and its history, before looking more widely at trauma narratives in the arts, with a particular focus on literature. The lines between fact and fiction, memoir and allegory are blurred here, and this chapter explores the issues surrounding those lines, and the public perceptions of both author and text, once the transgression of those lines has been revealed. I examine three case studies in which first-person literature has been created and presented (to greater and lesser extents) as autobiography rather than fiction: Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments* (1995) (with regard to the Holocaust), James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) (with regard to substance addiction), and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out Of Carolina* (1992) (with regard to incest). This discussion establishes a context in which to analyse Amos' 'Me And A Gun' later in the chapter.

Having established the perceived importance of authenticity in both the reception of music and the reception of trauma narratives in general, I turn specifically to the empirical work I did with Tori Amos listeners. Firstly, and relatively briefly, I examine the responses given to the question of whether or not Amos is perceived by her listeners as an authentic artist, and, given that these results show a chronological progression in the main, suggest some reasons as to why this might be the case. Secondly, I analyse the listeners' perspectives on issues of authenticity with regard to 'Me And A Gun'. I split those who believed the song

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<sup>226</sup> This performance took place after the release of my survey. As such, I took opinions from posters on NooooForums, and asked them to elaborate on their positions where necessary.

was less authentic into three distinct categories, and those who believed the song was not less authentic into two categories, with a close examination of each category, with examples. Finally, I examine the atypical performance of 'Me And A Gun' that Amos gave in Chicago in 2007, and discuss her listeners' reactions to this performance.

This chapter marks a shift in my thesis, in that it moves away from a focus on texts to look at audiences. However, in doing so, it also suggests a shift may be necessary in the way we think about authenticity in relation to trauma narratives. In looking at not just the text of a trauma narrative, as others have done, but also at how audiences have engaged with this trauma narrative, I conclude that authenticity lies not in the text itself, nor in the performance of it, nor in its reception by its audience, but crucially, in the interactions taking place between all three.

### **Authenticity in musical artists and performance**

Discussions of authenticity have always factored in debates on music, performance and the cachet of particular artists, but before addressing these, we must first find a working definition of authenticity. In *A Star Is Born and the Construction of Authenticity* (in Gledhill ed. 1991), Richard Dyer lists the recurring adjectives used in fan literature about stars in order to assert their authenticity: "*sincere, immediate, spontaneous, real, direct, genuine and so on*". Although Dyer points out that the language of authenticity has only been around in the last two or three hundred years, he argues that these are all qualities demanded of a star if he or she is to be accepted in the way that he or she is presenting – i.e. to determine if the person is who he or she is supposed to be. He argues that the criteria regarding authenticity have shifted their focus from the performance to the performer. This means that in order for a performance to be judged authentic, it is not enough for it to be well-executed, but it must also be performed by someone whose personality has been deemed to be authentic.

It is clear to see the applications of this argument with regard to current pop music. Reality TV shows such as *Pop Stars*, *Pop Idol*, *X Factor*, *American Idol* and *Britain's Got Talent* have changed the way in which popular music is created and received. Would-be pop stars are literally judged in the way Dyer describes, not just for their performances but also as people. Notions of authenticity and inauthenticity function in a microcosm in the context of a show like the *X Factor*.

It is just as important for someone who wishes to progress in the show to have a good background story - preferably one which includes some hardship that has been overcome (or would be overcome by success on the show) that resonates with the audience, as it is for them to have a good voice, engaging performance style, and physical attractiveness. A contestant deemed to be too confident, or too underconfident, without an accompanying story to explain this quality, or to be in some other way 'not showing us who you really are' will not win the competition<sup>227</sup>.

It goes without saying that for many, shows such as this represent the demise of 'real music'. There is a sense in which it is assumed that talent must be discovered by serendipity or chance for it to be authentic, rather than through a clearly-structured, time-bound, (and money-making) process. Building a pop star from the ground up, or assembling a band from the best sum of the available parts is to lose the organic or passionate elements people valued in the artists that make up their personal musical history. However, once we start to explore this, we can see that this construction also relies on the authenticity tropes found in the reality paradigm it insults. For example, it was not always necessary for all the elements that make up a band to be equally gifted in terms of musical talent, performance and looks – their contribution to the band may have been primarily defined by their existing friendship, and therefore chemistry, with another band member, or some other (perhaps indefinable) 'X-factor'.

Though these reality shows bring the debates on musical (in)authenticity to its apex, the arguments were being utilised long before Pop Idol was a glint in Simon Fuller's wallet. 'Sell-out' has been applied as an insult implying inauthenticity to any musician whose perceived drop in quality or 'mainstreaming' can be linked to a financial incentive – such as signing a record deal with a major label, or a concert promoter who sees a huge increase in ticket prices. The more 'authentic' or 'edgy' the artist was originally perceived to be, the worse the crime of 'selling out'. The act of 'selling out' may not even be related to the artist's music: for example, we might consider the 2009 advertising campaign that saw Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols plastered across billboards extolling the virtues of a particular brand of butter. It was his original position as intrinsically anti-establishment that made the 'sell-out' so jarring; eyebrows are not raised when (*Pop Stars*-manufactured band) Girls Aloud embark on yet another campaign to

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<sup>227</sup> Also see *Finding* (2008a) on the supposedly 'inauthentic' performance of a song with authentic credentials (Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah') by *X Factor* winner, Alexandra Burke.

sell chocolate bars or hair products, as it does not conflict with their 'brand' in the same way<sup>228</sup>.

Some debates about musical authenticity are to do with things the performer cannot change about themselves, such as gender (as discussed in Chapter 1), race, class and social upbringing. There is not space here to do justice to all the work that has been done on located (in)authenticity in music, however it is worth noting some of the major themes. For example, McLeod (1999) has explored the ways in which authenticity is contested in hip-hop when it is assimilated into wider US culture, as well as when artists themselves are perceived as distancing themselves from their roots, or 'the street' (the only location accepted as authentic). In this way we see that 'selling out' has two components: firstly, success with suburban kids, rather than (just) their own communities<sup>229</sup>, and secondly, taking on markings of a different location, such as fame, money, and connections with major labels or other institutions of power. In a related, yet different point, Hess argues that in fabricating his autobiography in order to appropriate some of the rags-to-riches narratives<sup>230</sup> of black hip-hop artists, Vanilla Ice<sup>231</sup> unwittingly changed the way in which white rappers confront and engage with their whiteness (Hess 2005 p.372). As a result of Vanilla Ice's discrediting as entirely inauthentic, Eminem framed his own approach to hip-hop differently. Rather than imitating the black hip-hop model, Eminem "*presents a new model of white hip-hop authenticity in which being true to yourself and to your lived experiences can eclipse notions of hip-hop as explicitly black-owned*" (ibid p.373)<sup>232</sup>. Through both McLeod's and Hess's examples, we see that

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<sup>228</sup> I gave other examples of this in Chapter 1 when discussing the links between pop music and politics – for example, the controversy over Sting's 'save the rainforest' campaign sitting side by side with his payment from Jaguar allowing his music to be used to advertise their (environmentally-unfriendly) car. However, there are other, more subtle distinctions being made around 'authentic' artists being marketed in manipulative or 'underhanded' ways. For example, the use of particular bands signed to one record label in popular TV shows owned by the same corporation is an issue that has come up since the 1990s and the days of 'Dawson's Creek', but perhaps reaching its apex on 'The O.C.' when certain bands were played repeatedly, and named as convenient shorthand for 'indie', 'cool' or 'edgy' to go with particular characters.

<sup>229</sup> The assumption being that one cannot make music which appeals to both because of the difference in upbringing and privilege connected with the two (classed) locations.

<sup>230</sup> These 'rags to riches' aspirational narratives are also appropriated by X Factor contestants and the like, when they give as their motivation for wanting to win the singing contest, not a love of music or performing, but the desire to make a 'better life' for themselves and their families, who they want to make proud of them.

<sup>231</sup> Hess is right to point out that Vanilla Ice "*became a scapegoat for a history of appropriation of black music forms by whites*" (p.373), calling him 'The Elvis of Rap', after the most famous cultural instantiation of this particular type of appropriation.

<sup>232</sup> In addition to this, Eminem also addressed in his music some of the ways in which he knew he was privileged through his whiteness, such as mainstream acceptance, and vastly increased record sales. We might be reminded here of the point made in Chapter 1 about male artists (not including Eminem) who have given consideration to their positions of power in terms of their gender, and have addressed sexism or sexual violence directly. It is interesting to note Eminem's engagement with some of his locations, but not others, in this way.

perceptions of authenticity can be as much about how the person *presents* who they are, as about who they actually are.

This connection moves us on to considering the performative aspect of the artist, whether in a musical context or off-stage. In a non-US example, one of the defining moments of the UK indie music scene in the 1990s occurred in 1991, after a Manic Street Preachers gig at Norwich Arts Centre. During an interview with NME journalist Steve Lamacq, who had been critical of the band in print, suggesting that they were appropriating elements of punk to bolster their own image, and not being true to their roots, Lamacq accused the band of what Pattie calls "*the ultimate crime of inauthenticity*" (Pattie 1999). After half an hour's discussion on the topic with the band, and band member Richey James Edwards' repeated unsuccessful attempts to convince Lamacq that the band was "for real", Edwards produced a razor blade and carved '4 Real' deeply into his arm. The interview continued for a few minutes until Lamacq realised the seriousness of the situation and alerted the band's manager to get Edwards to hospital. Pattie reads Edwards' act of self-harm as neither entirely theatrical, nor entirely spontaneous, but as "*both a private act, a moment of bizarre intimacy between James and Lamacq; but it has a strongly public element to it--it is, after all the most visible sign possible that the Manics' public image was an authentic one, and it is hard to imagine any other statement carrying the same emotional impact of James' desperate, last-ditch assertion of authenticity*" (ibid p.12). I will return to Edwards' act towards the end of this chapter, when discussing an atypical performance of 'Me And A Gun' in which Tori Amos uses both a knife and a gun are both used as props<sup>233</sup>.

Finally, I am in agreement with Allan Moore (2002), who argues that authenticity is something which is ascribed, rather than inscribed. Given that this makes any judgement reliant on the interpretation of the listener (an interpretation which must be situated in a cultural, historicised context), whether or not an artist, song or performance is authentic is as much to do with who we are, as well as who *they* are. This is reminiscent of Chapter 2, in which I discussed the importance of the listener for any narrative, referring to Butler (2001), Brison (2002) and Brockmeier's (2005) descriptions of the 'I' and the 'you', and the relationship that must take place between the two, especially with regard to

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<sup>233</sup> The Manic Street Preachers are a good point of reference when discussing Amos and her work in general: both artists reached teenagers with specific issues (in the case of the Manic Street Preachers, anorexia and self-harm in particular, in the case of Tori Amos, sexual violence), both Edwards and Amos spoke (and released songs) about their personal experiences of those issues, and both had a similar level of popularity as they rose to prominence in the early 1990s.

trauma narratives. It is with this, and the complications of authenticity in mind, that I turn to the question of what makes an authentic trauma narrative, in particular in song.

### **Autobiographical songs**

As one of the defining characteristics of Tori Amos' song 'Me And A Gun' is that it is based on her own experience of sexual violence, it is important to have some sort of context in which to think about autobiographical songs. Barker and Taylor (2007) define 'autobiographical songs' to mean "*songs that are truly about the singer (or writer) more than about anything else, that tell the truth, and that refrain from bleaching out facts through generalisation*" (p.104), a definition I will come to complicate as this discussion continues. With this definition in mind, however, they argue a song such as Percy Sledge's 'When A Man Loves A Woman' cannot be counted as an autobiographical song because, although written from Sledge's personal experience, all the specifics of that experience are missing in order to make it applicable to as many listeners as possible. By contrast, The Beatles' 'The Ballad of John and Yoko', is a perfect example of an autobiographical song: it is about two specific people, in a specific time and place, referencing events that the audience know to have really happened to those people. (Barker and Taylor p.104-105).

The very notion of an autobiographical song is a relatively new one – Barker and Taylor trace this back only as far as 1931 and Jimmie Rodgers. Rodgers wrote two autobiographical songs. The first, 'TB Blues' saw Rodgers singing about the tuberculosis that was slowly killing him, and the second, 'Jimmie The Kid', although narrated in the third person, was a condensed autobiography of sorts, giving lots of details about Rodgers' life, including such (true but somewhat mundane) facts as the train lines he travelled on. It is 'TB Blues' that is particularly relevant to this discussion. Other artists had sung about TB, and pneumonia, but this was the first time the issue had been addressed from the personal (traumatised) perspective of an artist who was known to have the disease. Autobiographical songs remained a rarity until the 1970s and the advent of the singer-songwriter genre, when it became as common to include at least autobiographical elements into a song as it was to sing about love (ibid p.128).

However, returning to Barker and Taylor's definition of what makes an autobiographical song, we might see some potential pitfalls. They give three

elements by which to measure an authentically autobiographical song: firstly, that the song must be more about its author than about anything else, secondly, that it must tell the truth, and thirdly, that it must avoid generalising to the extent that the specifics are lost. Of course, all of these clauses are open to interpretation and questions: How can we tell it is more about the author than about anything else? Whose truth must be told, and how much of it? How many specifics need to remain? Can anything be generalised or altered? These are questions that occur in any debate over authenticity in trauma art, not just in songs<sup>234</sup>. As these debates reached their apex with regard to trauma literature, it is vital we look the major points of contention before addressing 'Me And A Gun'.

### **Authenticity in literature: testimony, memoir and fiction**

A cursory glance at any bestseller list - non-fiction or otherwise - will show the popularity of first person accounts of trauma. These are predominantly, although not exclusively, concerned with experiences of childhood sexual abuse and (ghost)written by both men and women in equal measure, with childlike titles printed in 'handwriting' style, in order to convey the 'secret diary' mode of narrative. Examples include: *The Little Prisoner* (Jane Elliott, 2005); *Please, Daddy No* (Stuart Howarth, 2006); *Don't Tell Mummy* (Toni Maguire, 2007); *Daddy's Little Girl* (Julia Latchem-Smith, 2007); *Tell Me Why, Mummy* (David Thomas, 2008) and *Our Little Secret* (Duncan Fairhurst, 2007). The back cover will confirm that all of these stories are horrifying tales of 'a childhood betrayed', 'innocence lost' and, ultimately, 'courage and inner strength' to escape, find justice and build the type of happy family life not experienced in childhood. There is a strong fairy-tale element to these books, invoking quite literally the wicked (step)mother or (step)father who causes suffering to the tragic narrator, before they are able to overcome their experiences and narrate an ongoing (reasonably) happy ending. The fact that these books all conform to a particular style and narrative content is something that will be explored further in this section.

These books are foregrounded by earlier first-person sexual violence narratives, such as Sylvia Fraser's *My Father's House* (1987) at a time where these were much more rare. Although Fraser's book, sub-headed *A Memoir of Incest and of Healing*, does share some elements with the books above, it is also complex and

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<sup>234</sup> Though there has been some work on specific songs with regard to authenticity, the debates on authentic trauma narratives in literature much more closely mirror the issues which arise with regard to 'Me And A Gun', so I have not gone into the details of those songs. However, of particular interest is work by Pamela Fox (1998) and Molly Brost (2008) on Loretta Lynn's 'Coal Miner's Daughter', in terms of class identity and shared autobiographical experiences with the listeners.

does not shy from grey and confusing areas, such as Fraser's technique of splitting herself into two people (*The Girl Who Knows* and *The Girl Who Does Not Know*) in order to deal with the abuse. Her memories are fragmented and sometimes contradictory, and this is embraced as a part of the experience, rather than neutered and made palatable for a mass audience, as in the examples above. It is on these grey areas that this section focuses, as I turn to those representations that might be described as special or 'limit' cases.

While all representations bear some relation to reality, these are cases whose reception has been informed by the real life referent (i.e. in each case, there was a focus on 'what really happened'). I examine three books, concerned with traumatic experiences, which blur the boundaries between fact and fiction and therefore raise questions of authenticity. Although this thesis focuses on sexual violence, this discussion would not be complete without reference to two extremely controversial 'memoirs': Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*, and James Frey's, *A Million Little Pieces*, 'memoirs' of the Holocaust and drug addiction respectively<sup>235</sup>. The third book, and the only one not to be marketed as a memoir, but rather as a novel, is Dorothy Allison's story of child abuse and poverty in the South, *Bastard Out of Carolina*. In looking at the way these books were presented, marketed and defended, as well as responses to 'discoveries' or exposes about 'the real' story, I foreground my discussion of the Tori Amos song 'Me And A Gun', in similar circumstances.

### **a) Benjamin Wilkomirski - Fragments**

In 1996, Benjamin Wilkomirski's book, *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood 1939-1948*, was received to great acclaim. His story, about his childhood and the Holocaust was as beautifully written as it was difficult to read for its tragic content. However, the book – presented and marketed as memoir – was debunked by Daniel Ganzfried (1998), and Wilkomirski was revealed to be Bruno Grosjean. The issue for many detractors (Ganzfried 1998, Gourevitch 1999 etc.) was that *Fragments*, although in its very title acknowledged as partial and broken, had still been presented as testimony, and testimonial claims ought to be verifiable. A fictional account, presented as testimony, can do incalculable harm

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<sup>235</sup> In Chapters 1 and 3, I noted some of the dangers of swapping one marginalised location or identity for another (the loss of complexity, and the risk of homogenising 'trauma'). Though in this section, I am looking at narratives of Holocaust survival, drug addiction and sexual violence all together, it is not my intention to lump them together as generic 'trauma narratives'. Rather, they are included here because each one has something specific to say about the limits of authenticity with regard to autobiography, testimony or memoir, in light of the Tori Amos narrative I go on to discuss afterwards.

to the 'truth' of the Holocaust. It provides an 'other side' for those who would deny the facts of the Holocaust, and casts doubt on other, 'genuine' testimonies.

Daniel Ganzfried (1995) and Ann Charney (1973) both published their own survivor memoirs as works of fiction. Charney, despite being advised that her book would sell better as non-fiction, decided, as a matter of conscience, not to take this route, on the grounds that she "*did not trust the factual accuracy*" of her recollections (quoted in Feuchtwang 2003, p. 83). Charney wrote to The New Yorker of her concerns about the "*increasingly rapacious nature of the Holocaust industry*" (*ibid*), and accused Wilkomirski of fetishising suffering, and of creating a new genre in which accounts by impersonators, not hampered by the truth, seem more real than those by actual survivors. Both Ganzfried and Charney seem to fear not only the potential Holocaust-denier critiques of testimony in general, but also specifically that their own memories are somehow devalued by a story that, despite (because of) its fictionalisation, reads better. This is supported by a comment Martin Amis made in the context of a debate on Holocaust fiction published in a 1998 *Jewish Quarterly* entitled 'Writing the Unwritable'. Elie Wiesel's memoir, *Night*, Amis said, "*is a book that seems to me so inauthentic, so contrived and attitudinising, that it makes me think he wasn't there*". (quoted in Geras 2002 p. 121). Whether or not we agree with Amis on Wiesel's work, it is worth noting his point that factual accuracy has little influence over whether or not a book has any literary merit or public appeal.

Eaglestone (2004) believes that *Fragments* actually works as a parody of testimony, and does so because there are "*enough testimonies for their conventions to be successfully copied*" (Eaglestone 2004 p.127). The tropes to be found in Holocaust survivor testimony are easily identifiable and, as such, when an audience reads them, they recognise the book as part of the Holocaust testimony genre. Following genre conventions is certainly applicable in the 'misery memoirs' I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. We saw in Chapters 1 and 2, that when it is vital for someone to be believed, they may alter their narrative (of sexual violence) to fit in with the conventions of the widely recognizable narrative. In doing so, they are able to receive the response from others that they need in order to feel heard, validated and, ultimately, *better*. Lappin (1999) argues that the publication of *Fragments*, even with its (at least part-)fictionalized narrative, Wilkomirski's identity was confirmed and validated, as much to himself as to anyone else. Here we see that the need for the story to

be believed, and the need for the *felt* identity of the individual to be accepted, both of which we explored in Chapter 2, are intimately bound together.

Stefan Maechler (2001) argues, and other Holocaust narrative theorists (Waxman 2006, Stephan Feuchtwang 2003) agree that it is likely that in appropriating the Holocaust, Wilkomirski gives his own pain (a childhood trauma) a legitimate face. Wilkomirski is not the first to appropriate the Holocaust in this way. Sylvia Plath's poems, *Lady Lazarus* and *Daddy*, (Plath 1965) do likewise<sup>236</sup>. She uses Holocaust imagery to describe her suicidal thoughts, an augmentation many find offensive, as they have done with Wilkomirski. This notion of 'augmenting' a trauma narrative in order to make it more shocking or traumatic, or even more artistic, is something also found in the next example.

### **b) James Frey – A Million Little Pieces**

These debates are not confined to the realms of Holocaust memoir, fiction and imagery. In 2005, James Frey's drug-addiction memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, was chosen for Oprah Winfrey's monthly Book Club. Already a relative success since its publication in 2003, the Oprah connection turned it into a huge bestseller, selling almost five million copies. As a guest on Oprah, Frey encouraged a reader who had gone into rehab after reading his book, saying, If I can do it, you can do it'. A second Oprah show with Frey as special guest was planned, entitled, *Did 'A Million Little Pieces' Save Your Life?*

*The Smoking Gun* website (2006) printed an exposé of Frey's claims. Some of the stories taken issue with included Frey's description of an 87 day prison stint (he later admitted that he had only been held in custody for a few hours), and they provided proof that many of his tales were greatly exaggerated, if not entirely falsified. Frey and his team continued to stand by the book as factual, saying only that small details had been changed to protect identities. Winfrey went on record as saying that she supported Frey.

After later stories were published, and it was no longer possible to believe that many of the tales in the book bore more than a passing resemblance to Frey's actual life, the Oprah team invited Frey and his agent back onto the show. They thought they were taking part in a literary panel, but instead, the show consisted

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<sup>236</sup> e.g. from *Daddy*, "Chuffing me off like a Jew. / A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen" and from *Lady Lazarus*, "my skin / Bright as a Nazi lampshade". There are many more examples in these two poems to choose from.

of Winfrey interrogating Frey about why he 'had lied' to her. The following is a transcript of a small part of that interview, taken from the Oprah website, in which Winfrey demands to know the 'real' story behind Frey's assertions surrounding the death of his lover.

**Oprah:** Was your description of how she died true?

**James:** She committed suicide, yes.

**Oprah:** She hung herself?

**James:** I mean, that was one of the details I altered about her.

**Oprah:** Okay. And why?

**James:** Because all the way through the book I altered details about every single one of the characters to render them unidentifiable.

**Oprah:** So how did she die?

**James:** She cut her wrists.

**Oprah:** Hanging is more dramatic than cutting your wrists? Is that why you chose hanging?

**James:** I don't think either [is] more dramatic than [the other].

Winfrey demanded to know why the detail had been changed, insisting that the change made the narrative inauthentic, and 'lies'. Frey, on the other hand, insisted that the changed detail was insignificant. The question of changed details and whether or not they alter the authenticity of the whole is the primary focus of the audience research I undertook with Tori Amos listeners, and as such, we return to this issue in much greater detail when we examine 'Me And A Gun' in light of Amos' later statement that she was assaulted with a knife, rather than a gun. Nan Talese, Frey's agent, was also grilled by Winfrey on the same show, and argued that,

*"A novel is something different than a memoir. And a memoir is different from an autobiography. A memoir is an author's remembrance of a certain period in his life. Now, the responsibility, as far as I am concerned, is does it strike me as valid? Does it strike me as authentic? I mean, I'm sent things all the time and I think they're not real. I don't think they're authentic. I don't think they're good. I don't believe them. In this instance, I absolutely believed what I read."*

However, Frey and Talese's assertions that *A Million Little Pieces* was still authentic, despite its factual changes, were not enough to prevent the ensuing

fallout. Penguin dropped Frey from his lucrative contract with them, and Frey's literary manager resigned on the grounds that "the trust had been broken"<sup>237</sup>. Frey's publisher, Random House, actually made a legal agreement to refund anyone who (along with submitting a receipt and torn pages from the book) made a written statement that they had bought the book on the assumption that it was a memoir and then felt defrauded. Although Random House set aside over two million dollars to cover the expected claims, fewer than 2,000 people claimed, bringing refunds to under \$30,000. Perhaps many more felt deceived, and had no proof of purchase, or did not claim for some other reason, but given the disparity between the expected and actual figures, it would perhaps not be too far-fetched to suggest that the scandal and fallout was more confined to the media and a few outspoken critics than to Frey's readership at large. If, in fact, the majority of Frey's readership did not feel betrayed, cheated, or in some other way let down by Frey in light of the changed details of his narrative, this would point to either authenticity being less of an issue than Winfrey et al indicated, or that there is some way to understand the book as authentic, other than through the veracity of its components.

### **c) Dorothy Allison – *Bastard Out Of Carolina***

Many feminist theorists (Gilmore 2001, Doane and Hodges 2001, Cvetkovich 2003 etc.) have written about the importance of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* in terms of blurring the boundaries between autobiography and fiction. Often described as a 'semi-autobiographical novel', the protagonist's name is not Dorothy Allison, but Ruth-Anne Boatwright, and the book was marketed as fiction; however, the story of a young girl, growing up in a poor family in the South, sexually abused by her stepfather and not protected by her mother, closely mirrors Allison's own early life. Gilmore describes *Bastard Out Of Carolina* as a limit case, not just because of the limit between autobiography and fiction, but also because "*it points to a limit on realness*" (Gilmore 2001 p. 46). Whether or not it makes sense to ask, 'What really happened?', this question is still raised:

*"How do memory and imagination combine to form a historical record? Could a survivor of trauma offer a personal history of a collectivised experience – the Holocaust, for example – which incorporated invention?"* (Gilmore 2001 p. 47)

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<sup>237</sup> <http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6303378.html?text=evashevski>

Roberta Culbertson (1995) believes it can. Her account of her own experiences of sexual abuse as a child feels more 'real', more 'truthful' to her, when she couches it in childhood images of monsters and knights than when she has to give the 'legal narrative' or factual account many expect. We also saw this in Chapter 5 when looking at the different narrative techniques used to describe abuse in songs – one being images and motifs of childhood, such as fairy tales. Allison also has spoken of her discomfort with the 'legal narrative'. In an interview for *Women's Review of Books*, she said, "*I wanted you to know that kid's rage, shame and confusion, but I didn't want you to know how he put his dick in*" (Hollibaugh 1992, cited in Cvetkovich 2003 p. 100-101). She describes her own style of narrating her experiences as "*not biography and yet not lies*" (Allison 1988 p. 12).

Despite Allison's stance against the 'legal narrative', she forces herself into this narrative in *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*, when she writes, "*The man raped me. It's the truth. It's a fact.*" (Allison 1995 p.39). Having to justify the veracity of her sexual violence narrative because of the manner in which she chose to tell it<sup>238</sup> is unsettling, yet sadly not specific to Allison. As we have seen with the rape myths, it is much more likely for a woman not to be believed when she tells her story of sexual violence. The way she chooses to tell that story is simply one more thing that she, and her credibility, will be judged on. Reviews of *Bastard Out Of Carolina* focused on Allison's real-life experiences as well as her storytelling abilities, as if to reassure the reader of her authenticity (Doane and Hodges p. 114).

How does *Bastard Out Of Carolina* hold up against the rape myths we explored in Chapter 1? Although Daddy Glen does have 'outsider' status to the family because he is Bone's stepfather, it is clear from the novel that he is the only one who can confer the privilege and status of fatherhood to this otherwise illegitimate family. In every other way, Daddy Glen does not fit the stereotype of the rapist. He is white, and although he is poor, the novel is set in poverty, and he is no poorer than the other characters (although violence is an everyday part of the lives of many of them). In looking at who is abused, Doane & Hodges point out that Allison challenges the 'innocent child' rape myth by making sure that,

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<sup>238</sup> It is worth noting at this point that Allison's part-fictionalisation of her experiences made *Bastard Out Of Carolina* less, rather than more, horrific. Allison said in an interview, "*I made her, Bone, a stronger child than I was - and more important - I gave her a way out... if the book had been autobiographical it would have been a lot meaner*" (Garrett 1992 p. 3, quoted in Doane & Hodges (2001) p. 114). This is in sharp contrast to both Wilkomirski and Frey, both of whom exaggerated or invented events in order to make their narratives 'worse'.

although of course blameless for the abuse, protagonist Bone has a personality, and one which includes a sexuality at that (ibid p. 115). However, it is not Bone's feisty personality, but rather her inner sexual life, which some theorists find problematic. Bone asks, rhetorically, "*How could I explain to anyone that I hated being beaten but still masturbated to the story I told myself about it?*" (Allison p. 112-113). Although Allison, in both *Skin* (1995) and *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* (1996) defends her own enjoyment of (lesbian) S/M sexual practices as not being a re-enactment of her trauma and therefore damaging (as Herman – 1992 – would argue), it is important to note that this is not quite what Bone says either. She does not fantasise about her abuse as is, but rather fantasises about the narrative into which she is able to place parts of those experiences for sexual pleasure. Allison's approach allows for a damaged yet vibrant sexual agency to exist alongside sexual victimisation. While the victimisation, in Allison's reading, is never sexy, those who have been subject to sexual violence can be both sexual and sexy (without having first dealt with all their psychological issues surrounding their abuse). Ann Cvetkovich (2003) has argued along very similar lines for the potential advantages from certain types of lesbian S/M relationships or encounters, post-abuse. In taking an act that was non-consensual, and which positioned the victim, however untruthfully, as heterosexual, there may well be something liberating in the possibility of queering that act by re-enacting it in an entirely different, lesbian, consensual framework. Because Bone has some sexual agency over her own fantasies, she is ashamed and feels she must bear some responsibility for the abuse they are predicated upon. However, she also feels pride in her fantasies, because they are the only times in which she is able to stand up to Daddy Glen, with people watching, and this makes her feel strong. Cvetkovich argues that the shame and pride cannot be separated (Cvetkovich 2003 p. 103), but that it is too simplistic and disempowering to simply say that it is a necessarily entirely negative experience for someone to engage in S/M fantasies or activities after they have been abused in a similarly-themed way. To tell the story with only the abuse and not the fantasies would be a sin of omission: in order to truly understand the trauma, one must understand all its connections, in this case, including the pleasure and power that these fantasies afford.

In *Bastard Out Of Carolina*, Allison changes her own ending for a better one. She writes a scene in which Bone's mother, Anney, walks in on Daddy Glen raping Bone, and rescues her daughter, appalled at what is happening. Even though on many levels, Anney has 'known' about the abuse for a long time, it is only

actually seeing it in front of her eyes that forces her to act. Also, Bone is badly injured, which provides Anney with the imperative to get her to the hospital. As Gilmore points out, Allison is building in a critique of those who claim that they certainly would have rescued or protected a particular child, if only they had seen, rather than just suspected, abuse (Gilmore 2001 p. 66). Allison's critique (people do not see what they do not want to see) is complete when Anney abandons Bone at the hospital and takes her other daughter back home with her to Daddy Glen. Although the redemptive 'rescue' scene is wish-fulfilment, of the type we explored with regard to the film *The Accused* in Chapter 1, Allison tempers it with this return to 'not seeing'. Rather like Martin Amis' undoing of the Holocaust in *Time's Arrow*<sup>239</sup> (1992), the 'rescue' scene is perhaps more poignant for having not happened to (for) Allison, and for showing that however much we may want to write a different story, or ending, it does not necessarily make it 'real'. As Allison puts it, *Bastard Out Of Carolina* is ultimately about "*how my mama had, and had not, saved me as a girl*".

### **Issues arising from the 'limit cases' in literature**

These three cases trouble and complicate our understandings of authenticity. On the one hand none of them tell stories that are, in a strict sense, entirely 'true'. The fact that the authors did not tell the 'truth', however, did not prevent the texts from being read and interpreted as authentic, raising difficult questions about the relationship between truth/actuality and authenticity. It is clearly not necessary for an event to have actually happened - in the way it has been told - for it to be perceived as authentic. The flipside of this - most pertinent to sexual violence - is that in many cases narratives of traumatic events that have *actually happened*, are not felt to be authentic. Indeed, as I explored in Chapter 1, with regard to rape myths, a common (and in some cases, almost default) response to accounts of sexual violence is disbelief.

Experience of trauma therefore seems to be neither necessary nor sufficient to a narrative of that experience being held to be authentic, given the right narrative forms, story tropes, etc. An untrue account can be hailed as authentic, whilst a

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<sup>239</sup> *Time's Arrow* tells the story of a life narrated backwards. While this has amusing and poignant comments to make about various life experiences (for example, in this format, sexual relationships begin with an argument and end with a brief flirtation over coffee), nowhere is this as stark as with reference to the Holocaust. In literally 'undoing' the events of the Holocaust over time, Amis underlines both the ease with which life was taken (in his version, hundreds of bodies appear from smoke), and the fact that these events cannot be undone. In forcing the readers to reconstruct the 'correct' version as they go along, Amis asks the readers to determine which version is 'right' or makes more sense to them.

true one, conversely, can be treated with skepticism as not believable. The narrative forms of tales of trauma seem crucial to whether something will be understood as authentic, so too is the wider cultural context in which such stories are told.

The relationship between actuality and authenticity is clearly not a straightforward one. The difference between veridical realism and emotional realism seems, in many ways, to be the *felt* quality of authentic accounts. As such, what is deemed authentic is the continual product of interactions between the creator of the narrative, the receiver/s of the narrative, and the narrative itself. For example, Culbertson's fantasy narrative of her experiences, in which she uses knights and monsters to stand in for the real actors in her lived story, she claims feels 'more real' than the veridical narrative. She does not recognise herself, nor her experiences, in the 'legal narrative' version of events and, as such, argues that her fictionalised version is more truthful - to her lived experience - a truthfulness we might translate as authenticity. Likewise, the epigraph to the first volume of Charlotte Delbo's Holocaust memoir, *Auschwitz and After* (1997), reads, "*I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain that it is truthful*".

However, claims that fiction offers the kind of truth that facts are unable to, are controversial, and just because the narrative feels more authentic to its author than the veridical version, there is no guarantee it will be received as such. An augmented, or part-fictionalised memory - based on either context filling in the gaps with the most likely scenario, or symbolism providing a story that *feels* more authentic to the listener (or in Culbertson's case, the narrator) than what actually happened - is understandable, yet remains problematic. One of the main concerns over the Wilkomirski affair is that it hurt 'real testimony' and allowed the Holocaust deniers a 'free shot'. They were able to point to a 'made up' testimony and therefore imply that testimony *per se* cannot be trusted. Parallels can easily be drawn between the Holocaust denial contingent with regard to Holocaust testimony, and the False Memory Syndrome contingent (which was referenced in Chapter 2) with regard to sexual violence narratives. However, altering acceptable forms of narrativising and testifying to trauma on the basis of a small (albeit vocal) group seems intimately connected to the issues that were discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 of limited variability sexual violence narratives. We saw in Chapter 5 the possibility of a broader and more inclusive set of sexual violence narratives in popular music, and it is with both of these issues in mind

that we turn to the issue of authenticity with regard to 'Me and a Gun' in particular.

### **'Me And A Gun' as an authentic rape narrative?**

#### **a) History of the song and Amos' personal comments about it**

Tori Amos' experience of sexual violence is well documented. In her early twenties, when Amos was living in Los Angeles and playing in piano bars and nightclubs, a fan, who she had offered a lift home to that night, kidnapped and raped her. Having been silent on the subject of her rape for seven years, Amos has said that seeing the film *Thelma and Louise*, in which sexual violence affects the lives and choices of both protagonists, compelled her to go home from the film and write 'Me And A Gun'. She said of this experience, "*People had to move away from me in the theater, just because I was, you know, sobbing. I was like a little wellspring sitting there.*" (interview on 20/20 15<sup>th</sup> February 1999). The song itself was analysed in detail in Chapter 5, however it is worth noting at this point some of Amos' other comments about the song, in order to gain some insight into her motivation for writing it. As I discussed in Chapter 3, it is not necessary to understand Amos' intentions for the song in order to analyse it as a text, but, as we will see later, some of her listeners' connect the authenticity of the song with the emotional motivation and political intention behind it, so it is useful to at least see a little of this.

As with all music, everyone will have a different experience in listening to 'Me And A Gun', but Amos believed that everyone would recognise something significant in it, depending on their relationship to, and experience of, rape. She said,

*"The rapist knows 'Me and A Gun'. The boyfriend of the girl who was raped knows 'Me and A Gun', because he's had to live through it in a different way. The parents of the girl...we could go on and on."* (ibid)

Linking a general motivation for her listeners to gain some insight into rape through the song with a desire to have her own, lived experience heard and understood, Amos continued:

*"I was kidnapped and sexually violated. You feel like your boundaries have been crossed to such an extent that there is no law anymore, that there is no God. You feel like the Mother in you will do anything to protect the child in you from being shredded before your very eyes. You're thinking 'I gotta*

*'get out alive, I gotta get out alive.' With 'Me and A Gun', I hope that attackers as well as victims are listening. As well as judges, as well as lawyers. I want you to taste in the back of your mouth what it was like to be in the car with that pervert."* (ibid)

There is little doubt that Amos' wish for this song was granted. Crayton Harrison, (quoted from Whiteley 2000) on seeing 'Me And A Gun' performed admitted, "*it was the most personal and terrifying moment I've ever spent in a concert, watching a woman look directly at me and tell me what went through her mind as she was sexually attacked*".

When asked by the same interviewer if seeing *Thelma and Louise* had made her feel like she would have killed her rapist if she had been able to, Amos elaborated on her reasons for writing the song, and included her view that writing and performing the song was a type of therapy for her in terms of dealing with her experience:

*"You \*know\* I would have killed him if I could have, yes. But I was busier trying not to get killed. But sure, when she killed him in 'Thelma and Louise', do you think I had remorse? Absolutely none. And if he walked into this room now, would I kill him? No. Because I wouldn't want to make it that easy for him. But any man who gets killed raping someone has crossed the line. But I didn't kill him. I finally wrote a song about it instead and \*that\* has given me the freedom. 'Me And A Gun' is \*not\* about him. It's more about me forgiving myself. That's why my music now is so therapeutic, so cathartic for me. I made a commitment not to be a victim again, by writing and by singing as often as I can 'Me And A Gun'."* (ibid)

Amos never said it was a literal translation of her own experience; in fact she goes some way to explaining the slant of the song, describing the narrator not as herself but as her character:

*"When you choose your character, you're stepping into fact. This is who you are. In 'Me And A Gun', I'm the girl who's raped. That is the ground that I covered. I did not cover the rapist's point of view. Now if I were a guy, I'd cover that song from the rapist's point of view or from that of the victim's husband. If I were somebody who hated women, I'd cover it in one way, and if I were somebody who loved women, I'd cover it in another way. My having lived and survived this experience in real life wasn't the only reason that I could write and perform from that perspective. I could do it because I could walk back into that violated space and sing it from that space without wavering."* (Powers 2005 p.10-11 PBP)

As well as producing 'Me And A Gun' as a rape narrative, Amos has also talked in interviews about the difference between the details of the song and her literal

experience that night. In the 1994 *Hot Press* interview, in which Amos was the most open to speaking in this way, she said,

*"I'll never talk about it at this level again but let me ask you. Why have I survived that kind of night, when other women didn't? How am I alive to tell you this tale when he was ready to slice me up? In the song I say it was 'Me And A Gun' but it wasn't a gun. It was a knife he had. And the idea was to take me to his friends and cut me up, and he kept telling me that, for hours. And if he hadn't needed more drugs I would have been just one more news report, where you see the parents grieving for their daughter. And I was singing hymns, as I say in the song, because he told me to. I sang to stay alive. Yet I survived that torture, which left me urinating all over myself and left me paralysed for years. That's what that night was all about, mutilation, more than violation through sex. I really do feel as though I was psychologically mutilated that night and that now I'm trying to put the pieces back together again. Through love, not hatred. And through my music. My strength has been to open again, to life, and my victory is the fact that, despite it all, I kept alive my vulnerability." (Jackson 1994)*

This interview opened a schism in the Tori Amos community and beyond. This was nothing to do with Amos' exploration of her emotional state, or understanding of the personal repercussions of her rape and everything to do with the sentence, *"In the song I say it was 'Me And A Gun' but it wasn't a gun. It was a knife he had."*<sup>240</sup> The fact that Amos changed this detail led some to speculate that Amos had not, in fact, been raped at all. On 'satirical website' *Encyclopedia Dramatica* there is a page called 'Almost Raped', on which Amos is described as 'Singer-songwriter Tori Amos: patron saint of the almost raped.' Shocking as this may seem, almost every Tori Amos forum I have seen has, at one time or another, had a thread entitled 'was Tori REALLY raped?' or something along those lines. The most popular Amos-dedicated website of all – The Dent (now 'Undented') actually forbade discussion on this topic *"out of respect for Tori"*<sup>241</sup>, but there is no doubt that there were some who felt confused and/or angry about this issue. At times, there seemed to be so much debate that I wondered whether or not my assumption that this was a minority response was accurate. As such, in the survey, I asked, the following question:

*"Although 'Me And A Gun' is based on Tori Amos' experience of sexual violence, it is not a factual account (Amos has said that she changed some*

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<sup>240</sup> This is the major changed detail that people seize upon. Apparently an interview also exists in which Amos says she was not penetrated by her rapist – however, I have been unable to find or verify this – although some respondents mention it. Whether or not this interview exists is largely irrelevant, as rape is not limited to penetration of the vagina by a penis, but can be applied to several non-consensual sexual acts.

<sup>241</sup> <http://thedent.com/rape.html>

of the details). Some people have said that they find the song less authentic because of this. Do you agree?"

The overwhelming response to this question was 'no, I do not think it is less authentic', with 96% of respondents choosing that option<sup>242</sup>. Although a percentage this high proves that Amos's listeners, as a group, do not have a problem with this song's authenticity, it is still worth examining the 4% (3.5% of female respondents, 4.7% of male respondents) who did, as they often seem to represent a much more vocal cross-section of Amos' listeners than the numbers would suggest.

### **'Me And A Gun' as inauthentic because of the changed details**

Out of 2100 surveys, 78 respondents ticked the 'yes, I feel it is less authentic box'. After saying whether or not they thought the song was less authentic, respondents were invited to give reasons for their answers. Out of those 78, 7 gave responses that made it clear they had ticked the wrong box. From the remaining 71, 41 chose not to give reasons for their answers. This leaves 30 responses to analyse. The reasons given fell into three main categories, which I have loosely categorised as 'strictly speaking', 'liar' and 'yes, but it doesn't matter'.

#### **a) The 'strictly speaking' response**

The first of these I call the 'strictly speaking' or 'letter of the law' reason, which relies on an equation of 'authenticity' with 'total factual accuracy'. Some examples of this included:

(1966495)

*Well, simply, if she's singing about a gun and it was really a knife, which we know is one of the details that she changed, then it's strictly speaking not quite 100% authentic.*

(1967188)

*Because it wasn't a gun, it was a knife. And she said it wasn't physical penetration. Only she felt threatened. There was violence there, but not actual rape.*

(1974179)

*As soon as facts are changed, of course it's not authentic anymore.*

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<sup>242</sup> These responses will be analysed in the second half of this section.

(2145267)

*Well, the way she describes it in the songs is as if she was actually raped and threatened at gunpoint. But she wasn't raped and there was no gun involved.*

(2180125)

*she made it slightly more terrifying by changing the knife to a gun.*

### **b) The 'liar' response**

The second category I identified may include elements of the first, but is limited to those who seemed angry in their response, or called Amos a liar. Some felt duped, angry because she had achieved money, fame and credibility through the song, and some felt that Amos had belittled their personal experiences. These responses included the following examples:

(1949911)

*It bothered me why she lied in the beginning, when she highly praised herself of talking nothing but the truth. I've built great admiration to her because she was courageous to talk about her awful experience. I even gave her pity, only to realize she had been lying.*

(1953261)

*She said for years she was raped, and was marketed on that experience, then she came out later and said she wasn't raped.*

(1968089)

*because she lied. it was not penetration; it was a lie. but she manipulates this history into a metaphor for her spirit; this is sick.*

(1967060)

*I think that the power of the song in the early 90s was that it was true and she was so brave to sing about it. Then, a decade later, we hear that it wasn't all true. I have to be honest to say that I was disheartened about it.*

(2049710)

*it makes her a big liar for making people believe that she is that person we could relate to or who has exactly the same experience as us*

### c) The 'yes, but it doesn't matter' response

The final category consists of those who seemed to reluctantly tick the 'less authentic box'. Once again, this seems to have elements of the 'strictly speaking' category, but in this case, the respondents have actually said why they don't think it really matters, even if it is 'a bit' less authentic. Examples include:

(1957085)

*yes: obviously less authentic. but not necessarily less helpful to those who need it.*

(1978588)

*although it is basically similar to her experience, and even though she can, through music, encompass the feelings of the whole situation, she still didn't really live it entirely. regardless, it's only a little less authentic and still is completely personal and real.*

(1980754)

*I think the song is slightly less authentic, but I do not discount the big picture behind the song.*

(2195015)

*I'm actually torn on this one, but I have to say less authentic because in the beginning she absolutely described the experience as a rape, but she changed the story later on that she was able to fight off her attacker. If it had been characterized correctly from the start, it would be more authentic. However, if an author tells a good story, it's no less authentic because it didn't happen to them.*

In all three types of response, a picture of authenticity emerges. In the case of the 'yes, I think it is less authentic' respondents, authenticity is equated with factual accuracy, total honesty about an experience, and creating a piece of art that is consistent with that experience, in content as well as feeling. That only 4% of respondents felt this way about the song, and defined authenticity in this way, suggests that we might look at some of the 'authenticity controversies' we explored earlier in this chapter slightly differently, as they too seemed to rely on this definition of authenticity being the widely accepted one. In the case of over 2000 Tori Amos listeners however, we see that it is not.

### 'Me And A Gun' as authentic despite the changed details

As we saw in the introduction to this section, 96% of respondents did not find the song less authentic because details were changed from Amos' personal experience. In their written entries, respondents clearly valued the importance of

the narrative itself over the experience that inspired it. For the vast majority of respondents, their reasons for not feeling that the song was less authentic fell into one of two categories, which were utilised in almost equal measure, and which I have called the 'it's not a police report' response and the 'she's an artist' response, respectively.

### **a) The 'it's not a police report' response**

Respondents who fell into this category made the point that the song does not have to be a word-for-word account of Amos' actual lived experience to still be authentic. Though they felt it was important that Amos had *had* an experience of sexual violence, these respondents did not need her to relay that experience accurately through the song. People suggested reasons that Amos might change some of the details, for example, to retain a little privacy about her experience, or because it would be too hard to perform the song if it was exactly the same as her own experience. Many of the responses expressed concern for Amos' well-being with regard to the song, others simply stated the impossibility of incorporating the entirety of an experience into a pop song. I will return to this focus on how Amos 'needed' to write the song in the conclusion. Examples of the 'it's not a police report' response included:

(1970531)

*If she had to change the story, then that was the way she had to deal with the situation. Her pain and experience aren't less authentic because of this*

(1972170)

*I think that this is an expression of what happened to her and what it did to her deep within herself - its not a historical record of the event, it is a record of what it did to the person*

(1981663)

*Emotion and meaning give rise to authenticity... not necessarily direct word-for-word fact. Most memoirs would not be as interesting or as moving if told from true factual evidence... besides, she does not rob us of the raw nature of the experience - it is still effective without her reliving or divulging distinct details of the actual personal violation. As a woman, I respect that she keep that to herself.*

(1975132)

*It's all interpretive and personal to tori. What she chooses to reveal to the world and what she chooses to keep for herself are completely understandable if you've ever experienced a trauma of that nature. Further to that, specific details don't make the experience of it any more or less. If it happened, so many things are affected and one's own personal place within the process of it can look very different at any time.*

*I respect her version and what she's chosen to share. It's very courageous and inspiring.*

**b) The 'she's an artist' response**

For the most part, people who gave answers that fell into this category did not engage with the traumatic elements of the song. Instead, they simply focused on Amos' status as an artist who writes and performs songs. The way she chooses to do that, they argued, is completely up to her as an artist. Though the song may have been based on personal experience, it was seen by these respondents as unproblematic if Amos changed details, as it would have been a choice based on artistic merit – e.g. the changed detail sounds better, or rhymes, or in some other way enhances the creation or the audience's reception of it. For example:

(1966209)

*Violation is violation, and art is art. If you have to change some things in order to get a feeling across more potently in an artistic work, I think that's okay. We are so inured to pain these days I think an artist almost has to create a larger narrative to heighten emotions and get the message across. Whether it was a knife or a gun, and actual rape or a case of being at someone else's mercy, I think Tori was true to her feelings and the feelings of thousands of people who've experienced similar situations.*

(1972846)

*Songs can be autobiographical, but they aren't autobiographies by definition. Sometimes things have to be changed just to make music, but doesn't make the overall tone any less authentic.*

(1968548)

*Tori was sending out a vibration for ALL women to relate to. Her song wasn't just an autobiographical account of what happened to her; it was one for all women who have gone through something similar. Art doesn't always have to be completely true to be real.*

(1977956)

*Metaphors are what make writing great. They are what allow us as the listener to play with and interpret. So maybe she didn't have a bag of chips in the car. It doesn't make her experience or the telling of it any less valuable.*

(1978057)

*Music, and the lyrical poetry it entails, is about storytelling. It is a creative exercise. To me, the 'authenticity' of music is present in the entire creative package of the song - the language, the musical composition, the originality, and whether I simply like the song. Meanwhile, the factual nature of the lyrics of a given song, in the context of a given writer's life, should neither be assumed nor considered an obligation of the writer.*

*Therefore, I believe that whether the experience described in 'Me and a Gun' is an accurate account of Tori's life, or a fictional story with no factual basis - is irrelevant to whether it is an 'authentic' song. One thing has nothing to do with the other, in my view.*

Though there is a significant degree of overlap between the two types of response, the difference can be seen in looking at the ways in which the two groups define authenticity. In all the types of response (including those who thought the song was 'less authentic'), there emerged an admiration for the sort of honesty (reflected by factually accurate details) in art that stemmed from being brave enough to represent one's own personal, lived experience. However, in the two 'no, I do not think the song is less authentic' response groups I have discussed here, authenticity is seen to stand far more for 'being true to oneself' than being true to every detail. The recounting of details, while potentially both admirable and brave, is not necessary. It is truth-in-intention, truth-in-meaning and truth-in-emotional-revelation that make up the criteria for authenticity here. In splitting the 'no I do not think the song is less authentic' responses into two groups, we can also see that this apparently unified value of 'true to oneself' authenticity splits into two. The 'it's not a police report' responses allow Amos to be true to herself while withholding or altering details of her lived experience *if* that is what she needs to do in order to be as happy or whole as she can be with regard to her experience, suggesting that it is the authenticity of the person that matters. The 'she's an artist' responses, on the other hand, suggest that authenticity is something that can be created or made, in the act of creating the art itself. In this sense, the original experience is irrelevant to the authenticity of the art, which is the thing that matters. The first interpretation allows the artist to be authentic in the sense of 'being who she really is' or 'finding herself', and the second interpretation allows her to actually create herself as an authentic artist.

### **Would the real Tori Amos please stand up?**

As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, there is a significant pressure on artists to be perceived as authentic, as people, as artists, and in terms of both their musical output and their performances. It seemed to me through my observations of the forums as well as conversations with research participants over the years that there was a strong sense that Tori Amos was losing her claim to authenticity (in the somewhat unproblematised sense that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter) with each new album. Fans perceived Amos to be courting the mainstream with 'adult contemporary' singles such as 'Sleeps With

'Butterflies' (2005), and felt that this was a betrayal of the 'authentic roots' she had set down with her early work. Intrigued by this notion, I included a question to explore this in the survey. I asked survey respondents, "If being authentic means 'being true to yourself', 'being honest about your experiences and beliefs' and 'being real'<sup>243</sup>, how would you judge Tori Amos' albums in terms of her authenticity?". Although responses varied, a clear pattern emerged.

Most felt that Amos' album, *Y Kant Tori Read*, which predates her real 'debut' album *Little Earthquakes*, and has Amos looking and sounding very different to the artist she became, 'inauthentic'. Amos has said as much herself (Amos & Powers 2005, p. 122). The majority of people found her next four albums (*Little Earthquakes*, *Under The Pink*, *Boys For Pele* and *From The Choirgirl Hotel*) 'authentic'. These four albums deal primarily with Amos' experiences of trauma, from sexual violence, to relationship breakdown, to miscarriage. Amos' subsequent four albums (*To Venus and Back*, *Scarlet's Walk*, *The Beekeeper* and *American Doll Posse*<sup>244</sup>), which are less obviously personal and more reliant on concepts were most likely to be judged 'a mix of both'.

At the time of the survey release in 2007, Tori Amos had just released her album, *American Doll Posse*, in which she presents herself as five different characters or 'dolls': Santa, Isabel, Pip, Clyde and, somewhat confusingly, Tori<sup>245</sup>. In every show of the tour to support this album, the performance begins with a set from one of four of the 'dolls' (Santa, Isabel, Pip or Clyde), before a costume change and a longer set from Amos herself, or – possibly – 'Tori' the doll<sup>246</sup>. Many fans were confused by Amos' 'doll' concept altogether, and felt that although it was valid to explore different sides of her personality, this could have been done as herself, rather than her actually pretending to be five different characters. This is

<sup>243</sup> Though these questions have much in common with the criteria Barker and Taylor set out to define an authentically autobiographical song, they are less rigid (i.e. not so reliant on seeming absolutes, so 'being honest' rather than 'tells the truth' etc.) and therefore more open to interpretation.

<sup>244</sup> Just before this thesis was finished, Amos released her tenth studio album, *Abnormally Attracted To Sin*, which is not included here as the survey preceded its release. However, it is highly likely, judging by the posts on the forums, that this album would also have fallen into the latter category.

<sup>245</sup> Of course, there are many instances of writers, philosophers and artists who have used different narratorial voices in their work. For example, we might pay particular attention to Kierkegaard and his use of Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* (and other pseudonyms in other work), given Kierkegaard's pre-occupation, as an early existentialist, with authenticity as a religious value. Or we could simply bear in mind some of the precedents in music for this, such as David Bowie's alter-ego, Ziggy Stardust.

<sup>246</sup> I raised this question with some of her fans, as it did not seem immediately obvious to me whether Amos was performing her entire show in character, entailing a greater degree of abstraction from even 'Tori Amos' the performer, (who is, of course, to some extent a character created by the artist – and not, in fact, even the name she uses in real life), or whether Amos' album concept simply did not hold up to the practicalities of touring. The responses I received were varied. Some felt that the fact that Amos would perform the second set in a red wig (over her own red hair) was evidence that she was performing as 'Tori' rather than Tori, others felt that the choice of songs and length of set pointed towards Tori 'proper'.

particularly relevant when we come to discuss Amos' performance of 'Me And A Gun' as 'Pip'.

### **Controversial 2007 Chicago performance of 'Me And A Gun' as 'Pip'**

A somewhat startling development in the life-story of 'Me And A Gun' took place after the survey was closed, during Amos' *American Doll Posse* tour performance in Chicago in November 2007. During the first set, when Amos was performing (with the full band) as 'Pip', the angriest of the four 'dolls', she began 'Me And A Gun'. This was the first time the song had ever been performed in any way other than solo *a capella*, with Amos standing or sitting still. During the performance, 'Pip' writhed in ways that seemed both sexual and rageful. She picked up a knife, rubbed it across her body and mimed the rape act with it. She then dropped the knife and picked up a gun. She pointed it at her own head as she sang, and finished the song by pointing it at the audience.

It is common practice for those fans who regularly participate in the forums, who are at the show, to telephone, text or email setlists, updates and thoughts to others who are sitting at their computers, ready to update the forums, while the show is going on – often even song-by-song. Because of this, a significant (and international) debate about this performance was underway *before Amos had even finished the song*. I have taken part of this debate from Nooooforums, with permission from the posters involved, in order to demonstrate the type of discussion that took place about this performance:

One of the first people who was at the show to post her thoughts about this experience, Heather, wrote:

*that was one of the most SHOCKING and AMAZING things i have ever seen and to be RIGHT UP FRONT FOR IT!!!  
you guys, it might sound weird and bad taste...but honestly she got her point across and it was sooooo emotional....i had TEARS RUNNING DOWN MY FACE!! it was so intense...to imagine someone having that done to them....i was crying and shaking badly BUT managed somehow to take pictures. wish i was able to upload.*

Not everyone felt that the experience was quite so positive. Chrissie wrote:

*At first I thought MAAAG was really good with the band. So I'm going with it, listening, and I look down to fuck with my camera for a second, look*

*up, and BAM. Hey Tori, theres a real knife at your throat. fyi. Like, yeah its a prop. But a fucking knife???? WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?*

*Then, I freak out again, look down at my camera, hear something metal fall, look up, and the knife is on the ground, and there's a gun she pulls from the piano.*

*There are just no words. Terrifying.*

*Personally, I think it would have been fine without the props (not a fan of extra objects on stage). The knife and gun were more like, WTF THIS IS SCARY. But not really adding to the deeper meaning of the song. I don't know if that makes any sense.*

*Anyway, Tori Amos has lost her mind.*

The use of props was certainly a major factor in this debate, many feeling that props to help 'act out' what is actually a fairly straightforward rape narrative, were unnecessary, but some even divided on the choice of individual props. Jason wrote:

*Me And A Gun with a band started out AWESOME.*

*Me And A Gun with a knife going up her legs, being used as a penis and then up against her throat was a bit shocking.*

*Me And A Gun with a gun was uncalled for and really fucked up. it completely and utterly ruined the rest of the show for me. it was really bad and in very poor taste.*

Although opinions on the merits of the performance differed, it seemed that everyone agreed that the performance had been incredibly shocking. When I approached Jason, Heather and Chrissie to ask for their permission to quote their posts, they all agreed, though both Jason and Heather wanted to further elaborate on what they had said that night.

Heather wanted to give me some background on why she had been so affected by the performance. She wrote:

*That was intense...R\*\*\*\* [another board member] was next [to] me...I was just crying. It was also intense for me because back when I was about 17, I almost committed suicide and Me And A Gun started playing in my cd player as I held my big glass of milk and the bottle of pills...I stopped and really listened and something came over me. I realized that "hey, if this woman can survive something this horrible, I can make it through this."*

*(what I grew up with was not easy, i won't go into details as its a long story..but a lot of physical/emotional abuse by my mom. not sexual though..thank GOD)*

*anyway...so you may have some background to the emotion of it.*

Jason said:

*I can understand it being more of a theatrical performance than a song performance, but it's still hard to sort of justify it in my mind considering she's not known for doing such a thing.*

*I think the knife was really daring because of her past revelation that she was actually assaulted with a knife and not a gun. I thought that brought out a whole other level of honesty to a song that was already brutally honest.*

*The gun was more disturbing for me because for a second there, I actually contemplated whether or not she had seriously gone crazy and would pull the trigger on stage. Watching her holding a gun to her own head was so distracting from the actual song that I thought it completely lost the message of the song, despite it being more of a literal translation than the knife. I didn't see it as someone else holding a gun to her head as much as I did her ready to blow her brains out to end it all.*

*I do think it was really daring and provocative for her to do, I just didn't agree with all of it. Especially within the placement of it in the setlist - it ended and then it went right into the Widow mix and then Big Wheel. It was a huge wtf<sup>247</sup> moment. When she came out for 'Big Wheel', all I could think of was how eight minutes ago she had a gun to her head and now she's singing that she's a MILF<sup>248</sup>. I couldn't look at her the whole rest of the night. It really did ruin the whole show for me. If it hadn't been 30 degrees outside, I would have left. I felt that uncomfortable being there.*

Jason emailed back later to add:

*I also forgot another issue I had with the performance - I remember reading something about how Oliver Stone wanted to use the song in Natural Born Killers, but that she didn't want it used because it was going to be used during a scene where Juliette Lewis' character was going to be shooting/killing a bunch of guys. She felt that Stone had missed the entire point of the song. I just felt this really conflicted with the performance.*

The reference Jason mentions was an interview Amos gave to Melody Maker in the UK in 1994 at the height of her fame (her biggest selling single, 'Cornflake Girl' was in the UK Top 5). Amos and the interviewer discussed her rejection of Oliver Stone's offer to include 'Me And A Gun' in *Natural Born Killers* (Stone, 1994):

*"He [Oliver Stone] said the song was supposed to represent Peace in the movie. I said, 'Well, if I represent Peace then I'm not doing a hell of a good job am I? Because this woman kills 47 men.' See, it's always been difficult for me to sing 'Me And A Gun'. And when I sing, 'I must get out of*

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<sup>247</sup> Shorthand for 'What the fuck?' as confused/shocked disbelief

<sup>248</sup> Lyric from 'Big Wheel'. MILF stands for 'Mother I'd Like To Fuck'.

*this', I don't mean go kill 47 people. Like, you know, the Bobbitt thing<sup>249</sup>, the wanting revenge. I can understand all of that, the way the experience of rape is so totally life-changing, totally incapacitating, the way you want to show them what it's like. But the answer isn't go kill. Eventually I couldn't have any of my songs associated with the movie. There are layers to my songs. I didn't know if there were any layers to his film."* (quoted in Stud Brothers 1994)

Jason is right to note that Amos' comments with regard to the violence in *Natural Born Killers* is indeed at odds with her violent, rageful performance of 'Me And A Gun'. However, it is important to bear in mind that the interview was given in 1994, and the Chicago performance took place in 2007, thirteen years later. As such, it may be somewhat unfair to criticise Amos for inconsistency, when over a decade has passed in which she has evolved as a person and an artist, and her opinions may have changed. In addition to this, by the time of the Chicago performance, Amos had had sixteen years of performing the song in the same way and may have wished to try to bring something different to it.

As we will see in the next chapter, which examines the type of emotional support respondents feel they receive through Amos' music, 'Me And A Gun' holds a sacred place among many Amos communities and fans, as Heather's comments intimated. Some felt that this performance betrayed the intimate connection they had felt with the song, and with Amos more generally, since the days they first 'discovered' her. One respondent, who I have kept anonymous due to a professional connection with Amos, wrote:

*"i guess i don't expect authenticity from pop artists either ...*

*that's why it seemed different with tori.*

*and even if \*she\* wasn't authentic ... the performances and the places she was coming from did seem so.*

*i was young and damaged when i found tori ... like many of us were ... and so she mean(t) that much more to me ... and literally saved my life back in high school ...*

*so a lot of my wrath is caught up in nostalgia and mourning what was or what i thought was.*

*and while authenticity may be overrated ... or maybe not wholly applicable in most situations regarding pop artists ... i still don't see this performance of MAAG as anything more than shock and awe. it's not powerful to me ...*

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<sup>249</sup> The interview coincided with the verdict in the trial of Lorena Bobbitt. Amos told the interviewer she was thrilled by the verdict explaining, "You see, I'm coming from a different place to you. I'm coming from . . . I'm mad, mad at myself to this day that I didn't kill the man who raped me that night." (ibid)

*it's not accessing anything from another perspective for me ... it's tacky ... distasteful ... and more than anything desperate."*

Though I have sympathy with this position, based as it is in an emotional history with Amos and her work, it seems to me that this performance of 'Me And A Gun' performed at least some of the same functions that the original performance used to. People who go to enough of Amos' shows become used to her songs, even though she does play a different setlist every night. It is no coincidence that when the 'regulars' request songs, they tend to request the obscure B-sides, and groan when she plays the more crowd-pleasing hits. Given that Amos used to play 'Me And A Gun' every night (although this has not been the case for many years now), there are many regulars who have heard this song live tens of times. It becomes commonplace – the performance itself is an expected one, and the regular listener, can, in some sense, shut off from the experience contained in the song. In this performance, it seemed Amos picked up that experience and forced the audience to look at it afresh. People reported visceral reactions to the performance, whether they had witnessed it in person, or in watching the video, which was up on YouTube later that same night. Some witnesses, who had their own experiences of sexual violence, reported feeling 'triggered' by the performance, especially if their own traumatic experience had involved a weapon. Others simply felt shocked by the rape itself, and felt that the performance brought that experience across in a new and extreme way.

In performing it as 'Pip', it seemed she was accessing the song and the experience from a different place – a place of rage and near-insanity, instead of as a victim whose survival instinct would save her and support her. Many felt that although this was valid, it was a shame that Amos could not do this as herself, that she had to step into another character's shoes to do so. It is not schizophrenic to have different feelings about a sexual assault – one can be terrified, in pain, angry and victimized all at the same time – and to have to pretend to be someone else for each emotion potentially diminishes the idea of trying to make the self whole again after the fragmentation of rape. However, it is possible that Amos was trying to either represent that fragmentation, or to simply leave the original untouched and not taint it in any way that might confuse people. There were still those in the post-show debate who believed that Amos was betraying the song by performing it in this way, however. This raises an interesting question of who 'Me And A Gun' belongs to. In Chapter 3, I discussed the possibility of rewriting Barthes to suggest that 'the birth of the listener must be at the cost of the death of the songwriter', and looked at the ways in which

post-text interpretation by both author and audience alike is problematic. This performance is such a shift from the original that it is not immediately clear whether we should consider it a reinterpretation by the artist, a cover version by a 'different' artist, or a new text altogether.

I would argue that Amos' use of both gun and knife indicates an awareness on her part that there has been discussion about the facts of her assault, and that this has led to some feeling among some listeners that she had lied in some way, or that 'Me And A Gun' was not authentic. The earlier survey response that suggested Amos had changed the knife to a gun to make things 'more terrifying' is not supported by this performance. If anything, after the simulated rape with the knife, the gun is almost a relief, and seems more theatrical than traumatic. Perhaps this is partly because it is obvious that the knife is real and the gun is not, however if Amos wanted to make the point that her assault was not in someway less terrifying because the weapon used was not a gun, but a knife, she succeeded in this performance. Of course, there is a deep irony in the fact that it is this performance by Amos that is considered by some to be less authentic, when it is a telling of the narrative closer to the 'truth' of what actually happened.

When 'Pip' points the gun at the audience at the end, she seems to be accusing them. It is possible that she is challenging the role of the spectator, both in real-life sexual assault, and in Amos' own narration of it. With rape attrition rates desperately low, there is a valid criticism that we stand by and watch as rape happens before our eyes. In Amos' specific case, the audience had become complacent about her rape – laying it out in the bare, stark way that used to affect so many, perhaps did not perform that function any more. In pointing the gun, Amos may be laying the blame here, and also with an audience's need for sensationalism, for sex and violence, to hold our interest, as well as on some people's insistence that without knowing every physical detail of how Amos was raped, we cannot know if 'Me And A Gun' is authentic. Although it seems more likely that Amos is critiquing the links between sex and violence, I would argue that she comes dangerously close to performing them as she writhes while rubbing the knife on herself.

Was this particular performance authentic? To explore this question a little more deeply, I would like to return to the incident I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter – Richey Edwards' act of self-harm during an interview in 1991, and compare this with Amos' performance of 'Me And A Gun' in Chicago in 2007.



Figure 1: Richey James Edwards '4 Real'



Figure 2: Tori Amos as 'Pip' in Chicago

Amos performed the song not as herself, but as 'Pip', either an aspect of herself, or a separate creation, depending on one's perspective. Her clothes, hair and demeanour were all different to those expected from 'Tori Amos' and as such,

there is a clear distinction between Amos' usual performance of the song (solo, *a capella* and stark), and this one. In addition, Amos used 'props' in order to mime the acts she wanted to portray. The gun was not real, and could not have been fired into the audience as the mime suggested; the knife, while real, was used by Amos to simulate rape, not to *actually* perpetrate it. While her words may have been 'real', the fictitious character, props and mime used pointed to 'not real'.

As such, It could certainly be argued that Edwards' production of the razor blade and use of it to *actually* carve '4 Real' into his arm makes his act *de facto* more authentic than Amos' performance. The physical reality, as well as the musical iteration, of Edwards' emotional turmoil could not be avoided. As well as publicly self-harming, Edwards was also visibly anorexic for some time (the Manic Street Preachers' song '4st, 7lbs' is about this). Though Edwards talked about his depression and suicidal feelings in both interviews and songs, it was of course suicide<sup>250</sup> itself that was Edwards' final act of proof that the trauma he tried to articulate in his music and in interviews was 'for real'. One might argue that there could be no greater mark of authenticity for an artist creating art from their traumatic experiences than to die for/from them, and certainly, suicide was the fate of many of the artists mentioned in this thesis (Sarah Kane, Kurt Cobain, Elliott Smith, Paul Celan, Primo Levi, Sylvia Plath). But do we really need our trauma artists to die, or even for us to witness their suffering, in order for them to be considered truly authentic<sup>251</sup>?

It is often joked about on NooooForums (for example) that Tori Amos will not release another good record unless she gets divorced, or someone kidnaps her child, or she suffers in some other way. Though it is clear from the tone that no one is actually wishing Amos harm, there is certainly a sense in which it is assumed that her artistic output and her traumatised self are inextricably linked. This is borne out in the results of the survey question on Amos as an authentic artist, showing that Amos is considered most authentic when she is at her most personal, revealing and traumatised.

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<sup>250</sup> Edwards disappeared in 1995, leaving his car by the River Severn. Though his body was never found, he was officially declared 'presumed dead' in November 2008, almost 14 years after his disappearance.

<sup>251</sup> One survey respondent (1973805) answered the 'Me And A Gun' authenticity question by saying she did not find the song less authentic because, 'The woman needs to be able to keep something to herself every now and then. We shouldn't expect her to cut her wrists in front of us'.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to shed some light on questions of authenticity in testimony, from the point of view not only of texts, but also of active, engaged audiences. In exploring these audience responses, we have seen that no single factor is either necessary or sufficient for authenticity, but that a number of factors are crucial to the 'felt truthfulness' that the audience seems to most broadly accept as constituting an authentic trauma art narrative. These factors include: the location of the artist, the motivation behind the creation of the piece, the believability of the piece itself, and the artist's emotional connection with the piece of art they have created (both through history and performance).

There is a strong consensus among listeners that 'Me And A Gun' stands as a powerful, emotional, moving testimony. Even if its details differ from those in Amos' personal, lived experience, as a piece of art, it is believable. It is obviously crucial that a testimony is believed to be authentic. The issue of believability is a necessary grounding for authenticity, but much more is also going on in terms of what makes a good, convincing, compelling story. The need for the narrative to be good, convincing and compelling is not limited to its critical reception as a piece of art. As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, often 'authentic' rape testimonies are perceived as inauthentic because they do not meet established story codes, contain enough 'rape tropes', or their narrative does not display or perform appropriate emotion. In the instance of an official complaint of sexual violence, those with the power to decide the authenticity or otherwise of the narrative, include the police, juries and – in the case of publicised trials, or those cases involving celebrities – the media.

Finally: the issue of repetition in narratives was introduced in Chapter 2, and will be reappraised in Chapter 7, however it is worth making a point about it here with regard to Amos' Chicago performance. As Amos wrote 'Me And A Gun' in 1991 and has performed it hundreds of times since then, there is a clear question about how to maintain the impact of the narrative after multiple (near-identical) 'tellings'. In Chapter 2, I explored how repetitious narratives of trauma are used by the person who has had the experience in order to speak it, have it heard and accepted and, eventually, have it assimilated into the rest of that person's life. It could only be speculation to comment on Amos' personal stage of this process with regard to 'Me And A Gun' as her trauma narrative, however, we might understand her desire to change its presentation in light of this. In *Shattered*

*Subjects*, Henke (1998) talks about the need to write, rehearse and perform a trauma narrative, in a description that could have been written with the lifespan of 'Me And A Gun' in mind:

*"a major impetus behind autobiographical literature in general, and women's life-writing in particular, may be the articulation of a haunting and debilitating emotional crisis that, for the author, borders on the unspeakable. What cannot be uttered might at least be written – cloaked in the mask of fiction or sanctioned by the protective space of iteration that separates the author/narrator from the protagonist/character she or he creates and from the anonymous reader/auditor she or he envisages. Testimonial life-writing allows the author to share an unutterable tale of pain and suffering, of transgression or victimisation, in a discursive medium that can be addressed to everyone or no-one – to a world that will judge personal testimony as accurate historical witnessing or as thinly disguised fiction. No matter. It is through the very process of rehearsing and re-enacting a drama of mental survival that the trauma narrative effects psychological catharsis."* (Henke 1998, xix)

It goes without saying that people change and develop over a period of almost twenty years, and it would be perhaps more surprising if a narrator did not have different things to say about their experience of sexual violence at this later stage than they did at the beginning. Not only has the trauma been lived with and, potentially, assimilated over this period, but the message one might wish to communicate about it may well have changed. In Chapter 2, I also discussed the search to find ways to communicate the Holocaust to a new generation, in order that people do not become complacent about atrocities that have taken place out of their frame of experience. This is a topic I return to in the next chapter – however, it can certainly be applied to this performance. If nothing else, Amos showed with the Chicago performance of 'Me And A Gun' that the effects of a sexual assault do not disappear. They may change – victimisation may turn to anger, as in this performance – but they do not go away. Amos showed her rape afresh, not letting the audience become complacent about it, or about rape in general. However one might feel about the content of the performance, there is no doubt that fresh debates, empathy and shock at Amos' assault have all emerged as part of that, and that seems like a natural progression for an artist who has always tried to achieve this through her work and interaction with her audience. In the chapter that follows, we see the ways in which Amos' listeners understand sexual violence and deal with their own experiences of it, through their relationships with Amos, her music, and each other.

## Chapter 7: 'We'll get there together': learning, healing and progressing

*But if there were no music  
Then I would not get through  
I don't know why I know these things  
But I do*

Shawn Colvin ('I Don't Know Why')

### Introduction

In the preface to his book, *The Wounded Storyteller*, Arthur Frank writes,

*"In wounded storytelling the physical act becomes the ethical act. Kierkegaard wrote of the ethical person as editor of his life: to tell one's life is to assume responsibility for that life. This responsibility expands. In stories, the teller not only recovers her voice; she becomes a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voices. When any person recovers his voice, many people begin to speak through that story."* (Frank 2005, p.xii-xiii)

Frank's image of a chain of silences being unlocked by narratives goes right to the heart of this project, and has particular resonance with Tori Amos' work. Whether in lyrics such as "*Sometimes I hear my voice / And it's been here / Silent all these years*"<sup>252</sup> or in her involvement with RAINN (whose subheading is 'Unlock The Silence'), Amos has been inextricably linked with speaking out about sexual violence, which, in turn, has encouraged others to do likewise. However, it has been my contention since beginning this project that there is more taking place in Amos' work and her audience's response to it than adding more, diverse, testimonies to a collection of sexual violence narratives, vital though I believe that endeavour to be. Rather, I suggest that there are several processes at work here.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I examined what particular song narratives, including 'Me And A Gun' say about sexual violence. In Chapter 6, the authenticity of 'Me And A Gun' as a written and performed sexual violence narrative was analysed. In this

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<sup>252</sup> From 'Silent All These Years' (*Little Earthquakes*, 1992)

chapter, I turn to what 'Me And A Gun' *does*, that is, the functions it performs. In Chapter 2, I suggested three possible functions of trauma narratives. They were:

- a) To inform people who need to know, e.g. for practical reasons, or in order to seek justice/revenge/retribution
- b) To understand and incorporate the trauma on a personal level and repair the damage to the cohesion of personal identity
- c) To 'speak out' in order to help others, both personally, and politically, and to effect social change

In Chapters 4 and 5, I examined some of the ways in which these functions appear to be presented within the narratives themselves, as well as in statements and other public actions (such as involvement in activism) by the artists. In this chapter, I bring together these three functions in order to talk about affect in general with regard to the work that 'Me And A Gun'<sup>253</sup> does. In Chapter 2, I outlined Jill Bennett's argument that trauma art allows certain critical and affective interactions to take place, moving the trauma from the (personal) body into a (collective) political framework, leading to what she terms 'empathic vision' (Bennett 2005). It is mainly with Bennett's notion in mind that I approach this chapter, focusing on what may have *changed* as a result of Amos and her music. There are two potential critical and affective interactions that I wish to discuss in this chapter. The first concerns Amos' listeners' understandings of sexual violence, and in particular, rape myths. The second concerns the ways in which the listeners, as individuals, have used Amos' music, Amos as a person, and internet communities set up around Amos in order to deal with their own experiences of trauma.

One of my original research questions was concerned with whether or not Tori Amos listeners understand sexual violence differently to the 'general public' response we saw in the Amnesty survey, which was examined in Chapter 1. This chapter aims to answer that question. Using questions from the Amnesty survey of (UK) public opinion and understanding of sexual violence, my listener survey establishes Amos' listeners as less likely to accept rape myths than the general public. The first section of this chapter explores this in detail: however before doing so, it is important to establish why this finding is potentially significant in terms of the theoretical work done at the beginning of this project. When we

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<sup>253</sup> Here I use 'Me And A Gun' to stand in for Amos and all her connections to sexual violence – songwriting, performing, involvement with listeners and activism.

examined the survey demographic in Chapter 3, a picture emerged of Amos' listeners as a left-leaning, well-educated, liberal group. As such, the results of the survey may seem unsurprising, and of course, there is no way to ascertain how the respondents would have answered the questions about rape myths had they never been exposed to Amos, her music or any of the internet communities surrounding her. Without further work being done (e.g. a survey of non-Amos listeners with a similar demographic) there is no way to tell which way round this relationship goes and, therefore, whether it is a causal one or not. However, the trauma theory literature I introduced in Chapter 2 suggests that there might be a more interactive element to this result. In order to understand how these critical and affective interactions take place, we must see how those theories of trauma art can be applied to 'Me And A Gun' in order to produce three types of affect: discomfort or anxiety, empathic thought and motivation to take action.

Frank (1995) suggests that illness narratives fall into three categories: the restitution narrative (in which the main focus is a return to health), the chaos narrative (in which there is a lack of order or mediation), and the quest narrative (which takes the form of illness as a journey with something to be gained at the end). Though sexual violence experiences are not 'illness', the ways in which both can affect mind as well as body, self-identification and relationships with other people, mean that work on illness narratives is particularly relevant to work on trauma narratives<sup>254</sup>. 'Me And A Gun' takes the form of the chaos narrative, because of its immediacy and its non-resolution. The listener does not find out at the end of the song whether the narrator escapes her attacker or not, and is left with the details and the emotional panic of the experience, but no comforting, or otherwise explanatory context. Frank argues that the chaos narrative is the most embodied narrative of the three, existing as it does "*on the edges of a wound*" (p.101). It is the most difficult narrative for an audience to hear, because its lack of structure and resolution provoke anxiety, leaving the listener to face the narrative as a possible reality in their own lives. This approach is similar to LaCapra's (2001) 'empathic unsettlement' (in which one feels both empathy for the narrator and awareness of the gap between the narrator's experience and one's own), which was also discussed in Chapter 2. For Deleuze (2003), the 'encountered sign' in trauma art that is felt or sensed, rather than recognised on a purely cerebral level, is the spark in a narrative that allows an affective connection to take place. Once this connection has been made, the listener is propelled into deep thoughts, engaging in the narrative with both mind and body,

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<sup>254</sup> Also see Elaine Scarry's (1985) *The Body In Pain*, for further work in this area.

in a way that could not have happened without the spark of the encountered sign. In terms of 'Me And A Gun', this could be any part of the song that resonates with, or in some other way touches, the listener. However, the argument here would be that the audience, in encountering Amos' narrative in these visceral terms, is pushed towards a deeper understanding not just of Amos' narrative, but of rape itself. Finally, the ability to think differently, having deeply engaged with the narrative, can also lead to an imperative to act differently. As I explored in Chapter 2, Sontag's (2003) suggestion that artistic representations may carry a moral responsibility could lead to imperatives to look (hear), to not forget, or to actively protest the injustice that is being represented.

Of course, for many of Amos' listeners, there is not a gap between her narrative of sexual violence and their own experience in the way that LaCapra (1994) suggests, and it is on respondents with personal experiences of a certain range of traumas that the rest of the chapter focuses. The second section of the chapter looks at the ways in which respondents who have experienced sexual trauma experience Amos, her music and the online communities available to them. Although I take some quantitative data from the survey for this section (in order to see what percentage of Amos' listeners have written letters to her, felt supported personally by her etc.) the bulk of the data I use here is qualitative. This is because the chapter is primarily concerned with how people *feel* about Amos, her music, and those internet communities, in terms of their experiences. In the preface, I introduced the idea of keeping this thesis firmly rooted in the voices of women who had experienced sexual violence, and the importance of the work being accessible to them. With this in mind, I give over part of this chapter to analysis of some of those voices. I focus on two case studies in particular: those of Shannon and Lindsay<sup>255</sup>. Shannon is the founder of Pandora's Aquarium and as such, I explore her narrative mainly in terms of how Pandora's Aquarium came to be established, and how it currently operates. However, I also wanted to use a narrative from someone who uses Pandora's Aquarium, and Amos' music, for emotional support, and explore the ways in which this takes place. I use Lindsay's story in its entirety in order to illustrate this, and also to retain one voice to tell a whole story, before I analyse some of the salient points from that narrative.

Finally, having explored some of the chains of support that have been established as a result of Amos' work, I turn to the ways in which these chains have evolved

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<sup>255</sup> Both women were happy for their real names to be used

beyond her input. As Amos and her music have developed, so too has her involvement with the issue of sexual violence. The final section of this chapter deals with these changes, as reflected in Amos' interviews, her recent musical output, and the ways in which she continues to interact with her fans. I conclude the chapter by returning to Sontag's notion of the memory museum, which I also raised in Chapter 2, suggesting that Amos' work, as well as the work done by others in the chain, is firmly established there.

### **1. Rape myth acceptance in Tori Amos listeners**

One of my original research questions was to ask whether or not people exposed to music narrating sexual violence were likely to be better informed with regard to sexual violence than a general population sample. In order to ascertain this, I utilised an existing survey done on rape myths<sup>256</sup>. In 2005, Amnesty International commissioned a survey on attitudes towards, and understandings of, rape<sup>257</sup>. As I outlined in Chapter 1, these findings showed a widespread acceptance of rape myths. Participants had six scenarios described to them and were asked to comment on whether they thought a woman was 'totally', 'partially' or 'not at all' responsible for being raped in those scenarios. In my survey, I replicated four<sup>258</sup> of these scenarios, word-for-word, in order to compare responses.

In addition to the general picture given of rape myth acceptance in the UK, the Amnesty survey gives, it is also broken down by age, gender and social class. Though it would have been interesting to also break down the Tori Amos survey results in this way, it would not have given a valid comparison between the two for several reasons. The Amnesty survey contained only responses from the UK, whereas the Tori Amos survey contained responses from 71 different countries, all with differing attitudes and laws with regard to sexual violence, as well as different demarcations of social class. As such, it became clear that the most

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<sup>256</sup> That is, false assumptions about sexual violence. These were discussed in Chapter 1 in detail, and ranged from assumptions about the race and class of both the rapist and victim to assumptions about the causes of rape (uncontrollable lust, women's clothing choices, alcohol consumption etc.) among other things.

<sup>257</sup> 1095 adults (18+), taken at random, were interviewed over the phone.

<sup>258</sup> With hindsight, I wished I had included all six of the Amnesty scenarios in the Tori Amos survey. They were omitted due to concerns that the participants would be overwhelmed with these questions, when other 'politically-situating' questions (e.g. on abortion and gay marriage) were kept to one per topic. The two scenarios that were omitted were 'if it is known that the woman has had many sexual partners' and 'if the woman is alone and is walking in a dangerous or deserted area'. These two rape myths were the least accepted by the Amnesty respondents (68% and 69%, respectively, stating that they did not think these scenarios made the woman at all responsible), and so I chose to use the four scenarios from the Amnesty survey that had highlighted the greatest levels of misunderstanding from the respondents.

accurate point of comparison would be the 'general picture' – that is, to homogenise the group as 'Tori Amos listeners', and take a snapshot of their responses to the rape myths in comparison to the UK Amnesty respondents. In all cases, I found a significant difference in responses, with Tori Amos listeners far less likely to accept rape myths than the Amnesty respondents.

a) In the first scenario – if the woman is drunk – 30% of Amnesty respondents thought that being drunk makes a woman in some way responsible for being raped, with 4% stating this makes them 'totally' responsible, while over a quarter (26%) viewed this as making the woman 'partially' responsible. By comparison, only 12% of Tori Amos listeners thought that being drunk made a woman in some way responsible (1% 'totally' responsible, 11% 'partially responsible'), a difference of 18%. Though the majority of Amnesty respondents – 60% – thought drunkenness was not a contributory factor in making a woman in any way responsible for being raped, the percentage of Tori Amos listeners answering the same way was much higher – 81%. This gives a difference of 21%<sup>259</sup>.

In Chapter 1, I mentioned Bourke's (2007) argument that alcohol seems to have a double effect with regard to rape myths in that it is seen to make the female victim *more* responsible, but the male perpetrator *less* responsible. Given the media's focus on young women's 'binge drinking' as opposed to on alcohol use in any other group (besides pregnant women), it is perhaps unsurprising that an audience demographic of younger people, slightly skewed in favour of women, would reject this myth more readily.

b) In the second scenario – if the woman is wearing sexy or revealing clothes – a quarter of Amnesty respondents (26%) thought a woman bore at least some responsibility for being raped, with a fifth (20%) believing it makes them 'partially' responsible<sup>260</sup>, while 6% thought it makes them 'totally' responsible. Only 6% of Tori Amos listeners thought a woman bore any responsibility in this situation (1% 'totally' responsible, 5% 'partially' responsible), a difference of 14%. Two thirds (66%) of Amnesty respondents thought that wearing

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<sup>259</sup> In both surveys, the remaining percentages were taken up with those who chose 'Don't know / Not sure' or 'Prefer not to answer', which I have not included in the analysis here, as it is not statistically relevant, except with regard to the results of the fourth scenario, where it will be discussed.

<sup>260</sup> Interestingly, in the Amnesty survey, men were more likely to think wearing sexy or revealing clothes makes a woman 'partially' responsible for being raped, compared to women (22% vs 17%). This was the only statistically significant gendered difference in the survey. It is also worth noting that this 5% difference is considered statistically significant, given that the differences between the Amnesty respondents and the Tori Amos listeners are up to 29%, with even the narrowest point of comparison being a 6% difference.

sexy/revealing clothes did not make a woman at all responsible for being raped. This figure was 25% higher when the same question was asked of the Tori Amos listeners, with 91% of them believing that the woman could not be held in any way responsible for being raped in this situation.

Of the four rape myths I included from the Amnesty survey, this was the one least accepted by both Amnesty respondents and Tori Amos listener respondents. This may indicate a greater understanding of male culpability for rape, or of rape not being 'caused' by a choice of clothing, and it may be the case that media representation of this particular rape myth has slowed. However, we might also attribute this to the postfeminist media focus on (over)sexualisation and agency of women that was discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5. If women can now be empowered by pole-dancing, stripping, and a general embracing of 'porn culture', this would be at odds with showing the type of consequences for this behaviour that the rape myth suggests. In this way, perhaps one misleading approach is simply being swapped for another. Also worth noting here is the fact that this rape myth is explicitly addressed in 'Me And A Gun' when Amos sings, "*Yes I wore a slinky red thing / Does that mean I should spread / for you?*".

c) In the third scenario – if the woman has behaved in a flirtatious manner – 34% of Amnesty respondents thought this made the woman in some way responsible for being raped (28% thought this behaviour makes a woman 'partially' responsible, while 6% thought this made them 'totally' responsible). By comparison, only 10% of Tori Amos listeners thought this scenario made the woman in some way responsible (1% 'totally' responsible, 9% 'partially' responsible). This is a difference of 24%. While 56% of Amnesty respondents had the attitude that behaving in a flirtatious manner does not make a woman at all responsible for being raped, this number jumps 29% when Tori Amos listeners were asked the same question, with 85% of them choosing to answer in this way.

The responses to this rape myth provide us with the biggest differences between the Amnesty respondents and the Tori Amos listener responses. While we might again consider that the postfeminist notions of sexual empowerment and agency could be at work here, given the huge difference between the two sets of respondents, it is also worth noting Amos' own take on sexual presentation and agency. Amos herself has always presented in very sexual ways, whether straddling her piano stool, singing about masturbation ('Icicle' from *Under The Pink*, 1994) or being open in interviews about her desires as a sexual being, and

her belief that combining the spiritual and the sexual sides of oneself, as a woman, is vital. In addition, in speaking out about her experiences of sexual violence, Amos has presented a clear argument that neither sexual victimisation nor sexual desire and agency should be associated with shame. Given that these topics are at the heart of almost all of Amos' work, it is not unreasonable to suggest that these values may have been absorbed by Amos' listening audience, in part accounting for the difference in their response to this myth.

d) In the fourth scenario – if the woman has failed to say 'no' clearly to the man – the difference between the Amnesty respondents and the Tori Amos listeners is substantially reduced, though the difference is still significant. 29% of Amnesty respondents thought failing to clearly say no makes women 'partially' responsible while 8% thought this makes them 'totally' responsible, giving a total of 37% who thought this scenario made the woman in at least some way responsible for being raped. The Tori Amos listeners differ by 11%, with 26% believing that the woman holds at least some responsibility in this scenario (2% 'totally' responsible, 24% 'partially' responsible). 54% of the Amnesty respondents believed that failing to say no clearly to the man does not make a woman at all responsible for being raped, in comparison with 60% of Tori Amos listeners, a difference in this case of only 6%.

It is worth giving some thought to the results of the fourth scenario. In order to keep the comparison as accurate as possible, I used exactly the same wording as the Amnesty survey had used in asking the questions. However, I had serious concerns about the way the fourth scenario was worded in the Amnesty survey. "If the woman has failed to say 'no' clearly to the man" leaves a great deal unsaid. As was discussed in Chapter 1, with regard to the conversation analysis work done by Kitzinger and Frith (1999), women are socialised to not say 'no' at all, ideally, but if they do have to, to present it in a 'nicer' way than a straightforward verbal 'no'<sup>261</sup>. In a sexual situation, a woman may say 'no' in all sorts of ways – pushing the man away, freezing, stopping any active participation in the encounter, trying to change the subject or move away, or complimenting the man and attempting to give reasons as to why the sex might be a bad idea. Were the survey participants to have been given a situation such as, 'If a woman suddenly stops kissing the man, tries to move his hand away from her breast, and says, 'I really like you, but I think we might be moving a bit too fast", the

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<sup>261</sup> For example, if invited to a coffee date she does not want to attend, it is far less socially acceptable for a woman to say 'no, thank you' than it is to say, 'oh, I'd love to, but...' and invent a reason not to be able to attend.

response may have been different. Without even taking this point into account the question does not allow for other types of clear response that do not encompass the word 'no' – for example, saying 'I don't want to do this' or even a strong physical response from the woman, such as kicking or hitting the man, in an attempt to get away. The Amnesty question is presented as requiring a clear *verbal* 'no', rather than encompassing an understanding of the myriad other ways of clearly saying no to sex. As such, it runs the risk of falling into the very myth it is attempting to present.

The lack of clarity in the wording and meaning of the fourth scenario is highlighted in the responses to it from the Tori Amos listeners. In addition to the 'totally', 'partially' and 'not at all' responsible answers available to choose in each scenario, two other options were given. They were 'Don't know / Not sure' and 'Prefer not to answer'. In each of the four scenarios, 2% chose 'prefer not to answer', and nothing statistically interesting can be gleaned from these. However, with the 'Don't know / Not sure' response, there is a more significant result. In the first three scenarios – the woman being drunk, wearing sexy clothes, or flirting – the respondents chose 'Don't know / Not sure' in reasonably small percentages (5%, 2% and 3%, respectively). With the fourth scenario however, 13% of respondents chose 'Don't know / Not sure'.

It was my supposition when I set up the survey that those who had a personal connection to gendered violence would be less accepting of rape myths than those who did not. Taking three experiences: domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse, and rape, I compared rape myth acceptance in these groups to the general survey response in order to see if this was accurate. I was surprised to find that, although my supposition was borne out across each rape myth, the difference in percentages was not high. Those who had personally experienced these traumas represented the highest numbers of 'not at all responsible' responses, followed by those who had a partner, family member or close friend who had had these experiences. Finally, those with 'little or no experience' were the least likely to choose this option of the three groups. However, given that the difference in the percentages was, although consistent, small, I have not extended my analysis of those figures here. Rather, I turn instead to a more specific focus on the respondents who had experienced these traumas, in order to look at the ways in which they use Amos' music, Amos as a person, and support networks built around Amos, with regard to those experiences.

## 2. Support from Tori Amos

### in person, in music and in extended networks

It is very rare for an artist as successful as Amos is to meet fans before every show. Yet, Amos' 'Meet and Greet's have been a feature of her whole touring life, and are very important to her fans. They provide an opportunity for anyone who is willing to turn up a few hours before the show (before soundcheck) to meet Amos and speak to her. This opportunity is often used by fans to request a song for that evening's performance, have an album signed, or hand a letter or gift to Amos. However it also provides a space for other, more personal interactions. In attending several of the 'Meet and Greet's in both the USA and the UK in 2005, I witnessed people telling Amos deeply personal things about themselves and their experiences, including narratives of abuse, rape and attempted suicide, in this forum<sup>262</sup>. Amos herself seemed to be touched by these interactions, and to engage with each person and their story, fully. On several occasions, I noticed Amos' eyes well up with tears, or observed her taking and clasping the person's hand as they told her their story<sup>263</sup>.

I witnessed only a few 'Meet and Greet's, however, the survey confirms that these experiences are quite standard for Amos. I asked respondents if they had felt supported by Tori Amos *in person*, and 22% said they had. 1969 people answered this question, and 439 of them answered 'yes'. Given that each person who answered 'yes' had a personal interaction with Amos, in which they spoke to her about emotional issues, and were responded to in such a way that they felt supported, the work Amos has done in this regard herself is something quite extraordinary<sup>264</sup>. 22% of respondents had also written a letter to Amos, and 8% of respondents said that they had told Amos something that they had never told anyone else in their lives.

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<sup>262</sup> There is a significant degree of discomfort in 'eavesdropping' on interactions as personal as this. However, the nature of the Meet and Greet makes it virtually impossible not to do so. An area is usually fenced off for the Meet and Greet by Amos' security – so that there is some sort of barrier between Amos and the fans. After each person has their interaction with Amos, they move away to let someone else take their place. The fenced area is usually crowded and somewhat pen-like, and a truly 'private' conversation would be very difficult to achieve with this degree of proximity to others.

<sup>263</sup> Amos' support has sometimes taken practical forms, as well as emotional ones. A 28 year old respondent from the USA (1949320), who at the time of responding had been to 270 Tori Amos concerts and 150 'Meet and Greets' told the following story:

*"Once many years ago, my car broke down on tour and I was likely going to need to go home because it would cost too much to fix. She invited me backstage, told me she couldn't imagine the shows without me there, and said that at each show for the rest of the tour (about three months), she would leave four free tickets for me at the box office. She suggested I sell them to my friends who were driving with me to help pay for my car repair (though I did not end up actually selling them)"*

<sup>264</sup> Especially when taking into account the fact that the survey respondents only represent a small fraction of Amos' listenership.

Amos' unofficial role as personal confidante to the sexually abused was, and to a large extent still is, overwhelming. When she helped to set up RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), Amos gave a number of interviews in which she discussed this as her motivation for doing so. For example:

*"I got so many letters, not just from women, saying if they could have just had somebody to talk to... and not just somebody who talks on the phone and goes, 'Oh God, I know what you mean. I'm so sorry this happened to you.' But someone who can give you steps toward healing, not just commiserating. And that's what this number will do. Wherever you are in the country, you can call the 800 number and be put directly in contact with (a professional) who lives close to you. I had to do something, because you wouldn't believe how many letters come in. It would blow your mind how many."*<sup>265</sup>

(quoted from an interview with the Boston Globe, June 10, Morse - 1994)

Though Amos often spoke in these general terms, there was one specific incident that remained at the heart of her decision to set up a more official, stable and appropriate support than she could offer herself:

*"This girl showed up backstage... She just stood there and said, 'Last night my stepfather raped me. He's been raping me every night for seven years.' I said, 'Get her on the bus!' When we were crossing the state line that night, [the tour manager] said, 'The FBI's going to be on your ass so fast.' And I'm like, wait a minute, what is right and wrong here? Where has the law failed? That this girl's only hope is an artist...."*<sup>266</sup>

(quoted from Where The Girls Are by Joy Press, George Magazine, January 1996)

Though Amos gave this interview in the context of her motivation to set up RAINN, it is interesting to see that there are several other things at work here. Firstly, it is clear that the girl felt that she could come to Amos personally and share her experience. Secondly, it is also plain that it was Amos' first instinct to help the girl personally. Only Amos' tour manager prevented Amos from allowing the girl to come on tour with them, on the grounds that they could be arrested for kidnapping her, as she was underage and they would be crossing US state lines. However, the point Amos makes about the law having failed can be taken in a wider context than simply an interpretation of being stopped by law from

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<sup>265</sup> Amos has said elsewhere that at one point, she was receiving hundreds of letters a week from listeners who had experienced some form of sexual violation.

<sup>266</sup> Amos also recounts this story on the 20/20 segment I explore with regard to Shannon's narrative. On this show, Amos says that the girl was so overcome during the show that she collapsed. After being brought backstage, Amos remembers, "I said, 'What's going on with you?' and she said 'I want to come and join the tour'. I said, 'what's so bad that you want to do that, now?', and she said, 'Because my stepfather raped me last night, he'll rape me tomorrow night, and he's going to rape me tonight when I get home'." (Vargas 1999)

helping someone being victimised by something that is against the law. When Amos says "*That this girl's only hope is an artist...*", she is referencing not just the failure of the law to protect this girl, but also the fact that this girl had come to Amos, a recording and performing artist, for emotional and practical support with sexual abuse that had been taking place for seven years. This is indicative of two things with particular resonance for this project: firstly, the lack of service provision for those experiencing sexual violence, and, secondly, the finding of alternative service provision through an artist, her music, and the chains of support set up around these.

### **Shannon Lambert and Pandora's Aquarium**

In addition to the official channels of support that were created, other, unofficial networks were beginning to form, inspired by Amos' music and her example. When Shannon Lambert created a personal website, 'Welcome To Barbados', which was peppered with Tori Amos lyrics, telling her own story of how she had been raped at the age of 15 by an older boy at her school, she received a huge response, including an invitation to speak about her experiences on a USA national news show, *20/20* (1978-)<sup>267</sup>. After the *20/20* segment was filmed, Shannon and the two other sexual violence survivors who were with her were taken backstage to meet Amos. Of the experience, Shannon wrote<sup>268</sup>:

*"I followed him into Tori's dressing room and there she was...right next to me, the woman who has saved my life so many times, the woman whose voice helped me to find my own. For so long she has been my best friend, the one who keeps me company when I have nightmares, the one who validates every emotion I feel. I hugged her and introduced myself. We all sat down and she asked how we were...I said I was terrified. Tori decided we needed a lip gloss boost so she dug through her purse to find some delicious vanilla flavored gloss which she shared ('don't worry, I don't have any diseases you can see'). I felt a lot better with Tori-lip gloss on :) We spent a few moments just chatting, looking at Tori's wedding ring, and talking about random things.*

*Kellie, another survivor, asked Tori a question, and then it was my turn. I needed to thank Tori for all she has done for me. The tears were rolling down my face as she held my hand and told me that I was strong, that I was amazing, that I saved myself. For awhile, at least, I believed her. The 20/20 cameras were asked to leave, and then the real magic began as we all shared with each other. The four of us were sitting there, clutching each other's hands and strength, drying each other's tears, and we were*

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<sup>267</sup> The segment can be viewed here, in two parts:

Part 1: [http://youtube.com/watch?v=UXKK2JeC\\_tY](http://youtube.com/watch?v=UXKK2JeC_tY)

Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBO9LTeBW-k>

<sup>268</sup> <http://welcometobarbados.org/goodyear.html>

*all equal. It wasn't Tori, the musical superstar, and three of her obsessed fans; it was four equals, all fighting the same demons and holding on to each other. Tori shared with us so much, and that meant more to me than anything else. She convinced me that she needed us just as much as we needed her. All four of us were sobbing, and that beautiful moment will remain in my memory forever."*

Shannon described the conversation with Amos as "very healing, private and emotional" (personal interview, 2009). After it was over Amos autographed a photograph for Shannon with the words "*We'll get there together*", a phrase Shannon admits became something of a mantra to her when she developed the idea for Pandora's Aquarium. Knowing that she would not be able to respond personally to everyone who would write to her after the *20/20* show aired, Shannon wanted to create a space in which people could talk to each other. Originally integrated into her 'Welcome to Barbados' site, that space eventually became Pandora's Aquarium' (named after the Amos' song of the same name). Shannon's 'mission statement' reads: "*My hope is that Pandora's Aquarium will be a place where rape and sexual abuse survivors break the silence, tell their stories, heal those most invasive, unseeable of scars, and begin to live again*".

Since Pandora's Aquarium was set up, over 20,000 people have registered with the site for support<sup>269</sup>. Out of the 13,000 members who are currently registered at Pandora's Aquarium, 1460 (11%) are men, and 70 (1%) identify as transgendered. The vast majority, 11,470 (88%), are women, mainly aged between 18 and 35. There are two specific times when membership spikes. The first is in September/October, when school and university terms begin, as this coincides with a spike in (acquaintance) rapes. The second is whenever Tori Amos releases a new album or is on tour. Shannon attributes this to several factors. Firstly, increased publicity leads to more people doing web searches on Amos and coming across Pandora's Aquarium that way. Secondly, Amos' music and the live shows can trigger strong feelings in audience members, which leads them to seek out support<sup>270</sup>. Thirdly, Amos herself refers people to the forum when they share

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<sup>269</sup> It is worth noting that the distinctive flourishing of support groups (for all sorts of difficult or traumatic experiences, not just sexual violence) because of the ways in which the Internet allows people to connect despite geographical distance, or other separating factors, has meant that worldwide forums of support have been facilitated by this technology.

<sup>270</sup> Up until this point, I may have given the impression that the Tori Amos touring community is a universally positive experience for survivors, and by extension, is a guaranteed safe haven from sexual violence. Unfortunately, this is not the case. During Amos' 2009 'Sinful Attraction' tour, it emerged that at least two women who tour regularly had previously been raped by another member of the community, who had suddenly reappeared on the tour this year. The women chose to publicly speak out about their experiences at this point, out of a desire to protect other women on tour. Sadly, although many members of the community were supportive, others chose to disbelieve the (almost-identical) accounts from the women who had been victimised, and continued to allow the perpetrator

their stories with her at 'Meet and Greet's.

Shannon is now 30 years old, and works full-time as a lawyer. However, she still runs Pandora's Aquarium as an effective non-profit organisation. Pandora's Aquarium runs a lending library of sexual violence resources for its members, offers factsheets and articles to rape crisis centres and other non-profit organisation, and in 2009, hosted a survivor's retreat called 'Moving Forward'. One of the women who attended that retreat was Lindsay, a regular participant in Pandora's Aquarium, who volunteered (through Shannon) to be interviewed by me with regard to her personal experiences.

### **Lindsay's narrative**

Though I would have liked to interview Lindsay in person, due to the geographical distance between us, and also the sensitive nature of the topic, an online interview seemed more appropriate. I emailed Lindsay some questions, and made it clear that she could omit anything she felt hesitant talking about, as I wanted her to be able to take as much time as she needed, and not feel pressured to disclose anything that would have made her feel uncomfortable. The questions I asked her were: what her experience/s of sexual violence were, how she discovered Tori Amos, how she discovered Pandora's Aquarium, how she uses Pandora's Aquarium, and whether or not she had any personal contact with Tori Amos. Lindsay wrote back with a narrative incorporating the answers to all of these questions, and also said she was happy to have her real name and details used. Lindsay is a 24 year old, white, American woman who lives in Massachusetts. She defines herself as lesbian and is engaged to her girlfriend of two years. She is currently completing a Masters program in clinical social work. This is her narrative, which I share in its entirety as an example that is not untypical of Amos' listeners:

*"At ages 3 and 9, I was sexually molested and raped by my paternal grandfather. He fortunately lived across the country from my family, so I did not see him often. The last time I saw him alive at 15, he tried to rape me again, but I fought back and he left me alone. At 13, the father of a girl I babysat for raped me while I was on vacation with them. This was a one-time incident, but it left the largest emotional scar because I had trusted him and loved his family. I stopped babysitting for the family right after the rape, and lost all contact with the family when they moved out of state about a year later. The police and I attempted to prosecute him*

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to be an accepted member of the close touring group. This has left something of a schism in the community.

*when I was 18, but the strain was too much on me and so I stopped the case.*

*I discovered Pandora's Aquarium on accident in the summer of 2002. I had never intended to look for resources for sexual assault survivors simply because I had no clue that any even existed! I was 17 at the time, and I had only acknowledged the rape I experienced at 13 (I had not disclosed about the earlier abuse by my grandfather until I was 18 out of fear of family ramifications). I had just come home for working at a camp for middle school girls, and one of the counselors had shown us a card trick that I thought my brother would like. I looked around for that, and the one site that had it was a larger search engine. For some reason, Welcome to Barbados and Pandora's Aquarium were on the side bar for different links. I have no idea why they were on there, but I am certainly glad that the sites existed. I did not have much support in my real life, and Pandy's became my one main outlet. I found so much support around the social isolation I felt once I told about the rape at 13, and I began to make friends online, some of who became my friends in my life outside the boards.*

*At 20, an employee at my college raped me and badly slashed me repeatedly because of my sexual orientation. He also wrote horrible slurs about lesbians on my body. I did not know him well, but he saw me quite often with a group of friends who were also LGBT. I think I was the target of the group because we were both exiting the college at the same time. It was his attempt to try and make me 'turn straight' but it failed. This was particularly hard on me because it was the first time I had experienced any persecution because of my sexual orientation. He failed at his goal of making me turn straight, but I did try to hide my sexual orientation for several months afterwards. While the case did not go far in the legal process, he was fired and banned from campus under threat of arrest if he was within 100 feet of the campus.*

*I probably would have been very lost after this rape if I did not have the members at Pandora's Aquarium to help me through that horrific time. I had just found a new therapist prior to this assault, and I found it hard to trust her initially with this new experience because I hardly knew her (that trust issue is gone now though as I have been working with her for nearly 4 years). I turned to the members to provide me advice and support as I rebuilt my life.*

*I first heard about Tori Amos when I joined Pandora's Aquarium back in August 2002, when I was 17. So many of the members talked about how Tori Amos' music was an inspiration to them, and I decided to buy Little Earthquakes and Under the Pink. Little Earthquakes seemed to be the primary album that everyone seemed to say helped them the most. I listened to it for days and so many emotions that I had buried inside suddenly became released within me. I soon bought every album since and each has inspired and touched me in unique ways. Her music helped get me through the darkest hours of my life when I was 18 and attempted suicide and later at 20 when I was raped again.*

*I had one main interaction with Tori Amos back in 2005 when she was on her book tour for Piece By Piece. She had come to Boston as part of the tour, and the bookstore she was at was very close to where my college was. When I met her, she smiled warmly and shook my hand, while asking my name. I told her "I'm Lindsay. I just want to say that I first*

*was acquainted with your music three years ago when I joined a survivor message board called Pandora's Aquarium." She smiled at me and said to me, while signing my items, "Ah, I actually know the woman who runs it." I went on to say: "Your music and story has been an inspiration to me on my healing journey. I have been able to turn my pain into activism, which includes participating in fundraisers for RAINN and by participating in a local colleges' coalition against sexual assault, and I have you as a role model. I owe part of my journey to you." Tori said, "Thank you Lindsay. You know, we survivors need to stick together and work with others to make sure this never happens to anyone else. I'm glad you are doing this work." I about nearly died that I got that recognition for the activism I had done up to that time by one of my heroes.*

*In addition, I also won a contest later that summer to gain front row access to her Boston stop on the Summer of Sin tour. The concert was a phenomenal experience. One of my dearest friends, who also has been a member at Pandora's Aquarium (or Pandy's as it is affectionately known) went to the show with me, and we were both mesmerized. Tori had played some of the songs that helped me most, including "Winter," "Tear in Your Hand," and "Pretty Good Year." "Pretty Good Year" has been my anthem over the past few years, as my life truly is at a place where I am happy with how it is going. There are still challenges that I face, particularly still having to deal with some of the aftermath of being a sexual assault survivor, but I am stronger than ever and love the fact that I am soon going to have my master's in social work. I may not have musical talent like Tori, but I know how important having a good therapist who is empathic to the needs of survivors is to the healing journey. I hope to be that therapist to many people, particularly to survivors of sexual violence.*

*I took a hiatus from active involvement in Pandora's Aquarium about a year after the assault, but I have since returned and am an active part of the community once again. One of the sub-forums that drew me back is for LGBT survivors, which I have found helpful in navigating my relationships with women and issues revolving around intimacy and sex that stemmed from the sexual violence I experienced. There also is a relatively new section called 'Moving Forward' that drew me back to the community, as in the most recent past, I felt that I had done a significant amount of healing and was not as trapped by my past. This new section allowed me to share my experiences of how I got to the place that I am in my life now as well as provide understanding to those who are in a similar place and provide encouragement to others.*

*In my early years, I felt I took more than I gave to other members because I needed a higher level of emotional support. Now, I am at a point where I want to help others who are struggling. I still receive support from time to time when I have some difficulties that arise in my healing journey, but truly, my life has changed so much for the better. I am finishing up my master's in clinical social work. I am engaged to the love of my life. I have a wide group of supportive friends, both survivors and non-survivors, off-line and on-line, lesbians and non-lesbians. I have a much healthier relationship with myself as well as my family. I am on the cusp of entering into an amazing stage in my life. I never dreamed this life would be possible when I first joined Pandy's, and I am truly grateful for the wonderful creators and members over there who helped me along the way. In a few short months, I will also be attending the first Moving Forward retreat that is being put on by Pandora's Aquarium. I am*

*looking forward to fostering more friendships with amazing survivors who are also shining examples of how healing is possible. Life is beautiful now.”*

### **What Shannon and Lindsay’s narratives have to say about Tori Amos and support after sexual violence**

Both narratives illuminate the fact that there are three distinct, but interconnected sources of support for survivors of sexual violence who come to be caught up the music of Tori Amos: the music itself, Tori Amos herself – both in person, and as an iconic survivor/healer figure, and the community of fellow survivors that springs up around them. In both stories, it is clear that the three sources of support are both distinct and connected. For example, though I had assumed that most people who get support from Pandora’s Aquarium did so by first discovering the music of Tori Amos, and then being referred to the forum, or finding it through an internet search, Lindsay discovered Pandora’s Aquarium by chance, and then came to the music, and Amos in person, as secondary sources of support. In comparing Lindsay’s trajectory of Tori Amos-connected support to that of Shannon, who found Amos’ music first<sup>271</sup>, started writing about it online, and then received support from Amos herself, we see that the chain of support works in both directions.

The interconnectedness of these three modes of support is vital. For example, Amos would not be as iconic as a sexual violence survivor/healer without her music, but at the same time, she also offers both Lindsay and Shannon something more than is offered in her music alone. The connection that transpires between Amos and both Lindsay and Shannon transcends the expectation that both women seemed to have before the meeting – that they were fans meeting a singer who has also become the patron saint of sexual violence survivors. Rather, what happened in both cases, cements and deconstructs this role for Amos. Both Lindsay and Shannon get things autographed by Amos in their meetings – a marker of the star/fan relationship that is at work there. However, in both meetings, Amos takes a step away from that relationship, and towards a much closer one. In Shannon’s story, after the cameras stop rolling, Amos shares her lip-gloss with the women, before all four

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<sup>271</sup> In the 20/20 segment, Shannon says that after four years of trying to hide her experiences away, but feeling depressed and suicidal, a friend gave her Amos’ *Little Earthquakes* CD. On listening to ‘Me And A Gun’, Shannon said, “It was like I instantly knew what she was talking about. I locked my door, put the song on repeat, and just sat on the floor and absolutely sobbed. I was just so amazing to suddenly feel like I’m not all alone, and this is normal – to be feeling this way”.

tell their stories, hold hands and cry together<sup>272</sup>. In Lindsay's story, Amos tells her, "We survivors need to stick together".

I called this chapter 'We'll get there together', after the words Amos wrote on the photograph she autographed for Shannon. The words have resonance with both Shannon's story and Lindsay's story, as well as with the many narratives that people wrote on their survey responses about their personal experiences with Amos. It seems that one of the major ways in which Amos has helped people with their experiences of sexual violence lies in her willingness to align herself with her listeners. Because of this, people are able to feel part of a community of which Amos is not just the figurehead, but also a member, living with and struggling with the aftermath of her own experiences. However, it seems to me that Amos' role as figurehead of this community is just as important as her role as active participant in it. Though it may have been both healing and useful, I suspect that the 20/20 private meeting would not have had such significance for the women involved had Amos not also been present and participating in it. Likewise, when Amos affirms Lindsay's work in their face to face meeting, Lindsay says, "*I about nearly died that I got that recognition for the activism I had done up to that time by one of my heroes*". It is Amos' status as 'hero', both in terms of her music, and in terms of her iconic stature with regard to sexual violence, that make both women feel especially validated, heard and supported.

Though both Shannon and Lindsay's stories are, of course, deeply personal and individual, they are also representative. During the course of my research, I met many of Amos' listeners who also shared personal stories about their encounters with Amos, her music and the communities around them, with me. A common thread running through almost all of these stories was the (almost incredulous) gratitude that *someone like Amos* had taken the time to hear their story, interact with it in an emotional way, and offer some kind of personal support, in addition to the music that had already supported and sustained them. Their narratives, and many of those written on the survey by respondents, had many structural

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<sup>272</sup> It is interesting to note that Amos shares two personal things with the women: the lip-gloss and her story. We might discount the lip-gloss as trivial while lauding the story as significant, however, I believe there is more at stake here. In sharing something feminine, physical and personal with the women, Amos underlines the message she might like to give in words ('you are not dirty', 'you can still be a sexual being', 'you did not cause this by making yourself look attractive') with her actions. The parallel with the Bible story in which Jesus heals the leper (Mark 1: 40-45) is clear: though Jesus does heal the leprosy, the significance of the story is often seen in his willingness to touch the man, which was forbidden, at a time when the disease was associated with a great degree of shame and social stigma. Likewise, for these women, that someone in Amos' position of power (both as a star and as the 'patron saint' of sexual violence) showed willingness, not only to talk to them about sexual violation, but also to share with them something physically intimate, is as clear a message of acceptance as they could receive.

similarities, as well as similarities in trauma-content. They began with a sense of (usually teenage) isolation, before moving to the ways in which Amos' music had made them feel not alone. After discovering the music, they attended live shows and 'Meet and Greet's, which performed two functions. The first of these was to access Amos herself and get support that way. The second was to meet other, like-minded, people, with whom they formed friendships. James Mollison, whose photography project on music fans I referenced in Chapter 3, concluded at the end of his project:

*"I began to see how concert audiences are like surrogate families for music fans. They offer a chance to get together with people who share their connection to the music, or to relive their youth, or reach out to a scene or an attitude that existed before they were born"*  
(Mollison, 2008)

The statistics from the survey illustrate this sense of connection and family even further. 98% of respondents considered music to be a form of emotional support and 93% said there was a specific Tori Amos song that meant a lot to them on a personal level. When I asked respondents about the forums and communities, I asked, *"As a result of meeting someone through one of these forums, have you ever done any of the following (tick all that apply)?"* 53% of respondents had "toured or travelled with them"; 20% had "gone on holiday (non-tour vacation) with them"; 19% had "had a relationship or sexual encounter with them"; 3% had "worked with them" and 5% had "lived with them". Through these numbers, we are able to see a picture of a functioning community in which people form relationships and friendships that, although may have had their roots in a shared appreciation of Amos' music, stretch far further than that, and are sustained whether that mutual appreciation continues or not<sup>273</sup>.

At the beginning of the chapter, I raised the supposition that 'empathic vision' leading to political action was of particular relevance in the case of Amos and her listeners. Frank's assertion that *"in wounded storytelling, the physical act becomes the ethical act"*, propelling those whose voices have been lost, and then found, to help others to regain their voices too. In this section, we have seen narratives from Shannon, Lindsay and Amos herself that support this. All three women, as 'wounded storytellers', took their experiences of sexual violence and, after accessing support for themselves, went on to help others with similar

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<sup>273</sup> Indeed, in the case of NooooForums, the typical participant is someone who did once have a passionate attachment, and emotional connection, to Amos and her music, has now become disillusioned with her work, but remains in the community because of the friendships he or she has cultivated there.

experiences. Amos helped found RAINN and continued to sing about sexual violence and support her listeners with their experiences, Shannon founded Pandora's Aquarium and trained as a lawyer, and Lindsay is currently training to be a therapist. Many more of the survey respondents also reported being involved one way or another in 'healing work'<sup>274</sup>. Though many of these roles are unrelated to Amos (directly), there are also many unofficial 'helper' roles throughout the forums. Any participant in the forums may offer support in a thread asking for help with a particular issue and, in turn, be given such assistance themselves. Though I would have liked to have spent more time in analysing the uses of the forums, this was simply not possible within the time and space available. However, the survey indicated strongly that these resources are used in these ways, and, in the context of this chapter, it is sufficient to note that there are many networks of support in place, both explicitly linked to Amos and only tangentially linked. Once again, these linking chains may have their roots in Amos and 'Me And A Gun', but their range and reach now vastly extends this original spark.

### **Conclusion: Life after Tori?**

Amos' involvement in this issue, both personally and politically, has been so extensive that the absence of it would be keenly felt. The beginnings of this absence have already started, as of late, it has seemed that Amos is pulling away from this role somewhat. At the time of completing this thesis (October 2009), Amos had only performed 'Me And A Gun' live four times since the end of 2001. Three of these performances (July 2005 in Istanbul, Turkey, and September 2007 in Adelaide and Canberra, Australia) were of her usual solo, *a capella* type. The fourth was the November 2007 performance in Chicago, USA that was discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Though Amos has completed a world tour since then, the song has not been played at all in the last two years. In addition, Amos has changed the subject in interviews when asked about the song, or about rape in general. Of particular note is an interview Amos gave to BBC News show *Hard Talk*, in which the interviewer, Steven Sackur, brought up the topic of Amos' assault, and showed a clip from a live performance of 'Me And A Gun' from 1992<sup>275</sup>. Amos looks uncomfortable as she is asked how she feels about the performance seventeen years on, and says,

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<sup>274</sup> The other survivor featured on the 20/20 segment, Kellie Greene, also went on to do this. She became a spokesperson for RAINN, giving talks at colleges and human rights conferences, in order to raise money and awareness.

<sup>275</sup> This part of the interview can be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR6GSentKxQ>

*"Well...there's a rawness, an anger there. I'm a very different person. Maybe because I was able to sing that...uh...and express that. But now, being a mom, having worked through a lot of the trauma, I'm in a different place. But I can see the pain there."*

Though the interviewer tries to maintain the personal topic, Amos veers from it to talk about RAINN (in the third person) and then the music industry more generally. Amos has talked extensively elsewhere about having benefited from therapy after her experiences, and having moved on from the place she was in when she wrote 'Me And A Gun', and as such, perhaps she feels that she no longer needs or wants to perform the song<sup>276</sup>. She has often referenced her changing role as a mother as a new identity for her, as a woman, a writer, and a performer, but also in terms of her experiences. For example, in an interview to parenting website Babble, Amos said, *"This emptiness that was inside me before Tash at a certain point completely got filled up. Motherhood was a huge healer for me."* (quoted in Reiter 2009)

However, we need not necessarily attribute a trauma-related reason to Amos' change of direction. As an artist and a performer, Amos has changed considerably from the woman who used to sit at the piano in jeans, with messy hair, performing her earliest work. Amos is rarely seen now without a perfectly-styled wig, designer shoes and other high fashion attire. Her interest in couture led her to compose a soundtrack for a Viktor and Rolf fashion show in 2005, and the cosmetics company MAC provides all make up for Amos' tour, in return for publicity in her tour programmes etc. Amos has also stated that, due to being surrounded by make up artists and expensive products, her nine year old daughter rejected 'play make-up' at the age of five, and now "likes Dior" and would choose a facial at a spa as a fun day out (Reiter 2009). While it makes no difference to the narratives Amos has created in the past that she now embraces the type of consumer culture and stereotypically 'girly' pleasures we might associate with postfeminism, it is arguably harder for her to remain true to the more 'second-wave' concerns that infused her earlier work. This is certainly reflected in some of Amos' later work, which is, for the most part, 'lighter' on

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<sup>276</sup> In a similar vein, when I attended a Sinead O'Connor concert several years ago, an audience member shouted a request for the song 'Troy' (an anguished song from O'Connor's 1987 album *The Lion and The Cobra*). O'Connor replied, 'No. I've had years of therapy so that I don't have to sing that any more'.

these issues, and less lyrically dense<sup>277</sup>.

Whatever the reasons behind Amos' change of direction with regard to rape, there is no doubt that there have been changes. However, the vital question to ask here is whether or not Amos' continued involvement in anti-rape activism (in any form) matters. I suggest that it does not, for several reasons. Firstly, both anecdotal evidence and the *Hard Talk* interview I referenced show that people are still approaching Amos to talk to her about these issues in person. Even if this mantle is one Amos would rather put down, she is still inextricably associated with sexual violence in the eyes of both her listeners and the media, and, in all likelihood, this will continue to be the case. Secondly, as I discussed with regard 'empathic vision' leading to action, many of the chains of support that have been built up around Amos and her music, such as Pandora's Aquarium, now exist completely independently of Amos.

The work Amos has accomplished cannot be undone by her decreased personal involvement, nor by any allegations of 'dumbing down' that have occurred in criticisms of her later work. Rather, her work stands as a permanent reminder of both sexual trauma, and some of the work that has been done to alleviate it. The notion of a permanent reminder is reminiscent of Sontag's 'memory museum', which was discussed in Chapter 2. She argues that photographs and other Holocaust memorabilia have been "committed to a perpetual recirculation, to ensure that what they show will be remembered" (Sontag 2003 p.78). Though Sontag talks of people's desire for literal memory museums, in which they can visit and refresh their own traumatic memories, it seems to me that Amos' work, and the work others have done as a result of Amos' work, constitutes a virtual memory museum<sup>278</sup>. Songs like as 'Me And A Gun' are also perpetually recirculated, every time they are played, performed live, covered or discussed. The work done by these narratives in challenging rape myths, providing support to traumatised individuals and motivating people to work for political and social change cannot be ignored. As such, the impact of popular music in the field of sexual violence research and activism has been, and continues to be, as vital as Amos has been, and is, to so many of her listeners.

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<sup>277</sup> As referenced in Chapter 6, Amos' later work is seen to be less authentic than her earlier work by her fans. Of particular note in debates around Amos' slide from credibility are her lyrics about the sort of car she drives, using a sat-nav system and thinking of herself as a MILF.

<sup>278</sup> In which we could also house narratives of sexual violence from other artists, such as those explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

## Conclusion: when all is sung and done...

*Some chick says, 'Thank you for saying all the things I never do'  
I say, 'You know, the thanks I get is to take all the shit for you,  
It's nice that you listen, it'd be nicer if you joined in,  
As long as you play their game, girl, you're never gonna win'*

Ani DiFranco ('Face Up And Sing')

### **Introduction**

I started this thesis being interested in the relationships between music and sexual violence, in particular in whether the wealth of narratives of sexual violence to be found in songs by female artists broke with established 'rape myths' found in other media, and might offer more complicated and nuanced accounts of the experience, as well as a powerful means of support and affirmation for listening communities. I focused most of my analytic endeavour on Tori Amos, her songs and her listeners. Keen to keep any research project rooted in the lives of real people, I surveyed Amos' listeners as well as analysing her songs. Though I could easily have focused the entire project on Amos, I was also interested in what else was going on in popular music that was related to sexual and domestic violence, and situated her within a wider musical tradition. As such, I analysed a range of songs from a number of different artists dealing with these themes. I drew on contemporary trauma theory, as well as feminist theory of sexual violence, and the literature about popular music, in order to illuminate understandings of the ways in which these sexual violence narratives work. That trauma theory has something to contribute to an analysis of popular music, and that, in turn, popular music can speak back to the existing literature on trauma art, narrative technique and affect is at the heart of my conclusions.

### **Domestic violence narratives and postfeminism**

Analysing song texts narrating domestic violence experiences led to a conclusion that the content of these texts were bound to the time and context they were produced and released. Mapping the ways in which the texts followed the transitions from pre-feminism to second-wave feminism and, eventually, through to what some understand as a postfeminist moment, illuminated some serious concerns with postfeminist understandings of, and responses to, domestic

violence. The focus on empowerment and agency, to the exclusion of all other issues, shows no signs of dying out, and given that postfeminist sensibilities infuse every popular media form, this is especially important with regard to girls and young women. We must ask how gendered violence can be addressed within a framework that insists that equality has already been achieved, and that therefore such violence is logically impossible. If instances of gendered violence occur in this context, it seems that the fiction that power imbalances do not exist in (hetero)sexual relationships, must necessarily crumble, or even the most horrendous experiences will be represented as 'choice'. Changing the postfeminist outlook of our culture is an uphill struggle at best, but a way must be found to allow women's narratives of their experiences of gendered violence to co-exist with these competing representations if we are to avoid a return to the denial, silence or acceptance of these issues, which characterised the pre-feminist days.

### **Diversity and variability in sexual violence narratives**

Despite so many media representations of sexual violence that point towards a very limited understanding of the complexity and diversity of individual experiences of sexual violence, the narratives found in popular music that I analysed in Chapter 5 led to a quite different conclusion. Music seems to be far ahead of other media in presenting complicated and nuanced accounts of sexual violence that do not rely upon the well worn rape myths discussed in this thesis. The discovery that there were narratives of sexual violence 'grey areas', such as power imbalances, age differences and coercion, existing alongside narratives of childhood sexual abuse and (nuanced) versions of the more 'accepted' stranger rape scenario, allows for a wider range of experiences to be validated through representation. In addition to this, the number of narratives that focused on the aftermath of sexual violence meant that a picture could be painted of sexual violence, not as one act, but as a chain of experience that continues to happen to the individual long after the originating incident or incidences are over. In this way, it was exciting to be able to conclude that popular music actually represented a microcosm of 'good practice' in media representations of sexual violence.

## **Additional representations of sexual violence in the media**

There have been two significant portrayals of sexual violence in popular (fictional) media that I would have liked to have included in Chapter 1, had they occurred earlier. The first was a child abuse storyline in *Eastenders*, in which the young daughter of recurring character Bianca Jackson was sexually abused by her stepfather. The second storyline happened in US cult TV show *Weeds*, and followed lead character Nancy Botwin's relationship with a drug kingpin, who she enjoyed rough/humiliating sex with, before becoming pregnant. On attempting to exert some autonomy or assert some power over her pregnancy and choices, the kingpin raped her; however the two then settled into a (somewhat) more stable relationship and married. Both of these storylines had implications for the representations of rape myths that were discussed in Chapter 1 and would have made interesting additions to that section.

My discussion of 'perpetrator narratives' in music created by men would have been further informed by discussion of the controversy over French rapper, OrelSan, and his song 'Sale Pute' ('Dirty Slut') which took place in 2009<sup>279</sup>. However, there were other narratives of sexual violence in the music industry that did not take place within the songs themselves that would have also made interesting additions. Two 'real-life' cases came to light in 2009 that could have been discussed in terms of their media representation and public reception. These were the arrest of Chris Brown for his assault on his partner, R&B singer Rihanna, and Welsh opera singer Katherine Jenkins' revelation that she had been the victim of an attempted (stranger) rape as a student. I would also have liked to have discussed, as a more general theme what happens in the media when famous women speak out about their experiences of sexual violence. The cases of Ulrika Jonsson, Helen Mirren and Katie Price/Jordan in particular would have made for a fascinating discussion in this area, which would have added to the debate on postfeminism, especially with regard to their sexualisation in the media prior to these revelations and how the two are (not) reconciled.

The ongoing controversies over, or discussions of, these representations, and both the individual responses and media responses that occur every time a TV show or singer addresses issues of sexual or domestic violence shows that people are still grappling with the issue of representations. This grappling may take the form of struggling to understand sexual violence and draw meanings from it;

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<sup>279</sup> See Finding (2009a) for some discussion of this in similar terms to the debates raised in Chapter 1.

campaigning to have sexual violence represented 'properly' in the media, or to hear their own experiences validated, heard and reflected in the representations around them. The findings of this research project have certainly supported the theory that people are crying out to have their experiences represented and made sense of, in a way that feels authentic to them, in the media they consume.

### **Audience findings**

As a group of largely highly-educated, left-leaning and articulate people, it is perhaps no surprise that the research concluded that Tori Amos' listeners were less likely to accept rape myths than the general public. In addition, their sophisticated understandings of authenticity with regard to both experience and art, might also be attributed in part to their demographic. However, given that research on this scale with regard to an audience like Amos' has never been done prior to this, these findings are still of wider interest. In particular, the 'empathic vision' found in Amos' listeners, leading to political motivation to improve things for others who have experienced similar traumas, is an affect that cannot be easily brushed aside. In examining the narratives of Tori Amos listeners who have used the internet communities, the music, and Amos herself as sources of support, it became clear that popular music has the potential to be a service provider, however unlikely that may have seemed, for people who have experienced trauma. Many respondents indicated that the support they found in these areas had been missing elsewhere, highlighting both a clear gap in service provision for those who have experienced sexual violence, and the importance of the work done by Amos, her music and those community connections. In addition to taking that support for themselves, the fact that many of the respondents have gone on to help others establishes a chain of support that goes beyond Amos' original input, and will continue regardless of the personal involvement she chooses to have in it.

### **Additional issues raised in the course of the research**

There were two main research findings that I did not have space to address in my thesis, but which warrant further analysis. The first concerns experiences of trauma other than sexual violence. Though I only drew on case studies and specific survey conclusions from those who had personal experience of rape, domestic violence and child sexual abuse, there were many other forms of trauma addressed in the survey. In addition, plenty of people wrote in their

responses about the ways in which Amos and her music had helped them cope with issues such as depression, family struggles and relationship breakups. They also indicated using the internet communities for both practical and emotional support in these areas. These responses, and the uses of the online communities more generally are topics I would have liked to explore more fully, had space and time allowed it.

The second finding concerns Amos' gay male listenership. In both the survey and my research on the forums, I discovered many similarities between (gay and straight) women's experiences of sexual violence and their relationship to Amos and her music, and gay men's experiences. Although in discussing the respondents who had personal experience of rape, domestic violence and child sexual abuse, I did not separate them by gender or sexual orientation, I am aware that throughout the project, I referred in general to 'women's experiences of sexual violence'. As I discussed in Chapter 1, sexual violence is undoubtedly a gendered issue, largely perpetrated on feminine (and feminised) bodies, and as such, I feel these general references were justified. In looking at the 'comet's tail' of sexual violence aftermath, I focused on women's experiences in particular, as the aftermath is particularly gendered, including issues of disordered eating and self-harm. However, the number of gay male respondents who indicated in the survey that they had not only been raped, but had also experienced homophobic bullying and had attempted suicide (for example), indicated that there was particular resonance with some of these issues for gay men with experience of sexual violence. This would certainly warrant further investigation, especially as Tori Amos has such a large following of gay male listeners. Though of course, one research project cannot attempt to do everything, it is with a great sense of regret that I did not include these other voices, and I hope that further work in this area will allow them to be heard.

### **Closure**

In the final week before submitting this thesis, I attended two events, which served to act as a personal conclusion to this project. The first event was a book launch for an academic collection to which I had contributed a chapter. In introducing the book, *Secrecy and Silence: feminist reflections on the research process* (eds. Gill and Ryan-Flood, 2010), the series editor underlined the importance of feminist research in making unheard voices heard, and sharing the spaces that are not often talked about. Though the chapter I contributed to the

book was not on music or sexual violence, it was concerned with personal identifications, having a voice silenced or invalidated by others, and speaking out against this. As such, it was deeply connected to the premises of this project. Seeing that chapter published alongside other voices speaking in harmony about other silences, and having the importance of all those voices affirmed, reminded me, at a time when I was half-regretting ever having started a PhD, that the work I was finishing *meant something*, not just to me, but hopefully in a wider sense as well.

The second event was an Indigo Girls gig at Shepherds Bush Empire. As a teenager, discovering the music of the Indigo Girls meant being exposed, for the first time, to female artists who sang beautiful songs with complex lyrics about love, life and politics. Hearing and seeing the (mainly queer, female) audience singing along to every word of some of the Indigo Girls' most well-loved songs (and doing so myself) at that gig reminded me of the joy not only in discovering an artist whose work personally resonates in some way, but also finding a fellow audience who *seem to feel the same*. Whether the appearance of that connection is as simple as 'we may not know each other, but we all know all the words to this song' or as complex as 'this song is important to all of us, and maybe that means we have some shared experiences that might bind us together – in ways we might be able to guess at, but don't know for sure yet', the connection itself is palpable. It is the same sense of connection – though involving different characters – that I witnessed all those years ago in the Tori Amos concert I described in the preface. Though the candle I am holding with this research project illuminates only one artist, their community, and their impact in detail, I hope that it also opens a space for others to consider similar good work, with social and emotional resonances, done by other artists.

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