

NEW WAYS OF SEEING: SURVIVOR RHETORIC & (RE)WRITING STORIES OF
HUMAN TRAFFICKING

By

John T. Gagnon II

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing—Doctor of Philosophy

2017

ABSTRACT

NEW WAYS OF SEEING: SURVIVOR RHETORIC & (RE)WRITING STORIES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

By

John T. Gagnon II

New Ways of Seeing: Survivor Rhetoric and (Re)Writing Stories of Human Trafficking, listens to the ways survivors of human trafficking tell their stories and applies their reflections to problematize culturally situated discourses around the issue. Employing a methodology of care and situated within a cultural rhetorics paradigm, this project draws from decolonial, feminist, and indigenous theories to demonstrate how mainstream conversations around human trafficking have been framed in the discourse of globality, thereby rendering us less capable of hearing the voices of those most impacted. I explore how participants' storytelling practices reveal multi-layered rhetorics of recognition that push against the pervasive tendency of abstractifying discourses around the issue of human trafficking. I further demonstrate how the participants engage in a negotiation between the articulation of self and the use of the rhetorical frames of dominant human trafficking narratives to both encounter and confront colonizing language, while subversively using that same language to connect with the external. The project illuminates potential paths forward for a paradigmatic shift away from the globalized, colonizing rhetoric that has to-date defined human rights issues.

Copyright by
JOHN T. GAGNON II
2017

I dedicate this dissertation to Judy Wildman Roberts, my “other” mother, my confidant of many years, and, most of all, my friend. This project is, in many ways, a reflection of the things you taught me about the importance of listening, compassion, and empathy. Thank you for always encouraging me to *be* better, to *do* better, and to try to positively impact the world, no matter the context.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To My Committee Chair: *Dr. Malea Powell*, thank you for guiding me these past years and for giving me the opportunity to learn from you. I remember our initial meeting, in February 2013, and the ensuing conversation about my research interests. It was, as I recall, the first time someone fully processed what I was *trying* to articulate. You spent the next four years patiently helping me find my voice and my place in the academy. You always listened, gave me the space I needed to experiment and grow, and introduced me to the many storytellers who have shaped my scholarly identity. Perhaps more importantly, you've been a constant pillar of support as I sought to find my path and reorient as a human, while holding me accountable to my commitments. Thank you for being my academic mother, my mentor, and my friend. I am deeply honored to be one of your relations. *P.S.* – I know it may have seemed inconsequential at the time, but the Post-it note you gave me while I was writing this project will always be a cherished possession. I would not have finished without your encouragement.

To My Committee: *Dr. Bill Hart-Davidson*, thank you for the many times you talked with me about the intersections of law, policy, and rhetoric and for helping me think about ways to make my research accessible to communities beyond the academy. Even when I lacked confidence, you promoted my work and reminded me of its importance. At every turn, you've been available for whatever I needed when I needed it. I aim to emulate your approachability and kindness with my own students.

Dr. Trixie Smith, thank you for opening my heart and my mind to alternate ways of *feeling* and *seeing*. The *Embodied Rhetorics* class I took from you will forever be a

pivotal moment in my evolution as a scholar and as a human. In that class and in our subsequent conversations, you created the space for me to engage in self-examination and to genuinely re/connect with both myself and others. This project would have never come to fruition without that influence.

Dr. Stuart Blythe, one of my fondest experiences during my time at Michigan State was taking your class on rhetorical history and theory – I was a first-year doctoral student and the class reminded me of all the reasons why I fell in love with rhetoric. Even though I'm a Chicago Cubs fan, you found a way to overcome my character deficiency and spent the past years supporting my work while offering up invaluable guidance on ways to focus, structure, and present my scholarship to disparately situated audiences.

To My Other Academic Mentors: *Dr. Liza Potts, Dr. Candace Epps-Robertson, Dr. Dànielle DeVoss, and Dr. Terrion Williamson.* Each of you has guided me and left an impression on me. During my time at Michigan State, you offered reading suggestions, presented alternative approaches to and valuable critiques of my research, and opened my mind to new projects. Dànielle, you get special mention for your efforts in assisting me in thinking about the application of visual rhetorics to my research and for your “failed” attempts at guiding me in my ongoing quest to catch Northern Pike. Apparently, I still have some learning to do.

To My MSU Friends: *Phil Bratta*, our fishing trips, though notoriously unsuccessful, buoyed my soul and reminded me of the joy that life and friendship can bring. You opened yourself, your home, and your ideas; you even took the time to read and comment on my dissertation when it was still in draft form! Thanks for getting me

out of the house, thanks for all the conversations, and thanks for getting me back on the basketball court. Bottom line, you helped me begin to heal, and that's no small thing. Thank you for your friendship.

Ezekiel Choffel, we walked onto the map with similar stories and you embraced me as a brother. When I was unsure of what to do or to whom I could turn, you were there. Early on, you valued the work I could do and the work we could do together. You've been persistent in your vision to making scholarship matter; I look forward to joining you in that endeavor. You've become one of my dearest friends and I'm grateful to have you in my life. To many more years of friendship, conversation, and collaboration.

Wonderful Faison, when we first met you seemed determined to break through my exoskeleton. I'm so glad you did. I've thoroughly enjoyed getting to know you through our many conversations around the idiosyncrasies of the academy, the role of rhetoric, and the recent moves of our favorite baseball teams. Thank you for the many late nights, shared meals, and good drinks. Most of all, thank you for being you.

Doug Schraufnagle, we've embarked on journeys of intellect and of the soul, and you've never let me forget that there's something *more* to explore. With every encounter, you remind me that while the search may *at times* be lonely, it need not always be. You played a key role in convincing me to come to MSU for my doctoral studies; I'm glad I listened. I look forward to a lifetime of continued conversation about life's mysteries.

Maria Novotny, I deeply appreciate having had the opportunity to get to know you and work with you. You're efficient, you're motivated, and you're kind. We tend to

operate on the same wavelength and I am always grateful when I walk into a meeting and realize you're there. You've been my accountability partner, my collaborator, and have consistently encouraged me even when things got tough. Thanks for checking in on me when I needed it most. I hope we get to work together in the years to come.

Ronisha Browdy, you inspire me in so many ways: the work you do, the way you do your work, and the way you treat others. One of my great regrets is that we didn't get to spend more time together, because I always enjoy our talks and tend to walk away from our interactions having learned something. You've been one of the few people who *always* brings a smile to my face. Thank you.

Les Hutchinson, we've had a connection from the first time we met. While we've traveled different paths, there's always been considerable overlap in our interests, in our approaches to scholarship and work, and in how we make do. Thank you for always being so kind and welcoming, for your listening ear, and for sharing your work. I look forward to you making waves! We haven't interacted as much as I would have liked, but I'll always consider you an academic sister and a friend.

To My Brothers: *Raheim Myers*, you've been with me from before this journey began and had a front row seat to the transition. You and I have been together through thick and thin, through joy and sorrow, and you *always* had my back. You're one of the most important people in my life there's not a day that goes by where I'm not thankful for you. Thanks for all the good times, the late-night conversations, the excellent cooking, and for listening me drone on about all my problems. Whatever comes next, I know you'll be there rooting for me.

Eric Liddick, we go back...way, way back. And I'll always honor the bond that we developed in Sri Lanka. You are my best friend, my best man, and trusted guide, come hell or high water. We've been on an adventure or two together and I hope that we find the time and find it within ourselves to go on another one soon. Thank you for encouraging me on my life path *and* my academic path. I think we have another collaborative journal article to write one of these days, don't we?

To My Family: *Mom*, I love you. Thank you for giving me the appreciation of learning and inspiring me to be the best version of me. *Dad*, thank you for reading to me when I was young and for reminding me that mental fitness should be combined with physical and spiritual fitness. *Idalida*, thank you for making me laugh. And, thank you for opening your family to me and letting me be a part of your lives. *Miguel*, thank you for the ways in which you model kindness, compassion, and love; I will always look up to you. *Liz*, there's far too much to say within this limited space, but thank you for encouraging me to initiate this journey. There have been a lot of ups and downs, but pursuing this path was always the right choice. Thank you for seeing that and convincing me.

To My Dogs: Maia and Medusa, you offered me company while I wrote, reminded me when to take breaks, and made sure that I took time to play amidst all the work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Chapter 1: An Introduction | 1 |
| Background: Definitions & Clarifications..... | 8 |
| Setting the Scene: Human Interest Stories & the Dominant Narrative | 13 |
| Participant Recruitment | 20 |
| Setting the Stage: From Methodology to Analysis to Findings | 22 |
| INTERLUDE | 25 |
| Chapter 2: Learning How to Listen as a Research Practice..... | 27 |
| Orienting Lines..... | 31 |
| Why Stories? | 34 |
| Relational Accountability & Rhetorical Listening: Enacting a Methodology of Care ... | 38 |
| Storyteller Introductions | 47 |
| INTERLUDE | 59 |
| Chapter 3: Rhetorics of Recognition in Storytelling Practices | 61 |
| Transformational Storytelling | 63 |
| Remixing Identity: Beyond the Labels | 70 |
| Transformative Storytelling | 78 |
| Storytelling Practices: Empowerment, Activism, and Advocacy | 84 |
| In Their Own Words: A Narrative Rooted in Human Dignity..... | 88 |
| INTERLUDE | 92 |
| Chapter 4: Negotiating Rhetorical Liminality | 94 |
| On Spatiality & Liminality | 96 |
| Interiors and Exteriors: Traversing Domains | 100 |
| Negotiating Credibility..... | 111 |
| Liminality, Perception, Performance..... | 118 |
| INTERLUDE | 126 |
| Chapter 5: New Ways of Seeing | 128 |
| Thoughts on Policy & Research | 132 |
| Implications in the Discipline of Rhetoric & Writing..... | 138 |
| Seeing the Unseen, Speaking the Unspeakable | 144 |
| Implications & Future Study..... | 147 |
| WORKS CITED | 152 |

Chapter 1: An Introduction

In recent years, the phenomenon of human trafficking has garnered increasing attention by researchers. The involvement of scholars situated within the humanities has played and continues to play an important role in more deeply understanding how to define, interpret, and address this significant social and human rights issue. Relevant literature in this area primarily addresses legislative analysis, activist strategy, policy implications, and other related high-level concerns.¹ Examples of representative work include²: Rachel Gong's examination, in 2015, of the connection between emotion and anti-trafficking digital activism; Letitia Campbell's and Yvonne Zimmerman's criticism, in 2014, of sexual emphases in trafficking awareness campaigns; Rhacel Parrenas' questioning, in 2011, of the binaries of choice and consent in anti-trafficking policies; and Jo Doezema's exploration, in 2010, of the rhetorical construction of victimhood in trafficking-related legal discourse. In 2009, Marie Segrave advocated for pro-rights approaches to anti-trafficking agendas; and, in 2007, Jackie Pollock critiqued the ways in which anti-trafficking activist strategies could impact sex workers.

While such work is valuable, and plays an essential role in helping us better theorize the limits of contemporary human trafficking discourse, the current literature tends to be defined by a breadth and focus on high-level concerns that lend themselves to oversimplification about an issue that is frustratingly complex, multidimensional, and

¹ By "high-level concerns" I mean research and analysis that focuses on broad concepts rather than on narrowly construed specifics about the ground-level realities of human trafficking.

² Such representative works connect the humanities with other fields and disciplines of study, including sociology, religious studies, ethics studies, gender and sexuality studies, and criminology.

ultimately rooted in lived human experience. Existing scholarship on human trafficking largely centers on the implications of extant culturally situated concepts while failing to interrogate the underlying processes of cultural uptake (i.e., how/why those concepts enter into broader discourse). More than that, existing scholarship – much of it rooted in and oriented by the colonial mindset – has operated in a top-down manner, thereby suggesting frameworks for policy development, legislation, and activism without fully considering the informative value of survivors’ lived experiences. Resultantly, to date, researchers have not seriously examined the *ground level, everyday discursive spaces*³ relevant to nuanced inquiry around human trafficking. Indeed, as Erin Kamler – who works at the intersection of feminist social justice and the arts – argues, we need to better account for the complexities of human trafficking by listening to unheard stories, particularly those that fail to align with the dominant narrative (74).⁴

This dissertation situates itself within this lacuna – indeed, no academic work has yet addressed the ways in which specific individuals who have been trafficked rhetorically frame the problem of human trafficking; nor has any significant work considered survivor stories as providing alternative rhetorical strategies and frameworks

³ Michel Foucault’s notion of discursive formations, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, is useful for understanding the differences in human trafficking discourses that exist in competing spaces. If a discourse is a group of statements belonging to a single system of formation, then we must understand each competing discourse – for example, the broader cultural discourse situated around human trafficking and the everyday discourses of human trafficking found on “the street” – that are necessarily different in how they operate linguistically, enunciatively, and logically. My claim that researchers have not seriously considered the ground-level, everyday discursive spaces around human trafficking then connects both with Foucault’s notion of discursive formations and with the question of how/why some discursive concepts enter into broader discourse and how/why some do not.

⁴ There is a disconnect between the dominant narrative, typically generalized and abstract, and embodied stories – the concrete, lived experiences of individuals. This distinction is critically important to the claims made within these pages.

through which to view the issue. In that sense, this dissertation is an attempt to open space for voice and to show embodied stories as empowering and counterhegemonic. Some academic work has *hinted* at such approaches. Most notably, Denise Brennan, in her book *Life Interrupted*, used brief first-hand survivor accounts to examine the global economic inequities that lead to trafficking. Other examples: Laura Murphy edited a collection of trafficking escape stories to complicate notions of rescue and victimhood; Carolyn Hoyle conducted structured interviews with survivors to examine the relationship between agency and victimization; and Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd conducted an oral history project compiling stories about the experiences and challenges of trafficking survivors to foster greater public awareness. However, no effort has actively analyzed what rhetorical practices survivors engage in, why they engage in those practices, or how those practices frame their experiences, particularly in comparison to the dominant narrative.

Further, while many scholars have criticized the contemporary discursive framework of human trafficking, no studies have contemplated how survivors and survivor stories might inform the development of alternative ways to articulate, or *see*, the problem.⁵ By actively listening to the stories told by those most involved and most impacted – and valuing lived experience and storytelling as the project centerpieces – this endeavor seeks to *begin* the work of reorienting and reframing our understanding of human trafficking by looking *first* to those who *have lived it* (Royster and Kirsch 5). In so

⁵ My choice here to describe articulation as “seeing” is purposeful and connects to epistemology. The idea here is that seeing = knowing. In this construction, then, it necessarily follows that survivor stories operate as knowledge-building exercises in counterhegemony while also building self-knowledge and, in some cases, community knowledge.

doing, this project seeks to more deeply understand how the stories such individuals tell about their survival, resistance, identity, and renewal, can help change the broader conversation. I look to survivor stories to theorize new ways of defining, framing, and addressing particularized human rights concepts. Embracing the notion that survivors' lived experiences are powerful, educational, and revolutionary, this dissertation applies – and practices – *cultural rhetorics* to explore how their stories and storytelling practices constellate to make new meanings, navigate complex experiences, and construct unique discursive spaces that are relevant to the work of reframing, or re-seeing, the issue of human trafficking.

As I've traversed the academic landscape, I've become increasingly concerned by what seems to be, as John Chernoff has described it, "a limited capacity to comprehend the significance of stories" that are rooted in lived experience, especially as it relates to this topic (6). The stories circulated on the topic of human trafficking – in media, in public awareness campaigns, across law enforcement public relations, and by activists – overwhelmingly tend to be stories *about* others.⁶ In this sense, we might identify a core problem of anti-trafficking discourse as being one of imposing pre-defined assumptions onto lived experiences. Such discourse operates top-down rather than bottom-up by placing a framework around the issue of human trafficking *first* rather than

⁶ Not only this; they also tend to be overwhelmingly focused on statistics. This project does not introduce human trafficking statistics for two reasons: first, despite widespread beliefs to the contrary, there are few reliable statistics on human trafficking, either domestically or internationally. The statistics that can be verified only represent contact points with government or nonprofit entities and therefore do not adequately represent the full scope of the issue. Second, "statistics are meaningless without the stories of people" (Chernoff 33). In taking this approach, I purposely make the move of *not* falling back on the Western rhetorical tradition (i.e., the problematic abuse of ethos, logos, and pathos to muddy rather than clarify) in how human trafficking is *presented* within these pages.

constructing it *from* the stories that are told by those most involved and most impacted. An alternate approach – the approach that I adopt and model in this dissertation – might more closely consider and account for the stories that individuals tell about their storytelling practices, the stories that survivors tell about their lived experiences, and put those into conversation with the stories that institutions put forward about human trafficking. Such stories “are alive and powerful, and we can be listening to, thinking about, and learning from” them (Lee 111).

In recent years, scholars have repeatedly highlighted the confusing, biased, and highly problematic human trafficking framework currently deployed across cultural discourses and legal structures. In response to such concerns, some scholars⁷ have called for the creation of new communication spaces and rhetorical frameworks with which to more accurately address the complexities and multidimensionality inherent to human trafficking. The framing problem remains unresolved. As such, this dissertation seeks to build on and contribute to ongoing interdisciplinary conversations by offering an example of what might be described as a *radical* approach to rhetorical inquiry around human rights issues generally, and human trafficking in particular, arguing that listening to the stories of those who have lived the experience should be the *central focus* and *foundational starting point* for any new “framing” project; a claim which has potentially significant implications for broader discussions around human rights rhetoric. This dissertation seeks to fill a research gap that has yet to be addressed in any of the literature, whether in the humanities or social sciences. While “survivor rhetoric” has

⁷ Most notably, Doezeema (2010), Hua (2011), Kara (2015), and Kamler (2013).

been explored across a range of contexts and for myriad purposes, the rhetorical practices of individuals who have experienced human trafficking remain largely unexamined and, considering the social importance of the issue, meaningfully studying such practices – particularly the ground-level, everyday lived experiences of survivors – may have far-reaching implications not just in policy, legal, and activist contexts, but also for service providers and those engaged in the work of supporting survivor transitions. As a result, this project presents a unique contribution to knowledge that has the potential to inform ongoing conversations across a range of disciplines and fields of practice.

Within the following pages I examine how individuals who have been trafficked share and use stories to make meaning, navigate experience, and construct unique discursive spaces around their experiences. In so doing, I question and theorize how those stories and storytelling practices operate in relation to culturally situated human trafficking discourses, with the goal of potentially identifying new ways of seeing the issue. My specific research questions focus on documenting how survivors of human trafficking negotiate their experiences in contexts of recovery and transition, while also inquiring as to what can be learned from those negotiations. As such, this research seeks to answer specific questions relating to rhetorical practices:

- 1) How do human trafficking survivors *construct stories* about their lived experiences, including experiences rooted both in trauma *and* recovery?
- 2) In what ways, and in what contexts, do human trafficking survivors *use* these stories, and for what purposes?
- 3) What insights about culturally based human trafficking stories can be discovered

as a result of studying the stories that survivors tell about themselves?

4) Do these insights, if any, have any implications for how we see/understand, articulate, and frame the human trafficking problem within the context of human rights systems?

When I began my journey with this project, I found myself captivated by the question of how individuals who have been trafficked conveyed their experiences through stories, particularly as those stories related to the culturally dominant narrative about human trafficking. But as I entered into this project, I knew that I needed to be careful with my assumptions, if I was to engage in a project that fully *listened* to my participants. Any other approach would, simply, be mirroring the very mindset that I sought to interrogate. So, instead of seeking out to *prove* my assumptions, I instead started by asking: what would individuals who had experienced human trafficking have to say about the culturally dominant narrative and how would it show up in their storytelling? Relatedly, I wanted to know how they used their own stories, to what ends, and why they chose to share, particularly when such sharing opened them up in ways that could make them vulnerable.

I begin exploring these questions by looking to the specific moves that our storytellers make across four separate interview sessions. In so doing, I listen to the stories told by two survivors of human trafficking, paying close attention to the ways in which they use these stories and the ways in which they navigate the language of human trafficking's dominant narrative. In this sense, then, I'm operating within these pages as a facilitator, helping to organize, structure, and think about the common themes and ideas with which *they* are primarily concerned. In taking this approach, I

caution the reader that there may be moments of dis-orientation. But it is in those moments of dis-orientation that we can begin to re-orient, to travel down new theoretical lines to understand how these stories are told, how they are used, and how they can help us see and understand human trafficking in a new light.

Background: Definitions & Clarifications

I think it important to address some definitions, assumptions, and limitations of this dissertation in an attempt to stave off any confusion from the get-go. In his book *Hustling is Not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl*, John Chernoff writes:

The very words we use might have different meanings in other contexts. Our terms of reference as readers might reflect our concerns, but by the same token, those terms can be confusing. For scholarly writers, one technique employed to handle the situation is to refine their terms in order to separate the confusing connotations. (7)

So, I'll spend some time addressing each of these areas. But I do so with a caveat. While I do believe it to be important to refine and clarify as much as possible, this project is largely interested in rhetorics of recognition, discursive shifting, and tactical language hybridity. Indeed, one of my primary observations – that which led to this project in the first place – is that the discourse around human trafficking is already confused, or at least has led to confusion across and between communities-of-interest. Considering that as an underlying claim that drives the questions of this project, there are certain limitations as to how much can be acceptably defined. As Chernoff laments, “the problem with that method” – that of refining terms – “is that minutely precise terms can become so vaporous that they have no earthly distillate: they cannot be

subsequently condensed and used” (7). As a project that is thinking about words, terms, and rhetorical framing, we’ll refine but not so much so that we fall into the very criticisms that I present about current rhetorical paradigms around human trafficking.

So, some points of clarification.

Human trafficking is an umbrella legal term that both describes a pressing human rights issue and encompasses many different types of exploitation; the term’s meaning, in a technical sense, shifts based on legal jurisdiction.⁸ In a cultural context, the term is often misinterpreted and misrepresented as, variously, smuggling, sex work, or slavery.⁹ Legally, the term human trafficking encompasses specific types of forced or coerced exploitation, including: sex trafficking, child sex trafficking, forced labor, bonded labor, involuntary domestic servitude, forced child labor, and the use of child soldiers (U.S. Department of State). While human trafficking has been recognized in international law since the early 1900s, within the United States the issue was, for “most of the twentieth century” viewed as “a private sphere issue primarily concerning women” (Chuang 452). In the United States, human trafficking remained largely unaddressed and undefined until the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA). Prior to the TVPA, federal law did not directly address human trafficking. Cases were, instead, tackled through a confusing, and oft outdated, patchwork of federal statutes, including

⁸ Specific legal definitions of human trafficking can and do differ between State laws, Federal laws, and International law.

⁹ Trafficking and smuggling are different legal concepts, though they are often used interchangeably. While conversations about the relationship between sex work and sex trafficking are important, this project does not conflate *all* sex work as sex trafficking; it is important to note that both of my participants drew this distinction as well. Finally, I do not deploy the use of the term “slavery” in this project. A summary of my arguments against the use of this terminology may be found in my article “Rhetoric Matters: Race and Slavery in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act,” *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society*, Vol. 5.3 (2016).

those arising out of the Peonage Act of 1867 as well as those relating to workplace conditions and compensation, and anti-prostitution laws, such as the Mann Act of 1910. As Barbara Stolz notes, “the authority for enforcing each of these tools was scattered across government and resulted in wildly different outcomes depending on which charges were brought or which agency pursued allegations of abuse” (317). As legal scholar Mohammed Matter describes it,

The TVPA of 2000 recognized for the first time trafficking in persons as a specific offense. Forced labor, trafficking with respect to peonage, slavery, involuntary servitude, forced labor, sex trafficking of children or by force, fraud, or coercion, unlawful conduct with respect to documents, and attempting to commit any of these acts were all identified as crimes in the TVPA of 2000. (1250)

The TVPA, like any piece of legislation, is a culturally situated text in that it is rooted in cultural awareness about a particular issue. Scholars such as Jo Doezema, Gretchen Soderlund, and Juliette Hua have offered up valuable critiques of contemporary anti-trafficking legislation. They contend that through omitting multiple narratives implicated by the human trafficking issue, contemporary anti-trafficking legislation constructs a particular/ized narrative that is rooted in historical, cultural, and religious concerns about nonprocreative sex in the United States. Their critiques demonstrate that the TVPA interweaves human trafficking with discourses of female vulnerability and commercial sex, reflecting the historical influences of the social purity agenda of the early 20th century, associated fears about so-called white slavery, and the continued influence of predominantly white communities and conservative religious groups on issues of female sexual autonomy, gender roles, and interracial sex.

Importantly, these scholars recognize the TVPA as only the latest in anti-trafficking legislation, marking a significant expansion of past legislative efforts, specifically the Mann Act of 1910, to stem the perceived threats of commercial sex work in the United States over the past century. It is this connection between past and present that renders Jessica Pliley's work useful and relevant. Pliley, a historian, initiates her examination of the connections between past and present anti-trafficking legislation by contextualizing the rise of the *white slave narrative* in the early 20th century United States, arguing that "fears about the prevalence of prostitution" at the time evoked both racialized and gendered concerns about sexual exploitation (2). Public discourse around prostitution – spurred by women's rights activists, purity reformers, and church affiliated groups – rendered women "as both victims and subjects of sexual surveillance" while also constructing the framework for a narrative that compared prostitution to trans-Atlantic slavery (21). Pliley demonstrates that this discursive configuration created a generally accepted myth in public discourse, depicting victims of sexual exploitation to be "fundamentally white," taken advantage of by nonwhite traffickers and clientele (21). This rhetorical maneuver shifted national memory about trans-Atlantic slavery by reconfiguring the use of the term *slavery* in American discourse, while exploiting heightened concerns about racial co-mingling and immigration (Gagnon). Pliley outlines how Herbert Hoover and his efforts to modernize the FBI relied heavily on the "politics of sex and morality to raise the bureau's reputation" resulting in Mann Act investigations comprising the *largest portion* of agent caseloads throughout the 1920s (135). Pliley focuses on the FBI's development of its own carefully articulated narrative about commercial sex, shifting over time from a

reliance on the discursive framework of *white slavery* to the language of *trafficking*. This move allowed for a stronger rhetorical connection between commercial sex and popular, yet oft inaccurate, beliefs about organized crime while simultaneously blurring the lines between forced and voluntary prostitution, further broadening the ability to investigate and bring charges against those profiting from sexual commerce.

Anti-trafficking laws have then functioned over time in both constructing and affirming cultural discourses about gender, sexuality, and race in the context of commercial sex and human trafficking. Conceptions of human trafficking, as rendered via contemporary legislation and federal enforcement, then may be understood as an outgrowth of pervasive racial, class, and gender-based fears at the turn of the 20th century and the codification of those anxieties in the Mann Act, and then via subsequent legislative acts such as the TVPA.¹⁰

We must recognize that human trafficking, definitionally, is not limited to a single type of exploitation. Even so, it should be acknowledged that the individuals who agreed to participate in this project identify as individuals who experienced *sex trafficking*. Within these pages I deploy the use of the term human trafficking instead of sex trafficking, despite my participants' particularized experiences, because this project is concerned with questioning the broader rhetorical frame itself, rather than the specific types of trafficking that occur.¹¹ This dissertation is not primarily, or only, interested in

¹⁰ The confluence of race, class, and gender in anti-trafficking legislation underscores the need for a multisocial identity lens, an intersectionality lens, anytime one thinks about human trafficking, either historically or contemporarily. Lynn Weber's *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework* provides some tools for assisting the reader in this regard.

¹¹ See Tryron Woods' work in *Surrogate Selves*, who writes: "Considering Western society's basis in the riotous carnal historical context of slavery and colonialism, it is unsurprising that today's discourse on human trafficking is inordinately preoccupied with women engaged in commercial sex. The discourse on anti-trafficking repackages the time-worn theme of colonial-ism's so-called civilizing mission." (124)

sex trafficking. Rather, throughout the following pages, I work with and listen to the stories told by two individuals, Deb and Liberty, who lived through sex trafficking experiences, and put their stories and storytelling practices into conversation with broader questions about the entire framework of contemporary human trafficking discourse. The rationale for this approach is two-fold: first, by drawing the broader rhetorical frame into question, we are poignantly confronted with the ways in which cultural discourse around the issue focuses predominantly on sex trafficking, to the detriment of seriously addressing other types of exploitation; second, it allows us to interrogate the ways in which this privileging also operates in specific ways that perpetuate harm to individuals in sex trafficking scenarios.

Setting the Scene: Human Interest Stories & the Dominant Narrative

I have a tendency, when describing this project, to portray it as a story about how the dominant narrative that shapes our understanding of human trafficking in the United States render silent the most important stories, stories like those told by Deb and Liberty. On a broader level, I might go so far as to say that this project attempts to lay bare one murky corner of the ongoing American story, a story that tells us that the constitutive condition of the United States is built on a variety of exploitative practices. In this sense, I am fond of describing this project in Malea Powell's words: "I listen for unheard stories, counter-stories, which are usually silenced by the narratives that construct 'life' in these United States" ("Blood and Scholarship" 2). Indeed, many of the questions that I grapple with in the following pages are driven by the need to explore and examine the dissonance(s) that I perceive between the narrative that constructs

culturally situated understandings about human trafficking and the unheard stories and counter-narratives that are told by those who have lived through trafficking experiences.

So, too, it is story about me, the author, as both a researcher and human being who has navigated what some would say is a unique journey, from enforcer to researcher, from someone who unquestioningly propagated human trafficking narratives from the perspective of the State to someone who began to question how those narratives operationalized once let loose into the world. It would be easy to remove myself from these pages, to write in a neutral voice, to be stand-offish and protect myself behind the walls of language. Indeed, this would in many respects be my preference, and perhaps fulfill an expectation of my role as a Rhet/Comp scholar. But, as a scholar who situates myself as a *cultural rhetorician*, I think it important to share a bit of myself within these pages, just as my participants do, not only because it honors my participants – who shared their stories with me – but because of the impact that Shawn Wilson's¹² teaching in *Research is Ceremony* has had on my academic path; and he teaches to impart myself in the telling (32). By imparting myself, I hope to lay bare my positionality and to encourage a conversation about orientations to research practices. Within these pages, by putting my stories in conversation with those shared by Deb and Liberty, I hope, in part, to dismantle some claims to definitive validity and to engage in a collaborative act of questioning and (re)writing stories of human trafficking so that the storytellers stand at the center rather than the periphery.

I think it important to offer a brief background about what I mean when I refer to the “culturally dominant narrative” about human trafficking, since I’ve invoked the phrase

¹² Shawn Wilson is Opaskawayak Cree from Manitoba, Canada; his work, situated in indigenous studies, focuses on research methodology and epistemology.

repeatedly already, and will continue to do so. My belief had long been that discourse around the issue of human trafficking operated in a distinctly colonizing manner, rendering silent the voices of those most impacted; the very same voices I believed to be the most impactful. Much of this belief was rooted in my own experience working in government, particularly during a two-year period, from late 2010 through the end of 2012, where I oversaw the day-to-day operations of a wide range of programs stemming from the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* and the *Violence Against Women Act*. In that role, I found myself actively involved with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Blue Campaign, a department-level initiative to develop a "unified voice" for anti-trafficking efforts that sought both to expand public awareness and to enhance "collaboration with law enforcement, government, non-governmental and private organizations" (Blue Campaign). When I started this work, the Blue Campaign was merely months-old, its framework still undeveloped, its scope of mission not fully defined, and its materials and operations still in a nascent stage. At the time, I recall a sense of urgency to increase the Department's public presence on the issue, as it lagged far behind the attention being paid to human trafficking in the media and by non-governmental organizations. One of the early points of conversation in this effort centered on the importance of stories. The refrain that we needed "human interest" stories was a recurring point in those early meetings. But it was also abundantly clear that not just any stories would do; rather, they had to fit specific parameters – they had to fit within a dominant narrative.

One of the observations that I made at that time – and have continued to observe

in public awareness campaigns about human trafficking – is that regardless of setting, stories about human trafficking tend to be structured in very specific, identifiable ways. In a cursory review of such stories – whether deployed by government agencies, activists, or non-profit organizations – we can see complex lived experiences slip into an overly simplified narrative framework and value system that fails to account for the importance of the humanity of those who *lived* what is being described. The dominant narrative may be identified by the following specific attributes: 1) a reduction of complex individuals into simple actors within binaries¹³ – moral/immoral, criminal/noncriminal, victim/agent, 2) an emphasis on the work of institutional actors in rescue and/or prosecution, 3) a use of the language of victimization and vulnerability, and 4) a de-emphasis on the voice of the individual who has been subjected to trafficking. In other words, the stories about human trafficking that enter into cultural discourse almost always follow the same format. Ralph Cintron tells us that such simplifications of the complex represent a “desire for a power that enacts a kind of cleansing that washes out” knowledge (149). This washing out repeatedly appears in human trafficking discourse, deploying the language of victimization and heroic rescue (Buckland 47). As such the dominant human trafficking narrative operates as a fiction that orders a topic that is rife with contradiction and complexity, thereby fulfilling the human “psychological need to navigate complexity and uncertainty” (Kamler 89).

¹³ Colonialism – and Western metaphysics – is based on binary oppositions and operates in binary narratives: Self/Other, good/evil, civilized/savage, etc. This binary component of the dominant narrative is structured/influenced by European colonialism, which as Edward Said argued in *Orientalism*, results in both paternalism and aggression, and that “there is no purer example than this of dehumanized thought” (108).

As a way of contextualizing my claim about what constitutes the dominant narrative, I look back to the Blue Campaign’s “human interest” stories because they rigorously follow this format, thereby exemplifying the dominant narrative. The same format and themes emerge when looking at any other organization, whether governmental or nongovernmental, that does work in and around the issue. I refer to the Blue Campaign here to both illustrate my point and because of personal familiarity; it connects with my own story. In writing this chapter, I revisited the Blue Campaign website to see what stories were being told now, more than three years since I had departed. The very first “human interest” story on the website is comprised of a single paragraph that briefly describes a “vulnerable” girl who is forcibly taken by a gang-member and sex trafficked. *Her* story is told in a mere two sentences. The emphasis – demonstrated by the majority of the content of the paragraph – is on law enforcement’s “collaborative efforts” to “rescue the victim.” As I read this, I was struck by the ways in which this narrative simplified what was very likely an incredibly complex, multi-faceted series of experiences. Notably, the individual who is the centerpiece of the story, *has no voice*. She has no identity, not even a pseudonym, other than that of being “vulnerable” and a “victim” in need of rescue. And, importantly, there is no real closure: the story ends with law enforcement’s act of rescue. We are given no sense of what happened to the human at the center of their “human interest” story. The remainder of the human interest stories on the *Blue Campaign* website are constructed identically: a few sentences describing the trafficking scenario followed by detailing the rescue and criminal prosecution. In none of these do we hear the voices of the individuals who had

been trafficked, have any sense of their identities other than their status as “victims,” nor do we know what became of them following their “rescue.”

Edward Snadjr writes, “Anti-trafficking accounts...almost always include simple binaristic themes and easily interpretable symbols of morality and immorality, murky, malevolent characters, and unsuspecting and ultimately helpless protagonists” (238). Organizations that use such accounts tend to couch their practices in rhetorics of rescue and liberation, offering up a “compelling yet problematic vision of the liberated slave...as a figure who literally moves from darkness to light, from animal to human” (Govindan 514). In the stories about human trafficking told by the Blue Campaign, we see both of these moves at work and each of these stories represents the dominant narrative about human trafficking, which breaks down the lived experiences of individuals along simplified lines: the victim has no agency – and, as such, no voice – and law enforcement rescues or saves the victim from an immoral criminal actor. Considering this, then, we may describe the dominant narrative of human trafficking as rooted in and oriented by the colonial mindset – operating in a top-down categorizing manner, talking *about* rather than *with*, and not fully considering the informative value of survivors’ lived experiences. As Julie Cruikshank has observed, the colonialist mindset “move[s] forward by devising and reinforcing categories...” (7). In devising and reinforcing these categories, those with power and privilege monopolize and control the human trafficking narrative while marginalizing and silencing – i.e., *writing out* – the voices of those who have experienced it. In other words, the dominant narrative operates as a “particular language” that belongs to “the historical process of colonization” by silencing the

individual who has been trafficked (Spurr 1). In this sense, the individual of the “human interest” story, is rendered as a colonized “other” who is used discursively for the purposes of reinforcing agenda-laden categories.

This project questions the discursive othering that occurs in the dominant narrative by shifting focus from that narrative and instead focusing on the stories told by those typically identified as “other.” Put another way, this project centers on two individuals who have been “written out” of the narrative and seeks to explore the ways in which they tactically “re-write” themselves, both into the narrative *and* into new discursive spaces. This leads us to shift into considering what it means to include, to emphasize – indeed, *to listen to* – the stories of those who have lived these experiences, and what those individualized stories do to our understanding of the issue of human trafficking. One might articulate this project, then, as an effort that seeks to confront discourses that silence, that render absent, that de-value – that *discursively exploit* – the lived experiences of individuals who have already endured physical exploitation. As Malea Powell has written:

If dominant narratives only attain dominance through imagining themselves whole in contrast to other/Other narratives, then we must imagine those narratives differently, imagine ourselves in a different relationship to them. The challenge, then, is to imagine an alternative, not an Alternative, one that confronts difference...and empire, in the very discourses that bind us. (Powell, “Ghosts,” 18).

In this then, it is worth noting that within the space of this dissertation I am centering on

the storytelling practices of my research participants and the ways in which they interact with, use, and disregard the dominant narrative for their own purposes. In this, I seek to listen for the alternatives that may arise, that can – and do – confront difference. By listening to my participants, I believe that we can begin to imagine some alternatives to the dominant narrative of human trafficking.

Participant Recruitment

The participants for this project were recruited using a modified snowball sampling approach via coordination with Jane White, Director of the Michigan Human Trafficking Taskforce. I had been in contact with Jane since my first year in doctoral studies and we were able to develop a productive relationship, one which allowed a multi-year conversation about the importance of language choices in anti-trafficking activism. After reaching out to a number of organizations to recruit participants, my longstanding relationship with Jane proved the most fruitful; she helped me identify and communicate with potential participants who self-identified as survivors of human trafficking, were of adult age, and who had previously shared stories about their experiences in public and/or semi-public settings. Jane's guidance, support, and generosity enabled me to interact with a number of individuals who had experienced different types of exploitation under the human trafficking umbrella, including those who had been exploited for sex, forced labor, and indentured servitude. The recruitment process – spanning a period of three months of conversations, questions, and clarifications – eventually resulted in the enlistment of two individuals who had both been sex trafficked. While my initial vision for the project was to garner participants from a broader spectrum of the human trafficking landscape, other potential participants

expressed a deep reticence to engage with this project – particularly in having their words cemented in text – due to ongoing concerns about potential reprisal and variously situated questions about potential impacts to legal and/or immigration status.¹⁴ The participants in this research project – Deb and Liberty, who I will more fully introduce in Chapter 2 – are unique individuals, yet having both been sex trafficked, share much in common. Both experienced being forced and coerced into selling their bodies for sex, against their will. And both suffered profound physical and psychological trauma stemming from those experiences. Liberty’s intersection with sex trafficking happened at two distinct times in her life, while Deb’s experience spanned multiple decades, being both trafficked and engaging in independent sex work at various times.

Oral history interviews with Deb and Liberty were audio recorded, transcribed, and rhetorically analyzed. Because of the sensitive and personal nature of much of the content of the interviews conducted as part of this study, I’ve taken the effort to protect participant identities by changing the names of people and, in some instances, places. To ensure the privacy of participants – as well as to protect them from any potential for recrimination or retaliation – I have chosen to exclude as much personally identifiable information from the text of the dissertation as possible. Simply stated, I have made a good faith effort to confuse any potential effort to identify specific individuals and readers should assume that any name in the text is not the actual name of the person or place described. To further protect participants, I made a number of decisions in

¹⁴ This, in and of itself, represents an interesting “finding” of this project that I’ll return to in the conclusion chapter. It reflects a perceived reality of those who feel empowered to speak and those who do not. This may well be rooted in the confluence of a more complex array of issues in situations, like labor trafficking, where immigration discourses and laws come to the fore, connecting with issues of racism and xenophobia, and which also tend to be more implicative of big business, particularly the agricultural industry. The perceptions of risk, then, in sharing their stories for such individuals appear to be significantly higher.

consultation with Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The use of pseudonyms has been applied for each participant to ensure confidentiality. And, to ensure the accuracy of excerpts and to maintain ongoing consent to participate in the project, Deb and Liberty were invited to review both the transcripts and the dissertation manuscript to provide individualized feedback, check for accuracy, and to ensure that their views, experiences, and opinions were represented appropriately and in line with their wishes.

Setting the Stage: From Methodology to Analysis to Findings

In the following pages, I will make several moves. I set the stage in Chapter Two with an examination of my own positionality, how I came to engage with this project. In so doing, I discuss my process of learning how to listen as a centerpiece of my research practice and lay out a methodological framework that deploys a cultural rhetorics approach informed by feminist, indigenous, and decolonial theories. By combining these theoretical approaches, I construct what I refer to as a methodology of care. In these pages, I also introduce Deb and Liberty and describe how this methodology of care manifested in the interview and analytical portions of this project.

In Chapter Three, I shift from discussing methodology to analyzing Deb and Liberty's stories and storytelling practices. From this analysis, I demonstrate that Deb and Liberty create transformational and transformative "scenes of recognition." Specifically, I reveal how Deb and Liberty view the stories that they tell about themselves as *transformational*, that is they convey personal transformations through a story-driven process of identity construction and subject formation; and I show how Deb

and Liberty view the stories that they tell about themselves as *transformative*, that is, inherently capable of and actively seeking to induce external change.

In Chapter Four, I build on my exploration of these scenes of recognition to argue that Deb and Liberty exhibit a discursive in-betweenness, or liminality, that they tactically navigate in telling stories about their experiences. This navigation is exemplified in a continual shifting of language that is both self-regulatory and which moves within and between narrative frames and discursive spaces. In examining this navigation, I reveal that these stories exhibit an inherent tension between how Deb and Liberty construct the self and how they use language to be perceived by external audiences.

In Chapter Five, I summarize the findings of the previous two chapters and discuss implications to policy, research, and demonstrate how listening to the stories of Deb and Liberty can help us see human rights rhetoric in new ways, moving us away from colonizing and colonized discourses around particularized human rights concepts. I further demonstrate how these stories can help us visibilize the unseen and speak the unspeakable, providing us with a way to unlearn socially and institutionally mediated knowledge about human trafficking. Finally, I outline potential future areas of study.

As I emphasize in Chapter Two, this dissertation is a multi-vocal production. The nature of a dissertation is such that my voice is prominent; I engage in framing, theorizing, and analytical commentary. But my orientation to research also requires that my participants – Deb and Liberty – have their own space within these pages to centerpiece their voices, in their own words. To that end, between chapters, I've included *interludes*, excerpts from our interviews where Deb and Liberty tell pieces of

their own respective stories. Their words can and do stand on their own. I urge you to listen.

INTERLUDE

DEB: *I use it as an educational tool. One of the reasons I tell my story at the beginning of training – when I'm working with people and teaching them skills and stuff like that – is to feel comfortable. I'm getting ready to be really vulnerable right now and I'm going to share something about me so that you will feel comfortable enough to share with us as we go through the process of learning new skills and tools. And some of the things that you've experienced and some of the things that you find are some of your barriers and stuff like that. Early, like within the first half hour to hour of training, I tell my story, an abbreviated version of it, but it's just to let people know that I'm just as vulnerable, I'm shoulder-to-shoulder with you. I'm not here with any credentials or licenses behind my name. I'm shoulder-to-shoulder with each and every one of you. I've had my own experiences, and we might not have the same experiences, but we've walked the same pathways and all we want at the end result is recovery.*

LIBERTY: *I'm really wanting to become an abolitionist. I want to become a speaker against human trafficking. I really want to get involved. I think to me that's where my life is going to take me, down the road. If it's a mission field, fine. Learning to raise my own support to where I can have speaking engagements left and right to raise awareness. If I have to work on grants and get involved and work maybe a year here on a grant, on an advocacy program or a victim services program, that's fine. I don't see myself sitting still and watching this go by. I can't. I can't. It's not in me anymore. I'm now fighting bullets and letting my words be the bullets, plain and simple. I want to raise awareness. That's the way I feel about it. That's where my heart's at. That's what I feel like I need to do. I ain't worried about luxury. I don't need a fancy place to stay, I just need to get out and voice it. I've already been out of my comfort zone and I know how to be comfortable outside of it.*

Chapter 2: Learning How to Listen as a Research Practice

Beads of sweat line my forehead. The day is unbearably humid and I'm wearing a thick suit, the weight of its cloth more burdensome than usual in this heat. I reach for my tie, loosening it ever so slightly, trying to make a bit more room to breathe, while retaining my professional, carefully practiced, rigid appearance. But I feel claustrophobic. The space I'm in is brightly lit. The walls and floor and ceiling all meld together in the same sterile grey. There doesn't seem to be any air conditioning. In fact, the air is heavy and stagnant, like New Orleans after a mid-summer rainstorm. The smells of latex gloves, hand sanitizer, bad food, and unwashed bodies combine and sit in this space – an odd mixture that hangs pungently in the air. There's nowhere for it to go. There's nowhere for anything to go.

It is July 2008 and I'm in Fairfax County, Virginia, at a federal detention facility. I prepare for my session in an ad hoc interview room, on the edge of the "main floor" where the cells are located. The tools of my trade sit on the table in front of me: a laptop, a recording device, and some legal documentation. I look down at the names on my list and arise, readjusting my tie yet again, and remove my suit jacket so that my badge is fully visible. The badge – my passport – allows me to be there and allows me to leave. I brace myself, hating the next part. I stand and walk onto the main floor, where federal immigration agents are processing the latest arrivals. I walk over to Cell #3 and yell out, "THREE!" Nothing happens. My hand lingers on the cell door handle, waiting. I yell out again, this time louder with authority and machismo: "NUMBER THREE! OPEN THREE!" There's a buzz and a sharp click. I swing the door open. In the cell there are at least a dozen women in dark green jumpsuits. I know they've been

transported from another location and, as a result, have likely been up since 3am. Some are asleep. Others huddle. A few whisper cautiously with one another. Most avoid my gaze, but a couple stare back at me steely-eyed and defiant. I note the smallness of this space, how it isn't designed to hold that many people. The lack of basic privacy makes me shudder. But I have a job to do and I call out a name – Divine – and one of the women looks up, eyes wide, fear palpable. "Come with me," I say.

In the interview room, I direct her to a seat opposite my side of the table. I look closely. Her hands are trembling, and her eyes avert contact with my own. She's too afraid to look at me, I realize. I note her physical attributes: her dark skin, unkempt hair, the way the jumpsuit – easily a size too large – hangs on her thin body. I skim her file, key words jumping out at me from her initial encounter with government agents at a port of entry: Malawi, fake passport, fear of return, non-cooperative, inconsistent story. She can't be more than twenty, I think. There's definitely a story here. I start with some basic questions – her name, date of birth, where she was living – to try to determine her identity. I can't but help to momentarily pause on her name, Divine; a cruel irony considering the context.

And then I start in, as I always do: "So, what's your story, Divine?"

She tells me, speaking rapidly in slightly broken English. The story is defined by a terror so palpable it manifests in her body; she trembles, her eyes grow wide, and her recounting is interrupted by tears. But her story is told with broad brushstrokes. She talks about her family, about the authorities, and a local chieftain. She recounts being subjected to what she repeatedly calls "the initiation." I need specifics. I need details. And, so, I press her more and more, leaning on the interrogation techniques I learned

and practiced down in Glynco at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. I remind her that I can't help unless I receive a fully detailed account of everything that happened. I essentially tell her that her story isn't "good enough" unless she remembers, retells, and re-lives the whole awful ordeal right there in front of me – a stranger with a badge – in a sterile brightly lit room, detained against her will in a land far, far away from home. She shudders and begins sobbing.

But I don't stop the interview. I keep pushing. More than an hour in, she finally breaks down. Tears streaming down her face, and with poignant pauses of remembered terror, she finally tells me her story in excruciating, horrific detail. Stoic, I take careful notes, memorializing each detail for her file, pausing only to dutifully hand her Kleenex. For a moment, while she whimpers in the background, I sense a chill run down my spine: I feel incredibly uncomfortable, as if some line has been crossed. And I realize that I'm taking her story. In forcing her to re-live her experiences, she's being violated all over again. This feels horribly wrong and I decide that enough is enough, bringing the questioning to an end. After three hours, we've gone through an entire box of Kleenex and she's physically and emotionally spent, too drained to even get out from her seat. I fetch one of the immigration agents to help me lift and carry her back to Cell #3.

Later that evening, I'm at home in Rosslyn, Virginia, in a cool air-conditioned apartment, the tie now off. I'm thinking about Divine and her story, and about the way I conducted the interview, now a memory. I look out my window, the Potomac River just visible through a cluster of buildings. I take a sip of whiskey, the burn in my throat not as satisfying as usual. And my own tears come, at first haltingly and then steady, dripping from my jaw into my glass of whiskey. What have I done, I wonder? What did I put that

woman through? A phrase keeps repeating in my head: “You took her story. You’re an eater of stories.”

“For what, and at what cost?” I ask.

There is no reply.

Chapter 1 introduced this project’s research questions, provided a cultural and academic overview of the rhetorical framing of human trafficking, and addressed key terms and definitions. In this chapter, I will lay the foundation for a multi-vocal dissertation, discuss the conduct of my research through a Cultural Rhetorics lens, and develop a methodological framework rooted in feminist, decolonial, and indigenous theories. Within the pages of this chapter, I hope to lay bare my own positionality while sharing with you how I learned the truth about stories and how my relationships with stories changed over time. This personal evolution is critical to understanding how I was led to approach and conduct the research for this project. By embracing Shawn Wilson’s teaching that researchers should “impart their own life and experience into the telling,” I demonstrate the ways in which my orientation to storytelling manifests itself in this project methodologically (32). As Wilson writes, “When listeners know where the storyteller is coming from and how the story fits into the storyteller’s life, it makes the absorption of the knowledge that much easier” (32). My approach to this project situates me as both a listener and a storyteller – as a researcher who is listening to the stories told by my participants and as a storyteller who tells stories about that listening experience, which in turn is connected to my own life’s path. My journey down this path started in the summer of 2008, during my second year working asylum, refugee, and

human trafficking cases for the Department of Homeland Security. During that time, I took a lot of stories, a function of my role as an officer tasked with making decisions about protecting or removing individuals who had fled their homes out of fear. But, despite my function and its attendant fixation with stories, I didn't do much listening. I took the stories, analyzed them based on the law, and made life-and-death decisions with the stroke of a pen. Within this chapter, I'll explore how those experiences impacted my personal and intellectual evolution and resulted in this project. The past and present, then, collide in guiding the process of my own re-thinking about how stories are told. The implications of that re-thinking result in a very personal approach to "rhetorical listening."

Orienting Lines

Sarah Ahmed writes that "what is 'present' or near to us is not casual: we do not acquire our orientations just because we find things here or there" (21). Rather, she teaches, experiences become available to us "because of lines that we have already taken: our life courses follow a certain sequence which is also a matter of following a direction" (21). I start this chapter with the story about my interaction with Divine because it represents the culmination of orientating lines in my own life at a particular moment in time. When they intersected during that interview, I faced a stark choice: to continue stubbornly heading in the same direction I had been, or to learn from what I was experiencing to effectuate a change. Prior to meeting Divine¹⁵, I believed deeply in my work. I told myself that I was helping people, making the world a better place. When I met Divine and *took* her story – just as I had taken hundreds of others – I experienced

¹⁵ Divine was eventually removed from the U.S. and returned to Malawi against her will, based on a legal determination that I rendered.

a moment of dis-orientation that led me to travel down a new orienting line, a line that eventually led me from the work of *taking stories* to the work of actually *listening* to them. As Ahmed says, “It is by understanding how we became orientated in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be orientated in the first place” (6). This dis-orientation, forever seared into my memory in the form of Divine’s tear-stained face, led me down a path of re-thinking the work that I had been doing, re-evaluating the career that I had built, and carefully considering what it meant for me as a paragon of privilege – straight, white, male, with a federal badge – to take someone’s story, particularly a story told by a woman of color.

Certainly, this change was not immediate. It took some time – years, in fact – for me to fully understand how my discomfort with that moment created a new orienting line. But that new line led me to find my way back to academia because I wanted to ask questions about the stories I’d been taking. My re-orientation has taken many years, and still continues, but the tools that I’ve been exposed to as a doctoral student have opened my eyes to new ways of seeing stories. In many respects, the journey from *there* to *here* has been and continues to be defined by a series of dis-orienting moments and subsequent re-alignments, each one speaking to me and drawing into question the lines that I’ve drawn, the lines that I follow, and the lines that I recite. Listening to the truths of such dis-orienting moments isn’t always easy. Sometimes, in fact, it has been excruciatingly taxing – emotionally, intellectually, spiritually – but much of the work that I attempt to do within the pages of this dissertation is a confrontation with what I see as my orienting lines. I’m driven by the perpetual question of my growth as a person, and as a scholar: how can I be and do better?

Of course, it needs to be put front and center that I remain very much in a position of privilege. My interest in stories about human trafficking is one that creates both real and perceived tensions between my positionality and the work that I'm trying to do. In some sense, the issue relates back to the fact that many, who look just like me and maintain many of the same privileges I hold, engage in exploitative research – especially in relation to those who are of a different gender, different color, who are 'other.' The perpetuation of the colonial mindset in academic research, particularly around sensitive issues and topics is real and powerful. So much of the way in which we talk about and write about problems like human trafficking is rooted in this otherness and/or othering. As a result, much of the language deployed, particularly when referring to those who have lived through it, is language of *use*. It is this language of use that I seek to push against within these pages, instead opting for language that acknowledges agency, emotion, humanity. In confronting the language of use, I'll necessarily be grappling with what it means for someone like *me* to be doing this type of work, what it means when someone like me asks for stories, listens to stories, and tells stories about working with people who have every right to mistrust me, every right to be skeptical, and every right to see me as just another potential user or taker seeking to exploit. What I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, stated in the simplest way possible, is this: that the language of use can and should be replaced by the language of relationality. What this means, exactly, will become clearer as we work together and listen together across the space of these pages.

I'm deeply aware of the tensions inherent in this work and acknowledge how, in my own way, I have engaged in colonizing exploitation in the work I did in *taking* stories

while working for the government. This reality may make some readers uncomfortable. I want to affirm that discomfort. I, too, share it. I make it a point, while doing this work, to remind myself that I am not innocent. And that recognition has helped me to conceptualize what I needed to do to protect my participants from violative research processes and to protect myself from engaging in them in the first place, to situate my research in a way that would “break from the colonial mindset” that so often pervades this type of research (Villanueva 659). Such recognized discomfort also serves as a powerful argument for the use of decolonial theory as part of the methodological frame for this project because it serves as both an epistemological and ontological approach that reminds us that we have *all* been affected by colonialism. Since I, too, inhabit this space, I have a duty to question it and to break away from it responsibly. Such a reminder can help create a space within these pages to interrogate how the colonial mindset colors the rhetorical framing of human trafficking, as well as the research practices surrounding it. This reflects an enactment of my values: in acknowledging the roles of my own positionality and orienting lines, whether perceived or real, I situate myself as a researcher who is informed by the stories intersecting and constellating with my own story.

Why Stories?

Telling a story is an inherently vulnerable act. It is a creation of self, an opening of self, putting one’s self out for all to consume. As Thomas King¹⁶ reminds us in *The Truth About Stories*, “Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories you tell” (10). You should know,

¹⁶ Thomas King is a novelist, academic, and activist of Cherokee descent.

dear reader, that I have taken considerable time to evaluate how to do this project in a way that respects my own journey while also honoring those individuals who agreed to share their stories with me. In sharing my own stories and sharing my participants' stories, I'll be putting my orienting lines into conversation with their orienting lines; likewise, as the reader, your orienting lines will also come into the conversation, guiding how you listen, interpret, and respond. Each of these intersections create a complex, constellating story matrix. Joy Harjo teaches that such story matrices connect us all together making new meanings and helping us to see our experiences and our world in new ways (28). As such, I seek to handle the stories in this dissertation with care, and hope you will, too.

This project is centered on an attempt to understand human trafficking not through a legal, policy, or regulatory lens, but rather through the stories told by two individuals who have lived through the experience of being trafficked. This is purposeful: as I noted in the first chapter, we need a new way of seeing the problem of human trafficking and I believe that the best place to start is to look to the everyday discursive spaces created by those who hold knowledge rooted in lived experience. This being the case, I frame this project as a *listening* project. By actively listening to the stories told by those most involved and most impacted – and valuing lived experience and storytelling as the project's centerpieces – this endeavor seeks to begin the work of reorienting and reframing our understanding of human trafficking (Royster and Kirsch 14). In so doing, this project seeks to more deeply understand how the stories my participants tell about their survival, identity, and renewal, can help change broader conversations about human trafficking. I look to their stories – particularly the ways in which they frame their

experiences – to *begin* the work of theorizing new ways of defining, framing, and addressing a particularized human rights concept. Embracing the notion that lived experiences are powerful, educational, and revolutionary, this project applies a Cultural Rhetorics approach to explore how my participants' stories and storytelling practices constellate to make new meanings, navigate complex experiences and construct unique discursive spaces that are relevant to the work of reframing, or re-seeing, the issue of human trafficking.

I've spent much of my time as a doctoral student asking a string of questions about human trafficking narratives: What stories are told and why? What stories are left untold? How are stories constructed and circulated? Who is telling the stories? Why are certain stories privileged over others? I view this dissertation as a continuation of that line of questioning and an outgrowth of what I've already learned. I learned that contemporary anti-trafficking campaigns deploy stories *about* survivors, but only those that match with the dominant narrative. In other words, the dominant narrative about human trafficking tells stories *about* – rather than *with* – and actively engages in colonizing projects of definition, categorization, and narrative leveling that are created by and for dominant interests. In other words, they too are *taking* stories. Those subjected to human trafficking have, to a very large extent, been written out of their own stories. This dissertation project is a response to that reality and seeks to counter it by supporting my participants as they (re)write themselves into their own / alternative narrative frameworks. In this sense, it is a project that seeks to de-colonize the research and rhetoric surrounding the issue of human trafficking.

Decolonial research necessarily seeks to destabilize and resist dominant

domains of knowledge and thought that ignore, silence, cover up or negate the “other.” As such, this research is oriented as a “framework of self-determination...and social justice” that is both appropriate and necessary (Tuhiwai Smith). Throughout this dissertation, the decolonial project will value and privilege the everyday discourses, practices, and knowledges that have been subjugated in the dominant narrative; value the practices of study participants as theoretical; challenge simplistic binaries in cultural discourse across the issue of human trafficking, and emphasize humanizing narratives rather than dehumanizing sensationalism. While it is important to recognize, resist, and push against the colonial discourses that frame human trafficking, it is just as important to not center the discussion solely on deconstruction; indeed, as Tuhiwai Smith teaches, this type of work is only beneficial when seeking to carve out new paths for improving the future. Indeed, she encourages scholars to take on an activist orientation to research in an attempt to redress unbalanced power relations. As such this is not merely a project that deconstructs; rather it is a project that seeks to create new, multi-vocal ways of seeing an issue that has, largely, been cast through a single frame. Such a decolonial approach manifests within this project in the way that I actively sought to involve my participants. Rather than merely interviewing them, I sought to collaborate *with* them. As a result, the ideas, issues, and questions that eventually become central to this dissertation were developed and set by my participants. Not merely part of the story, they are the storytellers and, in that capacity function in a way that transcends mere participation: they, too, are researchers and partners.

Situating research in this way allows me to privilege story and storytelling practices to both interrogate and resist totalizing narratives. Andrea Riley-Mukavetz

writes, “we can learn from the stories we tell and re-tell what we do with cultural communities and the experiences of working with those communities (“Cultural Rhetorics” 110). Within such an approach, the storyteller’s identity and how it interrelates with the researcher’s identity is deeply significant and impacts research findings. This consideration requires awareness about the ways in which my participants have been and continue to be erased from their own stories and the tendencies of researchers to write about rather than listen to members of marginalized participant communities (“Theory Begins with a Story” 30). In my attempt to push against this tendency and to practice an approach that privileges story, I seek to create a space in which participants have room to engage in their own tellings, thereby establishing an opportunity for them to be heard, to influence, and to exert resistance against a system designed to ensure silence, thus rendering their individual voices relevant and palpable.¹⁷

Relational Accountability & Rhetorical Listening: Enacting a Methodology of Care

The approach I take in this dissertation is one that I describe as a methodology of care that rests on the pillars of relational accountability and rhetorical listening. In going about my research, I thought about what it meant to listen, not just within the context of an oral history interview, but more generally. It wasn’t just about the questions I asked or didn’t ask, it was also about the ways in which I wrote about the experience, the ways in which I provided spaces for participant voices (or not) in the dissertation, the ways in which I determined – and presented – my findings, both in conversing with my

¹⁷ The creation of such space is one way of negotiating and resisting dominant systems of power. As Chela Sandoval argues, in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, the speech utilized by oppressed individuals operates as its own deregulating system that decolonizes, renews, socially reconstructs, and emancipates (10).

committee and in presenting the material at conferences. These considerations served as the orienting lines for this project as it moved from conceptualization to interviews to analysis to write-up. In practicing a methodology of care, I specifically sought to create spaces for my participants to voice their needs and requests – what, for example, did they view as important? What did they see as unimportant? What did they think should be excluded? How did they want their stories used? For my research to have any integrity, both participants had to wield substantial influence over what was emphasized and what was de-emphasized. And so, after each interview, my participants were provided with transcripts, asked to provide input on what they wanted included – or excluded – and offered the opportunity to comment on my words in relation to their own and in the framing of this project. In that sense, this project is as much theirs as it is mine; it is a project defined by shared ownership.

I'll introduce my participants – the primary storytellers within these pages – a bit later, but, I think that this is a good moment to address a few critical points of understanding about them. The participants in this project have lived remarkable lives defined by a continued, persistent resolve to overcome repeated and seemingly insurmountable challenges. There's considerable inspiration in their stories – we can learn by listening to them – but it also is important for us to recognize that they took great risk upon themselves by agreeing to share these stories with us. By making themselves vulnerable and engaging in the act of storytelling, they remembered and re-lived their lives, some instances during which they were subjected to brutal exploitation and trauma. They didn't need to tell their stories. They were under no obligation. And, frankly, in every way they had more to lose than gain by sharing their stories. They did,

however, agree to do so because they believed that there was value in sharing their respective stories.

By recognizing our connecting lines, and the ways in which this project created spaces of vulnerability and potential harm, I wanted to develop an approach defined by relational accountability throughout the entire process. Shawn Wilson defines relational accountability as the way in which a researcher fulfills his or her relationship with “all my relations” (177). Rooted in indigenous thought, the notion of relational accountability “comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational...it is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation” (177).

By invoking relational accountability as an orienting line for this project, I must acknowledge my own story, the other stories, institutions, and power structures that I connect with, and the reality that my participants and I were brought together to share knowledge, create knowledge, and make meaning together in a constellated framework that transcends the merely interpersonal, but also recognizes the roles that other forces have played. It extends beyond just thinking about what relationships may exist, however; it reaches to thinking about how those relationships are enacted through my research. When I invoke relational accountability in this project, I also see myself as playing a role in maintaining relationships and creating new connections. And not just relationships in the amorphous realm of personal interaction, but in thinking about what it means for me, as a researcher, to work with my participants, within specific communities of knowledge and practice, and how my work with my participants is creating new connections and new relationship potentials between them and other

members of the community, institutions, and other communities. Shawn Wilson, in *Research is Ceremony*, describes my role as that of a mediator:

We are mediators in a growing relationship between the community and whatever it is that is being researched. And how we go about doing our work in that role is where we uphold relational accountability. We are accountable to ourselves, the community, our environment or cosmos as a whole, and also to the idea or topics that we are researching. We have all of these relationships that we need to uphold. (106)

In developing this project, I carefully considered this mediatory role and how I could go about upholding relationships not only in the conduct of my interviews, but also in what comes after in the ways in which I use this research to effectuate change. I see myself upholding relational accountability by actively seeking my participants' input on the development of this work – their words and mine, in conversation – as well as thinking about what this work might mean for and be shared with specific communities – e.g., survivor communities, local area task forces, research communities, and so on. In doing this, I'm trying to work with my participants to figure out how to make meaning, how to think of this less as a project of knowledge acquisition – or colonialist *taking* – and how it might instead be a work of shared production, shared ownership, and used in ways that align with my participants' desires and observed community needs.

I've found that a significant part of relational accountability in research relationships – particularly revolving around a subject area of this sensitivity – involves close, careful listening. I've not always been good at practicing this. The work underlying this dissertation is, in many ways, an exploration of my capacity for listening.

I knew that I needed to re-orient my listening practices from merely listening to take, from listening to use, to a paradigm that *listened to listen*. Listening is a central theme of this dissertation, so it is only appropriate to devote some space to telling you what I mean when I invoke that word. Royster and Kirsch's feminist framework for rhetorical listening proved invaluable as I thought about and worked on this project. Specifically, I embraced their call to consider a research approach that embraces a set of values and perspectives "that honors the particular traditions and subjects of study, respects their communities, amplifies their voices, and clarifies their visions...for a more dialectical and reciprocal intellectual engagement" (Royster and Kirsch 14).

Such an approach pushes against the traditional academic research endeavor that dishonors particular traditions, disrespects communities, and silences voices. Royster's vision arises from her own experience: "I have found it extremely difficult to allow the voices and experiences of people that I care about deeply to be taken and handled so carelessly and without accountability by strangers" (Royster 31). She describes these moments as a "violation, perhaps even ultimate violation" in which researchers intrude, take, and use without consideration to participant values, perspectives, or needs (32). In taking on this project, I acknowledge that it would have been very easy to impose my own voice over that of my participants, to take their stories and use them solely for my own purposes – the ultimate violation in Royster's view. Indeed, while arranging interviews, conducting interviews, and reviewing transcripts, there were moments where I felt the temptation to simply move forward in my own direction, to disregard my participants' values and needs in favor of my own need for a completed dissertation project. But each moment of temptation reminded me

of the incredible importance of not caving to the colonial mindset.

As someone who had taken stories before, I knew what it meant, and the lasting damage caused, to engage in that violation. It wasn't something I wanted to put my participants through; and it was also something that I didn't want to put myself through. Shawn Wilson describes this type of violation as "the breaking of a sacred law" and because I am profoundly aware of the difference, I am "accountable for all [my] actions" in dealing with the stories and the people associated with this project (107). I knew what my participants had been through, broadly speaking, based on my previous interactions with individuals who had lived through experiences of human trafficking. I knew that they had experienced profound trauma and held, even now, within themselves the still painful scars that accompany physical and psychological exploitation. I needed to handle this project with great care to ensure that I was being accountable to them and that I was actively and continually considering their values, perspectives, and needs in relation to this project. Royster's views encouraged me to use an approach that understands cross-boundary discourse and research as complex realities that require "individual stories placed one against another against another" (30). In fact, in many ways that exactly describes what this dissertation does: it places my individual story into conversation with the individual stories of my participants, and places each of those stories into conversation with the dominant narrative of human trafficking that has been taken up into cultural discourse. The only way to do this with any integrity is by emphasizing listening as a research practice. A researcher cannot, after all, truly consider participant values, perspectives, and needs if the participants have not had a chance to voice them. Royster asks,

How can we teach, engage in research, write about, and talk across boundaries *with* others, instead of *for*, *about*, and *around* them? My experiences tell me that we need to do more than just talk and talk back. I believe that in this model we miss a critical moment. We need to talk, yes, and talk back, yes, but when do we listen? How do we listen? How do we demonstrate that we honor and respect the person talking and what the person is saying? (38)

Royster's guidance weighed heavily on my mind – that I wasn't here to write *about*...rather, I was here to write *with* the individuals who had agreed to tell their stories to me. What did that mean? More importantly, what would it look like and how would I do it? Figuring out the answer to those questions proved to be a central concern for me.

Throughout the process of designing the study, conducting the interviews, analyzing the interviews, and writing this dissertation, I relied heavily on two of Royster and Kirsch's concepts – critical imagination and strategic contemplation. Critical imagination utilizes reflective, reflexive, dialectical, and dialogical strategies to account for what the researcher knows and to rethink and reexamine unheard people, unnoticed places, overlooked practices, and ignored genres (72). I deployed critical imagination early on, and through the entire process, but particularly when I reached the stage of writing up my findings. It would have been very easy to heavily rely on my own experience and knowledge. After all, I had dealt extensively with human trafficking related issues – on the individual case level and in the operational, legal, and policy realms – during my years in government. While that work has informed this project to some extent, and within these pages I do share some of my own stories related to those

experiences, I relied more heavily on re-examining what I thought I knew by focusing my attention and centering my writing on the experiences and practices of my participants, each of whom I believe presents compelling ways of re-seeing the ways in which human trafficking is discussed, written about, and framed in cultural discourse. Indeed, if there was one overriding assumption with which I allowed myself to engage across this project, it was that their voices had been “unheard” and systematically silenced; the knowledge that they held within themselves represented a domain that had been subjugated, thereby necessitating a need for a space in which to engage in the process of writing themselves to be heard how they needed to be heard. Strategic contemplation intersects with critical imagination by emphasizing a non-judgmental approach to inquiry and utilizing scholarly meditation as part of the research journey. In strategic contemplation, the researcher is encouraged to engage with embodied experiences – “visiting places, handling artifacts, following unexpected leads, standing in silence, and allowing for chance discoveries and serendipity” – to reimagine rhetorical situations and events (89).

I want to dwell for a moment on what it meant for me to conduct these interviews, for me to listen, what it was like to embody the practice of engaging in a methodology of care. Thinking about embodiment proves particularly informative because it reinforces the need to recognize the materiality of lived experiences, both my own and that of my participants. For me, much of this dissertation project represents a journey, a travel story across space and time from when I took stories as an interrogator to listening to stories as a researcher. There are commonalities between the two experiences. As I note in the two stories that bookend this chapter, the tools of the trade – in either

context – are pretty much the same: a laptop, recording device, and some legal documentation. There were moments during the interviews where my previous “self” came into play, moments where I found myself asking, or wanting to ask, questions that I knew I shouldn’t, moments where I struggled internally with my own identity and positionality while in the midst of conducting the interview. At some points, it was physically difficult for me to not push for more explicit details, to not ask about specific instances of trauma, to not question contradictions, to not drive the interviews based on my own perceived needs. Using strategic contemplation, I paused to consider what these moments might mean, and how I might think about them in relation to the experiences that my participants were going through by telling their stories from the other side of the table. Similarly, I listened closely to their stories, through repeated readings of the transcripts, by re-listening, again and again, to the audio, to locate moments of importance sometimes represented by a pregnant silence, laughter or crying, a joke or a side-bar about a valued pet. Strategic contemplation allowed me to focus less on the “words” and more on the underlying human emotions that were involved, both my own and those of my participants. As a result, there were moments where I re-evaluated certain portions of the interviews – moments that I had initially discounted as “valueless” but eventually came to recognize as critical and vice versa.

By actively practicing critical imagination and strategic contemplation within my research process, I enacted a methodology of care, which to be specific, encompasses caring for the community as a whole, caring for my participants, caring for my relationships, and most importantly making the practice of listening – to bodies, to places, to stories, to systems – as central practices within my research. Employing

Royster's feminist listening, then, enhanced my capacity as a researcher and to "deepen, broaden, and build rhetorical knowledge" through a multiply informed "interpretive capacity to the symphonic and polylogical ways in which rhetoric functions as a human asset" (Royster and Kirsch 132). To a very large extent, this is simply applying the practice of what might be referred to as humanizing my research. It isn't cold and calculated, and it doesn't seek to prove a specific hypothesis. It doesn't merely engage in rhetorical analysis.

By practicing these approaches and enacting a methodology of care within my research, I was able to shift my own paradigm to one which focused on the human element. Instead of disregarding emotions, I valued them; instead of discounting stories because of contradictions, I explored them; instead of dwelling on inconsistencies, I questioned what they might lead us to learn. And instead of forgetting that my participants were people to whom I was accountable, I sought out their input, guidance, and support, and offered it in return. In so doing, I actively sought to transform my research from a mere recounting of stories and rhetorical analyses into a process that might otherwise be described as an "activity of hope" (Tuhiwai Smith 203).

Storyteller Introductions

Now that you have some background on the way in which I've been thinking about this project, and the issues that I've grappled with in getting to this particular point, it is probably time to introduce you to my research participants, who I'll be referring to as this dissertation's storytellers. You'll get to know them over the pages in this dissertation, but I'd like to introduce you, first. Join me, then, in meeting them:

DEB – She's in her 40s, from the Midwest with a background not terribly different

than my own. She comes from a small town and an early family life that she describes as complicated, a background that I immediately connected with. Exhibiting a deep knowledge gleaned from years of struggle, she tells us a compelling story from which others may draw insight and hope. Navigating the traumas of trafficking, street life, and drug addiction across three decades, she treats her story as a cohesive whole – reminding us repeatedly that “everything is connected.” Her approach to storytelling about her lived experiences paints a picture that is carefully crafted and well-thought out, a method honed over time by sharing her stories with other survivors. Her voice is crisp. She talks fast yet pauses when clarifying key points. Eschewing labels, she expresses deep discomfort with the assertion that she is simply a survivor; rather she wants to be viewed as a mother who has spent the past years finding her own path and as someone engaged in a process of healing. Her storytelling does not come easily – but her unease is rooted in concern about how her story is used, insisting that it be a vehicle for creating awareness and bequeathing knowledge.

LIBERTY – She, too, is in her 40s, but harkening from the Deep South. She describes her childhood as defined by poverty, neglect, and abuse; first trafficked by her own father while in her teens and then, later in her 20s, by two men she met in a bar who offered to give her a ride home. She’s driven by intellectual curiosity and a desire to make new meanings out of her experiences, describing her healing process of one that transitioned her from victim, to survivor, to thriver. She treats fragments of her experience as artifacts, and her stories do their work in bits and pieces, often coming back to explore covered ground in attempts to situate her past with/in her present. Her descriptions of her lived experiences come piecemeal and at that same time are broadly

described, an intellectual effort to draw connections between the personal, the familial, and larger – even global – discourses. Her storytelling also does not come easily – a process that she describes as physically and emotionally exhausting – but it comes with a passion and energy that belies her desire to give voice to those who have experienced trauma yet don't possess the strength to share their own stories.

The stories gathered during my oral history interviews with Deb and Liberty are the primary *drivers* of what happens in the following pages. In that sense, then, the stories shared by my participants may be seen as “data” and, also, as “findings” in and of themselves (i.e., *story is theory*): each participant “creates frameworks in their language and on their terms” (Riley-Mukavetz, “Theory Begins With a Story,” 79). This project, then, embraces the notion that rhetoric is based in stories and seeks to emphasize the lived experiences of participants. This emphasis helps us see the ways in which my participants actively tell stories to not only theorize their own experiences but to theorize the world in which they inhabit, particularly how they exist, transform, and are transformed by cultural discourses about human trafficking. Terese Monberg describes the way I approached oral histories for this project:

Oral histories also give us a view into the arena of lived experience where subjects actively make rhetorical choices, where categories are created, refused, and negotiated – if we are willing to really listen... Oral history narratives, then, reveal a speaking subject actively negotiating, shaping, and building spaces, institutions, and histories. (91)

This approach enables the privileging of the participants' own words and conveyed ideas rather than, solely, my analysis of those words, thereby de-emphasizing my own

voice and my preconceived notions. In practicing relational accountability and rhetorical listening, it is crucial that I honor my research participants and to ensure that I am writing *with* rather than writing *about*. Part of that means closely listening to and considering the things that they emphasized and de-emphasized when we talked – both while the recorder was on and off. During our second interview, I asked Deb how she felt about the process and how she had felt after our first recording session. Deb sat back and sighed. After a pause, she spoke:

DEB: In the moment, I don't feel anything I guess. It's after the fact, like when I'm driving when we got done that day. I really didn't feel anything until I was driving home, but it was like, I don't know, just something that came over me a little bit. I was a little uncomfortable, but then it passed.

JG: What do you think made you uncomfortable?

DEB: I don't know. I guess you never know what you say, how people will take it or use it or anything.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, each participant opened themselves in an incredibly vulnerable way and, as such, one of my most important tasks was to ensure that the risk they each took in sharing their stories with me was done responsibly. Deb's discomfort served as a crucial reminder that this project, if it was to have any integrity, could not be mine alone. Her concern about how her words would be taken, used, and interpreted was one to which I needed to carefully attend. Her concern, of course, was well founded. As we'll explore in the following chapters, both participants are profoundly aware of how they both exist within and outside of the dominant human trafficking narrative as it exists in cultural discourse. And, as I'll demonstrate, they both express

deep discomfort with the ways in which that narrative silences their own unique stories. Deb's discomfort, then, stands as a plea, early on in this project's research phase, to listen to her story and share it in a way that aligns with her own needs and wishes. She doesn't want it to be purloined for other ends: it is *hers*, and she wants her story used in specific ways. Liberty, too, talked about the experience of telling her story, reiterating that she has specific reasons for sharing but that such sharing is difficult:

Not many survivors want to talk about it. It's too painful. It's too hard. Each time you talk, you have to go back to that place. You have to go back and relive those thoughts, those emotions, but some are stronger in the sense to understand that those thoughts and emotions are not like they were before. You're not living in fear anymore. You've overcome that, but there are a lot who are survivors who have not overcome those fears because they live with those fears mentally and physically the rest of their lives. There are some who are no longer in that fear and they're no longer held captive by that fear. For those who are, I think it's important to speak for them.

Across our interviews, Liberty repeatedly invokes her role as someone who is engaged in storytelling about her traumatic experiences with being exploited for the specific purpose of giving a voice to others who remain "captive to fear." She seems more comfortable telling her story than Deb, but she puts the difficulty, the psychological pain of re-living her experiences, front and center. She wants us to know that this isn't easy for her, but that while it may not be easy she views it as important to give a voice to others like her.

Because Deb and Liberty expressed these views early and often during the

research process, it became clear to me that I needed to frame this project in a way that looked, first and foremost, to their needs and desires. In some ways, this presented a distinct challenge as I began writing because, of course, I had my own ideas about what I wanted to say. Instead of trying to fit their stories into my framework, however, I opted to identify their values, their needs, and their desires for participation and to rely on those to determine how to structure the content of the dissertation and to create spaces for the ideas, themes, and theories that they felt were most crucial. As I talked with both Deb and Liberty, I learned that they viewed *healing* and the *reconstruction of identity* as centerpieces. They focused more on what it meant for them to heal, to grow, to evolve – to be engaged in personal transformation – and to help others, than on any other aspect of their experiences.

Both see this knowledge as essential, and both have navigated that very much individually without a significant amount of external support. It is possible, they both tell us, but many people who are coming out of experiences of trauma and exploitation don't believe that it is possible and don't have hope. So, then, both Deb and Liberty see their storytelling, the sharing of their stories, as a way to help others who have been or are going through similar experiences, to give them a message of hope. In talking about her motivations, Liberty told me:

I don't really share my story in-depth when I talk because I tend to want to leave it in the past, but bring bits and pieces to the present that is currently going on, that's still going on that hasn't changed because a lot of the things that happened to me changed. I'm no longer in that mentality, no longer in that past victimization mentality... I want to be an abolitionist. I want to be the one to be the voice to

stop what's going on.

For each, finding a path to healing and navigating that path on a daily basis was important – important for them to think about and reflect on, and important for others to know. In centralizing their storytelling on healing processes, Deb and Liberty ask us to listen and learn: what does it mean for someone who has lived trauma to find a path to healing? And, further, they both lament that this is not part of the greater narrative about human trafficking. People need to heal and need to know that healing is possible. Deb focuses in on this:

That's why a lot of time when I do tell my story and I'm just telling them the bad stuff. I talk about the recovery part of it, too. Only because that's the most important part. For me it is at least. I think it would be for another survivor...

Because for how many years did I go thinking this was as good as it was ever going to get. This is what I have to look forward to, I might as well just kill myself now. I'm never going to be anything else but a whore, a crack head, a felon.

Never going to be anything else but, and so what do I really have to look forward to? Nothing... Some of the barriers that I've overcome, I'm even amazed.

In writing about human trafficking, many scholars fall into the trap of focusing on “the bad stuff.” It would be easy to spend much of the space of this dissertation conveying the horrors that both Deb and Liberty have been through. They both shared these stories with me, sometimes in quite explicit detail. But Deb's comment – that she wished there would be less focus on the traumatic experiences and more focus on her personal transformation – ended up being one of the pillars of my decision-making process for what to exclude within these pages. In considering my accountability to both

participants, it struck me as important to convey the elements from their stories that they found important. Both repeatedly lamented the fact that so often the focus of human trafficking is on the trauma and exploitation, the sensationalization of exploitation. Neither viewed this as the key point of their storytelling and both noted that they preferred not to emphasize those parts of their stories. As Deb said at one point: “Those are just experiences I went through... they don’t define who I am.” Despite this reluctance, both Deb and Liberty started their interviews with me by immediately discussing the trauma and exploitation they had experienced.

This struck me as somewhat of a surprise – indeed, throughout my years in the field conducting interviews with refugees, asylum seekers, and trafficking survivors, I had always encountered – understandably so – a deep reluctance to discuss personal trauma. So during my interviews with Deb and Liberty, the initial discovery was that – at least in this context – that reluctance did not apparently exist. In fact, across all four interviews, they both made the move to initiate conversation about their most traumatic experiences within the first few minutes, a move unprompted by me. I led with general questions about personal background that both Deb and Liberty summarily dispensed with, quickly launching into telling of their traumas. In fact, I had only intended to address directly their trafficking experiences much later in the arc of the interview process. There was a sense, almost, that they projected onto me (1) an expectation that I was there to get the “bad parts” of their stories and (2) that they wanted to get that part of the interviews done and over with as quickly as possible.

They tell of their respective traumas, and they tell in sometimes explicit detail. But they tell quickly, *seeking to move on*. In speaking of trauma, they both tend to

emphasize the tactics of survival and resistance. They linger more on these ideas than they do on the trauma itself. They devote most of their storytelling around their trauma to analyzing it and trying to understand it as it relates to their own healing and the potential uses of their story for others. In sharing these memories there is a yearning that presents itself to at once both find meaning for the self and to extend the self to create opportunities for meaning-making with others. In thinking about what this means – particularly as it relates to accountability – I’ve purposefully excluded the specifics of their trafficking experiences and explicit excerpts about their traumatic experiences from the pages of this dissertation. They did share those pieces of information with me and, while they didn’t demand that they be excluded, I believe that including them would not be in line with the overarching wishes of Deb and Liberty insofar as why they agreed to participate in this project.

I pause, above, to listen (and to ask you to listen) to their words – words that convey fear, concern, and investment about how their stories are used – because throughout the pages of this dissertation I will necessarily be working *with* Deb and Liberty to facilitate their processes in telling their own stories, creating their own theories. I remind myself – and I remind you – *these are their stories*. Framing the dissertation in this way pushes against the dominant narrative that defines current human trafficking discourse and asks: what if this issue can’t be told in a single frame? What if we’re actually left with singular moments, individual stories, and a multiplicity of lived experiences? How then do we reconsider/rethink how we address issues of exploitation?

The characters in this dissertation – and the worlds they inhabit – are *real*,

sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent. There is an impulse, I think, to merely read their words and to think about the implications of the experiences that they've described. But it is important to remember that while *we think*, they continue to *live and deal with their lives* and the ways in which their pasts have impacted them. So, dear reader, I invite you to listen closely to what they have to say, to acquaint yourself with their nuances, their idiosyncrasies, and their rhetorical prowess. Within these pages our storytellers' voices are prominent, taking center stage.

It is a wintry day in January 2016 and I'm in Bessey Hall on the campus of Michigan State University. The campus is eerily quiet – most of the students, faculty, and staff have not yet returned from the holiday break. I'm in a conference room in the Learning Resource Center, sitting across from Deb, one of my research participants, and we're engaged in some small talk while I work on setting everything up for our interview. I am purposely not wearing a tie – they make me uncomfortable – instead opting for a cheery sweater vest that I hope presents a friendly and open appearance. I'm also wearing glasses, an overt attempt to look the part of the academic while also knowing that they help me appear a bit less rigid. Truth is, I haven't conducted an interview or interrogation in years. And, in that intervening time, I feel like I've lost my edge, lost my confidence, lost my self.

The room is comfortable, with soft seats, mood lighting, and paintings on the wall. Deb comments, "I like these paintings – they're nice." I agree. I have with me the tools of my trade – a laptop, a recording device, some legal documentation. We're almost ready to get started, when Deb posits a question: "So, can you tell me again

what you're trying to do with this?" I feel a shimmer of anxiety. Uh-oh, I think, she's having second thoughts. And then I catch myself...So what if she is? That's her right. These are her stories, not mine. I'm not just here to take her story. She needs to know what I think about this, so I need to tell her. And, so, before I turn on the recording, I talk again about my own story, how I became interested in how human trafficking stories are framed, and that I am here to listen and to learn from someone who has lived through the experience. I reiterate the important elements of the process and the consent form: "Deb," I say, "you can withdraw from this study if you want." She looks at me: "No, no. It sounds very interesting. I want to do this. I've got a lot to say." And she reaches out for the consent form and signs her name.

I turn on the recorder and begin, "Why don't you tell me a little bit about your personal background?"

She jumps right in, saying, "Okay, well, I'll start at the beginning, I guess." And she tells me story after story about her life, the words pouring out of her crisply and regularly punctuated by hearty laughter. I see, immediately, that she is adept at connecting with people. Every now and then she drops in an F-bomb, asking me if she can say that – "isn't this public record?" – she asks, and then laughs. She reflects on her experiences and tells me about survival and healing. She talks about what it means to not be believed, not to be listened to, not to be heard. And she shares with me the discomfort she still struggles with when it comes to her feelings, how everyday remains a constant negotiation between past and present, between shame and pride, between pain and hope. She tells me what it means to be a mother and what it means to be a business owner.

She also tells me about trauma, about being used, about life on the streets. She tells me about how others used her for their own profit.

I try to ask very few questions. I keep reminding myself: I'm here to listen, let her lead. Every now and then, while she is speaking, I can feel a gold badge sitting on my belt – even though there hasn't been one there in nearly four years – much like a phantom limb asserting its presence. I find myself struggling to not ask more questions, to not press for more details, to not ask her to be more specific. There are moments where I desperately want to use the techniques that I know, my story-extraction tools...I feel them bubbling up inside of me, ready to do their work, ready to take, eat, use her story...And yet I stay silent, and she keeps speaking. I continue to remind myself that this is her story. There is no gold badge. I'm here to listen. So, I listen. And I learn.

Our interview lasts more than an hour and forty minutes, and I leave feeling physically and emotionally exhausted. I go down to the first floor of Bessey and buy an energy drink because I am completely spent. Truly listening is hard work. Later that evening, in Lansing's eastside neighborhood, I'm in my cozy home watching my two dogs play outside in the snow. I'm thinking about the interview that I conducted earlier, now a memory, and I look out the window, watching the snow fall. Time seems to go slow: What do you hear, John? I ask myself, what do you hear?

This time, I hear a reply: You hear a story that is alive, that is living and changing in front of you. That is transforming and transformative. You hear a story that needs to be told.

INTERLUDE

DEB: *I had went to the County Fair. In my mind, I was going to run away with the fair. I was going to be a carnie because you always hear that you can have fun, they'll accept you, but by the next day I was hungry. I had slept underneath one of the rides the night before. The next day when people started coming back in the gates, I was confronted by a man that was very nice to me, bought me something to eat, and we talked for a little while and walked around. He was very interested in what I had to say, and seemed very concerned, and then asked me if I would just take him and show him around town later on in the afternoon, and I did. He had offered me a beer. I drunk the beer and the next thing I knew I was on my way to Detroit. He took me to a motel room, and for me it's very significant, there was a kitten there and I remember thinking that I had to take care of this kitten because it was alone. The first night I stayed by myself. He had left and didn't come back until the next morning. Then the next morning he told me to get back in the vehicle and we're going to back home. When I got back, he handed me \$20 and told me that if I wanted to be with him that I would be sitting at the bus stop and waiting for him in one hour... At that time, I still did not know what his intentions were. All I had seen is somebody that was interested about me, and treated me very well, and was nice to me. The whole time I sat there and waited at that bus stop. I sat there for the whole hour. An hour later he pulled up. He took me to a house and when I got there, there was four other females there. There was one female that was older, I think she was about 18 years old, and she was his bottom girl, and there was three other girls and we were all minors. I actually shared a bedroom with one of the other girls and then we were told that evening that I would be going to work.*

LIBERTY: *This guy said, "We're going to Florida. We'll go and we'll take you down to your dad in North Carolina first, and then we'll take you to your mom's." That sounded like a good idea. It wasn't a week later and I realized Herbert wasn't Herbert. His brother James was not James, and I'd overheard conversations. Because I was overhearing stuff, I wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt, and I told them the next day, "I overheard your conversations. You're not Herbert, your name is Randy. His name ain't James, his name is Stevie, and I heard you left a woman for dead in Florida." I was scared. I knew something was up. Then I knew too much...We'd stop and stay in hotels and she'd be gone all night and she'd come back and have money. That's when he says, "Well you know too much, and to protect you, I don't want you to get hurt. Stevie will kill you if you don't do this. He doesn't want me getting close to you, but I already am and what not." He says, "You're going to have to go out with her and make some money. You can't leave her sight." She had to go with me to the bathroom. I could not go anywhere without her. The first thing I had to do was go get on a truck with her. We were like a double team. He said, "Don't come back unless you got \$500"... I had no choice. My life depended on it. I don't know what had happened. Over the course of that, over three months, we ended up in North Carolina and at one point I told him I didn't want to do this...I told him I didn't want to do anything, and they left me alone with this man and his buddy, and come to find out I was paid for to be broke in. That was when I made the decision I had to do what I had to do. I started going on the trucks.*

Chapter 3: Rhetorics of Recognition in Storytelling Practices

I wasn't initially sure what I heard when I conducted my interviews with Deb and Liberty. There were layers upon layers of complexity, from overt descriptions of trauma to nuanced explorations of recovery and renewal. In my first attempts at writing these chapters, I found myself stymied by the variations and intricacies within their stories. How could I do justice to these stories, I wondered, without essentializing them in a way that removed their power? That question bothered me for some time. I wrote and re-wrote. And with each writing, I felt as if I was somehow coming up short. It was then that I realized that I wasn't *truly* listening, at least not listening in a way that was adequately careful or sufficiently close. So, instead of trying to engage in another round of writing followed by hand-wringing, I decided to pause and to take the time to re-listen to the entirety of the audio recordings from our interviews. The decision to go back to those moments, to sit with and to dwell on those exchanges – to *hear* the actual sound of our voices – marked a turning point in my writing process for this project. It tuned me in to our shared humanity, to the emotional and spiritual elements that were at play in their stories, and in my reactions to them. In hearing Deb and Liberty speaking to me and speaking about themselves – with attention to inflection, tone, and cadence – I found myself settling down and reflecting on what it actually was that they were sharing and what they believed to be most important. I had been in such a hurry to write as much as I possibly could that I had neglected the core approach of my work: to let my participants *guide me*, rather than the other way around.

What I heard, when I finally allowed myself to listen, was this: 1) Deb and Liberty view the stories that they tell about themselves as *transformational*, that is they convey

personal transformations through a story-driven process of identity construction and subject formation; and 2) Deb and Liberty view the stories that they tell about themselves as transformative, that is, inherently capable of and actively seeking to induce external change.¹⁸ Stated differently, Deb and Liberty seek to create for themselves a “rhetoric of recognition” that operates on two levels, the transformational and the transformative. On the transformational level, Deb and Liberty make specific moves to *recognize themselves*, creating and affirming their individual identities and subject status. On the transformative level, Deb and Liberty make specific moves to help external audiences recognize them as well as *themselves*,¹⁹ a seeking of recognition from the external in order to actively engage in more public discourse. Both storytellers exhibit a profound awareness of the internal and the external, and the interrelation between the two. As we move to consider our storyteller’s viewpoints, I hope to demonstrate how Deb and Liberty formulate a conception of “self” through storytelling that is both *informed by* and *resists* the dominant narrative about human trafficking. These stories, I believe, can be viewed as tactical rhetorical practices that are used for identity construction, a continually negotiated process that operates both internally and externally *to be recognized*. In this negotiation, both Deb and Liberty rely on storytelling to creatively rewrite the self to produce new meanings *for themselves* while also developing a voice in order for their stories to be heard. This chapter will

¹⁸ There is, I think, a natural impulse for readers to blur the lines between the distinction I make here. The common view is that identity and subjectivity are created by external forces and that storytelling attempts to transform those apparatuses. However, my contention turns this view on its head by arguing that storytelling operates both internally *and* externally: identity and subjectivity may be viewed here, then, as internal story-driven processes *as well as* attempts to transform the external in relation to the internal process.

¹⁹ Another way of thinking about this might be as agency enacted *for* recognition.

explore the ways that these scenes of recognition operate.

Transformational Storytelling

Within their stories, Deb and Liberty grapple with identity, particularly as identity is shaped by and functions within culturally dominant labels that actively seek to classify and categorize their lived experiences. As such, their stories operate as spaces for self-reflection and creative self-making. We might describe them, simply, as exercises in subject formation through storytelling. They are spaces where we might understand how their narrative performativity functions within and problematizes the mainstream narrative about human trafficking. More than just self-reflection, however, the creative self-making aspect of their stories is fundamentally defined by how they negotiate past and present, transforming not only the articulation of themselves but how they see themselves – a concerted and practiced effort to engage in self-recognition.

Not unlike African-American, Chicana, Indigenous, and Queer women writers and activists who find themselves silenced, ignored, and written out of culturally dominant narratives, Deb and Liberty display an ongoing effort to rid themselves of labels that have been placed onto them and to instead re-define “themselves by their humanity, their human dignity, and their rights to justice, equality, and empowerment within the human enterprise” (Royster and Cochran 218). For Deb and Liberty this process of re-defining identity is rooted in a process of recognizing themselves in a way that transcends the labels so commonly affixed to them – *survivor* and *victim* – thereby transforming themselves from being rendered through those specific identity lenses in cultural discourse to formulate their own identities for themselves. While Deb and Liberty are not seeking to redefine themselves as a result of the functions of systemic

racism, for example, they are engaged in a similar process of self-redefinition because of the ways in which they see the labels of survivorship and victimhood at work in their own lives. In this sense, we might see Deb and Liberty engaging in a “negotiation of fixed possibilities that both resists and remakes the representation of the human experience” (Watson 145).

In her piece “Unspeakable Differences,” Julia Watson provides a framework for understanding the moves that Deb and Liberty make across our interviews. While Watson is focused on examining the politics of gender in women’s autobiographies, her work – particularly as it relates to “speaking the unspeakable” – is informative for helping us understand how Deb and Liberty use storytelling to engage in the transformational process of alternative self-definition. In Watson’s view, the unspeakable is a persistent reality faced by the marginalized within the context of colonizing language practices. She writes that “naming the unspeakable is a coming to voice that can create new subjects, precisely because women’s marginality may be unnamable within the terms or parameters of the dominant culture” (139). Deb and Liberty, already marginalized by their status as women, have been further marginalized in the culturally situated discourses about human trafficking by the affixation of specific labels: their experiences as women who have been trafficked for sex operates to render them silent, their traumas too intense, too complicated, and too damning of dominant culture for them to be spoken. They are, then, marginalized by what may be described as discursive essentialization – they are survivors, they are victims, and while their status as such is documented as unfortunate, the dominant narrative provides no discursive tools for them to speak beyond the boundaries of those labels. In effect, they

are to be forever defined in this way, through these labels. As Gregory Sarris writes, such naming or categorization “cuts a wide swath. It silences or obscures not only the individual subject and the distinct quality of her voice and life...but the power dynamic that enables one party to name another in the first place” (29). In this sense, Deb and Liberty have been colonized by compulsory perpetual identification within these categories and, I believe, their storytelling is a purposeful resistance against this, a process of transformational self-decolonization, or de/colonizing the subject, in an attempt to recognize a self that exists outside of colonizing human trafficking discourse.

Across our interviews, I observed that Deb and Liberty both initially described themselves and their experiences solely *within* the fixed, categorizing language of the dominant narrative – that is, as survivors, as victims, as individuals who had been trafficked in the sex trade. While they initially inhabited this framework, the more comfortable they became with the interview process, the more they opened up. And it was in this opening that I perceived a deep reticence with regards to remaining within the framework of the dominant narrative to describe themselves and their experiences. Sensing an opportunity to gain deeper insight into their own views of identity, I made it a point to question how they *viewed themselves*. Rather than merely asking them to describe their experiences and to tell their stories, I wanted to listen to how they articulated identity. When asked how they *viewed themselves*, they both engaged in language shifts that moved them from the fixed, categorizing language of the dominant narrative to language choices that were both more personal and rooted in self-reflection. I noted that this shift operated *outside* that of the dominant narrative and focused on internal negotiations of identity and self-recognition. During one of my exchanges with

Deb, she expressed frustration with the limitations/limiting nature of the fixed language that she had been using throughout the interview²⁰:

JG: Do you see yourself as a survivor?

DEB: I don't know.

JG: You don't like labels?

DEB: Right. I don't like labels. I'm through with labels.... I don't know. I don't know if I look at myself as a survivor, or as a victim... It doesn't define who I am.

JG: What does?

DEB: Me being a mother, being a good employee, being a good person, being able to help others. That's what defines me today. I mean, those are just experiences that I went through.

In this exchange we witness Deb pushing back against the notion that her identity can be fixed within the categories of survivor and victim. Rather, she asserts her humanity, agency, and identity – a proactive engagement of self-definition – with roots that extend beyond the traumatic experiences she went through. This articulation of self reveals her internal complexity and sophistication, aspects not afforded by the labels affixed to her in the dominant narrative. Notably she distinguishes “experiences” from her theory of self; i.e., her construction of identity is rooted in how she sees herself and exerts control/power over her own story, rather than constructing her identity based on categorized experiences situated in the past. In this exchange, Deb reminds us that the construction of identity and self-definition, is hers and hers alone, and not for me or

²⁰ Notably, this frustration with language demonstrates Deb's deep understanding of the inherent issue/problem/challenge of language usage and choice: representation. Language represents and yet never really captures embodiment, materiality, event. Yet, we cannot escape language: it constructs, arguably, our reality. It is always used (must be used) while simultaneously slipping.

anyone else to impose upon her, hence her assertion that she's "through with labels."

This rejection of the "survivor" and "victim" labels is a purposeful move made in an effort to control her own identity and story, rather than permitting her identity to be determined via external actors or culturally situated discourses. Later in the interview, she expounds on this line of thought, explaining how she perceives the dissonance between the ways she has been labeled, her lived experience, and her perception of self:

DEB: What it was is they were looking at me as part of my behavior and what it was is me "out there." It was a dog eat dog world out there and so...I did what I needed to get my money or whatever it was I needed... I think they labeled me based on my history, not who I am today. For me it would have been easier to just fall into the label and just give up. I'm like, that's just a label they gave me.

Deb articulates a recognition of the external impulse for categorization, the need to affix specific terms to certain behaviors and experiences. In doing so, she asserts a profound awareness of how others view her history, and the tendency for that history to be oversimplified through the affixation of easy-to-use categories based on binaries in Western thought. While she understands this impulse, she also observes the dangers inherent to simplistic labeling, reminding us that it is easier to "fall into the label" and let that define her. But she actively resists this temptation throughout our interviews reminding me, and herself, that "that's just a label" to push against the oversimplification of the complex and to reassert her power over her own story. She rejects labels to actively engage in self-definition and self-driven identity construction. In this description, we see Deb asserting her agency and rejecting of across-the-board depiction of victimization, which "entrenches vulnerability as an identity for women" (Ham 543).

Deb's rejection of labels is an instance of speaking the unspeakable, an overt attempt to recognize the self outside of the categorizing framework – outside of the language – within which she has been placed. Interestingly, in attempting to locate language to describe how she views herself, Deb refigures the conversation in an embodied, relational way. Her re-writing of self is at once both physical and linked to her relationships with her children, to her employment, and to her ongoing work in helping other individuals. Her emphasis on the relational is a centerpiece of her practice; to do otherwise puts her at risk to fall into labels. For her it is as much driven by a need for connection / re-connection with other people as it is for a need to rewrite her relationships to those people. One of the themes she focuses on throughout the interviews is her relationship with her children and how she has sought to rewrite those relationships by eschewing the labels of victimization of survivorship. In re-casting her story through the lens of relationships, she resists the way she has been labeled based on her history, and moves to rewrite the arrangements of victimhood and survivorship.

Liberty engaged in a similarly complex rendering of her identity, though she was less committed to entirely rejecting the language of victimhood and survivorship when asked how she viewed herself. Like Deb, Liberty sought to refigure the language in terms of relationships, particularly her relationships with her children. But she also inserted into the conversation what she viewed as a more palatable "label" for herself. Our conversation around the language of victimization led to this exchange:

JG: You use the word victim; I'm interested in exploring that a little bit...How do you see yourself?

LIBERTY: Today, I don't use any of those words. I'm a thriver... I do associate

myself as a survivor, not just of human trafficking, but everything I've been through with my son and my daughter. I survived all of those obstacles that were put in my way. I've overcome them, which makes me thrive.

Notice her word choice here – she “associates” herself as a survivor but doesn’t “identify” as a survivor. One could assume that this is just a fluke of word choice, but my understanding during the interview was that she chose this word purposefully and carefully. So, while she sees a link between her experiences and the language of survival – she acknowledges that she survived certain experiences – she is hesitant to embrace that affirmatively *as an identity*. Instead, she inserts a new term into the conversation: thriver. Liberty makes a move to insert “thriving” as an important part of the conversation because, like others who have experienced similar exploitation/trauma, she sees the current discourse as lacking an adequate descriptor for the path her life has taken since exiting the trafficking scenario.

The notion of thriving, then, becomes centrally important to her subjectivity because it roots her identity in the present and in hope for the future, rather than relegating her identity as being wholly tied to a traumatic past. She explains her desire to identify as a thriver because “victim” is no longer a part of her experience or mentality... In our second interview she asserted: “I’m no longer in that mentality, no longer in that past victimization mentality.” Or, as she observed during one exchange: “Well what does a victim look like? A victim remains a victim if they don’t get help. I refuse to let the people who victimized me win over my life anymore.” By describing herself as a thriver, Liberty effectively distances herself from the language of victimization that is so commonly used in the dominant narrative, positively asserting

her own identity and her own language, a language that emphasizes healing and renewal rather than rooting her identity in experiences of victimization. Like Deb, Liberty sees the compulsory use of terms like victim and survivor as restrictive/restricting lines and responds to them by asserting a recognition of self through self-inquiry and relationality. Unlike Deb, the move that Liberty makes in still associating with those terms operates to represent her “identity as a double consciousness incapable of integration, and locates it in an originary fissure or split that opens up the fictive status of the unitary concepts of identity” (Watson 150). Not speaking, Liberty seems to say, reinforces the power of the unspeakable to sustain oppression; yet exposing the silences by a full rejection of the categories placed upon her would betray her external-facing ability to effectuate change. Gloria Anzaldua describes this complexity through her use of the concept of *Mestiza*, the idea that she does not belong to one fixed category yet embraces a range of consciousness as a survival strategy. Anzaldua describes the *Mestiza* consciousness as a “consciousness of duality” that embraces both ambiguity and contradiction as a survival strategy (59). Like Anzaldua, Liberty is engaged in this strategy, a constant “shift out of habitual formations” that operates pluralistically and beyond mere opposition (101).

Remixing Identity: Beyond the Labels

Understanding how Deb and Liberty view the labels of survivorship and victimhood is generally informative both regarding their discomfort as to how they exist within the dominant narrative and an individually situated desire to recognize a self that exists outside of that narrative. Indeed, one of the central themes across our interview sessions was that of personal transformation, a transformation that both seemed to view

as crucial to their subjectivity.²¹ This awareness manifested itself in a persistent acknowledgement and expression for the need to constantly raise questions of personal identity. Both Deb and Liberty discerned and commented upon the potential for “losing” the self when deploying the language of the dominant narrative. As such, we can see each engaged in a persistent effort to reframe their respective stories and negotiate “a dialogue in which personal interrogation of...subjective history begins to create a new subject,” a transformed subject whose identity aims “at being critically chosen rather than assigned and unspeakable” (Watson 163). Liberty pinpoints this when she discusses her motivations for telling stories about her experiences:

I lost my personal identity. I didn't even know who I was, what I amounted to, who would even appreciate me. ... That thing went through my mind. Who is going to respect me? Do I deserve that respect? Those things went through my mind. I had to channel all of that out of my life. That's not who I am. It wasn't who I was either. That I remember. That's not who I was. Women need to understand if they're forced into doing something against their will like that, that is not who they *are*, and it's not who they *were*. They weren't allowed to be themselves. They weren't identifying themselves.

In this excerpt, Liberty makes the important observation that even within a situation of exploitation and victimization, the *actual* identity of the individual is not necessarily that of the vulnerable victim. Indeed, in her construction, we see her grappling with what it means to have an identity that is *suppressed* – one which was both “disallowed” and one which, due to her circumstances, at the time remained unidentified, unrecognized.

²¹ I note that this set of ideas could be seen as in tension with postmodern critiques of the “self.”

But the language she uses here is not so much language that reveals a *lack of identity*, but rather *identity as something that was lost* and which needed to be found.²² Notably, she doesn't root this in a language of shame; rather, she identifies this moment in her storytelling to positively assert herself. While she actively shares her perceptions of lived experience, she also engages in subject formation through narrative performativity; in other words, she is not merely reflecting and making an argument, she is also *doing* something, actively "identifying" herself and asserting deserved respect. In this acknowledgement, Liberty urges others who are similarly situated to "reappropriate the camera" (Watson 162). She views and reflects on the unspeakable elements of her life to gain control over her own subjectivity in a context in which society has repeatedly asserted that she has no control. By articulating her loss of identity and the transformational process of relocating it, Liberty speaks the unspeakable, discovering the history of her own "assumed" subjectivity in order to reimagine herself. This reflective and negotiated process of self-recognition thus restructures Liberty's story into "a mode neither of nostalgic individuality nor simply of oppositional consciousness" (162). Rather, her storytelling process becomes a historicizing process that "decensorizes the unspeakable by making her operations and normative power manifest" (162). This re-visioning is a crucial part of her ability to self-identify: "Healing, forgiving myself was the hardest. A lot of it is spiritual. I had to forgive myself. I had to realize that I wasn't at fault."

In a similar vein of thought, Deb describes the loss of identity in her own language: "It's a shattering of who you are. You have a box and a big hammer and it's like

²² While "found" implies that it was lost; we might also read this as asserting a need to *construct* identity in that maybe it's less of it being lost and more of it being something to build through her agency.

shattering all your hopes, your dreams, your goals.” This shattering requires an effort to engage in a constant renegotiation of identity, which is what we see her doing across each of our interviews. In one exchange, she expounds on this shattering, describing it as something that needs to be pieced back together:

DEB: How do you pick up the pieces, how do you put that shattered vase back together, because a lot of times when you’ve been trafficked, you feel like your whole has been shattered... Okay, now that I’ve gotten out of it, how do I put that vase back together so that vase can still have meaning and purpose?

Like Liberty, Deb doesn’t indicate a total absence of identity, rather she describes it as something that needs to be reconstructed, rewritten, put together in a new way. In this sense, it is an inherently creative act of meaning making. Each piece of what has been broken becomes an essential ingredient to Deb’s meaning making and reconstruction of self – but it is not the same way; it is not the same “vase.” What Deb describes is not necessarily a “putting back together” so much as it is a *remix*: using the pieces she has identified and recognized to build something new that connects to her desire for “meaning and purpose.” This notion of a desire for meaning and purpose is loaded with and rooted in embodied experience and memory. The act of “putting back together,” of reconstructing the vase, becomes a necessity for her because of the constellation of embodiment, experience, and memory that drives meaning and purpose. Indeed, her transformational process, her remix, is rooted in what she describes as building new structures.

DEB: It was about getting to know who I was and what was important to me and my life. The more I educated myself, like learning how to take personal

responsibility because when I went into mental health services I thought, “these are professionals. They are going to fix me. I don’t have to do anything.” I realized after the first year that I had to do something. I had to take responsibility and work on my own recovery or nothing was going to change. I started doing things, educating myself on what kind of relationships I wanted to have, what kind of mother I wanted to be.

Deb’s story centers on the transformational in the way that she walks out of the frame of the dominant narrative and asserts both control and responsibility over herself and her own subject formation. In so doing, she complicates the binary oppositions of survivor/nonsurvivor, victim/nonvictim, criminal/noncriminal and seems less interested in the politics of legitimation than in determining who she wanted to be and “what kind of relationships” she wanted to have. In the process of therapy, when she realizes that no one could “fix” her but herself, she not only positively asserts herself, but *recognizes* herself; in so doing, she undoes the power that the language of control and restriction have exerted over her experience. In this sense, Deb’s process of “getting to know who I was” represents a double move of deconstruction and reconstruction, repositioning her subjectivity in a way that resists the “othering” or oppositional constructions of identity that she had experienced both while being trafficked and while being labeled as an extension of that experience. Like Liberty, in these excerpts, we can see Deb negotiating a dialogue in which a personal interrogation of her subjective history begins to create a new subject, one whose identity is critically chosen by her self-recognized self rather than being externally assigned, and as such unspeakable. In some ways we might describe these as forms of self-reclamation, highlighting the contradictory nature

of identity politics and the politics of legitimation. We can locate resistance on the borders that exist in the “in between” where “subjectivity, cultural power, and survival are played out” (Kaplan 133). In this reclamation and resistance, we can then see Deb and Liberty moving beyond being “objects of inquiry to active participants in the definition of themselves” (Gould 83).

In the evocation of reclamation and resistance, which stands in opposition to the categorizing nature of the dominant narrative of human trafficking, Deb and Liberty invoke the transformational power of using personal story to engage in a process of alternative self-definition beyond that which has been “assigned.” Instead of lingering in and dwelling upon the past – and the traumas of the past – they both seek to move beyond, situating themselves in the specific present all while displaying the complexity of maintaining that present-ness and of the struggle of engaging in the constant negotiation of the self. In telling their stories of trauma, recovery, and renewal, Deb and Liberty speak and name the unspeakable, asserting control over their own identities and their own lives. We can see these speakings as descriptions of the process of subject formation, writing the self, through which Deb and Liberty assert their own identities – identities which are typically, notably absent from the dominant narrative. Indeed, the “loss” and the negotiated effort to “re-write” the self is nowhere to be found in the dominant narrative; it remains silent and unspoken. In emphasizing their own processes of healing, of (re)finding the self, they assert that they are fully here and that they are not absent. In listening to the tellings of Deb and Liberty, we witness a conscious re-imagination and, literally, refigurement of the self; it is this use that I argue transforms their object status within the colonial discourse of human trafficking into a subject status,

a presence instead of an absence (Powell, “Survivance,” 396). Their presence becomes a palpable centrality across the interviews, a powerful reminder that these are not stories about human trafficking *per se*; rather these stories are living, breathing, embodied, sitting across from me in the very same room. These are stories of lived human experience.

This centrality of presence in their stories evokes Cherokee author Thomas King’s repetition of the statement: “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (2). Its power resides both in its initial saying and in its repeated use – a continual, persistent reminder. King’s words importantly connect to the stories told by Deb and Liberty. They, too, *are* stories, embodied collections of stories, and their tellings are part and parcel of their respective identities. In listening to how Deb and Liberty discuss identity and self-transformation, we see connections to Thomas King, Joy Harjo, Qwo-Li Driskill, and many other theorists operating in a native/indigenous paradigm, who emphasize the notion that *stories are what we are*. In the act of telling their stories, Deb and Liberty are not merely engaged in a recounting, but demonstrating their present subjectivity. Reflecting on what it means for how I constructed my own views of the “self” and how I saw stories at work in the world, indigenous ideas and scholarship have been critically important to helping me re-think and re-orient my approach to this project. What I learned by applying this understanding of story, was that the stories that live inside Deb and Liberty, whether told or untold, give form to their respective identities and constantly negotiate their place in the world. These stories – particularly when put into the world through speaking – constellate with other stories existing inside other bodies, and in other spaces, places, and times. The recognition that the stories and

storytelling practices engaged in by Deb and Liberty are *who* they are, rather than mere recountings, encouraged me to re-think what I heard when I listened to participants in my research. If the truth about stories is that that's all we are, how did this apply in understanding my work with Deb and Liberty?

Coming into this project, I viewed stories as discursive events that recounted happenings *to* people and which were recounted *about* people. As such, I understood “self” and “story” as things that could overlap but which were usually distinctly separate. In many ways, that compartmentalization made my work easier: if I could separate the person from the stories, then it mattered far less how I evaluated them. Stories became objects that could be accepted or merely discarded. But, in listening to Deb and Liberty, it became immediately apparent that separating the person from the story was not possible; to discard their stories would be to discard the individuals telling them. In considering the scenes of self-recognition, of transformation, that Deb and Liberty describe we are then reminded that the dominant narrative – and the impulse to separate person from story – is neither sufficient nor appropriate because of its colonizing compartmentalization. In resisting this narrative's construction of identity, Deb and Liberty demonstrate the alterity experienced by individuals who have been trafficked, an alterity that is perpetuated by the narrative. The affixation of labels encourages Deb and Liberty to view themselves through the eyes of others. This is the nature of subjugative practice – it seeks to remove the self and replace it with the acceptable, a psychological undoing of the self that typifies colonizing discourse. But instead of remaining within this frame, Deb and Liberty push against it, resisting and confronting, compelling a consideration of what it means to be “the other,” to view

oneself not through one's own eyes, but through that of a dominant entity and an indifferent world. By embracing their own language, eschewing labels, and articulating themselves *as themselves*, Deb and Liberty subvert the relationship between the traditionally unseen/unheard and dominant narrative, thereby establishing for themselves an opportunity to be heard, to influence, and to exert a form of resistance against a system designed to silence. By engaging in transformational storytelling that is rooted in self-identity, they undo the alterity of the subjugated, rendering their individual voices relevant and palpable. In their tellings, Deb and Liberty highlight the creative, oppositional, and healing power of subject formation through story. There is pain here. There is wisdom. There is strength. And we should listen.

Transformative Storytelling

In the preceding section, I demonstrated Deb's and Liberty's storytelling as *transformational*, that is they convey personal transformations through a story-driven process of identity construction and subject formation in a scene of self-recognition. Their storytelling also functions in a second scene of recognition, one that is external. Their (re)writing of the self is crucial to their practice of telling stories about their lived experiences to external audiences. The telling of stories might be seen as a practice that Deb and Liberty extend *beyond* the self, to occupy a second scene of recognition – a recognition *by others* that is necessary in order for Deb and Liberty to engage in public discourse, a role that both actively seek to engage in the *transformative*. What I mean by this is that the transformative aspect of their storytelling is intrinsically linked to the transformational. When they speak the unspeakable, they recognize themselves and in that act of self-recognition create the capacity to allow themselves to be

recognized by others. The relationship here between personal experience and political goals is critical to understanding the transformative aspects of their stories.

The transformative and its scene of external recognition is important to explore and analyze because it is the discursive space in which Deb and Liberty use their stories to demonstrate the empowerment stemming from self-recognition. Further, if we accept Wendy Hesford's claim that human rights topics have long "been dominated by antagonistic struggles for recognition tethered to the Hegelian dialectic of the self-other," the uses to which Deb and Liberty put their stories might also be viewed as sites of resistance (81). Put another way, Deb and Liberty push against the dominant narrative that has written them out by rewriting themselves back in, demanding recognition, and destabilizing the self-other dialectic that predominates. Hesford reminds us that some bodies are attributed the status of full participation, while others are relegated to being "marked as Other" and therefore, "not considered worthy of being bearers" of testimony (81). This othering reflects a paternalistic view of human trafficking subjects, and is exemplified by messianic rhetoric within the traditional human rights frame. This is particularly the case in instances wherein law enforcement agencies, for example, "determine" when a woman is acting with agency and when a woman "qualifies" as a victim (Maeda 55), implicitly creating a dichotomy in which women are presented as mere "shadows" who need their agency to be determined, qualified, and labeled or, more simply put, as individuals who need "to be granted agency, by being rescued or by being recognized" (55). In other words, the power of legitimation – and of "granting" agency – is typically in the hands of someone other than the individual who has been trafficked.

The victim/agent dichotomy muddies understanding about the core issues of human trafficking and requires individuals to be identified and *labeled* as victims by authority. Failure to be so labeled results in a determination of otherness: criminal, illegal immigrant, or some other subclass requiring enforcement action rather than assistance. This is not limited to law enforcement actions and can be seen playing out in the media, public relations materials, and visual representations developed and published by nonprofit organizations and anti-trafficking activists which both sensationalize the sexual side of human trafficking and reinforce the victim/agent dichotomy by depicting trafficking victims as “abject, deserving of pity, and in need of rescue by those who embody agency” (Maeda 53). As Donna Maeda has noted, these materials persistently use images representing the “victimhood of trafficked persons” which “emphasize the sexual exploitation of women in images of shame, destitution, fear, and extreme vulnerability” (53). While there is no question that individuals who are trafficked find themselves placed in situations that make them vulnerable, according to Julie Ham this sort of across-the-board depiction of vulnerable women “entrenches vulnerability as an identity for women” (“Trafficking and Gender” 543). Therefore, individuals such as Deb and Liberty are faced with rejection/silencing because their actuality is misaligned with perceptions about how they “should” be – abject, ashamed, fearful, mere shadows. When an individual who has been in a trafficking scenario, then, doesn’t align with the dominant narrative of what that individual should look like, how they should act, or how they should represent themselves, they are then faced with disbelief.

In the dominant narrative, Deb and Liberty both are marked as “other” and, as

such are to be talked *about* and, in broader cultural discourse, are not typically given a voice – they are not viewed as legitimate. They are disbelieved when they speak the unspeakable. As a result, their “other” status typically silences their potential testimony, a colonizing move that relies on “modalities of subordination and exclusion” such as labels and identity categories to legitimize or “allow” speech (Hesford 81). By engaging in self-recognition, Deb and Liberty empower themselves as fully present subjects, rather than mere narrative objects to be used by others. They legitimize themselves and thereby engage in the transformative by combining the personal experience and their own political goals as instruments for change. Rather than relying on the politics of legitimation in dominant narratives about human trafficking, they instead “work to narratively transform [their] experience of exclusion as a transgressive outsider into chosen, prized, collective difference” (Watson 154). Deb and Liberty share stories that are transformative; that is they tell stories to actively help others engage in self-recognition. In doing this, for both Deb and Liberty storytelling is a practice that allows them both to gain power over their own stories, a power not afforded by other means; by engaging in the practice of storytelling, they actively re-write themselves and re-write how they understand themselves in relation to broader discursive spaces, thereby creating a counter-discourse that stands in stark contrast to dominant narrative.

In many respects this transformative aspect of their storytelling mirrors traditions of witnessing and testifying. Lyon and Wilson write, “As symbolic acts concerned with engaging forces of oppression, witnessing and testifying have a particular place in speaking back to power, in creating counter-discourses and offer alternative worldviews” (7). The storytelling practices of Deb and Liberty predominantly represent

the creation of counter-discourse, one that focuses less on describing the horrors of human trafficking and more on developing a narrative of renewal. More than that, in the creation of this counter-discourse, Deb and Liberty seek to effectuate change – they use their stories to do something. The use of storytelling is a way of *extending self* into a community and a powerful rhetorical act to make new realities, thereby making do. Deb emphasizes this in her discussion of choice regarding who she speaks to about her experiences, primarily other individuals who have been through similar situations.

DEB: Okay, you've been through this trauma. How do you move past it? How do you get on with your life? You see so many people just stuck and don't know how to move forward. It's like, I've been there and maybe I can show you some things that have helped me that will maybe help you get past that or maybe work on some healing. I'm not a licensed therapist and I'm not a psychologist or a psychiatrist, or anything like that. But I can relate to what that trauma is.

Deb shares her stories because she can relate; she knows what trauma is. She knows what it is like to work through it, and she seeks to use that knowledge with others who can benefit. By sharing the transformational aspect of her story with those who are like her, she engages in the transformative, building relationships between herself and others to help them to engage in their own transformational self-recognition. In this sense, Deb's storytelling practice is a counter-discourse that is rooted in a persistent acknowledgment of her own humanity, a humanity that she encourages others to recognize as well, and a humanity that is ignored in dominant narrative. Instead of linking her discourse to the tropes of victimhood and survivorship, she instead defines herself by her humanity, her human dignity, and her empowerment (Royster and

Cochran 16). In so doing, she connects herself to the larger human enterprise and helps her audiences to see themselves in those ways as well. Liberty echoes this: “We’re all human beings. We all are served for a purpose on this world. We should not be demoralized or dehumanized.”

Like Deb, Liberty’s storytelling is driven by drawing connections between herself, her experiences, and others. She couches her language in a concept of thriving, and like Deb, seeks to help others move beyond notions of victimization and survivorship. For her, making these connections is a personal calling. While she describes the pain that still lingers, and her wish for justice, she doesn’t allow those emotions to define or limit her. Instead, she channels them into a passion:

LIBERTY: That's where my passion lies, and it's all drawn out of thriving, surviving, mentoring, helping those. That's my goal. This past year, that goal is finally coming to light. I'm seeing things that are actually getting into my pathway to where, okay, this is my next step, this is what I need to do. I'm doing more goal setting to where I can actually pursue this as a field, and so I'm a go getter. I'm going out and I am going to thrive and help other people learn to thrive after they've become victims, to survivors, to thrivers.

Liberty’s practice of seeking to help others “thrive” by telling her story, is a counter-discourse that is rooted in a complex understanding of her own experiences – she sees her healing process from trauma and exploitation as a point of reference through which she can help others find renewal and justice. As she says at one point, “It’s not going to bring justice for what I went through, so it’s not about me. It’s about justice for those who are going through it today.” In doing this, she actively encourages her audiences to

reject the language and mentality of shame and the abject and to instead embrace a paradigm of hope and renewal.

Storytelling Practices: Empowerment, Activism, and Advocacy

The ways in which Deb and Liberty describe their storytelling, particularly in relation to others who have endured trauma and exploitation should give us pause when we consider broader discourses around the human trafficking issue. As I noted in this dissertation's introduction, the "story" of the "rescued survivor" typically ends with the "rescue." Deb and Liberty remind us that the moment of extraction or escape from the trafficking scenario is not the end of the story, but rather the beginning. Ironically, in the all too common reality, human trafficking subjects are silenced while being used as exemplars of the state's beneficence – used once again as commodities in "human interest" stories designed to demonstrate state action and yet rendered silent through the state's ownership over and framing of their stories. They are "freed" yet slipped into discursive silence while being used yet again. By positioning their storytelling practice as a counter-discourse that pushes against this, Deb and Liberty are *doing* social activism and advocacy. Neither describe it in this particularized language, but I see their practice – specifically as it relates to others – as a proclamation of presence that acknowledges the "intricate connections" between their status, their needs, and their recognition of the status and needs of others like them (Royster and Cochran 16). In this sense, they function in a way that is boldly at odds with the normative discursive frame of human trafficking. Indeed, by grounding their stories in the idea and language of human dignity, they prioritize the humanity, the presence, and the subjectivity of their audiences. This isn't merely bearing witness, it isn't merely testifying, rather it is an act

of human connection, one that finds no place in the dominant narrative. Like African American women who advocate for their race and gender to be treated with respect, Deb and Liberty advocate for human trafficking subjects to be recognized as “human beings with a full range of human potentialities, including their desires to function as intellectual beings with agency and authority over their own lives” (Royster and Cochran 17).

As a practice, this serves to “unflatten” the tropes of victim and survivor, instead encouraging us to listen to and learn from the complexity and multi-faceted humanity of lived experiences of those who have been traumatized, marginalized, and silenced. By unflattening these tropes, Deb and Liberty write themselves onto the discursive landscape and encourage the recipients of their stories to do the same. This counter-discourse is a direct response to the perceived limits and limitations of the labels that dominant narrative inscribes. Deb directly addresses this when she describes how she works with other individuals who have been trafficked:

DM: They feel like that's their new identity. I tell them, "Don't let labels define who you are. You still are a brother, a mother, a sister, a husband, a wife. You can still have a fulfilling purpose in your life..." That's what started it. Storytelling is using that lived experience and how I was able to move past that... and still become somewhat happy person. Still have a lot to work on. Now I'm almost 50 and I'm still working on myself.

By encouraging others to eschew the labels of the dominant narrative and connecting that assertion back to her own experience, she is able to engage in transformative storytelling, encouraging her audience to find empowerment in their own stories, to

actively re-write themselves and re-write how they understand themselves in relation to broader discursive spaces. In this, I see parallels to the approach, described by Andrea Smith, of wellness circles used by Native women to “share their stories and learn from each other as they travel on the road toward wellness (73). Smith writes,

We began to see that we do not need to rely on the “experts” who have their own agendas; we need to trust our bodies, which colonizers have attempted to alienate from us. Our colonizers have attempted to destroy our sense of identity by teaching us self-hatred and self-alienation. But through such wellness movements, we learn to reconnect, to heal from historical and personal abuse, and to reclaim our power... (73)

While the wellness circles described by Smith are in response to both historical and ongoing colonization, there are, I think, similarities between her experience and the approaches used by Deb and Liberty in their own storytelling. Like what Smith describes, Deb and Liberty are fully cognizant of the ways in which experts have sought to label and categorize them, as individuals, and their experiences. They, too, have grappled with the expectations of self-hatred or self-alienation that necessarily stem from the “expert” labels with which they are so often given. Instead of allowing such colonization to destroy their sense of identity, they instead share their stories as a means to resist those discursive spaces through building relationships. They are able to connect with others by attending to and resisting “expert” categorization, and facilitating a process of self-recognition that does not rely on oversimplifications of lived experiences.

Deb and Liberty also both repeatedly emphasize the importance of helping

others find empowerment through rewriting the self on the individual level, an act that not only resists the self-hatred and self-alienation, the shame, that so often accompanies labels of victim and survivor. Simply put, they share their stories as an activity of hope that runs directly counter to the dominant narrative. Deb describes this poignantly when she talks about her recent experience in returning to a women's prison – one at which she had been previously incarcerated – to work with some of the inmates.

DEB: People go in there thinking that, "Now I'm a convicted felon nobody's ever going to hire me. I'm never going to get a job. Never going to get my kids back. What's the use? Why even try?" Especially the women's prison for me was really powerful because when I went in there, I sat down, and I shared my story, I had a few of the women say, "I thought I knew you." They had recognized me but they were like nobody's coming in the gate the way I came in that had been in the gate from the backdoor. They were like, "You just gave me hope."

That giving of hope is the motivation that drives Deb and Liberty in their storytelling. While they mention other aspects of their reasons for sharing – creating awareness, educating the public and so on – they both return to their connection with others who have shared similar experiences. In seeking to connect with them, and to build trust, they're engaged in a powerful transformative storytelling process that helps others find their own strength. In this sense, Deb and Liberty enact their own brand of relational accountability by asserting that their relationships with others with whom they can identify are primary, rather than being relegated as a secondary consideration. They desire to connect, to share hope, and to help build something new. In considering this, I

am reminded of Greg Sarris' "Conversations with Mabel McKay," where he describes how she uses basket making to demonstrate theory. Like Mabel McKay, Deb and Liberty are *practicing* their own theories. For them, theory and practice come in one package – one's life and one's theories about that life are intrinsically interwoven. For Deb and Liberty, sharing stories with others who have been through trauma is an act of communion, one which is rooted in their own experiences, and one in which they see as both creative and communal. By engaging with and reflecting on their relationships, with discursive spaces and ideas, and with the facts of their existence, Deb and Liberty tell stories as means to make do, to live and to help others live.

In Their Own Words: A Narrative Rooted in Human Dignity

The transformative aspect of their storytelling isn't just situated in helping facilitate healing and renewal. It is also situated in an effort to transform how we see, listen to, and understand the lived experiences implicated by human trafficking. By re-writing how they understand themselves in relation to broader discursive spaces, they also inhabit a scene of recognition in which they destabilize the dominant narrative that misrecognizes or fails to recognize at all. They want to be heard and they want others who have endured trauma and exploitation to be heard as well. In this, they seek to be recognized by those who would seek to tell stories *about* them, while asserting control over those stories for themselves. They do not seek recognition to be legitimated, but rather seek to be recognized *as they are* within the frame of their own subject formation.

This quest to be heard and recognized on their own terms is, I think, important to understanding not only the motivations of their storytelling, but also to understanding how they view the larger narrative frame of human trafficking discourse. When we listen

to Deb and Liberty talk about themselves, discuss their work with others who have been in similar situations, and open up about their life journeys, we begin to hear their concern with the ways in which they see themselves as mis-recognized or not recognized at all. In effect, the desire to be heard on their own terms is a clear effort to remind that the dominant narrative fails both in its recognition of individual subjectivity and in its capacity to open up space for stories to be told. And, too, it is not just a reminder of that, but also a continued re-assertion of control over not only the telling of their stories but their use. There's a caution that Deb and Liberty share when they open up, a caution that is connected to their knowledge that once their stories are "let loose into the world" they cannot be taken back (King 10). Such an acknowledgement leads to a continued evaluation and re-evaluation of what is being said and, more importantly, a questioning of how what is being said will be used by others. That question of use becomes a recurring factor across interviews because these are their stories and they want their stories used in specific ways. Notably, the desired use of their stories tends to be a use that exists outside of the way stories are typically deployed in the dominant narrative; rather than mere sensationalism to create awareness, they see their stories as potential bridges to connect with other people, a use of language to emphasize transformation, a transformation that most usually occurs in the background, unseen and unheard and, yes, outside of broader culturally situated discursive spaces. In this sense, there's less a desire to be "incorporated into" the broader narrative than in a desire to create a new, alternative narrative that is rooted in human dignity.

In creating an alternative narrative rooted in a recognized self and in a framework of human dignity, Deb and Liberty work to create a discursive space within which they

can reside. We may think about this as a concept of developing a “home” for the stories they share and the stories that others like them share. Such an approach informs us in thinking about discursive home-making as resistance, as a “site of struggle over the politics of representation, the exercise of power, and the function of social memory” (Giroux 142). By purposefully taking the action of creating a home for their stories, Deb and Liberty are engaged in a strategy for resistance that is both centered in a relationship of self implicated in the other and in relation to an opposition to the dominant narrative. By creating a home for their stories outside of that narrative, Deb and Liberty make apparent their resistance of wider narratives that have sought to script their lives and the collective lives of those who have been impacted by human trafficking. By comparing their stories against those offered up in the dominant narrative, we can begin to see how their stories disrupt. In this disruption, we can see Deb and Liberty traveling across the discursive terrain to “be with people in other, often ‘othered’ spaces” (Dolan 78). In this, we witness the ways in which “identities shift and overlap as they resist the boundaries of cultural containment” (Brunner 52).

Such an alternative narrative involves a reconsideration of how we think about and articulate subjectivity in human rights discourse. Wendy Hesford has written that “the incorporation of the individual into the human rights system” involves survivors “taking on a double subjectivity as rights-bearer and victim” (82). In listening closely to how Deb and Liberty construct their stories and use their stories in relation to others, we can see an alternative ideal of the incorporation of the individual into the human rights system. Indeed, a careful reading of Deb’s and Liberty’s stories and descriptions of their storytelling practices would indicate that both reject this notion of double subjectivity.

When they share their stories, they continually assert themselves as they are, not as they were. They do not embrace victimhood, a prerequisite of the “human rights systems.” They seek to be recognized as themselves, as they transcend, or move beyond, conceptions of survivorship and victimhood. In this sense, the stories told by Deb and Liberty are transformative in that they encourage a paradigmatic shift from recognizing survivors as victims and instead recognizing them as “human beings with a full range of human potentialities, including their desires to function as intellectual beings with agency and authority over their own lives” (Royster and Cochran 17). The emphasis on human dignity, on present-ness, on personal transformation, they seem to be telling us, should transform how we recognize them within the rhetoric of human rights and within human trafficking discourse. Instead of perpetuating the subject/other-object dichotomy, such a recognition transforms our understanding of how we should listen to these stories. As Erik Doxtader writes, perhaps instead we should listen to these stories as demonstrations of how such individuals possess and are actively asserting a right to invent their own “practices of identification, contest identities pre-formed by tradition, and the power to negotiate subversive subject-positions” (149). In other words, instead of seeking recognition to engage in public discourse within the pre-formed, pre-defined frame – along with its attendant categorizing labels – perhaps we should listen to how Deb and Liberty are identifying themselves, pushing against those pre-formed identities, engaging in their own subject formation...all while helping others to do the same.

INTERLUDE

DEB: *I think it made me realize that I wasn't alone. That other people have gone through something similar. Maybe not all of the aspects that I've been through, but somewhere along that journey I can relate to something that somebody else is going through or how my story relates to them. It might not always be the abandonment or the prostitution, and trafficking or substance abuse, prison, mental illness, whatever, but I can always find something to relate to somebody about. It really helps me in my recovery when I'm able to say that I know how it feels to be afraid or have that fear of doing something that you haven't done before, because I've been there. There was a time that I didn't have a voice and I was afraid to ask for what I needed, but today I can tell you, "You know, this is what worked for me. It might not work for you, but let me share what I did." What it does is it really helps an individual, it lets them know that they're not alone. That I'm there to support them. That I'm not there to judge them or have an opinion. That I'm there just because I care and I want to support. It really has. It really has helped me in my own recovery, and then I went along and then started my own company, too, working with individuals. I got into training, health and wellness, and recovery because I believe that if people know how to take care of themselves or learn ways to take care of themselves, that they don't have to be a victim. I like to do the training and education.*

LIBERTY: *My closest friends in the class, they'd already known I'd been through enough, and one of the girls looked at me, she said, "Are you kidding? What more have you been through?" They know me as a person today and by knowing who I am today, they're like, "I would never have guessed you've been through so much. I would never have guessed that you were into drugs. I would never have guessed that you had been trafficked. I would never have guessed that you were a victim, because you don't seem like a victim." I said, "Well what does a victim look like? It could be anybody in this room, but a victim remains a victim if they don't get help." I refused to let the people who victimized me win over my life anymore, and that was the day I said that right there in that classroom in front of my peers. These are people younger than me. I'm nearly fifty years old and I'm in school. When I said that, I felt the empowerment in me. I said, "Okay, enough is enough. I'm done. I'm ready to start challenging this. I'm ready to start facing it and talking about it. I won't be ashamed of it. I won't be dealt dirty. I did no wrong, period." I was forced into doing this. I was scared for my life. There was never restitution, but I will seek restitution one way or the other, and that is justice for those who are being hurt today. I might not have ever gotten it, but I will see it out to the end of my days. That's where my change came.*

Chapter 4: Negotiating Rhetorical Liminality

In the preceding pages, we've listened to Deb and Liberty grapple with the rhetorics of rescue and vulnerability that so commonly accompany stories about human trafficking and how they move beyond those rhetorical frames to creatively engage in their own individualized processes of subject formation. In both instances, we can perceive deep discomfort with the ways in which the rhetorical frames of human trafficking operate on the level of the individual: the rhetoric of rescue dissipates in both stories into a form of colonizing control; and the rhetoric of vulnerability expresses itself as yet another means of limiting discourse, one which does not account for the complexity and multiplicity of experiences of the individuals who are categorized merely as victims or survivors. For Deb and Liberty, human trafficking – as a phrase and as a rhetorical frame – in and unto itself poses its own form of power, operating both to silence individuals and to create zones of silence around those who might need to hear. We'll weave these findings together over the following pages to make an argument that Deb and Liberty tell stories that engage in a negotiation between the articulation of self and the use of the rhetorical frames of dominant human trafficking narratives to confront the colonizing language of such discourse, while also subversively using that same language to develop connections with external audiences. In this, then, we see both the complexity and multidimensionality of lived experience and in the conveyance of that lived experience through language.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how the storytelling practices of Deb and Liberty are both transformational and transformative. To a large extent, the storytelling practices Deb and Liberty engage in are rooted in a process of identity construction that

exists outside of and actively resists the framework of the dominant narrative about human trafficking. Resultantly, in order to pursue personal transformation and to help others do the same, they both find it necessary to move beyond a framework in which their identities are connected to concepts of victimhood and survivorship. And, yet, while their processes of identity construction/subject formation resist the oversimplifications of the dominant narrative, we still see them using the language of the dominant narrative to tell their stories. As such, they exhibit a discursive in-betweenness, or liminality, that they tactically navigate in telling stories about their experiences. This navigation is exemplified throughout our interviews in a continual shifting of language that is both self-regulatory and which transgressively moves within and between narrative frames and discursive spaces.

Put another way, within these stories exists an inherent tension between how Deb and Liberty construct the self and how they use language to be perceived by external audiences. This chapter will demonstrate that liminal situatedness and I will show the ways in which Deb and Liberty construct their stories in this liminal space. We'll explore the tension that exists within the language they use to tell their stories, and I'll demonstrate how they both engage in a deft navigation of the politics of legitimization to travel between different discursive spaces. Within the pages of this chapter, I seek to demonstrate how Deb and Liberty use words and language to adeptly engage in "tactical refigurings" (Powell, "Survivance" 405). In so doing, we may begin to understand their stories as a practiced use, makings in which they simultaneously consume, deploy, and reject the dominant narrative about human trafficking, which in turn allows them to "maintain their difference in the very space" occupied by the

dominant narrative (de Certeau 32).

For Liberty, that difference is used to problematize the narrative by creating new categories, while also arguing for a voice within it. For Deb, the difference is used more broadly to argue for a breaking down of categories and a re-assertion of and acknowledgement of agency. For both, the use of mainstream language serves as a central tactic to negotiate their respective in-betweenness, that of the “survivor” in the language of the dominant narrative and that of the post-survivor “self” which views those experiences as less defining than informative. Their respective approaches push against the apparent stability and fixity of the dominant narrative, instead employing an approach that blends language, moves between discursive spaces, and is defined by embodied, relational rhetoric. This “transgressive” travel between discursive spaces allows each to maintain control over their stories and maintain power over the self, while not ceding it to larger forces. In doing this, Deb and Liberty adopt storytelling as a practice that allows them to exercise power over their own lived experience and re-write how they understand themselves in relation to broader discursive spaces, while garnering credibility for a wider cultural audience.

On Spatiality & Liminality

We were midway through an hour-and-a-half long interview when I asked Deb about how she saw her lived experience, how she viewed her own story. Her eyes lit up and she leaned forward, fingers reaching to grab a pen and paper sitting mid-table. She began drawing two meandering lines down the center of the paper, something that looked very much like a river on hand-drawn map. She paused, looked up at me, and started talking animatedly while continuing to draw on the paper in front of her:

My lived experience, I'll give you an illustration... It's not so much about human trafficking or mental illness or addiction or anything. I talk about how there's this river here and there's alligators, there's crocodiles, there's a lot of scary stuff in there like piranhas, these things like the monsters. On this side of the river is this desert. It's dry. Nothing grows there. It's awful to live there... On the other side of this river is a big, lush, green forest. You look over there and you see things are growing... There's food over there. There's everything, and it's just beautiful, and you long to be over on this side of the river, but you don't really know how to get there.

When Deb invoked the imagery of movement across terrain, she made an explicit maneuver to consciously transform a place into a space through the practice of storytelling.²³ Both Deb and Liberty structured their stories in ways that highlighted this spatial movement from what Deb describes as the desert to the lush, green forest on the other side of the river. Liberty, in a similar fashion, repeatedly invoked word choices such as “journey,” “progress,” “going forward,” and used the metaphor of driving: “if I had stopped long enough and drove slowly along enough, I would’ve observed it sooner...you’re going to notice things you normally wouldn’t notice and quit passing.” Liberty situates that use of language by reminding me that to initiate the journey, “you’ve got to start at the beginning.” By telling their stories, then, both Deb and Liberty engage in acts of *practicing place* that transform mere places into spaces through telling and the language choices that comprise the story. The space is, therefore, actuated by “the ensemble of movements deployed within” and situated by the actions of the subjects

²³ It is also important to note that she’s engaging in a multimodal, embodied practice.

involved in the telling (de Certeau 117). This differentiation between place and space becomes crucial to understanding their stories because it moves us away from the impulse to flatten narrative and encourages a consideration of how their stories might be considered spatially.²⁴ Stated differently, in using the metaphor of traversing terrain, Deb reminds us that stories “take place” and thereby constellate disparately situated tellings as “linked through narrative” (Rendell 1). Deb’s focus on spatializing story implicitly invokes de Certeau’s ideas about stories as loosely connected devices for making connections between the incongruent. In this, then, we might understand Deb and Liberty’s construction of spatial stories as a means of exploring and understanding the discursive terrain in terms of the relationships between their own experiences, individual storytelling practices, and the stories *about* them existing in the dominant narrative about human trafficking. In some sense, we might view these spatial stories as ongoing interrogations of the borders between private and public; past, present, and future; and determinations of a self that is embodied separate from, and yet which embodies, cultural discourses which categorize the subject. The stories told by Deb and Liberty, then, are consciously and unconsciously designed to navigate identity in self-defined legitimate spaces *and* exteriorities through the creation of frontiers and bridges (de Certeau 123).

Both Deb and Liberty produce meaning through the construction of story as they traverse this discursive terrain. In this traversal of terrain, they actively change their connections to the external and in so doing seek to redefine their individual relationships

²⁴ “For those concerned with issues of identity, spatial metaphors constitute powerful devices which can be employed as critical tools for examining the relationship between the construction of identities and the politics of location” (Rendell 3).

between self and the world. Importantly, Deb's illustration also shows that her travel story is an ongoing negotiation of contradictions, limitations, and border crossings. She draws clear distinctions between "the desert," "the lush, green forest" and the river, which serves as a boundary. By clearly demarcating different points of travel within her story, Deb generates what de Certeau refers to as geographies or theaters of action that both create boundaries and serve as Geertzian models for reality (123). However, "more than just reproducing and preserving what is perceived as already given, stories as forms of the 'productive imagination' also pave the way for an exploration of the possible and of the possibility of change" (Pannell 164). These theaters of action present potential for the possibility of change within the stories told by Deb and Liberty, yet they also structure "journeys and actions [that] are marked by the 'citation' of the places that result from them or authorize them" (de Certeau 120). From the maps offered in such stories, de Certeau tells us that we can compare personal stories against broader narratives.

Dianne Brunner theorizes such a move as being "the disruptive site of personal narrative when read against grand narratives" (52). I contend, however, that this ongoing internal comparison is not merely disruptive *but also* generative, insofar as it is tactically used by Deb and Liberty to build connections and cross bridges. Importantly, this traversal of terrain reveals Deb and Liberty's lived experiences as existing in a rhetorically liminal space that they navigate and use for their own purposes. This liminality requires rhetorical transference across the de Certeauian bridge and, as such, their stories are constructed in both legitimate and exterior spaces created through the

practice of specific and shifting constructions of consciousness, identity, and to create spaces of tactical use.

Interiors and Exteriors: Traversing Domains

In each of our interviews, Deb and Liberty engage in what is “much more than a simple presentation of events” (Powell, “Survivance”, 406). Instead, they present those events in ways that are designed to make sense both to themselves (i.e., asserting control over their own stories based on personal domains of knowledge and language) and to external audiences (i.e., using the language of a broader, culturally based domain of knowledge and language to claim credibility). Across each of the interviews I conducted, Deb and Liberty constantly shift back and forth depending on the point they are trying to make and, importantly, on whether the point they are trying to make is based on how they view themselves or they are discussing their attempts to persuade external audiences on issues and concepts about which they care. It is important to consider their rhetorical liminality because the language of their subject formation is not necessarily aligned with the language of the dominant narrative; indeed, as I argued in the preceding chapter, I believe that their subjectivity exists wholly outside of this narrative, and as such operates as a rejection of the assumed double subjectivity that exists within the language of the human rights system. That is, how they articulate themselves operates separately from the language that they use to meet the expectations of external audiences.

It is important to acknowledge external audiences and to further acknowledge that Deb and Liberty do carefully consider those audiences as they share their stories. As Michael Murray argues, such narratives are not and cannot be told in a vacuum and, as

such, the language used by storytellers becomes shaped by specific contexts (116). Murray's observation comes to bear because the audiences to which Deb and Liberty tell their stories vary. During our interviews, I learned that Deb tends to feel more comfortable telling her story to people who come from similar situations: she regularly shares with individuals recently coming out of trafficking scenarios, incarcerated females, and those overcoming addiction and mental health issues. She sees broad overlap across these populations and has made helping individuals in those situations, whether trafficked or not, a centerpiece of her practice. Even so, she has also spoken to audiences comprised of law enforcement, state government officials, victim service providers, and been involved in a video documentary on human trafficking. Liberty has likewise done some work with those who have experienced trafficking, having become actively involved as a partner in establishing one of Michigan's first safe houses exclusively serving women who have been trafficked. But her audiences tend to be a bit more varied; she speaks to church groups, members of the general public at awareness events, and recently traveled to Washington, DC, to participate in a forum on human trafficking hosted by the U.S. Department of Justice.

It is in these ever changing contexts that we see Deb and Liberty making purposeful moves to adjust their language and their stories, and in these adjustments we see a profound tension between their articulations of self and in their attempts to describe their experiences in language that is accepted / acceptable. We see this in their descriptions of how they construct stories differently based on considerations of audience²⁵:

²⁵ It is important to point out here that rhetorical liminality isn't (just) about agent location; rather, it is about agent relationality to other bodies (human bodies, institutions, etc.) as audiences.

DEB: Now, we're getting people, you find a lot more people coming in with mental illness and substance abuse issues. As I talk to more people with substance abuse issue, I talk about being trafficked because a lot of times, some of the females that have used drugs can relate to more of that story or some aspect of it. I guess it depended on my audience.

Deb's approach considers the potential that her own story has in connecting with whom she's sharing. For her, the "opening" of her storytelling, where she specifically invokes the trauma and exploitation of her own experience with having been trafficked occurs almost exclusively in those instances where she can engage in the relational: building bridges, trust, and lines of communication with others who may benefit. As she describes it across our interviews, she's less interested in telling stories to larger, more "public" audiences than in being able to work with specific individuals who might find strength from her personal journey. As she puts it: "I guess my storytelling is to empower people, to let them know that they're not alone." For Deb, relationships are primary. She roots this in her own experiences, across decades of struggle, exploitation, addiction, and incarceration. These experiences are not meant to be shared for the mere sake of sharing, or for merely creating awareness, but rather specifically for connecting with people who are sitting where she sat, living through what she lived through, and struggling with the same or similar issues. She remembers what it is like to feel alone, to feel lost, to not know what the next step is, or whether to even try. And, for her, telling her story is meant to respond to that sense of loneliness, to outstretch her hand and say, *I'm here and I understand; if I got through it, you can too.*

For Liberty, who speaks to a broader range of audiences, her stories are situated

more generally and for a multiplicity of purposes. Depending on the context, the scope of the story changes, sometimes dramatically:

LIBERTY: You got to know your audience. You got to know who you're talking to. What part of the story is more important for them to hear? Do they need to hear the whole story or do they need to hear just what pertains to them like mental health? Do they really need to know about the law enforcement not listening? Yeah, I think they do, so I go into that, but then I don't when it comes to church groups because they don't really need to hear the horrifying aspect of it... It depends on your audience. You just have to know who you're speaking to and what issues you're allowed to talk about and what you're not.

Her emphasis on the context, setting, and constituency of the audience are important elements of her storytelling. But, of even more interest to me is her statement regarding the acceptability of language. The way she constructs this – “what issues you’re allowed to talk about and what you’re not” – is an observation about the politics of representation and legitimation that exist in and around human trafficking discourses. While her audiences have different needs and expectations, across the audiences there is a perceived commonality as to limitations on her stories; that is, there are aspects of her experience that she recognizes as being disallowed from putting into discourse, that she is restricted from putting into speech. Diane Carr characterizes this conflict of allowed/disallowed speech as a power struggle between the purveyors of the dominant narrative and those telling their own stories:

De Certeau describes a dynamic, generative partnership of non-equals. On the one hand are the sanctioning, legalizing, and delineating discourses of

empowered institutions and producers. On the other are the proliferating, ephemeral and transient practices of consumers. These practices in fact reposition consumption itself as a form of production. While this resistance involves a kind of empowerment, the practices are the symptom of an unequal distribution of power and this inequity is not itself overturned by these practices.

(43)

Considering this, storytellers like Liberty and Deb then might be seen as tactically self-repositioning as both consumers and producers: engaging in acts of resistance, even of self-empowerment, while also reminding us of their liminality and unequal status position. While the distribution of power may not itself be overturned by her choices in storytelling, Liberty does seek at least to confront it. Even so, Liberty sees that there are elements of her story and the language she uses to tell her story that remain unspeakable. Interestingly, the unspeakability of these elements is entrenched in her own discussion surrounding it. In our interviews, she mentions allowed/disallowed speech multiple times yet never articulates what, specifically, she perceives as being restricted or unacceptable in the context of telling her story.

There are multiple layers to consider, the story itself and that which exists outside the story – the socio-political context, if you will – which shape how she and Deb navigate the language elements they choose to use or disregard based on an analysis of what they perceive to be important or relevant to external audiences. In Murray's view, then, "the narrator is regarded as a complex psychosocial subject who is an active agent in a social world" (116). How Deb and Liberty use language, demonstrates not only their agency, but their recognition of the social contexts and power dynamics

implicated by putting their stories into circulation, and the ways in which those contexts lead them to alter their stories and to negotiate perceived restrictions by engaging in discursive blending and shifting. By unpacking the language blending and shifting in their stories, we can begin to understand the tension that exists between how they articulate themselves and how they seek to actively put that articulation into conversation with broader narratives.

Nowhere is this more noticeable than in how they grapple with the trope of the “inhuman, monstrous” trafficker. In the dominant narrative, the traffickers – those who exploit – are given little attention and, too, are rendered voiceless. Interestingly, in my interviews with Deb and Liberty, both talked at length about their traffickers. One of the most significant revelations I experienced during my work with them was a recognition of ways in which they humanized the individuals who had exploited them. Certainly, there was anger. Certainly, there was a desire for justice. Certainly, there was a sense of loss. And, certainly, they blamed their traffickers for the ways in which they had been traumatized and brutalized. But both also reflected on their experiences by discussing the humanity that they saw in their traffickers. In one particularly emotional exchange, Deb told me about how she had reached out to communicate with her trafficker years later, describing him in a way that directly contrasted with the narrative trope of the monster:

DEB: There was a charisma about him. When you think about human traffickers being monsters and these older men, I guess, he was just 19 years old when we met.

JG: He wasn't that much older than you?

DEB: No. I tried to find out, “Well what made you do that? Why did you have so much resentment and anger for women? Why did you hate women?” He opened up about a couple of things that I didn’t know about him. As a child his mother hated him because he reminded her of his dad that had abused her and left her... He was constantly being abused by his mother. Constantly being neglected emotionally, physically... It was hard for him, I guess, now... so I wonder if it stems from how his mother treated him. I don’t know.

Here we have an individual who had been trafficked, purposefully contacting her trafficker to find out why he had done the things he had done. Deb wanted to know why she had been exploited and abused. And while she doesn’t receive a fully satisfactory answer, she describes the inquiry as central to her healing process to try to understand the human behind the monstrous actions she lived through. Interestingly, Deb indicated that she kept in touch with him, even encouraging him to tell his own story because she believed it would be valuable for the public to explore both perspectives.²⁶ But this type of ongoing reflection and even communication to find answers – and to broaden awareness about the complexity of human trafficking – is rarely discussed in the literature and certainly is never found in the dominant narrative.

Liberty engages in a similar move. For her, discussing the humanity of her traffickers was more complicated because she was initially trafficked by her own father. But her description of her second trafficking experience is one in which she describes

²⁶ Deb’s observation on this point is an important one. Those who engage in trafficking and associated exploitative practices have not yet been deemed worthy of serious study in academic contexts. Considering that such individuals supply society’s demands for various types of free or low cost labor, further study is warranted to gain insight into the individuals who take advantage of systemic inequalities to exploit others in order to meet those demands. They, too, are part of the story.

her trafficker as “a criminal for a reason.” To some extent she sees his humanity and some goodness within him:

LIBERTY: I feel sorry for Randy because, in a way, I believe he was scared... I don't know if it was because he was under his brother's wing or what. I'm more afraid of [his brother] than I would be of him. I think, in a way, that I have to look and say, criminals are criminals for a reason. His parents enabled him to do drugs, his circle, and being up under his brother was his downfall.

Like Deb, Liberty looks for a way to understand her trafficker's behavior and mindset. She tries to understand the “why” of her experience and, in her estimation, one cannot understand the “why” without humanizing the person who did it. There's a deepness here, a maturity, a recognition of shared humanity that is rooted in pain and must be incredibly difficult. Yet both Deb and Liberty purposefully engage with it – making it a point to do so – to confront it, reflect on it, and acknowledge it as a part of their experience. With an issue so charged and a rhetorical frame that demonizes, simplifies, and silences, both of these individuals remind us that there's a pain on both sides that needs to be explored in order to find healing and reconciliation. It isn't a justification for exploitation, but they tell us that we do need to examine it for what it is. In doing this, both make an argument about the complexity of their experiences, reminding us that we need to account for that complexity without reducing human trafficking into simplistic tropes if we are to fully address it as an issue.

In moves like this, Deb and Liberty engage in what I refer to as “transgressive” travel between discursive spaces to maintain control over their stories and maintain control over the self. It is transgressive in the sense that the larger forces at play would

contend that the traffickers should not have a voice in these spaces and, yet, Deb and Liberty reject the shame that would typically be associated with such reflective examinations, instead opting to articulate their own experiences in a way that can help them make meaning from their experiences. In so doing, they reassert their own control over their stories. In these moments, Deb and Liberty reject the politics of legitimization out of the recognized need to engage in control over their own stories. This tension has important implications for how we understand their use of language and structure in the stories they tell, particularly as it relates to dominant cultural narratives about human trafficking.

If we accept de Certeau's claim that "both rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system – that of language or that of an established order" we might argue that Deb and Liberty refer to the fixed rhetorical map markers of the dominant narrative because they are aware of their rhetorical liminality (24). Culturally situated language about human trafficking is not sufficient to describe their experiences and, yet, it is the only language they have that can be used to connect to external audiences. This rhetorical liminality creates its own space in which they both reference map markers from the dominant narrative and disregard them within the same story. This is an eminently pragmatic use and, I believe, is informed by the ways in which they see the entire rhetorical frame of human trafficking as inadequate. I asked both about this, specifically what they thought about the phrase "human trafficking" and how it related to their own experiences. In asking, I sought to get at the root of some of the language in operation and how they specifically viewed language usage through their own individual lenses. I honestly didn't know how they would respond, but what I

discovered was that they, too, shared some of the concerns that I had long held about phrase “human trafficking” and about the language surrounding the issue in general. Their responses are informative and critically problematize the way in which their experiences are discussed.

You can see the apparent frustration surrounding this language use in Liberty’s response when I asked her about her thoughts on language:

LIBERTY: I wouldn't have understood. I wouldn't have understood what the term meant. What do you mean trafficked? I'm not trafficked. What is trafficked? I'm thinking of a convoy. What is that? I think of a convoy. I was in the truck stops, but I wouldn't have understood. No.... As he said, I was his squaw. That was his terms, I'm his squaw. I would have thought I'm more he's getting money off of me, I'm his girl. He was grooming me really well, but trafficking? I would have never thought of the term. Girls on the street today if they look and you've got a flyer up: “Are you being trafficked?” They'd look at that and say, “No.” They wouldn't understand it... I think the word trafficking is very confusing... Trafficking, everybody thinks of the word prostitution when they hear it. Majority of people I asked, what is trafficking to you? It's people being sold into prostitution. Okay, but what about all this other stuff? To me trafficking is a huge word that's misconstrued. A lot of people just misinterpret the term.

That level of misinterpretation poses significant issues and it also brings us back to considering the human trafficking rhetorical framework as colonizing. In the sense that it deploys language that is inherently confusing, we must at least consider the possibility that it is designed to *be limiting* and *to limit* those who can access it beneficially. It isn't

always simply about whose voices are silenced, but also about who can't "hear" because the message has been so fully muddled. Liberty's frustration isn't so much that the framework isn't technically usable – *it is* – but rather that the framework can only be used by those authorized and empowered to do so. By highlighting that some people can hear the phrase "human trafficking" and not understand its meaning, she reminds us that the framework operates as a colonizing language used to not only silence, *but to deafen*; and in deafening to dampen understanding. This is typical of colonizing frameworks; as David Spurr notes in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, colonizing rhetoric is a tool that is used to create difference. He writes,

The problem of the colonizer is in some sense the problem of the writer... colonization is a form of self-inscription onto the lives of people. For the colonizer as for the writer, it becomes a question of establishing authority through the demarcation of identity and difference. (7)

The language of the human trafficking frame asserts a "radical difference" from the colonized, which operates to legitimize some and de-legitimize others by using categorization to affix pre-determined identities onto people. In other words, the phrase human trafficking and the language of human trafficking becomes an assertion of authority over the other. As a form of colonizing discourse, this operates to create an "inherent confusion of identity and difference" (Spurr 7). Liberty sees this confusion as a significant problem, and one with which she grapples in her own language use to tell her stories. Deb added some additional perspective, saying that even if she had understood the term, she still wouldn't have identified with it:

JG: A lot of times they don't identify as being trafficked?

DEB: Right. I was a ho and I was going to be the best ho that I was, that I could be. Sad as it is, I embraced that lifestyle because that's all I knew. You figure from a child all the way to an adult, this is all I've been taught to do, so I was going to be the best at it. To call me a ho was not a bad thing to me at that point.

The above examples show a tactical use of language that reveals Deb and Liberty are not merely concerned with subject formation, then. The use of culturally situated beliefs about human trafficking permeates both stories, while also being drawn – profoundly – into question. It is my contention that much of this is rooted in the perceived need to garner credibility while simultaneously problematizing the need to be *deemed* credible in the first place.

Negotiating Credibility

While it is true that the necessity of credibility is essential to any storyteller, the purposeful attentiveness Deb and Liberty pay to using language that aligns with the dominant narrative seems to stem from experiences with having been deemed non-credible. In other words, they use “acceptable” language because they know it will be accepted. This is a tactical choice, one that reflects their respective past experiences with telling stories that have been rejected. Being deemed non-credible is a common experience for those who have endured forms of trauma and exploitation. I witnessed this first-hand – and even rendered legal determinations based on negative credibility findings – in my initial years working asylum, refugee, and human trafficking cases for the government. I encountered numerous stories that resulted in negative credibility determinations, *not because they weren't true*, but because of “the lack of rationality, the lack of internal consistency, and the lack of inherent persuasiveness in testimony”

(Kassindja 373). In some cases, I even witnessed non-credible determinations made by other officers simply because the story wasn't "good enough." Early on in my own work in the field, I learned that the stories with gaps, with missing memories, with inconsistencies – the stories that were raw and didn't neatly fit into tidy legal categories – were actually more often than not credible stories and *legitimate claims*. Those who have experienced trauma, realized or potential, simply don't recount full stories in a perfect linear format. Add socioeconomic differences and education barriers into the mix and you have a perfect storm of misunderstanding. When an audience considers a story, there's no formal consideration *required* for such differences or even the impacts of trauma and, as such, the whole process comes down to audience positionality. Unfortunately, too many audiences – in formal and informal settings alike – don't address these hurdles, instead using minor inconsistencies or reactions to "unacceptable" language choices to render a story either legitimate or illegitimate, credible or non-credible. In a society that views a storyteller's credibility as "of extreme importance" in assessing claims, a negative credibility finding is, then, the easiest way to not listen (373). There's no need for audiences to justify such determinations because internal inconsistencies in the story or unacceptable language usage are perceived, *de facto*, to demonstrate a lack of credibility. Recent publications demonstrate that negative credibility findings remain an all too common experience of those who tell stories about trauma and exploitation, reflecting a lack of awareness about how trauma impacts mental health and how socioeconomic differences impact the interpretation of stories. An article, published last year in the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* describes the ways in which credibility assessments can actually re-

traumatize individuals (Kagan). Not only have such individuals re-lived their trauma in the telling their stories but are further traumatized by then being told that they aren't believable. Unfortunately, those who have the courage to tell their stories – like Deb and Liberty – are often told that they are liars.

Therefore, the need to be “credible” storytellers is centered in a reaction to “disbelief” that both have encountered. It is a response to the perceived reality that they are purveyors of subjugated or non-legitimate knowledge. As Foucault describes it, this type of knowledge represents a way of knowing that dominant culture neglects, represses, or fails to recognizes.²⁷ In this sense, then, we can see Deb and Liberty grappling with their own way of knowing as a form of subjugated knowledge, rendered illegible, because they exist outside the proper and legitimate ways of knowing that would render them legible and legitimate. The struggle to be recognized as legible and legitimate is a centerpiece of both experiences and provides insight as to why Deb and Liberty engage in the tactical uses of language that they do to garner credibility. Liberty tells us of an early experience, one of the first instances in which she attempted to share her story, which was rejected out of hand, setting the stage for a lifetime of negotiation with the politics of legitimation:

LIBERTY: I went to talk to a detective in South Carolina, and I pulled him aside, I said, "I want to tell you...I need to tell you what happened." I gave him the whole story, and he looked at me and he says, "You know, that's all bullshit. You're just

²⁷ Foucault, who wrote about subjugated knowledge in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, described such ways of knowing as those which have been “buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization” (81). Foucault argued that despite the dismissal of such ways of knowing, the subjugated can gain power through opposition; this struggle is apparent in the practices shared by Deb and Liberty.

telling me that because you're busted." I even gave them the name of the girl that I overheard that they left for dead in Florida because they made her sign everything over in her house and they put it on a U-Haul truck and they left her in the woods...I was very discouraged by law enforcement at that time...

In seeking to share her story with the detective, Liberty was not heard because she positively asserted her agency in direct contrast to how she was “supposed” to operate as described within the dominant frame of the rhetoric of rescue. Therefore, as Liberty tells it, because she proactively told her story she faced rejection because her actuality was misaligned with perceptions about how she “should” be: abject, ashamed, fearful, a shadow. Indeed, the dominant narrative asserts that individuals who are trafficked have no voice, requiring someone else – an authority – to speak on their behalf, someone to deem them legitimate. When she tells of speaking on her own behalf, she describes a moment in which *believability* and the rhetoric of rescue clash. She is “unbelievable” because of her act of positive assertion and unrescuable because the authority has not rendered her as a “credible victim.” Simply put, by asserting herself as someone in need, Liberty actively undid external perceptions of her identity as rooted in the abject, deserving of pity, and in need of rescue. In undoing this, she created a new perception that she was instead a “bullshitter,” a criminal seeking to find a way out from being busted, all stemming from a simple plea for help.

LIBERTY: Help me. You get the door slammed in your face. You might as well go back to that lifestyle because they're not going to believe you. For those who are brought up in it, that's the real truth of it right there. They're not going to want to come back to law enforcement. They're going to say, "They aren't going to

believe me anyway, I might as well go back to it. What's the point?"

This skepticism provides us with insight as to *why* Liberty engages with the politics of legitimation and why she uses language in the way she does. She's experienced rejection because of the ways in which her story has been perceived by audiences in the past and, in her storytelling practices now she actively seeks to counter potential objections by aligning her narrative with the dominant discourse.

Deb describes similar encounters which have colored her view and informed her language use in her storytelling approach. Over the years during which Deb was trafficked, she faced dozens of arrests; not a single time during which she was identified as someone in need of help, even when she positively asserted a need. I asked her about this, why she thought none of her potential "rescuers" identified her as someone in need, or even at risk, particularly while she was underage:

DEB: You know what, sometimes, I'm going to tell you, when women are getting arrested for prostitution, a lot of times law enforcement is not going to look at you as a victim as opposed to a nuisance or a problem because that's what they do. They just arrest.... I mean, they have quotas. Okay, you go out and you have to arrest so many prostitutes or so many johns, so their focus is not on, "Is she being trafficked," it's about, "Let me get this arrest" ... A lot of times they don't really care about what's happened or why are you here. How can we get rid of you?

In Deb's experience, her interactions with law enforcement were rooted in mistrust and skepticism that was defined by the backward logic of the rhetoric of rescue, which in her case failed to account for a lack of options to assert agency without being penalized.

Indeed, if there's a persistent theme throughout Deb's story it is that her capacity to act within her situation was severely limited by a scarcity of productive options due to structural limitations. Nowhere was this clearer than in her description of a fundamental lack of trust of the institutional structures that were purportedly there to help. Deb asserted her agency repeatedly, finding clear paths of survival and resistance, but she was unable to assert it in a way that would alter external perception. Indeed, for Deb there was no option to ask for help because, in her situation, it was just as often law enforcement who engaged in trafficking and supporting trafficking operations as anyone else:

DEB: We worked there on the streets but some of the police officers that were out there also had females working the streets. It's like, if you tell somebody, who do you tell? They're right out there with you. We would meet them when we went to after hour joints in the end of the night...

For Deb, there was no one to whom she could positively assert a need for help and she was perceptive enough to realize that such a request would likely place her at far greater risk than if she simply remained silent. Even now, she exhibits a deep mistrust of institutional narratives:

DEB: News generates money. News is the bad stuff. They're just having a major trafficking case over there...a mile from my house a couple of days ago... Is it really truly human trafficking? We don't know. All these labels, they say it's a human trafficking ring. I don't know. I think there's different types of trafficking. Some cases might not even fall under human trafficking and they still call it human trafficking.

Mistrust of institutions translates into a clear-headed observation that the rhetoric surrounding the issue is both muddled and yet operates in very specific ways, many of which are actually detrimental rather than beneficial. For both, then, their experiences with storytelling about exploitation and related traumas has been rooted in a fundamental lack of trust of the institutional structures that purportedly exist to help. In both stories, we see the victim/agent dichotomy of the rhetoric of rescue play out, resulting in silencing. And it is because of these experiences that Deb and Liberty know that in order to be heard *now* they need to use the language of and operate within the framework of the dominant narrative, even if they view that framework as insufficient for understanding and explicating their lived experiences.

While this seems contradictory, we may consider de Certeau's argument that "stories are actuated by a *contradiction* that is represented in them by the relationship between the frontier and the bridge, that is between a (legitimate) space and its (alien) exteriority" (126). As Thacker argues in *Moving Through Modernity*,

Two things cannot occupy the same place: elements can only exist beside one another, each situated in its proper location. De Certeau uses proper to mean the official and legitimized use to which a place or activity belongs. A space, however, is based not on stability, but on direction, movement, and velocity. (31)

Accepting this, then, it appeared to me that Deb and Liberty were engaged in storytelling practices through which they were consciously attempting to fit their language within what they perceived as being the proper/legitimized space while also regularly returning to their own language. It struck me during my re-reading of our interviews that I had stumbled onto an observation that very clearly explained apparent

dissonances between their stories and the dominant narrative that their stories sought to fit within. I realized that their storytelling practices demonstrated a continual, persistent *movement* that revealed their liminal rhetorical situated-ness through a fluidity of language. Specifically, depending on what point was being described language shifted, often contradictorily, in a way that revealed a tension between theaters of action – between lived experience and a desire to be accepted and acknowledged. More than this, I noted that they both appeared deeply aware of their own in-betweeness. In other words, the movement within each story – and its attendant contradictions – seemed to be a conscious attempt to negotiate the liminal and in so doing meet perceived culturally-situated expectations while also remaining true to lived experience, an experience that did not necessarily align with those expectations.

Liminality, Perception, Performance

Persistently aware of their liminal situatedness, Deb and Liberty exist somewhere in between the normative “victim” or “survivor” who affably shares stories aligning with the dominant narrative and the post-survivor self, whose stories draw that narrative into question. In other words, their liminality is rooted in both perception and performance: they both reject the language of the dominant narrative (e.g., “I don’t know what trafficked is”) while also appropriating that same language throughout their stories because that is what they perceive to be expected of them. In effect, they use their liminality to transgressively travel between domains of knowledge, that of “the street” and a subsequently re-envisioned self, and that of the dominant narrative. Examples of this discursive shifting span all four interviews. Both Deb and Liberty use, reject, and re-use the language of the dominant narrative. Words and phrases like “survivor,” “victim,”

“trafficker,” and “criminal” all make appearances, as does the binaristic language of morality, sometimes in ways that align with the dominant narrative – efforts to garner credibility – and sometimes in ways that draw the language into question. One of the most noticeable examples of this, across each of my interviews with both participants, was the shifting that occurred in the use of language surrounding victimization and survivorship. As noted earlier within these pages, both expressed discomfort with the labels of “victim” and “survivor.” Indeed, at multiple points in each interview, both Deb and Liberty either problematize these labels or outright reject them. And, yet, despite their apparent discomfort with these labels, and despite the fact that they engage in creative articulations of the self that purposefully exclude those labels, there are moments where they turn back to them, using such labels in reference to their own stories.

As another example, across our interviews Deb and Liberty reflected the interchangeability of language with regards to the phrases of “slavery” and “human trafficking.” They both actively invoke both terms and explain their experiences in those terms; yet, when asked about how they would describe their experiences in their own words, there is a notable language shift away from those terms to language that is more reflective of their individualized experiences. Liberty borrows the language of her trafficker: “As he said, I was his squaw. That was his terms, I’m his squaw.” In this construction, she considers the use of a term that was used by her trafficker to describe her – a term that is contextually obscene, derogatory, and offensive. In that “obscenity” we see a more accurate depiction of her actual lived experience. This language is strong, certainly stronger and more evocative than the language of “having been

trafficked.” Deb likewise engages in a similar move. While she regularly invokes the words slavery and trafficking, when asked to describe it in her own words, she says: “I was a ho and I was going to be the best ho that I was, that I could be.” Here, the language of “the street” finds a place in a story that otherwise generously uses the language of the dominant narrative. In putting her experience into her own words, however, Deb speaks the unspeakable; for her the experience wasn’t “being trafficked”; rather, it was being taught, trained, and molded into “being a ho.” Like Liberty’s construction, this language is emotionally ripe, and both in the hearing and in the reading it is hard to bear. Even so, it reveals a less sanitized, truer conveyance of lived experience; one to which many audiences would likely object.

A third example exists in the way in which both shift back and forth from the use of the simplistic binaristic constructions of the dominant narrative (e.g., immoral / moral; criminal / noncriminal) to a complicated and complex multidimensionality. Liberty talks at some length about how she was a “criminal” engaged in “immoral” behavior; but this construction breaks down, again, when asked to describe the experience in her own words. The immoral criminal becomes a multifaceted person who has a “need for love, need for acceptance, and a place in society.” She makes a similar move while humanizing her traffickers and recognizing their shared humanity. Deb engages in the same shifts, from describing herself within binaristic frames and then to humanizing both herself and her trafficker(s) by deploying language that seeks to demonstrate a multifaceted nature of her experiences, even reflecting on friendships made and positive moments while she was being trafficked. It is in this discursive shifting – from their own language, to the language of the dominant narrative – that Deb and Liberty reimagine

and refigure the tropes of the dominant narrative. This *use* transforms each within the colonizing discourse of human trafficking narratives into a fully acknowledgeable presence, instead of an absence or merely voiceless “human interest” story. They exist as they see (and articulate) themselves *and* as culture perceives (and articulates) them (i.e., as victims/survivors of human trafficking). This dual positionality *within language* renders them rhetorically *in-between* and is demonstrated by how they deploy language to construct their stories.

In examples like this this we might think about their storytelling practices as expressions of rhetorical ambiguity, what Bakhtin characterizes as “the internal dialogism of double-voiced prose” that “draws its energy, its dialogic ambiguity, not from individual dissonances, misunderstandings, or contradictions... but sinks its roots deep into a fundamental socio-linguistic speech diversity and multi-languedness” (325-26). Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia is useful for exploring the language shifting in the interviews I conducted with Deb and Liberty because it keys us in to the ways in which their storytelling practices are dynamic, relational, and engaged in a process of revision. The double-voicedness of their language choices to describe experience is one that both seeks to draw lines between past and present, but which also is revisionary. When I say it is revisionary, I mean that they use the language of the dominant narrative to revise the rawness of their stories to be more “palatable” for a general audience. Indeed, by choosing more sanitized language to describe their experiences, they have represented themselves as “acceptable” and credible practitioners of the dominant narrative in their storytelling practices. The shift in language that occurs when asked to put it in their own words is notable for how unsanitized and raw it is, language that

would likely be deemed as less “acceptable.” In this we see a negotiation between the rawness of lived experience and the language used to describe it, and the choice to convey that experience in language that is more palatable to external audiences. This is not occupying a double subjectivity, as some might assert, but rather an assertion of a single subjectivity while acknowledging the expectations of the dominant narrative and tactically playing to those expectations in language use.

Carol Winkelmann argues that such language shifting is common in “survivors” because it is representative of the phases of healing: as they move from phase to phase, they assimilate new language which, in turn, results in a hybridity or double-ness in storytelling (211). Winkelmann’s notion of “hybridization” is, I think less helpful, because it oversimplifies what I see happening in the storytelling practices of Deb and Liberty. Rather than being representative of the phases of healing, I see their language shifting across our interviews as an ongoing negotiation and compromise between the articulated post-survivor self – which does not fit neatly into “healing phases” – and the perceived expectations of external audiences.

Instead of representing hybridization, or even a double subjectivity, what I instead see happening here is a complex process of role negotiation that remains true to the self. A dissonance presents itself between the realities of their lived experiences (and the language used to describe that experience for themselves), and the language that they use to describe it for the external. In seeking to draw connections, build credibility, establish trust – in effect, *to be heard* – they realize that the role they inhabit as storytellers requires careful language choices that only change when asked to use their own language. Rather than representing a fragmentation of subjectivity, this

demonstrates a clear sense of self and a purposeful move to use specific language to protect the self in the realm of public discourse. If, as de Certeau tells us – “what the map cuts up, the story cuts across” – we might see the dominant narrative as a map and we might see the stories told by Deb and Liberty as tactical uses of and subversions of the map (32). They actively use the language of the dominant narrative to speak to their audiences while also engaging the act of protecting their own articulated identity. This (re)positioning discursively locates them as “observably and subjectively coherent participants” in collectively produced narratives (Davies & Harre 91). According to Potter and Wetherell, this entails a critical approach to the idea of self-as-entity, where language is central, as “people become fixed in position through the range of linguistic practices available to them to make sense” of their world (109). In this we can see the language choices used by Deb and Liberty both as tactical and subversive, as well as limited: the linguistic practices available to them to describe their experiences are insufficient. Chris Brickell argues that selves are constructed using socially available meanings and discourses as resources (37).

But what happens when socially available meanings and discursive frames are inadequate resources for our storytellers to convey experiences? The stories shared by Deb and Liberty are located in a liminal space rhetorically because they are in between their perception of their own lived experiences and cultural perceptions of their lived experiences. They are ‘in between’ in regards to rhetorical framing and language usage as it relates to human trafficking. Indeed, the language available to them is separated from their respective constructions of self, a situation that disallows incorporation into cultural discourse *as themselves*. In some respects, this echoes Gloria Anzaludua’s

description of liminality in *Interviews/Entrevistas*: “I live in this liminal state between worlds, in between realities, in between systems of knowledge...” (268). But instead of recapitulating the tragic “caught in between two worlds” stereotype, Anzaldua demonstrates the promises of occupying the liminal, where she can negotiate the distance between several discourse communities. In my exchanges with Deb and Liberty, discursive shifting/blending operate to negotiate this distance, a traversal of the discursive terrain. There is, in this, a sophisticated navigation of the politics of legitimation and the self. Each knows that in order to be heard, specific language choices are required. And Deb and Liberty align with the language of the dominant narrative because there is no other “acceptable” language to use and in order to be heard. Across the interviews, there is a reticence to fully embrace the narrative as both Deb and Liberty seem to recognize its limitations and the ways in which it is limiting – it doesn’t tell the whole story, it doesn’t recognize the complexity of their experiences. Even so, like Anzaldua, Deb and Liberty see this not necessarily as a tragedy but instead as an opportunity to cross the discursive terrain in ways that are meaningful. Malea Powell sheds some light in her description of Charles Eastman’s rhetorics of survivance, when she writes of

his willing participation in multiple discourses, his awareness of how those discourses work, and his surfacing of the imposed belief systems of those discourses through simple commentary and observation. This participation becomes use when he injects a doubleness of narrative awareness into his retellings and then engages in a tactics of linkage and textual and symbolic affiliation combined with experiential tellings that reveal his familiarity with Indian

and white culture. (“Rhetorics of Survivance” 427)

Like Eastman, Deb and Liberty are willing and knowing participants who leverage their liminality to engage in tactics of linkage. This, I think, is where we see the profound nature of the stories told by Deb and Liberty across venues and audiences. While they may exist in a rhetorically liminal state, they are able to negotiate systems of knowledge *productively*, in ways that both serve their respective constructions of self and connect their constructions of self to different discourse communities to make meaning. This may be best exemplified in the commitments that Deb and Liberty have made to participate in projects such as this, and to speak to a broad range of discourse communities interested in the issue of human trafficking. The value of making these connections is, for them, clear: with each telling, they open up important new spaces to seriously contemplate – and to help others contemplate – the ways in which their respective stories collide and constellate with issues of race, gender, law, and power.

INTERLUDE

DEB: *On top of being in the home where you're at and you're constantly afraid of being abused or degraded because there was a lot of verbal abuse, a lot of emotional abuse, and then physical abuse, you also have to deal with the same things out on the streets. Your body and your mind is always in constant fight or flight mode. Then I think about all the things that I went through and I'm still here. I think about some of the girls that have been out there for short periods of time and they got bullet holes, stab wounds, things like that. I feel like I was pretty lucky. I remember being out there and one day I was there and I got raped by a guy. When it got done, I was able to get back and I was like, "Oh my god, I just want to die. I do not want to live like this anymore." I was crying and another car pulled up and I kept on telling the guy, "I just want to die." I got in this guy's car and he took me into a cemetery and then raped me. I got raped twice back to back. Then when I got in the car I was like, "Oh god, please. I don't want to die." It was like, "But how much more can I take?" I always find the strength to keep moving so I always say, "If I can survive that, I can survive standing up and speaking in front of a group." Maybe it might be just a message that I am able to share, maybe I'll touch somebody that's in the audience that hasn't shared what's going on in their life or they're afraid to talk about it.*

LIBERTY: *"You will do this or you won't be able to do this." Your identity is stripped and that is the main commonality. Your identity is stripped away. You are no longer who you are or thought you were to be or who you can be. You are what they make you. You tend to now lean towards supporting that trafficker. You're going to do everything you can to help that trafficker because they're giving you a roof over your head. They threaten to send you home if you don't do as you say. They've threatened your life, so what else can you do? You have to switch gears in your brain and do in that survival mode at that time. You have to switch into a different type of survival mode. You're surviving for your life and you will do everything you have to survive for your life, if it means prostituting, if it means carrying drugs or being a mule, if it means working sunup to sundown, so you can have a pillow for your head or food for your belly. I think that is the main commonality is that we did what we had to do to survive at that time. I find strength because people are listening. I find strength because people are believing, because then full on, they're setting their minds to it. They're actually being open-minded and listening. I find strength when I talk to law enforcement agencies and they pull me aside and say, "I'm so sorry you went through that. How do we change this?" They're asking questions now. They're wanting to know how to fix this. That's my strength because after I voice it, they're aware, now this is what went wrong. This is what we need to do to change it. How are we going to do it and what can we do from a victim's perspective? It makes sense because you can't take someone who's never been through it and try to make a law.*

Chapter 5: New Ways of Seeing

It is the morning of October 15, 2015, and I pull into the parking lot of the Royal Dearborn Hotel and Convention Center. The lot is near capacity, populated with a variety of local, state and federal law enforcement vehicles, from the dark blue cruisers of the Michigan State Police to the black, unmarked SUVs of the FBI with their tell-tale government plates. The presence is imposing. I eventually find a parking spot for my Toyota Yaris – which appears sorely out of place in the sea of police vehicles. I take a swig of Pepsi and slowly extract myself from my car, but not before I look in the mirror to make sure everything looks just right. I check to verify that my favorite tie, visually comprised of horizontal green and blue lines, is properly knotted. I've chosen it for this event because it has been my go-to, an article of comfort, since my Tulane days. I extract myself from the Yaris, put on my suit jacket, and pause.

I realize that I haven't worn this suit since 2012 and I notice, for the first time, how steeped it is in my own history. I feel the cloth against my skin, and with its touch I'm transported into the past – I remember the other times my body has found itself wrapped in this protective ensemble, professional attire that both gives me confidence and hides my humanity and its attendant insecurities. I remember the times I've felt this cloth against my skin in conference rooms in Washington, D.C., in court rooms, in detention facilities. I recall the times this suit has covered my body while sitting across from men and women in jumpsuits, sometimes in shackles, telling me their stories of pain and trauma. With that remembrance of the specific feel of a specific ensemble of clothing, the stories come back all at once, the stories living inside me, the stories that live in the cloth of the suit itself – an oddly embodied symbol of all the tears I've caused

and all the tears I've shed. Sure, the suit has been dry-cleaned, and neatly pressed, yet it has been witness to and part of so many stories that I begin to feel unkempt, vulnerable, unsure of myself. *What am I doing here?* I'm still standing outside of my Yaris, the door not yet closed, and I'm brought back to the present by the persistent *ding-ding-ding* of the car reminding me that I need to grab the keys, close the door, and get to work. I look down and my hands are shaking – a result of the flood of memories and a recognition of the fact that I haven't talked to an audience like this in years. I wonder if I still have it within myself, I wonder if I actually have something worth saying that this group of people will find valuable. More than that, I wonder if they'll even be open to listening to what I have to say.

In the hotel, I make my way to the grand ballroom, where Michigan's Attorney General, Bill Schuette, has already started his remarks for the *Human Trafficking: A Closer Look* conference hosted by the Michigan Prosecuting Attorney's Association. The audience is comprised of nearly 400 law enforcement officials, prosecutors, anti-trafficking activists, and victim service providers. I find a seat and settle in, interested in hearing what the state's top law-enforcement official has to say in a conference billed as an effort to "search for pathways of new information to achieve success" in combating human trafficking. Schuette, like any effective politician, is telling stories. He talks about the valiant efforts of law enforcement, about how much he cares about victims, about his laser-like focus on ending trafficking in Michigan. But the longer he speaks, my level of discomfort grows. His stories are centered on prosecution. His stories are centered on the sex trade; indeed, he completely fails to mention issues of labor trafficking, indentured servitude, forced marriage, and so on. His stories are focused on numbers

and jail time and budget allocations. I hear nothing about prevention. Those who have experienced trafficking have no voices in his stories. Everything is black and white. In Schuette's articulation, mirroring cultural discourse, there are no grey areas when it comes to human trafficking. Everything is from the perspective of the state. And then, as he nears the climactic point of his presentation, he talks about his vision for "putting these thugs away and throwing away the key." This statement is greeted with thunderous applause and I feel my heart sink a little bit. Not because I don't agree that traffickers should be prosecuted, but because of the way in which his presentation has fallen, predictably, into the top-down binaristic tropes that so problematically have found their way embedded in cultural discourse around the issue. Bolstered by the audience's response, he continues to invoke the language and imagery of "thugs" and "predators" who prey on "our daughters and our sisters" and the "heroic" cops who "rescue" them. More than ever, I wonder what sort of response I'll receive when my turn comes to talk, because I'll be confronting some of these very rhetorical moves head on.

Later that afternoon, I take my place in front of the audience. Jane White, the Director of the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force, asked me to present after meeting with me over coffee a few weeks prior. Instead of a typical presentation, we agreed to share the stage and to engage in a more informal format that might appropriately be described as a conversation between the two of us while encouraging audience participation and interaction. We sit, a few feet apart, and begin our conversation. It spans a wide variety of topics, including the role that academics can play in demystifying myths about human trafficking, about community-driven and community-oriented research, about building bridges through meaningful conversation.

And we talk about the power of language, about terms like “victim,” the rhetoric of rescue, and about how the words we choose to talk about the topic of human trafficking *do* things. At some point, about half way in to the hour-long talk, I speak of the dissonance that exists within human trafficking related discourse between and across communities-of-interest. I tell the audience that in my work across academic, law enforcement, service provider, and activist communities “the one thing that I can identify as a commonality is miscommunication and confusion.” There’s so much entrenchment in the current rhetorical paradigm and when these words leave my lips, I wonder if I’ve gone too far. But the audience responds – there’s laughter throughout the room, heads nod, people exchange knowing glances, some even applaud. They know exactly what I’m talking about; they, too, have experienced this confusion. They, too, have experienced talking past one another in anti-trafficking forums. I realize that they’re frustrated, just as I have been. And I build on this shared frustration to make a simple point: until we address these issues and come up with a shared rhetorical frame that works and makes sense across communities-of-interest, we’re never going to have any progress.

The following day, I join a presentation delivered by Mark Sullivan, a professor at Michigan State University, to discuss “building a research agenda” to connect communities-of-interest with academic researchers. An attendee from both presentations comes up to me afterwards, thanks me for my work, and says: *you can change society when this type of exchange happens; this is important*. I realize that despite all my hand-wringing, despite my discomfort, that my background allows me to bridge these disparately situated worlds in ways that many others cannot. I can speak

the language of law enforcement, I can speak the language of activists, and I can speak the language of academics. This recognition, rooted in a moment of disorientation in the parking lot, allows me to reorient myself to see my work both for what it is at this stage and what its potential is for the future. I share this story to initiate the final chapter of this dissertation because it is a moment that helped me think about what this project does, doesn't do, and what its broader implications are. Despite my initial ambition of this project as being the culmination of work, I now understand it as necessarily merely an *initiation into inquiry* that, with commitment, time, and effort may eventually present implications for law, policy, and the study of rhetoric. In these final pages, I'll attempt to break down my critical points of learning, what I believe to be the immediate implications of this work, and look to the future to chart a path forward for future research.

Thoughts on Policy & Research

This project began, in part, out of a desire to re-think the language and rhetorical framing of human trafficking as it exists in cultural discourse, and by way of extension in the language of law and policy. At the prospectus stage, I had a broad vision in mind – with regards to study participants, overall approach, scope, and impact. My goal was no small thing: I wanted to change the conversation. Of course, this sort of giddy ambition tends to be tempered by reality. And in the months following the successful defense of my prospectus, I found myself having to severely narrow the project scope while also grappling with the fact that this project had less to do with how I wanted it to be than *listening to what my participants wanted it to do*. Despite my self-perceived maturity and ethical approach to research practice, it became very clear early on that my orientations

were biased and that I needed to allow the subsequent disorientation to reorient me to do good, ethical, appropriate work that honored, first and foremost, my participants but also those scholars upon who I relied but needed to more fully acknowledge in my writing. As I wrote in my introduction, I had long observed the problems within human trafficking related discourse and wanted to respond by, perhaps too ambitiously, charting a new path for the development of a new rhetorical frame around the issue. I viewed this – and still do – as critically important work because of my personal belief that anti-trafficking activism and enforcement paradigms have been hampered as a result of a colonizing rhetorical frame that inaccurately conveys, or constructs limiting and limited discourses around the complexity and multidimensionality of human trafficking.

As the scope of this project necessarily narrowed, I realized that any de-colonizing effort with regards to the language of human trafficking needed to start not in the realms of law and policy, but in the everyday and at the local level. As a result, this project ended up focusing on the stories and storytelling practices of two individuals who had *lived through* and *moved beyond* their own experiences with having been trafficked. This dissertation does not and cannot address the larger questions I asked as I initiated this project. This dissertation does not and cannot resolve the concerns within communities of interest about discursive confusion, rhetorical slippage, and miscommunication. Yet, this dissertation makes a deceptively simple argument: that an effort to develop new ways to describe and address human trafficking necessarily must start at the level of the individual who has been trafficked and be situated in the local, rather than the global. This is not to say that that we don't need a framework – we most

certainly do. Nor is my argument one that seeks to focus inquiry into human trafficking in a reductionistic manner. I don't think this is a simple topic that can be properly considered by *only* looking at the individual and local; global systems are in play and must be considered. Rather, I think it important to acknowledge that the current framework is one that arose out of a very specific historical context, was developed in a top-down manner, and has proven to be woefully ineffective at both enabling communication between communities of interest and incorporating the ideas and needs of those most impacted. Its construction of limited and limiting discourses has resulted in significant harms: the criminal prosecution of those exploited for sex; the detention and removal of those exploited for labor; the sensationalization and perpetuation of myths about human trafficking in the media; the commodification of trafficking as a revenue generator for private organizations; the emphasis on sex trafficking over labor and other types of exploitation; and many more.

My argument, then, is that to initiate a move beyond the current human trafficking framework in an effort to mitigate these areas of ongoing harm, we need to *first* stop and carefully listen to those who have been most impacted; to hear, absorb, and consider what they have to say about experiences of exploitation, about their needs, about their survival, about their capacity for re-writing identity. Their stories, practices, and perspectives have for too long been unattended and we must consider their implications seriously. For those of us interested in activism around this issue, there is a clear need to engage in better, more careful, listening practices and to push against the colonizing language and research paradigms that have thus far defined work connected to the human trafficking issue. While this project hasn't succeeded at this in every

respect, it does, I believe, present a potential model for initiating this type of work around particularized human rights concepts and issues. The lens of cultural rhetorics, informed by indigenous, decolonial, and feminist theories opens for us a different way – and I believe a better way – of starting this work.

As someone who has been connected to this topic for the better part of the last decade – as an officer in the field, as a program manager at the headquarters level, and as a researcher in academia – I’m keenly aware of the ways in which the current framework is operationalized. In Chapter 1, I discussed some of the issues with the Blue Campaign’s use of human interest stories. But that is a relatively benign example. In drawing this dissertation to a close, I point to another example with far greater impacts. From late 2010 through late 2012, I managed and provided nationwide operational oversight for the T nonimmigrant visa program. The T visa allows foreign nationals who have been trafficked within the United States to remain, work, and eventually pursue immigrant status. Despite the benefits of this program, it remains tragically underutilized: with an annual cap of 5,000, the most T visas approved in a year was 848, in 2013, a 16% utilization rate (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services). The underutilization of this program has been, in my opinion, a direct result of the onerous requirements it places on individuals who have been trafficked. In order to qualify, an individual must demonstrate that they were trafficked, establish that they would suffer “extreme hardship” if removed,²⁸ be supported by an endorsement from a law enforcement agency, and comply with ongoing requests from law enforcement agencies

²⁸ The “extreme hardship” standard is incredibly difficult to meet: it is a discretionary determination by an adjudicator and the applicant must show, based on a totality of the circumstances, that they would face “great suffering or loss” and/or “unusual or severe harm” upon removal.

for assistance in the investigation or prosecution of human trafficking (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services). The last requirement is often the most taxing; despite the existence of an under-used and ill-defined “trauma exception,” the notion of maintaining an ongoing relationship with law enforcement – which, in effect, often means re-telling and re-living the experience of exploitation in substantial detail, sometimes across years depending on the scope of the investigation and prosecutorial process – represents a hurdle that many cannot or are unwilling to overcome. For individuals who have survived trafficking, this represents another type of exploitation or use and reflects the government’s claim of ownership over their experiences and stories. This exertion of ownership over stories is a particularly profound example of the ways in which the current framework colonizes; and, for individuals who have been through trafficking it can be particularly damaging with regards to their process of (re)writing the self, and moving beyond the trauma of trafficking. What would happen, then, if we paused to listen and to apply what can be learned from those most impacted?

Deb and Liberty both articulated clear discomfort with the perceived expectation to dwell on the horror and trauma of their experiences. And, yet, this focus – re-telling the details of horror and trauma – is the centerpiece of victim support and protection programs provided by the government. If we pause to listen, we might be able to develop an alternate approach. What if, in the instance of the T visa example, we re-wrote the associated regulations and agency policies to more clearly reflect the challenges of individuals who have been trafficked? What if we made the law enforcement compliance requirement *optional* rather than *mandatory*? Considering what such individuals have already experienced, what if we eliminated the extreme hardship

qualifier? What if we deployed listening to learn what such individuals most needed and structurally incorporated mechanisms to meet those needs in benefit programs? When we consider the programmatic changes such as these, we begin to re-orient away from *ownership over stories* to engage in the facilitation of renewal and hope. If I learned anything from my interactions with Deb and Liberty, it is that renewal and hope should be the centerpieces of any programs designed to support those who have been trafficked.

Such notions are also applicable to academic research around this issue. By applying my learning across these areas to a project that sought to listen closely to two individuals, I demonstrate how researchers interested in doing work around human trafficking can actively engage in accountability to move away from a language of use to a language of relationality; or, put in other words, how to “write with” rather than “write about.” In so doing, I enact listening as a cultural rhetorics practice, highlighting the ways in which this has impacted my work methodologically and the ways in which I have made the practice of listening – to bodies, to places, to stories, including my own as well as my participants – as central within my research and writing. In telling stories about my research approaches, interactions with participants, and my own successes and failures in listening, I hope to generate conversation around practices that encourage and enhance relationality, particularly for those doing work with people and communities mistrustful of the academic research process. In applying cultural rhetorics to a significant human rights issue – in this case, human trafficking – this project has the potential to show how communally situated meaning making can construct unique

discursive spaces that are relevant to a deeper understanding of and focus on the *human* in human rights.

Implications in the Discipline of Rhetoric & Writing

I want to pause, for a moment, on the above emphasis on *human rights*. I do so because that specific term holds within it, I think, some of the implications this project has for the study of rhetoric. As a discipline, ours is increasingly concerned with and interested in the role that rhetorical scholarship can play in explicating and (re)defining human rights issues and frameworks. Despite this interest, academics engaged in rhetorical scholarship have mostly ignored the issue of human trafficking as an area of academic inquiry. Considering the facilitative role that rhetorical scholarship can play in inter/multi- disciplinary research, as well as the unique insights that rhetoric scholars can bring to human rights inquiry, this project encourages and invites others in the discipline to actively participate in research relating to the human trafficking issue while also moving rhetorical scholarship on human rights issues away from the “traditional” textual analyses that predominate. It is my contention that this project’s emphasis on individual and localized meaning-making and storytelling practices teaches us something about the ways in which we might reconsider disciplinary conversations around human rights.

While ongoing conversations about human rights rhetoric are important, they remain oriented by colonizing and colonized (limiting and limited) discourse, functioning in a top-down manner, and casting human rights issues as persistently global in nature and scope. Jacqueline Jones-Royster and Mary Cochrane argue that “the rights of human-ness are innate” and, as such “a global enterprise for all humanity” – a position

with which I agree – however, I am no longer confident that framing these issues with such broad brush strokes is most effective for actually addressing them (18). Having trained in and practiced international human rights law, I get why the global is default, but over time I have grown increasingly wary of the ways in which specific human rights issues are persistently moved “into the discursive realm of global human rights” (Gagnon 4). I see such moves as inherently dangerous because of the tendency to paint human rights issues in the abstract, with over-broad generalizations and neat, tidy categories. This abstraction does a great disservice to the individual lived experiences of those who have suffered, let alone the project of enhancing human rights. It is my contention – and this dissertation practices my belief on this point – that while we should recognize, be involved in, and actively facilitate the quest for global human rights, much of the decolonizing work that must occur to effectuate that quest has to function by shifting from the language of the global and moving into the language of the local.

Shelley Wright has observed that “much of the abuse which human beings actually suffer cannot be adequately addressed within ‘mainstream’ human rights discourse” (233). Similarly, Wendy Hesford contends that “rights talk is limited in its ability to address the structural violence and symbolic mechanisms that have functioned as modalities of subordination and exclusion, such as normative identity categories” (283). What Hesford and Wright are getting at is something that I believe to be true of projects involving the issue of human trafficking: the mainstream discourse, which has been framed, top down, in the discourse of globality has rendered us less capable of seeing and less willing to hear the individual and communal voices that exist at the local level. To a very large extent, I see this as a need and responsibility for engaging in the

feminist work of “re-mapping boundaries and renegotiating connections” (Hernandez-Avila 174). As Inés Hernandez-Avila writes, “This mapping and renegotiating is a necessary process within communities as well as between communities” (174). One of the specific ways that boundaries need to be remapped, or transformed, in the study of human trafficking, is in situating what it means to be trafficked with respect to the local rather than the global. And in asking that question, I think that we’re also confronted with the attendant question of what that means for thinking about building connections between communities of interest at the local level while thinking about accountability. By refocusing the lens, this project contributes to ongoing conversations about human rights rhetoric by practicing a new way of seeing that is both directly connected with and accountable to individuals who have endured abuses of their human rights. Such direct conversation – *writing with, not about* – helps us, as scholars think about how human rights rhetoric, and its attendant abstractions and rhetorical framing devices, might be recast to more fully acknowledge lived experience in a way that carefully works with those who know what it means to be exploited while working towards accountability to those who remain in situations of exploitation, of those individuals who exist within and pass through the very communities within which we live and work.

When considering what this means in the context of this project, I want to consider how the primary observations made across Chapter Three and Chapter Four help us to see human trafficking in new ways and how these new ways of seeing might guide future efforts in (re)writing stories about human trafficking. In Chapter Three, I demonstrated that the storytelling practices of Deb and Liberty operate on two levels of recognition: the transformational and the transformative. In so doing they seek to

recognize themselves and to be recognized as themselves rather than as abstract “victims” or “survivors.” My observations about such “rhetorics of recognition” are important to and directly relevant to ongoing conversations about human rights rhetoric because such practices push strongly against the impulse for making issues like human trafficking into mere abstractions. Deb and Liberty remind us that their projects of self-reclamation and subject formation have been and are intensely personal, palpable, and concrete. For them, these do not exist in the abstract; they are crucially important stories, and representations of the self, upon which they place great value and seek to share with others because of the potential for those stories to facilitate healing, renewal, and change. While there has been, as Bales and Trodd note, an “explosion of storytelling in the human rights field over the past twenty years,” the *use* of such stories has largely been within the broader frame of human rights rhetoric (3); this is even more true, as I noted in Chapter One, when considering the specific issue of human trafficking. By listening to Deb and Liberty and by considering how they cast their stories as both transformational and transformative, we begin to see how they engage in their own project of framing lived experiences; such personalized approaches are informative and powerful for their capacity to demonstrate the importance of incorporating lived experiences into activist efforts and of considering them in law and policy discussions.

Such a re-framing on the individual level is, as I noted in earlier chapters, simultaneously subversive and creative; such creative subversion by impacted individuals is not openly acknowledged or discussed in conversations around human rights rhetoric. I maintain that this is a rich area of inquiry, particularly as we consider its potential to “unsettle, disrupt, and sometimes threaten” the limiting and limited

discourses that have become so normative (Hernandez-Avila 174). Instead of operating within pre-defined parameters and strict labels, Deb and Liberty position themselves as *beyond* victim, as *beyond* survivor, and in so doing move beyond their traditionally generally “degraded” or silenced status in discourse; an effort that is one of “reclaiming their own humanity and the potential of that humanity, an activist project.” (Royster and Cochran 16). By advocating for “individuals with their status and experience to be treated with respect, as...responsible human beings with a full range of human potentialities” Deb and Liberty transform our own understanding of how individuals who have lived through exploitation and abuse can and do “function as intellectual beings with agency and authority over their own lives” (17).

In Chapter Four, I demonstrated that the stories told by Deb and Liberty exhibit a discursive in-betweenness, or liminality, that they tactically navigate in telling stories about their experiences. This rhetorical liminality forces us to consider the ways in which individuals who have been subjected to human trafficking find themselves without a discursive home. Under the broad umbrella of human rights, individuals like Deb and Liberty find themselves persistently facing assumptions and presumptions about the appropriateness of their membership within the community and the acceptability of their language. Even on a narrower level, anti-trafficking communities of interest do not offer a discursive space for their stories as they want to tell them because of the politics of representation and legitimation that exist in and around human trafficking narratives. The tactical use of discursive shifting, of language hybridity, of that transgressive travel across the narrative terrain, reveal something that should be of interest to those of us interested in human rights rhetoric because it demonstrates the limits of how topics like

human trafficking have been framed. In the tension between the language choices of Deb and Liberty, we see how human rights rhetoric “crushes discussion under the weight of moral condemnation, legal adjudication, textual certainty, and political power” (Kennedy 975). Rather than enabling a full expression of human-ness, human rights rhetoric typically dis-ables the types of self-expression sought out by individuals situated in the rhetorically liminal spaces inhabited by Deb and Liberty. The acceptability of language, the privileging of certain stories over others, all operate to exclude the most impactful voices. It is my contention that only by observing and considering this rhetorical liminality that we can begin to think about what perspectives like those held by Deb and Liberty might do for opening up discourse around human rights issues like that of human trafficking, and in so doing to help explore the possibilities for creating new discursive spaces for individuals to share their stories and have their voices heard.

We should, I think, also find the recognition of these liminal spaces as troubling because such liminality reminds us that we have not been listening. As David Kennedy writes, individuals inhabiting these spaces

are erased under the power of an internationally sanctified vocabulary for the self-understanding, self-representation, and representation...of abuse...[thereby] propagating an unbearably normative, earnest, and ultimately arrogant mode of thinking and speaking about what is good for people, abstract people, here and there, now and forever. This is bad for people in the movement – it can demobilize them as political beings in the world while encouraging their sanctimony – as well as those whose sense of the politically possible and desirable is shrunk to fit the uniform size. (975-976)

Kennedy's observations here pointedly express the reasons why rhetorical liminality in human rights discourse proves so troubling. Because we have not listened, individuals like Deb and Liberty are not able to fully incorporate themselves into cultural discourse as themselves and we are not able engage in actually seeing the issues as they impact real lives.

Seeing the Unseen, Speaking the Unspeakable

Not listening. Not hearing. Not seeing. These are more than abstractions. Over my time working with Deb and Liberty, I began to understand that they saw and heard things that I didn't see and didn't hear. And it wasn't just with regard to language, to rhetorical framing, to discursive spaces... but with regard to how the limitations of language around human trafficking have negatively impacted the ability of those interested in the topic to identify it, to combat it, to *do something*. What they seemed to be telling me was that for all the interest in the issue, for all the conferences and law enforcement attention and media and awareness campaigns, we remain blind because we aren't willing to put simple truths into simple words that reflect real experiences. To illustrate the point, I want to share another story, connected to the one that started this chapter. What I didn't know at the time that I presented at the *Human Trafficking: A Closer Look* conference was that Liberty was in attendance. We had not yet been formally introduced by Jane White and that moment of unknowing passage likely played a key role in her agreement to participate in my project. During our second interview, Liberty reflected on her experience the conference – she had spoken in a closed session to law enforcement officials about her experiences – and she shared with me a

story that I think is important to pause and reflect upon. At the end of the first day of the conference, she was in the hotel and had the following encounter:

LIBERTY: I went up the elevator and as I was getting in the elevator, this young girl comes walking out. This bothers me really much, so if I start crying, I'm sorry, but... came out and she was dressed to the nines, wearing a beautiful, beautiful black laced dress, very thin. She couldn't have been no more than 15 or 16. She looked very young. On her arm was an old man probably around 70, maybe late 60s, early 70s. I heard her say something to him that, "We'll take care of the day and you can pay me later tonight after we get back and you have a good time." I thought this is an escort, but is she forced? Is she doing this out of her own will? She's a baby. She can't be doing this out of her own will. What's going on? ...My heart was just sinking at that time.

Now keep in mind the context of this real moment. She's at the Royal Dearborn Hotel and Convention Center, where a conference on human trafficking is occurring. The building is quite literally teeming with law enforcement, subject matter experts, and anti-trafficking activists. No one sees a thing out of place. A teenaged girl in a lace dress on the arm of a 70-year-old man. In the elevator, through the lobby, out into the parking lot. No one sees a thing. *Except for Liberty*. She sees it, recognizes it, knows it for what it is because *she's been there. She's been that girl*. And for her, the conclusion is obvious: there's no way that this "baby" is "just an escort" doing this out of her own will.

When she told me this story, I was initially dumbfounded. What was I to make of this? I'm still not *entirely* sure, but as I've reflected on it I've come to view this moment as a clear example of one of the many reasons why we need to listen to individuals like

Deb and Liberty. Because they've lived through moments just like this, they possess a powerful insight into helping us better identify instances of trafficking and giving us the language to describe it in more relevant, tangible ways – in ways that actually reflect the lived realities of what trafficking is and looks like *within our own communities*. For all the efforts that have been put into creating awareness about human trafficking, the discourse remains one defined by abstractions, of horrors that occur far away from our own communities, in “other” places, to “other” people. Liberty’s story is a reminder that, no, trafficking occurs right here in my community – and yours – and it often looks benign. Liberty’s ability to identify this moment for what it is reflects the embodied knowledge that she holds within her self. This differs from the discursive knowledge possessed by other participants at the conference. Despite the presence of subject matter experts and those trained in “identifying” trafficking, no one other than Liberty saw this for what it was because they lacked her embodied knowledge. Marion Fourcade has written, “The things that feel natural to us are not natural at all. They are the result of processes of socialization, inculcation, and training” (569). The discursive knowledge held by conference participants rendered them incapable of seeing what Liberty saw; indeed, nothing seemed necessarily out of place, or unnatural. Because of the ways in which we have *learned* to talk about human trafficking, the unnatural is naturalized, rendered benign.

This reflects one of the major issues with the current framework used to describe human trafficking: it hides, or naturalizes, exploitation in our communities. It is unseen. Liberty’s ability to see the unseen exposes the unspoken, unspeakable terror that accompanies a consideration that exploitation, trauma, and abuse are regularly and

actively perpetuated in our communities, in our neighborhoods, all around us, every day. We must consider the possibility we remain wedded to our limited discursive knowledge because we are fearful of a fuller exploration of Liberty's embodied knowledge for what it might reveal, potentially shattering our paradigms about the constitutive conditions of our communities and the ways in which we unwittingly contribute to exploitation. Liberty's anecdote should give us pause; it forces us to carefully evaluate the ways in which current discourse hides the ongoing terror that exists all around us. Too often, we dare not speak of it; we dare not consider it. Yet, it is not in some faraway place; it is just down the street. By speaking of the unseen unspeakable, we render such terror visible, which may well explain the incidence of so many full-throated denials of human trafficking in the abstract accompanied by a reticence to do anything. But, as Fourcade argues, "that does not mean we never intervene in the process" of naturalizing the unnatural (570). Indeed, this is why it is so important to listen to and learn from individuals like Deb and Liberty. They provide us with a way to unlearn socially and institutionally mediated knowledge about human trafficking and to take the first steps in being able to actually see exploitation in our communities, thereby enabling the first steps to do something about it.

Implications & Future Study

Many of the implications of this project have been addressed in the preceding pages, but I want to highlight a few additional potential outcomes of moving this initial inquiry forward. Based on my work with Deb and Liberty, I propose the following as implications for the future study of the storytelling practices of individuals who have experienced human trafficking:

- 1) Through continued theorizing about how and why individuals who have experienced human trafficking construct stories about their lived experiences, we can develop insights into rhetorical tactics that are critical to helping individuals move beyond exploitation.
- 2) By examining the contexts in which individuals who have experienced human trafficking share stories about their lived experiences, we can grow our understanding of the ways in which stories can be and are operationalized to effectuate change within our own communities.
- 3) By studying the ways in which storytelling practices intersect with culturally based human trafficking narratives and other human rights frames, we can gain insight into the ways in which rhetoric might contribute to decolonization within the broader project of human rights.
- 4) By engaging in listening projects designed to emphasize and value the perspectives and ideas of those who have survived trafficking, and privileging the embodied over the discursive, we may develop new methods of “seeing” and formulating responses to trafficking in our own communities.

As a final piece of this project, I want to shift to considerations for what future work might look like. To maintain accountability, these, like the rest of the content in this dissertation, directly flow from the observations and ideas shared with me by Deb and Liberty.

- 1) The continued study of storytelling practices across communities impacted by human trafficking – especially including individuals impacted by different types of exploitation falling under the umbrella of human trafficking (e.g., labor trafficking,

indentured servitude, etc.) – as part of an ongoing effort to consider the ways in which the issue of human trafficking might be rhetorically reframed to better reflect the lived experiences of those most impacted.

- 2) The study of rhetorical practices of anti-trafficking activists, victim service providers and law enforcement personnel to understand how differently situated communities of interest impact and have the capacity for altering culturally based narratives about human trafficking.
- 3) Further exploration, through a cultural rhetorics lens, of the relationship between storytelling practices and human rights rhetoric to illuminate potential paths forward for a paradigmatic shift from globalized, colonizing rhetoric to more decolonial, feminist approaches.
- 4) Finding ways to build bridges between researchers and externally situated communities of interest to forge coalitions to generate new research initiatives.
- 5) The development of alternate policy and procedural frameworks for government entities involved in anti-trafficking efforts.

My discovery early on – during the recruitment phase of this project – that individuals who had been trafficked in ways other than for sex (i.e., labor, indentured servitude, debt bondage, etc.) were reticent to participate in this type of research leads to another important observation about the first item immediately above. Examining the rhetorical practices around human trafficking needs to continue and be enlarged to encompass non-sexual trafficking scenarios. Such scenarios have been far less accessible and seem to be more socially unacceptable areas of inquiry. In many ways, I believe that this “silence” represents and is an expected outgrowth of the constellation of

immigration discourses, politics, and the exertion of systemic institutional power via major corporations, lobbyists, and legislators. Those of us trained to engage in careful rhetorical analysis are uniquely positioned to push against these frameworks and to engage in important inquiry into the reasons why there is such cultural silence around these issues.

Through each of these potential areas of future study and action, I believe that we can contribute to ongoing discussions about human rights rhetoric and continue the work of effectuating change through meaningful conversation between communities of interest around the issue of human trafficking. Each of these areas harkens back to my initial goal of “changing the conversation.” While ambitious, I believe that this work has great potential to open up new avenues of scholarship, both within the discipline and interdisciplinarily, while furthering the project of cultural rhetorics to privilege stories, create new communities, and to build new meanings. As rhetoricians and scholars, we can and should play a role in considering how projects like this might play a role in building bridges between disparately situated discourse communities; how might we, for example, translate findings from projects like this to useable knowledge for decision-makers and professional writers in the world of policy, of law, of activism? These are the questions to which I will attend as I move forward in my scholarship; I hope that you’ll join me in this work.

Within these pages I’ve sought to the best of my ability to write with Deb and Liberty, rather than merely write about them. The nature of a dissertation complicates this, but the ideas and areas of emphasis addressed within these pages have been driven by the topics that Deb and Liberty identified as being most important to them and

to their respective storytelling practices. In doing this work, I've found many of my own presumptions challenged and I've been profoundly moved by their willingness to share, to discuss, and to help me see human trafficking in new ways. These are strong, inspiring women and we need to listen to what they have to say. As they've shared with me the ways in which they've (re)written themselves, they've also showed me ways in which we may (re)write human trafficking narratives. As I listen to the stories they tell me, I slowly begin to understand how they interact, intersect, and constellate with my own. In some sense, too, they become mine and part of my own becoming. Not in the sense of ownership, but rather in the sense of shared experience. The telling and the listening are events that fold into my own story and my own self. There's some discomfort in this, because in first coming to this work I admit that I had a desire to keep my life separate from the stories with which I interacted. This became the internal struggle between my own acquired and preconceived notions, the institutional expectations with which I had become too familiar, and my dis/re-oriented understandings of story and self. This came to a head during my work on this research project. Importantly, that struggle gave me the courage to begin exploring and dissecting the many narratives that have defined me and undefined me, academically and otherwise. It is in this realization that I am struck by a simple, yet profound fact: by listening to their stories and dwelling upon their words, I've found myself transformed. I hope that you have, too.

WORKS CITED

WORKS CITED

- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- --- ---. *Interviews/Entrevistas*. Routledge, 2000.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bales, Kevin and Zoe Trodd, editors. *To Plead Our Own Cause: Personal Stories by Today's Slaves*. Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Blue Campaign. "Human Interest Stories." Web. Accessed July 19, 2016.
<www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/human-interest-stories>
- Brennan, Denise. *Life Interrupted*. Duke University Press, 2014.
- Brickell, Chris. "Masculinities, Performativity, and Subversion: A Sociological Reappraisal." *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 8, no.1, 2005, pp. 24-43.
- Brunner, Diane. *Between the Masks: Resisting the Politics of Essentialism*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.
- Buckland, Benjamin S. "More than just Victims: The Truth about Human Trafficking." *Public Policy Research*, vol.15, no.1, 2008, pp. 42-47.
- Campbell, Letitia M., and Yvonne C. Zimmerman. "Christian Ethics and Human Trafficking Activism: Progressive Christianity and Social Critique." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, vol. 34, no.1, 2014, pp. 145-172.
- Carr, Diane. "The Rules of the Game, The Burden of Narrative: Enter the Matrix." *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded*. Edited by Stacy Gillis, Wallflower Press, 2005, pp. 36-47.
- Chernoff, John. *Hustling is Not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl*. University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Chuang, Janie. "The United States as Global Sheriff: Using Unilateral Sanctions to Combat Human Trafficking." *Michigan Journal of International Law*, vol. 27, 2006, 437-439.

- Cintron, Ralph. "Inventions of Hyperbolic Culture." *Culture, Rhetoric, and the Vicissitudes of Life*. Edited by Michael Carrithers, Berghahn Books, 2009, pp. 138-155.
- Cruikshank, J. "Oral History, Narrative Strategies, and Native American Historiography: Perspectives from the Yukon Territory, Canada." *Clearing a Path: Theorizing the Past in Native American Studies*. Edited by Nancy Shoemaker, Routledge, 2002, pp. 3-28.
- Davies, Bronwyn and Rom Harre. "Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves." *A Body of Writing, 1990-1999*. Edited by Bronwyn Davies, Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, pp. 87-106.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 3rd ed., University of California Press, 2011.
- Doezema, Jo. *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*. Zed Books, 2010.
- Dolan, Jill. *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance*. Wesleyan, 2001.
- Doxtader, Eric. "A Question of Confession's Discovery." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2011, pp. 267-281.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*. Vintage Books Edition, 2010.
- --- ---. *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. Vintage Books Edition, 1990.
- Fourcade, Marion. "The Problem of Embodiment in the Sociology of Knowledge." *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2010, pp. 569-574.
- Gagnon, John. "Rhetoric Matters: Race and Slavery in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act." *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2016.
- Giroux, Henry. *Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Gong, Rachel. "Indignation, Inspiration, and Interaction on the Internet: Emotion Work Online in the Anti-Human Trafficking Movement." *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2015, pp. 87-103.
- Gould, Janice. "The Problem of Being 'Indian': One Mixed-Blood's Dilemma." *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 81-90.

- Govindan, Padma. "Rethinking Emancipation: The Rhetorics of Slavery and Politics of Freedom in Anti-Trafficking Work in India." *Interventions*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2013, pp. 511-29.
- Ham, Julie. "Beyond Borders: Exploring Links Between Trafficking and Gender." Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women Working Papers Series: 2010. Bangkok: Thailand. Web. Accessed July 19, 2016.
<www.gaatw.org/publications/WP_on_Gender.pdf>
- --- ---. "Trafficking and Gender." *Handbook of Research on Gender and Economic Life*. Edited by Deborah Figart and Tonia Varnecke. Elger Publishing, 2013, pp. 542-558.
- Harjo, Joy. *Crazy Brave*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2012.
- Hesford, W. "Human Rights Rhetoric of Recognition." *Human Rights Rhetoric: Traditions of Testifying and Witnessing*, Routledge, 2012, pp. 1-11.
- Hernandez-Avila, Inés. "Relocations Upon Relocations: Home, Language and Native American Women's Writings." *Reading Native American Women: Critical/Creative Representations*. Edited by Ines Hernandez-Avila, Altamira Press, 2005, pp. 171-188.
- Hua, Julietta. *Trafficking Women's Human Rights*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Hoyle, Carolyn, et al. "Labelling the Victims of Sex Trafficking: Exploring the Borderland Between Rhetoric and Reality." *Social & Legal Studies*, vol. 20, no.3, 2011, pp. 313-329.
- Kagan, Michael. "Believable Victims: Asylum Credibility and the Struggle for Objectivity." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2015, pp.123-131.
- Kamler, Erin M. "Negotiating Narratives of Human Trafficking: NGOs, Communication and the Power of Culture." *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2013, pp. 73-90.
- Kaplan, Caren. "Resisting Autobiography: Out-law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects." *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 115-138.
- Kara, Siddharth. *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Kassindja, Fauziya and Layla Bashir. *Do They Hear You When You Cry*. Dell

- Publishing, 1998.
- Kennedy, David. "The International Human Rights Movement: Part of the Problem?" *International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law: Treaties, Cases, and Analysis*. Edited by Francisco Martin, et al., Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- King, Thomas. *The Truth About Stories*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Lee, K. "Heartspeak from the Spirit: Songs of John Trudell, Keith Secola, and Robbie Robertson." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2007, pp.89-114.
- Lyon, Arabella and Lester Olson. "Human Rights Rhetoric: Traditions of Testifying and Witnessing." *Human Rights Rhetoric: Traditions of Testifying and Witnessing*. Edited by Arabella Lyon and Lester Olson, Routledge, 2012, pp. 1-11.
- Maeda, Donna. "Transforming the Representable: Asian Women in Anti-Trafficking Discourse." *Confronting Global Gender Justice: Women's Lives, Human Rights*. Edited by Debra Berghoffen et al., Routledge, 2010, pp. 50-65.
- Mattar, Mohamed. "Interpreting Judicial Interpretations of the Criminal Statutes of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act: Ten Years Later." *Journal of Gender, Social Policy and the Law*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2011, pp. 1247-1304.
- Monberg, Terese. "Listening for Legacies; or, How I Began to Hear Dorothy Laigo Cordova, the Pinay Behind the Podium Known as FANHS." *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric*. Edited by LuMing Mao and Morris Young, Utah State University Press, 2008, pp. 83-105.
- Murphy, Laura, editor. *Survivors of Slavery: Modern-Day Slave Narratives*. Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Murray, Michael. "Narrative Psychology." *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, edited by Jonathan A. Smith, Sage Publishing, 2003, pp. 111-31.
- Pannell, Sandra. "From the Poetics of Place to the Politics of Space: Redefining Cultural Landscapes on Damer, Maluku, Tenngara." *The Poetic Power of Place*, edited by James Fox, Australian National University Press, 2006, pp. 163-172.
- Parrenas, Rhacel. *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking*. Stanford University Press, 2011.
- Piley, Jessica. *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI*. Harvard University Press, 2014.

- Pollock, Jackie. "Thailand. In GAATW." *Collateral Damage: The Impact of Anti-Trafficking Measures Around the World*. GAATW: 2011. Web. Accessed February 22, 2016. <www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports>
- Potter, Jonathan and Margaret Wetherell. *Discourse and Social Psychology*. Sage Publications, 1987.
- Powell, Malea. "Blood and Scholarship: One Mixed-Blood's Story." *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*. Edited by Keith Gilyard, Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1999, pp.1-16.
- --- ---. "Listening to Ghosts: An Alternative (Non)Argument." *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*. Edited by Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzel, Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2002, pp. 11-22.
- --- ---. "Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics." *Enculturation*, 2014. Web. Accessed January 13, 2016. 13 January 2015. <www.enculturation.net/our-story-begins-here>
- --- ---. "Rhetorical Powwows: What American Indian Making Can Teach Us About Histories of Rhetorics." Hutton Lecture Presentation. Unpublished. November 2010.
- --- ---. "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2002, pp. 396-434.
- Rendell, Jane. "Travel Stories: Angels and Nomads." *Sue Ridge: Travel Narratives*. Norwich, 2000. Web. Accessed March 13, 2016. <<http://www.janerendell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/travelstories.pdf>>
- Riley-Mukavetz, Andrea. *Theory Begins with a Story, Too: Listening to the Lived Experiences of American Indian Women*. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2012.
- --- ---. "Towards a Cultural Rhetorics Methodology: Making Research Matter With Multi-Generational Women From the Little Traverse Bay Band." *Rhetoric, Professional Communication and Globalization*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 108-125.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones. "When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 47, no. 1., 1996, pp. 29-40.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones and Gesa Kirsch. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2012.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones and Molly Cochran. "Human Rights and Civil Rights: The

- Advocacy and Activism of African-American Women Writers." *Human Rights Rhetoric: Traditions of Testifying and Witnessing*. Edited by Arabella Lyon and Lester Olson, Routledge, 2012, pp. 11-28.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. 1st Edition, Vintage Publishing, 1979.
- Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Sarris, Greg. "What I'm Talking About When I'm Talking About My Baskets': Conversations with Mabel McKay." *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 20-33.
- Segrave, Marie. "Order at the Border: The Repatriation of Victims of Trafficking." *Women's Studies Forum*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2009, pp. 251-260.
- Smith, Andrea. "Rape and the War Against Native Women." *Reading Native American Women: Critical/Creative Representations*. Edited by Ines Hernandez-Avila, Altamira Press, 2005, pp. 63-76.
- Snajdr, Edward. "Beneath the Master Narrative: Human Trafficking, Myths of Sexual Slavery and Ethnographic Realities." *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2013, pp. 229-256.
- Soderlund, Gretchen. "The Rhetoric of Revelation: Sex Trafficking and the Journalistic Exposé." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2011, pp.193-211.
- Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire*. Duke University Press, 1993.
- Stolz, Barbara. "Interpreting the U.S. Human Trafficking Debate Through the Lens of Symbolic Politics." *Law and Policy*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2007, pp. 311-338.
- Thacker, Andrew. *Moving Through Modernity*. Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd Ed. Zed Books, 2012.
- U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services. *Victims of Human Trafficking: T Nonimmigrant Status*. Web. Accessed June, 3, 2016.
<<https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>>
- Villanueva, Victor. "On the Rhetoric and Precedents of Racism." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1999, pp. 645-661.

- Julia Watson. "Unspeakable Differences: The Politics of Gender in Lesbian and Heterosexual Women's Autobiographies." *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 139-168.
- Weber, Lynn. *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*. 2nd Edition, Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Wilson, Shawn. *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood Publishing, 2008.
- Winkelman, Christine. "The Language of Healing: Generic Structure, Hybridization, and Meaning Shifts in the Recovery of Battered Women." *Survivor Rhetoric: Negotiations and Narrativity in Abused Women's Language*. Edited by Shearer-Creman, Christine and Winkelman, Carol, University of Toronto Press, 2005, pp. 198-228.
- Woods, Tryon. "Surrogate Selves: Notes on Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Blackness." *Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 120-134.
- Wright, Shelley. *International Human Rights, Decolonisation and Globalisation: Becoming Human*. Routledge, 2003.