

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: BEYOND SCRAPS: NARRATING TRAUMATIC HEALTH EXPERIENCES THROUGH SCRAPBOOKING

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For centuries, women have served as the primary storytellers of domestic life. In volumes known as scrapbooks, women collect family snapshots and memorabilia for generations to enjoy. Traditional scrapbooking tends to highlight cheerful familial themes, such as weddings, births, and other life milestones. Contemporary online iterations of the age-old artform have begun publicly incorporating stories of traumatic health experiences.

In this dissertation, I attend to the scrapbooking projects created by a selection of women who address personal health issues. I examine narrative and rhetorical strategies employed in health trauma scrapbooks, contending that women use the craft to preserve a sense of self while also publicly voicing social concerns. I combine feminist textual analysis and ethnographic-inspired observation to illustrate how scrapbooking comprises a form of knowledge production narrating women's collective wisdom about survival. The scrapbook projects I explore demonstrate techniques crafters use to manage cultural memories by reformulating their self-image as social change activists rather than as mere enthusiasts engaging in a trite hobby.

This dissertation explores a selection of health concerns women raise through the craft, with a particular emphasis on breast-cancer themed scrapbooks. Applying breast

cancer scrapbook pages as a case study, I illustrate how women deploy online scrapbooking in the service of health narration, thereby claiming a public voice about the illness experience. As I show in the final part of the dissertation, scrapbookers coalesce in activist communities, carving out a platform from which to press for social justice. I conclude by revealing ways that scrapbookers utilize the World Wide Web to facilitate health activism and public narration of traumatic health experiences.

This dissertation is designed to elevate the place of contemporary scrapbooking in American Studies scholarship. Because the scrapbook has been both poorly preserved and grossly understudied, the earnest task of my project is to offer a useful model for analyzing women's trauma scrapbook pages that resonates for future scholars. I seek, above all, to raise awareness about the scrapbook as a relevant cultural artifact that contains richly contextual narratives of self and society.

BEYOND SCRAPS: NARRATING TRAUMATIC HEALTH EXPERIENCES  
THROUGH SCRAPBOOKING

By

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## Foreword

My interest in the role scrapbooking plays in women's lives continues to grow the more I discover the craft's many facets. However, I initially came to study scrapbooking by accident. Like many students, during the course of my graduate career, I sought community support and a reprieve from the ardors of graduate education. Although art does not come naturally to me, much to my surprise, I decided to take up a creative pursuit. A magazine article on scrapbooking convinced me it would be an interesting hobby for me. After all, I had countless photographs, and I journaled about my life experiences almost daily. Scrapbooking artfully combines these visual and narrative elements. After purchasing the requisite products (pieces of colored paper, embellishments, and various types of adhesives and scissors), I joined several online scrapbooking communities, developing relationships with fellow scrappers. I was surprised to observe scrapbookers sharing such personal stories publicly, through craftwork that reflected the more gritty side of life. Instead of solely creating scrapbooks featuring traditional baby pictures and family vacations, women today were also scrapbooking about anorexia, breast cancer, chronic illness, and other potentially traumatic health experiences. The more I interacted with scrapbookers online, the more I realized there was much more to this craft than mere scraps.

## Dedication

My parents remain a significant influence in my life. Although they are gone from this earth, their unwavering support is sure, bright, and ever-present. This project — by which I mean my entire graduate education — has unfolded with their spirit of adventure in mind.

## Acknowledgements

I am fortunate to be surrounded by friends and colleagues who bolster and inspire me. Many thanks to my various cheerleaders and mentors, especially my Maine family, MM, Dr. Collins, KT, and my California family. My committee has tirelessly supported me. Special thanks to Dr. Psyche Williams-Forson for her regular feedback on chapter drafts and sixth sense about the “big picture.” Extra special thanks to Dr. Nancy Struna, who has remained a steadfast source of support through the ups and downs of my graduate career. Truth be told, I may actually miss our sunrise breakfast meetings. Lastly, I am ever-grateful for the enthusiastic praise of my junior high school teacher, Ms. Clark, who was convinced, when I shared my short stories with her, that she would “read one of my books one day.” Such early faith in my ideas has quietly ushered me forward.

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## Chapter 1: Crafting Meaning: Introduction to Contemporary Scrapbooking

Their odyssey is but a reflection of our own crooked path:  
raw, triumphant, fearless, or bereft, we make scrapbooks  
as gestures of permanence in a world we can only  
temporarily inhabit.<sup>1</sup>

In woman, personal history blends together with the history of  
all women, as well as national and world history.<sup>2</sup>

For centuries, women have served as the primary storytellers of domestic life. In volumes known as scrapbooks, women have collected family snapshots and memorabilia for generations to enjoy. Traditional scrapbooking tends to highlight cheerful familial themes, such as vacations, weddings, births, and other life milestones. However, a closer look at contemporary scrapbooking shows the emergence of different facets of the craft. In a subset of today's scrapbooking, depictions of women's health are captured online in pages decorated with photographs and colored paper. In these realistic scrapbooks, women annotate their health struggles using embellishments as diverse as flowers, bra fasteners, and x-ray film.<sup>3</sup> On individual pages measuring 12 by 12 inches, scrapbookers dispense often-overlooked cultural commentaries regarding physical and mental health. This dissertation explores online scrapbooking projects that address women's traumatic health experiences. I show that scrapbooking serves as a site of women's meaning making about health-related topics. I illustrate how the scrapbook, as a cultural narrative, supplies a medium through which women apply narrative, rhetorical, and health activist approaches to critique culture while sharing coping techniques with fellow crafters.

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Helfand, *Scrapbooks: An American History* (New Haven: Yale, 2008), 171.

<sup>2</sup> Hélène Cixous, trans. "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1:4 (1976): 882.

<sup>3</sup> Creating Keepsakes refers to this style of scrapbooking as "reality scrapbooking"; see here for examples: <http://www.creatingkeepsakes.com/content/view/9071/95>.

## Research Questions

By studying the online scrapbook pages of a selection of crafters, I attempt to answer the following research questions:

- How do scrapbookers negotiate issues relating to identity or selfhood when coping with traumatic health experiences?<sup>4</sup>
- How does scrapbooking serve as a site of women's meaning making about health-related topics?
- What types of knowledges about women's health concerns are produced through scrapbooking?
- How are ideas and images disseminated through scrapbooking, and how can cultural memories be shaped by the craft?
- What are some links between the public consumption of women's illness narratives and scrapbooking's popularity?
- How do women use scrapbooking as a form of health activism and community building around women's health issues?
- What role does the Internet play in women's scrapbooking communities and health activism?

This dissertation is designed to offer a new intervention that sheds light on the practice of contemporary scrapbooking. I show that women are creating crafts that explore unconventional subjects, including traumatic health experiences. Through close

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<sup>4</sup> My conception of selfhood has been shaped by social constructionist views of the self. This perspective holds that one's sense of self is socially constructed and thus shifting. This instability notwithstanding, I view selfhood as core dimensions of a person by which she defines herself at a given moment in time (e.g., gender, life goals). These knowledges may change over time as a person's sense of self flexes; Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1967); Corey Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity* (State University of New York Press, 2001); John Paul Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). Throughout this project, I also use the term "identity" to signify selfhood.

readings of individual scrapbook pages, I study ways that women apply meaningful narrative and rhetorical strategies to rethink health traumas and social obstacles. I supply examples revealing techniques that women use in scrapbooking to talk back to, or critique, culture about issues relating to selfhood and health, and to seek out public witnesses for what are often private traumas.

In this project, I assert that individual scrapbook pages, studied collectively, comprise a kind of cultural scrapbook. The emerging shared narratives afford insight into contemporary women's challenges. I surmise that through their use of the scrapbook as a cultural text, women are in a key position to communicate ideas. In addition, scrapbookers have carved out a public forum in which to accomplish their social goals. Crafters, I observe, use the pastime to gain a voice in their own lives. Scrappers utilize the craft to reformulate women's self-image as agents of change rather than as passive consumers of a domestic hobby.

To date, the activist aspects of scrapbooking have not been explored in a scholarly context. However, the popularity of the craft, alongside its prominence in social causes, speaks to the meaningful applications of scrapbooking, particularly its use in women's health activism.<sup>5</sup> Thus, my study explores how the scrapbookers I study convey core social values through collective activism designed to educate and support others. Women's scrapbooking, I suggest in this project, constitutes a form of knowledge production that has the power to recraft cultural memories rooted in women's traumatic stories. Rather than merely indulging in scrapbooking as an entertaining hobby, some

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<sup>5</sup> I define health activism using Heather M. Zoller's flexible definition of grassroots efforts designed to "change norms, social structures, policies, and power relationships in the health arena related to patient activism, health care reform, disease prevention, [and] illness advocacy"; health activism embraces both mental and physical health issues; Heather M. Zoller, "Health Activism: Communication Theory and Action for Social Change," *Communication Theory* 15:4 (2005): 341.

crafters, as I show, channel their political, activist aims directly into the craft and community in an effort to bring forth change.

## Sources

In an effort to answer my research questions, this dissertation studies two primary kinds of published scrapbook pages: those contained in the idea book *Imperfect Lives: Scrapbooking the Reality of Your Everyday* and scrapbook pages published on popular websites.<sup>6</sup> Available from Memory Makers, a leading crafts publisher, *Imperfect Lives* was selected because it is one of only a handful of publications collecting scrapbook pages featuring difficult life experiences. The remaining scrapbook pages in this project were either published on high-traffic blogs or on the website Scrapbook.com, which serves as a major warehouse for public scrapbook pages.<sup>7</sup>

All but one scrapbook page featured in this project was originally created as a material product, and then digitally photographed and uploaded onto a public website or included in the *Imperfect Lives* publication.<sup>8</sup> The fourteen pages studied herein were completed after the year 2000. Permission was gained for each page visually depicted in this project (with one exception).<sup>9</sup> Other data in the dissertation include surveys

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<sup>6</sup> I denote a key distinction between a ‘scrapbook’ and a ‘scrapbook page’: a scrapbook is defined as a series of individual scrapbook pages that are, typically, thematically arranged in a bound album. Scrapbook pages, on the other hand, are created and exist individually. Although they may be assembled in albums for ease in displaying, scrapbook pages are not necessarily designed as part of whole. That is, they may only be displayed as stand-alone works of art. This is not to say the page will not later be incorporated into an album, but at the time of creation and based on their public display, the scrapbook page is designed as an independent product. To the best of my knowledge, the scrapbook pages studied here were initially created to stand by themselves; Tara Governo, *Imperfect Lives: Scrapbooking the Reality of Your Everyday* (Cincinnati: Memory Makers, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Blogs include LiveJournal.com, a popular blogging website.

<sup>8</sup> One digitally created page is included in this project. A future study might consider any differences between pages physically produced versus those created using scrapbooking software.

<sup>9</sup> See the Appendix for facsimiles of signed consent forms; in one instance, the publisher could not be located for permission, and so information identifying the scrapbook compiler has been removed (although the scrapbooker has been personally contacted).

completed by scrapbookers whose pages I analyze as well as excerpts from online scrapbooking discussion forums.<sup>10</sup>

I selected specific pages by searching the Scrapbook.com database and an online scrapbooking community blog, to which I belong. I narrowed my search of scrapbook pages in *Imperfect Lives* and the thousands of pages I viewed online<sup>11</sup> by stipulating that the page must possess the following criteria:

- focuses on traumatic and/or health-related topics
- contains both visual and narrative elements
- enables access to compiler's identity

In order to select my pages, I narrowed down health-specific topics by mental and physical illness, including issues such as depression/anxiety, eating disorders, physical/mental abuse, and cancer. The fourteen pages I selected for this project specifically address traumatic health issues. I define trauma in this project as a foundational experience or set of experiences that significantly shape one's life, resulting in emotional, physical, and/or material turmoil. Trauma may include external events such as death of a loved one or domestic abuse. Notably, as I observe in this project, trauma often results from health-related issues, such as mental illness or disease.

Next, all of the visual and narrative elements included at least a photograph, embellishments (such as flowers or other symbols), a title, and journaling or other notes on the scrapbook page. I required that the page contain sufficient elements to analyze,

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<sup>10</sup> See the Appendix for the dissertation questionnaire.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that there were, literally, thousands of scrapbook pages online from which to choose. Although I narrowed my select in this dissertation to fourteen pages, my reading of these pages was informed by the thousands of other pages I examined.

although in some cases the topic and photographs on the scrapbook page were deemed significant enough to enable deep analysis.

Lastly, in this project, I included only those scrapbookers whose biographical information or identity could be determined. Including readily-identifiable scrapbook pages was essential. Specifically, given the visual nature of this project, I thought it important to reprint images in the dissertation so the reader could view the scrapbook pages referenced. Since the project required that permission be obtained for any image reprinted in the dissertation, this requisite discouraged use of pages by unidentifiable compilers.<sup>12</sup>

## **Methods**

I apply two analytic methods to answer my research questions: 1) a feminist textual analysis of scrapbooks and 2) an ethnographic-inspired exploration of the producers and consumers of scrapbooks. Using a multidisciplinary lens, I perform a feminist textual reading of select scrapbook pages. I examine the scrapbooker's choice of visual and design techniques and perform a close reading of journaling, or textual narrative, included on the scrapbook page. I attend in particular to scrapbookers' notions of selfhood that they explore in their artwork. I observe the creative means women use to cope with personal obstacles related to health as well as ways they support and educate each other through scrapbooking.

This dissertation has emerged from my own scrapbooking about challenging life experiences, as well as close involvement and relationship with fellow scrapbookers, particularly those creating craftwork about traumatic health issues. My research is also

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<sup>12</sup> However, as mentioned, since the publisher could not be located for permission, information identifying the scrapbook compiler has been removed.

informed by my own training in feminist ethnographic concepts as well as my earlier work performing textual analyses and completing material culture and feminist theoretical studies, particularly of artistic subjects.

By bringing a feminist lens to this expressive medium, I highlight scrapbookers' critiques of culture, specifically as these evaluations relate to gender expectations and women's health.<sup>13</sup> This method of studying health/trauma scrapbooking is vital as it attempts to be what scholars Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy describe as faithful to a feminist textual analysis; that is, my approach strives to examine important cultural issues using products or artifacts produced by "women who may not otherwise be considered."<sup>14</sup> As the feminist scholars observe, the notion of a content, or textual, analysis originally emerged from the idea that a close look at a culture's material and symbolic products can help us learn more about the culture in general.<sup>15</sup> Keeping this in mind, my project begins by looking at women's individual trauma scrapbook pages, then expands outward to women's scrapbook community activist work, offering a broader reading of the culture in which these often-overlooked projects were created.

My use of feminist textual analysis serves as recognition that my readings of women's scrapbooks are situated. To the best of my ability, I am mindful of my analytical boundaries when discussing scrapbookers' trauma artwork. I aim to exemplify what Donna Haraway insists feminist researchers should be: "answerable for what we learn how to see."<sup>16</sup> In particular, I resolve to be cognizant that in my position as

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<sup>13</sup> Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, eds. *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 236.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1988): 583.



researcher, I have learned to “notice” certain patterns in a text. As such, my awareness is bounded by what I have learned to observe. As a caveat, I firmly believe that the scrapbook pages I analyze in this dissertation are ultimately open to interpretation. My personal experiences with health concerns and my own experiences with scrapbooking undoubtedly come to bear on my analyses. At the same time, these very experiences deeply inform my analysis, which in turn adds value and legitimacy to my study of women’s scrapbooking art.

In *A Thrice-Told Tale, Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility*, anthropologist Margery Wolf reminds researchers embracing feminist ethnography to observe carefully the power dynamics between researcher and informants. She even goes so far as to declare an ethnographic agenda, which is to “expose the unequal distribution of power that has subordinated women in most if not all cultures and discover ways of dismantling hierarchies of domination.”<sup>17</sup> Wolf insists on mindful research and well as use of an accessible writing style. In this project, I have attempted to steer clear of assumptions about scrapbookers’ intentions and to be mindful of my relationship with the informants. However, as a feminist researcher who is crafting a study from personal observation, it is almost unavoidable for a hierarchy, no matter how intentional, to emerge. My hope is that by rendering transparent my role in the research project, that I will sidestep some of the pitfalls feminist ethnographers so despise in traditional anthropology.

In addition to a feminist analysis, I perform an ethnographic-inspired analysis of scrapbookers’ works. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s influential approach to analyzing

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<sup>17</sup> Margery Wolf, *A Thrice-Told Tale, Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility* (New Haven: Stanford University Press, 1992), 119.

cultural groups or phenomena is of particular use in my mission to study cultural contributions of contemporary scrapbooks. Similar to that of Geertz, my analysis of scrapbooks is an “interpretive activity.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than plainly describing the scrapbook pages and their contents, I deduce from the works a particular meaning, which is always already based on my own interpretations. As Geertz observed, “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to.”<sup>19</sup> Although Geertz’s anthropological polemic centers on ethnography, I find the underlying structure of his ideas in “Thick Description” to be a fitting model for cultural studies as a whole and my project in particular. Thus, my analysis of cultural artifacts created by a subset of women is rooted in thick description because my mission is to draw a series of contextualized generalizations about women’s trauma scrapbooks. I attempt, in Geertzian fashion, to “generalize within” rather than “generalize about” a group.<sup>20</sup> This philosophy is echoed by feminist textual analysis.<sup>21</sup>

Geertz is known for his analytic concept “thick description,” which he advocates as part of ethnographic research to deeply understand the nuances of human culture and to decipher how humans create meaning.<sup>22</sup> Thick description offers an apt framework for my analysis of women’s scrapbooking for several important reasons. First, the approach not only encourages extensive, detailed description of a phenomenon, but also

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<sup>18</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Although Geertz may not be traditionally viewed as a feminist, in a 1991 interview, Geertz is quoted as saying: “Has feminism made us all more conscious? Yes, I think it has. Feminist critiques of anthropological masculine bias...have been quite important, and they certainly have increased my sensitivity to that kind of issue. I think feminism has had a major impact on anthropology.” He acknowledges that there are still “gross inequalities” with respect to gender equality in culture; Gary A. Olson, “Clifford Geertz on Ethnography and Social Construction,” *JAC Online* (1991): 11:2, [http://www.jacweb.org/Archived\\_volumes/Text\\_articles/V11\\_I2\\_OlsonGeertz.htm](http://www.jacweb.org/Archived_volumes/Text_articles/V11_I2_OlsonGeertz.htm).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

recommends taking into account cultural context. By highlighting various elements of each scrapbook page and further taking into consideration the women creating the page and the culture in which it is created, I provide a framework that may be useful for the reader. In addition, my close reading of scrapbook pages grants them an authority not otherwise proffered by popular culture or, generally speaking, in academia. That is, by studying scrapbook art, I seek to untangle meaning and highlight the importance of scrapbooks as revealing cultural products.

Cultural studies scholars have at times been conflicted over the role of universals to explain culture, and about the risks inherent in studying smaller sample sizes to understand culture as a whole. By applying and extending the cultural theories of Geertz in my observations of women's scrapbooking, I theorize how individuals can be used to understand better an interrelated, contextualized, social whole. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz holds that culture resides in the individual.<sup>23</sup> In this dissertation, I propose an analytic system designed to assist future researchers in conducting a contextualized analysis of scrapbooks. By performing an ethnographic and feminist textual analysis, I offer a new framework for studying scrapbooks and their role in American culture, one that does not seek to generalize about a culture or society without context but rather retains a narrow focus on a subset of people.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, I aim to show my study's applicability to obtaining the broader cultural significance of the scrapbook as a form of health narrative. First, I offer relevant background information on the scrapbooking industry and the scrapbooking hobby. In the next section, I highlight the

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<sup>23</sup> Geertz, "Thick Description."

<sup>24</sup> My thinking on this subject has been informed by John Caughey's *Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Life History, Issues, Methods and Readings* (University of Nebraska, 2006), which offers a primer for performing an ethnographic analysis.

current state of today's scrapbooking, followed by a brief history of the pastime and the industry as a whole.

### **Contemporary Scrapbooking**

The present decade brought with it an explosion in the cultural presence of scrapbooking. The Hobby Industry Association places scrapbooking as the third most popular hobby in the United States, and it is currently the fastest growing pastime. Most major department stores, such as Wal-Mart, Target, and Kmart, carry at least an entire aisle of scrapbooking materials. Supply chain art stores, such as Michael's and JoAnn Fabrics, offer considerably more supplies. There are over 4,000 independent shops dedicated entirely to scrapbooking in the U.S., with such names as "Stampin' Station," "Craft Country," "Remember Me Scrapshop," and "Forevermore Scrapbooks."<sup>25</sup>

Multiple online stores sell a myriad of scrapbooking products, and hobbyists regularly swap or purchase supplies from each other via online community message boards and groups. Craft companies like Creative Memories sell supplies to interested parties much in the same way that Tupperware is distributed: from house to house and between individuals.

Vast networks of artists annually gather together for national scrapbooking conventions, as well as for local "crop sessions," organized events during which women swap techniques, ideas, supplies, and life stories. Online communities coexist in which scrappers share and provide support for each other's creative work. Many of these groups offer "challenges," in which scrapbookers enter contests that push their individual art and the collective craft forward. Volumes of print and online how-to guides signal the serious artistic aspects of the modern-day artform. Increasingly sophisticated tools and products

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<sup>25</sup> Scrapbooking.com Magazine; Creating Keepsakes, 2004.

are available to scrapbookers, who in turn continually develop new designs for the multi-billion dollar industry.<sup>26</sup>

Today, scrapbooking has expanded its visibility to high-traffic online communities. For example, the social networking site Facebook.com mimics aspects of scrapbooking in that users share photos, news clippings, and journal-like comments with each other. Other social websites such as Myspace.com provide a similar template. The blogging website LiveJournal.com includes a “scrapbook” element in which bloggers can upload photos and share them with select groups or individuals.

Incorporation of scrapbooking into these popular websites suggests the hobby’s reach into domains that are not necessarily craft-centric. Another example exists in academic settings, in which teachers encourage students to create scrapbooks as visual learning tools. The University of North Carolina School of Education has devised an online literary scrapbook to help students critically analyze literature.<sup>27</sup> The craft is also popularly applied in therapeutic and health-related fields to support people coping with trauma or difficult life changes, such as adoption.<sup>28</sup> In online and physical museum exhibits, scrapbooks about and by historical figures are used to tell stories. Examples include the Smithsonian’s American History Edward Hopper online scrapbook<sup>29</sup> and a scrapbook exhibit chronicling Washington’s Jewish community at the National Building Museum in Washington, DC.<sup>30</sup> In 1998 National Scrapbooking Month was established,

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler, *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Literary Scrapbooks Online: An Electronic Reader-Response Project, <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/external/Readwritethink200606212753>.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Grove Radford, “Adoption Albums: Telling Stories of the Soul,” *Memory Makers*. May-June: 50-55, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Hopper Scrapbook, <http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/hopper/index.html>.

<sup>30</sup> “Jewish Washington: Scrapbook of an American Community,” June 24, 2005-July 4, 2006, <http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/jewish-washington.html>.

further increasing the craft's visibility. I argue in this dissertation that, given the growing circulation of scrapbooking, coupled with women's uses of it to tell the more difficult stories of their lives, the craft plays an important role in knowledge production and shaping of cultural conceptions of women's life experiences.

A benchmark survey of the scrapbooking industry, conducted by the Craft and Hobby Association, crafts a picture of the average scrapbooker. According to the survey of over 400 U.S. scrapbookers, 85% of scrappers are female, 92% are Caucasian, and are typically between the ages of 30 and 50. More than half have children under 18 living at home. It makes sense that the most likely themes of this artform — just over 60% — are domestic in nature (i.e., marriage, family, and vacations). Other scrapbook subjects mentioned by respondents were holidays, family history, and parties.<sup>31</sup>

### **Scrapbooking History**

Despite its potential as a relevant historical-cultural artifact, the scrapbook has been both poorly preserved and grossly understudied. There are two main reasons for lack of scholarly attention paid to the craft. The first is historically related to the low-quality materials used in early scrapbooks. In the U.S., scrapbooking is believed to have begun in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Nascent scrapbooks consisted of collections of “scraps,” or bits of paper and memorabilia, gathered together in books. Typical materials evolved over time but in the early years, often included advertising cards, candy wrappers, and newspaper clippings, items that rarely stood the test of time. Popularly called

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<sup>31</sup> The 2004 National Survey of Scrapbooking in America from *Creating Keepsakes*, the leading scrapbook magazine, offers slightly different figures and data. This survey found that 98% of scrapbookers were female, and 85% were Caucasian; National Survey of Scrapbooking in America from *Creating Keepsakes*; CK Media, 2004, [http://www.eksuccess.com/pdfs/article\\_49.pdf](http://www.eksuccess.com/pdfs/article_49.pdf). The 2007 Craft & Hobby Association Scrapbooking Study of over 400 US scrapbookers is, to the best of my knowledge, the most recently published national scrapbooking survey; CHA Scrapbooking Study (New York: Ipsos Insight Inc., 2007).

Commonplace books, these 17<sup>th</sup> century products were designed to capture memories as well as to gather educational materials, such as information physicians might collect to pass on to each other.<sup>32</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the scrapbook became more like a personalized album. James Granger published a bound book illustrated with letters, prints, and other personalized materials; books using this technique were described as having been “Grangerized.”<sup>33</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an increase in scrapping activities, with the rise in photography and the invention of chromolithography, or the application of multiple colors to prints. Probably the most famous scrapbook was created by Mark Twain, who patented his scrapbook in 1873. One of the distinctive aspects of Twain’s scrapbooks was a sticky coating that helped the user arrange scraps to the page.<sup>34</sup> None of these techniques or products kept longevity in mind; as a result, few scrapbooks have persisted over time, or else have been difficult to recover due to degradation of materials.

As photographic methods continued to evolve, so too did the role of scrapbooking, which increasingly began to center on photography. Kodak’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century advent of rolled film changed the way photographs were developed, further shifting content of scrapbooks as photography rose in popularity.<sup>35</sup> Around this time, commercial photographers began mounting photographic prints on small cardboard cut-outs the size of calling cards. These “cartes de visite” were available for purchase in the U.S. in the mid 1800s. Cartes de visite enabled people to capture and collect photographs.<sup>36</sup> Photograph albums followed, which also included autographs of

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<sup>32</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 6, 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Kodak, <http://www.kodak.com/global/en/corp/historyOfKodak/1878.jhtml?pq-path=2699>.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah McNair Vosmeier, “Picturing Love and Friendship: Photograph Albums and Networks of Affection in the 1860s” in *The Scrapbook in American Life*, eds. Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 207-219.

celebrities, locks of hair, and quotations. The mid 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the democratization of scrapbooking, which was attributed primarily to the accessibility of paper scraps and photographs, materials commonly incorporated into scrapbooks at the time.<sup>37</sup>

Soon, business-minded individuals marketed albums that were more durable than the make-shift products created by collectors. These albums, according to Sarah McNair Vosmeier, “quickly assumed [their place] in the middle-class household.”<sup>38</sup> Photo albums began to house more and more photographs, as the first mass-marketed camera, the Brownie, became more widely available to consumers.<sup>39</sup> Various collectibles such as postcards started appearing in scrapbooks, as these albums began to experience regular use as bride books, funeral books, and first communion books.<sup>40</sup> Further, the artistic technique collage, which began appearing in the modern artworld, inspired scrapbookers during this time.<sup>41</sup> Collage elements are commonly still found in contemporary scrapbooking projects.

The evolution of photo albums and improved access to cameras ensured that scrapbooking would continue as a hobby, but it did not reach the level of popularity that it saw in the 19<sup>th</sup> century again until the 1970s, when family history and genealogy became trendy. The precursor to the “new wave” of scrapbooking, which began in the 1980s, occurred when Utah resident Marielen Christensen collected pages consisting of family photos and mementos into sheet protectors, placed into three-ring binders. After creating more than 50 volumes, Christensen was invited to display them at the 1980

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<sup>37</sup> John Fleishman, “The Labyrinthine World of the Scrapbook King,” *Smithsonian* 22 (February 1992): 79-87.

<sup>38</sup> Vosmeier, “Picturing Love and Friendship,” 209.

<sup>39</sup> I am indebted to the scrapbooking timeline <http://www.tulane.edu/~wclib/timeline.html>.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> David Cottingham, *Modern Art: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).



World Conference on Records in Salt Lake City, Utah. Due to the popularity of Christensen's albums, educational scrapbooking seminars and classes were formed to teach design techniques. In 1981, the first known retail store selling scrapbooking supplies opened. Soon thereafter, the family published *Keeping Memories Alive*, considered the first instructional book on organizing and preserving family memories.

Alongside *Keeping Memories Alive*, the family-owned business of the same name as the magazine, another business was responsible for the profitability of the scrapbooking craft. Creative Memories, an international direct-selling company, launched in 1987 in Minnesota. Today, the company hires consultants who sell a variety of scrapbooking products, and in return, earn a portion of the total price of products sold.<sup>42</sup> In addition to creating entrepreneurs and inviting the scrapbooking craft directly into households, Creative Memories is also credited with beginning the trend of putting more artistic flair into the craft.

Although direct-to-consumer selling of scrapbooking further increased its presence, the craft initially only predominated in the Western and Midwestern states (partly because it originated in Utah). By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, scrapbooking doubled in size as it spread to the rest of the country.<sup>43</sup> Other media outlets helped disseminate scrapbooking more widely. Both *Memory Makers Magazine* and *Keeping Memories Alive* launched their magazines in 1996. In addition, increased accessibility and use of the Internet also contributed to the spread of scrapbooking throughout the rest of the U.S. In 1996, *Keeping Memories Alive* launched

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<sup>42</sup> Creative Memories, "Host a Get-Together," <http://www.creativememories.com/MainMenu/Host-a-Get-Together>.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Walker, "The Way We Live Now," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/04/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-4-4-04-consumed-memory-maker-photo-bracelet.html>.

Scrapbook.com, the first online scrapbook supply store containing a virtual warehouse for crafters to display their scrapbooking projects. This popular website features prominently in this dissertation because of its social role in the craft.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century continued to see a sharp rise in the visibility of scrapbooking in the U.S. Independent stores arrived on the scene, and, as indicated previously, big box stores began offering scrapbooking supplies. A growing number of newspaper, magazine, and television media outlets began featuring the new trend, further increasing scrapbooking's popularity.

Today, scrapbooking consists of paper and digital layouts that combine colored, patterned paper, photographs, and embellishments — such as stickers, ribbons, buttons, stamps, and other materials, like concert stubs — to create visually appealing pages and to capture a moment in time. Available materials today boast state-of-the-art archival, acid-free contents so that scrapbooks will not suffer the same fate as in past centuries.

Although the archival potential of scrapbooks has dramatically improved in the past decade, researchers are still slow to recognize their cultural worth. This may be a response carried over from past conceptions of what constitutes a worthwhile subject. However, there is likely another reason scrapbooks have not been taken seriously as subjects of scholarship: scrapbooks have long been ignored because they have a tendency to be dismissed as a simple hobby created just for a family's enjoyment.<sup>44</sup> According to Leigh Ina Hunt, author of *Victorian Passion to Modern Phenomenon: A Literary and Rhetorical Analysis of Two Hundred Years of Scrapbooks and Scrapbook Making*, the lack of scholarly attention paid to scrapbooking is related “to the negative connotation of

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<sup>44</sup> Another reason may be linked to the fact that, historically, middle-class women of leisure often occupied themselves with such domestic hobbies as scrapbooking, and little attention was paid to their creations.

‘scraps’ and a failure to recognize scrapbooks as sites for personal writing and reflections of our history and culture.”<sup>45</sup> Scholars have long neglected the role of scrapbooking in understanding compilers and their culture.

### **Scrapbooking Scholarship**

In the past few years, however, these oversights have slowly begun to be corrected. Contemporary scholars, museum curators, and researchers have started mining historical scrapbooks for their insight into historic living experiences. *The Scrapbook in American Life*, edited by Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler, is one of the only recent texts in the humanities that has attempted to excavate the role of scrapbooking in American cultural life.<sup>46</sup> Offering an excellent history of the craft, the collection describes scrapbooking as a “material manifestation of memory” reflecting an important cultural moment shedding light on the creator’s experiences within a particular social milieu.<sup>47</sup> The 2006 volume focuses on scrapbooking as a source of education for its potential viewers. The majority of the essays explore historical periods during which select categories of individuals or groups used scrapbooks to further knowledge, such as physicians’ use of scrapbooking for medical education. Other entries include the scrapbooking of women whose projects provide insight into historic periods, such as the Mexican war. Part of the book examines a category called “Books of the self,” which consists of scrapbooks maintained by individuals chronicling their private selves and innermost thoughts. The authors suggest that scrapbooks kept by individuals may be used as a window into broader culture and social phenomena. *The Scrapbook in American Life*

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<sup>45</sup> Leigh Ina Hunt, “Victorian Passion to Modern Phenomenon: A Literary and Rhetorical Analysis of Two Hundred Years of Scrapbooks and Scrapbook Making” (Ph.D. dissertation, U Texas Austin, 2006), v.

<sup>46</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

will likely be recognized as the first published book to consider seriously the importance of scrapbooking in American cultural life.

In addition to *The Scrapbook in American Life*, one other recently published volume on scrapbooking deserves mention here. In *Scrapbooks: An American History*, Jessica Helfand displays hundreds of color illustrations of a wide variety of scrapbooks.<sup>48</sup> The scrapbookers Helfand covers are both known and unknown. For example, 20<sup>th</sup> century poet Anne Sexton's scrapbook of happy romantic mementos are juxtaposed against those of unknown artists. Among those Helfand includes are the scrapbooks of a young music student in the 1920s who saved candy wrappers and ticket stubs. Thomas Jefferson's poetry and songs are also exhibited, along with the dog tags of an ordinary World War II soldier. In this volume, Helfand considers scrapbooks as valuable artifacts of social history, noting that the craft "implore[s] us to remember who we were, and why it mattered."<sup>49</sup>

Only a small number of additional published scholars have acknowledged the value of scrapbooks in offering insight into broader cultural phenomena. Although their numbers are few, they warrant mention. In the article, "A Silent Woman Speaks: The Poetry in a Woman's Scrapbook of the 1840's," Patricia B. Buckler and C. Kay Leeper examine Ann Elizabeth Buckler's scrapbooks, observing how this middle-class Southern woman's craftwork exposes the many challenges antebellum women faced, such as marriage, motherhood, and maintaining virtue.<sup>50</sup> This article suggests that scrapbooking served as one of the few means women had to express themselves at the time. Women

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<sup>48</sup> Helfand, *Scrapbooks*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>50</sup> Patricia B. Buckler and C. Kay Leeper. "A Silent Woman Speaks: The Poetry in a Woman's Scrapbook of the 1840's," *Prospects* 16 (1991): 149-169.

used the craft to capture life narratives since their story might not otherwise have been heard. Tamar Katriel and Thomas Farrell have also observed the autobiographical potential of scrapbooking.<sup>51</sup> The authors note that “scrapbook making...[may be viewed] as an American art of memory *and* as a rhetorical practice of construction and performance of self.”<sup>52</sup> The authors focus on the scrapbook’s place in autobiographical self construction, noting the scrapbook maker’s use of the craft to glean deeper insights about selfhood. In their essay on antebellum women’s scrapbooks and their overlap with autobiography, Buckler and Leeper hold that scrapbooking represents a “deliberate effort by one individual to make sense of her life by composing it...”<sup>53</sup> These articles demonstrate that the important role of historical scrapbooking in autobiographical self construction and its place as a window into culture has begun to be recognized by scholars.

A key source of emerging scrapbook scholarship lies in graduate theses and dissertations. A Proquest thesis abstract search indicates that in the past few years, only a small number of dissertations on scrapbooking have been written.<sup>54</sup> While the majority tackle such issues as product consumption and gender dynamics, they are nonetheless excellent points of departure for my project. The previously mentioned dissertation by Leigh Ina Hunt is invaluable, offering both a comprehensive history of scrapbooking and a compelling rationale for academics to study the subject. Hunt argues that scholars can

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<sup>51</sup> Tamar Katriel and Thomas Farrell, “Scrapbooks as Cultural Texts: An American Art of Memory,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 11:1 (January 1991): 1-17.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Buckler and Leeper, “A Silent Woman,” 1; Helfand also views scrapbooks as “works of autobiography”; *Scrapbooks*, 159.

<sup>54</sup> Search parameters included interdisciplinary theses and dissertations with any of the following key words: “scrapbook,” “scrapbooking,” “scraps.”

no longer ignore scrapbooks as cultural products, particularly given their insight into individual lives and historical time periods.

In another recent thesis, *Crafting Culture: Scrapbooking and the Lives of Women*, Heather Ann Downs examines the consumption of scrapbooking, mining ways the industry, as well as scrapbook creators themselves, reinforce notions of domestic bliss and gender stereotypes.<sup>55</sup> The author also shows how this primarily female hobby is a site of women's innovation, as artists can simultaneously manage their families and preserve friendship and kinship networks through scrapbooking. While Downs does briefly discuss her informants' scrapbooks, which treat such topics as death and illness of children, she does not analyze the pages themselves in any significant way; rather, the author examines the hobby as a whole, eclipsing the significance of individual contributions.

Another dissertation on scrapbooking is *Memory-Craft: the Role of Domestic Technology in Women's Journals*, authored by Tammy Janine Lynch Powley.<sup>56</sup> This project asserts that memory-crafting is a nontraditional writing form, focusing on its use by women who narrate personal and familial stories. According to the author, scrapbooking may be considered a domestic technology since it incorporates material as well as digital paper scraps. Powley's project provides a useful grounding in domestic technologies, particularly ways women have historically gravitated toward alternative uses of writing forms, such as novels, to couch their own stories surreptitiously. The author does not discuss the tendency of female scrappers to tackle more unsavory life

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<sup>55</sup> Heather Ann Downs, *Crafting Culture: Scrapbooking and the Lives of Women* (Ph.D. dissertation, UIU, Urbana-Champaign, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Tammy Janine Lynch Powley, *The Role of Domestic Technology in Women's Journals* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Central Florida, 2006).

experiences, the approaches used, or their broader contribution to understanding cultural phenomena. Thus, gaps in these recent scholarly projects indicate some of the ways my dissertation, as a study of individual scrapbook pages chronicling trauma, intends to advance scrapbooking, trauma, and cultural studies scholarship.

Although studies of historical scrapbooks are gaining in cultural import, as the above sources indicate, contemporary scrapbooking (which, unlike its predecessor, is generally well-preserved for future generations) continues to be dismissed by scholars ostensibly positioned to raise awareness about ways women are reworking the domestic pastime. The current seminal text bringing to the fore the importance of scrapbooking does not do justice to today's scrapbookers. The editors of *The Scrapbook in American Life* suggest that today's scrapbooks are inadequate as primary sources because they are often "devoid of context, with no attribution, provenance, history, or biographical information."<sup>57</sup> They neglect to note ways contemporary scrappers often supply useful context for their personal stories through journaling and biographical information. One of the primary techniques scrapbookers utilize in the craft today is journaling, which is contextualized narration of emotions and events, recorded directly on the scrapbook page. Cohesive narratives are frequently conveyed through scrapbook journaling. In addition, the large number of scrapbooks published on websites enables scrapbookers to tell the "story behind the layout," which can illuminate the motivation behind their project and reveal the significance of materials used in creating the art. Thus, criticisms dismissing contemporary scrapbooks as mere hieroglyphics of a lost time as a result of "their chaos of oblique signs known only to compilers, and the frequent lack of any recognizable content" no longer serve as just cause to ignore contemporary scrapbookers'

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<sup>57</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 19.

contributions.<sup>58</sup> Historical scrapbooks, the subject of current scrapbooking scholarship, often lacked such relevant details. Thus, it is crucial that scholars acknowledge today's increased contextualization of scrapbooks, which can further assist more comprehensive studies of the contemporary craft.

Some scrapbook scholars dismiss the pastime due to its mass commercialization. Jessica Helfand's views on the current scrapbook scene discount the rich complexity I have observed in women's scrapbooking. The author finds the application of prepackaged scrapbook supplies "homogenized and culturally neutral," referring to the final products as "primitive by objective standards."<sup>59</sup> While it is true that scrapbooking stores tend to offer stock supplies, which are often conveniently coordinated by style and color, it is unfair to suggest that frequent use of such products necessarily strips scrapbooks of their complexity.<sup>60</sup> Many of the scrapbook pages studied in this dissertation incorporate found objects as well as the pre-packaged scrapbooking supplies Helfand mentions. Some scrapbookers, such as those highlighted in this project, actually apply stock embellishments, patterned paper, and other widely available products in complex ways. As I demonstrate in this study, scrapbook pages comprise a variety of additional elements, such as journaling and other rhetorical strategies, further complicating the pastime. Thus, Helfand's fear that, "veiled by embellishments, drenched in die cuts and ribbons, won't scrapbooks all look alike?" may be eased by observing the sampling of distinctive scrapbook pages contained in this dissertation.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Helfand, *Scrapbooks*, 164.

<sup>60</sup> CHA Scrapbooking Study.

<sup>61</sup> Helfand, *Scrapbooks*, 164.



An additional concern relating to studying contemporary scrapbooks posed by the editors of *The Scrapbook in American Life* is important to address. The authors ask the relevant research question, “where does one begin with the unpublished, highly personal scrapbook?”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the earnest task of my project is to offer a model for analyzing women’s trauma scrapbook pages. Although scholars like Ott, Tucker, Buckler, and Helfand raise legitimate concerns regarding the researcher’s ability to read effectively these personal projects of the self, I address this concern by openly admitting my personal bias. That is, by aligning myself with anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s famous notion that ethnography is an “interpretative activity,” I blatantly admit that my interpretation of trauma scrapbooking constitutes one of many possible interpretations. However, I hope my project paints a clear picture of the complexity and richness of the craft, which, like most artwork, invites multiple interpretations. Archivist Juliana M. Kuipers offers an additional point that may reassure scholars wary of studying personal scrapbooks. Kuipers holds that “the more literate a researcher is in material culture, the more information he or she will be able to cull from the scrapbook.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, even though scrapbooks pose challenges for researchers, I propose here that students of the craft can nonetheless glean relevant, useful information about the creator and her culture through carefully attending to the messages, techniques, and strategies contained within contemporary scrapbooking.

In light of such debates over the validity of scrapbooking as a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry, my study aims to change the dismal forecast of contemporary scrapbooking. This dissertation illustrates the complex ways women depict traumatic life

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<sup>62</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Juliana M. Kuipers, “Scrapbooks: Intrinsic Value and Material Culture,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 2:3 (2004): 89.

experiences through a close study of several scrapbook pages. Using an array of rhetorical techniques and social commentaries in their scrapbooks, women narrate stories about themselves in ways that stray beyond popular conceptions of the craft. Women have begun writing themselves directly into their art, as evidenced by the proliferation of online guides and recently-published books asserting the importance of representing the self in scrapbooks.<sup>64</sup> In addition, as I observe in this project, today's scrapbookers also narrate difficult life experiences, such as domestic abuse, psychiatric disorders (e.g., depression, bipolar disorder), and death, among others, through scrapbooking as a way to preserve their own stories, which have historically been overlooked in favor of family tales.<sup>65</sup> As my project shows, today's scrapbooking reveals richly contextual projects of self and society.

### **Limitations**

One of the challenges encountered in this project is related to selection and collection of scrapbook sources and data. There existed a large volume of scrapbook pages available to study, but the parameters of this project required a close study of a limited number of pages. Ultimately, I elected to include scrapbook pages created by women whom I could identify and contact to obtain permission to reprint their work

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<sup>64</sup> Recently published texts include: *Imperfect Lives: Scrapbooking the Reality of Your Everyday* (Cincinnati: Memory Makers, 2006); *Out of Bounds: Scrapbooking Without Boundaries* (Cincinnati: Memory Makers, 2007); and *Self-Centered: The Art of Scrapbooking You and Your Life* (Santa Ana, CA: Pine Cone Press, 2006). The rising number of recently published volumes on alternative scrapbooking techniques, with a focus on the self offering specific examples. *Scrap City: Scrapbooking for Urban Divas and Small Town Rebels* (New York, NY: Sixth & Spring Books, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> Emphasis on the domestic is a traditional aspect of women's stories, in which marriage and family figure prominently. Romance plots are typically associated with femininity and women's narratives, whether this has historically been the case or not; Diana Holmes, *Romance and Readership in Twentieth-Century France: Love Stories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Sonya Stephens, ed., *A History of Women's Writing in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jayne Ann Krentz, *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

(with one exception, previously acknowledged). This restraint of course limited my study to readily-identifiable scrapbook pages, but it also enabled me to reproduce the image for improved contextualization.

Another limit to this project is that I did not conduct a large, comprehensive survey of scrapbookers. Rather, I sampled a small group of artists whose works depict traumatic health experiences. I distributed a survey (see Appendix) to all fourteen of the artists whose work I analyze, and received and used responses from four of the surveyed women. However, in most cases biographical information provided on a website or in a publication enabled me to contextualize the artist and her work when I was unable to collect interview data. I should note that at this point, no comprehensive surveys have been conducted to illustrate quantitatively how many scrapbookers produce art about difficult health experiences. My research nonetheless suggests that this type of scrapbooking constitutes a fruitful emerging area of inquiry for cultural studies and is an important contribution to scrapbooking scholarship.

Marketing surveys indicate that scrapbooking is a white, middle-class women's<sup>66</sup> hobby. My study did not gather official qualitative data on each scrapbooker studied. However, in the majority of the informal surveys<sup>67</sup> returned from about half of the scrapbookers in this project, the crafters identified themselves as college-educated, Caucasian women. To my knowledge, there have been no large-scale detailed studies of race- and class-based demographics for the craft. It would be useful for future studies to

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<sup>66</sup> Data regarding race and class are derived from two sources. A 2004 published research survey of nearly 600 scrapbookers found that 42% of respondents reported a household income of \$80,000 and above. 23% reported an income over \$40,000, and 23% reported an income over \$60,000; Eugene H. Fram, "The Booming Scrapbooking Market in the USA," *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 33.3 (2005): 215-225. The 2007 Craft & Hobby Association Scrapbooking Study of more than 400 US scrapbookers found that over 90% of respondents reported their race as Caucasian; *Craft and Hobby Association Scrapbooking Survey* (Westbury, NY: Ipsos Insight, Inc., 2007).

<sup>67</sup> A facsimile of the scrapbooker questionnaire is provided in Appendix B.

consider why certain groups are drawn to scrapbooking, with an eye toward accessibility of materials, marketing targets, and types of products used by certain groups.

Additionally, a future study may consider which groups tend to share their scrapbooking projects in public online communities, and which groups may be left out of this practice.

This dissertation focuses on U.S. scrapbooking, although one of the scrapbooks studied is from South Africa. Given that many pages are circulated online, it is difficult to make assumptions about user base. By limiting my study to pages that are largely created and circulated in the U.S., I intend for my contextualized generalizations about scrapbooking to be nonetheless broadly applicable. A study focusing on women's scrapbooking from other regions of the globe might offer even more insight into the role of scrapbooking in U.S. culture and around the world.

As scrapbooks tend to use artistic elements such as collage, photos, paint, stickers, and embellishments, it is important to study them as material products. However, it was not possible in this project to obtain the physical scrapbook pages. Rather, scrapbookers photographed their pages and shared digital images of them on websites. While I had access to the electronic pages as well as scrapbookers' descriptions of the elements of their work, I did not have the benefit of experiencing the pages in their tactile forms. As a result, my analysis may unintentionally omit details specific to the material products themselves. A future study might include direct observation of the material scrapbook pages.

Gender is an important component of my project. Data support my assertion that the pastime is largely a female hobby.<sup>68</sup> However, men's engagement in scrapbooking has been acknowledged through marketing as well as historic studies of the craft. The

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<sup>68</sup> The CHA survey indicates that overall, women comprise almost 80% of scrapbookers.

CHA scrapbooking survey shows men's involvement at just over 20% of crafters. However, the survey's designation of what they term heavy users, that is, those completing 11 or more projects in a year, places men at just over 30% in this category. Scrapbooking scholars also reiterate the role of men in creating scrapbooks.<sup>69</sup> Some of the earliest, most famously documented scrapbooks date back to Thomas Jefferson and Mark Twain.<sup>70</sup> A 2007 *Wall Street Journal* article revealed the new trend of marketing scrapbooking products to men.<sup>71</sup> For example, the company Stampin' Up has begun designing scrapbook paper and stamps with arguably less "gendered" themes, such as vehicles, deer, and war medallions. Despite men's documented involvement in the craft, given the popularity of scrapbooking among women and my personal experience with the craft, which is centered on the female gender and scrapbooking, my study remains justifiably fixed on women's particular uses of the hobby.

Identifying a precise definition of trauma — an important concept in this project — posed a challenge. As mentioned, I define trauma as a foundational experience or set of experiences that significantly shape one's life, in the process resulting in emotional and/or physical or material turmoil. Despite employing a specific definition of trauma, it may be difficult if not impossible to determine whether the scrapbookers studied herein would consider their depicted experiences as in fact traumatic. There is a limit to the extent to which a researcher can directly link a specific parameter of a study to an individual's private experience. A risk to the trauma label is that it potentially carries psychiatric/medical connotations, and can venture dangerously close to diagnosis. To

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<sup>69</sup> Helfand, *Scrapbooks*; Tucker, *The Scrapbook*.

<sup>70</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*.

<sup>71</sup> Kelly Crow, "Wanted: A Few Good Men (with Scissors)," *Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 2007. [http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB117581834237461642-bmDQEcs4PD3zksSTgEcdHO5\\_EHs\\_20070416.html?mod=msn\\_free](http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB117581834237461642-bmDQEcs4PD3zksSTgEcdHO5_EHs_20070416.html?mod=msn_free).

every extent possible, I have tried to negotiate these issues by close awareness and avoidance of language and analysis that approach medicalization, unless that is the rhetoric used by the scrapbooker herself.

### **Contributions to American Studies**

Goals of the American Studies field include a critical exploration of key aspects of U.S. culture, particularly the cultures of everyday life and cultural constructions of identity. In this dissertation, I honor these aims of the field in several key ways. First, I offer a new intervention that examines women's domestic products to better understand how scrapbookers negotiate health-related concerns through the craft. I contend that the folk-based tradition of scrapbooking serves as a useful site on which to better examine women's production of meaning.

Second, my study offers insight into women's first-person narratives in which they negotiate complex issues relating to health and gendered selfhood. I demonstrate, through a close reading of several trauma scrapbook pages, the various ways these artists grapple with traumatic health concerns. As I show, through scrapbooking, the compilers reimagine selfhood/identity, suggesting the craft's key role in depicting women's self-perceptions.

Further, this dissertation examines an under-studied aspect of U.S. women's cultural craftwork. Rich cultural resources, scrapbooks have much to tell us about women's cultural experiences. My project serves as a call to improve scrapbook preservation, to acknowledge the contributions of contemporary scrapbooking, and to urge historians to envision today's scrapbooks as a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry. Museum studies, ethnography, and cultural studies fields can benefit by seriously

attending to the stories contained in women's scrapbooking and other multimedia life-story projects. Trauma and narrative theories, including illness narratives, may utilize the foundation my project lays for studying alternative media. The dearth of scholarship relating to scrapbooking suggests sufficient space to link narrative theory and material culture studies. Thus, my project can contribute to myriad disciplines, such as life writing, trauma theory, and material culture studies. This research also has the potential to broaden the utility and scope of narrative theory by applying it to visual media and other artistic products on trauma, a subject that is often difficult to put into words.

### **Chapter Overview**

The chapters of this dissertation trace my core themes of health, trauma, and selfhood in scrapbooking through observations of the production and meaningfulness of women's health activist scrapbooking. I alternate close readings of scrapbook pages with chapters contextualizing the craft through a broader analysis. In Chapter 2, I continue the background from this chapter by offering a deeper treatment of intellectual issues that arise when considering women's online scrapbooking communities. One of the goals of this chapter is to assess the utility of various definitions of community, with a focus on concerns relevant to online communities. In addition, in this background chapter, I highlight other key intellectual areas crucial to my research, drawing from such fields as narrative theory; feminist memoir studies and feminist narratology; trauma theory and memory studies; knowledge production and feminist standpoint theory; and cultural memory. The problems I tackle in this chapter lay the foundation for the rest of the dissertation.

In the third chapter, “Self-Preservation: Scrapbooking Traumatic Health Experiences,” I perform a close reading of trauma scrapbook pages, exploring various ways women use the craft to self-express and to talk back to culture. The chapter holds that scrapbooking fails to meet rigid definitions of narrative, as many scrapbook pages are created without the intention of necessary inclusion in an album. In fact, many scrapbook pages are created as stand-alone pages, bound together in albums with no particular theme or linearity. Viewed collectively, the health-related scrapbook pages I study constitute a variety of contemporary perspectives on women’s experiences with selfhood and health. Another core theme of this chapter is self-preservation, which points to how, on the one hand, creating art out of trauma helps a scrapbooker preserve her sense of self, which may be uprooted as a result of trauma. At the same time, self-preservation also illustrates how women scrapbookers narrate stories about themselves as a way to preserve memories of their own lives — so often left out of a craft focused on family life. Lastly, I elaborate, using a sample of health- and trauma-themed scrapbook pages, how the distinct characteristics of the hobby allow it to manage the particular challenges of narrating trauma.

The fourth chapter, “Telling Trauma: Producing Knowledge, Crafting Cultural Memory,” explores ways in which scrapbooking is a form of knowledge production narrating women’s collective knowledges. I provide examples of the types of knowledges produced through the hobby, showing that women use scrapbooking to demonstrate technical aspects of the craft, as well as to share coping strategies and suggestions for living a better life. In addition, the chapter examines ways that scrapbooking offers revised cultural memories relating to women’s (often traumatic) life experiences. I posit



that influential ideas and images can be perpetuated by scrapbooking, which suggests that cultural memories can be shaped by a craft devoted to memory preservation. As a form of knowledge and cultural memory production, scrapbooking demonstrates women's attempts to reformulate their self-image as activists of change rather than as passive consumers of a domestic hobby.

In tracing health-related issues in scrapbooking, I found that a large number of scrapbooks centered on the breast cancer experience. In the fifth chapter, "Courage, Hope, and Selfhood: Scrapbooking and Breast Cancer Culture," I explore how women use breast cancer narratives in scrapbooks to claim a voice about the illness experience. The connections I observe between the commercialization of breast cancer and scrapbooking's popularity played a role in my pairing of this disease and scrapbooks. Through my study of select breast cancer scrapbook pages, I discovered that many of the works both reinforce and reject the rhetoric of breast cancer culture. This chapter further illustrates how scrapbooking is a conducive site for women's meaning making about the challenges of breast cancer. Exemplifying the influence of breast cancer culture on scrapbooks, the chapter contends that scrapbooking can secure an influential place in shaping cultural constructions of women's selfhood and health.

In Chapter 6, "Communities of Compassion: Charity Cropping and Health Activism," I examine two forms of scrapbooking activism: charity cropping (in which women gather together to scrapbook and raise funds) and scrapbooking businesses that raise money for charities. I explore how women use scrapbooking as a form of social activism and community building around health issues. Scrapbooking is an effective form of health activism because it enables crafters to create art together while seeking social

change. This chapter also describes what I call “communities of compassion,” addressing the limitations as well as benefits of these communities vis-à-vis health activism. As I observe, communities of compassion supply women a forum to scrapbook about themselves, away from family or other personal/domestic obligations. In what I call “scrap activism,” or scrapbooking activism, women embrace community involvement to express their feelings about a traumatic experience to which others can relate.

The final chapter, “Conclusion: Viral Cropping and the Ideal Text,” explores how the Internet serves as an important tool of community collaboration for the craft. I contend that the widespread sharing of online scrapbook pages, alongside the volume of comments visitors to websites can leave, result in a multivocality, in effect maximizing the number of voices that can be heard. It is for this reason that I believe that scrapbooking democratizes life writing. Since formal training is not required to scrapbook, more women can tell their stories about health traumas to audiences of compassionate listeners.

In this final chapter, I also observe how as physical ephemera, scrapbooks have long held the reputation of being transient. However, the semi-permanence of digital images on public websites transforms our notion of scrapbooking as ephemera. Thus, what were once private, ephemeral memory representations are now potentially permanent public exhibitions of women’s life stories. Lastly, this chapter argues that scrapbooks be viewed as an ideal text. Borrowing the notion from Roland Barthes, I suggest that the intertextual potential of scrapbooks renders it ideal for trauma narration. That is, the interwovenness of scrapbooks — and the chorus of voices contributing to the

craft — points to the many possible interpretations of individual pages as well as uses of the craft as a whole in trauma and health narration.

## Chapter 2: Studying Scrapbooking: Surveying the Literature

In this chapter, I survey key issues and diverse academic areas that have helped shape my research questions regarding women's involvement in trauma scrapbooking. I begin with an engagement of concerns surrounding contemporary online scrapbooking, with an analysis of the challenges posed by studying online works. I then provide a brief overview of scholarship on community, with a focus on online communities in particular. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to examining some of the key intellectual issues I faced throughout my research of women's contemporary trauma scrapbooks.

### **Online Scrapbooking and Online Communities**

In the introductory chapter to this dissertation, I provided an overview of current literature on contemporary scrapbooking, the majority of which is historically rooted. In this chapter, I would like to expand the definition of contemporary scrapbooking to include online scrapbooks, the primary types of scrapbooking projects on which I focus in this dissertation. I define online scrapbooking as those scrapbook pages that were originally created as 12 X 12-inch, physical, tangible material products and which have been digitally displayed on the Internet. In other words, they are scrapbooks that have been scanned or photographed, the files for which uploaded to a website or blog, the exclusive media through which I have accessed the pages I study. As I indicated in Chapter 1, my criteria for determining that a page qualifies as a scrapbook is that the pages contain both visual and narrative elements. In particular, the scrapbook pages I analyzed contained photographs, embellishments (such as flowers or other symbols), a title, and journaling or other notes on the scrapbook page.

Although I have attached a particular meaning to scrapbooking in this dissertation, the definition of scrapbooking itself — particularly online scrapbooking — is ever-shifting. For example, the artistic expressive form of collage, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, has had an influence over scrapbooking styles and techniques. A case in point is that some of the online scrapbooking pages I browsed (and indeed, selected) for this project straddle the line between scrapbooking and painting. These products also incorporated some of the characteristics of scrapbooks, such as photography, journaling, and symbolic embellishments. The distinction between what is and is not a scrapbook can at times be fine, but given that I viewed and selected pages that were posted on scrapbooking websites and blogs, my educated assumption is that the artists categorize their work as scrapbooks (or else they would have displayed them elsewhere). As long as the works incorporated my designated key elements of scrapbooks (journaling, photography, embellishments), and were presented on 12X12 scraps of paper, they were fair game for my project.

Lastly, I have become aware that my own definition of scrapbooking is in actuality connected to my needs as a researcher. That is, I have “arbitrarily” defined scrapbooking in such a way that only a subset of what might be considered scrapbooks are included in this project. As a result, I feel it is important to point out that scrapbooking is a broad field, and that artistic projects have the flexibility to self-categorize as scrapbooks if they so choose.

If scrapbooking has a somewhat ambiguous and shifting definition, so too does community, a concept I explore throughout this dissertation. My focus herein rests on the value and power of online communities for scrapbookers, who in turn use technology as a

medium for education and social/personal advocacy. Scrapbookers routinely share their work with each other, providing critiques and emotional support, as well as teaching scrapbooking techniques and offering craft product suggestions. Women have also formed countless online businesses for the purposes of educating and selling craft products to scrapbookers. Communities of scrapbookers also use the online forum to organize face-to-face meetings, some of which are designed to raise funds for charities. Thus, online communities are central to modern scrapbooking, which I contend in this dissertation is a form of community organizing.

I am cognizant that the concept community is not free from compelling theoretical problems. Indeed, community is a notoriously complex notion whose blanket usage often raises the ire of scholars. Barry Wellman has defined community as “networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity.”<sup>1</sup> However, while this definition was attached to Wellman’s specific study of a select group of individuals, it is all too easy to apply such generalized notions to any and all communities. Open definitions are often so broad that they can signify any group, at which point they risk losing their meaning altogether. After all, communities can refer to anything from a group of people living in separate geographical locations, to groups of people firmly rooted in and identified by location. Communities, too, may be embedded within other communities, which creates layers difficult to untangle with broad-sweeping definitions. Communities may be bound by race, gender, class, location, age, sexual orientation, religion, politics, technology, or special interests. They may be self-described or labeled as communities by others. The important point here is that

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Wellman, “The Community Question: The Intimate Networks of East Yorkers,” *American Journal of Sociology* 84: (1979):1201-31; Barry Wellman, “Networks, Class and Place,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25 (2001): 227.

community is a social construct, an amorphous, ever-shifting symbolic concept that is notoriously difficult to pin down.<sup>2</sup> When writing about community, then, it is especially important to acknowledge challenges inherent in using the term.

Intellectual dilemmas posed by community are heightened when considering touchstone works on community, such as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.<sup>3</sup> This text has been widely criticized for its lack of theoretical development with respect to community and Anderson's dangerous universalizing of history.<sup>4</sup> Anderson asserts that members of a community may never know each other, which is true enough and certainly applies to online scrapbooking communities. What is important to me, and a point which Anderson stresses, is what specifically coheres members of said communities. That is, community is often defined, according to Anderson, by what it is that members say makes them part of a community.

The notion of communities as socially constructed and a symbolic creation is important to address here. Similar to Anderson, in *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Anthony Paul Cohen examines how boundaries of communities come to be defined, with a focus on how individuals become aware of belonging to a community.<sup>5</sup> In understanding community as a cultural phenomenon, Cohen teases out the concept as a symbolic structural whole through specific examples from observed communities. I mention Cohen's work on community because he sidesteps the pitfalls of universalizing and totalizing (something Anderson is accused of doing), and instead deftly illustrates his

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Paul Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (New York: Routledge, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Prominent critiques of Anderson have come from Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Paul Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985). Similarly, G. Suttles argues for the significance of individuals and groups in the construction of communities G. Suttles, *The Social Construction of Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

definition of community with personal observations and case studies. Thus, Cohen's work has been particularly helpful in thinking through the challenges I encountered in this project with respect to blanket uses of community. It has occurred to me that once again it is crucial to be cautious when walking the line between broad, largely applicable concepts and a narrow focus on individuals and personalized practices.

My working definition of community developed out of the above groundwork scholars have laid, as well as from my observations of women's scrapbooking communities. As I witnessed geographically dispersed crafters forming communities around shared ideologies, I realized that, like other scholars<sup>6</sup>, community begins with the notion of people coming together to address specific grievances. While not all the community members I observed necessarily shared the same background, or even ideologies, they found common ground based on a specific concern or set of concerns (eg, health trauma). My research also showed that women's scrapbooking communities comprised subcultures of women who may share more with each other than with the entire group. That is, women may claim to belong to a scrapbooking community, but their involvement or interactions may be centered around a more narrow group of participants and a concrete set of issues related to the umbrella community. My research revealed how subgroups of scrapbookers may belong to a general community, but may also form smaller groupings of more narrow concerns and more closely matched life experiences and ideologies.

As we can see from the above, the notion of community is complex and at times rife with conflicting meanings. The concept of online communities also poses interesting

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<sup>6</sup> Loretta Pyles, *Progressive Community Organizing: A Critical Approach for a Globalizing World* (Routledge, 2009).



intellectual obstacles. Online community is an elusive concept, because it is located nowhere and everywhere at the same time. In *Communities in Cyberspace*, Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock observe how online communities create open boundaries.<sup>7</sup> That is, individuals can “join” a group without ever actively taking part or revealing they are a member. This may be accomplished by an anonymous user name, so that one’s true identity is hidden from the group. Online group members may also merely “lurk,” a term which refers to the act of observing online interactions, but never actually engaging with the group (ie, only reading blog posts, and not posting one’s own viewpoints online to the group). Since I believe that inactive engagement with a community does not discredit membership, in this project, I am interested in the engagement of scrapbookers in online communities. As such, my focus rests on the sharing of ideas, life strategies, and activism among scrapbookers in a virtual forum.

When thinking through online activism, I turn to Smith and Kollock, who raise the related issue of “organized citizenship,” whereby members of online communities have such a strong affiliation to their group or organization that they are willing to take specific, direct action if called upon to do so.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in Chapter 6, *Communities of Compassion: Charity Cropping and Health Activism*, I explore the ways in which online scrapbooking communities foster such desire for social action that scrapbookers organize face-to-face charity gatherings. The virtual environment, then, plays an integral role in shaping offline, or face-to-face, interactions among community members. In the case of crafting events centered around charity causes, Internet communities mediate and spark

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<sup>7</sup>Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock, *Communities in Cyberspace* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock, eds, *Communities in Cyberspace* (London: Routledge, 1999).

further types of interactions that bring individual members together into new forums, potentially resulting in ever-new communities.<sup>9</sup>

Limitations often cited relating to online communities include that intimacy is simulated and cannot approximate face-to-face, tangible intimacy; that it is difficult to glean the “legitimate” identity of online participants, because alternate personae are frequently adapted; that technologies such as computers ultimately make people more estranged from each other; and that the relationships among people are tenuous and easily disrupted (eg, user stops going online).<sup>10</sup> While these limitations are certainly valid and are important to keep in mind, they do not necessarily preclude productive activism. That is, even if people interact online and do not feel an intimacy with specific individuals, they may be persuaded by a specific cause to continue group membership. Lastly, there is sufficient evidence that technologies can mediate human relationships and create meaningful groups. Online scrapbooking provides one of countless examples dispelling the myth that computers necessarily cause estrangement.

### **Literature Review**

Thus far, I have addressed some of the key intellectual issues with which I grappled during the course of this dissertation. In this next section, I further my analysis by touching on the diverse collection of academic areas and distinct issues that have shaped my research questions regarding women’s engagement in trauma scrapbooking. Within each of the sections below, I examine additional intellectual problems that impacted my analysis of contemporary scrapbooking.

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<sup>9</sup> Judith Stefania Donath, in “Inhabiting the Virtual City: The Design of Social Environments for Electronic Communities” discusses the notion of a “virtual city,” a concept she feels can help frame human interactions online; Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Barry Wellman, *Networks in the Global Village: Life in Contemporary Communities* (Westview Press, 1999).

The primary academic fields that have framed my study include: narrative theory; feminist memoir studies and feminist narratology; trauma theory and memory studies; knowledge production and feminist standpoint theory; and cultural memory. Below, I offer a closer look at each area of scholarship, indicating how key scholars have influenced my study of the production and meaning of scrapbooking about women's health.

### *Narrative Theory*

The need to tell is a human drive. At a very fundamental level, humans use stories to understand their daily lives.<sup>11</sup> We call on narratives to help us understand our relationship to our families, to members of our community, and to contextualize cultural experiences. Narrative may be viewed as a representational system; as Francois Lyotard observes, it records cultural details and helps people understand the world.<sup>12</sup> Analysis of narrative has traditionally applied to literature (e.g., poetry, novels). Increasingly, however, narrative theory has been called on to supply a deeper understanding of the foundations upon which our lives are built, including such individual and global concerns as human relationships, ideologies, and politics. Thus, narrative theory has started bridging increasingly more academic fields, such as cultural studies.<sup>13</sup> I contend that based on this trend, it makes sense that my project on women's trauma scrapbooks would apply several of the foundational as well as experimental principles of narrative theory.

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> Brian Richardson, *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frame* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002).

This dissertation takes as its premise that scrapbooks are forms of life narratives. Although they may be deemed nontraditional, scrapbooks nonetheless contain visual and textual elements that can adequately represent a person's life experience. However, although narrative theory has long played a role in cultural studies, the notion of what constitutes a narrative is at times strictly observed. For example, prominent narrative studies scholars hold fast to the notion that to qualify as a narrative, a story must be linear, have continuity, exhibit temporality, and must contain a semblance of a beginning, middle, and end.<sup>14</sup>

Scrapbooking, and arguably much of women's life writing, fails to meet such strict definitions of narrative. For example, scrapbooks lack closure and disrupt what we expect of a life story, in part because they contain truncated visual and narrative elements such as phrases, miscellaneous words, and symbolic imagery. As a way to position my project within both cultural studies and narrative theory fields, I propose my own working definition of narrative, which holds that any form used to tell a story is a narrative. Thus, narratives may take the form of such diverse media as quilts, postcards, songs, poetry, or scrapbooks. As narrative theorist Marilyn Robinson Waldman observes, "We cannot assume that a text...tells no story because it does not make its story explicit, formally organized, and finished."<sup>15</sup> An example of this phenomenon may be found in Andrea Newlyn's study of 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscript cookbooks.<sup>16</sup> In a compelling article,

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Scholes, *The Nature of Narrative: Revised and Expanded* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Marilyn Robinson Waldman, "The Otherwise Unnoteworthy Year 711: A Reply to Hayden White," *Critical Inquiry* 7:4 (1981): 784-792, 786.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to other scholars who have analyzed the narrative aspects of so-called nontraditional texts, such as oral stories, diaries, folktales, and music; Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*; Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968); David Nicholls, "Narrative Theory as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Popular Music Texts," *Music and Letters* 88:2 (2007): 297-315, among others.

Newlyn contends that these cookbooks exhibit distinct and complicated textual strategies.<sup>17</sup> Newlyn's argument that cookbooks challenge what constitutes a literary text aligns with my observations of contemporary scrapbooks, which confront head-on the definition of autobiographical narrative. As narratives of the self, scrapbooks serve as important contributions to women's cultural stories by raising crucial social concerns and allowing a wider spectrum of voices to be heard.

Contemporary narrative theory holds that narrative is a socio-cultural phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Stories are always linked to a complex network of social relations.<sup>19</sup> As Lyotard decisively notes, narratives "define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves part of that culture, they are legitimized by the fact that they do what they do."<sup>20</sup> As cultural phenomena, narratives have the power to contribute to broader cultural knowledge.<sup>21</sup> This notion of narrative as a cultural system perpetuating beliefs is important to my study. I seek to show the role of women's individual and collective trauma narration (through scrapbooks) in revealing salient cultural concerns. Since narratives and culture are deeply embedded, any narrative at hand, even scrapbooks, can supply insight into a culture's belief systems. According to Hayden White, narratives are "a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted."<sup>22</sup> In this project, I am interested in ways that women's individual and collective narratives created through

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<sup>17</sup> Andrea Newlyn, "Challenging Contemporary Narrative Theory: The Alternative Textual Strategies of Nineteenth-Century Manuscript Cookbooks," *The Journal of American Culture* 22:3 (1999): 35-47.

<sup>18</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (Routledge, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Steven Connor, *Postmodern Culture: Introduction to the Theories of the Contemporary* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Bal, *Narratology*.

<sup>22</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 1.

scrapbooks have an effect on culture, and how culture influences the scrapbooks that women create. I am, in effect, studying how women's shared realities are recorded.

This shared reality, however, assumes veracity. That is, it would appear that the underlying assumption of my project (or any project exploring first-person narratives) is that the stories presented are factual, believable. It stands to reason that the trauma narratives contained within the scrapbook pages I examine are rooted in actual life experiences. However, this is impossible to know for certain. The scrapbookers' stories may sound possible, and interviews with the artists would appear to confirm their story. It must be observed, however, that as readers of this medium, there is no way to truly know what has transpired in these women's lives.

I raise this issue because my entire project is theoretically contingent on the believability of these stories. If there was any doubt as to the reality of the scrapbookers' experiences, the project may fail to have legitimacy. These concerns bring to mind the challenges inherent in public confession, a notion I explore in the section below. As I note, the truthfulness of women's testimonials does not discredit their persuasive and therapeutic value.

### *Feminist Critiques of Memoirs*

My study of contemporary trauma scrapbooks of the self has been framed by feminist works on the life narrative form memoir, which has achieved mass popularity in the past few decades. Although their formats are strikingly different, scrapbooks and memoirs share key characteristics of interest in this project: both are creative works capturing a distinct moment in time; women are increasingly using them to work through trauma; and they frequently (and often deliberately) serve as a means of connection and

education for women. Both scrapbooks and memoirs are flexible formats that can accommodate — in their own distinctive ways — the challenges of narrating trauma, which trauma theorists widely view as difficult to articulate. By all accounts, these narrative formats are comprised of incomplete stories, snapshots of an acute experience in a woman’s life. Such connections reveal the close relationship between these very different life-story media.

Memoir serves as one the most recognizable narrative methods by which women publicly recount difficult life experiences, particularly in the past 15 years. Memoir is a distinct life writing form that is sometimes used interchangeably with autobiography, although there are key differences. Autobiography typically encompasses a traditional, linear narrative that chronicles a person’s childhood through to adulthood, with an emphasis on important developmental moments.<sup>23</sup> Memoir, on the other hand, typically narrows in on a specific, often traumatic, moment in the writer’s life.<sup>24</sup> In many cases, memoirs are reconstructed out of primary source materials, such as diaries and letters. According to Leigh Gilmore, the memoir boom of the 1990s marked the beginning of a new era in life writing, one that focused directly on tales of crisis and trauma.<sup>25</sup> What the British call “misfit” — public confessionals whose topics revolve around difficult life experiences — dominates the U.S. literary landscape. Indeed, a brief look at memoirs published in the past 12 years indicates they have often centered on traumatic, often health-related, experiences.<sup>26</sup> Similar topics, such as mental illness, abuse, and body

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<sup>23</sup> Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Janet Mason Ellerby, *Intimate Reading: The Contemporary Women’s Memoir* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Notable examples include: Kathryn Harrison, *The Kiss* (1998); Julie Gregory, *Sickened: The Story of a Lost Childhood* (2004); Alice Sebold, *Lucky: A Memoir* (1999); Marya Hornbacher, *Wasted: A Memoir of*

image issues have also become fodder for women's scrapbooks. These projects share the notion of American self-improvement, as scrapbookers often glean useful tips from each other's efforts at elevating quality of life.

In both memoirs and scrapbooks, the modern practice of public confession dominates. The increased availability of forums in which women can bare their intimate stories has resulted in a wide array of public confessionals. Alongside memoirs, scrapbooks offer yet another medium through which personal stories can be conveyed. One of the challenges inherent in public confession is that it has become so commonplace as to not reveal anything novel. That is, anyone who has read memoirs over the past 10 years has likely heard similar narratives ad nauseum; the repetitive nature of these testimonials has the unfortunate effect of dampening the impact of the story meant to move and inform.

As Herbert Read notes, confession also presupposes sincerity, which conjures up notions of truthfulness.<sup>27</sup> In the case of women's online scrapbooking, public confessions are paramount. As I have noted, inherent in my study is the inevitable assumption that the stories put forth by the scrapbookers are truthful. However, there is no way to determine the veracity of these difficult life stories. Rather, as a researcher, I have the option of taking at face value these personal testimonials. Another option is to recognize that these stories may not actually be truthful, yet still honor their legitimacy.

This approach has been played out in recent incidents in which popular memoirs were called out as containing false information. Most famously, perhaps, is James Frey's

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*Anorexia and Bulimia* (1998); Elizabeth Wurtzel, *More, Now, Again: A Memoir of Addiction* (2002); Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation* (1994); Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (1994); Judith Moore, *Fat Girl: A True Story* (2005); and Mary Felstiner, *Out of Joint: A Private and Public Story of Arthritis* (2005).

<sup>27</sup> Herbert Read, "The Cult of Sincerity." *The Hudson Review* 21(1): 1968: 53-74.



memoir *A Million Little Pieces*, which was found to contain embellished details and falsehoods in his book.<sup>28</sup> The impact this disclosure had on public trust was staggering. Public talk shows blasted Frey and other autobiographers for misleading the public and casting doubt on future memoirs.<sup>29</sup> However, Frey's book remained popular and created a public dialogue around the role of the truth in legitimizing a life story. Readers were forced to confront the cognitive dissonance created when some factual details were false, yet the overall thrust of the life story was accurate. In an interview, Frey raised interesting points about the flexibility of memoir, a genre that often is believed to be unequivocally nonfiction:

A memoir literally means my story...a memoir is a subjective retelling of events. It's an individual's perception of what happened in their own life. This is my recollection of my life. It's a truthful retelling of the story. In the memoir genre, the writer generally takes liberties. You know, you take liberties with time because you're compressing time a lot. You take liberties with events and sequence of events. The important aspect of a memoir is to get at the essential truth of it.<sup>30</sup>

These observations are important because they get to the heart of the flexibility that the memoir genre offers, while at the same time indicate how a memoirist today must still defend himself to the public when all the details in the book are not 100% provable. This notion is akin to Roland Barthes' "Death of an Author" in which he advocates against

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<sup>28</sup> James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces* (Anchor, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> "The Man Who Conned Oprah," <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/0104061jamesfrey1.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Larry King, "Interview with James Frey," January 11, 2006. <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/060111/lkl.01.html>

equating a text with its author.<sup>31</sup> Instead, one must turn to the reader, who is charged with interpreting meaning. Thus, there is no longer one authoritative author, but rather a collection of “authors” who are in actuality the readers — those who interpret meaning of the text. Thus, based on the public outcry around James Frey’s memoir, his readers appear to be unaware of the power they possess in interpreting/validating his text, which ceases to be Frey’s the moment he puts pen to paper.

In online scrapbooking, so-called falsehoods like those uncovered in Frey’s memoir are less relevant. Online scrapbooking, in fact, may be viewed as akin to other creative artistic endeavors like Post Secret, a community mail art project in which people are encouraged to mail homemade postcards which contain anonymous secrets. Many of the postcards are posted on the PostSecret website, included in the published PostSecret compilation book, or even in a museum exhibit dedicated to these post card secrets.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, online scrapbooking offers a flexible medium through which crafters can expose their most difficult life experiences and darkest secrets, without anyone actually knowing their true identity.<sup>33</sup> This public disclosure, then, encourages others to reveal their own difficult stories, a phenomenon creating a kind of ripple effect, a subject I address later in this project. One must be aware that since accountability is not relevant here (ie, due to anonymous public disclosure), the truth is always in question. However, this realization need not necessarily detract from the value of the message. That is, even if a scrapbooker tells a falsehood, as long as her story resonates with other women or inspires others to self-express, it has had a positive impact. The truth is ancillary.

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<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” in *Image-Music-Text* (Macmillan: 1988): 142-149.

<sup>32</sup> PostSecret, <http://postsecret.blogspot.com/>; Frank Warren, *PostSecret: Confessions on Life, Death, and God* (William Morrow, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> One could also view online scrapbooks as valuable archives in which the modern moment of women’s lives is captured.

Another way of thinking about personal narratives and truth is the extent to which self-presentation is a performance. Erving Goffman famously addressed humans' everyday performances.<sup>34</sup> Goffman suggests that we are all actors on a stage selecting our preferred personae and props. Thus, the selves we put forth are relational to social interactions and shift based on a particular situation. This concept has given me pause to think about the collection of scrapbook pages I study in this dissertation. For example, I have found myself questioning how women use scrapbooks to represent themselves. Upon retrospection, the majority of the scrapbook narratives selected contain a positive message, something I didn't actually seek out when deciding which pages to include in the project. There is arguably a culture of positivity running through women's scrapbooking such that even difficult life experiences are presented with a positive spin.<sup>35</sup> One might even contend that the self-presentation of these scrapbookers is influenced by this overall culture of cheerfulness, such that the pages begin to resemble each other in their uplifting messages since that is what is expected in this cultural milieu.

Feminist literary studies on memoir have informed my own scholarship on rhetorical and narrative techniques in scrapbooking. Helen M. Buss asserts that the memoir "must be understood as both writing strategy and social discourse."<sup>36</sup> Following this, scholars have examined the narrative strategies apparent in women's memoirs. Contemporary women memoirists chronicling challenging life experiences often take advantage of memoir's flexible writing format, resulting in literary experimentation. In *Intimate Reading: The Contemporary Women's Memoir*, Janet Mason Ellerby holds that

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<sup>34</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Anchor, 1959).

<sup>35</sup> My research also uncovered scrapbooks that were not unequivocally upbeat; a future project may focus on these creative pursuits which seem to defy the overall cheerful culture of contemporary scrapbooking.

<sup>36</sup> Helen M. Buss, *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 2002), 184.

memoir offers a radical format that gives voice to the intimate, painful experiences of a woman, who may, because of trauma or precarious social standing, be an outsider.<sup>37</sup>

Marilyn Chandler, in *A Healing Art: Regeneration through Autobiography*, observes how the memoir format accommodates the technical requirements of recounting difficult life experiences.<sup>38</sup> Chandler holds that “all marginal experiences or crises necessitate a struggle with language,” suggesting that women’s traumas inevitably encounter difficulties with articulation.<sup>39</sup> My project expands the notion that trauma is challenging to narrate. I contend that it requires ever-new forms of narration due to struggles with selfhood. As I show, contemporary scrapbooking is a new evolution of trauma narration, as it is uniquely equipped to negotiate the challenges of narrating the complicated relationship between selfhood and trauma.

Through mining the rubble of the inner world, women reconstruct their lives and selves, often using memoir’s creative format to give voice and coherence to their dismantled lives. In *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*, Susanna Egan identifies trauma narratives as “highly responsive texts” that are uneven and inconsistent because they refer to an unstable event or period of time.<sup>40</sup> As a flexible genre, memoir helps women express disorienting experiences using equally complex language, since sophisticated writing techniques often enable articulation of difficult ideas. Although memoirs offer ample space to narrate textually one’s life experiences, as

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<sup>37</sup> Janet Mason Ellerby, *Intimate Reading: The Contemporary Women’s Memoir* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Marilyn Chandler, *A Healing Art: Regeneration through Autobiography* (New York: Garland Publisher, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Susanna Egan, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 8.

I show in this dissertation, scrapbooks enable a different kind of articulation that incorporates both visual and textual elements.

Lastly, many feminist scholars have explored how memoirs articulate and contribute to deeper understanding of women's often precarious social and cultural positioning. Jill Ker Conway believes that this life writing genre exposes women's marginalized social status.<sup>41</sup> For Marilyn Chandler, autobiographical writing "represent[s] an attempt on the part of individuals to provide for themselves what the culture fails any longer to provide."<sup>42</sup> Thus, what for many women is a private crisis or trauma, once narrated, becomes a public articulation of their experiences, which are often suppressed or ignored in society. Chandler notes that autobiography constitutes "one available means of restructuring, redescribing, reevaluating, and remythologizing the world."<sup>43</sup> Buss contends that contemporary women's life writing does the important work of "revising cultural contexts so that their experience is not excluded," often through publicly revealing a private or shameful account.<sup>44</sup> Self narration also plays a part in how women have a hand in shifting cultural memories by offering more realistic narratives about their lived experiences.

Although published memoirs are widely recognized as exposing personal challenges, scrapbooking is an unexpected format for this kind of public disclosure of private life experiences. As my study shows, scrapbooking exposes women's personal health traumas in a public form. I contend that scrapbooking accommodates trauma in a unique way that memoirs alone cannot. In addition, online scrapbooking in particular

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<sup>41</sup> Jill Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Chandler, *A Healing Art*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Buss, *Repossessing the World*, 3.

democratizes the life writing format, as a wider variety of women can “publish” their personal testimonials, which can be witnessed by other crafters. Publication of memoirs can be more limited given the politics of which authors are published and who gains wider distribution.

### *Feminist Narratology*

Questions of whose private stories attain public recognition have historically been linked to gender. This is why feminist narratology supplies insight into women’s public testimonials of private traumas. I draw from feminist narratology because of its investment in the social and cultural contexts of narrative, and the ways that narratives themselves may be gendered.<sup>45</sup> Traditional narrative theory is typically centered on (male) action. Women’s narration, it is presupposed, is by definition inactive, particularly since it is often placed in contrast to men’s narration. Since many of women’s plots are domestic in nature, they are by default perceived as inactive. Associating women’s narrative with inaction and men’s with action is a dangerous move, and one that many in the field contest. According to feminist narratologist Ruth E. Page, narrative form in and of itself need not be gendered.<sup>46</sup>

However, some feminist scholars hold that narrative structure can actually reveal gender, e.g., that women’s writing is frequently characterized by nonlinearity, repetition, and disjunctivity.<sup>47</sup> However, form itself need not necessarily be linked to gender.

Feminist concerns regarding whether there truly is a ‘women’s writing,’ and whether men

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<sup>45</sup> Susan Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> Ruth E. Page, “Feminist Narratology? Literary and Linguistic Perspectives on Gender and Narrativity,” *Language and Literature* 12:1 (2003): 43-56.

<sup>47</sup> Egan, *Mirror Talk*.

and women do write differently speak to long-standing debates over gendered narration.<sup>48</sup> In light of this, my project analyzes both the structure and content of narrative, keeping an ever-watchful eye on gendered context.

While narratives are not necessarily gendered, as Page reveals, “this does not mean that women writers cannot use weak narrativity in their text for feminist ends.”<sup>49</sup> This perspective marks my study’s point of departure from traditional and feminist narratology. While men and women may not *write* differently per se, their *modes* of expression are certainly discrete at times. Scrapbooking is undeniably dominated by women. In *Fictions of Authority*, Susan Lanser proposes the theory that “different communities of women have had different degrees of access to particular narrative forms.”<sup>50</sup> Women’s access to scrapbooking has historically been relatively open, as it is a female form of expression given its connection to arts and crafts, and its persistent focus on domestic life. Materials are often easy to acquire, and women are encouraged to be their family’s record keepers.<sup>51</sup> Thus, an awareness of debates in feminist narratology can help unpack complex, gendered components of the domestic pastime and its use in narrating trauma.

### *Trauma Theory and Memory Studies*

Use of scrapbooking to help cope with trauma is not new. The craft has seen therapeutic/rehabilitative applications for some time.<sup>52</sup> Jeanne Thibo Karns’ instructional

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<sup>48</sup> In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous describes the notion of “écriture féminine,” which emphasizes the importance of women’s experiences in the face of phallogocentrism. She famously wrote, “woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing...woman must put herself into the text — as into the world and into history — by her own movement”; 875.

<sup>49</sup> Page, “Feminist Narratology?,” 52.

<sup>50</sup> Lanser, *Fictions*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*.

<sup>52</sup> Kristie Williams, “Scrapbooking as an Intervention for Grief Recovery with Children,” *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 3:4 (2008): 455-467.

article, “Scrapbooking During Traumatic and Transitional Events,” extols uses of scrapbooking to address difficult life experiences.<sup>53</sup> The article offers the practitioner practical advice about introducing scrapbooking into the therapeutic setting to promote recovery and healing. Karns’ study illustrates how scrapbooking can be used as a therapeutic tool, particularly during traumatic and transitional life events. As Karns observes, scrapbooking offers similar therapeutic potential to journaling, but it provides an alternative medium of expression that encourages artistic experimentation.<sup>54</sup>

Scrapbooking, I argue throughout this dissertation, is an important tool that individuals can use to narrate and cope with difficult emotions. However, illustrating the potential for scrapbooking to serve as a healing device is only one of the missions of this dissertation. My project is also invested in women’s narrative, rhetorical, and activist applications of the craft to narrate trauma and educate/support others. Trauma theory provides helpful grounding for this approach.

Scholars contend that trauma narratives exhibit distinct characteristics due to their basis in memory. In *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Mieke Bal contends that memory, specifically that which is trauma-based, relays its own distinct narrative.<sup>55</sup> Bal correlates the telling of trauma to theatre. Traumatic narratives are characterized by a kind of timeless, repetitive, and compulsively reenacted drama often fractured into scenes. Analyzing trauma narratives within the context of narratology, the author views this fracturing as repression or dissociation, which correlates to omission of key aspects

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<sup>53</sup> Jeanne Thibo Karns, “Scrapbooking During Traumatic and Transitional Events,” *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 2:3 (2002): 39-47.

<sup>54</sup> Scrapbooking has also been used by mental health organizations to help promote emotional recovery and self-expression. For example, one Survivor’s Art Foundation member uses scrapbooking to help manage her multiple personality disorder; <http://www.survivorsartfoundation.org/>. Linda Poutney describes scrapbooking as a “very positive bereavement ritual” that she used to cope with the death of her twin sister; “Scrapbooking to Heal,” <http://www.scrapartistry.com/docs/Scrapbook%20Artice-Jeanne705.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Bal, *Acts of Memory*.



of the narrative in the former, and a splitting off into a side story that then cannot be incorporated into the primary (or normative) life narrative in the latter. These “side” stories are often captured in trauma scrapbooks.

Scrapbooks provide a particularly conducive site for the fragmentation inherent in trauma narration, as the artform enables the artist to tell stories in as truncated a form as desired. It is this project’s contention that if women are only able to narrate a fraction of their traumatic tales (for a variety of reasons, including limited time or emotional distress), scrapbooking is an appropriate medium of choice. As Tucker and colleagues aptly declare, “What could be more emblematic of the fractured narratives of modernity than scrapbooks?”<sup>56</sup> The entire story cannot be captured on a scrapbook page, but sufficient narration does occur, which offers access to traumatic memories, even if they are splintered from the core trauma event.

In the field of trauma studies, a central concern involves how to communicate or share traumatic experiences that are often otherwise nearly impossible to articulate. Many scholars note the difficulty inherent in trauma’s expressibility.<sup>57</sup> Often, in order to survive, the survivor suppresses the memory, or cannot adequately articulate the experience. In “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self,” Roberta Culbertson explores the contradiction inherent in the silence surrounding a traumatic event that nonetheless asks to be relived/recounted.<sup>58</sup> The challenge then lies in how to narrate such a difficult, seemingly “untellable” story, when

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<sup>56</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 16.

<sup>57</sup> Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self* (Princeton University Press, 2002); Janice Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back* (Rutgers University Press, 1998); Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>58</sup> Roberta Culbertson, “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self,” *New Literary History* 26:1 (1995): 169-195.

silence often works to block memory and thereby protect the survivor. Once a memory gets narrated, the difficulty then lies in its believability. As Culbertson keenly observes of trauma, “the demands of narrative...operate as cultural silencers to this sort of memory” by requiring accuracy of recollections, just at the time when trauma obscures or distorts truth.<sup>59</sup>

Culbertson asserts that the role of narrative is to enable the survivor to articulate her trauma so that she can “return fully to the self as socially defined, to establish a relationship again with the world.”<sup>60</sup> The key phrase is *self as socially defined*, Culbertson’s acknowledgement that the self needs to be recognized *through* narration, that disintegration as a result of trauma cannot be repaired until the survivor shows herself as socially integrated through her story. This notion has tremendous implications for the power inherent in life stories, and offers a chance to think about how scrapbooking offers insight into ways women use the form to reestablish or recreate their senses of self following trauma.

As I observe in trauma scrapbooks, some women grapple with notions of selfhood following a difficult life experience. One of the distinct ways the craft enables women to address these concerns is through its deep community connections. The importance of telling a story may become paramount to one’s connection with society following a traumatic experience. Susan Brison, in *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, evokes Dori Laub’s notion of the power inherent in communicating traumatic stories to others, who allow one to reintegrate the narrative back into oneself.<sup>61</sup> The use of narrative

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>61</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*; Dori Laub, “From Speechlessness to Narrative: The Cases of Holocaust Historians and of Psychiatrically Hospitalized Survivors,” *Literature and Medicine* 24:2 (2005): 253-265.

gives the survivor a sort of control over the story, and thus, the event. By laying bare a difficult experience, the story is somehow transformed. As she notes, “control, repeatedly exercised, leads to greater control over the memories themselves, making them less intrusive and giving them the kind of meaning that enables them to be integrated into the rest of life.”<sup>62</sup> Audiences serve to validate one’s trauma and one’s self, since, in Laub’s and Brison’s opinions, the self requires a social network to witness experiences and help reintegrate individually and socially. As my study shows, in online and face-to-face gatherings, women educate and offer support to each other through the personal testimony that scrapbooking provides. In addition, via what I call communities of compassion, scrapbookers establish themselves as activists of change seeking new, more tenable conceptions of themselves.

In positing the notion of audience, particularly when thinking about interactions among scrapbookers, I have relied in part on Stuart Hall’s scholarship of audience reception.<sup>63</sup> Hall found that during information exchanges, for example between a writer and a reader, a certain level of active exchange is involved (rather than passive reception). The reader negotiates the meaning of the text. That is, the specific cultural background of reader plays a role in how the text is interpreted. This is important when thinking about reception of women’s scrapbook projects, since scrapbookers are not merely mimicking each other’s work but rather are using their unique life experiences to develop creative projects that reflect their own lives. These distinct online craft projects, which are viewed by hundreds of other scrapbookers, then go on to inspire subsequent creative endeavors. So, audiences serve the purpose of holding space for scrapbookers

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<sup>62</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 54.

<sup>63</sup> Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973).

who bare private, traumatic life experiences. In addition, audiences enable active exchange of ideas and knowledge, important characteristics of contemporary online scrapbooking to which I now turn.

### *Knowledge Production and Feminist Standpoint Theory*

Testimonials of traumatic life experiences via scrapbooking communicate important knowledges relating to women's lives. A core aspect of my project is to study ways women educate each other through scrap art about health and survival. I define knowledge as information or awareness gained by experience that may be applied in future scenarios. Given that knowledge is situational, it is assimilated contextually. That is, knowledge is social. Emile Durkheim calls knowledge a "social fact," as it is socially formed.<sup>64</sup> Knowledge production, then, is a social practice; information takes on meaning for a group when it is contextualized. As a function of community consensus, knowledge is continually negotiated between groups and across time and space.<sup>65</sup> Knowledge is also viewed as situated. Situated knowledge emphasizes, according to Geraldine Pratt and Michael Watts, "embodied physicality, social construction, and cultural politics."<sup>66</sup> Knowledge offers a roadmap of reality that models the self and society. Rather than reflecting reality, knowledge provides a means for better understanding a culture and its values. This partially speaks to why knowledges are referred to as plural, and as situated.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Émile Durkheim, trans., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> Jürgen Habermas, trans., *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); Fritz Machlup, *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States* (Princeton University Press, 1962).

<sup>66</sup> Geraldine Pratt and Michael Watts, *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 742-743.

<sup>67</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1988): 575-599.

Information gained through group interactions can be of use in the context of social activism. Thus, it makes sense that there exists a relationship between knowledge and social change. As Vivien Burr observes, “knowledge and social action go together.”<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, Louis Althusser believes that the production of knowledge involves a transformation.<sup>69</sup> He views the production of knowledge as a real, concrete activity that can have tangible results.

Public scrapbooking embodies this pairing of social and activist knowledge production. Crafters organize both online and face-to-face social gatherings. One such event discussed in this dissertation is the crop session, which, as mentioned, is an organized event during which women swap techniques and personal stories. Crop sessions are also often focused on charitable activities. Social aspects of scrapbooking enable dissemination of women’s collective knowledges, as scrapbookers share tips, skills, and new products with one another. The resulting health activism of trauma scrapbooking illustrates the broader benefits of women’s community involvement. Knowledge production through nontraditional media helps often-unheard populations or those previously silenced gain a voice.<sup>70</sup> Narration such as that seen in scrapbooking can be referred to as a kind of transgressive narratology.<sup>71</sup> This articulation of traumatic experiences in an unexpected format defamiliarizes what we come to expect of certain media. Trauma scrapbooks, then, render unfamiliar both the scrapbooking hobby and the

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<sup>68</sup> Vivien Burr, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (Routledge, 1995), 3.

<sup>69</sup> Louis Althusser, trans., *For Marx* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Althusser, trans., *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1976), 189ff.

<sup>70</sup> William G. Tierney and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Representation and the Text: Reframing the Narrative Voice* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997).

<sup>71</sup> Joe Kincheloe, “Fiction Formulas: Critical Constructivism and the Representation of Reality,” in *Representation and the Text: Reframing the Narrative Voice*, ed., Tierney and Lincoln (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), 57-79.

domestic themes with which they are typically associated.<sup>72</sup> That is, on the surface, scrapbooks are a fun, creative hobby. The reality that such traumatic occurrences are articulated through scrapbooking transforms expectations of the pastime.

Trauma scrapbooking also contributes new knowledges that transgress expected boundaries of the medium. Important information regarding health politics and gender expectations is disseminated through the domestic pastime. This notion has radical implications, since it is not commonly believed that such powerful social messages could issue from women's domestic crafts. As Sandra Harding notes in *Whose Science, Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*, the notion that women are knowers is actually a kind of contradiction.<sup>73</sup> Historically in Western culture, women have been deemed knowledgeable about the domestic realm and related arts (e.g., crafts like quilting and certain forms of memory preservation). Knowledge about culture, however, as well as the sciences, has traditionally been linked to men. The dominant epistemology that holds knowledge as fixed and impartial (i.e., scientific) inevitably debunks other forms of knowledge. In contrast, socially situated knowledge, such as that gained in domestic, feminine realms like scrapbooking, is often dismissed.

As a result, socially legitimated knowledge has not traditionally been acquired through observations from the perspectives of women. Lack of awareness of women's contributions to cultural knowledge has been a driving force behind feminist standpoint theory.<sup>74</sup> This particular branch of feminist epistemology has informed my project, as it brings to the fore key issues relating to the importance of legitimizing women's voices

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<sup>72</sup> Tierney and Lincoln, *Representation*.

<sup>73</sup> Sandra Harding, *Whose Science, Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

and highlighting their contributions to knowledge production. Standpoint theory asks the following question, “who can be subjects, agents, of socially legitimate knowledge?”<sup>75</sup> This viewpoint lays out several key rationalizations for basing research in women’s lives, and therefore, acknowledging women’s roles in knowledge production. Some key, but by no means exhaustive, points made by feminist standpoint theorists include the following: the general difference between men’s and women’s lives (i.e., work, home, activities, responsibilities) lends itself to differing viewpoints, which can contribute to new knowledge; women are “strangers” to knowledge production, which means they offer new and different perspectives; women’s perspectives are, for the most part, rooted in everyday life, particularly given their submersion in “women’s work.”<sup>76</sup> These concepts have helped shape this project, which aims to legitimize women’s knowledge contributions through scrapbooking.

### *Cultural Memory*

In addition to my study of ways women produce knowledge through scrapbooking, I also explore women’s role in cultural memory production. According to the influential memory studies scholar Jan Assmann, cultural memory is “that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image.”<sup>77</sup> Cultural memory

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.; Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987); Hilary Rose, “Hand, Brain, and Heart: A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences,” *Signs* 9:1 (1983): 73-90; Jane Flax, “Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics,” in *Discovering Reality*, eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), 245-282; Nancy C.M. Hartsock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

<sup>77</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplincka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 132.

theorists thus have the task of locating and understanding the rites and material objects that hold meaning within a given culture at a particular moment in time.

As I have indicated, scholars and archivists have recently argued that scrapbooking has long been overlooked as a crucial source of social history. It holds, then, that a hobby focused on memory representation, preservation, and perpetuation would play a role in cultural memory. Through the craft, important social images and experiences, the core of which are cultural memories, are circulated.<sup>78</sup> The spread of scrapbooking into popular culture suggests its potential to shape social agendas. Viewing cultural memory through a social constructivist lens, I argue in this project that shared images such as those in scrapbooking actively shape cultural memory through their continual dissemination among communities. Inspired by the social constructivist views of cultural memory put forth by Maurice Halbwachs, my approach also seeks to reveal how texts and images may be ‘cultivated’ — in Assmann’s sense — by scrapbooking.<sup>79</sup>

The notion of cultural memory as malleable provides a point of departure for thinking about women’s uses of scrapbooking and its role in crafting cultural memory. Roberta Pearson views public memory as exhibiting “simultaneous fluidity and stability”; as she notes, “the representations that have achieved dominance at one particular historical moment are constantly challenged from below.”<sup>80</sup> Certain institutions or groups hold sway over a cultural norm until other, often marginalized groups offer an alternative history that is (sometimes surreptitiously) written into or over the previously dominant

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<sup>78</sup> Ann Rigney, “Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory and the Case of Jeanie Deans,” *Poetics Today* 25.2 (2004):361-96.

<sup>79</sup> Assmann, “Collective Memory”; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>80</sup> Roberta Pearson, “Custer Loses Again: The Contestation Over Commodified Public Memory,” in *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, ed., Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 176-201; 181.



cultural narrative. As I show in the dissertation, contemporary scrapbookers use the craft to relay important information not only regarding their difficult health experiences, but also about those of others as well. This health activism speaks to how, through scrapbooking, women seek to challenge dominant narratives. My project illustrates how the scrapbookers I study have the potential to craft cultural memory through avid support for underrepresented groups and investment in more accurate depictions of women's everyday lives. Women's use of the craft to challenge dominant narratives about health and self-identity demonstrates the craft's relevance to cultural memory production.

### Chapter 3: Self-Preservation: Scrapbooking Traumatic Health Experiences

Just how some people sing, write poetry, paint, scrapbooking can fill that void for those who maybe don't see themselves as artists. But the process of remembering a difficult experience, and organizing it into something creative is healing.<sup>1</sup>

What could be more emblematic of the fractured narratives of modernity than scrapbooks?<sup>2</sup>

I frame my analysis in this chapter around women's use of scrapbooking as a form of self-preservation. This concept denotes, on the one hand, how creating art out of trauma helps a scrapbooker preserve her sense of self, which may be uprooted as a result of trauma. Self-preservation also illustrates how women scrapbookers narrate stories about themselves as a way to preserve memories of their own lives — so often left out of a craft focused on family life.<sup>3</sup> I identify and illustrate examples of self-preservation strategies via close readings of select trauma- and health-themed scrapbook pages, published online and in *Imperfect Lives: Scrapbooking the Reality of Your Everyday*, a book that features scrapbook pages about difficult experiences.<sup>4</sup> This latter book is distributed by Memory Makers Books, a common press for craft-oriented projects. The compilation displays over 60 layout ideas and is available online from major suppliers (e.g., Amazon.com) and from a variety of other retailers.

In this chapter, I illustrate scrapping techniques women use to talk back to culture about issues relating to trauma, selfhood,<sup>5</sup> and health. Women's public scrapbooking

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<sup>1</sup> Teri Anderson, personal communication, Feb 2, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler, ed., *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>3</sup> A 2007 Craft and Hobby Association survey found that domestic themes (e.g., children, vacations, family) comprise over 60% of hobby topics; *Craft and Hobby Association Scrapbooking Survey* (Westbury, NY: Ipsos Insight, Inc., 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Tara Governo, *Imperfect Lives: Scrapbooking the Reality of Your Everyday* (Cincinnati: Memory Makers, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> By selfhood, I refer to core dimensions of a person by which she defines herself (e.g., gender, life goals) which may change over time as a person's sense of self flexes; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The*

offers an opportunity to gain witnesses for what are potentially considered private traumas. Presence of fellow crafters who observe the survivor's experiences can be a self-empowering and restorative process. My close feminist textual readings of select pages reveal how women's trauma scrapbooking applies a discourse strategy illustrating ways I believe the craft is well equipped to articulate the distinct challenges of trauma narration. Specifically, I evaluate ways scrapbookers narrate challenging life experiences and examine women's particular uses of scrapbooking to publicly express trauma. Crafters, I show, use the pastime to gain a voice in their own lives. This vocalization becomes, in essence, a form of self-preservation in the face of limited public platforms for addressing personal as well as political concerns. These nuanced health trauma scrapbook pages reveal creative, complex applications of a hobby whose capacity for life narration is emerging in its cultural importance.

Storytelling and the ensuing credibility of memory are linked to gender. Women have at various times in history been denied the authority to publicly recreate and recollect past events, including their cultural past, which at times, unfortunately, is comprised of trauma. Women's narration of trauma has also been silenced or may not receive positive reception, particularly when the accuser lays blame on a guilty party, who may be a family member, acquaintance, groups of people, or even society in general. As a result, talking back to culture, as a form of remembering, is also gendered.<sup>6</sup> In this section, I show how some women, through scrapbooking, have claimed the authority necessary to talk about trauma (which is often reserved for those other than survivors) as

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*Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1967); Corey Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity* (State University of New York Press, 2001). I also refer to this concept using the term "identity."

<sup>6</sup> Janice Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

a way to self-preserve. That is, I suggest here that women may be calling on the authority of their own experiences to scrapbook in an effort to claim agency. The following analysis of scrapbook pages demonstrates these strategies.

## I

My analysis begins with the scrapbook page “Who could have known?,” which shows the photo of a 16-year old girl struggling to match her physical form to external notions of ideal beauty (Figure 3.1). The most prominent features are a large question mark on the page and a picture of the young artist circled. An arrow points to the photograph, which the compiler, Rachel Hall, indicates was the inspiration for this particular layout. Rachel notes “how happy and put together” she was in the photo.<sup>7</sup> However, instead of electing to create a page that reinforced this outward image, Rachel chose to tell the more honest story of her difficult teenage years.

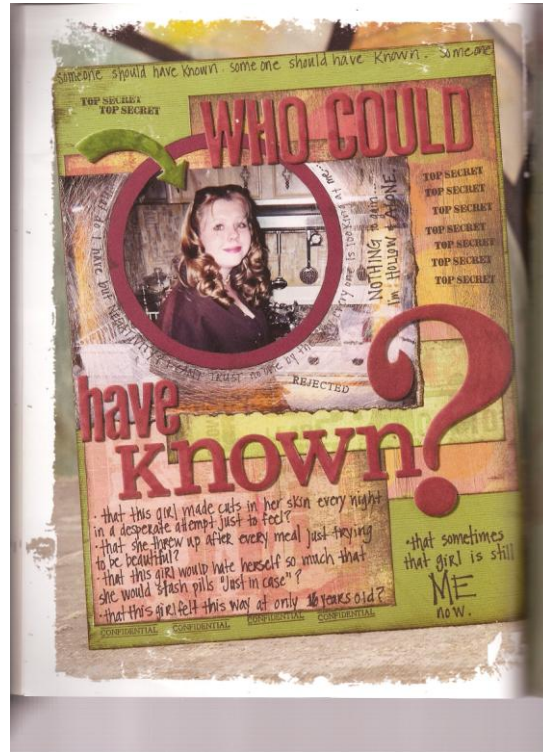
Rachel’s project narrates a complex tale of a young woman grappling with self-esteem, isolation, and body image issues. Indicating that she “resorted to cutting myself and suffered from bulimia and depression,” Rachel addresses through the medium these important social issues, which potentially mirror the feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem plaguing young girls today.<sup>8</sup> By titling her page, “Who could have known?”, Rachel plays with the contrast between one’s outward image and the reality of one’s internal self-image. The artist reflects this disconnect via her own photo. In the image, a sharp red circle is drawn around Rachel’s face and shoulders, while the rest of the photograph, from her waist to her shoulders, is scratched out, mimicking the cuts she

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<sup>7</sup> Governo, *Imperfect*, 67.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; Peggy Orenstein, *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (New York: Anchor, 1995); Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Riverhead Trade, 2005).

made to her own body.



**Figure 3.1** From *Imperfect Lives* copyright © 2006 by Tara Governo. Reprinted with the kind permission of Memory Makers Books, an imprint of F+W Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

The text wrapped around the edge of the photo reads: “what do I have but negativity? I can’t trust no one...by the way everyone is looking at me...”<sup>9</sup> The word “rejected” is stamped in all capital letters on the image, reflecting how this teen may have felt at the time. One of the most sobering aspects of Rachel’s journaling is the phrase written the bottom of the page, “sometimes that girl is still me now,” suggesting, as Rachel indicates, that “there are still times that I struggle with these same issues.”<sup>10</sup> By reflecting inward on a ‘past’ self, a younger version of herself, Rachel appears to go back in time as if to alter the narrative. The stand-alone photo tells one story of a happy teen, while Rachel’s

<sup>9</sup> Governo, *Imperfect*, 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

honest elaboration on the photo's context transforms the narrative. Rachel's use of scrapbooking to rescript her story conveys how women apply narrative methods in scrapbooks to convey salient experiences that in turn can have social purchase.

Although the scrapper's insistence on asking, "who could have known?" implies that her secret was well hidden, she uses the scrapbook to expose lack of awareness around self-esteem issues young girls may face. The phrase, "Someone should have known," is repeated across the top of Rachel's page, eclipsed by an acknowledgement that her feelings were "top secret." This stands in stark contrast to the title, which, with its prominent lettering, calls attention to itself. The contrast between Rachel's prior secretive behavior and her use of the page to tell her story is akin to what Judith Greenberg refers to as a "psychic splitting" in which "the process of narrating trauma depends upon an oscillation between the desire to tell the truth and the desire to keep it secret."<sup>11</sup> "Top secret" is stamped down the side of the scrapbook page, yet Rachel also writes across the top of her page in unobtrusive, small letters, the phrase, "someone should have known." The messages on the page are somewhat contradictory, in both presentation and meaning. By placing her commentary — that no one could have been aware of her trauma — in large letters and at the center of her page, she contradicts the "top secret" and "someone should have known" messages tracing her art.

The contrary messages scrapbooking can contain, via visual and textual elements, illustrates how women's writing exemplifies specific discourse strategies, such as nonassertiveness.<sup>12</sup> As Rachel's page shows, scrapbooking supplies an unobtrusive medium that can be used to nonassertively share outrage related to personal experiences

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<sup>11</sup> Judith Greenberg, "The Echo of Trauma and the Trauma Echo," *American Imago* 55:3 (1998): 324.

<sup>12</sup> Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (New York: Routledge, 1980).

and societal expectations. Through scrapbooking, Rachel creates a form of discourse that provides a voice which may not otherwise be accessed or heard. Further, Rachel's admission serves as social commentary on the sometimes hidden, and still-relevant, issues facing young girls today, suggesting that the craft can be used not only to voice publicly one's intimate self narrative, but also to protect others.<sup>13</sup> By using the craft as a social platform, scrapbookers like Rachel preserve their own stories while urging for social change.

Rachel's sharing of her cultural critique in a public forum such as *Imperfect Lives* reflects one of the ways women's contemporary scrapbooking offers meaning. The craft enables a succinct, indirect form of cultural critique that garners a significance audience, suggesting that women witness both scrapbookers' personal stories but also their accompanying social messages. Scrapbookers are well aware that their work has the potential to inform others about challenges women typically face and techniques for coping with them. Rachel reflects in her biography on the page opposing her scrapbook art that, "my hope in sharing this page is that maybe others will realize that they are not alone."<sup>14</sup>

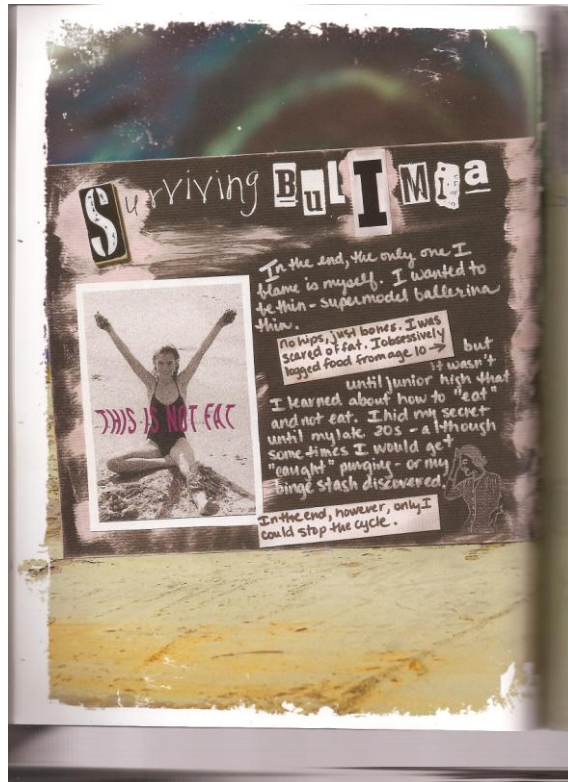
In a project similar to Rachel's, the scrapbooker Jennifer Lynn Moody reveals, through art, her struggle with body image issues (Figure 3.2). Calling this scrapbook page "a cathartic piece of art," Jennifer exposes publicly through the artform what was once her "dirty little secret."<sup>15</sup> Titled, "Surviving Bulimia," the page displays a triumphant picture of a young girl lounging in the sand in her bathing suit with her arms raised to the sky.

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<sup>13</sup> Orenstein, *Schoolgirls*; Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*.

<sup>14</sup> Governo, *Imperfect*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



**Figure 3.2** From *Imperfect Lives* copyright © 2006 by Tara Governo. Reprinted with the kind permission of Memory Makers Books, an imprint of F+W Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

The words, written in a font that distorts the letters, read, “this is not fat” and are traced across her midsection. Jennifer’s page highlights the hand-written journaling telling her story of surviving the disorder. She admits to wanting to be “supermodel ballerina thin” with “no hips, just bones.”<sup>16</sup> Jennifer narrates her struggle with eating and the ways she hid her secret, noting, “in the end, the only one I had to blame was myself” and that “only I could stop the cycle.”<sup>17</sup> This language, which suggests the artist is taking responsibility for her own behavior, may offer a source of empowerment for other women experiencing similar struggles. It should be noted, however, that Jennifer’s comments do not fully acknowledge the role of social forces in bulimia. In her memoir *Wasted: A Memoir of*

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 69.



*Anorexia and Bulimia*, Marya Hornbacher addresses the societal pressures contributing to her behavior:

I can think...of all sorts of ways in which I might have avoided an eating disorder...If I had been born at a different point in time, when starving oneself to death did not seem such an obvious and rewarding... way of dealing with the world. I want to write a prescription for culture...that will make it less maniacally compelled to climb the StairMaster right into nowhere...<sup>18</sup>

Although Jennifer's work does not confront society as overtly or aggressively as Hornbacher's self narrative, her art nonetheless gives important insight into her own experiences and ways she overcame obstacles. Her project also brings to mind the reality that social concerns such as bulimia and anorexia are often viewed as uniquely middle-class, Caucasian Western women's experiences, just as scrapbooking is considered a middle-class,<sup>19</sup> Caucasian woman's hobby.<sup>20</sup>

Jennifer admits that submitting her art to the *Imperfect Lives* publication constituted a challenging form of self-exposure. She notes, "I was almost too frightened to submit it, but I figured once I hit the send button, I would truly be free of my secret. I feel better already!"<sup>21</sup> Public exposure of a challenging personal experience has its advantages, seen in Jennifer's scrapbook page on bulimia, which she admits, "helped me

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<sup>18</sup> Marya Hornbacher, *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 282; 283-284.

<sup>19</sup> Eugene H. Fram, "The Booming Scrapbooking Market in the USA," *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 33:3 (2005): 215-225.

<sup>20</sup> The connection between the use of scrapbooking to narrate a particularly raced, classed issue like bulimia potentially speaks to the role scrapbooking has for select groups of users. A future study may find qualitative corollaries.

<sup>21</sup> Governo, *Imperfect*, 69.

get through one of the steps of recovery.”<sup>22</sup> The process of including such an intimate page in *Imperfect Lives* proved an opportunity for Jennifer to “come clean” about her behavior. Both Rachel’s and Jennifer’s artwork<sup>23</sup> enabled them to reveal a shameful secret with the hope that their struggles would help other women; their art serves as a warning call to others. Both pages note how the photos resurrected distinct memories for the artists, and demonstrate how their sense of self shifted from the time period reflected in the youthful photos. The artists have used scrapbooking to display these images anew, with fresh hope to model personal transformation for others struggling with similar health issues. In doing so, scrapbookers can wrangle with their shifting senses of self as a result of traumatic childhood experiences.

Like Rachel’s and Jennifer’s scrapbook pages, which illustrate how women use scrapbooking to publicly preserve intimate tales as well as to talk back to culture, the next two pages — one on postpartum depression, and one on bipolar disorder — use scrapbooking as a means to self-express as well as to educate others about the realities of mental health. Karen’s page on postpartum depression is titled, “postpartum or hell” (Figure 3.3). The mother of eight children experienced postpartum depression after her twins were born. The page was created as a result of what she calls a “three-month up-and-down roller coaster ride.”<sup>24</sup> The scrapbooker includes a variety of details in her page, accompanied by an explanation of why she used each element. This elaboration is extremely useful to understanding her work and is becoming an increasingly common

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>23</sup> I am mindful that use of the term “artwork” to refer to scrapbooking may be contentious. For more on this subject, I refer the reader to Susan E. Bernick, “How an Artifact Becomes or Ceases to Be a Work of Art: Artworld Category Changes as a Possible Model for Feminist Politics” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Governo, *Imperfect*, 49.

annotation in online and published scrapbook pages. Although these artists enumerate the products used to create their pages (such as brand of paper or embellishment) — somewhat akin to supplying references in a research document — Karen offers considerably more explanation regarding the significance of her embellishments, adding further depth to the craft.



**Figure 3.3** From *Imperfect Lives* copyright © 2006 by Tara Governo. Reprinted with the kind permission of Memory Makers Books, an imprint of F+W Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

As Karen explains, the project “helped me organize each feeling I had in each product that I used.”<sup>25</sup> For example, according to Karen, the journaling on the page exposes the challenges of openly discussing postpartum depression and its ugly realities. The scrapper uses two types of journaling: one is contained in a photo-sized box that serves as the frame for a photo of the scrapbooker reclining with her eyes closed. The

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

journaling appears hand-written, although it is unclear whether it is in the author's own hand or in a font mimicking script. The writing underneath Karen's photo reads: "so what is postpartum anyway? I begged the doctor to let me stay an extra day. What makes a woman feel helpless, not in control and always teary eyed?"<sup>26</sup> The strips of paper on which these phrases are journaled slice through each line of text, rendering the script disjointed, representing Karen's intention to depict how "we are not able to discuss it [postpartum depression]."<sup>27</sup>

A variety of embellishments garnish the page, reflecting Karen's application of meaning to her art. The photograph is framed by three bra fasteners, which Karen indicates represent "me trying to hold it together as a woman and a wife."<sup>28</sup> This notion highlights cultural expectations about a modern woman's being able to do it all. Tape on the page also serves a similar purpose. In a wry gesture, Karen includes a ticket stub, literally depicting the "ticket to hell," which illustrates postpartum depression for the artist.<sup>29</sup> The other images on the page are just as arresting in their despair. A black frame overlaps a cartoon image whose contents are not clear; pasted over the comic is what appears to be a clipping of a woman in a slip looking like a paper cut-out. Above this frame is a photo of a woman turning away from her dinner companion. Karen comments that these images reflect "how we can go about daily living though we feel we are in a window showing the nakedness."<sup>30</sup> The scrapbook offers insight into a modern woman's challenges of managing her fractured life. As the editors of *The Scrapbook in American Life* observe, "What could be more emblematic of the fractured narratives of modernity

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

than scrapbooks?”<sup>31</sup> This medium of expression lends women the voice to articulate their painful experiences as well as provides a means to preserve a shifting sense of self.

Karen’s story behind her layout indicates that she watched Brooke Shields, who also struggled with the condition, on a morning talk show. Inclusion of this popular cultural icon suggests that Shields’ story resonated with Karen. The scrapbooker may also recognize that this cultural reference would not be lost on readers of *Imperfect Lives*. Shields’ memoir on postpartum depression, *Down Came the Rain: My Journey Through Postpartum Depression*, was published in 2005 and garnered much-needed attention to the traumatic condition affecting many women.<sup>32</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control, 12% of women have reported being moderately depressed after delivery, and 6% reported being very depressed after having their baby.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Karen’s salient story has the potential to touch and inform women struggling with postpartum depression.<sup>34</sup> Her page is a good example of a scrapper’s use of distinct techniques, particularly with respect to symbolic embellishments, to narrate a traumatic health experience.

As Karen’s work illustrates, scrapbooking provides artists the flexibility to visually and textually narrate an experience. The multimedia artist Kimberly Cole, like Karen, also aims to talk back to culture about her mood disorder (Figure 3.4). Her scrapbook design reflects the chaos Kimberly experienced throughout the diagnosis and management of bipolar disorder. Kimberly preserves herself by reconstructing her past

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<sup>31</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Brooke Shields, *Down Came the Rain: My Journey Through Postpartum Depression* (New York: Hyperion, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> CDC, “Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS): PRAMS and Postpartum Depression,” <http://www.cdc.gov/prams/PPD.ht>.

<sup>34</sup> One might also argue that postpartum depression is a distinctly Western condition, publicized as affecting white women. Expression of the condition in scrapbooking may also point to corollaries between the craft and particular conditions.

and identifying ways it has shaped who she is today. Working through the obstacles she faced — alcohol abuse, miscarriage, and being institutionalized — this scrapper reconstitutes her identity<sup>35</sup> by confronting head-on preconceptions about bipolar disorder: “I’m not crazy or ‘psycho,” she asserts, referencing terms frequently applied to individuals diagnosed with psychiatric disorders.

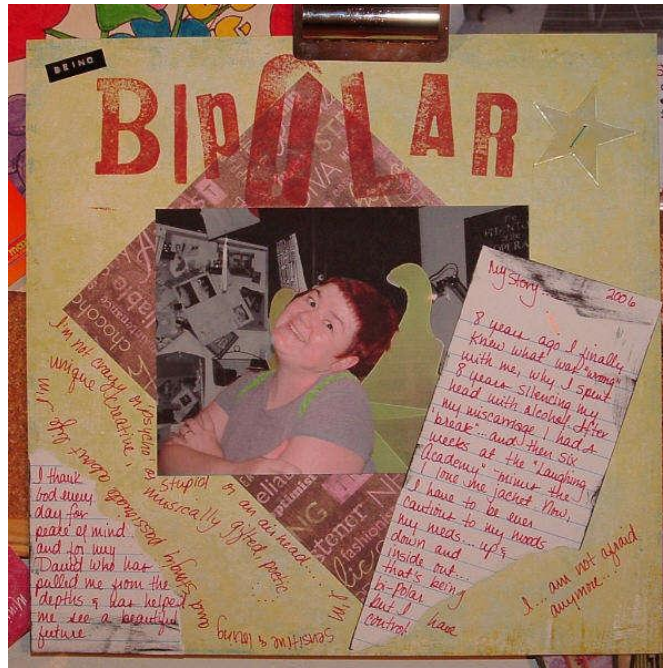


Figure 3.4

As a cultural critique, the page echoes the emotions Kimberly narrates with words. The trauma she writes about is captured in the disjointed nature of her layout, as well as by the content and style of her journaling, handwritten on scraps of paper and looped around her own self portrait. She comments, “I’m unique, creative, musically gifted,” which is handwritten under her photo, and is swirled around the misnomers “crazy” and “psycho,” illustrating Kimberly’s efforts to contest social expectations. Indeed, public education has become one of Kimberly’s personal missions. She indicated to me that “any chance I can

<sup>35</sup> Note that this term is used interchangeably with “selfhood.”

get to further the knowledge, educate, and explanation of bipolar I will take. My goal is to have those who suffer from its symptoms become victors instead of victims.”<sup>36</sup>

Kimberly’s work reveals an artist who refuses to be dismissed because of a misunderstood mental illness and who now, triumphantly, declares, “I have control.”

Kimberly’s narrative has been well-disseminated and has affected a number of women. Her scrapbook page has been viewed over 200 times on the website Scrapbook.com. The majority of the over two dozen comments on her work reflect how viewers can relate to Kimberly’s experience and how appreciative others are that Kimberly shared her story. One observer comments, “It is awesome that one: you can tell a story like this and not care what other people think and two: you are taking care of yourself.” She goes on to reveal, “I take medication for depression and Bi-polar [sic] so I know exactly what you are talking about in your journaling!”<sup>37</sup> Another fellow scrapbooker expresses appreciation that Karen is narrating a challenging life experience through the craft. She relates to Kimberly’s circumstances when she remarks, “It’s great to see that not everyone scraps only the good things in life...I too have a problem...I will do a LO [layout] on it for my kids’ book. I want them to remember as much of me as possible including the not so good stuff because some of the not so good stuff is how we become who we are today.”<sup>38</sup> As the scrapbook stories examined thus far indicate, women use the craft to preserve their traumatic stories in creative ways while also widely communicating broader social concerns regarding women’s health.

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<sup>36</sup> Kimberly Cole, personal communication, December 16, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Scrapsaholic, comment on “BiPoLaR.... an imperfect world challenge,” comment posted April 26, 2007, <http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/?m=image&id=724003&type=searchwords&s=bipolar&page=1&vote=0>.

<sup>38</sup> Spend2much, comment on “BiPoLaR.... an imperfect world challenge,” comment posted April 7, 2007, <http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/?m=image&id=724003&type=searchwords&s=bipolar&page=1&vote=0>.

## II

The above analysis has explored ways women preserve themselves through scrapbooking. By exposing private traumas and talking back to culture about social and personal issues, scrapbookers use the medium as a public platform for social expression. I intimated that scrappers use distinct techniques to articulate trauma, such as contradictions in imagery and message as well as symbolic use of embellishments. In this next section, I analyze scrapbook pages further illustrating approaches scrapbookers use to preserve a self affected by trauma. In addition to showing how scrapbook pages exhibit some of the above stylistic devices, such as contradictions in visual imagery and nontraditional topics, I explore other characteristics, such as the role of voice and use of the craft to educate others about health issues.

In her scrapbook page “Empowered,” Amy Guimond, a 28-year old entrepreneur, chronicles her struggles with myofascial pain disorder and asthma, health conditions she has found at times debilitating (Figure 3.5). The two-page spread, posted on an active scrapbooking blog, shows the artist peering out from rips in her actual x-ray slides with the title “empowered.”<sup>39</sup> Thread weaves its way up the left-hand side of the page, resurrecting notions of medical procedures.

Extensive journaling on the right-hand page chronicles the artist’s struggles with her physical conditions. She links feelings of empowerment with the physical activity of karate. As Amy explains on the page, in karate class, she kicked her own x-ray slides as a form of therapy, which provided another outlet for her frustration.

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<sup>39</sup> Livejournal, [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com).





**Figure 3.5**

The artist then mounted the torn x-ray film onto the scrapbook page and extensively narrated her experiences:

Historically, the time I have always been in the least amount of pain was when I was involved in martial arts. Knowing this, against the advice of the physical therapists but with the support of my personal doctor, I joined karate to have a stable and supportive work out environment. About a year ago, knowing that sometimes people use x-rays as targets as kicking drills, I gave all of my old x-rays to the dojo and I never thought about them again. So we flash forward to tonight when I walked into class and told sensei that I had recently been having some pain and some breathing problems from the asthma and that I still wanted to take it slow. He said that it was going to be an intense class, and he was right. For the first time since I joined the school, he pulled out the x-rays for me to do kicking drills. He handed me 2 and I spent

an hour and a half kicking the crap out of them. At the end of the class, when I looked at one of them, I realized that it was my x-ray. Clear as day, it was my lower spine.

In this scrapbook's journaling, we can see how the hobby provides a discrete space for Amy to claim voice about a traumatic experience. In "Empowered," Amy exposes misconceptions about an elusive, chronic condition, asserting, "...myofacial pain (like fibromyalgia) is a legitimate pain. The person who is suffering from it is NOT a hypochondriac." In experiencing what is considered an invisible disability, Amy must struggle to get her needs met while inadvertently maintaining the outward appearance of able-bodiedness.<sup>40</sup> The notion of certain disabilities' being more "legitimate" than others — known as the hierarchy of disability — is evident in her narrative.<sup>41</sup> A common formulation addressed by both disabled and nondisabled groups, the hierarchy of disability holds that certain disabilities are more "worthy" of respect or accommodation than others. References to fears of appearing weak recur in Amy's narrative, pointing to prescribed notions of how a person, perhaps even a woman, with a certain condition should conduct herself. Amy admits, "I don't talk about it a lot because in my opinion, it's just another weakness...and I hate it when people see me as weak." The theme of societal expectations can be traced throughout her journaling, as Amy attempts to defy preconceptions through an empowering, active rendering of an otherwise debilitating health concern.

The artist's voice is heard on multiple levels. First, she chronicles a detailed story of her history with chronic pain. Amy's journaling recounts the ebb and flow of her

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<sup>40</sup> Donna R. Falvo, *Medical and Psychosocial Aspects of Chronic Illness and Disability* (Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Lennard Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

illness and how it has affected her quality of life. She then talks about the empowering role of karate in elevating her sense of well-being, illuminating the significance of her most recent class, as well as offering insight into her relationship with her sensei. In this sense, Amy's page relies on the interplay between narrator and audience. The artist tells a story in a way that suggests she knows it is going to be heard by others, just as she displays the narrative using scrapbooking, conveying awareness that scrapbooking is a format conducive to trauma journaling. Amy's voice echoes throughout the page as she concludes with what it felt like kicking her own x-rays. She reveals that "class really helped with my internalized struggles. It was cathartic in a way that I never expected it to be. As I spent the evening kicking the x-ray of my back, I spent the evening kicking the notion that this condition has to hold me back." Amy's face peers out from behind the torn x-ray, which effectively frames her survival. Self-preservation is an important theme in Amy's art; she uses the scrapbooking medium to record insights into her self-perceptions and chronicle ways she has overcome challenges. Scrapbooking helps her preserve these memories, yet it also gives the artist a voice to help her publicly preserve positive self-conceptions.

A powerful application of scrapbooking is its use in preserving one's story of survival as a means to assist others in similar struggles. In Julie's scrapbook page on domestic abuse, the compiler offers her experiences as a cautionary tale and as proof that other women can overcome the physical and psychological trauma of domestic violence (Figure 3.6). The page contains a healthy photograph of the artist, with a pond and plants in the background. Colorful flowers dot the bright page. The majority of the scrapbook

page contains extensive journaling typed on narrow, horizontal strips of aged white paper.



Figure 3.6

Julie’s journaling narrates her early marriage at 16 to an abusive man. She explains, “he abused alcohol and he abused me, on a daily basis, for over 5 years.” The mission of her page is clear when she writes, “I fight for understanding and help for those who are going through the same things.” She acknowledges the challenges women in her position likely face:

You cannot simply pluck somebody out of an abusive situation.

They have to learn to trust in their own judgment when they never have before. All are terrified of retaliation from the abuser. Going out into the world alone is a GIANT step for abused women. Most have suffered abuse for so long they know no other way of life.

Julie’s scrapbook page provides an important example of the conflicting messages that can be presented using this domestic technology. The page, on brief visual inspection, is uplifting. A felt bluebird is surrounded by blue, yellow, and orange flowers. The colors are vivid, and the image of the artist is pleasant. However, the elements of the scrapbook page belie the starkly serious contents. Julie has crafted a page that is both visually appealing, yet also manages to offer serious advice and stern social commentary on domestic abuse. She did not create the page strictly for her own private purposes, either. The message in her journaling — “I fight for understanding and help for those who are going through the same things” — indicates that scrapbooking serves as a vehicle driving Julie’s social mission.

Posted on a major website, Julie’s page has garnered several user comments, which reflect the community support available through scrapbooking. People remarking on Julie’s work serve, in effect, as witnesses to her trauma. Julie’s art has received 995 visitors and 56 comments, many of which assert the apparent strength of the artist to pull through such a difficult experience. There are also comments on the website by women sharing similar stories with Julie. One user comments:

Having read your story, I thought I would share a little with you. I, too, was abused, but mine was from a step monster, as I have called him for as long as I can remember. Even though he’s been out of my life for over 30 years, it took me a long time to get over and above the abuse, but finally I realized, as I know you have, that to keep it inside is only letting him win over and over and over again, because that, too, is a form of continual abuse. My heart

and prayers go out to you, but also my admiration. Great LO [layout], and thanks for sharing with us all.<sup>42</sup>

Julie's scrapbook page triggered a memory in this viewer which compelled her to share her experiences not only with Julie but with other visitors to this website. Julie's desire for her art to "fight for understanding and help for those who are going through the same things" has presumably accomplished its task. Many of the women commenting on her page also expressed a desire for the scrapbook to help other women. As one visitor writes, "You are so strong and brave, and I am sure that just by posting this LO, you will help someone in their struggle to find freedom."<sup>43</sup> Many recognize the potential for this layout to reach out to as well as educate other women. Another scrapper remarks, "Now that you have this in your gallery, you never know when it might make a connection with another woman in a similar situation."<sup>44</sup> As we can see from Julie's page, publicly narrating a traumatic experience is a powerful way of coming to terms with a difficult experience. Her comment, "it took me many years to confront my abuse and be able to bury it. More than 20 years!" suggests that she has to some extent made peace with her abusive past and is prepared to narrate it for an audience.

The pages studied illustrate that contemporary trauma scrapbooking offers artists an opportunity to articulate difficult experiences for an audience. In the following sections, I continue my analysis rooted in the scrapbook pages studied above to elaborate

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<sup>42</sup> Ttxtwmsmom, comment posted on "Stronger Woman - LUCKY 7 CONTEST," comment posted July 2, 2007, <http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/?m=image&id=899171&type=searchwords&s=abuse&start=100&page=1&vote=0>.

<sup>43</sup> 3frogsandaprincess, comment posted on "Stronger Woman - LUCKY 7 CONTEST," comment posted June 26, 2007, <http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/?m=image&id=899171&type=searchwords&s=abuse&start=100&page=1&vote=0>.

<sup>44</sup> C-leaper, comment posted on "Stronger Woman - LUCKY 7 CONTEST," comment posted June 26, 2007, <http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/?m=image&id=899171&type=searchwords&s=abuse&start=100&page=1&vote=0>.

on ways women self-preserve using the artform. Throughout the next sections, I thread trauma theory and feminist narratology into my extended analysis of the scrapbook pages. I aim to show how the medium is a conducive site for women's meaning making about health-related traumas, as well as to explore how women use scrapbooking as a platform through which to negotiate selfhood and health-related issues.

### III

It is widely believed that use of narrative gives a survivor control over the story of their trauma, and thus, a command over the painful event itself.<sup>45</sup> Trauma studies scholar Brison contends that “control, repeatedly exercised, leads to greater control over the memories themselves, making them less intrusive and giving them the kind of meaning that enables them to be integrated into the rest of life.”<sup>46</sup> The importance of telling one's story may be key to (re)establishing a connection with society following a traumatic experience.<sup>47</sup> In thinking through the roles of listener and narrator, which can be important to coping with trauma, I am reminded of Laub's concept of the “addressable other,” who experiences “the anguish of one's memories and [can] thus affirm and recognize their realness.”<sup>48</sup> A narrator, whose traumatic tale is heard, can experience a connection with society by publicly airing her painful story. Sharing traumatic stories with others serves as a form of self-preservation since it may in fact allow one to reintegrate an unthinkable narrative back into one's life, thus helping reassemble a fractured self.<sup>49</sup> By exposing a difficult experience to others, what was once an

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<sup>45</sup> Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 68.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

unfathomable story is somehow transformed as a result of its audience of sympathetic listeners. Audiences can validate one's trauma and one's self, since the self requires a social network to witness experiences and to enable individual and social reintegration.<sup>50</sup> The self is contingent and relational; it can be undone by violence/trauma, but it can also be reconstituted with outside support.

Roberta Culbertson asserts that the role of narrative is to enable to survivor to articulate her trauma so that she can "return fully to the self as socially defined, to establish a relationship again with the world."<sup>51</sup> The key phrase, in my mind, is self as socially defined. This is Culbertson's acknowledgement that the self needs to be recognized through narration, that its disintegration through trauma cannot be repaired until she shows herself as socially integrated through her story. This notion has tremendous implications for the power inherent in life stories, and offers a chance to think about how experimenting with scrapbooking offers insight into how women use form to reestablish or recreate themselves following trauma.

Reconstruction of a traumatized self is paramount to recovery. Following a traumatic event, a person experiences a set of relatively typified after-effects, including terror, loss of control, depression, and hypervigilance.<sup>52</sup> The aftermath of the trauma may be accompanied by a disruption of memory, severing one's past from the present. Trauma serves to undo the self by "breaking the ongoing narrative," that is, by slicing through the steady flow of one's life so that the future becomes unknown or even impossible to

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Roberta Culbertson, "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self," *New Literary History* 26.1 (1995): 179.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



conceive.<sup>53</sup> This notion of narrative slicing and eventual reintegration is evident in Julie's scrapbook page, which tells a difficult story but relies on witnesses to help reaffirm survival. Although Julie does not know her audience on scrapbook.com, she could have predicted that the sensitive content of her page on the website Scrapbook.com will be well received, partly because the website models compassionate sharing. The reputation of this particular "safe" site of disclosure offers reassurance that one can expose painful experiences publicly. Thus, scrapbookers create a compassionate forum in which the self can be protected. The process of telling one's story, in effect, offers a self-preservation that both records key memories but also helps the narrator momentarily secure her sense of selfhood. Thus, publicly telling one's traumatic stories, through scrapbooking, may be viewed as an important act of self-preservation.

As I have explained, several narrative techniques point to the craft's role in managing selfhood. For example, in both Rachel's and Jennifer's scrapbook pages, the adult self reflects back on the child self, a move that shifts subjectivity by enabling the adult narrator to have a command over her own story. This practice of resurrecting one's past selfhood has important implications for the narrative potential of scrapbooking. It suggests that the craft can comfortably accommodate temporal leaps. Trauma studies scholars argue that some survivors' tales of trauma are considered nonlinear, fragmented, and rife with temporal shifts.<sup>54</sup> Scrapbooking is constructed around evocation of memory; thus, the viewer expects to see some form of recollection. As a result, the compiler can narrate cogently about both a "past" and "present" version of the self that still make sense

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>54</sup> Judith Greenberg uses the helpful metaphor of an echo, a "belated return," which carries fragments of sound and the after-effects of the original noise, to describe the narration of trauma; Greenberg, "The Echo," 321.

to an audience. It is important to remember that this complex temporal shifting typically occurs in the space of a 12 X 12-inch scrap of paper. The ability of scrapbookers to convey their stories effectively speaks to the value of scrapbooking as a form of self-expression as well as to the skill of crafters in articulating such complex stories in a limited space.

We saw in Karen's page how use of symbolic embellishments on the scrapbook page communicated important messages about the compiler's notions of identity. That is, Karen used the craft to convey how she struggled with expected notions of who she was expected to be, and what cultural image of motherhood she was required to uphold. Thus, through creative practices, the artist contested social expectations and sought a more authentic identity for herself.

Another narrative characteristic that scrapbooks inevitably exhibit is a fractured story. Like scrapbooks, due to their basis in memory, traumatic narratives, regardless of the medium of expression, may be characterized by fragmentation. One of the reasons scrapbooking is an effective and meaningful tool in memory reconstruction is because it flexes to accommodate the fragmentation of traumatic stories. To this end, I contend that scrapbooks provide a particularly conducive medium for the fractured narratives emerging out of trauma. One reason for this is that the artform enables the artist to tell her story in as truncated a form as desired. If women are only able to narrate a fraction of their tales (due to the psychological and narrative challenges of articulating trauma), scrapbooking is an appropriate medium of choice. In Kimberly's project on bipolar disorder, we have only a snapshot of her life experiences. However, the fragmented material the artist shares nonetheless communicates important information regarding

living with a misunderstood mental illness. It is important to recognize that although the entire story cannot be captured on a scrapbook page, as in Kimberly's page, sufficient narration arguably does still occur, offering access to telling traumatic memories.<sup>55</sup> That is, even if only parts of the story are narrated, even if nonlinearly or in fragmented form, the narration may still assist the scrapbooker in coming to terms with a difficult memory, and, as we have seen, may still offer ample support to others through the process.

Since scrapbooks narrate traces of a traumatic experience (that is, they do not supply sufficient "space" to narrate the so-called complete story), they reflect the impossibility of locating the narrative in its entirety. Trauma scrapbooks work through and among the layers of the original story to narrate only parts of the difficult experience. The fact that scrapbooks as trauma narratives can never directly experience or narrate the entire original trauma signals that they suffer from challenges some scholars associate with women's trauma narratives (i.e., lacking plot, nonlinear, fragmented). However, I offer here that this alleged deficit is precisely what enables scrapbooking the flexibility to narrate trauma. In fact, the challenges of representing trauma are well handled by scrapbooking, which craftily accommodates trauma narration.

Another characteristic of scrapbooking trauma health narratives is their tendency toward narrative repetition. That is, stories are told and re-told in multiple versions and configurations. At some point after an event is experienced, the compiler records her story within a scrapbook page, which uses both visual and textual elements to tell the

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<sup>55</sup> This is akin to the postmodernist notion that all texts are partial, that no one text can tell the "whole" story. Laurel Richardson, "The Consequences of Poetic Representation: Writing the Other, Rewriting the Self," in Carolyn S. Ellis and Michael G. Flaherty, ed., *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 125-137.

story in more than one fashion.<sup>56</sup> As we have seen, in some cases, the scrapbook page elements may tell different versions of the story (e.g., colorful flowers as embellishments for a page chronicling domestic violence). Then, she may elect to share her page publicly by uploading it on a website. The space allotted for uploading pages often offers additional room for the compiler to further elaborate on the story behind the layout, or otherwise explain the rationale for the page. Visitors experiencing her scrapbook page might then use the website as a forum to comment on the page and tell their own related tale. Further, said scrapbooker may even create her own page to tell a similar story, and then potentially upload her own page, pointing to ways she was inspired to scrapbook about her own traumatic experience.<sup>57</sup> As with most cultural stories, narratives in their repetition are self-legitimizing processes. That is, they continually reinforce each other by virtue of their repetition.<sup>58</sup> The recurrence of scrapbook pages about health and trauma, and the bevy of witnesses to the experiences, illustrates how women use the craft to self-preserve and articulate their social agendas.

#### IV

One means for understanding the specific characteristics of scrapbooking that lend themselves to self narration is by more closely, or “thickly,” attending to what women say about their scrapping process. On a popular scrapbooking website, myriad responses arose to the question, ‘why do you scrapbook?’, posed by a discussion leader in

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<sup>56</sup> I should note that this is a potential scenario illustrating how scrapbooking stories circulate and are re-told in multiple ways. There are, of course, many other ways for scrapbookers to share their stories with others.

<sup>57</sup> Examples of this echoing abound in online scrapbook forums and communities, a subject addressed in subsequent chapters.

<sup>58</sup> This notion of a self-perpetuating system suggests that certain ideologies may be reproduced, but it also reiterates the power of women’s narration of traumatic memory to craft cultural memories, notions I explore in further detail in the last chapters of this project. Since narratives and culture are deeply embedded, any narrative at hand, like scrapbooks, can supply insight into a culture’s belief systems.

an active forum.<sup>59</sup> The responses are telling, as they reiterate the impact of the craft on women.<sup>60</sup> The primary reasons women admit they scrapbook include: preserving memories for future generations; because it is a creative outlet; because it serves as an opportunity to learn new skills; and because there is a large, supportive scrapbooking community available. As one crafter responded, “I scrapbook mainly as a means of artistic expression. It’s wonderful that I’m preserving family memories, but the truth is that I do it because it’s fun.”<sup>61</sup> Bellagirl shared, “I love to journal, and scrapping gives me a chance to put pictures to my words.”<sup>62</sup> This further draws a link between the textual and visual narration scrapbooking enables. Similarly, Susanstamps commented that she scrapbooks “because I love to create art from memories.”<sup>63</sup> These scrappers view the craft as a form of art as well as a practical means of memory preservation.

Some replies to the seemingly simple question, why do you scrapbook? have yielded nuanced perspectives suggestive of a deeper consequence for crafters. For example, one artist, Priss, reveals: “I scrap because I am custodian of family genealogy archives...I scrap to create memories for others to enjoy the future, and define the world as my world is today.”<sup>64</sup> Felicia remarks, “I want to leave a legacy to my children, grandchildren and beyond. I want them to understand me, the culture and time I live in,

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<sup>59</sup> Linda Sattgast, comment on “Why do you scrapbook?”, comment posted April 15, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>; Sattgast is also a digital scrapbooking instructor.

<sup>60</sup> These responses mimic what was found in the 2007 Craft & Hobby Association Scrapbooking Study of over 400 US scrapbookers; CHA Scrapbooking Study.

<sup>61</sup> Kygirl, comment on “Why do you scrapbook?”, comment posted April 16, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>.

<sup>62</sup> Bellagirl, comment on “Why do you scrapbook?”, comment posted April 16, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>.

<sup>63</sup> SusanStamps, comment on “Why do you scrapbook?”, comment posted April 16, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>.

<sup>64</sup> Priss, comment on “Why do you scrapbook?”, comment posted April 16, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>.

and what was important to me.”<sup>65</sup> These responses hint there is something more complex going on, a kind of re-making of the self through scrapbooking. As these comments indicate, women seek to articulate their realities and the context in which they live.

As shown, some crafters have expressed hope that their art accurately reflects their cultural environment so that future generations understand them in context. Perhaps women also use this format to make meaning in their own lives and to leave the legacy of their *own* voices, rather than just the histories of other family members. Thus, although the women cited here tend to modestly reiterate the importance of telling their entire family’s story for the benefit of future generations, in practice, these scrapbooks subtly articulate their own voices.

In addition to wanting to leave a legacy and to make a mark on history, scrappers share how the craft helps them cope with difficult emotions. Amy comments: “I find that scrapbooking provides a creative release. I am treated for depression and post traumatic stress off and on and I find that I can maintain positive mental health for longer periods of time when I am being creative.”<sup>66</sup> As this scrapper suggests, therapeutic aspects of the craft come both from the process of creating as well as the ability to create art and share difficult experiences.

Referring to themselves as closet scrapbookers, some women have observed that their families and friends either are not interested, or are not aware that they have a scrapbooking hobby. They elect instead to share their pages online in compassionate and enthusiastic scrapbook communities. Sometimes public exposure, particularly pertaining to traumatic issues, is safer when the community is likely to be receptive and anonymity

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<sup>65</sup> Felicia, comment on “Why do you scrapbook?”, comment posted April 16, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>.

<sup>66</sup> Amy Guimond, personal communication, Jan 12, 2009.

can be preserved. One respondent indicated that barely anyone “outside of this forum” has seen her work.<sup>67</sup> However, although liberating, public exposure can also be difficult. As scrapbooker Amy explains, she sometimes protects herself from the public aspects of sharing, noting: “the more personal stuff I am very nervous about [sharing]. I am afraid of being judged. I have occasionally blurred out the journaling...sharing is VERY difficult. Which I guess is another way for me to deal with some of my issues.”<sup>68</sup> Yet, contradictorily, women also appear to use public scrapbooking as a way to claim a voice and to showcase intimate stories.

The art of scrapbooking can at times be solitary, allowing women to work in the privacy of their own homes. However, web-based sharing has enabled women to create communities of support. Although online scrapbook communities are very common, scrapbookers also regularly gather together face to face in what are called crop sessions to provide support, swap techniques, challenge each other, and to share life stories. As Mamaduck explains:

It is a relaxing hobby which allows me to bring to life my deepest emotions from the depth of my heart and soul. It is very cathartic in dealing with deep rooted feelings of love, sadness, anger, pride... there is a huge community out there of people who share the same love for the craft that you do and understand completely your feelings about all the things you scrap about, who are giving, caring, sharing, and become, in essence, another part of your family. You get to know them as well or better than their own family

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<sup>67</sup> Teonei, comment on “Why do you scrapbook?”, comment posted April 16, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>.

<sup>68</sup> Amy Guimond, personal communication, March 8, 2009.

members and you grow to love one another in a special bond that transcends understanding.<sup>69</sup>

The characteristics of scrapbook community-building will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 6.

These responses expose how some women are drawn to the craft and illuminate various ways scrapbooking connects women to each other. Listening to women's voices expresses the essence of this project, which is to glean from scrapbooker's artwork and their own observations about the craft a better understanding of the meaning-making potential of contemporary scrapbooking. Further, the narrative characteristics of scrapbooks mark the craft as the new evolution of trauma narration, a concept I explore further in the final chapter.

## V

In women's trauma scrapbooks, the act of recollecting and sharing a difficult story using this medium is in itself transgressive. Here I expand upon Janice Haaken's argument that the act of remembering is "transgressive work" by suggesting that the dual project of narrating and listening results in a powerful, feminist project of reshaping a traumatic experience.<sup>70</sup> The feminist notion of active listening<sup>71</sup> may be a helpful concept to refer to here, as it gives space for the survivor to safely tell her story and become reintegrated into a receptive and validating community. Active listening, which involves an interchange between the trauma narrator and witness, offers the survivor support and

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<sup>69</sup> Mamaduck, comment on "Why do you scrapbook?", comment posted April 17, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>.

<sup>70</sup> Haaken, *Pillar of Salt*, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Psychologist Carl Rogers developed the principle of active listening in *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961). Roland Barthes, in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), devotes a chapter to the subject of listening, in which he theorizes various forms, including active listening.



may also, as Greenberg observes, “enable the survivor to rehear his or her own words anew.”<sup>72</sup> When scrapbookers share their work and receive positive reinforcement, including reiterations of their own stories echoed by other women, active listening is at play. This interplay helps reshape a trauma so that it is more recognizable and understandable to both narrator and narratee.

Given its adept use in trauma narration, women’s scrapbooking is a form of discourse strategy replete with possibilities.<sup>73</sup> Scrappers, in effect, use the pastime to gain a voice in their own lives. They also use a discourse strategy reminiscent of gestures of intimacy or inclusion, inviting others into their pain. Public voice, as I have argued in the context of scrapbooking, offers crafters a means of self-preservation. As is evident in the scrapbooks studied here, the pages reflect the feminist project of inclusivity (even if the scrappers do not explicitly regard themselves as feminists), the sense of a story’s belonging to everyone. Tales about trauma can call on others (as we have seen in the above scrapbook pages) to experience or witness the trauma, to help the narrator feel more connected to others, and to validate her experiences. Just as the scrapbook pages described here demonstrate, the relationship between narrator and listener is a crucial component of making scrapbooking work as a narrative. These elements of feminist narration reflect the liberatory potential of women’s writing in general and women’s health scrapbooking in particular.

Online sharing of scrapbooks offers an additional kind of liberatory potential. As I have observed (a subject I continue in subsequent chapters), scrapbookers often belong to online communities that support and encourage use of the craft as a form of self-

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<sup>72</sup> Greenberg, “The Echo,” 334.

<sup>73</sup> Lanser, *Fictions*, 624.

expression. In turn, these communities offer agency to women who may not otherwise access their personal power. It may be argued that power does not necessarily derive from publicly sharing one's private work, but may also be a result of simply using the craft to work through a difficult experience. Regardless of whether a scrapbooker elects to share her private traumas (recall some refer to themselves as "closet scrapbookers" whose friends and family are unaware of their hobby), the very act of narrating a traumatic experience gains her agency.

Another important characteristic of scrapbooks is their drive toward change. It may be observed that inherent in public remembering is in fact a desire for change. Hélène Cixous calls writing (or what I would refer to as self-expression) "the very possibility of change."<sup>74</sup> Trauma scrapbooks are thus the epitome of change narratives.<sup>75</sup> Generally speaking, the craft is not often considered a platform on which to publicly voice one's cultural critiques; however, its use as a critical tool is precisely why contemporary scrapbooking, with its focus on the self and social issues, represents a shift for the hobby. While trauma narratives were once relegated to the psychologist's office, or to women's private diaries, they have begun making their way into public scrapbooking. As a seemingly modest means of self-expression, scrapbooking on the surface would appear to primarily manage family memories. However, as I have aimed to show in this chapter, women have adapted the craft to publicly narrate what were once private, traumatic events relating to their own health and selfhood. As I have explored, scrappers use art to offer outreach to other women, as well as to share insights into

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<sup>74</sup> Hélène Cixous, trans., "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1.4 (1976): 875-893, 879.

<sup>75</sup> Gayle Greene observes that, "all narrative is concerned with change: there is something in the impulse to narrate...related to the impulse to liberation"; "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory," *Signs* 16:1 (1991): 291.

contemporary women's social concerns, particularly health issues. I further this concept in next chapter, as I explore links between scrapbooking and cultural memory formation as well as women's use of scrapbooking to produce particular knowledges about women's health.

## Chapter 4: Telling Trauma: Producing Knowledge, Crafting Cultural Memory

One could easily come to the conclusion that the concepts of women and of knowledge — socially legitimated knowledge — had been constructed in opposition to each other in modern Western societies. Never was what counts as general social knowledge generated by asking questions from the perspective of women's lives.<sup>1</sup>

What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender.<sup>2</sup>

Trauma is telling. Articulating its intricacies is challenging; it is often a painful story that begs to be told, and yet its narration is fraught with peril. Danger is inherent in revealing a traumatic story that may implicate a perpetrator or otherwise guilty party. But there is another challenge involved in trauma narration, touched on in the previous chapter. Trauma stories exhibit distinct characteristics that assist in narrating what is by all accounts often an unspeakable experience. These narrative qualities include truncated, disjunctive stories that often play with notions of time and self. I contended in the previous chapter that scrapbooking, as a visual/textual life story medium, is equipped to negotiate the challenges of trauma narration.

Here, I continue the theme of telling trauma stories by focusing on the knowledge scrapbooking offers. By producing knowledge through the craft, women forge a site of meaning making specific to women's traumatic health issues. I begin by exploring one of the key ways scrapbooking lends itself to knowledge production, moving on to the types of knowledges produced through the craft. I then suggest potential ramifications of

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 106.

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction," *Signs* 18:1 (2002): 6.

knowledge production in trauma scrapbooking informed by feminist standpoint theory, before I segue into the role of scrapbooking in cultural memory.

Influential ideas and images can be perpetuated by scrapbooking, and that cultural memories can be shaped by a craft devoted to memory preservation. Applying a social constructivist approach to cultural memory, I draw from Clifford Geertz's theories relating the individual to culture as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Feminist cultural memory anchors my argument that scrappers use the craft to reformulate women's self-image as agents of change rather than as passive consumers of a domestic hobby. I began in the previous chapter an analysis of ways women use scrapbooking to speak back to culture about health and selfhood. This chapter continues this line of argument, positing that women's use of scrapbooking has the potential to foster meaningful cultural memories rooted in knowledges relevant to women's health.

## I

Women scrapbookers actively produce knowledge through the medium of scrapbooking. As previously noted, I define knowledge as awareness gained that may be applied to future experiences. Knowledge is social; it is information that takes on meaning for a group when contextualized. Knowledge production, defined here as the ways in which knowledge is collected and disseminated (i.e., produced), can also be viewed as a social practice. I contend in this chapter that use of this medium enables important individual as well as cultural knowledges to be articulated via the craft.

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<sup>3</sup> This approach is also used by Maurice Halbachs in *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

In contemporary scrapbooking, information is disseminated among women using the craft's viral reach (a topic I address in more detail in the final chapter of this dissertation). We saw in the previous chapter how the move from women's scrapbooking about the self, by all accounts about private stories, has become public through sharing on websites, in books, and through crop sessions. Thus, while individual scrapbook pages convey a particular moment in a woman's life, envisioning the value of these works and their role in knowledge production by observing their collective, public organization is also useful. When publicly displayed and collectively assessed, individual scrapbook pages, I argue here, illustrate how women use the craft to convey information important to women's health.<sup>4</sup>

One way the medium is used to produce knowledge is via print publications showcasing scrapbook pages. Individual pages may be collected and displayed in compilation, or idea, books, such as *Imperfect Lives* (from which we saw a small collection of pages in the previous chapter).<sup>5</sup> In this publication, distributed by craft-oriented publishers, specific themed pages are acquired from various scrapbookers (e.g., through a call for contributors). The selected pages are then gathered together, usually accompanied by biographical information and the "story behind the layout," which elaborates on both content and materials. In *Imperfect Lives*, individual pages are grouped together into distinct chapters, with such titles as "love lost," "portrait of a woman," and "life lessons."<sup>6</sup> When examining these individual pages synecdochally, that is,

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<sup>4</sup> Judy Elsley refers to the act of relating fragments to each other as "femmage"; Judy Elsley, "The Color Purple and the Poetics of Fragmentation," in *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern*, ed. Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley (University of Missouri Press, 1994), 82.

<sup>5</sup> Tara Governo, *Imperfect Lives: Scrapbooking the Reality of Your Everyday* (Cincinnati: Memory Makers, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

considering how the parts make up the whole (or *are* the whole), we can envision these books as albums, comprised of individual pages that exist as part of a bigger social project. In the case of *Imperfect Lives*, the stated intent is to show “layouts that tell the ‘real’ story of life.”<sup>7</sup>

Although these idea books are comprised of snapshots of individual women’s lives — women who may not know each other — the themes contain overlapping stories such that one can almost imagine the women living amongst each other. These “albums,” collecting women’s lives together, provide a snapshot of how some scrapbookers, scattered around the United States, experience today’s culture. For example, the *Imperfect Lives* chapter titled “Portrait of a Woman” comprises 19 scrapbook pages, spanning ruminations on one’s life purpose to transition into adulthood/womanhood to coping with miscarriage to coming to grips with one’s immortality. Women ranging from their 20s up through “that age”<sup>8</sup> address some of the same issues, are pressed with similar domestic demands, and are aware of persistent cultural expectations. Thumbing through the colorful scrapbook pages, most of which were created in the past few years, the viewer is provided with an overview, as it were, of contemporary culture. The artwork exhibits, from a woman’s perspective, struggles with heartbreak, death, motherhood, and identity crises. These challenges may be summed up by what Jamie Warren says of her layout: “coming to terms. Acceptance. Dealing. Coping. Winning the battle within.”<sup>9</sup> The narratives in *Imperfect Lives* have the potential to resonate with other women, which is one way knowledge can be disseminated in this format. That is, viewers of the book learn

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 91.

through stories how other women negotiate stress. Their collective stories,<sup>10</sup> then, provide potential for producing knowledge about traumatic health experiences.

Another important way knowledge is spread is via the World Wide Web. In fact, online scrapbooking is an apt example of how the Internet may be used to create communities of knowledge. Information may be spread by online scrapbooking, both through the scrapbook pages themselves, but also through feedback crafters leave for each other's work. For example, artists sharing stories online by posting a digital image of their scrapbook page may receive comments from other women viewing their work. As a result, scrapbooks' social messages have become increasingly widely distributed, in turn sparking action on the part of others.<sup>11</sup> One layout, for example, may inspire a scrapbooker to tell her own story via the craft or in prose, usually online (e.g., via a blog or by commenting in a forum). Her comments may also contain valuable information that other women have access to, further producing knowledge through online scrapbooking.

Like published idea books, individual online pages may also be viewed as "albums." These cultural stories comprise vast collections of women's scrapbook narratives, which work together to produce knowledge. The website Scrapbook.com, boasting over 1 million unique visitors per month, illustrates how individual pages may be viewed as part of a collective form of knowledge production.<sup>12</sup> The "gallery" portion of the site contains several tabs within which are included relevant scrapbook pages posted by users. Under the most active tab, "layouts," are several subcategories, such as

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<sup>10</sup> Anne L. Bower suggests that certain folk texts/materials are a kind of "communal autobiography." Bower, "Reading Lessons," in Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley, eds. *Quilt Culture*, 34, fn 2 (University of Missouri Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Pages posted online are often "shared" on other websites, such as Facebook.com, a popular social networking site in which users share news articles and photos amongst friends. This further increases the dissemination of scrapbooking to other high-traffic websites.

<sup>12</sup> Scrapbook Advertising, <http://www.scrapbook.com/advertising/stats.php>.



favorites, inspirational, funny, heartwarming, and cute. Pages are also categorized into themes, including religious, career, family, holidays, military, book of me, and beach. Thousands of scrapbook pages are posted under each theme.<sup>13</sup> The pages appear as thumbnail images with the scrapbooker's user name, and the date the page was uploaded. Clicking on any page pulls up a larger image, along with details such as the materials used to create the work, biographical information about the artist, and the inspiration behind the scrapbook page. Visitors can post comments about the art, adding further meaning to the scrapbook pages, which, when viewed collectively, build upon each other. Together, these discrete projects comprise a cultural scrapbook, gesturing toward women's shared stories.

The organization of pages on Scrapbook.com enables a narration of women's collective knowledges. Pages are searchable by keyword, which allows a user to view pages grouped by common theme. As an example, a search using the keyword "illness"<sup>14</sup> yields close to 200 entries. A brief, informal survey of the scrapbook pages elicited from the "illness" search includes a 2-page spread by a user named Fletch showing a captivating image of her daughter, a nursing student who contracted MRSA, methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, from a patient.<sup>15</sup> The scrapbook page incorporates a picture of the daughter sporting gruesome effects of a virus on her face. It is easy to be drawn into this image, as it, like so many other singular scrapbook pages, conveys a rich

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<sup>13</sup> Statistics from the gallery portion of Scrapbook.com indicate that nearly 1 million images have been uploaded, well over 5 million comments have been recorded, and there have been a staggering 137 million views; <http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/>.

<sup>14</sup> Users "tag" their photos with what they think are relevant markers or explanations for their contents. Searching for "cancer" or "sickness" may not necessarily elicit pages specifically about illness, even if these key words happen to appear in the page's caption.

<sup>15</sup> Fletch,

<http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/?m=image&id=1222907&type=searchwords&s=illness&start=40&page=1&vote=0>.

story. Another compelling narrative is offered by Lindaah40. This scrapper displays a memorial page she created featuring her cousin, who passed away from complications related to AIDS. In the description of the page, the scrapbooker indicates that no one in the family knew her cousin was HIV positive until “right before his death.”<sup>16</sup> This story suggests the shame at times still associated with this disease, and offers insight into challenges some communities face with respect to public disclosure. In yet another project relating to contemporary concerns, Monica Judge proffers her scrapbook page revealing that she cuts herself to cope with the pressures of modeling. Judge explains that she produced this page so that “my daughter will understand my feelings.”<sup>17</sup> The artist uses scrapbooking as a vehicle of communication and information exchange between the generations. In each of these pages, we can see the potential for knowledge mobilization through online sharing.

## II

Now that I have explored an important way scrapbooking is used in knowledge production — that is, public sharing via online and print publications — I turn in this section to examples highlighting the *types* of knowledges produced by women scrapbookers. As I show in the previous chapter, women’s trauma scrapbooks address salient cultural concerns via trauma scrapbooking, particularly knowledges relating to selfhood and health. I demonstrate how women use the craft to talk back to culture as a way to establish more grounded conceptions of women’s day-to-day experiences. Here, I further illuminate these themes, pointing to distinct ways scrapbookers model how the

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<sup>16</sup> Lindaah40, <http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/?m=image&id=1222907&type=searchwords&s=illness&start=40&page=1&vote=0>.

<sup>17</sup> Monica Judge, <http://www.scrapbook.com/gallery/?m=image&id=506839&type=searchwords&s=illness&start=100&page=1&vote=0>.

artform can be used to produce knowledge. I categorize three types of knowledges I have observed in the scrapbooks studied. The first type is a scrapbooking technique that enables flexible narration. The other type of knowledge models the versatile type of content that can be narrated through the craft. To illustrate the former, I show an example of how this scrapbooking technique is used to (often surreptitiously) convey knowledge to others. In the latter knowledge type, I offer an instance pointing to ways women can use scrapbooking to model an alternate way to self-express about traumatic topics. The third type of knowledge observable in scrapbooking is conveyed via organized scrapbooking communities. This topic is addressed later in the chapter.

A knowledge format used by some scrapbookers is the inclusion of hidden journaling somewhere on the scrapbook page. This approach is typically employed by scrappers who do not want to mar the page with excessive journaling, or whose journaling is too private to include on the page itself. The journaling is typically placed underneath a flap of paper on the scrapbook page. Typically, there is some indication that the viewer should lift the flap and look underneath. I contend that hidden journaling points to the potential subversive uses of scrapbooking to communicate knowledge. For example, a scrapbooker presenting online work containing hidden journaling can elect to reveal the hidden text. She has command over her story. As an example, in the scrapbooking page titled, “Hello, My Name is Lana,” the viewer is aware that the page contains what the artist refers to as, “my story. True confessions. A long time ago.”<sup>18</sup> A torn photograph of the compiler, Lana Rappette, is included on the page (Figure 4.1). Scanning around the page reveals a photo of a table and chair. On the table rests a styrofoam cup, and a white jacket is draped over the chair. The chair is pushed away from

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<sup>18</sup> Governo, *Imperfect Lives*, 78-79.

the table, signaling its desertion. This image is fastened to the page using brackets that indicate it may be lifted up. Printed on the photo is the phrase, “the juicy part.” Thus, the viewer becomes aware that there is more to the story than what is available upon initial inspection.



**Figure 4.1** From *Imperfect Lives* copyright © 2006 by Tara Governo. Reprinted with the kind permission of Memory Makers Books, an imprint of F+W Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

Printed in *Imperfect Lives*, the journaling for this page is available in the idea book opposite the scrapbook page. Lana’s writes that she has “two stories,” which include “my life before I quit drugs and alcohol and my life after.” The hidden journaling narrates these two phases in the compiler’s life. She chronicles various challenges, including “alcoholic family, abuse, teen angst, careless living, isolation, depression, out of control, crashing and landing in rehab.”<sup>19</sup> This first part of the story reads like a stream-of-consciousness narrative essentially listing her various life obstacles. So-called

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 79.

“story 2” of Lana’s life contains a more coherent narrative that shows how the lessons learned in the difficult phase of her life translated into better choices, which she then lists at the end of lengthy hidden journaling. She explains that in this second life story, she is “hopeful but struggling, recovering, began loving myself, starting loving life for the first time.”<sup>20</sup>

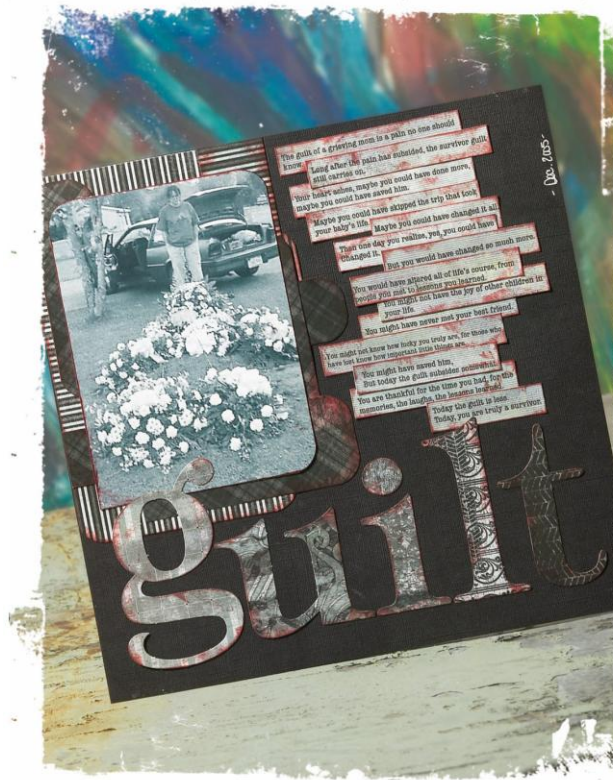
Scrapbook pages like Lana’s, which include hidden journaling, model for other crafters a possible template for expressing oneself via the hobby. That is, a scrapbooker can learn that she does not necessarily need to place her personal narrative on the surface of the page, but can “hide” it and regulate who views it. Hidden journaling also enables the scrapper to include any length of narrative. Artists can write several pages of text if they so desire, and can simply fold the pages up and tuck them under something on the page. This technique offers more flexibility regarding self-expression, and expands the boundaries of the traditional 12 X 12 scrapbook page. In addition to modeling the potentially useful approach of hidden journaling, knowledge is also shared relating to ways Lana coped with health-related challenges.<sup>21</sup>

Like Lana’s work, Jamie Tharpe’s scrapbooking models a way to use the artform to self-express about traumatic life experiences (Figure 4.2). Her work communicates important information regarding how to use the platform of scrapbooking to narrate and emotionally process an unconventional topic. In the scrapbook page titled “Guilt,” Jamie addresses the issue of survivor guilt, which is often experienced by surviving relatives when a loved one dies.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 4.2** From *Imperfect Lives* copyright © 2006 by Tara Governo. Reprinted with the kind permission of Memory Makers Books, an imprint of F+W Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

The artist explains in the journaling on her scrapbook page:

The guilt of a grieving mom is a pain no one should know. Long after the pain has subsided, the survivor guilt still carries on. Your heart aches, maybe you could have done more, maybe you could have saved him.<sup>22</sup>

In her story behind the layout, Jamie indicates that she sought to share her page so that “someone else out there may realize that they too are no longer a guilty survivor.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, Jamie’s artwork communicates to others the challenges survivors experience when a loved one passes away. The compiler models use of scrapbooking to express this guilt,

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 107.

and as a way to illustrate how she overcame trauma associated with this feeling. The scrapbook page Jamie created echoes her grim experience with guilt. The page is muted, and includes a black and white image of the artist standing at her son's grave. The grave site is engulfed in flowers, and Jamie stands with head bowed, hands in her pockets. The word "guilt" is prominently displayed on the page in large letters, and along the right-hand side is Jamie's typed journaling. This content-specific example of knowledge production illustrates the desire to pass on hard-won information about mental health potentially of use to others.

Thus far, I have illustrated how hidden journaling supplies one technique scrapbookers may use to communicate knowledge using this form. This section has also demonstrated how scrapbooking serves as a model for others to envision how the craft can articulate difficult content. In the next section, I explore a third type of knowledge that women convey to each other via the pastime. In particular, I focus on the social aspects of the craft and the distribution of particular knowledges proffered via scrapbooking communities.

### III

Like the production of knowledge, scrapbooking may be observed as a social act. Contemporary scrapbooking comprises social groups that bind women together. A popular scrapbooking social gathering is the crop session (Figure 4.3). In these events, women typically gather together to scrapbook and socialize, often swapping techniques, supplies, and life stories. Information regarding fresh layout designs and new applications, along with the latest scrapbooking supplies, are often exchanged. In this sense, women share both technical and content-specific knowledge.



**Figure 4.3** Cropping Session. Photo Courtesy of Amy Guimond.

A common aspect of crop sessions is a “challenge” in which a scrapbooker devises a set of “rules” for a page (e.g., incorporate 5 circles, 1 ribbon, and 2 pictures), and users are encouraged to submit their projects for a small reward and group recognition. Prizes usually include miscellaneous scrapbook materials, such as paper supplies. New techniques are often introduced in these challenges, which scrapbookers are encouraged to attempt. These techniques potentially require purchase of specific equipment or supplies. Women thus add to their craft “stash” by accumulating a variety of new products, such as paper, embellishments, and various tools. As a result, new knowledge related to products and skills may continually be disseminated among scrapbookers through these challenges.

Today’s scrapbooking, then, often demands access to state-of-the-art products and archival-quality materials. Popular gadgets like the Cricut<sup>®</sup>, an electronic cutting machine, promise stunning layouts.<sup>24</sup> New lines of stamps, coordinating paper sets,

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<sup>24</sup> Cricut<sup>®</sup>, <http://www.cricut.com/default.aspx>.



adhesives, and digital scrapbooking software continually emerge, tempting paper and digital scrapbookers to invest in the most up-to-date products.

It is important to note that some of these techniques and products require purchase of costly materials. In fact, it might be argued that scrapbooking can be downright expensive for the regular crafter. It is for this reason that one might tie scrapbooking style and techniques (eg, products used to produce a desired visual effect) to social class. As an example, women scrapbookers may hide from their spouses the amount of money they spend on scrapbooking, since it has the potential to be a very expensive (and, in the eyes of some, unjustified) hobby.<sup>25</sup>

The technique- and knowledge-based aspects of the craft have resulted in a flurry of women's entrepreneurship related to scrapbooking. Some women — usually themselves scrapbookers — have launched small businesses (usually web-based) in which they offer kits consisting of coordinating sets of paper and accompanying embellishments. The supplies are initially purchased piecemeal from a variety of craft companies and then assembled by the seller in sets, which usually alternate monthly. This system enables scrapbookers to sample materials from various companies. Kits are ordered directly from the seller through an online payment system, such as Paypal, an online business that enables payments and money transfers between business and individuals.<sup>26</sup> Discounts may be offered if scrapbookers join a “kit club,” in which they commit to a certain number of months, thereby encouraging an ongoing relationship of learning. These clubs often have an online presence, and may also offer challenges, such

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<sup>25</sup> Downs, Heather Ann. “Crafting Culture: Scrapbooking and the Lives of Women.” Ph.D. dissertation, UIIL, Urbana-Champaign, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Paypal, [https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=xpt/Marketing\\_CommandDriven/securitycenter/buy/Privacy-outside](https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=xpt/Marketing_CommandDriven/securitycenter/buy/Privacy-outside).

as those described above. In these events, scrapbookers are encouraged to attempt new approaches and to challenge their skill set, thus offering the opportunity to gain new technical know-how. Scrapbookers share the results of their challenge attempts online, thereby spreading knowledge about new techniques or products used.

Women also form online communities in which they share artwork, products, and applications. I offer here an example to demonstrate knowledge production specific to communities that form as a result of the Internet. Amy Guimond is a scrapbooker and owner of Commit2paper, a company that offers kits for purchase, as well as assembles custom-made scrapbooks to order from a client's photos and keepsakes (referred to as S40, or scrapping for others).<sup>27</sup> Amy's team of co-creators display layouts on her website designed from each month's featured products. I have personally observed how interactions on a community website illustrate the craft's potential for knowledge accumulation. On the community/blogging site, Live Journal.com, Amy has a devoted following in the online community<sup>28</sup> "scrapbookers," which describes itself as "a fun community to share scrapbooking tips and pictures."<sup>29</sup> Over the course of a couple of years, Amy has built up a community of scrapbookers — myself included — who appreciate her work and creative insights. Periodically, Amy offers online tutorials in which she demonstrates a craft skill of interest to the group. This scrapbooker has seamlessly transitioned from her role as regular contributor to the scrapbook-sharing site to an entrepreneur who sells scrapbooking kits and her own creative services as a talented

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<sup>27</sup> Commit2paper, <http://www.commit2paper.com/>; "Scrapbooking Evolves into Art and Archiving," *The Washington Times*, Feb 18, 2004, <http://washingtontimes.com/news/2004/feb/18/20040218-110705-5613r/>.

<sup>28</sup> My notion of community is drawn from the definitions of Joseph R. Gusfield (*The Community: A Critical Response*, New York: Harper Collins, 1975) and Emile Durkheim (*The Division of Labour in Society*, New York: Free Press, 1964); both scholars view community as a collection of individuals with shared interests and skills.

<sup>29</sup> "Scrapbooking is Fun," <http://community.livejournal.com/scrapbookers/>.

artist. The nature of Amy’s contributions to the “scrapbookers” community shifted once she began her own company. Her recent posts — and those of Commit2paper’s co-contributors — frequently feature the products she is selling. That is, Amy shares layouts with the online community “scrapbookers,” indicating that products used are from her own kit, thus directing members to her website to view more layouts and consider purchasing directly from her company. Amy describes the process of forming her own company out of an online community:

I started because a friend suggested I [do it] through a web forum. All the women there shared their stuff and wanted to see a little of my stuff too. I started sharing a lot more about 6 months before opening my own business. I tend to share almost everything now as a way to inspire others... it helps keep interest in the business.

It’s more selfish than I want to admit...<sup>30</sup>

This scenario offers an example of the unique combination of knowledge production and community that scrapbooking garners. In the example provided above, I observed Amy’s skill at sharing her knowledge while building an online community of followers, myself included. As a fellow scrapbooker, I have purchased Amy’s kits, based on her recommendations and displays of products in the online community. Like others, I then share my own creations with the group, thus perpetuating the cycle of knowledge consumption and production. As a result of her business-savvy and social skills, Amy has benefitted from the knowledge production proffered by the craft — as well as her own artistic skills — in a scenario repeated throughout scrapbook communities. Unlike the conspicuous consumption sociologist Thorstein Veblen recounted, contemporary

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<sup>30</sup> Amy Guimond, personal communication, Jan 12, 2009.

scrapbookers have transformed their consumption of a domestic hobby into knowledge-based communities that perpetuate knowledge production.<sup>31</sup>

Now that I have examined the types of knowledges produced through scrapbooking, I turn to the effects, or the outcome (whether deliberate or not), of knowledge production in scrapbooking. As mentioned in this chapter's epigraph, women's knowledge has not historically been placed in the category of "socially legitimated knowledge." My argument that women's trauma scrapbooking offers important knowledges is informed by feminist standpoint theory, which helps bring to the fore key issues relating to the importance of legitimizing women's voices and highlighting their contributions to knowledge production.<sup>32</sup> Given that women's perspectives are, for the most part, rooted in everyday life, particularly as a result of their immersion in "women's work," they offer important insights often omitted from general cultural knowledge.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the effect of knowledge production through scrapbooking has potential tangible social effects.

Scrapbookers' spread of information may be viewed as anchored in social change. That is, as I showed in the previous chapter, scrapbookers convey information designed to educate and emotionally bolster other women. Some compilers even indicate in their artwork that they seek to help raise awareness that may benefit others. Crafters who share tools in gatherings such as crop sessions are helping arm other women with information they can use to create their own projects that may in turn be of benefit. Some

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<sup>31</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899). The line of argument intimated here, relating scrapbooking and consumerism, is a rich area of future exploration, but in the interest of space, I have only briefly mentioned it in passing here.

<sup>32</sup> Harding, *Whose Science?*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*; Smith, *The Everyday World*; Rose, "Hand, Brain, and Heart"; Flax, "Political Philosophy"; Hartsock, *The Feminist Standpoint*.

scrapbookers explicitly create scrapbook pages to financially support charities. In the next chapters, I examine in more detail the activist aspects of the pastime, which have the potential to offer far-reaching social effects.

With the effects of knowledge production in mind, this next section explores the relationship between scrapbooking and cultural memory, with a look first at scrapbooking's rise in popular culture. I convey that women scrapbookers use the craft to become activist agents of change rather than passive consumers of a domestic hobby. I demonstrate how crafters have the potential to modify cultural conceptions of women's roles and experiences through shifting cultural memories about women's traumatic experiences.

#### IV

Scrapbooking has exploded in visibility in the past decade, resulting in ever-increasing cultural capital.<sup>34</sup> For example, the craft has been adopted by other prominent popular culture knowledge tools. The social networking site Facebook.com approximates scrapbooking in that users share photos, news clippings, and journal-like comments with each other. Social websites such as Myspace.com provide a similar template. The previously mentioned blogging website LiveJournal.com includes a "scrapbook" element in which bloggers can upload photos and share them with select groups or individuals. The incorporation of scrapbooking into these high-traffic websites illustrates the hobby's reach into domains that are not necessarily craft-centric.

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<sup>34</sup> In "The Forms of Capital," Pierre Bourdieu denotes cultural capital as accumulated knowledge (gained through formal education or experience) that results in both power and social status; in John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 241-258. I suggest here that the infusion of popular culture with scrapbooking offers the craft (and by association, crafters) ever-increasing social influence and legitimization.

Another realm into which scrapbooking has made a peculiar debut is mystery writing. In 2008, scrapbooking guru Joanna Campbell Slan — who has contributed countless “how to” articles to the scrapbooking industry’s premier publications — published *Paper, Scissors, Death*.<sup>35</sup> This first novel in the Scrap-N-Craft Mystery Series was nominated for the coveted Agatha Award for best first novel.<sup>36</sup> The second book in the series, *Cut, Crop & Die*, is scheduled for a 2009 release.<sup>37</sup> In fact, a number of craft-related murder mysteries have emerged in the past year, with titles such as *Death Swatch: A Scrapbooking Mystery*, part of author Laura Childs’ Scrapbooking Mysteries series that has run since 2003.<sup>38</sup> Characteristic of these so-called “craft cozies,” as this genre is called, is the inclusion of helpful tips related to the craft featured in the novel. Author Campbell Slan observes that this niche market is growing for the “simple” reason that “there are more crafters than readers of mysteries here in the [United] States,” which “offers a huge growth market.”<sup>39</sup> The potential of scrapbooking in the context of cultural knowledge and memory production is evident in other industries as well, which themselves attempt to broaden their scope using the craft’s extensive outreach.

Scrapbooking, as a popular effort in memory preservation, continues to embed itself into American culture. For example, in academic settings, teachers encourage students to create scrapbooks as visual learning tools. The University of North Carolina School of Education has devised an online literary scrapbook to help students critically

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<sup>35</sup> Joanna Campbell Slan, *Paper, Scissors, Death* (Woodbury, MN: Midnight Ink, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Jane Henderson, “St. Louis mystery writer is nominee for Agatha Award,” March 13, 2009, Stl Today.com, <http://www.stltoday.com/blogzone/book-blog/uncategorized/2009/03/st-louis-mystery-writer-is-nominee-for-agatha-award/>.

<sup>37</sup> Slan, *Cut, Crop & Die* (Woodbury, MN: Midnight Ink, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Laura Childs, *Death Swatch: A Scrapbooking Mystery* (New York: Berkley, 2008); other titles in Childs’ series include *Keepsake Crimes* (New York: Berkley, 2003); *Photo Finished* (New York: Berkley, 2004); and *Frill Kill* (New York: Berkley, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> Fiona Veitch Smith, “Craft ‘cozies’: Mysteries for Crafters,” Oct 30, 2008, <http://www.thecraftywriter.com/2008/10/30/craft-cozies-mysteries-for-crafters/>.

analyze literature.<sup>40</sup> The craft is also popularly applied in therapeutic and health-related fields to support people coping with trauma or difficult life changes, such as adoption.<sup>41</sup> In online and physical museum exhibits, scrapbooks by and about historical figures are used to tell stories. Examples include the Smithsonian's American History Edward Hopper online scrapbook<sup>42</sup> and a scrapbook exhibit chronicling Washington's Jewish community at the National Building Museum in Washington, DC.<sup>43</sup> In 1998, National Scrapbooking Month was established, further bolstering the craft's visibility and knowledge production. Given the growing reach of scrapbooking, coupled with women's uses of it to tell the more difficult stories of their lives, the craft, I argue here, has the potential to play an important role in shaping of cultural memories in the U.S.

As I mentioned earlier, scholars and archivists have recently argued that scrapbooking has long been overlooked as a crucial source of socio-cultural history.<sup>44</sup> It holds, then, that a hobby focused around memory representation, preservation, and perpetuation would have an important role to play in cultural memory cultivation. Here I seek to engage with Astrid Ell's broad definition of cultural memory as "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts."<sup>45</sup> I also draw from influential memory studies scholar Jan Assmann, who sees cultural memory as "that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to

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<sup>40</sup> Literary Scrapbooks Online: An Electronic Reader-Response Project, <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/external/Readwritethink200606212753>. Accessed 3/23/09

<sup>41</sup> Margaret Grove Radford, "Adoption Albums: Telling Stories of the Soul" *Memory Makers*. May-June: 50-55, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Hopper Scrapbook, <http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/hopper/index.html>.

<sup>43</sup> "Jewish Washington: Scrapbook of an American Community," June 24, 2005-July 4, 2006, <http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/jewish-washington.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Jessica Helfand, *Scrapbooks: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); *The Scrapbook in American Life*, ed. Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler (Temple University Press, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning, ed., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International Interdisciplinary Handbook* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 2.

stabilize and convey that society's self-image."<sup>46</sup> These open conceptions of cultural memory leave space to consider cultural memory on a smaller scale (e.g., communities of practitioners), rather than the more common notion of cultural memory as comprising group memories about high-profile public events, like September 11, 2001.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, cultural memory studies often revolves around what happens when individual memories of public, national events are shared, such as personal testimonials of the Vietnam war, September 11, or the AIDS crisis.<sup>48</sup> In this project, I am more interested in what happens when personal memories of private events are publicly shared with sympathetic communities. That is, I am invested in learning what happens when murmurs of recognition arise from a group, particularly when what was thought of as a "private" trauma is something others have also experienced, thus rendering it a collective experience.

By applying the cultural theories of Clifford Geertz in my study of women's scrapbooking, I contend here that individual knowledge, such as that illuminated by discrete scrapbook pages, can be applied to understanding an interrelated, social whole. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz holds that culture resides in the individual.<sup>49</sup> As I previously mentioned, cultural studies scholars are conflicted over the role of universals to explain culture, and the risks inherent in studying smaller sample sizes to understand culture as a whole. At the risk of overgeneralizing, I submit it is important to start with individual instances and broaden outward, knowing full well that large claims are riddled

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<sup>46</sup> Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-134, 132.

<sup>47</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>48</sup> This is essentially Sturken's project in *Tangled Memories*.

<sup>49</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).



with exceptions. Like Geertz, I believe it to be crucial to look to small samples or individual examples to learn about culture with a capital “C.” I agree with the famed anthropologist who observes, “the notion that unless a cultural phenomenon is empirically universal it cannot reflect anything about the nature of man” is bunk.<sup>50</sup> I find the concept of telescoping in on individual examples useful in attempting to make broader, though contextualized, claims about aspects of a culture. Earlier in the chapter, I make the case that individual scrapbook pages may be viewed as part of a larger cultural album. My implication with that particular suggestion is that individual, related stories, threaded together, comprise the quilt of social history.

The stories contained in scrapbooks, as I have shown, often contest social history, attempting to offer a different set of experiences with which to create cultural memories. Women’s creative application of scrapbooking demonstrates a desire to reformulate their self-image as activist agents of change rather than as passive consumers of a domestic hobby. Women’s use of the craft to challenge dominant narratives about health and self-identity further increases the craft’s value in memory production. Crafters have the potential to shift cultural conceptions of women’s roles by producing cultural memories.

Through scrapbooking, important social images and experiences are circulated, which is at the core of cultural memories.<sup>51</sup> The spread of scrapbooking into popular culture, examples of which are provided above, signals its potential to actively shape social agendas. Inspired by the social constructivist views of cultural memory put forth by Maurice Halbwachs, I contend that influential ideas and images can be perpetuated by

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<sup>50</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation*, 44.

<sup>51</sup> Ann Rigney, “Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans,” *Poetics Today* 25:2 (2004): 361-396; see also the Library of Congress digitized American Memory historical collection, which includes manuscripts, photographs, pamphlets, recordings, and motion pictures, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>.

scrapbooking.<sup>52</sup> Shared images such as those in scrapbooks actively shape cultural memory through their continuous spread of socially-motivated memories among communities of women.

The craft's evocation of intimate memories sits at the core of its role in cultural memory cultivation. Although memory would seem to be a private, personal experience, it is actually shaped and influenced by public representations. Individual memories, such as those contained in scrapbooks, are *not* independent per se, as social forces continually act on us, directly influencing our actions and memories.<sup>53</sup> As part of a collective experience, personal memories inform group memories.<sup>54</sup> Our memories are daily and publicly memorialized via such media as magazines, newspapers, and television. Media shape memory and serve to align the public's notion of the truth. People construct their realities and elect their values based on cultural memories.

Cultural memory is far from static; in fact, its flexibility is part of what marks its potential to transform. A culture can shift its communal memories, particularly when a compelling notion infiltrates popular media.<sup>55</sup> Reconstitution of cultural memories may actually enable a marginalized group to express agency and resistance.<sup>56</sup> That is, non-dominant groups may be able to alter the cultural norm by modeling or telling the story of an alternative history which may be (sometimes surreptitiously) written into or over the previously dominant cultural narrative.<sup>57</sup> An example of this at-times subversive act may

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<sup>52</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*; I agree with the memory studies scholar, who claims that individual memory does not exist on its own; it is always socially produced and therefore linked to the collective.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg, eds., *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> Sturken, *Tangled Memories*.

<sup>56</sup> Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier, *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith, and Identity* (Austin: Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Roberta Pearson, "Custer Loses Again: The Contestation over Commodification of Public Memory" in

be seen in the ways that diverse individuals living with AIDS (e.g., members of gay communities) have sought visibility in the interest of improving access to resources, including medical support. Groups whose voices were once suppressed found a means of vocalizing their political and social agendas. In the case of scrapbooking, ordinary women convey their particular value systems relating to health and womanhood, which at times buck mainstream views.<sup>58</sup> The resultant cultural memories may have a hand in shifting more global cultural values. While I agree with Marita Sturken that cultural memory “is not automatically the scene of cultural resistance,” I hold that there are also moments when cultural memory production *can* act as a form of active resistance, and even, as is the case with scrapbooking, as a subversive mode of opposition.<sup>59</sup>

This flexibility of cultural memory to conform to or buck social conventions provides a point of departure for thinking about how women deploy scrapbooking in the service of cultural memory. Contemporary scrapbookers’ willingness to elicit fundamental shifts not just for themselves, but for others, suggests the desire to evoke social change and to challenge dominant narratives. Through scrapbooking, crafters articulate social messages and speak up for marginalized groups whose voices, like their own, may not otherwise be heard. Artists craft cultural memory by attempting to alter the dominant narrative to reflect the voices of those on the edges of society. I contend that use of the craft to narrate trauma is indicative of available means for women to self-

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*Cultural Memory*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 181; Roberta Pearson views public memory as exhibiting “simultaneous fluidity and stability”; as she notes, “the representations that have achieved dominance at one particular historical moment are constantly challenged from below.”

<sup>58</sup> By “ordinary,” I refer to scrapbookers who have achieved limited or no public recognition for their work.

<sup>59</sup> Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 7.

express and to critique culture.<sup>60</sup> One of the reasons some may be drawn to scrapbooking as a way to narrate trauma is because it offers the opportunity to exhibit power, a command over one's story in a way that is typically not available. The scrapbooker has creative license to talk back to culture, to reclaim her sense of self, and to attempt to elicit change in other scrapbookers' lives. By producing various types of knowledges and attempting to cement their own cultural memories, scrapbookers can tap into the powerful resources offered by their own and other women's experiences.

Scrapbookers, in their resistance to social expectations, exhibit a desire to reconfigure how women's lives are narrated, perhaps in an effort to tell the private, darker side of a white, middle-class life.<sup>61</sup> As I have observed, scrapbookers may struggle with pressures to uphold social expectations regarding womanhood and health. Their work shows complicated aspects of middle-class existence, such as admitting overwhelm at juggling roles a working mother must inhabit or sharing obstacles encountered when attempting to reconceptualize positive mental health despite stereotypes. Thus, women's knowledge may become socially legitimized among themselves.

As previously indicated, modern-day scrappers serve as crucial resources, supplying each other with important, relatable life lessons. Scrapbooks reflect Francois Lyotard's concept of "narrative knowledge" in that they comprise social narratives that communicate knowledge. Information is continuously distributed as women's trauma

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<sup>60</sup> I acknowledge that women access knowledge in a variety of formats/media, on a host of issues, including those covered in this dissertation. I do not intend to argue here that women acquire information through scrapbooking that wouldn't otherwise be available; however, the fact that online scrapbooks constitute an emerging, creative form of knowledge production may be of particular interest to some scholars.

<sup>61</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, although the demographic for scrapbookers today would suggest it is not necessarily considered a marginalized group (i.e., comprised of white, middle-class women), one need only look deeper into the craft to observe women struggling with disabilities or other potential challenges, which would, in theory, place them in a vulnerable class.

stories are told and retold.<sup>62</sup> Given the social significance of the craft, and its fast circulation among communities of women, scrapbooking reverberates with repeated stories that are shared with other women.<sup>63</sup> The tales women are passing on to each other echo the “acts of transfer” coined by Paul Connerton in the context of cultural memory.<sup>64</sup> Memories that are continually recalled intermingle, resulting in a more solid set of memories of women’s experiences. The infectious character of scrapbooking, in which women are educated and influenced by each other’s memories, exhibits the craft’s influence.

Information circulated through pages and across computer screens strengthens women’s knowledge base, steadying each other against life’s obstacles. I have illustrated the effects of knowledge mobilization in the ways women exchange health-specific as well as practical craft-based information and support each other in online scrapbooking communities. As I demonstrate below, messages (in particular, traumatic messages) communicated via scrapbooks also carry strong cultural cache — and hence, the potential ability to transform cultural conceptions of health issues and women’s roles through revised cultural memories — due to their narration via the hobby.

## V

When thinking about what triggers memories, objects almost immediately come to mind, as they play an important role in the creation of memory.<sup>65</sup> There is little doubt that photos, the primary element of scrapbooks, have the ability to stimulate memories.

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<sup>62</sup> Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>63</sup> Rigney, “Portable,” 367.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>65</sup> Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsle, ed., *Material Memories: Design and Evocation* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999).

As cultural objects, photos model a particular kind of narrative force that is central to conveying memories.<sup>66</sup> Since images are “vehicles of memory,” they are also a powerful means of transporting ideas, particularly those that run counter to the status quo.<sup>67</sup> In this analysis, I am indebted to Hirsch and Smith’s feminist perspective on cultural memory, which they view as “the product of fragmentary personal and collective experiences articulated through technologies and media that shape even as they transmit memory.”<sup>68</sup> This notion of media technologies as arbiters of gendered memory further links the format of scrapbooking to cultural memory. I remain mindful when studying scrapbooks’ photographic elements of Sturken’s acknowledgement that “technologies of memory” such as photographs are not innocent; they inevitably suggest an intention to evoke emotion or elicit action.<sup>69</sup>

By virtually imposing themselves on memories, the persuasive visual tendency of photos is to stir up emotions. Centering their work almost entirely on photos, scrapbook creators may be well aware of the role a powerful photograph can have in a scrapbook’s reception. Even if digitally created, scrapbooks exhibit a kind of presence with which to transmit important stories about culture. As objects of exchange that are passed back and forth among women, scrapbooks serve to reinforce personal relationships, trigger memories, and evoke emotion.

As I have shown, the form in which cultural memories are circulated has an effect on the way they are received. The role of photos as part of the scrapbooking medium plays an important role in the ability of scrapbooks to influence memory. However, form

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Vol I, Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994); Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Plimlico, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism,” 5.

<sup>69</sup> Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 10.

includes not just an individual “text” (material object such as a scrapbook page or a book), but may also involve a collection or pairing of texts. Texts have a tendency to operate in concert, sometimes even in addition to other forms of memorialization. This is seen in the case of scrapbooking, which I have previously observed as both an individual and collective/social mechanism for distribution of information.

I have argued how women use the scrapbooking form to critique culture. The craft has enabled women to express their concerns about contemporary cultural ills, as well as proposed health remedies, precisely because of its narrative possibilities. As previously chronicled, women scrapbookers’ creative application of narrative tropes such as nonlinearity and fragmented stories enables a more flexible approach to cultural criticism. Ott and colleagues playfully call the scrapbook “a rogue and a renegade” due to its ability to take liberties with form and content.<sup>70</sup> The format and subject of narratives are relevant factors in determining which stories are circulated among groups.<sup>71</sup> The gritty topics in contemporary scrapbooks, alongside women’s creative narrative approaches, ensure that this craft become an important subject of cultural memory studies. I have asserted that in addition to the narrative structure of women’s scrapbooking, the content of scrapbooks’ messages is also a significant factor in the perpetuation of memories. In addition, trauma narratives supply important stories that may impact broader culture. The next section surveys the specific effect trauma scrapbooks per se may have on cultural memory.

## VI

Traumatic health stories in scrapbooks contain timely messages about how to confront social expectations. In their art, women offer each other tips and

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<sup>70</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 20.

<sup>71</sup> In addition, as Rigney points out, “literary expressiveness” and “narrative skills” play a role in how memories endure; Rigney, “Portable Monuments,” 380.

reconceptualizations of alternative notions of womanhood and acceptable ways of dealing with health issues, among others. Women also explore the scrapbooking format to reframe traumatic life experiences. Through the art of publicly narrating a difficult story, women reconstitute the traumatized self. Presence of an audience works to empower the scrapbooker, suggesting that there is much benefit to sharing traumatic stories with others. As I showed in the previous chapter, public trauma narration allows the survivor to reintegrate an unthinkable narrative back into one's life.<sup>72</sup> A traumatic incident can wreak havoc on one's life narrative, and thus, one's sense of self. The presence of an audience as witness, alongside the drive to narrate, help reassemble a self splintered through trauma. What is compelling about use of scrapbooking to narrate trauma is the way the craft enables an exchange between witness and survivor. As women's trauma scrapbooks take full advantage of the craft's narrative potential, they also play an important role in cultural memory production.<sup>73</sup> They do this by securing for an audience key memories women seek to preserve in scrapbooks, and then by working through those memories to suggest alternate possibilities for existing reality.

Narrative stories about trauma further cement the art's potential to record cultural memories, rescripting stories to reflect the lived realities of contemporary women.

Through scrapbooking, women reformulate their self-image as activist agents of change instead of passive consumers of a domestic hobby. That is, rather than comfortably

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<sup>72</sup> Dori Laub, "From Speechlessness to Narrative: The Cases of Holocaust Historians and of Psychiatrically Hospitalized Survivors," *Literature and Medicine* 24:2 (2005): 253-265.

<sup>73</sup> Marita Sturken's work on memory and trauma in *Tangled Memories* is helpful in working through the link between trauma, cultural memory, and scrapbooking. Sturken is interested not in memories' truthfulness so much as in how memories are conveyed, what cultural artifacts are used to conjure the past, and how these narratives influence the present. Cultural artifacts and memories are the primary means through which ideologies are conveyed and perpetuated. Viewing memory as "an inventive social practice," Sturken's social constructivist view of memory offers rich possibilities for its role in the creation of cultural ideologies, 259.



consuming scrapbooking, women crafters, as I have shown in this project, work to change cultural notions of selfhood. Passing memories down to future generations enables perpetuation of new knowledges and belief systems.

## VII

Since women are traditionally the family archivists, as such, they are more likely to manage familial memories.<sup>74</sup> Traditionally, scrapbooks were displayed exclusively for private audiences comprised of family members. As a result, women have grown accustomed to their role as arbiters of domestic memory production. The advent of online communities, crop sessions, and other scrapbook-related gatherings has extended this paradigm to a broader population. Women have recognized that they are in a unique position to communicate important messages via such persuasive cultural texts as scrapbooks, and now have public forums (e.g., published books and websites) in which to accomplish their social goals. Ideas may actually be ‘cultivated’ by memory conservation activities like scrapbooking.<sup>75</sup>

Some scholars have argued that what is culturally remembered and what is forgotten are related to gendered structures of power.<sup>76</sup> Scrapbooking may transform cultural memory production in that the craft supplies an avenue through which women can at times surreptitiously buck social mores. Today’s scrappers are increasingly creating projects about themselves as a way not just to pass their memories down to future generations, but also as a way to grapple with life’s challenges and to speak back

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, “Photographs as Objects of Memory,” in Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsle, ed., *Material Memories: Design and Evocation* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999), 221-236.

<sup>75</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplincka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-133; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>76</sup> Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism.”

to culture. Audiences of women avidly consume the large number of scrapbook pages shared in idea books and online. The public consumption of scrapbooking suggests the craft's potential cultural value, experienced through its ability to subtly convey social messages.

This chapter has urged for a recognition of scrapbooking's role in knowledge production and its relationship to cultural memory. Although it may be easy to view public pages solely as discrete units composed by individual women, there is significant value, as I have shown, in studying how these individual pieces of art come together collectively, particularly in the way they gather sharp insights about contemporary culture. By viewing these individual stories as part of a collective, I hold that one can better understand women's views about culture. Discrete life narratives build upon each other such that among them lies a collective, nuanced view of women's experiences in contemporary culture. Through group memories carved of individual stories, scrapbooking allows an opening to construct an alternative history reflecting women's complex feelings about domestic expectations, health, and self-identity. I further the concept of speaking out about trauma in the next chapter, as I draw a connection between broader cultural influences and the role of scrapbooking in breast cancer narration. I enumerate how this prominent contemporary concern and popular topic of crafters has shaped women's trauma narratives, particularly scrapbooks. I show in turn how women's life stories have altered popular cultural notions of breast cancer and women's health, further illustrating the important role of the craft in narrating women's contemporary cultural critiques and health concerns.

## Chapter 5: Courage, Hope, and Selfhood: Scrapbooking and Breast Cancer Culture

Here's a project I'd like to see... a website for women [who] don't want teddy bears and ribbons, who want ACTION! We don't need more 'awareness' of breast cancer — we're VERY aware, thank you very much. What we need is a truly sisterly response to this ghastly disease — one that is both loving and militant, courageous and caring.<sup>1</sup>

The epigraph to this chapter features a quote from Barbara Ehrenreich, who has publicly blasted breast cancer culture for its “general chorus of sentimentality and good cheer.”<sup>2</sup> The activist’s primary concern is that the corporate support and vast popularity of the charitable ends of breast cancer gloss over the search for actual causes of the disease. In addition, Ehrenreich holds that the optimism of the movement chokes back the less-than-positive voices of women experiencing breast cancer. In the wake of super-saturated, upbeat survivor rhetoric, there is little space for women to talk about the more challenging aspects of the disease. With this tension between maintaining optimism and articulating negative feelings in mind, this chapter addresses the visible role of scrapbooking in breast cancer culture.

So far in this project, I have explored how women use the scrapbooking medium to narrate trauma, a challenging topic by all accounts. I explained how scrapbookers self-preserve their memories and sense of self using the craft. The craft, as I have shown, produces distinct knowledges around coping strategies for traumatic experiences and cultural expectations regarding selfhood and health. In addition, I illustrated how scrapbooking serves as a way to refashion women as active producers of knowledge and cultural memories.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, Breast Cancer Action Talk, 2002, <http://www.annieappleseedproject.org/barehar.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, “Welcome to Cancerland: A Mammogram Leads to a Cult of Pink Kitsch,” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 2001: 43-53.

This chapter continues my project's core themes by offering a case study closely reading select scrapbook pages on breast cancer. Through art, women contest social expectations regarding women's health and ill bodies — particularly those plagued by cancer — as well as use the medium to educate each other about breast cancer. I focus specifically on contemporary breast cancer culture, which has created a distinct set of visual markers and tropes relating to women's health and selfhood. Thus, I use the chapter to exemplify how scrapbooking can flex to accommodate the unique challenges of narrating traumas induced by breast cancer. Techniques women employ to recuperate selfhood are also studied. I also show how breast cancer supplies an important case study in my project on scrapbooking health narratives, as breast cancer culture overlaps with the evolving place of scrapbooking in women's health trauma narration.

Before conducting a close, or “thick” reading, of specific breast cancer scrapbooks, I begin the chapter with a brief study of the role of visual narratives — specifically, photography — in breast cancer storytelling. This will help establish the importance of visual elements, so prominent in scrapbooks. In addition, the particular photography described below has served an important role in the increased visibility of breast cancer in American culture. By closely attending to cultural trends relating to visual media, I hope to better illuminate the link I propose exists between scrapbooking and breast cancer culture. A brief history of the breast cancer movement will help establish historical themes relevant to breast cancer scrapbooks. Lastly, I turn to the scrapbooks themselves, closely reading select pages in an effort to understand how some women frame their traumatic brushes with the disease. My readings attempt to illustrate ways women buck cultural expectations regarding women's diseased bodies, but I also

aim to show the influence of broader breast cancer culture on women's scrap narratives.

## I

Visual imagery plays an important role in how trauma is perceived. Photography in particular provides an outlet for coping with traumatic events. My readers are well aware of the haunting photographic depictions of the 9/11 disaster and can likely think of other equally compelling images that evoke intense emotion.<sup>3</sup> It is not surprising that self-portrait photography has become a popular avenue for depicting life disturbances such as breast cancer. In addition to its ability to visually capture the challenges of cancer, self-portrait photography also serves as an effective tool for raising cancer awareness<sup>4</sup>. This medium of expression is important to consider, as it plays a key role in health narratives such as those in the scrapbooks I study.

Two prominent, widely circulated photos that have had an important influence over public perceptions of women's bodies and cancer are worth mentioning. In a well-known post-mastectomy photo entitled "The Warrior," Deena Metzger displays her chest with her arms outstretched (Figure 5.1). A tattoo of a branch covers her mastectomy scar. This photo has been widely circulated, and is still available as a poster and postcard on Metzger's website.

The photo provides a positive depiction of a woman's pride in her body despite the dramatic physical effects of cancer treatment. The current printing company, which has been issuing reprint requests for the past 10 years, has sold 1,250 copies.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ann E. Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Awareness refers to public education campaigns designed to improve access to resources, and to prevent and treat the disease.

<sup>5</sup> Clay Colt, personal communication, Jan 8, 2009.



**Figure 5.1** Deena Metzger's "The Warrior."

Another recognizable breast cancer image is the photo made famous in *The New York Times Magazine* in 1993. The self-portrait of the artist and breast cancer survivor Matuschka, entitled, "Beauty out of Damage," glamorizes her post-mastectomy body (Figure 5.2). A white gown lays bare Matuschka's mastectomy scar, while her intact breast is draped by the dress. This photo garnered much attention from the public, ranging from accolades to accusations of porn.<sup>6</sup> The image has received at least 11 awards, including a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize, both as a piece of art and for its humanitarian influence. Tracey A. Rosolowski, in "Woman as Ruin," considers Matuschka's photo the "most recognizable image of breast cancer in existence."<sup>7</sup>

Referring to Matuschka's depiction of her post-mastectomy body as subversive, Rosolowski reads the famous image as an exploration in how the female body might be "aestheticized in an alternate way."<sup>8</sup> Because the image evokes traditional notions of femininity (flowing dress, provocative pose), it is accessible to a wide variety of viewers

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<sup>6</sup> Linda Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Tracey A. Rosolowski, "Woman as Ruin," *American Literary History* 13:3 (2001): 544.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 550.

precisely because it depicts familiar feminine conventions.



**Figure 5.2** Matuschka’s “Beauty out of Damage.”

Matuschka banks on popular depictions of womanhood in order to convey an alternate message: an unconventional representation of the ill female body.<sup>9</sup> The viewer is aware that the subject has cancer and has undergone radical surgery, and yet the woman in the self-portrait photo radiates health. The power of this image is that the feminine ideal is restored yet upended by the visually confusing inclusion and absence of a breast, the universal sign of the female. The viewer is forced to grapple with this alternate vision of female beauty.

Like Matuschka’s powerful image, Metzger’s “Warrior” composition also casts femininity in a new light. Metzger looks upward, away from the lens and insists we see her chest bared in its entirety. In the Warrior, Metzger’s physical stance is more confrontational and overt in its assertion of female strength and freedom. Her

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

mastectomy scar is openly displayed, and her body radiates power and self-acceptance. Both images continue to be reproduced, a testimony to the enduring influence of visual imagery.

These famous images represent the increased visibility of breast cancer in American culture. Roughly starting in the 1990s, the breast cancer cause, which encompasses encouraging women to do self-exams and get mammograms; raising funds to help find a cure; and educating the public about risks, ascended to high social prominence. Up until the 1970s, breast cancer was still considered a private disease. Women's health movements and feminist efforts during this time resulted in increased visibility of breast cancer, casting it as a cultural force. The breast cancer movement and the women's health movement (which intersected each became increasingly political and feminist in the 1970s) both worked at shifting public perception of breast cancer from an individual woman's stigma to a public health concern. Rather than blaming themselves and hiding their bodies from public view, women increasingly displayed their transformed bodies in pride.

In the past couple of decades, the notion of breast cancer as a public women's health issue has only increased. Public figures increasingly go public with their health status as a way to ensure raised social awareness of disease prevention and treatment options. High-profile photos such as those by Metzger and Matuschka live on in depicting the realities of breast cancer. They exemplify today's climate of public illness by showcasing stories about women free from shame about their "damaged" bodies. By exhibiting the corporeal aftermath of breast cancer treatment and surgery, the photos



reflect the dramatic shift in the way breast cancer has been reimagined in U.S. culture.<sup>10</sup>

Images are distinctly powerful in altering public opinion. W.J.T. Mitchell, in *What Do Pictures Want?*, views pictures as telescoping in and out of a moment in time.<sup>11</sup> They appear to have a life of their own, evidenced by the sheer power images have in evoking intense emotion or shifting popular understanding of events or phenomena. This overwhelming response to Matuschka's photo in the *New York Times* — even today — speaks to the ability of images to radically transform public opinion.

I have thus far observed characteristics of visual imagery that speak about or influence breast cancer culture. I now turn to the various ways that culture shapes how women tell cancer stories, particularly those crafted in scrapbooks. It should be clear at this point in my study that scrapbooks may be thought of as a hybrid form of narrative exhibiting characteristics of photography and written narratives. Scrapbooking combines not only photos of the artist (some of which are self-portraits), but also a textual and/or visual narration of the breast cancer experience. I continue the theme that scrapbooking is a flexible medium that supports trauma stories, particularly those contained in cancer scrapbooks. As a grounding for an analysis of contemporary cancer scrapbooks, I explore changing public conceptions both of cancer and of women's ill bodies to show how breast cancer scrapbooks marry the popularity of the scrapbooking hobby with the popularization of the breast cancer cause. In order to see how and why contemporary scrapbooking and breast cancer culture intersect, it will be useful to first examine the

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<sup>10</sup> Lisa Cartwright points out that the breast cancer community was not necessarily unilaterally in support of Matuschka's visual depiction of breast cancer, despite its having won and been nominated for prestigious awards. According to Cartwright, the publication of this photo did not "mark a shift in the public politics of breast cancer" (128). My argument — that a combination of factors, which included Matuschka's photo — shifted consciousness, is slightly different; Lisa Cartwright, "Community and the Public Body in Breast Cancer Media Activism," *Cultural Studies* 12:2 (1998): 117-138.

<sup>11</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

trajectory of the popularization of breast cancer in the U.S. beginning in the 1970s when the cause began to gather strength.

## II

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, breast cancer remains a highly visible cultural phenomenon in the U.S., although it is not necessarily the biggest threat to women's health. References to the "breast cancer epidemic" belie the fact that it is behind skin cancer, cardiovascular disease, and lung cancer in terms of diagnosed cases.<sup>12</sup> After lung cancer, it is the second cause of cancer deaths in women.<sup>13</sup> Increased public awareness of the disease has resulted not only in greater visibility of breast cancer but also in more diagnosed cases. In the 1980s, breast cancer incidence rose significantly, which has been attributed to higher frequency of early detection methods, such as self-breast exams and mammograms.<sup>14</sup> To date, breast cancer incidence rates have, particularly in Western countries, increased,<sup>15</sup> although the reasons for this are varied. It is widely believed that the rise in diagnoses is related to more mammographies; the fact that most cases are detected early is seen as further evidence that breast cancer rates have risen in proportion to increased screenings.<sup>16</sup> Some researchers are pleading for the factoring of other reasoning (e.g., environmental) into rise in breast cancer rates, particularly since its origins are still not

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<sup>12</sup> Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) Program, [www.seer.cancer.gov](http://www.seer.cancer.gov).

<sup>13</sup> L.A.G. Ries et al, *SEER Cancer Statistics Review, 1975-2003* (Bethesda, MD: National Cancer Institute, 2006); American Cancer Society (ACS), "How Many Women Get Breast Cancer?", [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI\\_2\\_2\\_1X\\_How\\_many\\_people\\_get\\_breast\\_cancer\\_5.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_2_1X_How_many_people_get_breast_cancer_5.asp).

<sup>14</sup> Ries, *SEER*.

<sup>15</sup> ACS.

<sup>16</sup> M.L. Brown et al, "Is the Supply of Mammography Machines Outstripping Need and Demand? An Economic Analysis," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 113:7 (1990): 547-552; Paula M. Lantz and Karen M. Booth, "The Social Construction of the Breast Cancer Epidemic," *Social Science and Medicine* 46:7 (1998): 907-918; E. White et al, "Evaluation of the Increase in Breast Cancer Incidence in Relation to Mammography Use," *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 82 (1990): 1546-1552.

completely understood<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of the factors responsible for increased reports of the disease, it remains a prominent public concern. The proliferation of personal breast cancer testimonials in the form of life narratives<sup>18</sup> and, as observed, photography, has contributed to visibility of the cause. In addition, since the 1970s, public figures have steadily “come out” with breast cancer, openly discussing their treatment courses and recovery stages. In the nearly 1970s, Shirley Temple Black, Betty Ford, and Happy Rockefeller were the first celebrities to publicly address their disease. Their vocal treatises of breast cancer are believed to have reflected a notable change in public attitudes and are thought to have increased the frequency of screening strategies such as self-breast exams and mammograms.<sup>19</sup>

Even today, celebrities (e.g., Christina Applegate, Suzanne Somers) continue to reveal personal trials with breast cancer, hoping to educate others. This steady-state of public recognition, in addition to public access to information, ensure breast cancer’s visibility. Major news programs have, particularly in the past couple of decades, routinely aired segments on breast cancer, and countless mainstream news articles, tackling every possible angle of breast cancer, have been published. The establishment of Breast Cancer

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<sup>17</sup> Ehrenreich, “Welcome to Cancerland.”

<sup>18</sup> Women’s narratives about the trauma associated with breast cancer have proliferated in the past decade, particularly in memoir form. Personal testimonials continually shape the cultural experience of breast cancer in the United States. Rose Kushner’s *Breast Cancer: A Personal History and Investigative Report* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), published in 1975, is regarded as the manifesto that introduced breast cancer as a social concern rather than solely as an individual problem. The list of breast cancer memoirs published in just the past couple of years is lengthy and includes such catchy titles as: *Cancer Is a Bitch: (Or, I’d Rather Be Having a Midlife Crisis)* by Gail Konop Baker (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008) and Meredith Norton’s *Lopsided: How Having Breast Cancer Can Be Really Distracting* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2008). Creative breast cancer narratives have also been published, including graphic novel-style memoirs, such as *Cancer Vixen: A True Story* (New York: Knopf, 2006) and comic-style memoirs, such as *Cancer Made Me a Shallower Person: A Memoir in Comics* (New York: Harper Collins 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Barron H. Lerner, *The Breast Cancer Wars: Hope, Fear, and the Pursuit of a Cure in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Awareness Month in 1985 further raised the visibility of the disease.<sup>20</sup>

Media attention hit its stride in the 1990s when breast cancer as a distinct “cause” began to take shape. I use the term “popularization” to denote how the widespread recognition of breast cancer — usually in the form of pink ribbons and products with pink logos signifying that proceeds will be donated to breast cancer charities (i.e., cause-related marketing) — has etched the disease as a worthy cause into the public consciousness.<sup>21</sup> As Samantha King observes in *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*, breast cancer, now chic, sells products.<sup>22</sup> Breast cancer culture is largely commercial today, and is symbolized by pink ribbons, which have become the cause’s most cherished commodity. In the month of October, an increasing number of businesses, which place pink ribbons on their products, partner with breast cancer foundations to raise funds (and arguably to sell their products). Campbell’s soup company, Ford Motor Company, and General Mills are just a few of the diverse corporations who heavily advertise their pink ribboned-covered products as participating in raising funds for breast cancer foundations.<sup>23</sup> Raising money has become the central focus of the contemporary breast cancer movement. As Emily Kolker observes, funding activism has singularly driven the cause.<sup>24</sup> These efforts, which began in earnest in the 1990s when the federal government became involved in breast cancer funding, have

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<sup>20</sup> National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, [http://nbcam.org/about\\_board\\_of\\_sponsors.cfm?id=7](http://nbcam.org/about_board_of_sponsors.cfm?id=7)

<sup>21</sup> Samantha King, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>23</sup> There has been some backlash against the commercialization of breast cancer. The activist group Breast Cancer Action (BCA) launched the “Think Before You Pink” campaign in 2002 to encourage consumers to question charity purchases. BCA called on consumers to verify the charity to which the company was donating, what proceeds were specifically designated, whether there was a cap on total donations, and the total cost of promoting the pink products; King, *Pink Ribbons*.

<sup>24</sup> Emily S. Kolker, “Framing as a Cultural Resource in Health Social Movements: Funding Activism and the Breast Cancer Movement in the US 1990–1993,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 26:6 (2004): 820-844.

largely been successful due to work on the part of early framers of the breast cancer movement.<sup>25</sup>

High visibility of breast cancer has also resulted in a specific gendered target for the typical consumer-patient. Individuals with cancer are frequently depicted as young, white, middle-class women (despite statistics citing that postmenopausal women are the largest group diagnosed).<sup>26</sup> Activists became aware of the advantages of emphasizing gender equity in seeking (and ultimately, securing) federal funding for breast cancer research. This was successful as activists effectively pointed out how federal funding and research shamefully neglected the disease because it was a woman's health issue.<sup>27</sup> Playing the gender card proved a successful strategy in the 1990s, as gender was a media topic that was sure to receive airtime.<sup>28</sup>

Another outcome of public attention on breast cancer is that it has forged a powerful cultural perspective with respect to the disease. The shift from viewing cancer as a defect located in an individual to its depiction as a cultural plague reflects a fundamental change in consciousness that continues to shape the movement, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> By casting breast cancer as a condition touching the majority of Americans, activists seek to raise the stakes of the disease toward collective action. Part of the impetus for this social model is an objection to the tendency, particularly on the

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<sup>25</sup> Jean Maza, "Nancy Brinker: The Making of the Breast Cancer Movement Based on a Simple Promise between Two Sisters," *CancerFutures* 1 (2002), [http://www.cancerworld.org/CancerWorldAdmin/images/static\\_modules/images/1427/CF\\_7\\_8\\_Vol1\\_301.pdf](http://www.cancerworld.org/CancerWorldAdmin/images/static_modules/images/1427/CF_7_8_Vol1_301.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Julia Mason, "Resisting Pink Promotions: Deconstructing Mainstream Breast Cancer Advertising," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Women's Studies Association, Millennium Hotel, Cincinnati, OH, June 18, 2008), [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p233062\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p233062_index.html).

<sup>27</sup> Kolker, "Framing."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer R. Myhre, "The Breast Cancer Movement: Seeing Beyond Consumer Activism," *Journal of the American Women's Medical Association* 54:1 (1999): 29-31.

part of medicine, to strip from breast cancer its political and economic contexts.<sup>30</sup> The social approach is akin to that adopted by disability rights activists, who view disability as not solely a physical condition affecting an individual, but also as a societal problem affecting all aspects of an individual's life.<sup>31</sup> Citing disability as a socially constructed category, disability rights proponents urge society to take responsibility for its discriminatory ideals of health.<sup>32</sup> The contemporary breast cancer movement relies on both gender and the social model to justify the need to raise funds for treatment and research for those at risk for and diagnosed with breast cancer, especially minority populations.

The media (e.g., print news and television) play a crucial role in increased breast cancer awareness and are in part responsible for the surge in fund-raising campaigns. There is tremendous incentive in having the media on the side of breast cancer's rise as a social dilemma. As Phil Brown notes, the media are massively influential in swaying a wide variety of viewpoints.<sup>33</sup> Key players such as politicians, business people, community organizers, and others commonly respond to societal problems articulated by media outlets.<sup>34</sup> The average citizen, too, may heed the call of the media, which tends to accompany its findings with an urgent need for public action. In the case of breast cancer, this can have positive outcomes as more people become aware of treatment options or ways to be more involved in the breast cancer cause.

I have traced a brief history of the breast cancer movement, focusing on its

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Paul K. Longmore, *Why I Burned my Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Phil Brown et al, "Print Media Coverage of Environmental Causation of Breast Cancer," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 23:6 (2001): 747-775.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 753.

commercial aspects, which reflect what I call the popularization of the breast cancer cause. Next, I further elaborate on breast cancer's popularity, showing how shifts in consciousness relating to breast cancer can transform public perception of illness as well as affect perceptions of women's ill bodies. I later elaborate on how these social views influence the types of narratives used to articulate the illness experience, offering even more evidence for how scrapbooks serve as a site of women's meaning making.

### III

While media attention heavily contributes to fundraising efforts, it also gives these outlets an element of control over the breast cancer message. The media chose to display Matuschka's provocative scar on the cover of a familiar news magazine, which caused a firestorm of public response. With the mass popularity of this image, the media latched onto a cause that had tremendous cache. The phenomenon launched by Matuschka's photo is an example of Malcolm Gladwell's concept of the "tipping point," that moment when a notion catches fire and takes hold of the popular imagination.<sup>35</sup> There have been several tipping points in the breast cancer movement, including those created by the emphasis on personal narratives, and the introduction of public images of women's post-mastectomy bodies. These key moments have resulted in shifts in consciousness and a change of direction for the movement. Other tipping points can result from use of alternative forms of self-expression like scrapbooking. This artform has not traditionally tackled such difficult topics as breast cancer. However, the prominence as well as gendered aspects of the breast cancer movement, combined with the popularity and gendered components of scrapbooking, have resulted in a logical

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<sup>35</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002).

pairing.

Shifts in public consciousness are important to consider when examining how alternative media such as scrapbooks are used to self-express. As sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann claim, humans continually construct and reconstruct their own reality. In any given society, there are multiple realities, and at any given moment, one reality typically surfaces as the so-called “paramount reality.”<sup>36</sup> Within the context of breast cancer and the popular imaginary, the disease is currently viewed as a societal problem that must be tackled en masse. This is breast cancer’s paramount reality. Today’s dominant belief systems regarding breast cancer are, just as Berger and Luckmann theorize, taken for granted as a constructed reality — which is of course how and why they are so seamlessly perpetuated. Political personal narratives, celebrities’ coming out, and radical breast cancer imagery all constitute fissures that disrupted the so-called “symbolic universe,” the standard way of conceptualizing reality.

Use of scrapbooking to express trauma is another refashioning of familiar forms of self-narrative. Proliferation of breast cancer scrapbooks announce that additional means of self-expression have arrived. However, just as these health narratives comprise new formulations of an old pastime, they are also bound up in the ideologies of the culture in which they were created, even as they at times attempt to stray from expected rhetoric.

Before I turn to the distinct ways scrapbooking engages with breast cancer rhetoric, I first examine the gendered components inherent in illnesses such as breast cancer, a disease that can radically transform women’s bodies. With this in mind, I

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1967), 21.



address rhetoric linking femininity, cancer, and women's bodies. I contend that breast cancer remains a compelling social issue because of its traumatic effects on women's bodies, as well as due to social perceptions of the effects of illness. The effect of the disease — and society's response to it — on women's self-identity and health will be evident in my subsequent analysis of breast cancer scrapbooks, which reflect an alternative format with which to narrate the breast cancer experience.

I propose several reasons why breast cancer persists as a prominent societal issue. One is related to cancer as a still-terrifying disease. Despite greater public understanding and local, state, and federal involvement in the cause, the “Big C” uttered can still conjure terrifying images of suffering and a doomed sense of finality. Although today there is less stigma associated with a cancer diagnosis, it is still a fearsome disease, as testified by the regular and melodramatic media attention it receives. Current news reports enumerate a wide array of breast cancer risk factors (e.g., small birth size, family history, excessive weight, and smoking) and preventative measures (e.g., vigorous exercise, mammograms) that women should take.<sup>37</sup> Although cancer appears widely to be treated as a social dilemma, rhetoric around the disease as located in an individual woman's body persists. Further, the emphasis on prevention and urgent steps women should take highlight the presumed role of individual responsibility in halting the spread of breast cancer.

Breast cancer's highly public nature and intimate association with women casts it as a disease against which we must all be vigilant, since it affects people in a kind of ripple effect: one woman's disease affects/infects many. Susan Sontag observes how cancer has long served as a particularly persuasive contemporary allegory. In *Illness as*

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<sup>37</sup> Medline Plus, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/newsbydate.html>.

*Metaphor*, Sontag describes cancer as a “master illness” whose role is to help transform individual health as well as to “express a sense of dissatisfaction with society.”<sup>38</sup> A pervasive disease like cancer, with its sweeping attendant metaphors, signals a fundamental fissure between individual and society.<sup>39</sup> This feud plays out in the conflict over causes of cancer, which alternate between individual and social, resulting in a peculiar dilemma. Confusion resulting from conflict over the true “source” of cancer has fundamentally affected how the disease is perceived. Indeed, a tremendous sense of urgency, accompanied by the impulse to action, persists with respect to breast cancer in American culture. Citizens are bombarded with action-oriented messages to join the “race” for the cure, to “make strides” against cancer, and even to “shop” for a cancer cure.

Cancer is, as a contemporary monster, “an embodiment of a certain cultural moment.”<sup>40</sup> Society seeks to understand its causes, and strives continually to prevent its (re)occurrence, yet it resists definition. Early efforts to hide cancer served only to reinforce it as a private experience, which resulted in deepening the mystery of the illness.<sup>41</sup> Although today cancer is a visible social issue, it nonetheless persists as a symbol for a monstrous growth that spreads, infecting individuals and culture as a whole.<sup>42</sup> The exact etiology of breast cancer is still a mystery<sup>43</sup>; as a result of its lack of definitive origins, cancer falls into that amorphous zone of the monstrous, as that which cannot be pinned down and whose source is impossible to locate. In *Monster Theory*,

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<sup>38</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 72.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey Cohen, *Monster Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Sontag, *Illness*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; Jackie Stacey, *Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer* (Routledge, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> M.P. Madigan et al, “Proportion of Breast Cancer Cases in the United States Explained by Well-Established Risk Factors,” *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 87:22 (1995): 1681-1685.

Jeffrey Cohen notes that *monstrum* is Latin for “that which warns” or “that which reveals,” suggesting that a society’s monsters unveil what plagues the public imaginary at a particular moment in time.<sup>44</sup> Today’s monster may be viewed as breast cancer itself.

If cancer is society’s monster, the female body is the parasitic host. The emphasis on individual choice has cast women as singularly responsible for their own health, and thus for the perpetuation of the disease (particularly in those cases where it is inherited). In a study of breast cancer representations in popular magazines, Paula M. Lantz discovered that the stories tended to focus on individual causes of breast cancer.<sup>45</sup> In particular, she found that articles often targeted nontraditional, young women’s behaviors, such as use of oral contraceptives and the decision to have a child later in life, and the relationship of these choices to breast cancer incidence. Media explanations linked to individual choice have resulted in “pathological repercussions” for women’s bodies.<sup>46</sup> The social construction of breast cancer via popular media articles consists, as Lantz observes, of “tools of social control [that] may legitimize policies that serve to subjugate women.”<sup>47</sup> The very behaviors enabling women to “have it all” that the media celebrates have resulted in a backlash against women’s individual choices, which are to be feared, as they have placed women and by extension, the rest of society, at risk for breast cancer’s monstrous contamination.<sup>48</sup> The widespread fear of cancer — despite public education around prevention and treatment — remains one of the reasons breast cancer has captured the public imagination.

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<sup>44</sup> Cohen, *Monster*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Paula M. Lantz and Karen M. Booth, “The Social Construction of the Breast Cancer Epidemic,” *Social Science and Medicine* 46:7 (1998): 907-918.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 907.

<sup>47</sup> Lantz, “Social Construction,” 917.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

The second reason breast cancer subsists as a sexy subject is that it is a highly gendered, body-altering disease. The inevitable link between breast cancer and women's ill bodies marks breast cancer as a provocative cultural concern. Women's modern choices (e.g., delayed childbirth, abortion), represented in and through their bodies, reflects a distinct cultural moment characterized by contemporary anxieties around women's reproductive freedom. The correlation of monstrosity with women's bodies, and by association femininity, is not new. Theorists have analyzed notions of women's bodies as unruly. In *Embodying the Monster*, Margrit Shildrick contends that Western culture views "the female body [as] monstrous, the necessary locus of worship and disgust whose corporeality threatens to overflow boundaries and engulf those things which should remain separate."<sup>49</sup> The linkage between women's reproductive choices and breast cancer adds an additional complicating factor to the monstrous female. J.M. Usher, in *Managing the Monstrous Feminine*, reminds us of the ways, over time, that the feminine has been deemed monstrous.<sup>50</sup> This association with monstrous can be traced back to Freud, whose influence on Western culture, particularly human sexuality, is immense. Ideas perpetuated by Freudian logic — including that women's genitals are actually in men's castrated form — have contributed to modern anxieties around women's leaky, messy bodies.<sup>51</sup> As Hélène Cixous declares, "Who...hasn't accused herself of being a monster?"<sup>52</sup>

In fact, it is not unusual for breast cancer survivors, particularly those undergoing

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<sup>49</sup> Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 75.

<sup>50</sup> J.M. Usher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

<sup>52</sup> Hélène Cixous, trans. "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1:4 (1976): 875-893, 876.

mastectomies, to view their own transitions as grotesque, and their bodies as monstrous, foreign. A study on women's self-descriptions following breast cancer treatment found that women's sense of self shifts radically post-surgery.<sup>53</sup> Many of the women in the study group echoed feeling not whole, and viewed themselves as ugly following chemotherapy and surgery. Given the negative repercussions of physical difference, much is done to obscure breast cancer's corporeal effects. Wigs are a common tool to cover the "unnatural" bald female head, and prosthetics as well as the more radical breast reconstruction are used to "recover" the physical feminine form. However, some women reject these head-covering techniques.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the nude, unrepentant display of the transformed and beautiful female body is why images like Metzger's "The Warrior" — arguably a monstrous depiction of a woman's "misshapen" body — are so powerful.

Due to its alluring corollary to women's bodies, breast cancer serves as a remarkably powerful source of cultural anxiety. As "that which warns," breast cancer acts as a social warning bell insisting that women be mindful of their role in their own health, since cancer has larger social repercussions.<sup>55</sup> Cancer is, Sontag notes, "morally, if not literally, contagious."<sup>56</sup> If cancer is a disease that women can somehow control, and yet can still be considered an epidemic, it falls under the category of monstrous, as an ambiguous yet insidious force infecting society. The claim that women's choices have not only resulted in a cancer diagnosis, but have potentially launched an epidemic, is a telling charge.<sup>57</sup> The agency attributed to women with breast cancer suggests that the

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<sup>53</sup> L. Rosenblatt, "Being the Monster: Women's Narratives of Body and Self after Treatment for Breast Cancer," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 32 (2006): 53-56.

<sup>54</sup> Jane Schultz, "(Un)body Double: A Rhapsody on Hairless Identity" (paper presented at Cancer Stories: The Impact of Narrative on a Modern Malady conference, Indianapolis, IN, November 6-8, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *Monster*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen, *Monster*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Lantz, "Social Construction."

monster lies in women's unruly, uncooperative bodies. Intimate linkages between breast cancer and women's ill bodies have resulted in a cultural dissonance between feminine beauty ideals and the grim realities of breast cancer. One method for tackling such a disconnect is by rejecting social scripts suggesting that women's choices have somehow led them to breast cancer's door. A powerful mechanism for dispelling myths and making one's voice heard is through first-person narratives. In the remaining part of this chapter, I demonstrate how women use scrapbooking — a versatile storytelling medium — to narrate personal stories and address cultural issues relating to breast cancer. As I have shown, these pages illustrate how scrapbooking and the breast cancer cause are intimately bound together.<sup>58</sup>

#### IV

I argue here that breast cancer culture overlaps with the evolving place of scrapbooking as a method of trauma narration. My analysis of contemporary scrapbooks will illustrate how the artform responds to some of the complex issues relating to breast cancer. In addition, I show how scrapbooks about the disease deliver distinct technical, narrative, and rhetorical strategies, including a public mission to educate and a platform on which to critique culture.

One typical approach used by crafters who narrate breast cancer is sharing lessons learned. Karen's scrapbook page does so in a "top 10" format, a common template in women's scrapbooking (Figure 5.3). Her scrapbook offers tips for how survive breast cancer. Although this is an unconventional subject for the hobby, the page still borrows some of the traditional elements of scrapbooking, such as bright colors, floral

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<sup>58</sup> As Jessica Helfand observes, scrapbooking is an "untamed species" — evoking my earlier discussion of monstrosity — that is difficult to pin down, suggesting it is well positioned to narrate health trauma; Helfand, *Scrapbooks: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 177.

embellishments, and ribbons. The overall feeling of cheerfulness renders the contrast even more striking between the upbeat tone of the page design and the somber subject. Karen’s choice of paper, color, and embellishments as well as smiling self-photograph belie the seriousness of the content, which is cancer survival.

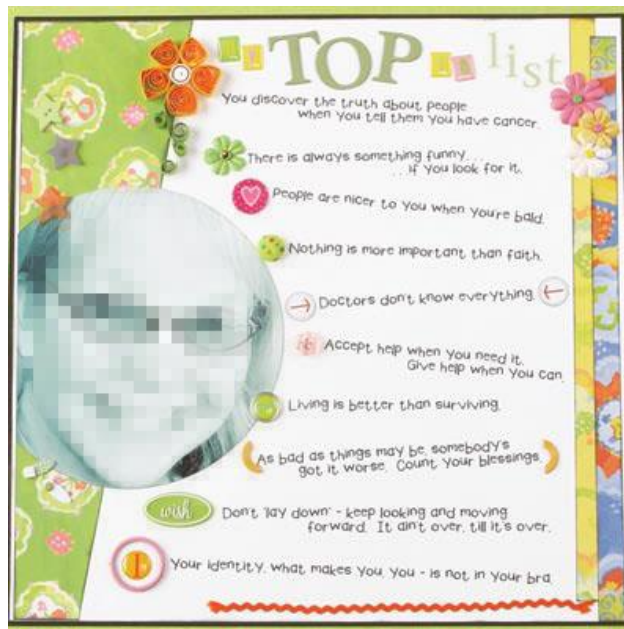


Figure 5.3<sup>59</sup>

I read this juxtaposition as a strategy to tell a traumatic story using the seemingly light-hearted medium of scrapbooking. That is, the page lures the viewer in with its pleasing design and color scheme, but upon further examination, the viewer must reconcile this imagery with the content of the page, which is reflected in such sobering words as “cancer” and “bald.”

The artist emphasizes humor as a way to deal with breast cancer. Included in her top 10 tips are the observations: “There is always something funny...if you look for it” and “people are nicer to you when you’re bald.” The reality of the breast cancer experience, along with the challenges of treatment and recovery, undercuts the good-

<sup>59</sup> Scrapbooker’s identity is intentionally obscured.

natured tone of these comments. Couched in these jaunty phrases lies a more serious message. In a commentary on the medical care system, Karen contends that medical professionals may not have all the answers. The artist hints at the recognition that mainstream medicine claims to possess a knowledge about the patient that the patient herself lacks. It may be easy to accept what Petersen and Benishek call the “intellectual hegemony” of medical staff over one’s own illness experience.<sup>60</sup> The science-based U.S. medical system tends to dominate breast cancer treatment decisions and regimens. Contrary positions on the part of the patient may result in a “noncompliant” label, which some of those trying to survive disease avoid. Preferable is the “good patient” label, which aligns well with popular notions of illness survival. However, while women previously had few options but to submit to paternalistic treatment by the U.S. medical system, the patient rights movement of the 1970s marked a shift in how patients interacted with doctors.<sup>61</sup> The 1972 Patient’s Bill of Rights encouraged consumers to actively participate in their own treatment by asking questions, refusing treatment if desired, and ensuring privacy measures.<sup>62</sup> This active stance on the part of survivors to question medical meta-narratives and to fight the passivity that may be required of long-term patients is captured in Karen’s scrapbook page. One of the advantages of using this medium to buck medical conventions is that the artist can make a political, moral, and/or social statement in a nonconfrontational format.<sup>63</sup>

Scrapbooking supplies an unobtrusive means of self-expression that allows the

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<sup>60</sup> Suni Petersen and Lois Benishek, “Social Construction of Illness: Addressing the Impact of Cancer on Women in Therapy,” *Women & Therapy* 23:1 (2001): 75-100, 85.

<sup>61</sup> King, *Pink Ribbons*.

<sup>62</sup> Robert M Veatch, “The Pharmacist and the Patient’s Rights Movement,” in *Pharmacy Ethics*, ed. Mickey C. Smith, Steven Straus, and H. John Baldwin (Gloucestershire, UK: Hawthorne Press, 1991), 253-256; American Hospital Association, “The Patient’s Bill of Rights,” in *Pharmacy Ethics*, 249-251.

<sup>63</sup> Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (New York: Routledge, 1980).



artist to engage with broader cultural issues. When Karen notes that “your identity — what makes you you — is not in your bra,” she appears to be responding to dominant hegemonic narratives correlating women’s identities with their corporeal form. In critiquing the cultural emphasis associating feminine ideals with women’s selfhood, Karen offers a refashioning of the self. In the same vein as Matuschka’s and Metzger’s photography, this artist insists on an identity outside of what fills her bra. Although scrapbooks have not historically been associated with unconventional messages about selfhood, as I show here, the craft serves as a conducive site for women’s meaning making about health-related traumas in part because it is seemingly a ‘harmless’ pastime. As Karen’s page evidences, everyday women can use scrapbooking as a means to communicate their important social messages, to talk back to culture, and to discover their true feelings about selfhood.

Many of the bullet points Karen uses to narrate her account of breast cancer invite the viewer to read between the lines. There is far more to this story than what is evident on this scrapbook page, which is part of what makes scrapbook cancer narratives so compelling. When this survivor says, “don’t lay down – keep looking and moving forward. It ain’t over, till it’s over,” the rest of her story begs to be told. This singular page stands alone as an important testimony of one woman’s survival of breast cancer, but it does not narrate an individual’s entire life story in the expected format of beginning, middle, and end. Individual scrapbook pages, when studied as texts, admittedly do not tell the “whole” story, but their truncated nature does not diminish their cultural value. As narrative theorist Marilyn Robinson Waldman so aptly puts it, “we cannot assume that a text...tells no story because it does not make its story explicit,

formally organized, and finished (that is, fully narrative); we cannot even assume that explicitness is universally a sign of ‘full’ narrativity.”<sup>64</sup> This project was designed to expand the definition of narrative to include snapshots of stories such as those contained in scrapbook pages. Even though one does not have the women’s life story in linear format, one does have a glimpse into her tale of a life-changing experience.

I have argued how scrapbooking offers a flexible medium for telling the story of life’s tragic moments. As such, it is a narrative form that increasingly fits within the framework potentially necessary for women’s life writing. Feminist scholar Kristi Siegel asserts that women have devised particular techniques in life narratives to play around with notions of subjectivity, particularly since theirs may be tenuous.<sup>65</sup> The scrapbookers examined here are both the producers as well as the subjects of their pages, complicating their subjectivity. Through the medium of scrapbooking, scrappers view themselves from a distance, since they are their own subject. At the same time, by crafting pages about themselves, these artists are able to tell their life story their own creative way, insisting the viewer notice their cultural concerns and personal trials.

Scrapbooking also enables creative narration of women’s lives disrupted by trauma or other major life events. Some scholars characterize women’s personal narratives by their nonlinearity and tendency toward temporal disjuncture.<sup>66</sup> As Siegel notes, women’s writing may be literally interrupted, such as by children or a family member’s need, resulting in disjointed narratives. Women’s self narratives are fragmented and marked by an inconsistency that does not necessarily track a linear,

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<sup>64</sup> Marilyn Robinson Waldman, “The Otherwise Unnoteworthy Year 711: A Reply to Hayden White,” *Critical Inquiry* 7:4 (1981): 784-792, 786.

<sup>65</sup> Kristi Siegel, *Women's Autobiographies, Culture, Feminism* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

coherent flow of life events.<sup>67</sup> Women’s scrapbook pages about their own lives, in their disjointed nonlinearity, fall into this framework. As the pages examined here demonstrate, women have turned to this medium in part for its flexible storytelling capabilities. Scrapbooking challenges conventions of narrative by denying a beginning, middle, and an end. The story is as yet complete, yet the scrapbook pages still offer a recognizable testimonial of a woman’s battle with breast cancer.

As Karen’s page demonstrates, scrappers use the craft to speak back to culture about salient issues relating to women’s health. While some scrappers question cultural expectations regarding women’s bodies, not all scrapbook pages seek to uproot that status quo. In fact, as I will show, some echo the common rhetoric (characterized by such uplifting phrases as “courage,” “love,” and “hope”) of breast cancer culture, demonstrating the pervasiveness of the movement’s language. In “Claire”s<sup>68</sup> scrapbook page showing an image of herself bald from cancer treatment, the most prominent feature is her direct gaze into the camera (Figure 5.4).

Claire’s message is that every moment is a choice, and her journaling tells the story of a woman who has learned to live in the present and not “worry about a future that I can’t control....” Her message is overwhelmingly full of hope and optimism, with an assuredness that life is good. She references her medical team, her family, and her appreciation of the little things, like petting her cat and breathing fresh air. Claiming that “right now, I have everything I need,” this artist emphasizes the positive, and conveys to others what she has learned.

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<sup>67</sup> Estelle Jelinek, *Women’s Autobiography* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980).

<sup>68</sup> A pseudonym has been used at the request of this scrapbooker.

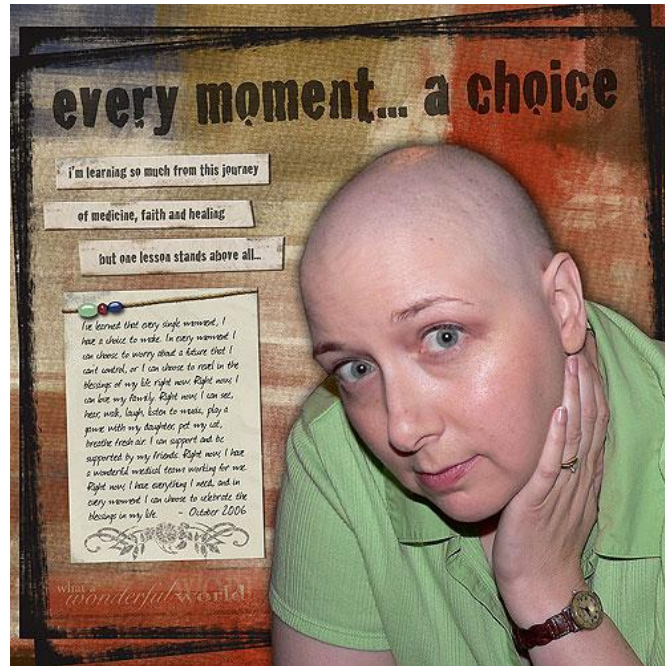


Figure 5.4

There is, surprisingly, no mention of the word cancer, and yet Claire’s photo and the tone of her page communicate what she deems relevant for an audience to know. Several people responded to Claire’s artwork, which is posted on a high-traffic digital scrapbooking website: over 30 comments are recorded, and the page has garnered over 1,030 views. The immense popularity of the hobby ensures that pages like Claire’s posted publicly will be widely viewed. The craft thus becomes a viable conduit through which women can narrate trauma. Another way that scrapbooking is conducive to articulating traumatic life disturbances like cancer is that the “canvas” is finite. That is, the artist must work within the limited frame of the scrapbook page. Thus, women’s choices regarding what to reveal and what to exclude on the page are important sources of information.

Although cancer is not textually represented in Claire’s page, it is visually present. One of the primary visible signs of cancer is baldness, as seen in Claire’s image. Like photographs revealing the mastectomy scar, the bald female has become an insignia

of breast cancer's effects. Baldness speaks for itself, and "brands" the person with the mark of cancer. It is, as scholar and breast cancer survivor Jane Schultz notes, "a freakish commodity."<sup>69</sup> Schultz admits that while experiencing baldness as a result of chemotherapy, she refused to protect others from her sign of difference. She wore her baldness visibly, rather than covering her head with the requisite hats and scarves.<sup>70</sup> Schultz notes, "I asked myself what the comfort of others had to do with my illness, and I had to answer, 'Nothing.'"<sup>71</sup> The naked bald female head necessarily casts a contradictory image of health and sickness. Karen's and Claire's scrapbook pages point to ways images on the page can contradict the message (as in Karen's) and alternatively, ways that the message can contradict the image (as in Claire's). Women's breast cancer scrapbooks challenge notions of health by offering alternative and at times competing depictions of health and sickness.

Dana Hollis Miron has created a breast cancer page that mirrors mainstream breast cancer culture's overarching theme of optimism (Figure 5.5). Calling herself a survivor, Dana uses the trademark terms "courage" and "hope," reflecting her positive feelings about the experience. Fear of death is also mentioned, but is downplayed by the overall cheer of the scrapbook page. Bright colors such as pinks and reds surround three photos of the artist. The photos are layered: the first image is a snapshot of Dana's eyes, gazing directly at the camera. It is not clear from the photo whether the expression in her eyes reflects courage or fear, although paired with the other two images, the overwhelming feeling is positive. The second image is half-covered by the top image, and is a picture of the author bald. She is clearly smiling, despite the fact that half of the

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<sup>69</sup>Schultz, "(Un)body Double, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 7.

grin is obscured. The bottom image shows a candid photo of the artist with a full head of hair looking healthy and happy. The journaling on the page references how her journey resulted in “moments of amazing courage” and “many moments of heartfelt hope.” Dana uses the phrase “self-discovery” to describe the outcome of her breast cancer battle. Like the other scrapbookers mentioned, this artist thus couches her experience in what it has to teach her, what life lessons it provides. She then uses this knowledge to educate others.



Figure 5.5

## V

The above pages, which are fairly representative of available breast cancer scrapbook pages, are dominated by a cheerful tone that Samantha King has wryly termed the “tyranny of cheerfulness.”<sup>72</sup> Today’s breast cancer culture is rife with optimism, a cheerful force that some argue distracts from the reality of the illness. In Barbara

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<sup>72</sup> King, *Pink Ribbons*.

Ehrenreich's field notes from an ethnographic study of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, she chides the breast cancer movement for its supersaturation with over-the-top, difficult-to-maintain optimism. She terms the commercialization of breast cancer "the cult of pink kitsch."<sup>73</sup> But this mentality serves a purpose in the name of commodification. The positivity of the movement lies in how survivors' experiences are unilaterally represented. Aligned with disability rights, some breast cancer activists have refused to be steeped in the language of victimization. Instead, those wrangling with the disease are self-termed "survivors." This widely used term has garnered the ire of some activists, who are concerned that the word survivor actually (and ironically) equates with victimhood and has unsettling corollaries with Holocaust rhetoric.<sup>74</sup> Survivors are also located in the liminal space between health and illness, so they cannot be viewed as completely well, but cannot be seen as entirely sick either. Proposed alternative terms to survivor include "cancer folk."<sup>75</sup>

Objections to the term "survivor" comprise a small yet powerful subset of voices seeking to change the overly optimistic rhetoric of breast cancer culture. Ehrenreich includes herself as a skeptic of "survivor" mentality. She holds that the linguistic turn toward "survivor" cannot possibly articulate women's individualized encounters with the disease. Instead, Ehrenreich urges more emphasis on causes of breast cancer that lie outside of the individual, such as the damaging effects of environmental toxins. The environmental movement has in fact chided dominant breast cancer culture's lack of serious inquiry into the *causes* of breast cancer as well as its refusal to acknowledge the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>74</sup> Emily Bartels, "Outside the Box: Queer Subjectivity and the Discourse of Survival" (paper presented at Cancer Stories: The Impact of Narrative on a Modern Malady conference, Indianapolis, IN, November 6-8, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

role of race and class in how the disease (which is usually depicted as a young, middle-class white woman's disease) is experienced.<sup>76</sup> Activists fear that as a result of the preoccupation with prevention and treatment, the overall movement will ignore other factors and groups thought to contribute to breast cancer, including the food and tobacco industries, corporate giants' role in pollution, and the military-industrial complex. Ehrenreich calls this dominant ideology the "Cancer Industrial Complex" and calls for rigorous inquiry to peel back the pink cheerfulness of the movement.<sup>77</sup>

Of course, there are a variety of ways of representing the breast cancer experience. Randy S. Milden urges for a more nuanced depiction of the emotions surrounding breast cancer.<sup>78</sup> As both participant and observer of the Race for the Cure, Milden notes that women's feelings of diagnosis, treatment, and recovery run the gamut. She reminds us that "you can have more than one set of feelings."<sup>79</sup> Directly referencing Ehrenreich's outrage over the breast cancer movement's overly positive slant, Milden makes the point that it is "oppressive in a different way to deny women the full range of their inner lives."<sup>80</sup> She makes a valid point, although it is also possible she is missing the bigger picture, which is what Ehrenreich attempts to capture (at the risk of dipping too deeply into skepticism) — that people may be deeply influenced by cultural rhetoric, especially in an age of self-help, survivor-oriented oratory. As the breast cancer movement stays focused on the positives, it leaves less room for equally valid negative representations of a challenging health experience.

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<sup>76</sup> Myhre, "The Breast Cancer."

<sup>77</sup> Ehrenreich, "Welcome to Cancerland," 52.

<sup>78</sup> Randy S. Milden, "Pink Ribbons and Bad Girls of Breast Cancer," *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 10:1 (2005): 98-104.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*



Thus far, I have explored scrapbook pages that conform, for the most part, to the rhetoric of the breast cancer movement's cheerful tones. I have also examined pages that buck social expectations and offer critiques of social mores regarding feminine ideals and medical professionals' self-professed omniscience. If one looks closely, in all of the pages, one can observe traces of other pages (perhaps in use of traditional elements, such as flowers, or templates, such as the top 10 list). One way of studying echoes seen in the craft is through examining the potential intertextuality of scrapbooking, which scrapbooking scholar Jessica Helfand refers to as the palimpsest-like qualities of scrapbooking.<sup>81</sup>

Like a palimpsest, breast cancer scrapbook pages are direct products of breast cancer culture. Scrapbookers draw not only from each other but also from the culture in which they are created, as I have shown. I borrow my ideas from Patricia Buckler, who observes scrapbooking as intertextual, and from Clifford Geertz, who views cultural practices *as* texts in and of themselves.<sup>82</sup> The king of "thick description" famously observed, "the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles..."<sup>83</sup> In addition to borrowing from each other, breast cancer scrapbooks are intertextual in their proximity to the breast cancer movement, as well as to U.S. cultural values surrounding women's illness. I have illustrated how scrapbooking contains traces of breast cancer movement key ideologies, such as cheerfulness, bravery, courage, love, and hope. These comforting terms are deeply embedded into contemporary breast cancer rhetoric. Some of the scrapbookers studied here conform to the movement's expectations by reproducing

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<sup>81</sup> Helfand, *Scrapbooks*.

<sup>82</sup> Patricia P. Buckler, "Letters, Scrapbooks, and History Books: A Personalized Version of the Mexican War, 1846-1848, in Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 60-78; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

<sup>83</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation*, 452.

survivor mentality. Given that the movement is fund-driven, maintaining a brave, cheerful facade on the disease keeps money flowing and avoids the messy complexity that is cancer. The breast cancer scrapbooks studied share the common drive to use the craft to speak directly to other women about breast cancer. In addition to giving testimony, scrapbooks also echo the impulse to instruct through experience. Crafters link their lives to others, using scrapbooks to dispense advice and educate each other. Embedded in these scrapbook micro life narratives is the desire to foster awareness among women at risk. The concept of intertextuality is discussed in more detail in the last chapter.

The notion of awareness is deeply entrenched in contemporary breast cancer culture, as represented by the self-breast exam and mammogram. The prevention campaign has dominated the overall movement, so it makes sense that scrapbooking would echo some of these ideals. The following scrapbook page, featuring images of Maria, a 41-year old Puerto Rican woman receiving her first mammogram, is an example of how women are using the craft in meaningful ways to foster awareness (Figure 5.6). Guzman explains the comfort that planning on narrating her experience through scrapbooking offered: “I had made an appointment for my first mammogram ever and I was a little nervous. So, I decided to bring my camera with me and asked if I could take pictures for my scrap page.”<sup>84</sup>

This is a compelling page, as it is an atypical subject for scrapbooking, particularly due to its inclusion of medical imagery. The scrapbook page shows three photos. One image is of the mammogram machine, and the other two photos depict the scrapbooker receiving a mammogram.

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<sup>84</sup> Maria Guzman, personal communication, Feb 2, 2009.



**Figure 5.6**

The viewer gains insight into a very private experience typically witnessed only by patient and medical technician. Since the page was posted on a public scrapbooking website, this private procedure is transformed into a public campaign for awareness. Guzman noted that she “wanted to document this day and share it with other women that may be facing the same thing.”<sup>85</sup> The page — with its message of awareness — hits home in a way words alone could not, pointing once again to the value of scrapbooking in effectively telling breast cancer stories. One of the reasons behind Guzman’s creation of the page was because she believed that “women need to take better care of themselves and have themselves checked out regularly.”<sup>86</sup> Several of the visitors to the scrapbook page have offered comments, often referring to how the page was “tastefully done.” Instead of being turned off from the challenging content, viewers are moved by the honest corollary between scrapbook’s ability to capture memories and the sobering reality of a mammogram.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

The title of Maria's page, "Awareness is Key," evokes a concept that has become a catch-all term for the movement. The familiar word "awareness" resurrects the notion of individual responsibility, as the implication is that awareness is a preventative practice in and of itself. The dominance of awareness rhetoric sends a contradictory message. This word is strangely incongruous because of the emphasis on the social model, which looks outward at the effects of cancer, seeking external causes. The collective effort on the part of charities and the federal government to supply financial and medical support would seem to remove some individual responsibility for such vigilant awareness. Yet, awareness rhetoric saturates the movement, resulting in a contradictory view of the role of individual responsibility in breast cancer.

Although scrapbookers' overall message in breast cancer scrapbooking is typically upbeat, they are increasingly depicting the more challenging aspects of the breast cancer experience. Maria's photos of receiving a mammogram reflect the move in contemporary scrapbooking to portray life more realistically. The life exhibited, like that reflect in all the pages studied, is richly intertwined with the culture of scrapbooking as well as the broader culture in which the pages were crafted. This intertextual quality of scrapbooking casts it as an even richer form of life narrative.

The next artist I turn to, Santie, incorporates medical imagery into her pages much like Maria does (Figures 5.7 and 5.8). By intersecting art and medicine, scrapbookers are illustrating ways that the intertextual craft can educate. Santie's series of scrapbook pages offer an even sharper picture of the role of scrapbooking in breast cancer narration, exhibiting ways that women have fashioned the craft into a form of consciousness

raising. Santie, a 47-year old white South African woman<sup>87</sup>, routinely uploads scrapbooked images of herself undergoing chemotherapy on a high-traffic public website. Santie has created pages for each of her chemotherapy visits, with annotations such as that included on her second chemotherapy page, noting that the photos were taken by her sister, and by this second treatment, Santie had lost all her hair. The scrapbooker has also designed a two-page spread narrating her hair loss. In this page (see Figure 5.7), which includes 10 images of Santie in various stages of hair loss, the viewer cannot help but notice that she is smiling in every photo.



**Figure 5.7**

Santie indicated in an interview that it was “kind of difficult to do the cancer layouts, but after a while it became better and I wanted to do it, [e]very bit of to share it with others who are experiencing difficulties with the idea of cancer.”<sup>88</sup> The artist comments at length on her own positive outlook and desire to share her experience:

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<sup>87</sup> This is the only page studied created by a non-US citizen. Future studies might offer a cross-cultural perspective of scrapbooks from various regions.

<sup>88</sup> Santie Bronkhorst, personal communication, Jan 13, 2009.

I just thought to share it with other people so that they can see there is good in the not so good experiences. I hope that my positivism comes out through my scrap layouts. Some people think that being diagnosed with (in my case) breast cancer means you just got the death sentence. It is not a good experience, but it is good to share with other[s] that I overc[a]me the trauma I experienced when all my hair fell out. The nausea after the chemo was terrible, I felt bad for days after, but a week later I was back at work and carried on as normal as possible...<sup>89</sup>

These pages not only document the scrapbooker's journey through breast cancer treatment, but serve as a call to increased awareness about the disease and ways to cope with cancer. Santie's journaling in Figure 5.8 cites South African cancer statistics with the overall message that knowledge is a weapon against all forms of cancer. Through compelling, intimate images of breast cancer treatment, this scrapbooker uses her life and art to show others that people form the foundation of the statistics she cites.

Santie's work reflects the role scrapbooking performs in trauma narration. The craft is an outlet for an individual to tell her own story in a format that enables her to incorporate elements specific to her experience. The communal aspects of the craft also offer scrappers an opportunity to share their story and educate the public. Their work may also be viewed as a model for ways to express a challenging life experience. As Santie explains, "It is so inspiring for me to...make people aware that something like

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

scrapbooking is really very therapeutic.”<sup>90</sup>

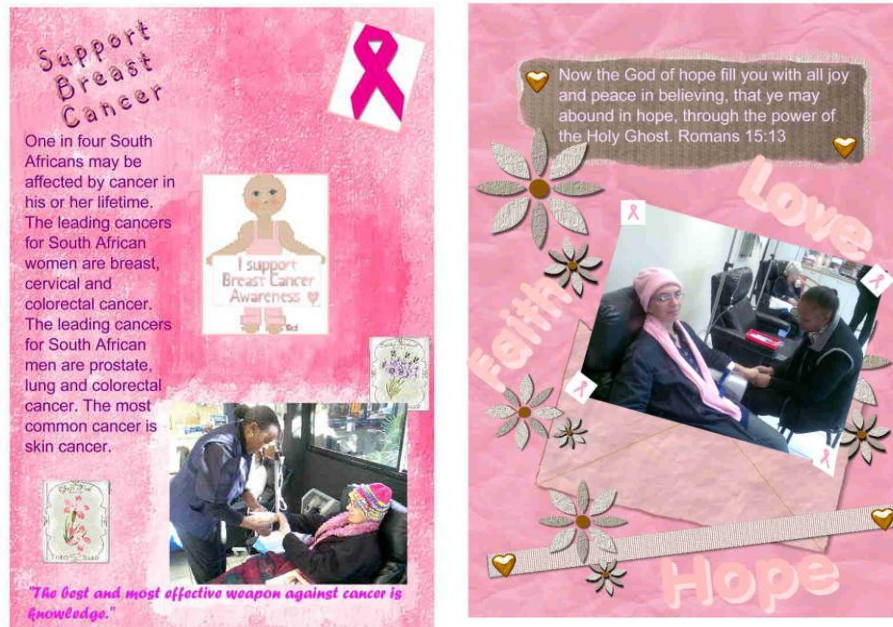


Figure 5.8

## VI

While once a largely private activity, shared only with close friends or family members, today scrapbooking is a much more public endeavor. Considerable audiences are able to access women’s scrapbooking projects, and thus, can view scrapbooker’s important messages. Claire’s page, for example, is available on a high-traffic digital scrapbooking website. The page has garnered over 1,000 views, and over 40 people have offered observations about her work. Several of the comments are centered on the actual composition, suggesting that fellow scrapbookers are paying attention to the structure of the craft. Users commented on the composition, referring to “the boldness and depth of the design.”<sup>91</sup> Notes left by visitors frequently indicate that Claire’s page offers an

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Kimscraping, comment on “About Me,” comment posted October 5, 2006, <http://www.digitalscrapbookplace.com/gallery/showphoto.php?photo=136190&cat=500&ppuser=39013>.

important life lesson, with one person noting, “I admire your ability to be so raw and yet so positive and uplifting.”<sup>92</sup> More than one user hoped for a future layout, either with Claire’s hair grown back or else as a “survivor layout” with an update on the scrapbooker’s health. In doing so, women appear to form communities of support online, and check back in with each other to offer encouragement. I further address these examples of what I call “communities of compassion” in the next chapter.

Breast cancer scrapbooking demonstrates the traditional functions of rhetoric: changing beliefs, encouraging action, and raising consciousness.<sup>93</sup> This framing may be viewed as what Sally Miller Gearhart calls the “womanization of rhetoric.”<sup>94</sup> Women’s communication, particularly when contained within different forms of media, conveys an alternative kind of rhetoric. I have illustrated this through women’s choice of scrapbooking to depict breast cancer. Scrappers have used the format in complex ways to tell stories of trauma. Women’s language, particularly through such a medium as scrapbooking, offers a transformation, rather than demands the change associated with traditional rhetorical strategies. Breast cancer scrapbooking creates an opening into and out of which new ideas can flow, at times conforming to but also disrupting the usual rhetoric around breast cancer.

Scrapbooking creates new possibilities for rhetoric by its atypical delivery method. The online availability of a large number of individual scrapbook pages echoes the public nature of breast cancer. In increasing numbers, women post their pages on

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<sup>92</sup> LeaMcD, comment on “About Me,” comment posted October 5, 2006, <http://www.digitalscrapbookplace.com/gallery/showphoto.php?photo=136190&cat=500&ppuser=39013>.

<sup>93</sup> Barbara F. Sharf, “Poster Art as Women’s Rhetoric: Raising Awareness about Breast Cancer,” *Literature and Medicine* 14:1 (1995): 72-86; Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric” (paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention, Miami, FL, Nov 1993).

<sup>94</sup> Sally Miller Gearhart, “The Womanization of Rhetoric,” *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979): 195-201.



websites devoted specifically to scrapbooking. Virtually anyone can visit the pages and leave a comment. These scrapbook pages are on display much like museum artifacts, inviting the public to speculate on their meaning. The majority of the messages left for scrapbookers echo the challenges of breast cancer, the bravery of the artist in capturing her experience in scrapbooking, and appreciation of the artistic elements or scrapbooking techniques.

As I have shown, scrapbooks flex to accommodate the complex challenges of trauma and illness, and scrapbookers take advantage of the medium's versatility. In the case of breast cancer narration, scrapbooks are a particularly conducive format, as they adequately capture the inevitable fragmentation of women's lives and the complicated, stressful phases of the breast cancer experience. As I explained in Karen's Top 10 page, scrapbookers adapt the medium to provide commentary on societal issues they deem important. In this artist's case, the medical care system should be under scrutiny, as physicians do not always know your body as well as you do. Karen is also critical of master narratives that relate women's identities with their feminine physical characteristics. I pointed out in Claire's work examples of how scrapbooking is conducive to articulating traumatic life disturbances.

Since scrapbooking's format is finite, the artist is limited by the parameters of the page, rendering the content particularly salient. Both Dana's and Santie's pages illustrate how scrapbookers use this medium to educate others. Knowing there is a faithful audience of viewers, these artists use the craft to model how they coped with a traumatic health concern, from diagnosis to treatment to recovery. These pages demonstrate how individual scrapbook pages expand the definition of narrative by inviting abbreviated

versions of life stories. Their nonlinearity in no way detracts from the richness of the story narrated on the page.

Artists who tell fragments of their life stories do not have to fully commit to a linear, complete story (perhaps because they may not be physically or literally able to do so), but instead can capture the most important aspects of their experience, highlighting parts of their lives to which they want to testify. With this in mind, the single pages become even more compelling testimonials shedding light on the breast cancer experience. Similar to the AIDS quilt, individual scrapbook pages, when displayed and studied collectively, are like a patchwork of discrete pieces reflecting transitional moments in women's lives. Intertextually rich when fashioned together, scrapbooking offers important insight into women's representations of health, trauma, and selfhood, seen here through the lens of scrapbooking in contemporary breast cancer culture. As I have shown, scrapbooking can also secure an influential place in shaping cultural constructions of women's health. The next chapter addresses the diverse ways that women use the art as a form of health activism, particularly focusing on ways crafters develop communities of compassion revolving around charitable scrapbooking efforts.

## Chapter 6: Communities of Compassion: Charity Scrapbooking and Health Activism

The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another.<sup>1</sup>

It seems particularly crucial...at this point in history, to find ways to make visible the relations of inequality, obligation, and exploitation that structure well-intentioned charitable practices.<sup>2</sup>

I previously analyzed scrapbook pages focusing on women's narration of trauma and the strategies they draw on to grapple with life's challenges. I demonstrated how women use scrapbooks as social platforms from which to impart coping methods as well as to criticize cultural value systems through overt messages and more subtle manipulation of narrative. Given that scrapbooks are now broadly circulated on popular websites and blogs, women's trauma narratives have the potential to garner audiences of hundreds, and in some cases, even thousands.<sup>3</sup> As a result, their socially-charged messages, disseminated among women through scrapbooking communities, result in a particular kind of health activism.

In this chapter, I define health activism using Heather M. Zoller's flexible definition, which describes grassroots efforts to "change norms, social structures, policies, and power relationships in the health arena [that are] related to patient activism, health care reform, disease prevention, [and] illness advocacy."<sup>4</sup> I embrace Zoller's notion that health activism is driven by social change that seeks to "challenge...existing

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, quoted in Michael W. Fox, *The Boundless Circle: Caring for Creatures and Creation* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1996), 61.

<sup>2</sup> Samantha King, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 124.

<sup>3</sup> Some scrapbookers are quite popular. Ali Edwards has developed a lucrative and well-sponsored blog that boasts thousands of followers. Edwards has also published books on scrapbooking, <http://aliedwards.typepad.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Heather M. Zoller, "Health Activism: Communication Theory and Action for Social Change," *Communication Theory* 15.4 (2005): 341.

power relationships” influencing health issues.<sup>5</sup> This chapter reflects my effort to examine further the role and effects of health activism in scrapbooking. I identify three primary forms of what I call “scrap activism”:

- 1) Large retailers that donate a portion of proceeds to charities and/or that promote a cause to sell products for profit.
- 2) Small businesses that raise money almost exclusively for charities.
- 3) Individuals who self-organize for the purposes of donating money to charities.

Through charitable efforts designed to make visible social issues around women’s health, large companies, smaller retailers, and individual scrappers use community in distinct and differing ways to press for political and social change. I denote the communities arising from activism “communities of compassion.” This chapter examines the advantages as well as potential pitfalls relating to these communities. I also survey the relationship of health activism to community compassion. I illustrate how contemporary crafters utilize the popularity of the pastime to share core values and circulate personal belief systems through organized scrapbooking charity events. Compassionate community-building in women’s scrapbooking illustrates feminist modes of listening, a topic addressed previously in this project and one that results from collective efforts at raising awareness about women’s health.

I preface this section with a brief mention of women’s shifting scrapbooking practices with the past couple of decades. In the introductory chapter to this dissertation, I explored scrapbooking history, with an emphasis on the materials and technologies used to create scrapbooks, which have evolved significantly in just the past decade. Here I briefly explore various ways women have used the scrapbooking craft since it evolved

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 344a.

technologically since the mid 1990s. As I have discussed, women have been scrapbooking for centuries. Over time, the practice has been transformed by historical events, cultural conceptions of family, the mass marketing of scrapbooking, the Internet, and technologies that enable digital scrapbooking, to name a few.

While it is difficult to pinpoint precisely when large numbers of scrapbookers began using the World Wide Web to present their work and learn about the craft, it is logically correlated with new software and evolution of scrapbooking-sharing websites such as Scrapbook.com, which began in the mid 1990s.<sup>6</sup> During the past two decades, the Internet has figured prominently in how women practice scrapbooking.<sup>7</sup> Women have formed online discussion groups, countless blogs and websites on which women share their scrapbooking projects, and developed Internet-based businesses through which women buy and sell scrapbooking products.

It is important to recognize that the popularity boom of scrapbooking in the 1990s, alongside widespread use of the Internet, have contributed significantly to the broad reach of scrapbooking. Published idea books, scrapbooking retreats, charity crops, online businesses, and countless scrapbooking websites have ensured that scrapbooking reaches an even broader group of women, and that ideas of singular women are disseminated to a collective in ways never seen before the past 2 decades. One of these important and influential ideas is scrap activism.

Crafters make use of the high visibility and knowledge potential of scrapbooking for far-reaching social ends. Instead of relying on the purchasing potential of the craft to earn money for themselves, scrapbookers take advantage of the social reach of the craft

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<sup>6</sup> Leigh Ina Hunt, "Victorian Passion to Modern Phenomenon: A Literary and Rhetorical Analysis of Two Hundred Years of Scrapbooks and Scrapbook Making" (Ph.D. dissertation, U Texas Austin, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

to raise money for charities. In previous chapters, I investigated how the scrapbookers studied in this project narrate their health experiences, modeling how the craft can provide a useful social outlet and offer a public voice to women who may not otherwise be heard. I also demonstrated how women may benefit from sharing their traumatic stories with others, who can serve as compassionate witnesses and potentially help a survivor heal. In this chapter, I build on these concepts and show that the collective compassionate activism of scrapbooking illustrates the craft's ability to elicit political and cultural change. As a component of health activism, this change has the potential to influence women's health outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

## I

The previous chapter chronicled the corporatization of charities; that is, the extent to which large companies have marketed products with charity logos. Scrapbooking retailers are not impervious to this selling model, which pairs charity and business models. A number of scrapbooking companies in fact use the popularity of charitable causes to market products, while promising to contribute part of their sales to charities. For example, the online company Choubox sells select products, such as paper and embellishments, for the purposes of donating proceeds to needy groups.<sup>9</sup> One of the charities Choubox supports is the Susan G. Komen foundation.<sup>10</sup> The craft company makes customized breast cancer-themed scrapbooks from clients' photographs depicting, for example, the Breast Cancer Race for the Cure.<sup>11</sup> Choubox also offers to be a sponsor

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<sup>8</sup> Luis Urrieta, "The Social Studies of Domination: Cultural Hegemony and Ignorant Activism," *The Social Studies* (Sept/Oct 2005): 189-192.

<sup>9</sup> Choubox, [http://www.creative-scrapbook-layouts.com/scrapbooking\\_for\\_charity.html](http://www.creative-scrapbook-layouts.com/scrapbooking_for_charity.html).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; Countless other online companies supply breast cancer-specific products, such as pink paper and ribbon stickers; among these is the Pink Ribbon Shop (<http://www.pinkribbonshop.com/pink-ribbon->

for scrapbooking groups that wish to raise money for charities. On their extensive website, the company provides specific layout ideas and designs tips. Education of visitors appears to be a primary goal of the Choubox company, as their website features a dictionary of scrapbooking terms, suggestions for organizing crafting space, and a Scrapbooking 101 article, which walks the crafter through all the steps of creating a scrapbook.<sup>12</sup> As an educational site that focuses in part on a health-based charity, this organization serves as an example of health activism offered in the service of profit.

Other scrapbooking companies sell charity-themed products, but do not explicitly donate proceeds to charities. Rather, these businesses are selling the popularity of a cause, while at the same time claiming to raise awareness about a health issue. For example, in the month of October, the company Cricut offers breast cancer-themed cartridges for use in its electronic cutter popular among scrapbookers. The “Pink Journey Solutions” cartridge features cut-outs of such formulaic phrases such as “believe,” “survivor,” and “fight.” Images include butterflies, wings, sneakers, and pink ribbons. This company is one of several that achieves a profit from charity-driven merchandise.

In contrast to the above vendors that profit from the popularity of charitable giving, certain scrapbooking organizations exist with the sole purpose of donating money to charities. For example, the mission of Scrap Royalty is to “raise money and awareness for noble causes through unique scrapbooking and crafting events and to promote ‘creative’ opportunities for crafters to give to others in need.”<sup>13</sup> This volunteer-run organization donates 100% of its proceeds to select causes. It organizes events for

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scrapbook-paper.aspx), which carries a wide variety of breast cancer-specific products (such as t-shirts) in addition to scrapbooking supplies.

<sup>12</sup> Scrapbook 101, [http://www.creative-scrapbook-layouts.com/how\\_to\\_make\\_a\\_scrapbook.html](http://www.creative-scrapbook-layouts.com/how_to_make_a_scrapbook.html).

<sup>13</sup> Scrap Royalty, <http://www.scrapbookroyalty.com/>.

charities supporting health issues, including the American Diabetes Association and the Susan G. Koman 3-day Breast Cancer Walk. Types of events used to raise money include raffles, silent auctions, scrapbooking retreats, and instructional classes sampling crafting products from sponsors. Scrap Royalty is funded by donations from individuals and small organizations, as well as by corporate sponsors, including prominent craft companies. This organization, which at times partners with other charity-specific scrapbooking groups (e.g., Crops Plus), has been featured in popular trade publications.<sup>14</sup> Their donations to high-profile charities like Susan G. Koman foundation and support from major industry sponsors may result in ever-expanding networks of scrapbookers, business consultants, and companies.<sup>15</sup> Increased interest in and visibility of charitable organizations like Scrap Royalty suggests the potential for broad-reaching health activism through scrapbooking.

The online scrapbooking community Scrap It Forward also operates with the main purpose of supporting charitable causes. Their goal is to “make this world a better place, one layout, card, and gesture at a time.”<sup>16</sup> Group activities center on challenges, which, as mentioned, are instructions (e.g., use of a specific approach or type of embellishment) for scrapbookers to follow while creating a page. Winners submit their scrapbook pages for review online and are awarded a prize, typically scrapbooking a gift card or supplies, such as paper, stickers, and other embellishments. The company is able to offer awards to scrapbookers due to a craft company’s donation to Scrap It Forward. Charities to which the organization donates include the Ronald McDonald House, a nonprofit invested in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Scrap It Forward, <http://scrapitforward.blogspot.com/>.



promoting children's health.<sup>17</sup>

Organizations like Scrap It Forward encourage community involvement in charitable causes while appealing to scrapbookers' interest in learning new skills and techniques, as well as fostering support for each other's artwork. By competing in a good-natured way with others, scrapbookers are encouraged to be creative and share their work with the group. Recognition and suggestions may spur new ideas. Thus, community involvement in these challenges for charity helps foster collective health activism.

In addition to corporate-involved scrap activism, grassroots scrapbooking is a growing branch of scrap activism. Charitable gatherings are common forms of grassroots activist efforts and often take the form of crop sessions. In recent years, there has been a flood of charity cropping.<sup>18</sup> This increase has been linked to the overall culture of giving, enlivened by such global traumas as the September 11 incident.<sup>19</sup> Charity crops typically raise money by charging admission to scrapbookers or by selling raffle tickets. In these organized, more formal crops, scrapbookers gather together in a large space filled with tables on which to do craftwork.<sup>20</sup> Typically, scrapbookers bring their own supplies to these events.<sup>21</sup> Food is often provided by local vendors, and scrapbooking companies are invited to sell their goods. Vendors may donate a portion or all of their sales to the featured charity. In addition, administrative fees and money raised from raffle tickets may

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<sup>17</sup> Ronald McDonald House, <http://rmhc.org/who-we-are/mission-and-vision/>.

<sup>18</sup> Nicole Humphrey. "Scrapbookers Unite For Great Causes." June 9, 2007, <http://scrapbooking.families.com/blog/scrapbookers-unite-for-great-causes>.

<sup>19</sup> Jessica Helfand, in *Scrapbooks: An American History* (Yale University Press, 2008, 165) observes that scrapbooking sales have dramatically increased since September 11, 2001 because of the comfort remembrance brings. I would add that the desire to occupy the self with important social causes and to make a difference are additional reasons for both the increase in sales and jump in charitable scrapbooking.

<sup>20</sup> More informal crops (solely for pleasure, rather than fundraising events) may be held at a scrapbooker's home. To wit, some for-pleasure scrapbooking events may be held on cruise ships; <http://www.scrapbookcruise.com/>.

<sup>21</sup> Charity Adams. "Scrapbook Rolling Totes are a Must for Crops," April 30, 2009. Ezine Articles, <http://ezinearticles.com/?Scrapbook-Rolling-Totes-Are-a-Must-For-Crops&id=2290802>.

be donated to a select charity.

Charity crops offer tremendous potential for community involvement. Several examples demonstrate the social reach of charity crops. For instance, Care to Crop is an online company that organizes charity cropping events.<sup>22</sup> The group covers their operating costs through donations and sponsorship. Care to Crop recently began an annual 1-day event designed to raise money for a specific charity. To attend the crop, scrapbookers are charged an admission fee, which is donated to the cause. Event sponsors, including scrapbooking companies, contribute food and other supplies, and individual donations also fund the large crop. This event is an opportunity for vendors to display examples of their merchandise, as well as for scrappers to socialize and learn more about products and techniques. In addition, attendees experience the satisfaction of having contributed to a worthy cause just by paying the admission fee. The 2009 Care to Crop event raised over \$4,000 for a local hospice.<sup>23</sup>

Another example of health activism is Stamp, Scrap, Cure, which is a nonprofit organization that offers an annual crop fund-raiser for ovarian cancer research.<sup>24</sup> The founder, Nori Gartner-Baca, established the organization in memory of her mother, who passed away from the disease. An avid scrapbooker, Nori discovered only after her mother's death their mutual love for scrapbooking. She explains:

A few years ago, I came across a box of her things that I had never seen before. Inside were scrapbooks that she kept of her life. One from when she and my father first began dating. I had never seen them before and she never spoke of them. I had been scrapping

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<sup>22</sup> Care to Crop, <http://caretocrop.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> StampScrapCure, <http://www.stampscrapcure.org/>.

for nearly a decade when I found them. She's my constant motivation for this event, my endless inspiration.<sup>25</sup>

Gartner-Baca's revelation that her mother also kept a scrapbook inspired her to build a charitable scrapbooking business. To that end, the Stamp, Scrap, Cure website provides an educational service by featuring detailed information about the annual crop, as well as general resources for ovarian cancer.

Stamp, Scrap, Cure hosts an annual 1-day cropping event that includes giveaways, a silent auction, and raffles. Vendors also station themselves at the event to offer information about their company and to sell and demonstrate various products. Attendees are charged a registration fee and are then able to take advantage of the social experience of scrapbooking with others. Scrappers are also invited to accumulate a certain number of pledges, or offers of financial support from friends and family, prior to attending. As a result of this financial commitment, crafters not only enjoy a space in which to scrapbook, but may also be more invested in the charitable cause.

Like the Care to Crop organization, this group exemplifies health activism by seeking to educate the public about a specific health concern or a social issue. This is accomplished in part because during the events, charity crops often distribute educational information about the cause to which scrapbookers have donated. In these events, women rally together around a central health-based concern, forming a community that can have far-reaching implications (e.g., attendees may share their knowledge with others, or even start their own charity crops/fundraisers).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> As further testimony to the extensively networked charity scrapbooking and cropping, there also exists an organization whose sole purpose is to manage logistics of scrapbooking events. Crops Plus caters a variety of scrapbooking crops, some of which are charity fundraisers. Charities to which Crops Plus has donated

While most charity crops are grassroots affairs, larger retailers may also incentivize scrapbookers in organizing crops to benefit specific charities. For example, Sticker Planet, a scrapbooking company that sells embellishments and designer paper through a print catalog and website, launched a Charity Crop Challenge that ran for several years.<sup>27</sup> The retailer offered prizes to organizers of charity crops designed to benefit ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. In 2005, the company raised \$20,000 for ALS charities. Company co-owner Richard Kraft commented on the challenge's surprising success:

When we announced this event, we were overwhelmed at the response from people signing up on our website to organize charity crops in cities from Farmington, Missouri, to Mesa, Arizona and many cities in between. Many people have commented how pleased they are to be able to channel their love of scrapbooking toward a worthy cause.<sup>28</sup>

These examples illustrate the compassionate activism exhibited in charity cropping. Jo Kemp, part of a nonprofit charity cropping organization, illustrated why she scraps for charity: "I love to scrapbook and meet people, but to be with a group of people and raise money for a cause is the epitome of having fun."<sup>29</sup>

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include a domestic violence shelter, <http://www.ourcropsplus.com/index.html>; Michelle Vocke, "Crops Plus Hosts a Charity Crop for Helen's Pajama Party," Examiner.com, <http://www.examiner.com/x-5065-DC-Paper-Craft-Examiner~y2009m4d24-Crops-Plus-hosts-a-charity-crop-for-Helens-Pajama-Party>.

<sup>27</sup> Scrapbooking for Charity.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Dudley Brown, "Personal passion grows crops," (2007), Go Upstate.com. <http://www.goupstate.com/article/20070919/NEWS/709190307/1028/YOURLIFE>.

## II

I have provided examples of three types of scrap activism: large retailers, smaller businesses, and individual-based charity crops. Although these efforts work in tandem to comprise scrap activism, they emerge from different ideological platforms. Larger retailers arguably profit from involvement in charitable causes. For example, affiliation with a specific charity may draw patrons. In addition, consumers hoping to purchase a product while also donating to a cause are likely to boost a charitable retailer's business. While acting as sponsors of crops, major scrapbooking companies gain advertising and may benefit from the all-important pairing of their organization with charity work. Craft vendors, which are often popular, brand-name scrapbooking retailers, that sell their wares at cropping sessions also earn advertising, as well as make a profit from products sold at the crop. In addition, a scrapbooking company that promotes a fundraising event may be able to publicize cheaply (e.g., in local newspapers without charge).

In contrast to the monetary benefits larger retailers garner, the latter two types of scrapbooking activism — smaller retailers and grassroots crops — also emerge out of the culture of giving, but with seemingly fewer direct financial benefits. For small craft companies, many of which are women-owned, entire proceeds are donated to charities. Smaller scrapbooking charity organizations and individual-oriented activist practices may be viewed as invested in developing community. By involving crafters in challenges, these scrapbooking events bring women together for the purposes of friendly competition, and exposure to new ideas and practices. In contrast, larger businesses seeking to profit from charity merchandise or donations to charities are more reflective of an ideology of capitalism rather than being motivated by bringing people together for a

cause.

While charity cropping serves the financial and social needs of various craft companies, it also offers several benefits that trickle down to small, grassroots organizations and communities of scrapbookers. For example, the exposure a cause achieves as a result of a retailer's involvement can in turn affect smaller businesses or grassroots crops. As knowledge is disseminated to crafters, communities of compassionate-minded people willing to donate products, time, and creativity in the service of others are constructed. Alternatively, grassroots efforts and small scrapbook businesses may grab the attention of larger retailers hoping to advertise their products to these influential crafters. Thus, while there is a dark side to marketing efforts targeting the culture of giving, there is also a beneficial side that continually spurs new communities hoping to give back. It is to this notion of the infectious effects of scrap activism, and to scrapbooking communities of compassion, that I turn in the next section.

### III

Before I address scrap community compassion, I first want to point to a craft that, much like scrapbooking, threads communities together for social causes. Historically used for social and political ends, quilting is an apt case study that further illustrates my contention that a domestic "hobby" like scrapbooking has the power to tell important stories about the self and society, stories that can carry political messages.<sup>30</sup> As Van E.

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<sup>30</sup> As Bettina Aptheker (*Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989, 70) observes, "quilts have provided details of community and a record of women's cultural and political heritage." The same may be said about scrapbooks. Other scholars writing about the role of textiles and cultural products like quilts and scrapbooks in social history include Marilyn F. Motz, "Visual Autobiography: Photograph Albums of Turn-of-the-Century Midwestern Women," *American Quarterly* 41:1 (March 1989): 63-92; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Of Pens and Needles: Sources in Early American Women's History," *Journal of*

Hillard observed, “quilts are instruments for examining the efficacy of and application of socially construed metaphors significant to human culture.”<sup>31</sup> Quilting can also help exemplify craft-oriented health activism because of its emphasis on community and involvement in social causes, illustrating communities of compassion akin to those seen in scrapbooking communities.

The colossal NAMES project AIDS quilt epitomizes a highly visible manner in which this craft has been used to raise awareness, tell a story, and educate.<sup>32</sup> This mammoth project patches together 3X6 foot individual panels created to commemorate loved ones stricken by HIV or AIDS. The individual segments are randomly sewn together to join the massive memorial quilt, so immense that it can now only be displayed in segments.<sup>33</sup> The entire premise behind the quilt is health activism, making the AIDS quilt a mighty example of the power of community work to manage social expectations and shift political power. Another example of a community activist effort is Quilt for a Cause, a nonprofit organization that sells handmade, donated quilts to support breast and gynecologic cancer research.<sup>34</sup> The organization raises money to fund research, increase awareness regarding prevention and detection, and educate health care providers involved in treatment of breast and/or gynecological cancers. In 2006, over 500 quilts were donated, and an auction garnered \$120,000.<sup>35</sup>

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*American History* 77:1 (June 1990): 200-207; and Juliana M. Kuipers, “Scrapbooks: Intrinsic Value and Material Culture,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 2:3 (2004): 83-91.

<sup>31</sup> Van E. Hillard, “Census, Consensus, and the Commodification of Form: The NAMES Project Quilt,” in *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern*, ed. Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 112.

<sup>32</sup> Names Project, <http://www.aidsquilt.org/programs.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Quilt for a Cause, <http://quiltforacause.org/>.

<sup>35</sup> Quilt for a Cause offers transparent data regarding their donations. In 2006, the \$120,000 raised was divided between a Cancer Center, with funds directed to breast and gynecological cancer research only, and the Tucson Medical Center Foundation was awarded \$55,000 for a digital specimen radiography system

These examples of activist quilting illustrate the important role of craftwork in calling for social and political change, particularly regarding women's health. In addition to its political relevance, quilting is also known for threading women together through what are known as "quilting bees." Elaine Hedges has observed that "quilting bees were [used] to reestablish social bonds among women otherwise isolated [and] to exchange news and ideas and to express feelings."<sup>36</sup> Like quilting, scrapbooking also draws communities of like-minded women to crop sessions, which one scrapbooker actually referred to as "the new millen[n]ium quilting bee."<sup>37</sup>

Through scrap activist activities like crops, communities of crafters may coalesce around shared ideologies, resulting in subcultures comprised of women experiencing similar events, frustrations, and in some cases, health traumas.<sup>38</sup> In addition, subcultures of scrapbookers may form in which crafters who may share more with each other than with the entire group form a tightly-knit subgroup. This may be the result of bonding with a smaller group of women with whom one shares specific concerns and more closely matched life experiences or ideologies. Regardless of subgroup community involvement, as I noted previously, women often self-organize around causes that affect them personally. Recall that businesswoman Nori Gartner-Baca built her Stamp, Scrap, Cure business around ovarian cancer, the disease from which her mother died. Compilers also use the scrapbooking platform to self-express about their personal experiences with

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and \$8,000 to help uninsured women under the age of 40 who have had a mastectomy with breast surgery construction; Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Elaine Hedges, "Quilts and Women's Culture," in *In Her Own Image: Women Working in the Arts*, Elaine Hedges and Ingrid Wendt, eds. (New York: Feminist Press, 1980), 13-19; 15.

<sup>37</sup> Mommy-girl, comment on "Why do you scrapbook?," comment posted April 16, 2007, <http://www.scrappersguide.com/forums/showthread.php?t=1317>.

<sup>38</sup> As mentioned previously in this project, my notion of community is drawn from the definitions of Joseph R. Gusfield (*The Community: A Critical Response*, New York: Harper Collins, 1975) and Emile Durkheim (*The Division of Labour in Society*, New York: Free Press, 1964); both scholars view community as a collection of individuals with shared interests and skills.



breast cancer or, as shown in past chapters, mood disorders or trauma linked to death of a loved one. Their pages frequently provide a forum through which scrapbookers may critique the health care system or raise awareness about important health issues. Activism emerging from scrapbooking communities of compassion demonstrates the craft's ability to elicit political and cultural change, which may improve women's health outcomes.

I adopt in part the definition of compassion proffered by feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who views it as “a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person's undeserved misfortune.”<sup>39</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, I view compassion as an emotion that stirs individuals to action. Although I find determination of another's emotions elusive, it is clear that an individual's awareness of another's difficult circumstances is part of what motivates some to charitable action. It is for this reason that I view scrapbooking activist groups, particularly those exemplified by charity crops and other group efforts to raise funds for improved women's health, as “communities of compassion.”

The link between health activism and communities of compassion is worth pursuing here, as it can result in powerful social movements. Health-related, including trauma-inducing, events have become hot topics in U.S. culture. Earlier in this project, I enumerated the cultural cache associated with breast cancer activism, particularly the kitsch factor prevalent in breast cancer charitable efforts. As I have shown, a number of groups and businesses have jumped on the breast cancer awareness bandwagon, which has resulted, according to Samantha King, in corporatization of the cause.<sup>40</sup> Influential corporations have, as King puts it, “capitalize[d] on the growing public interest in the

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<sup>39</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 301.

<sup>40</sup> King, *Pink Ribbons*.

disease.”<sup>41</sup> One of the potential dangers of the popularity of this form of health activism is that companies who have donated large sums to the cause have profited from the disease’s elevated social status. That is, pharmaceutical companies, producers of cosmetics, and others seemingly otherwise unattached to the charity have enjoyed automatic promotion of their goods as a result of charitable donations and public affiliation with a charity.<sup>42</sup>

Despite this danger, it is important to acknowledge positive outcomes of widespread charitable efforts. These include the tendency toward compassionate community health activism. Sophisticated organization of charity-conscious groups, such as the well-known Susan G. Koman foundation for breast cancer awareness, epitomize the value of linking health activism and communities of compassion. The organization’s Race for the Cure, for example, has become a household brand name, as well as an opportunity for community involvement.<sup>43</sup> This example illustrates the beneficial pairing of a popular cause with the compassionate activism it elicits.

The powerful association of compassion and activism — even on a small scale — can bring much-needed change to a widespread social or health-related dilemma. Breast cancer charities, for one, have arguably contributed to greater social awareness of the disease, as well as better overall public education regarding prevention, screening, and treatment options. Thus, it should be evident that the popularity of certain causes, as seen in the case of breast cancer, can result in greater visibility of survivors, who in turn educate others about the disease.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, xx.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, xx-xxi.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

## IV

There are evident advantages of communities of compassion, including funding activist efforts and joining women together for a cause. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are certain dangers as well. Profit-driven charity activities reflect the tenuous relationship between capitalist profits and charity efforts. As I observed in Chapter 5 and intimated earlier in this chapter, financial contributions to social causes is fraught with conflicts as well as benefits. The company donating to a charity profits by eliciting advertising and a good name. At the same time, the charity benefits by gaining further recognition and financial contributions that in turn help individuals in need of assistance. In addition, communities are often formed out of this awareness, and in some cases can emerge out of the popularity of a perceived national health threat.

Additional challenges related to the culture of giving and compassion can surface, too. Compassion, particularly in groups, may result in an overly sentimental outpouring of pity. There is a fine line between evoking empathy versus unintentionally conveying victimization, which can result from expressing pity for others.<sup>44</sup> By openly supporting charities, activists can potentially run the risk of evoking the kind of sympathy that inadvertently victimizes survivors.<sup>45</sup> Disability rights scholars have long criticized various systems for using pity to raise money and awareness. Examples of this include the Jerry Lewis telethon, which relies on dramatic imagery, sentimental music, and piteous life stories of individuals with disabilities to solicit funds.<sup>46</sup> This ability to victimize (albeit unconsciously) suggests that those offering charity have power over

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<sup>44</sup> Hirsch and Smith, "Feminism," 12.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> James I. Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

those they are assisting, by the very fact that they have the means to supply financial support. This may upset the power balance between donor and recipient. Such an imbalance may be more pronounced with larger organizations donating to charities rather than in grassroots activist efforts such as those exemplified by smaller crafts organizations and crop sessions.

I maintain here that craft-oriented activism counters this potential power imbalance in two ways. First, the group bonding associated with the craft — particularly its relationship to health-related causes — epitomizes feminist modes of listening. This distinct listening act is achieved via a conscientious and compassionate listener, who may even empathize with someone’s story.<sup>47</sup> Scrapbooking exhibits feminist modes of listening through women’s collective efforts at raising awareness. That is, the craft enables women’s narration of intimate stories while at the same time building a community of compassion. Scrapbookers support each other, encouraging self-expression and processing of often traumatic emotions through the community the craft fosters. Scrapbookers also work together to fund charities, which in turn may indirectly support loved ones experience health challenges. This collaboration, particularly in the context of scrapbooking, may help minimize potential for inadvertent victimization of recipients of aid.

Another way scrap activism avoids the pitfalls of sentimental compassion is by actively working toward tangible solutions. Although “blind” donations to organizations to which one has no connection may set up an unequal dynamic between donor and beneficiary, scrapbooking events avoid this by commitment to a specific charity. That is, charity cropping events are frequently constructed in honor of a particular cause and

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<sup>47</sup> Hirsch and Smith, “Feminism.”

include health education about key issues relating to the charity. As women scrapbook together, they may find that attendees have a personal connection to the cause, further fostering communities of compassion — and potentially future activism — around the health issue. These public gatherings enable women to claim a voice while encouraging each other to share stories without labeling each other as brave victims. Exchanges between scrapbookers model activism from within. That is, rather than a more powerful group's agitating for change for a disadvantaged group, health activist scrapbooking reflects crafters' desire to elicit change.

## V

Change from within is an important aspect of women's scrap activism. While organized efforts to raise social awareness may not necessarily elicit sweeping shifts in national policies, bit by bit they have the potential to shift consciousness.<sup>48</sup> As I have observed throughout this project, women, through craft activism (recall my example of quilts as well), have refashioned their immediate culture to reflect their needs. Scrapbookers have worked together to raise awareness about health issues affecting women, both through social gatherings and financial contributions. Scrapbooking is an effective kind of health activism because it facilitates crafters in creating art together while seeking social change. Scrap activism may also offer an opportunity for women to express their feelings about a traumatic experience. For example, donating time and money to a charity that has personally affected an individual or loved one may supply an opening for self-expression and a chance to heal.

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<sup>48</sup> I am reminded of the powerful effects of *Sistren*, a Jamaican women's theatre collective, which has enabled women to use the stage as a way to practice speaking up to their abusers, through rehearsed dialogue; Honor Ford Smith, "Ring Ding in a Tight Corner: A Case Study of Funding and Organizational Democracy in *Sistren*, 1977-1989," Women's Program, ICAE (Toronto, Ont., 1989).

Scrapbooking activism, as I have intimated, has other positive, though perhaps more self-serving, effects. Charity cropping may offer women an acceptable “excuse” to scrap at an organized event with other women. Because charity crops are designed around a “legitimate” social purpose, this may alleviate the guilt of spending money on scrapbook supplies and of creating just for fun. Functioning as communities of compassion, crop sessions may supply women a forum to scrapbook about themselves, away from family or other obligations. Some scrapbooking events are advertised as a scrapbooking retreat so that women can enjoy a weekend away from home. Women’s abilities to incorporate socialization, an outlet for emotions, and health activism into an event designed to support charity denotes change from within, a key aspect of scrap activism.

It is important to mention that scrapbooking communities of compassion are often brought together via the Internet. Technology plays a vital role in dissemination of information and is an important social networking tool. Most of the groups and organizations represented in this chapter subsist in a virtual space. That is, the companies or communities mentioned are not housed in a physical storefront. All have online businesses, and it is through these websites that women communicate with each other. Some have designed their own scrapbook-oriented website, while others use pre-established blog sites through which they assemble community challenges and announce dates for upcoming gatherings. Websites are used as a social organizing tool for face-to-face crop sessions. Technology, then, brings women together, playing a prominent role in lubricating activist efforts. The concluding chapter of this project studies the complex role of the World Wide Web and technology in scrapbook communities.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion: Viral Cropping and the Ideal Text

To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it.<sup>1</sup>

[Scrapbooks are] the original open-source technology, a form of self-expression that celebrate[s] visual sampling, culture mixing, and the appropriation and redistribution of existing media.<sup>2</sup>

The Internet is a tool of self-expression and community-building that has bolstered the scrapbooking industry. As described in the previous chapter, countless online scrapbooking businesses (many women-owned) coexist with online communities sponsored by craft companies. Major online storehouses for scrapbooking projects boast high traffic websites. Large swaths of scrapbookers and businesses interact online, where connections are forged and ideas intersect. As I have discussed throughout this project, the scrapbook offers a flexible format that can accommodate the challenges of narrating traumatic, deeply personal stories. As a result, this medium is what Roland Barthes would identify as an “ideal text,” that is, a text whose platform is open, receptive, and interactive. Below, I further elaborate on why the scrapbook may be viewed as an ideal text and explore the viral aspects of the scrapbooking industry, dual concepts that have much in common.

### I

Publicly sharing one’s private life is possible for anyone with access to a computer and the inclination to tell their story.<sup>3</sup> Based on accessibility, certain formats

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, trans., *S/Z: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Helfand, *Scrapbooks: An American History* (Yale University Press, 2008), xvii.

<sup>3</sup> One of the primary examples of public exposure of private issues is online web logs, or blogs. A popular Internet life writing format, blogs mix visual and written elements through which individuals narrate a wide variety of issues of interest to them. Topics run the gamut from parenthood to politics to food. While not all blogs contain biographical information, many in fact daily narrate the life experiences of an individual. It is estimated that there are 71 million blogs, a large number of which are published in English; Technorati, <http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogsphere//>.

are more likely to be used to self-express over others. In *Fictions of Authority*, Susan Lanser proposes the theory that “different communities of women have had different degrees of access to particular narrative forms.”<sup>4</sup> Women’s right of entry to scrapbooking has historically been unblocked, as the craft is considered a female form of expression, given its connection to arts and crafts and its persistent focus on domestic life. Materials are often easy to acquire (since they can encompass both store-bought and regular household items), and women are encouraged to serve as their family’s record keepers.<sup>5</sup> Since scrapbooks today are increasingly focused on the crafters themselves, there is much support in women’s use of the accessible craft to tell their own life stories. In addition, given the availability of scrapbooking materials, accessibility of online tutorials, and greater Internet access globally, women are increasingly able to publish their creative works online.

One might even argue that scrapbooking democratizes life writing, as no technical or formal writing skill is required. Publishing, that is, publicly displaying one’s work, is, for those who are technically equipped and have access to resources, a relatively easy affair, since there are multiple online warehouses for scrapbooks. Publicly sharing scrapbooking requires scanning or photographing a scrapbook page, and then uploading the page onto a website.<sup>6</sup> As a result, publishing one’s private stories in scrapbook format is easier now than ever. By electing to post a scrapbook page on public websites,

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler, eds., *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> While this project largely focuses on scrapbook pages physically created and then digitally photographed, there is a large segment of scrapbookers who prefer digital scrapbooking, which consists of creating scrapbooks using software only. Crafters cite mention the convenience of digital scrapbooking and lack of clutter and mess; Eleanor Levie, “Scrapbooking, Cyberstyle” *US News & World Report*, Sept 5, 2004.



scrapbookers' stories can become more widely disseminated than if they remained inside an album atop the family coffee table.

Displaying scrapbook pages in public web spaces has enabled more interaction among scrapbookers as well. For example, visitors to websites often have an opportunity to offer their perspectives on the scrapbooking they see. This phenomenon of open input is akin to Walter Benjamin's and Roland Barthes' observations that the reader of public texts can ultimately become an author as well. In online scrapbooking, women can contribute to the scrapbook narrative by telling her own parallel story. As I indicated in Chapter 3, many visitors to scrapbook websites elect to share their own stories describing how they have struggled with similar life challenges. The posting of one scrapbook page on a website can elicit numerous life stories, blurring the lines of authorship. That is, at times, the additional life narratives offered in the comments to a scrapbook page constitute a shared narrative, resulting in combined authorship.<sup>7</sup> Jessica Helfand observes of scrapbooks that they feature editor, author, curator, photographer, and protagonist all in one.<sup>8</sup> I contend that the comments contained on scrapbook websites further the multivocality of scrapbooking by maximizing the number of voices and witnesses to women's personal testimonials.

Scrapbooks have truly gone viral. Vast community networks of hobbyists share ideas, materials, and life stories. I use the term "viral" not in the pejorative sense of viral marketing, or stealth attempts to convince consumers to participate in an activity or purchase a product. I also do not mean to imply that scrapbooking is like a virus in that it spreads or infects; this meaning is often used more maliciously than I intend here. Rather,

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<sup>7</sup> However, it should be noted that this dissertation also relies on the authenticity of the authorship of my selected scrapbook pages.

<sup>8</sup> Helfand, *Scrapbooks*.

by viral, I refer to the extensive word-of-mouth reach of the craft industry. As I have illustrated through this dissertation, scrapbookers connect using a variety of networks, many of which involve the Internet as a social tool to organize virtual or face-to-face gatherings. In addition, scrapbooking businesses are savvy to women's crafting habits, and work to support scrapbook events and gatherings through sponsorship, which in turn increases a company's visibility. Lastly, scrappers themselves share their projects on websites, further disseminating ideas and increasing contact among hobbyists.

## II

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, today's scrapbooking supplies a flexible medium of self-expression that is uniquely equipped to accommodate the fractured narratives of trauma plaguing modern women. This pliability, as well as the extent to which scrapbook pages can be read individually and collectively (a topic I addressed in Chapter 3), suggests that scrapbooks are an ideal text for women's trauma narration. My thinking is informed by Roland Barthes' notion of the ideal text, which he describes in *S/Z: An Essay* as a text that "has no beginning" and is "reversible."<sup>9</sup> He observes that through textual interpretation (which he explains is "not to give it [a text] a... meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it"), "we gain access to it by several entrances."<sup>10</sup> Scrapbooks reflect this description of the ideal text because interpretation of their meaning is always open. That is, their variety of elements offer layers of signification.

As I have illustrated in my close reading of select scrapbook pages throughout this dissertation, the significance of scrapbooking is entirely open to the researcher's

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<sup>9</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

interpretation. Possible readings of both individual and collective scrapbook pages point to the various entry points available to scrapbooking researchers. Although in this project I have proposed my own analytic methods, I acknowledge there are other techniques for analyzing scrapbooks.

The narrative pliability of scrapbooking also casts it as the ideal text for life narratives. In Chapter 3, I argued that the distinct characteristics of scrapbooks facilitate a narration of trauma since both women's lives and trauma narratives may be read as fractured. Thus, the nonlinearity of scrapbooking allows the "multiple entrances" Barthes references as a core characteristic of an ideal text. Further, the qualities I have discussed — nonlinear, disjointed, unbounded — have been so animated by contemporary crafters that scrapbooking may very well serve as a new evolution of trauma narration. In this sense, the craft has become an ideal text for women's health-related traumas.

As I explained in Chapter 3, scrapbook pages, when read collectively, offer insight into the plural experiences of women today. Enhancing this perspective are the virtual aspects of scrapbooking. Online visual exhibitions comprise a gallery showcasing modern women's experiences with selfhood and health concerns. In these displays, one can view a myriad of perspectives on women's health.

Scrapbook's potential for intertextuality is another way it can be viewed as an ideal text. As mentioned in Chapter 5, intertextuality, drawn from the ideas of Julia Kristeva, refers to the ways in which texts rely (whether consciously or not) on past texts to produce meaning.<sup>11</sup> That is, there is no such thing as an original work of art (written, oral, visual, or otherwise). This is because all works contain strains of past discourses.

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<sup>11</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

Kristeva describes a text as “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text.”<sup>12</sup> The proliferation of meaning contained within scrapbooks points to the many possible interpretations as well as uses of the craft. As I have shown, scrapbook pages may incorporate a wide variety of characteristics, styles, and embellishments. The hodge-podge of elements garnishing a page bring to mind Claude Levi-Strauss’ notion of bricolage, or the extent to which a variety of resources are used to create meaning.<sup>13</sup> As narrative bricoleurs, scrapbookers arrange on paper meaningful visual signifiers reflecting challenging life moments.

Since scrapbooks comprise a relevant facet of popular culture, one can trace the intertextual influence of culture on the pages created. In this project, I have noted how scrapbookers incorporate cultural references into their scrapbook pages. For example, one crafter mentioned a pop icon’s struggles with a mood disorder, suggesting connections between popular culture and crafting. I also addressed the overlap between culture and scrapbooking when I illustrated how breast cancer scrapbook pages revealed cultural influences. Intertextuality, however, in its strictest sense, is not characterized by such overt references to other texts.<sup>14</sup> Rather, intertextuality acknowledges the *traces* of other texts found in any given text. By cobbling together scraps of an individual’s memory, scrapbooking is necessarily intertextual.

In addition to their being influenced by broader culture, scrapbookers also rely on each other’s creative insights to develop a scrapbook page. The common intertextual technique of “scraplifting,” or borrowing ideas from other scrappers, is widespread in

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<sup>12</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, trans., *La Pensée Sauvage* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>14</sup> Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

crafting communities. Some hobbyists ask permission to use a particular scrapping template or idea, while other scrapbookers freely borrow ideas or directly lift templates from scrapbook pages of interest. Many scrappers indicate, when displaying a page publicly, that their work was “scraplifted” from another artist.

The fact that scraplifting evokes stealing (i.e., ‘shoplifting’) has interesting implications. It evokes guilt and the desire to admit that one’s ideas are not solely one’s own. If the scrapbooker indicates specifically from whom she lifted an idea, she is recognizing that person’s contributions to her project. This approach reflects how scrapbookers are readily influenced by each others’ ideas and accounts for the intertextuality of scrapbooking. It also tangentially addresses the important issue of copyright and authorship. When crafters acknowledge “scraplifting” an idea, they imply that there is one artist to whom a creative concept can be attributed. At the same time, they illustrate the versatility and collaboration built into the craft, which combines the creative works of multiple scrapbookers. This flexibility to accommodate multiple creative approaches into a project has only increased with the Internet’s role in enabling online sharing of craftwork.

### III

Although online scrapbooking offers countless benefits to scrapbooking culture, including communities of women sharing ideas and important life stories, there are repercussions associated with virtual depictions of the craft. Walter Benjamin’s famous piece, “The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” brings to mind warnings about the effects of reproducing art. Scrapbooks, traditionally, are haptic<sup>15</sup>; that

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<sup>15</sup> David Trotter, “Lynne Ramsay’s *Ratcatcher*: Towards a Theory of Haptic Narrative,” *Paragraph* 31:2 (2008): 138-158.

is, they are tactile objects. Embellishments rise up off the page and are perceptible to the touch. The question remains, then: what happens when scrapbooks are no longer touchable? Digital renderings of a 3-dimensional piece of art necessarily affect its meaning. It could be argued that in this project, I am not studying the “original” works since I do not have access to the physical scrapbook pages. Instead, I am studying digital and reprinted renderings of scrapbook pages. This suggests that the pages I have included in this dissertation are not the “original” products per se.

There may be implications associated with studying only the virtual representations of cultural artifacts, but in the case of the scrapbooks I examine in this dissertation, the authors have duly contextualized their work. That is, when the scrapbookers uploaded their page onto a website, they included relevant information, such as types of products used in creating the page, supplying context for the page, and any other information they believe viewers might need. If my study had included older scrapbook pages that were not originally designed to be shared online, there might, as a result, have been compelling and perhaps prohibitive repercussions for including them in my study.

Historically, physical ephemera like scrapbooks have long held the reputation of being transient, fleeting. However, as I showed at the beginning of this dissertation, improved archival materials have sought to better preserve today’s scrapbooking. In addition, the potential permanence of digital images of scrapbook pages posted on public websites has transformed the notion of scrapbooks as ephemera. Thus, what were once private, impermanent, fragile memory representations have now become semi-fixed, immediately-accessible public exhibitions of women’s life stories.

I suggest here that digitization of scrapbooks is misleading in its permanence. Online scrapbooking, like its original paper forbearers, may be, in some cases, actually perceived as ephemeral. Online scrapbooks may exhibit lack of permanence due to the fact that the scrapbooker may remove her art from a website. In this case, what was once a publicly searchable cultural artifact has instantly become unattainable, at least to the public.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the website on which the scrapbook page is uploaded may experience a technical glitch, wherein the scrapbook image is no longer available, or the file is corrupted. These drawbacks — just a couple of many — to public, digital scrapbooking places them potentially in as fragile a position as their centuries-old paper predecessors. An important advantage to online scrapbooking, however, is its ability to be preserved in multiple ways: to be backed up on a hard drive, CD, or DVD. Multiple copies of a scrapbook page file suggest it can almost always be retrievable, at least in digital form.

#### IV

Digital access of scrapbooking has been accompanied by increased community involvement in the craft. As I mentioned in Chapter 6, crop sessions are frequently organized with the aid of the Internet. In these events, crafters gather together to swap supplies and life stories. Given the potential community organizing of the Internet, it may come as no surprise that some crops are actually held online. In these “cyber crops,” or virtual gatherings, scrapbookers work on projects while interacting online in forums and

---

<sup>16</sup> During the course of my selection of scrapbook pages, I became vulnerable to the whims of the digital world. One of the scrapbook pages I had so carefully selected and studied was suddenly no longer available upon subsequent online retrieval. The scrapbooker, I later learned, had sold the rights for the page to a prominent publisher, who removed it from any website unrelated to their company.

chat rooms. Although they do not interact face-to-face during cybercrops, scrapbookers have found a way to engage in real-time interactions with other crafters.

As I have illustrated, the Internet has become an important tool of collaboration and group bonding over life experience and choice of self expression. For example, online scrapbook sharing has enabled fringe hobbyists to connect with fellow scrappers. One group exemplifying this is a scrapbooking community built entirely around nontraditional topics as a way to buck conventional subjects dominating the craft. One group, who calls themselves Gutter Girlz, boasts the motto, “get your art in the gutter!” This group of artists explains their group’s mission:

GutterGirlz is a group of girlz...who got it in their heads that scrapping isn’t ALWAYS about niceness, and politeness.

Sometimes, it’s about sharing yourself. Sometimes it’s about going to that dark place, and once in a while, it’s about getting all dirty in the gutter.”<sup>17</sup>

Projects revolve around challenges encouraging members to create projects related to such prompts as “zip it!”, “I take that life back, thanks!”, and “still hurting.”<sup>18</sup> Scrapbook pages inspired by these prompts on the group’s website depict women speaking back to culture or resisting family expectations. Member “Jenny” tells the story of her parents’ expectations that she attend college. Instead, she followed her own path, declaring it “one of the best decisions I ever made.”<sup>19</sup> Other Gutter Girlz contributors share their work with more general scrapbooking communities, such as the “scrapbookers” group on

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<sup>17</sup> Gutter Girlz, <http://guttergirlz.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; “Prompts” are a common feature of challenges and allow scrappers a way to frame their projects. Often, scrapbookers are asked to include the prompt phrase on the scrapbook page.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



LiveJournal.com, mentioned earlier in this dissertation. This results in a cross-pollination of ideas from artists whose focus rests on the more challenging aspects of life and less on uplifting domestic themes. One of many activist communities recently formed to tackle the less savory aspects of life through scrapbooking, Gutter Girlz illustrates how ideas can trickle out among groups and consciousness-shift through example.<sup>20</sup>

As I described in Chapter 6, scrapbooking readily lends itself to social activism and community building. The tendency toward community activism sets up an interesting dichotomy regarding the public versus private aspects of contemporary scrapbooks about the self. It has been observed that scrapbooks of the 18<sup>th</sup> century focused on individual lives. These products were typically relegated to the family, and were not publicly disseminated. In subsequent years, the craft began emphasizing family life, leaving out the scrapbooker herself. As I have indicated, there have been modern movements to reinstate the scrapbooker as the subject of her art. Despite the historic privacy of the craft, today's scrapbooking marks a departure from the secluded life of the scrapbook. Today's scrapbooks are considerably more public. Interestingly, the contemporary impulse toward scrapbooking about the self — including intimate testimonials about health issues — would suggest that the craft would remain private, particularly given the sensitivity of some scrapbooker's subject matter. The contrary, however, is true. Increasingly, scrappers boldly share work online and in face-to-face crop sessions.

In addition, crafters, as I have illustrated throughout this project, combine forces,

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<sup>20</sup> Other groups have been formed out of the need to create distinct communities of scrappers. For example, Bad Girls Kits is a community that shares scrapbooking materials and ideas related to non-conventional topics; <http://www.badgirlskits.com/about.html>; Punk Rock Scrappers is another group formed to reflect the “bold and unconventional scrapper; the type of person who isn't afraid to speak her mind, defy the status quo, and be different...For all of us who aren't exactly the ‘flowers, teddy bears, and chick flicks starring Meg Ryan’ type”; <http://punkrockscrappers.blogspot.com/>. Yet another example is Scrapbook Underground, a technical blog for “scrapbooking that isn't tacky or boring,” <http://www.scrapbookunderground.com/>.

working together to make personal and in some cases broader social change. As indicated in Chapter 6, community activism is becoming a more central component of today's scrapbooking culture, potentially because scrapbookers are incorporating themselves more directly into their projects. That is, personal expression may lend itself to social activism, as the individual observes the need for social circumstances to shift. The popularity of the hobby — alongside public focus on women's health — has also contributed to the regularity with which scrapbooking plays a role in community health events.

## V

This project has attempted to balance the challenges of analyzing contemporary works of art with highlighting the important contributions of scrapbooking to American culture. Clifford Geertz once wisely observed that, “cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete.”<sup>21</sup> Citing W.B. Gallie's comment that interpretive approaches to culture are “essentially contestable,” Geertz wryly notes, “What gets better is the precision with which we vex each other.”<sup>22</sup> I am well aware that my case study of women's trauma scrapbooking dangerously toes the line of assigning intentionality and meaning to craftwork. The editors of *The Scrapbook in American Life* caution that “no scrapbook can present meaning without the collaboration of a reader, yet no reader (aside from the scrapbook maker) knows enough to interpret any scrapbook authentically and definitively.”<sup>23</sup> I have attempted to keep this philosophy in mind; as a result, to the best of my ability, my analysis has been tempered with a humble recognition that I, the researcher, can never know the artist's intention.

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<sup>21</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Tucker, *The Scrapbook*, 25.

What I am equipped with, however, is a set of research tools that have enabled me to conduct an analysis that I hope will contribute to the work of future scholars. Specifically, I have asked and offered responses to questions regarding how scrapbookers negotiate issues relating to selfhood; how they use the medium to understand health issues; identified characteristics that render scrapbooking conducive to trauma narration; explored types of knowledges about women's health concerns that are produced through the scrapbooking hobby; observed how ideas and images are disseminated through scrapbooking, as well as considered how cultural memories are shaped by the craft; identified some of the links between the public consumption of women's illness narratives and scrapbooking's popularity; suggested ways women use scrapbooking as a form of health activism and community building around women's health; and examined the role of the Internet in women's scrapbooking communities and health activism.

## VI

As I have argued throughout this project, the fluidity of scrapbooking as a cultural form of memory allows a freedom of interpretation that makes it an important subject of intellectual inquiry intersecting disciplinary boundaries. Although this study covers a lot of ground on a variety of concerns regarding contemporary scrapbooking, it undoubtedly leaves room for future studies, in a variety of disciplines. In this dissertation, I referred only briefly to the consumerist potential inherent in the multibillion dollar hobby industry. Consumerism would be a fascinating and important study that might offer insight into marketing efforts, women's consumption, and uses of the hobby. Marketing efforts on the part of the Hobby Industry Association suggest the intent to diversify their

clientele, namely to Hispanic communities, African Americans, Asian Americans, and men.<sup>24</sup>

Topic-specific scrapbooking also offers the potential for future studies. Fledgling projects of interest include mothering and adoption scrapbooking. Kendra Gale, in “Scrapbook Narratives of Mothering,” offers a study of showcasing stories on motherhood narrated through the craft.<sup>25</sup> As Gale observes, the content of mothering-related scrapbooking can influence the construction of identity, family memories, and potentially even history. Adoption books are another important scrapbooking subject. These projects may be used at various stages of the adoption process. For example, prospective adoptive parents may be asked by an agency or birth parents to create an adoption plan and present it via a scrapbook. Birth parents may also create a scrapbook for their child as a way to commemorate the birth occasion and share the event with adoptive parents. Adoptive parents and their children may also create scrapbooks together chronicling their new family.<sup>26</sup>

My project has sought to insist how paramount it is that we not dismiss scrapbooking as mere scraps collected by women with idle time on their hands. Flippant comments about scrapbooking have suggested that it is self-indulgent, overwrought, and sentimentally fixated on the experiences of an otherwise unremarkable individual.<sup>27</sup>

Michel de Certeau’s famous book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, demonstrates the value

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<sup>24</sup> Hobby Industry Association, <http://www.craftandhobby.org/research.html>; Stefanie Hubbs, “Who Said Scrapbooking Is Just for Girls?” *Universe*, Brigham Young University, Oct 27, 2003, <http://newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/46416>.

<sup>25</sup> Kendra Gale, “Scrapbook Narratives of Mothering” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New York, New York City, NY, Feb 2-5, 2009), [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p14178\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p14178_index.html).

<sup>26</sup> Scrapbooking Adoption, <http://scrapbooking.adoption.com/>; Carol A. Peacock, “Her Family Way,” *Working Mother* 32:2.3 (Feb/Mar 2009), 100.

<sup>27</sup> Helfand, *Scrapbooks*.

of examining even the most ordinary practices of daily life.<sup>28</sup> The author asserts that by noticing the ordinary, people's "tactics," or approaches, will be revealed. These practices are designed to help people make an environment their own. The health-based scrapbook pages studied in this dissertation illustrate the meaningful rhetorical and narrative applications of the hobby. As I have shown, scrapbooking serves as a site of community activism and personal healing in the face of traumatic health concerns. Creative use of the pastime to launch social change reflects women's production of meaningful life narratives that, as signposts of social history, promise to persist well beyond scraps.

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<sup>28</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2002).

## Appendix A

### Signed Consent Forms

**Dawn Reynolds**

4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

Deena Metzger  
20666 Callon Dr  
Topanga, CA 90290

July 9, 2009

Dear Ms. Metzger:

I am completing my doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland on trauma narratives in contemporary women's scrapbooking. I would like to gain your permission to reprint in my dissertation an image of your poster, "I Am No Longer Afraid," also known as "The Warrior," shown below:



The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation and to the publication of my dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). Your signing of this letter confirms that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

I acknowledge that permission to use the poster, "I Am No Longer Afraid," also known as "The Warrior," is granted under the following terms and conditions:

- 1) The source of the poster will be listed in some form in either the article or its credits so that an individual can order it from Donnelly/Colt.
- 2) A copy of the published piece will be sent to Deena Metzger at P.O. Box 186, Topanga, CA 90290.
- 3) Refer readers to Metzger's three books on healing: *Tree: Essays & Pieces*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, ISBN 1556432453, which contains the journal of her experience with breast cancer; *From Grief Into Vision: A Council*; and *Entering the Ghost River: Meditations on the Theory and Practice of Healing*, both from Hand to Hand, Topanga, CA, ISBN 0-972071-88-2.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter in the space below, and return it to me at the mailing address listed above. Thank you for your contributions to my project.

Best,  
  
Dawn Reynolds

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE ABOVE REQUESTED MATERIAL(S):

Signed: 

Print Name: DEENA METZGER

Date: 7/13/09

Dawn Reynolds

4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

Joanne Motichka  
150 East 87th Street #2C  
New York, NY 10128

February 2, 2009

Dear Matuschka:

I am completing my doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland on trauma narratives in contemporary women's scrapbooking. I would like to gain your permission to reprint in my dissertation your image, "Beauty out of Damage," for an agreed-upon fee of \$50. The image requested is shown below:



plus one copy of the  
dissertation sent  
to ABOVE ADDRESS

Your signing of this letter confirms that you are the sole copyright owner of this image.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter in the space below, and return it to me at the mailing address listed above. Thank you for your contributions to my project.

Best,

Dawn Reynolds

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE ABOVE REQUESTED MATERIAL(S):

Signed:

Print Name: JOANNE Motichka

Date: 2/7/09

Dawn Reynolds

---

4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

I hereby give my permission for Dawn Reynolds to use my photograph/image as part of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland College Park. The permission extends to any future revisions and editions of the dissertation and to the publication of the dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). This permission will in no way restrict republication/redistribution of the photograph in any other form.

Date: 8/10/09

Name: Vicky L. Foster  
(please print)

Email: foster4@consolidated.net

Signature: Vicky L. Foster



**Dawn Reynolds**

---

4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

I hereby give my permission for Dawn Reynolds to use my photograph/image as part of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland College Park. The permission extends to any future revisions and editions of the dissertation and to the publication of the dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). This permission will in no way restrict republication/redistribution of the photograph in any other form.

Date: 8/27/09

Name: Amy M. Guimond  
(please print)

Email: amy.the.adoragirl@gmail.com

Signature: A Guimond

Dawn Reynolds

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4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

I hereby give my permission for Dawn Reynolds to use my photograph/image as part of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland College Park. The permission extends to any future revisions and editions of the dissertation and to the publication of the dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). This permission will in no way restrict republication/redistribution of the photograph in any other form.

Date: 8-11-2009

Name: Melinda Mueller  
(please print)

Email: muellers@consolidated.net

Signature: Melinda Mueller

Dawn Reynolds  
4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5844  
Dawney@yahoo.com

Santie Bronkhorst  
Santie Bronkhorst@gauteng.gov.za

December 29, 2008

Dear Santie:

I am completing my doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland on trauma narratives in contemporary women's scrapbooking. I would like to gain your permission to reprint in my dissertation four (one of which is a two-page spread) of your scrapbook pages chronicling your experience with breast cancer, shown below:



The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the publication of my dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form

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by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter in the space below, and return it to me at the mailing address listed above. Thank you for your contributions to my project.

Best,

  
Dawn Reynolds

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE ABOVE REQUESTED MATERIAL(S):

Signed: 

Print Name: SANTIE BRONKHORST

Date: 02-01-2009

2

Dawn Reynolds

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4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

December 16, 2008

Amy Guimond  
Commit 2 Paper, LLC  
Amy@Commit2Paper.com

Dear Amy:

I am completing my doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland on trauma narratives in contemporary women's scrapbooking. I would like to gain your permission to reprint in my dissertation your scrapbook page entitled "Empowered":



The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the publication of my dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter in the space below, and return it to me at the mailing address listed above. Thank you for your contributions to my project.

Best,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Dawn'.

Dawn Reynolds

---

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE ABOVE REQUESTED MATERIAL(S):

Signed: Amy Guimond

Print Name: Amy Guimond

Date: 12/16/08

Dawn Reynolds

---

4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

December 16, 2008

"Claire"  
Digital Scrapbook place.com

Dear "Claire":

I am completing a doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland on trauma narratives in contemporary women's scrapbooking. I would like to gain your permission to reprint in my dissertation the following image:



The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the publication of my dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter in the space below, and return it to me at the address listed above. Thank you for your contributions to my project.

Best,

Dawn Reynolds

---

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE ABOVE REQUESTED MATERIAL(S):

Signed:  "Claire"

Print Name:  JS

Date: 3/1/09

Dawn Reynolds  
4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

December 16, 2008

Kimberly Cole  
Altered Whimseys

Dear Kimberly:

I am completing my doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland on trauma narratives in contemporary women's scrapbooking. I would like to gain your permission to reprint in my dissertation your scrapbook page entitled "Bipolar":



The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the publication of my dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter in the space below, and return it to me at the mailing address listed above. Thank you for your contributions to my project.

Best,

Dawn Reynolds

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE ABOVE REQUESTED MATERIAL(S):

Signed: Kimberly Rae Cole

Print Name: Kimberly RAE Cole

Date: 12/16/2008

**Dawn Reynolds**

---

4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

February 1, 2009

Maria  
zukamaya@yahoo.com

Dear Maria:

I am completing my doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland on trauma narratives in contemporary women's scrapbooking. I would like to gain your permission to reprint in my dissertation your scrapbook page entitled "Awareness is Key":



The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the publication of my dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter in the space below, and return it to me at the mailing address listed above. Thank you for your contributions to my project.

Best,

**Dawn Reynolds**

---

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE ABOVE REQUESTED MATERIAL(S):

Signed: Maria Guzman

Print Name: Maria Guzmán

Date: 2/5/09

Dawn Reynolds

---

4600 Usange Street  
Beltsville, MD 20705  
202.365.5944  
Dawnrey@yahoo.com

Julie Evans  
julie.evans@edwardjones.com

December 19, 2008

Dear Julie:

I am completing my doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland on trauma narratives in contemporary women's scrapbooking. I would like to gain your permission to reprint in my dissertation your scrapbook page, "Stronger Woman," shown below:



The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the publication of my dissertation on demand by University Microfilms Inc. (UMI). These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter in the space below, and return it to me at the mailing address listed above. Thank you for your contributions to my project.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dawn Reynolds".

Dawn Reynolds

---

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE ABOVE REQUESTED MATERIAL(S):

Signed: Julie Evans

Print Name: Julie Evans

Date: 12-19-08



## Appendix B

### Dissertation Questionnaire

Thanks again for granting me permission to use your scrapbook page in my dissertation.

As a way to contextualize your page within my overall project, I'd like to ask you a few questions. You are free to answer as many of these questions as you'd like and to write as much as you'd like.

Please respond to the following biographical questions:

Age

Marital status

Children?

Occupation

Racial/ethnic background

How introduced to hobby?

How long doing it?

Answer any or all of the following in any way you'd like:

Why do you scrapbook?

Why do you use scrapbooking, as opposed to other forms of expression, to capture a specific life experience?

Do you scrapbook alone or in groups?

Do you produce individual pages versus entire themed scrapbooks? How do you organize your scrapbooking?

What percentage of your pages are about difficult life experiences versus everyday/positive experiences?

What made you want to share your pages publicly? Did/do you have any reservations about sharing your pages on public websites?

What is the story behind this layout?

Is there anything else you'd like to discuss about scrapbooking?

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