ABSTRACT

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| Title of Thesis: | GOSSIP AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE: INFORMATION-SHARING STRATEGIES AMONG SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE |
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Gossip is a site of resistance, productive power, and platform for sharing experiences for marginalized communities, especially survivors of sexual and interpersonal violence, who are denied access to traditional information institutions. Narratives, rooted in rape culture, about the "ideal victim" or "perfect survivor", affect the efficiency and power of survivors' gossip.  Yet despite the negative consequences some survivors face, we still gossip, pointing to the inadequacy of current resources and options of "justice" for us. How do survivors pursue healing justice in a world increasingly dominated by digital - and social - media?  This research paper focuses on survivors' responses to healing from sexual violence as mitigated through zines, gossip, callout culture, and social media, as enabled by and through digital media.

GOSSIP AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE: INFORMATION-SHARING
STRATEGIES AMONG SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

by

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# Chapter 1: Gossip as a Site of Resistance: Information-Sharing Strategies Among Survivors of Sexual Violence

*Introduction*

Neoliberalism – "a vision of competition, inequality, market 'discipline', public austerity, and 'law and order'" (Duggan, x) – has had a profound impact upon discourses around recovery and healing for survivors of sexual violence, emphasizing individual's actions over collective change, personal responsibility for recovery, and the professionalization of therapeutic possibilities. At the same time, survivors are creating their own narratives that resist, challenge, and complicate these dominant, neoliberal, conceptualizations of recovery by creating, sharing, and repurposing information over and through digital spaces. Survivors utilize digital media and spaces to create their own counterpublics and communities that prioritize survivor solidarity, healing justice, and collective action, building sites of radical healing and community building in the process. These digital enclaves can work as a bridge across the physical spaces that isolate survivors, especially survivors who live at the intersections of multiple marginalizations, creating space for both themselves and other survivors to navigate resistance and recovery together. They afford access for often isolated communities to information about healing and recovery. However, information about healing and recovery is not enough – this information must be created *for and by* peers who identify as victims and survivors of sexual violence *and* situated within an anti-oppressive, survivor-centered framework to truly provide access to relevant, trustworthy, equitable, and, ultimately, *useful* information about healing justice. Many

survivors and victims of sexual violence are distrusting of information from "professionals" due to violent experiences with the entangled intersections of ableism, rape culture, misogyny, white supremacy, homophobia, and (trans)misogyny. This is why a peer-to-peer information network is so vital to addressing the concerns of survivors.

Healing justice, as defined by Black and Indigenous queer femme organizer Cara Page, is both a personal and political practice that functions as "a framework that identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene on generational trauma and violence and bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts and minds" (Page, 2010). After all, "our movements themselves need to be healing or there is no point to them" (Page, 2010).

### _Building Sustainable Movements: A Brief History of Healing Justice_

It is crucial to acknowledge and appreciate the histories, lineages, and roots of the work we do because movements, "especially in low-money, low-time-to-document, brilliant-burnout-femme-of-colour-led movements" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2016) are at risk for being forgotten and/or erased. I want to honor the healers, organizers, activists, artists, and scholars who have come before me by offering a brief history of the movement towards healing justice that celebrates their brilliance, abundance, and resilience.

The healing justice movement was birthed by "queer and trans people of colour and in particular Black and brown femmes, centering working-class, poor, disabled and Southern/rural healers" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2016) but "before 'healing justice' was a phrase, healers have been healing folks at kitchen tables and community

clinics for a long time—from the acupuncture clinics run by Black Panthers like Mutulu Shakur in North America in the 1960s and 1970s, to our bone-deep Black, Indigenous, people of colour and pre-Christian European traditions of healing with herbs, acupuncture, touch, prayer, and surgery" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2016). The healing justice movement was a response to widespread trauma amongst healers, change-makers, and community organizers, who were fraught with increased depression and burnout, isolated and stigmatized, and losing their communities' healing traditions. The increased privatization of healing work, due to changes brought about by neoliberalism, was also affecting healers' work. Core to this movement was the understanding that many, if not most, people were survivors of trauma – and that this was nothing to be ashamed of, kept private, or made "personal". Tanuja Jagernauth, a queer South Asian co-creator of the healing justice community clinic SAGE Community Healing Collective in Chicago, wrote, "Healing justice acknowledges and addresses the layers and layers of trauma and violence that we have been living with and fighting for generations. And, it asks us to bring collective practices for healing and transformation INTO our work... People have been asking more and more questions about 'sustainability' in the work. I think that working within a healing justice framework is a way to institutionalize sustainability in our work" (Jagernauth, 2010).

Another core tenet of the healing justice movement was the centering  of disabled peoples' experiences, lives, and wisdom. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha notes that "healing justice centres disabled wisdom that does indeed want access to medicines, adaptive technology, and other things that improve our energy, mobility, or

immune systems, but also believes sick and disabled and mad and neurodivergent bodies are a normal part of the continuum of being human, full of wisdom, cripskills, adaptability, and cripscience" (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha, 2016).

Healing justice is explicitly about dismantling white supremacy, ableism, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and other forms of violence that cause trauma to vulnerable communities by advocating for collective and community-based care. Central to healing justice is access to, the sharing of, and repurposing of information. Gossip is a valuable medium within this context.

*Gossip as a Site of Resistance: Using Digital Media for Healing Justice*

For centuries, gossip has been utilized as a communication practice among the most marginalized communities and peoples across society:  women, people of color, queer and transgender folks, as well as survivors of sexual and interpersonal violence. Gossip is traditionally understood as spreading rumors, witch-hunting, creating drama, or otherwise attention-seeking and generally negative behaviors (with a gendered and feminized slant).  Yet when we are actively and historically excluded from traditional information institutions, such as the media, our education system, and political sphere, it can become one of our only and last resorts for not only resistance – but sharing life-saving information with each other.

Our culture demands a highly specific performance of survivorship; this spectacle of the "good survivor" must be gendered, racialized, and classed in all the "right" ways; our personalities, actions, and reactions to trauma must also fit this suffocating and troubling narrative in order to be deemed worthy and deserving of healing justice and the resources required to access recovery.  These standards and

measures of what makes a "good survivor" are determined by the ideologies of the white supremacist, classist, ableist, heteropatriarchal rape culture that we exist within.

The experiences, knowledges, and works of marginalized peoples are trivialized within this system. Feminized labor, such as gossip and rumor, is marked as trivial, insignificant, and superficial at best, and malicious, attention-seeking, and slanderous at worst. In the digital era and age of social media, we cannot afford to downplay the importance and relevance of gossip. Survivors of sexual and interpersonal violences have used gossip as a tool of resistance to share their experiences, seek support, build community, warn others, and demand justice and accountability from their rapists and abusers.

Gossip, as defined by the Oxford American College Dictionary, is "casual or unconstrained conversation or reports that are not confirmed as being true." Within popular culture, gossip is often situated as slanderous, attention-seeking, creating drama, even witch-hunting. Yet it's an activity people frequently engage in (Foster, 2004), with researchers estimating that people spend between 65% (Dunbar, Duncan, & Marriott, 1997) and 80% to 90% (Emler, 1994) of their everyday conversations gossiping. People also participate in gossip through a variety of mediums, such as print media (including magazines, diaries, letters, zines, etc.) and digital media (such as social media, including platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, tumblr, Instagram, and so on). It's the meat of everyday conversation and socialization. The process itself also offers social and political value; in Gossip, Spacks (1985) summarizes the productive potentials of gossip, noting:

Gossip, they tell us, is a catalyst of social process. It provides groups with means of self-control and emotional stability. It circulates both information and evaluation, supplies a mode of socialization and social control, facilitates self-knowledge by offering bases for comparison, creates catharsis for guilt, constitutes a form of wish-fulfillment, helps to control competition, facilitates the selection of leaders, and generates power. It provides opportunity for self-disclosure and for examination of moral decisions (34).

Yet around the globe, gossip is universally condemned from texts such as the Bible to Chinese, Spanish and Jewish proverbs, across both religious, philosophical, anthropological, psychological, and literary texts. According to the Bible, "the words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts" (Proverbs 18:8, New International Version). An old Jewish proverb warns "what you don't see with your eyes, don't witness with your mouth" while an Irish saying states "'they say' is often a great liar". Other popular proverbs advise that "gossiping and lying go hand in hand", "if you can't say anything nice, then don't say anything at all", and "loose tongues are worse than wicked hands". However, the etymology of "gossip" is benign: meaning "god-related" and originally designated as a noun to speak of a god-parent, of either sex, then broadened to include any close friend (Spacks, 1985). However, during the middle of the eighteenth century, gossip's meaning and the affect associated with it suddenly changed; defined as "one who runs about tattling like women at a lying-in" by one Dr. Johnson (Spacks, 1985). Yet even in the medieval era, gossip had been censured as a both negative and feminine activity, appearing among such serious

transgressions as envy, deceit, and even murder.   Gossip was also considered one of the deadly sins (Schein, 1994).

As Spacks summarizes, "few activities so nearly universal have been the object of such sustained and passionate attack" (24). If gossip is such a popular activity that produces positive sociopolitical effects, the question remains:  Why does it have such a bad reputation?

The answer is such: when other avenues of resistance are closed and/or inaccessible, gossip becomes an increasingly important and vital resource for subordinated peoples.  It is  a key tool for building community and solidarity and at the same time, a weaponized form of intimacy one can wield against those with/in power. Marking gossip as trivial, petty, and of an inconsequential nature is an attempt to discredit the words of women, people of color, queer and transgender folks, survivors of sexual and interpersonal violence, people with disabilities, and other subjugated peoples as this demarcation downplays gossips potential power.  "The trivialization and feminization of gossip demonstrates how sexism 'infects the very valuation of certain knowledges and ways of knowing'" (Cifor, 4).

For example, during the medieval era, women were instructed not to gossip, not to provoke gossip, not to become the subject of gossip, as well as not to listen to gossip. This was an attempt to control women, who at the time, were barred from holding office and direct lines of political influence, were relegated to the domestic sphere, and had limited opportunities to exercise real power over even their own lives.  Gossip was one of their few means, albeit a dangerous one, to gain power in their highly hierarchic, classed, society.   While gossip today is often discredited, during the medieval era, it

had the power to destroy peoples' reputations and was generally accepted as truth. Therefore, the power of gossip was very much feared and controlled (Schein, 1994). It was a way of sanctioning against women and Black slaves' speech: "Black slaves were not permitted to converse in their own African languages by American slave owners. Women have, in one sense, always spoken the same language as men, so outlawing mother tongues was never a possible vehicle for controlling women's speech. Social sanctions against women's speech […] against gossip in particular, [is] as close as the patriarchy could come to outlawing women's language" (Ayim, 95).

Gossip has been written about for centuries, however, I will review more contemporary, current, and relevant literature on gossip as this is the body of research my paper is primarily drawing from.

People who "have the most need to know" are the most likely to engage in the "the precious, devalued arts of gossip" (Sedgewick quoted in VanHaitsma, 140) precisely because of its "special value as a resource for the disposed" (Spacks, 15). In "Gossip as a Rhetorical Methodology for Queer and Feminist Historiography", VanHaitsma (2016) explores gossip as a methodology, a queer and feminist fashion of relating to the past through speculation, allowing the past to remain open to indefinite suggestion, rather than to attempting to fix history. She speaks to gossip as evidence, quoting Butt (2005), noting its ability to "deconstruct the bases of authoritative sources of truth" or the false but pervasive myth of objectivity rooted in white masculinist worldviews. Gossip utilizes the feminist critical imagination to function as a form of poetic intervention, to imagine what could have been, what still could be, by queering normative discourses on rhetorical scholarship.

The study of gossip is pertinent to feminist scholarship and inquiry as it can function as an emancipatory tool that holds the potential to challenge moral and epistemological assumptions rooted in misogyny and other systems of power. Code, in her famous essay, "Gossip, or in Praise of Chaos", argues against seeking respectability via arguing gossip as a scientific model because this would prevent feminist inquiry and thought from radically departing from mainstream epistemology, which an analysis of gossip could create space for. Gossip is a located and situated discourse, never stabled nor fixed. The unruliness of gossip, its refusal to bend, to break, to conform, is both the locus of its power as well as the source of its danger.

Gossip can also suggest a model of alternative knowledges and a site for feminist discourses. Gossip, as characterized by Voswinckel, is "the discourse of the excluded 'others,' who use it as a subversive strategy" (Voswinckel quoted in Chidgey et al., 483). In "Rumours from Around the Bloc: Gossip, Rhizomatic Media, and the Plotki Femzine", the authors explore how gossip is often used for control and surveillance, but also holds "illegitimate" knowledges that are capable of deconstructing and destabilizing hegemonic, institutional discourses. These "illegitimate narratives" (Chidgey et al., 484) are embedded with incredible amounts of potential productive power to disinvest from narratives of authenticity and logic. They argue that zines, both feminist and otherwise, as well as other forms of alternative media, can be a tool in this enduring and gendered struggle

Critics of gossip rely upon the politics of respectability based on white masculinist philosophical anthropology to dispute and discredit its inherently feminist paradigm. Unlike other forms of discourse, gossip has no explicit, formal rules

dictating who speaks when, the order of the conversation or business, and so on. Additionally, there are no theoretically based rules of entitlement to speak, no specified level of "evidence" or "authenticity" required, nor a fixed criteria of relevance, thus making gossip an extremely accessible practice and form of communication to those disempowered by traditional information institutions. Collins, in her essay "Gossip: A Feminist Defense" (1994) challenges the myth that all gossip is malicious and instead, offers the productive potentials of gossip to empower individuals, protect personal agency, and help us understand other people in general by paying attention to the details of their lives. It can also help challenge us to change our moral views and develop deeper empathy.

The use of personal experiences – of which gossip can certainly be considered to fall under - in feminist scholarship is examined in Foss & Foss' essay "Personal Experience as Evidence in Feminist Scholarship" (1994). Since current constructs and theories were developed without women's – or other historically marginalized peoples' perspectives – Foss & Foss argue that new theories need to be created to account for these absences, gaps, and erasures in order for us to accurately understand information collected, written, and gathered about women's experiences. They define personal experience as "the consciousness that emerges from personal participation in events" that "usually assume[s] the form of women's personal narratives about the events of their lives, their feelings about those events, and their interpretations of them", revealing "insights into the impact of the construction of gender on women's lives, their experiences of oppression and coping with and resisting that oppression, and their perspectives on what is meaningful in their lives" (39). On this note, personal

experience is always admissible because scholars should not and can not be the judges of experience, declaring some to be better, more important, or truthful than others. "How, after all, can one experience deny, negate, disprove, another experience?  Even if I've had a lot more of it, your experience is your truth.  How can one being prove another being wrong? (Le Guin quote in Foss & Foss, 39-40).  Essentially, only the participant can be the expert on their own life.  This poses interesting challenges to information literacy.

There is not much known about language use in all-female groups; thus the study of women's gossip, an integral speech and communication pattern among women, is crucial.  Jones focuses on the sociolinguistic features of gossip, with an emphasis on how it functions, to examine four categories of gossip: "house-talk, scandal, bitching, and chatting" (Jones, 242).  These forms of gossip share a commonality though:  that they utilized as a form of expression because marginalized peoples, such as women and queer folks, are permitted no other such forms.  Gossip is trivialized to downplay how threatening it can be to hegemonic systems of power through strategies ridicule, interruption, physical constraint, and even laws.  For example, the "bitching" category of gossip described by Jones is the medium of such that is the most threatening as it's an overt expression of anger at oppression, violence, and injustice.  While this anger is privatized, it functions as an important political form of consciousness-raising.  It also offers cathartic benefits to help women and other marginalized peoples survive the realities of living under a white supremacist, capitalist, ableist, heteropatriarchy.  Information sharing becomes therapeutic in this sense.

Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi (1994) argue in "The Tendency to Gossip as a Psychological Disposition: Constructing a Measure and Validating It" that gossip is context and intention dependent: the same information can be considered gossip or non-gossip depending on who gives it to whom. Therefore, we must always consider the context and intentions of gossip, not just the information itself, or we may fall prey to stereotypical and harmful ideologies that can bias our research. The existence of gossip itself, as a practice that has lasted throughout centuries of human history, speaks to gossip as fulfilling a deep human need which has some therapeutic effect. In terms of functionality, it transmits information, enforces group norms and values, as well as creates group cohesion and identification. Yet very little empirical research has been done on this subject, which is where this article and study came in. The authors found that both men and women participate in similar levels of communication marked as "gossip" but the content, based on gendered socializations, differs. They suggest that future research focus on the relationship between the tendency to gossip and other personality traits, such as extroversion and the need for power.

In "Feminist Figurations: Gossip as Counterdiscourse", Leach (2000) asks, "What would it mean to create new lines of flight, fragments of other possibilities, to experiment differently with meanings, practices, and our own confoundings?" (Leach, 223). She works with the legacies of Foucault, Deleuze, and Irigaray to build her work and theories on gossip as a form of feminist counterdiscourse which challenges notions of "authenticity" and who has the right to speak and on what matters. What is considered an "authentic" knowledge or source is often based in canons founded on legacies of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, ableism, and capitalism. Gossip does

important work in both the public and domestic spheres, where it has power as a real force in the world's events at home and in the political landscape. However, because of the logocentric structure of our culture, any knowledges that refuse to submit to scientific rules, are distrusted and feared. Serious gossip can be serious discourse as it allows us to illustrate and question the boundaries that make the normative prevailing discourses rendered as "legitimate". Additionally, taking gossip seriously gives power to the idea that the personal is not only political but also the theoretical. Thus, it can be understood as a weaponized intimacy practice: hard to repress, it provides knowledges and languages that could be disruptive to the hegemonic order but vital to marginalized peoples and communities. For example, gossip can provide crucial oral histories that have been suppressed for nations and peoples who have been colonized. Leach ends with an important question: "In what ways does the practice of gossip both appropriate and undercut traditional representations of dialogue, stereotypical representations of women's talk and the everyday?" (Leach, 2000).

Highlighting the ways in which lesbians use gossip, Livia (1996) in her chapter, "With Gossip Afterthought" challenges politics of authenticity, and centers gossip as a community-building practice integral to social politics of marginalized peoples who are excluded from many traditional information institutions. She asks of us, "If by 'mere' gossip, we mean that what we are saying is not necessarily true, then why are we repeating it?" (Livia, 1). Livia attests to desire to create our own histories, our own archives, of which gossip undoubtedly plays an important role in. It is also an important tool for communities, as it allows for us to "all join in, adding what we know or think or feel. It provides a more stimulating, more equal, more informative service" (Livia,

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4-5). She argues that much of our (lesbians) history will not be found in traditional documents or information institutions, such as rapes and queer bashings (that don't make the papers) and the existence of dyke bars, pointing to the vitality of gossip in creating and preserving the histories of marginalized communities. Additionally, Livia argues for the abolition of police, at least in lesbian communities where women are incredibly vulnerable to brutality and violence at the hands of the state. Gossip, then, can function as an alternative source of justice and accountability. This is especially important for survivors of sexual and interpersonal violence, as Livia notes, "We decide for ourselves what we will believe. Not only a decision, but a political decision. If a woman tells you she has been raped, do you believe because the consequences of not believing are so much worse?" Livia argues that we need more gossip, not less, to make informed political decisions.

Duffy (2002) thinks about gossip In terms of research possibilities in her essay "Hot Gossip: Rumor as Politics". She argues that while gossip and rumor have a universally reviled location in dominant discourse, they also wield productive power that can provide researchers with information not available by other means, offer evidence of how specific groups perceive an issue or situation and how they represent it to outsiders, build and support existing sociopolitical communities and networks, particularly among the powerless, and that can be used to criticize systems of power. Most importantly, the ways in which we use (and abuse) gossip reveals the struggle over what counts as knowledge and who gets to define it.

Rumor and gossip help both powerful and powerless interest groups to spread information, influence political processes, and create, support, and sustain political

networks. Far from trivial, gossip and rumor are integral to the political process. It can function as both a tool of control for powerful interest groups as well as a mode of resistance for marginalized groups and peoples. The term "gossip" is used as a pejorative to undermine the importance of information transmitted via oral, feminine, networks, typically operating outside the realms of so-called "rational" discourse based in masculinist understandings of logic and authenticity. This strategy is used to undermine and exclude marginalized peoples' contributions, knowledges, and work in political debates and decisions.

However, "rumor-based resistance strategies" (Duffy, 174) represent crucial, value-laden, knowledges that are excluded from traditional information institutions, such as media outlets controlled by single-interest groups. In this type of society, gossip and rumor may be one's best sources of information about political corruption, current affairs, and other such scandalous yet important topics. Marginalized communities can use these oral networks as a sort of political resistance, one of the "weapons of the weak" (Scott quoted in Duffy, 175).

We can imagine rumor as a political instrument that can build power through the act of gossiping and as a form of political resistance that can create space for marginalized groups to enter public discourse they normally would be denied access to. Gossip threatens systems of power by not only disseminating reputational information but by deciding reputations themselves. Far from being a trivial and superficial activity, gossip is actually a complex, sophisticated, and powerful process that centrally contributes to the successful functioning of one in their environment.

After all, if gossip were so trivial, why would those with/in power make such grandiose, sustained, attempts to stifle it?

Elmer (1994) states, "gossip is a powerful process in the politics of everyday life. This inevitably makes it the target of attempts at control". He argues that gossip will continue to be distorted and misrepresented as a communication practice as long as gender injustices in the political and economic landscapes of our culture exist (Elmer, 1994), which is why the task of reclaiming gossip from the grasps of those with the power to degrade, dismiss, and downplay it is crucial. In some cases, gossiping and the rumors spread via this communication tactic have gained so much traction that they have led to legal investigations and the eventual convictions of rapists and abusers (Salter, 2013).

In particular, I will focus on the ways survivors of interpersonal and sexual violence have utilized gossip as a form of weaponized intimacy and resistance, due to the pervasive ways in which rape culture – or the ways in which rape is connected to enabled by a myriad of everyday social and cultural practices that minimize and excuse rape – operates to dismiss, silence, shame, and blame survivors for and about the trauma they've experienced. To do so, I will analyze two forms of digital media: zines and social media as mediums that survivors have utilized in unique ways to resist rape culture.

*Social Media and the Online Politics of Survivorship*

Social media is defined as "forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as

videos)" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2016), such as Facebook, Twitter, tumblr, and Instagram. These online technologies have intensified the everyday reach and visibility of issues of sexual and interpersonal violence. While social media allows for the creation and exchange of unique user generated content with the potential to exercise one's creativity, traditional gendered power structures that shape offline spaces are duplicated on social media. Even so, social media has become an important contemporary site of feminist participation in the public sphere, as well as for activism, especially for young women (Sills et al., 2016). One of the benefits of online spaces is that they can circumvent the gatekeeping of "old media", producing a "counterpublic" (Fraser, 1990) – a discursive network that elaborates alternative styles of political behavior and norms of public speech – that functions not only as a site of discussion for survivor's voices, but a space in which survivors and online activists can seek justice, healing, support, and accountability outside of the prison-industrial complex and associated criminal "justice" system. Since the public sphere has never been a truly open forum, as it is "rife with exclusions along gender, race, and class lines, with their voices always struggling for legitimacy" (Sills et al., 937), social media has emerged as an alternative discursive space with the potential to be flexible and friendly to the needs of survivors. These pockets of resistance on the Internet produce supportive spaces for survivors to share their experiences with, understandings of, and organize against rape culture, sexual violence, and interpersonal violence. In this way, they function as a form of "subaltern counterpublics" (Fraser, 1990) that can create a sense of collective belonging through creating content, as well as through the consumption and (re)distribution of what other survivors are making.

Social media is an important site of analysis because of not only its' widespread popularity and use but its' accessibility in terms of raising survivor issues in ways that are user-oriented and able to be widely and quickly disseminated. Social media platforms have made it easier to seek out a social justice-informed education; indeed, feminist messages – including those about rape culture – are now part of the online landscape for young people (Sills et al., 2016). Additionally, survivor spaces online operate with a "politics of care" (Rentschler, 2014) that enables the construction of healing spaces. These spaces are enclaves, hidden from the view of most of the public, and dedicated to fostering resistance and nurturing the community's needs.

An important aspect of social media culture is "call out culture" which is an alternative, gossip-oriented, way of seeking accountability and justice by "exposing" the harmful behaviors of others, particularly abusers and rapists. Call out culture is a form of gossip, essentially, as it empowers survivors to immediately and directly talk about their experiences with sexual and interpersonal violence in a public forum. For those who have been failed by the criminal "justice" system (or who refuse to participate in sustaining the prison-industrial complex), calling out their perpetrators can be a powerful way to seek justice and/or revenge in a fashion that both counteracts and challenges contemporary social and legal norms. Call outs are reminiscent of some early feminist anti-rape organizing and activism, such as the publishing of identities of rapists in feminist newspapers (Gavey, 2009). An important question remains, however, how does it work and is it effective? Here are four tangible examples from the past decade of online vigilante justice for survivors:

- In 2007, female students created a Facebook page outing a male student as a "piece of shit rapist" (Slovic, 2008). Subsequently, the local campus newspaper picked up the story, one of the victims made a formal complaint to the university which resulted in a hearing and the suspension of the male student (Salter, 228).

- Steubenville, Ohio: an unconscious high-school girl was gang-raped by several of her male classmates, which was posted on social media sites. Alexandria Goddard used the aforementioned social media posts to gather evidence implicating her perpetrators. She posted these materials, as well as the names of the boys involved, to her blog, which garnered international media coverage and eventually resulted in the convictions of two students for rape of a minor and three adults for obstructing the investigation (Salter, 228).

- The tumblr blog "Predditors" was created in 2012 with the goal of naming men who post photos online of girls and women taken without their consent. The information they gathered by these activists was used in a high-profile case to fire and convict a high school teacher who was taking photos of his underage female students (Salter, 228-229).

- Savannah Dietrich made international headlines in 2012 when she defied a gag order by tweeting the names of two boys convicted of sexually abusing her in Kentucky. Online support of Dietrich's defiance of the gag order proved powerful, bringing enough pressure on the court to give Dietrich a better outcome and also resulted in a series of blog posts outing the boys as rapists (Salter, 229-232).

However, there is an hierarchy of survivors and sexual violence, set up by systems such as white supremacy, classism, ableism, (hetero)patriarchy, and the ways they interact and intersect with rape culture. For example, the case of Kim Duthie, who posted nude photos of three St. Kilda football players with the message 'Merry Christmas courtesy of the St. Kilda Schoolgirl' after she was raped by a group of these football players, resulting in a pregnancy, all of which was dismissed by the authorities. Duthie's conduct can be understood as that of a traumatized teenage girl under extraordinary pressure – yet her case was largely ignored by the same activist networks and feminist blogs that supported Dietrich (who conformed to many of the "ideal victim" stereotypes and not only financial access to legal and media advice but the emotional and financial support of her family). Instead, social media articulated a massive misogynist attack on her character and behavior where users even created hate groups like "'Closing your legs after a hard day of being Kim Duthie' with over 12,000 'likes'" (Salter, 234). Clearly, not all survivors can find representation, support, and solidarity in such public forums – instead, a fierce backlash might emerge. These online counterpublics privilege younger users who conform to stereotypes about the "ideal victim". However, the willingness of some survivors to seek out alternative modes of discourse and justice points to an indisputable shortfall in the (in)adequacy of institutions' effectiveness to responding to sexual and interpersonal violence. Thus, other mediums for survivors to resist sexual and interpersonal violences must rise up.

### *Zines and Survivors: Creating Art That Transforms Trauma*

Zines are "quirky, individualized booklets filled with diatribes, reworkings of pop culture, iconography, and a variety of personal and political narratives. They are

self-produced and anti-corporate. Their production, philosophy, and aesthetic are anti-professional" (Piepmeier, 2009). They are traditionally self-produced, embodying a DIY (do-it-yourself) ethos and are anti-corporate in nature, making them a popular medium for challenging dominant discourses around sexual violence and the support of survivors via feminist interventions and resistance. "Zines reflect communities in a state of progress [and] give a voice to the everyday anonymous person because they often do not easily reflect a distinct author" (Gordon, 4). Zines "are education and revelation, empowerment and healing, giddy secret and proud f-you (Zeisler quoted in Piepmeier, xiv); "they are "irreverent, parodic, utopian, and imaginative, [and] thus, in a sense, zines perform the difference they are trying to make" (Licona, 109). Zines are an effective and powerful tool in the movement against sexual and interpersonal violence because "they complicate reality by giving personal voice and experience to political projects" (Gordon, 5), envisioning the possibility of change, while simultaneously acknowledging that "these are not formulas or simple answers to complicated structures of dominance" (Gordon, 6).

Zines function as another medium for gossip because of their D.I.Y. approach to the processes of creation and publication that allow for zinesters (people who create or contribute to zines) to voice their experiences, feelings, and thoughts without any gatekeepers, enabling creators to publish the names of rapists and abusers anonymously. Like many other forms of gossip, they challenge academic scholarship's claim to "authentic" knowledge and information production and dissemination around discussions of sexual and interpersonal violence.

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Take, for example, the zine *Quarrel: Stories of Survivor Self Determination – Direct Action, Strategies for Safer Spaces, & Ripping the Patriarchy to Shreds* which states in their "Introduction":

We support the self-determination of survivors and use harm reduction inspired techniques in survivor-led actions to transform our communities into safer spaces.

We work toward developing alternatives for addressing harm outside of the misogyny, racism and classism of the police state. We support and value accountability processes, see [them] as critical to the practice of transformative justice, and believe they can take many forms. In this work, we have found the tools of harm reduction useful for addressing people with patterns of abuse who are unwilling to be accountable. We have confronted perpetrators of assault, set boundaries, presented community demands and shared information as an act of self defense. [emphasis mine] (Quarrel, 4).

*Quarrel* combines resources for survivors with stories of direct actions against abusers and rapists and rants like "Assholes Everywhere" and "We'll Show You Crazy Bitches" (Quarrel, 3). This zine publishes the names of rapists and abusers who have avoided accountability and describes how the Quarrel collective took direct action against them to pursue closure, accountability, and justice for survivors. An example of their strategy, in their own words, follows:

We took an extreme amount of care in organizing this action and response. While we find [name redacted]'s violent impact on queer Women of Color atrocious and intolerable, we did not pour all of our energy into an

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accountability process which he would use to continue to perpetrate harm, as that had already happened multiple times.  At the same time we did not want to lead a smear campaign, criminalize this abuser or police him.  We wanted to support survivors and their agency, we wanted something more harm reductive for our communities.  We consciously chose to purse cautious awareness raising through one on one conversations to create a boundary around Queer Women of Color safe spaces to allow the participation and presence of survivors (13).

What ensued in the aftermath of this direct action was a "great deal of hostility" as the organizers and survivors were accused of "being caught up in a victim frenzy" (Quarrel, 13) which led to the loss of political alliances and friendships along the way.  However, the collective also noted they received "unexpected support and resisted the patriarchy and misogyny that would accept that a man with a pattern of assault and abuse has more of a right to participate in community and political organizing than people who have survived his violence" (Quarrel, 13).  A letter, just one among many sent in the backlash to the Quarrel collective reads:  "Stop your gossip, Stop it!" (Quarrel, 64).   They respond with "Some thoughts on Gossip", which speaks to the relationship between speaking up about sexual violence and being accused of gossiping:

There is no clear line that neatly separates [gossip from other modes of sharing critical information].  It all becomes especially dodgy when discussing a topic which is continually evaded, like sexual assault.  I once heard "unsubstantiated" information fourth hand about a man's reputation of abusing women, allegations of abuse.  I didn't even know the person who mentioned it and

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struggled for a moment with the idea that passing on this rumor could be harmful. I decided to share the information and in opening the conversation I heard dozens of stories about the man's abusive past within a few months. There was widespread knowledge of pattern abuse just under the surface, knowledge that could have kept women in our community from becoming survivors of violence (64).

After publishing this zine, the Quarrel Collective "is sun setting for now, dissipating back into the ionosphere in order to free up our genius to cultivate different forms of organizing for self-determination" (Quarrel, 6). While the collective itself may no longer exist, their zine perhaps "small-scale", their words and legacies still do live, offering fellow survivors options for redress outside of the police state and prison-industrial complex, the possibility of political interventions by providing an outlet for active criticisms, and in doing such, modeling new ways of being and conjuring up possibilities for change, imagining new worlds and existences: those free of a rape culture.

Like social media, accessibility challenges and hierarchies exist. Zines are produced primarily by white, middle-class, people (whose experiences inform zines and zine culture as a whole) due to the fact that making zines requires not only time and access to resources but the ability to absorb the costs of printing and shipping copies upfront. While *Quarrel* was produced by queer women of color and zine distros that circulate *only* zines written by Black and Brown authors exist (such as Brown Recluse Zine Distro), white voices still dominate the zine scene, creating hostility against people of color.

Scholarship on gossip, especially feminist research on the potentials of gossip as a tool of resistance, have steadily grown over the years, much work still needs to be done. Some areas for further research include:

- Gossip practices and theorizations of such among people of color, queer and transgender people, disabled people, working class people, people who participate in sex work or other activities deemed "illicit", and so on, as much of the literature focuses only on (presumably) white women's experiences with gossip.

- The use of gossip as a positive and productive tool in library management.

- The authenticity of gossip as archival records and as evidence of such and/or work that challenges masculinist conceptualizations of authenticity and legitimacy in the archives.

- Histories of how people with/in power have attempted to control gossip and the ways in which marginalized communities and peoples have resisted these attempts at such through creative information strategies.

- What affects the effectiveness of gossip; what contexts is it most powerful in; and how gossip can be weaponized efficiently (as well as where it has the potential to fail and/or harm the gossipers).

- The ways in which gossip challenges and/or complicates traditional understandings of information literacy.

- The transmission of gossip in and through informal information networks that compares and contrasts these practices among different groups.

These are a few examples of areas for further research on gossip; almost endless possibilities for new research and scholarship exist, especially within the field of Library and Information Science.

*Conclusion*

Gossip can be – and is – a powerful tool of resistance, a form of weaponized intimacy, that marginalized peoples and communities have utilized for centuries. It remains one of the most heavily attacked practices, across a multitude of sources, from religious to scholarly. Gossip is often deemed "trivial" but if it was truly so, it wouldn't be the victim of such a sustained and passionate attack, speaking to its' power as a "weapon of the weak" (Scott, 1985) and a practice of everyday resistance. Feminists have recently taken up a defensive position, arguing that it's one of the few ways women can participate in the public sphere. I extend this argument to survivors of sexual and interpersonal violence by examining examples of how gossip has been used by survivors and their allies via social media and zines. While both offer success stories, the adherence to the "good survivor" narrative is key in determining this and violent backlashes can occur. Both also pose accessibility issues related to race, class, gender, disability, nationality, and so on. For example, social media may not be accessible to users with specific disabilities or to folks without an Internet connection. Zines, on the other hand, cost money to print and are dominated by white, middle-class, voices. Through the test of time, informal information networks or "word of mouth" seems to remain the most accessible and effective way for gossip to operate as an avenue to share life-saving information among survivors. Many areas for potential further research exist as this is still a relatively new area of scholarship. Gossip will

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continue to be challenged about legitimacy and authenticity as long as our culture's sociopolitical oppressive landscape exists. Until then, I will continue to gossip, to speak my rapist's name out loud, to warn other women and queer people about him, and offer my experience as my truth.

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