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Beyond Survival: Embodied Rhetoric and Resistance to Campus Sexual Violence

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Abstract

Seeking to understand the culture of rape in the U.S., this project centers the stories of women of color on college campuses. In particular, I analyze Emma Sulkowicz's *Mattress Performance* and the past, present, and future activist projects of Wagatwe Wanjuki. Positioning Sulkowicz and Wanjuki in the center of the conversation on sexual violence reminds us of the historical reality of rape for women of color. Collectively, Emma Sulkowicz and Wagatwe Wanjuki create discursive spaces for what Lisa Flores calls a "rhetoric of difference" and via Cherríe Moraga's "theory in the flesh." Throughout, I argue that we must analyze the rhetorical power of protestors of color, like Emma Sulkowicz and Wagatwe Wanjuki, who fight for a radically inclusive understanding of sexual violence and social change. Sulkowicz and Wanjuki present us with captivating stories about survival, struggle, and resistance in the aftermath of campus sexual assault (CSA). Both protestors have resisted the bureaucratic calcification of their university's silence to enact, perform, and craft spaces for storytelling and social change. Sulkowicz and Wanjuki serve as a powerful rhetorical message and model for resistance in the context of campus culture.

KEY WORDS: Campus Sexual Assault; Consciousness-Raising; Embodied Resistance; Social Protest; Performance

Beyond Survival: Embodied Rhetoric and Resistance to Campus Sexual Violence

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Thesis

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I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.

-Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action"

Introduction

I am a survivor of sexual violence.¹ For me, the term “survivor” fails to account for how surviving is a daily burden in the aftermath of sexual assault. “Survivor” indicates that the sickness, trauma, or event has ended—as if you are to be past it. Survivors/victims of sexual violence are expected to find ways to survive on their own. I am to keep my head down, my voice low, and my “private” issues out of public discourse and spaces. But I am a survivor of sexual violence—a survivor who must work to verbalize and share my story with others.

I remember watching news reports on the Steubenville, Ohio Rape Case in 2013 like it happened yesterday. News outlets, blogs, and other social media platforms erupted with their concern for the future of high school football athletes, Trent Mays and Ma’Lik Richmond. I sometimes can still feel the stiff-sharp pain in my chest as I recall US Journalist Poppy Harlow discuss how devastating it was to see their future college careers ruined. For her, the verdict was “incredibly emotional” and “incredibly difficult” as the “*star* football players, *good* students, literally watched as they believed their life fell apart” (Shapiro; emphasis hers). I wondered if anyone was concerned with the life of the victim/survivor.²

Fast forward to January 18th, 2015 at approximately 1:00 a.m. Brock Turner entitled himself to the body of a young woman he followed after a party and raped her behind a dumpster at Stanford University. In the news coverage, Turner was referred to as a “champion swimmer” (Stack). Reporters continuously expressed concern about the effects jail time could have on

¹ The CDC defines sexual violence as, “a sexual act committed against someone without that person’s freely given consent” (cdc.gov). Broadly, this covers rape, sexual harassment, unwanted sexual contact, and also any attempt to violate someone sexually. When I use sexual violence, I am speaking to both the general term of “sexual assault” and the more specific term “rape.” I also extend my definition of sexual violence to include the violation of reproductive rights, female genital mutilation, and other unwanted acts that violates the bodily autonomy of another person.

² Because I do not know which identifier (or *if* she uses one), I will use “survivor/victim” to refer to the defendant in this case. I will also use “victim/survivor” when referring to others who have been sexually assaulted or raped regardless of whether or not they have reported.

Turner's future. Judge Persky sentenced Turner to a mere six months in jail—only two of which Turner served—and again I found myself confronted with America's unabashed concern for the future of rapists. Even with overwhelming proof of sexual assault from eyewitnesses, we live in a culture that would rather prioritize the right of men to engage in "20 minutes of action" (as Brock's father said), than the justice and well-being of survivors/victims of sexual violence.

I begin with brief snapshots of the Steubenville and Stanford University incidents to highlight the need for further research and nuanced conversations on sexual violence in the United States. While Steubenville is a big high school football town that reminds us of popular football dramas like *Friday Night Lights*, Stanford is a well-known Ivy League university with a predominantly privileged student population. Even though the settings may be different, high-profile cases like Steubenville and Stanford usually have one thing in common: the women mentioned—if mentioned at all—are white.

Women of color have suffered sexual violence in the silence perpetrated by media outlets, the women's movement's early anti-rape (white) activists, and public discourse (Lorde; McGuire; Collins). Most discussions of sexual violence in the U.S. do not speak to socially constructed identity differences such as race, gender, class, ability, and other bases of oppression that prevent some women of color from being believed or helped. Jessica C. Harris writes, "The term *women of color* refer to all women who do not have white privilege and are discriminated against based on their race or gender. The term *experiences with sexual violence* includes any unwanted sexual experience" (42; emphasis hers).

Popular discussions of sexual violence are often ahistorical and/or non-intersectional. For example, white feminist groups centered their discussion on police and the courts as a response to sexual violence, which failed to account for the violent and racist history that people of color

have experienced with the criminal justice system (INCITE!). On college campuses in the 1970s and 1980s, consciousness-raising (C-R) groups—comprised of white female activists—received a lot of attention. Women of color were not absent from anti-rape activism, but they were excluded by early white anti-rape activists' call for greater police involvement and heavier punishment in the courts: “Women of color and poor women frequently organized in communities outside college campuses, calling attention to the intersections of race, class, and gender in sexual violence responses” (Linder and Meyers 176). For example, in 1866 the United States Congress conducted hearings about the violence and brutality during the Memphis riots. At the hearings, black women testified about “being gang raped by a white mob” (Poskin). The hearings of the Memphis Riots are documented as one of the earliest, if not the *first* time, women “[broke] the silence of rape” (Poskin). Conversations and resistance *against* sexual violence did not only emerge in the 1970s-1980s from white women (Bevacqua). Women of color, black women predominantly, have played a major role in putting rape on the public agenda.

Women of color are not just marginalized because they are women or because they are a part of a subjugated racial group; they are marginalized because they are both at the same time. Kimberlé Crenshaw argues, “Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (1244). Smith explains that women of color live in the dangerous intersections of gender and race: “Gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism” (Smith 1). Gender violence is motivated by more than the psychic, sexual, or political. The historical roots of sexual violence are racialized and bodies are always raced. The act of rape, and other sexual violence, is an act of racialized violence.

Contemporary scholars across disciplines also explicitly and implicitly privilege whiteness. Addressing the field of communication and rhetorical studies, Lisa Flores argues, “If the rhetorical logics of whiteness lie in its strategic invisibility and purity, that invisibility and purity . . . it locates racially marked bodies as the carriers of racial difference and racial excess” (13). By extension, our cultural imaginary of who can commit rape and/or who can be raped is constructed and constrained by our societal privileging of whiteness. Hannah Giorgis argues, “To be a ‘good rape victim’ is to immediately report your assault to the police (even knowing you will likely never see ‘justice’), but to be a good *black person* is to avoid the police entirely because your life quite literally depends on it. The tightrope walk is impossible.” Black women in particular are cast as “too loose” (e.g. Jezebels) or “too strong” (e.g. Matriarch) to be raped and thus cannot be innocent (McGuire). Survivors/Victims of color are rarely believed or defended and often suffer bodily consequences for telling their stories.

In this project, I value resistance struggles by women of color. While some insights may be applicable to broader understandings of resistance to sexual violence outside of college/university campuses, my intention is to examine how survivor-activists of color, Emma Sulkowicz and Wagatwe Wanjuki, embody their experiences. Broadly, I explore the following questions: How are discourses of resistance deployed by survivors/victims of color on university campuses? What is the importance of survivors/victims of color coming forth with their stories of trauma and sexual violence? Attention to how hegemonic discourses of identity and resistance circulate is of particular importance for the field of Communication. However, that does not always include or legitimize the intersectionality of lived experience. I join the (too small) chorus of rhetorical scholars who write with special attention to intersectionality, embodied experiences, and resistance. In the very act of writing, scholars like Dana L. Cloud, Erin J. Rand,

Lisa A. Flores, and Bernadette Calafell also practice resistance by crafting spaces in the field of scholarship for otherness and (othered experiences).³ Lisa Flores argues,

[T]he study of rhetors and audiences, of public and presidential address, of bodies and meanings, of politics, culture, and practice—is at its soul, deeply invested in meanings and matters. . . I maintain that race is foundational to the work of rhetorical criticism and that any criticism voice of this consideration is incomplete, partial, if not irresponsible. (6)

Victims/survivors are consistently confronted with epistemic violence (from peers, media outlets, social media platforms, and etc.) and systemic backlash (courts and/or universities failing to provide justice) that directly concerns the interests of rhetorical scholars who study power structures, political engagement, and public dialogue. To discuss sexual violence without also attending to racially marked bodies is irresponsible and fundamentally misunderstands the history of sexual violence, which overwhelmingly targets women of color.

As members of a field that dedicates itself to ideals of democratic engagement, it would be a failure to overlook the voices excluded from participating. To begin crafting a more inclusive space in rhetoric and communication studies, rhetorical scholars ought to participate in “racial rhetorical criticism” (Flores 12) to account for “negotiations of identity” that attend to “identity and belonging, hybridity and citizenship, bodies and embodiment, colonization and resistance” (Cisneros; Flores 12). Questions of “impact, influence, or circulation, or question of argument and audience, or questions of affect and materiality” *cannot* ignore attending to race as a critical part of assessing the circulation (and embodiment) of rhetorical meaning (Flores 7).

Bodies are always already raced.

³ See Cloud "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34"; Rand "An Appetite for Activism: The Lesbian Avengers and the Queer Politics of Visibility"; Calafell *Latina/o Communication Studies: Theorizing Performance*; Flores "Between Abundance and Marginalization: The Imperative of Racial Rhetorical Criticism"

The lived experience of women of color is a valuable embodied epistemology that contributes to inclusive understandings social justice issues, support for individuals who have *lived* (and continue to live) through trauma and the public dialogue on embodied difference and sexual violence. In this context, the argument that I advance throughout this project is three-fold:

- (1) Protestors who have lived experience of oppression are vital for the expansion of social justice issues and inclusion.
- (2) Women of color who are survivors/victims of sexual violence have some of the highest risks (psychic, social, economic, political) to overcome by speaking out as *embodied protestors* who have lived and continue to live through the trauma of their sexual assault/rape.
- (3) As Women of Color, Emma Sulkowicz and Wagatwe Wanjuki perform the rhetorical power of narrative, consciousness-raising, and embodied knowledge in the fight for social change.

There is a difference between an embodied protestor and an “ally” who partakes in protests. The embodied protestor is one who not only lives their experience via their bodies, but one who also lives their experiences *because* their body is always gendered, raced, and classed. For a survivor-activist, participating in social protest is influenced by their experience of rape and/or sexual assault. The “ally” is not protesting something they have experienced, but rather their experience of empathy, anger, fear, or solidarity or other feelings for those who have. Extending on Patricia Hill Collin’s concept “Matrix of Domination” and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of “intersectionality,” I view embodied protestors as those who cannot separate their oppressions, and instead experience them in manifold layers simultaneously. The key to the organizing and activism of an embodied protestor is the rhetorical construction of their experience as well as the strategic positioning of their lived experience against the injustice of a powerful institution. In

this way, lived experience is often resisting disembodied theory (present in many disciplines in higher education) and/or bureaucratic maneuvers to oppress marginalized groups.

As embodied protestors, Sulkowicz and Wanjuki protest their experience of embodiment (and their confinement to being identified and objectified *because* of their body). Sulkowicz and Wanjuki protest on behalf of their past selves (pre-rape), their present selves (post-rape), and their future selves who desire to live in a moment beyond the rape that is said to define them. In other words, activists who *embody* the experience for which they protest are always working across time—to repair/maintain their social persona. The oscillation between various “selves” inform and reform Sulkowicz’s and Wanjuki’s institutional challenges—whether it be the future of tomorrow or in forthcoming years.

The embodied protestor contributes to social protest with a deliberate performance of practice and theory, or praxis, because of the knowledge acquired from their lived experience. It is important, however, to remember that “Every rape experience is unique, but each is bodily; therefore, we are capable of locating the various axes of bodily meanings that rape affects” (Cahill 9). In *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Cherríe Moraga terms “Theory in the Flesh” as theory that meets “the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (23). She continues,

We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
 We are the feminists among the people of our culture.
 We are often the lesbians among the straight.
 We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling out stories in our own words. (23)

For embodied protestors like Sulkowicz and Wanjuki, resistance is derived from their standpoint *as* female survivors/victims of color who were brought up in a particular location(s) and whose

parents were of a particular class background (Hartsock). There are also varying degrees of difference in their lived experience because sexual violence is very intimate and individual. Survivors/Victims like Sulkowicz have cited their protest as “better than therapy” (Sulkowicz, “Carry That Weight” Interview) and/or as a personal process of transformation after their attack.

In what follows, I begin by contextualizing rape culture in the U.S. college and university setting. Next, I review literature on agency, embodiment in the public sphere, and forms of resistance. Finally, I provide an overview of the remaining chapters and explicate the value of lived experience *as* resistance. In (re)constructing the stories of survivor-activists of color like Sulkowicz and Wanjuki, I argue that we must analyze the rhetorical power of embodied protestors of color who fight for a radically inclusive understanding of sexual violence and social change. Sulkowicz and Wanjuki present us with captivating stories about survival, struggle, and resistance in the aftermath of campus sexual assault (CSA). Both embodied protestors have resisted their university’s bureaucratic calcification of their silence to enact, perform, and craft spaces for storytelling and social change. Sulkowicz and Wanjuki serve as a rhetorical message and model for resistance in a climate of unspeakable violence.

Sexual Violence and the University

Sexual violence on college campuses is rampant. All over the United States, public and private campuses are failing to support their survivors/victims. Many survivors/victims do not report their cases out of fear of slut-shaming or victim-blaming. Then, colleges sweep reports of sexual violence “under the rug” (Booth) or quickly accuse the survivor/victim for being at fault. In “One of the most dangerous places for women in America” editor and writer Barbara Booth writes, “For freshmen, the first six weeks of college—between student orientation and

Thanksgiving break—are considered the ‘red zone.’ The time first year students are at greatest risk of sexual assault” (Booth). Despite the proliferation of sexual assault cases presented by media outlets, the problem of sexual violence on college campuses is a “scourge that remains unabated” (Gray, Hassija & Steinmetz 1).

While sexual violence affects various populations, there are specific groups that are affected at a higher rate. Studies commonly find that women in their late teenage years and early 20s experience the highest rate of victimization (James 6). College women are “*four times* more likely to be raped than all other female age groups” (Fisher, Cullen & Daigle 65; emphasis theirs). In *Campus Action Against Sexual Assault*, Michele A. Paludi lists among most vulnerable people “women in male-populated majors,” “physically and/or emotionally disabled students,” and “female graduate students” to name a few (xxv). The majority of assaults that take place on college campuses transpire during a “common social interaction” wherein the assailant is likely known—even if tangentially—by the survivor/victim. These those two factors dramatically decrease one’s likelihood of reporting (James 21). In addition, she notes, women of color are especially likely to be targeted because of the intersection of race and gender in the dehumanization of women and minorities.

For the purposes of this project, it is important to broaden Jessica C. Harris’ previous definition of women of color to consider “color” as a diverse and not always visible factor for all people of color. Harris argues that “women of color” pertains to women who do not have white privilege. Her discussion could benefit from looking at women of color who also are not *always* visibly identified as a person of color. In this project, for example, I am looking at how Sulkowicz and Wanjuki are rhetorically constructed by popular discourses of being a “survivor” as well as the how they resist cultural assumptions of surviving rape. Sulkowicz is fairly light-

skinned (at least half white and half Japanese) and Wanjuki is dark-skinned. Sulkowicz certainly benefits from white privilege in moments—as do other light-skinned multiracial people, while Wanjuki is *always* read as a black woman and fights for social change from her embodied position as a black woman. In discussing Sulkowicz’s *Carry That Weight* and Wanjuki’s CSA organizing and activism, it is important to attend to not just race and gender, but also the way privilege operates within the spaces of the university. While Sulkowicz *is* a person of color, as is Wanjuki, Sulkowicz benefits from colorism (and racial privilege) as well as economic prosperity.

Addressing the systemic attitudes and environments of college campuses that foster the reoccurrence of attacks is essential (Murphy and Brunt ix). In *The Crisis of Campus Sexual Violence*, Sara Carrigan Wooten and Roland W. Mitchell address the culture of the university as a major issue:

Higher education institutions in the United States reflect the dominant social norms of our culture. The theoretical standpoint of this volume identifies that culture as patriarchal, whereby violence against women by men is responded to generally in a manner that either blames women for the violence done to them or focuses on prevention strategies that identify how women can better protect themselves. Institutional culture in higher education often promotes a mission of helping women help themselves. (3)

Predominantly, “help” comes in the form of self-defense training, public safety messages to walk home with friends and/or practice bystander intervention, and alcohol awareness programs that encourage students to drink less (3). Michelle J. Anderson analyzed 64 sexual assault policies by universities/colleges. Anderson concluded that higher education institutions generally discourage students from reporting that they are a survivor/victim of sexual violence. For example, universities adopt constricting policies such as “prompt complaint, corroboration, requirement, and cautionary instructions” (1). Not only is it necessary for some survivors/victims to emotionally process (and sometimes physically heal from) the trauma they’ve endured, but in the

case of some incapacitated survivors/victims, they may also be unaware of what happened until a certain time.⁴

The Legislative Approach to Sexual Violence

In 1972, Title IX was passed as a part of other education amendments that “prohibits sex discrimination in all educational programs or activities that receive federal funding” (Germain 9). As Lauren J. Germain writes, sex discrimination includes “sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape,” and other actions that may exclude survivors/victims from “access to educational opportunity or benefit” (9). The overall purpose of Title IX is to provide equal access to education for women and requires that colleges and universities are responsible for promptly eradicating hostile environments that are created on the basis of gender (Murphy & Brunt 3).⁵

If colleges and universities are found violating Title IX, they could lose financial assistance from the federal government. Title IX is guided by three broad principles, as Paludi notes,

Through reliable, and impartial investigations of discrimination and harassment; Prompt, effective, and equitable resolutions of harassment and discrimination; and remedies to end discrimination, prevent its recurrence, and remedy the impact upon the survivor and community. (xxiii)

The burden on university administration to act quickly is to further prevent harm (e.g. emotional, physical, psychic) to the survivor/victim as well as to ensure the safety of other students. Other and policies, such as the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), the Violence Against Women

⁴ Here I am choosing to use “incapacitated” in the broader sense. While I am using it to signal alcohol incapacitation, there are also physically violent assaults wherein the survivor/victim has been beaten beyond recognition.

⁵ Title IX also applies to “admissions, recruitment, financial aid, academics, counseling, grading, housing, classroom assignments, discipline, vocational education, and students on terms abroad,” (Paludi xxiii) and is most widely known for being applied to sports teams in higher education.

Reauthorization Act (VAWA) and the Clery Act contribute to the force of Title IX. VAWA (eventually modified to the Clery Act) mandates that colleges and universities “implement strategies for students and employees related to the prevention of sexual assault” such as domestic or dating violence and stalking (Brunt & Murphy 3). As part of VAWA, the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (Campus SaVE Act) modified the Clery Act in 1990 which required “colleges and universities [to] collect and report crimes that occur on or adjacent to campus” as well as release annual security reports (Brunt & Murphy 5). While colleges and universities are required to collect crime data, they are not required to collect data which differentiates between race, ethnicity, or any other identity marker. Most universities collect data on the basis of male/female gender binary.

In the context of CSA, the development of so-called sexual assault prevention programs continues to fail insofar as they treat social identities as monolithic and binuristic. Overlooking the fact that that survivors/victims of color need different types of support than white survivors/victims echoes Crenshaw’s argument that “institutional expectations [are] based on inappropriate nonintersectional contexts” and “ultimately limits the opportunities for meaningful intervention on their behalf” (1251). CSA prevention programs also tend to operate under the assumption that “female” and “male” are the only gender identifiers. In using gender as a monolithic identity and ignoring racial/ethnic differences, CSA programs generalize and re-substantiate the male/female binary while continuing to perpetuate gendered stereotypes (i.e. women not drinking, walking with a buddy, or dressing differently).

It is also worthwhile to mention in this discussion the White House’s role in sexual violence on University Campuses. During the Obama administration, involvement in CSA

prevention efforts increased—or at least appeared to. In 2014, the White House published the first report related to CSA. Signed on January 22, 2014, the presidential memorandum reads,

Sexual violence is more than just a crime against individuals. It threatens our families, it threatens our communities; ultimately, it threatens the entire country. It tears apart the fabric of communities. And that’s why we’re here today—because we have the power to do something about it as a government, as a nation. We have the capacity to stop sexual assault, support those who have survived it, and bring perpetrators to justice. (Obama)

As Germain notes, the purpose of the Task Force is to help colleges and universities respond to reports of sexual violence as well as to support their students. The method listed in the *Not Alone* report is “that we continue listening” (13). According to Germain, survivors/victims have been speaking up because the media barrage us with case upon case of CSA.⁶ “Listening,” as the White House recommends, is not the root of the problem and will not lead to preventive measures against CSA. Similarly, Former Vice President Joe Biden’s *It’s on Us* campaign merely advocates for bystander intervention—which has been proven to be ineffective and fails to make students aware of systemic racism and sexism that allow rape to persist.

Government policies have been limited in their impact because of cultural norms, structural impediments, and the priorities of the neoliberal university. Not only does the culture of higher education largely reflect our normative ideals about survivors/victims of sexual violence (i.e., rape myths/victim blaming), but educational institutions also are ill-equipped to deal with criminal cases. Colleges and universities still function as dominantly masculine spaces in which female students (and faculty) are responsible for learning how to succeed. As masculine spaces, universities offer advice to women on how to be more responsible, such as drinking less

⁶ While I do agree with Germain on this point not *all* victims have been given the opportunity to be *truly heard* (or believed). Moreover, public discourse on sexual violence cases typically operates on assumptions of whiteness as the normative experience of sexual violence.

or wearing less revealing clothes. Anti-binge drinking programs send the message that women who do not take extra precautions become survivors/victims because *they* allowed themselves to be “vulnerable” to an attack. On the whole, colleges and universities are wholly incompetent to handle matters regarding sexual violence which is evident by the increasing number of ongoing Title IX investigations by the U.S. Department of Education.⁷ It is clear that campus survivors of sexual violence must seek agency beyond these meager legal protections.

Agency, Performing Embodied Resistance, and Identity Framing

In the field of rhetorical studies, “agency” has been an ambiguous (and consequentially limitless) term. Scholars convened at the Alliance for Rhetoric Societies (ARS) in 2003, to answer the question *How ought we to understand the concept of rhetorical agency?* Cheryl Geisler wrote a report on ARS stating,

The term “agency” has moved from marking off the unnoticed foundation for efficacious rhetorical action to opening up its essential mechanisms . . . we have become less concerned with determining the universals for rhetorical action and more interested in the specific local or historical conditions that undergird it. With this, we acknowledge that rhetorical agency is not universally available to all its members of society, but we also make a commitment to developing rhetoric in a way that will account for rather than ignore this disparity. (14)

In my view, it is essential to account for the ambiguity of the term agency and adapt to different ways of knowing and performing resistance. As Lucaites stated at the ARS, “Every rhetorical performance enacts and contains a theory of its own agency—of its own possibilities—as it enacts and structures the relationships between speaker and audience, self and other, action and structure” (Giesler 13). I view the study of rhetorical agency as attention to how rhetors manage

⁷ See “There Are Far More Title IX Investigations of Colleges Than Most People Know” by Tyler Kingkade. Also see archived information from the U.S. Department of Education. To clarify, I am not saying the courts are more equipped as they similarly treat women of color deplorably.

to enact, perform, articulate, and create spaces of agency that may or may not transform into acts of resistance.⁸

According to Lisa Flores' rhetoric of difference, the "creation of discursive space means that the margins are transformed into the center of a new society, and the disempowered find power" (152). Flores extends our understanding of agency by focusing on how marginalized peoples enact their agency while also recognizing external constraints (Campbell "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean" 3) that determine who can speak and to what extent (3). Like both Flores and Campbell, I recognize that not everyone is a "free agentive being" with limitless choices. Instead, some—depending on race, class, sexual identification and other qualifiers—face severe repercussions for speaking and/or acting out of decorum.

Embodiment in the Public Sphere

The university as a public sphere contains norms within and outside the campus walls that extends into wider public spaces. Jürgen Habermas theorized that people, the bourgeois class, entered the "public sphere" (Habermas) as a result of the Enlightenment. Contrary to Habermas's rationalism, I view the public sphere as a discursive realm of ideas that has bodily consequences for anyone outside of the "bourgeois class." Young also recognizes that the public Habermas theorizes achieves unity because it "excludes bodily and affective particularity" (443). Other public sphere theory scholars argue that the bourgeois public sphere ultimately pushed femininity to a (private) discourse surrounded by particulars.⁹

⁸ See Geisler "Report from the ARS"; Brower "Precarious Visibility"; Wilson "Racial Politics"; Dube "Women Without"; Campbell "Enactment as Rhetorical Strategy"; Lucaites "Understanding 'Rhetorical Agency'"; Fishman "Rhetorical and Performative Agency"; Biesecker "How Ought We to Understand".

⁹ See Landes, "The Public and Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration"; Benhabib, "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, The Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas"; and Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere".

The university is a male-dominated space that restricts others from speaking out, being believed, and/or reporting assault. While many universities have higher female enrollment than male enrollment, the administration is largely made up of white males who do not value—or merely cannot comprehend—particular experiences unless it contributes to the capital of the university. Feminist public sphere scholar Joan Landes explains, “An idealization of the universal public conceals a way in which women’s (legal and constitutional) exclusion from the public sphere was constitutive, not a marginal or accidental feature of the bourgeois from the start” (143). The university, as a public sphere, is similar to Habermas’ theorizing of the bourgeois class because it effectively excludes non-normative bodies and experiences. As a white hetero-patriarchal space, college and university spaces enable racism, homophobia, classism, and ableism to proliferate. A non-intersectional approach to CSA fails to support, or provide justice for, a member of their student body who are (or become) survivors/victims of sexual violence.

Survivors/Victims of CSA do not enter the public sphere as “active agents” but as objectivized problems to be surveyed, solved, and administered through public [and higher education] policy, police, and the law.” Since women have often been excluded from participating in public argument, “subaltern counter publics” become spaces to enter into the public sphere and [subaltern counter publics] function as a space of social transformation (Fraser). Activists-survivors create alternative discursive spaces on university and college campuses to highlight and reject differential power relations.

Consciousness Raising

One way that women have resisted their exclusion from the public sphere is in consciousness-raising, or C-R, groups and other practices. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell writes that C-R groups are historically “small leaderless groups in which each person is encouraged to express her personal feelings and experiences . . . The goal is to make the personal political: to recreate awareness through shared personal experiences” (68). Likewise, Tasha Dubriwny explains that “the move from personal to political is based upon the transformation of meaning of experiences that occurs through the articulation of those experiences” (407). In this way, the “power of experiential epistemology” transforms both audiences and hegemonic ideologies into potential agents of change. Both Campbell and Dubriwny agree that sharing experiences is both political and transformative. C-R groups are also a space wherein discourses of identity form (and reform) among and between the group members. As a transformative process, C-R is a particular type of praxis that seeks to resist gendered norms for social change. In doing so, C-R groups challenge the discursive division between the public and private as well as the personal and political.

As much of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s research suggests, C-R groups are significant spaces for women’s speech. She argues, “Because women have had struggles to shape an identity that gave them voice . . . Women have been unable to challenge social values overtly; they have had to find ways to reinterpret tradition such that they support women’s agency or an enlarge sphere of influence” (60). C-R then, can be said to have developed out of *necessity*, similar to Moraga’s “Theory in the Flesh.” Sulkowicz and Wanjuki devote their efforts to the political education of others that raises consciousness about their story as well as the story of other CSA survivors/victims on their university campuses. The failure of their universities to provide them basic support services or justice provided the necessity for Sulkowicz and Wanjuki to act. While

Sulkowicz and Wanjuki are not necessarily in C-R *groups*, their efforts are most closely akin to raising consciousness as a form of political education and resistance. As survivors-activists, their interactions with other survivors/victims as well as allies to the cause *are* moments of contemporary consciousness raising. Political education and social change require C-R efforts, embodied protest, and other means of persuasion to create a discursive space for the narratives of survivors/victims of sexual violence.

Performing Narrative and Identity Framing

Performance studies closely attends to and emphasizes embodiment as well as the construction of bodies within the context of rhetoric and social protest. Performance studies literature read in tandem with rhetorical studies provides a fruitful discussion on how the symbolic, material, and lived experiences of Sulkowicz and Wanjuki are constructed and communicated in public spaces. While performance studies provide the clearest lens for the *Mattress Performance*, Wanjuki's activism via narrative construction and storytelling also depends on the performative. In *Beyond the Text: Toward a Performative Cultural Politics*, Dwight Conquergood argues that it is important to deploy performance to decenter Western textualism for at least two reasons:

- (1) Performance-sensitive ways of knowing hold forth the promise of contributing to an epistemological pluralism that will unsettle valorized paradigms and thereby extend understanding of multiple dimensions and a wider range of meaningful action;
- (2) performance is a more conceptually astute and inclusionary way of thinking about many subaltern cultural practices and intellectual-philosophical activities. (26)

Socially constructed discourses of racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism prevent some marginalized groups from safely expressing their grievances while others are able to do so with little to no repercussions.

Performance can be a way to enter public dialogue and potentially minimize risk. Within the U.S., protesting for people of color has proved to come with bodily consequences (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement, Standing Rock), but this did not prevent Sulkowicz and Wanjuki from speaking out against their institutions. Conquergood adopts Homi K. Bhabha's definition of performance to "[refer] to action that incessantly insinuates, interrupts, and antagonizes powerful master discourses, which he dubs 'pedagogical'" (Conquergood 32). More specifically, Bhabha argues,

Instead of construing performance as *transcendence*, a higher plane that one breaks into, I prefer to think of it as a *transgression*, that force which crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back into that vortices of political struggle—in the language of bell hooks as 'movement beyond boundaries.' (Bhabha 207)

As D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera write in *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*, "On multiple levels, performance 'means' and 'does' different things for and with different people. On one level performance is understood as theatrical practice, that is, drama, as acting, or 'putting on a show'" (xii). In *Campus Sexual Assault: College Women Respond*, Germain explains that she's spoken with survivors/victims who articulate the "desire or need to exercise agency to manage the ways that others perceived them in the aftermath of sexual assault...It is an exercise of one's agency to think about and act in an effort to preserve, change, or otherwise impact the way one is perceived" (40). These performances, of their pre-assault socially constructed identities or the idea of that past-assault self, construct the discourses (e.g. narratives, identity/subjectivity, protest) that a survivor/victim enacts or participates in. Performing trauma

and enacting self-constructed discourses as resistance is unique to Sulkowicz's *Mattress Performance* and Wanjuki's intimate acts of storytelling.

Performance scholar Diana Taylor also theorizes a way to look at Sulkowicz's and Wanjuki's performances as *distinct* from other performances. In acknowledging the relation between trauma and performance, we are then able to "think of actions or performances that work simultaneously to mitigate the personal and collective effects of trauma even as they make their claims for social justice. Whether we situate trauma in the individual or social body, its expression depends on live reenactments and interactive performance. Expression involves repetition compulsion and other acts that compartmentalize knowing" (1676). Similarly, Dwight D. Conquergood writes, "Performance privileges threshold-crossing, shape-shifting and boundary-violating figures, such as shamans, tricksters and jokers, who value the carnivalesque over the monumental" (Conquergood 1995: 137-138). In this way, performance and performative acts of C-R can be understood as that which enables individuals to act and/or react in the world – enactment, then, is a central part of the *Carry That Weight* performance.

In C-R groups, women reason through and narrate their private experiences and learn that their personal experiences are shared through the act of storytelling to and from others.¹⁰ Protesting through narrative also "enables us to understand the actions of others" (Fisher 66). Angel Medina argues that human reason is narrative and symbolic because "the major aim in the formation of this totality is its own self-presentation within the dialogue of consciousness" (69). While survivors/victims are seldom believed, many who become activists continue to tell their

¹⁰ As many activists and scholars have mentioned, the "personal" experiences of women are always already politicized. See more from: Fixmer, Natalie, and Julia T. Wood. "The Personal Is Still Political: Embodied Politics in Third Wave Feminism." *Women's Studies in Communication* 28.2 (2005): 235–257. Print.

story to raise awareness for sexual violence. Social identities, then, are constructed by public discourse and delivery of narrative and lived experience.

A loose coalition of “feminists, academics, mental health professionals, and social workers” sought to define domestic violence as a social problem (Rothenberg 204). In struggle together, these activists spurred public, political, and media interest in the necessity for a “battered women’s movement” (Rothenberg 204). Rothenberg argues, “[b]y selecting the ‘right’ accounts [of their personal experiences], advocates harness the evocative power of narrative and show how the lived experiences of individual women align with their definition of the domestic violence problem” (204). Similarly, Sulkowicz and Wanjuki use a variety of means, such as narrative through the medium of artistic protests, organizing, interviews, speeches, and blog writing, to define sexual violence as a social problem that must be attended to. Not only do Sulkowicz and Wanjuki protest utilizing narrative to communicate their experiences of trauma, but they also perform the rhetorical power of narrative as well as the multifaceted forms that narrative appears in.

Gary Alan Fine views social movements as “bundles of narratives.” He explains, “Most groups—and in social movements in particular—participants share accounts of their lives and activities within the movement organization” (229). Survivor-Activists Sulkowicz and Wanjuki, are not necessarily leading or organizing a movement. Started by individual acts, Sulkowicz and Wanjuki are raising awareness for their lived experience and working to be in solidarity with other survivors/victims of sexual violence. Fine continues, “These discursive practices [of narrative] are shaped in light of the goals of the group and the characteristic of members. Stories, along with behaviors and material objects, come to characterize the group and constitute the group culture” (229). Sulkowicz’s *Mattress Performance*, was designed to be a performance by

an individual (her) in a way that raised awareness about her rape and Columbia University's failures. Wanjuki also set out to raise awareness about her continued rapes, the inadequacy of Tufts's response, and her expulsion. Wanjuki, as an individual, wrote blogs, participated in campus talks across the U.S., and wrote articles for mainstream journals—to name a few of the narrative forms Wanjuki uses. Broadly, both Sulkowicz and Wanjuki oriented their acts of protest against the university's failure to support them.

Narrative also constructs Sulkowicz's and Wanjuki's stories for public knowledge in and outside of university boundaries while also unveiling the administrations' negligence for their wellbeing. In both Sulkowicz's and Wanjuki's case, their stories and their actions have been used or imitated to spark collective action and coalitions against campus sexual assault. While narrative helps discursively frame who Sulkowicz and Wanjuki are (in terms of their public personas), it also can influence public consciousness for others to use for action. As Gary Alan Fine argues, "Narrative is often present explicitly or implicitly, detailed or telegraphed. Talk that is structured by sequence is effective for communication" (Fine 230). Sulkowicz and Wanjuki are not merely sharing their stories of events that they witnessed and that may have affected them. Instead, both survivor-activists are sharing *embodied* narratives. Narratives that are *embodied* are more than just "talk." An embodied narrative should also include gestures, performances, and lived events that ought to be addressed intersectionally. At its' most basic level, the embodied experiences that reach audiences via narrative forms are explicated in tandem with the body. For Sulkowicz, she also adds a material object (the mattress) to display her physical and emotional burden of sexual violence. Wanjuki, rarely (if ever) speaks to her experience of sexual violence without also discussing her body as always raced and classed. The narratives of their experiences are not just about their rape, but also about *how* their rape affects

their bodies and how their bodies affect their chance of being raped and ignored by the university.

Walter R. Fisher theorized the narrative paradigm, which posits that humans are naturally storytellers and generally see their lives as narratives. “Viewing human communication narratively stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors)” (18). Fisher’s idea of a narrative paradigm challenges the belief that rhetorical human communication must adhere to the rational world paradigm because the world can be viewed as “a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation” (65). Sulkowicz and Wanjuki (re)present themselves as survivors who narrate their experiences in the past, present, and what they hope to be a better future that commits to justice for survivors/victims of sexual violence. Survivors/Victims who speak out against the university’s injustices re-create who they are in relation to the act of social protest.

Identity framing is inextricably tied with the construction and presentation of personal narrative. For example, interviews frame a person’s identities that creates a public persona. C-R, narrative, and identity framing are interrelated because of the performative elements of constructing the self that is often constrained by cultural norms. Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette Calafell explain that “performative elements of identity and the body, are cultural performances” (61). Well-known sociologists Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow discuss framing as meaning construction. Benford and Snow view framing as a verb denotes,

[A]n active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. It is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process. It entails agency in

the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organization or movement activists. (614)

Our visual imaginary of society is brought to us through a particular frame (via the media and/or education systems) and socially constructs our worldview. I am most interested in the shifting nature of Sulkowicz and Wanjuki as they perform, enact, and create literal (and discursive) spaces for other survivors/victims to come forward and/or resist cultural notions of slut-shaming and victim-blaming. Viewed in this way, identity framing is a form of resistance. Through forms of consciousness raising and storytelling, survivor-activists Sulkowicz and Wanjuki reconstruct expectations of *what* a survivor/victim can become in the aftermath of their assault.

Chapter Overview

In coming to know how women of color like Emma Sulkowicz and Wagatwe Wanjuki protest injustices and norms in the university public sphere, we diversify our cultural notions of who can claim that they are a survivor/victim of sexual violence. Sulkowicz and Wanjuki are most notable for their fearless mobilization of identity discourses in particularly powerful ways. After Sulkowicz and Wanjuki felt that their universities failed to support them, they did not give up on voicing their experiences. Both continued to fight for themselves and other survivors/victims on college campuses. In translating an “unspeakable” experience such as rape, both survivor-activists build large networks with survivors/victims far beyond their campus walls. For them, raising consciousness exceeds the masculine public sphere of the university.

Chapter 1: “Performing Trauma in Social Protest: Sulkowicz’s Carry That Weight as an Embodied Protest”

“Rape can happen anywhere. For me, I was raped in my own dorm bed. Since then, that space has become fraught for me and I feel like I’ve carried the weight of what happened there with me everywhere since then.” —Emma Sulkowicz to the Columbia Daily Spectator

In the fall of 2014, Emma Sulkowicz vowed to complete an endurance art piece called *Carry That Weight* for her senior project as a visual arts major at Columbia University. The piece began on September 2, 2014 and ended on May 27, 2015. As her personal website indicates, the endurance art piece consisted of multiple parts: Wall painting, objects, performance, public response, and diary entries (“Mattress Performance Overview”). The empty white walls of her studio are covered with rules of engagement in thick dark black paint. On her website, Emma lists “one mattress, multiple waterproof mattress covers, a pair of winter gloves, and other related artifacts/ephemera” as the only materials she will need (“Mattress Performance Overview”). Lastly, Sulkowicz kept an electronic diary composed of approximately 60,000 words wherein she “chronicled moments and experiences that stood out to me throughout the performance” (“Mattress Performance Overview”). No single element (or act) from this performance can stand alone because each element is carefully crafted to depend on another. Sulkowicz’s consciousness raising cannot be explained merely as a form of art, albeit important. Instead, the relationship between the wall painting, the materials, the performance, the public response, and her diary entries *are* the performance. Sulkowicz’s performance transformed each day as she walked through new spaces, made new relationships, and refused to adapt/blend in to her surroundings.

In the display of herself as a survivor/victim of rape, Sulkowicz’s endurance art piece uses and performs the materials of her own conditions. Bringing the private items of the bedroom into the public spaces of Columbia University is a deliberate disruption of “business as usual” in the university setting. In *Carry That Weight*, Sulkowicz is unable to enter any university space as a university citizen with solely “public” or “private” issues. In order to understand how

Sulkowicz performs embodied resistance as well as how she positions herself against the Institution of Higher Education, public sphere theory and performance theory is most apt. In the way that the public sphere is a space of “private individuals who join in the debate of issues bearing on state authority,” Sulkowicz’s performance is an outright rejection of Columbia University’s handling of her sexual assault case (Calhoun 7). In order for her to make visible her pain and suffered injustice at the hands of the institution, she (re)performs her trauma every day to move a private object, such as a mattress, through the public spaces of the university. In this way, Sulkowicz directly protests the expectation that survivors/victims of sexual violence remain silent.

Chapter 1 analyzes *Carry That Weight* as a work that performs the relationship between performance and the rhetoric of social protest and the act of C-R as a tool of resistance. Specifically, I argue that *Carry That Weight*, as performative endurance art, radically displays the rhetorical and performative power of survivors/victims of CSA through embodied performance. *Carry That Weight* performatively challenges the deleterious ways universities/colleges, like Columbia, ignore the lived experiences and cultural burdens placed on their racially marginalized student populations.

Chapter 2: Writing to be heard: Wagatwe Wanjuki’s Campus Sexual Assault Activism

In 2008, Wagatwe Wanjuki filed a complaint with Tufts University regarding two years of rape and abuse she suffered by another Tufts student whom she was in a relationship with. Instead of remaining silent about the trauma of what happened to her, Wanjuki began to reach out to other students. She vehemently spoke out against Tufts University in hopes that they would have to amend their policies to support survivors/victims: “I met another student in class.

She actually was able to go through the adjudication process, and they found—it was a very terrible experience. . . . So we started a movement to change Tufts’ sexual assault policy . . . when we started speaking up and I started speaking up about my own experience, they actually ended up expelling me” (Democracy Now!). Although her grades were strong enough to graduate and she was in her final year of school, the administration decided to expel her.

Initially grounding myself in media reporting on Wanjuki (and what little there is), I found that Wanjuki participated in several public interviews, speeches, and documentaries. Chapter 2 works through aspects of Wanjuki’s social media activism and construction of a public narrative to craft a rhetorical future without rape. Specifically, I argue that C-R provides an essential avenue for political engagement that marginalized groups are excluded from. As an embodied protestor, Wanjuki raises consciousness about racialized sexual violence to craft a discursive space wherein she can speak of her lived experience that simultaneously critiques the systemic oppression that affects women of color and CSA survivors/victims. The reflexivity of her past and present experiences of racialized sexual violence and silencing mirrors her past, present, and future directions of C-R and activism.

Conclusion

The motivation for this project comes from my desire to understand how survivor/victims of sexual violence are creating spaces for their experiences in an effort to foster social change. As a survivor of sexual violence myself, I constantly look for ways to improve our current understanding of what it means to be a survivor/victim of sexual violence. I lost some of my closest friends after my rape during my undergraduate education. To add insult to injury, my best friend of 5 years testified against my character in the university trial. The university trial dragged

on throughout my junior year and caused me to drop out of organizations that I had worked my entire undergraduate career to create. Because of my experience, I am constantly dumbfounded by societal responses to survivors/victims—especially on college campuses that ought to care for and support their students. Bearing the trauma that survivors/victims carry, many of us live to stand back up. The following chapters detail how survivor-activists Sulkowicz and Wanjuki construct their stories and perform their identities in opposition to their respective universities. While I have positioned each chapter to explicate resistance intersectionally, the theories in and between them overlap and at times become inseparable.

As Calafell states, “We come to rhetorical artifacts as they are, we do not make them conform to a hegemonic understanding of what text or knowledge production looks like” (115). My varying methodological approaches stands on the fine line between “letting the object lead” and resisting the urge to determine what knowledge is or can be (Hall; Calafell). Overall, I believe that scholars are at times activists in their understanding of ways to approach powerful institutions. As an activist, a survivor, and a scholar, I believe that rhetorical theory has an *obligation* to recognize and open up space for difference, marginalized subjects, and nontraditional objects of study. In the ways that rhetoric also seeks to uncover multiple truths to create a more inclusive democracy, only taking note from the same bodies and ways of knowing literally contradicts those efforts. In this project, theory meets practice as it emerges from the quotidian gestures and epistemologies of the everyday. Powerful women of color like Sulkowicz and Wanjuki are engaging in several forms of political education that socially constructs identities that have been created and theorized *for* them.

Performing Trauma in Social Protest: Sulkowicz's *Carry That Weight* as an Embodied Protest

"We are more determined than ever to end sexual assault on this campus and across the nation, a movement is rising" – Emma Sulkowicz

In the fall of 2012, Emma Sulkowicz was anally raped by _____ Nungesser: "I felt disgusting and I didn't want to talk about it at all, but after I met other women that my rapist had attacked as well, I realized that if I didn't do something, he would continue to rape other students" (Sulkowicz "A Survivor's Burden"). At first, Sulkowicz did not intend to report the assault to the university or police, but eventually she filed a report with Columbia University (CU). Sulkowicz waited throughout her junior year for administration to reach out to her and offer support. At the end of her junior year she was notified that Nungesser was cleared of wrongdoing.

For the remainder of her time as a student at CU, Sulkowicz was expected to attend—and live as a dormitory resident—a school with the same person who raped her. While the case was closed in the eyes of CU administration, Sulkowicz had a different vision in mind. She decided to take action: She would carry her mattress everywhere with her to publicize her private violation. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Sulkowicz explains, "I will be carrying this mattress with me everywhere I go for as long as I attend the same school as my rapist" (Kim). From the fall of 2014 to the spring of 2015, Sulkowicz designed her project titled *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)* to last until, (1) her rapist left school (voluntarily or by expulsion) or (2) until she graduated. Sulkowicz describes the five key rules ("Rules of Engagement :") of her project:

- (1) Whenever I am on Columbia University (CU) property, I must have the mattress with me. This area includes the campus, all the buildings on campus, and any Columbia-owned buildings off-campus,
- (2) When I am inside a CU-owned

building, the mattress must be inside the building as well. However, it *can* be in a different room, (3) I may not seek help carrying the mattress. However, if someone offers either to help me carry the mattress or carry it for me on their own accord, I can accept their aid, (4) When heading from a location owned by CU to a location that isn't owned by CU, I must leave the mattress in a safe place on campus, (5) When heading from a location not owned by CU to a location owned by CU, I must first collect the mattress from wherever I left it previously, (6) I must notify all my professors about the performance before classes begin. They may deny me a spot in their classes at their own discretion. (Sulkowicz "Rules of Engagement")

Why did she choose these? The rules of engagement for *Carry That Weight* prevent Sulkowicz from altering the performance as it evolves. Many survivors/victims of sexual assault seek control, structure, or stability in their daily activities in an effort to (re)construct their pre-assault selves (Germain 40). "It's better than therapy," she told American art critic Roberta Smith (Sulkowicz "A Conversation"). The artistic elements of *Carry That Weight* operates as a performative therapy of sorts—therapy that is not exclusively intimate between an individual and their therapist.

The *Mattress Performance* constructs a therapeutic rhetoric that is also communicated to the wider campus environment and by extension televised and written about on social media, news outlets, and documentaries. Dana L. Cloud argues, "At moments of political anger or dissatisfaction, rebellion is possible, but therapeutic discourse [or rhetoric] effectively translates resistance into 'dis-ease' and locates blame and responsibility for solutions in the private sphere" (4). Therapeutic rhetoric can be derivative of and facilitated by powerful institutions (e.g. Institutions of Higher Education, Judicial System). Although Cloud cautions activists and scholars against the potential privatization of responsibility and action in therapeutic discourse, her discussion of C-R in feminist notes that sometimes the practice of sharing intimacies opens out onto the political domain. In a social protest, therapy becomes embodied as the body

becomes the vehicle for moving forward. For survivors/victims like Sulkowicz, performance art and social protest coupled with acts of “self-care” subvert the socially constructed notion that self-care and therapy are elements of the private and are instead a process of embodied experience.

In this project, I analyze Sulkowicz’s *Mattress Performance* as the performativity of an embodied rhetoric. Performativity “must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler 2). Explaining Butler’s theory of performativity further, Chris Weedon writes, “As individuals inserted within the specific discourses, we repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until these are experiences as if they were second nature. Where they are successfully internalized, they become part of lived subjectivity” (7). Embodiment, on the other hand, “accounts for the multiplicity of experiences of rape by acknowledging that rape occurs only to individual bodies, and that individual bodies are marked and constructed by larger discourses (although never in a wholly determined way)” (Cahill 9). The *Mattress Performance* inextricably ties together various aspects of the performance such as inanimate objects like a mattress, Sulkowicz’s body, and the lived experience of surviving sexual violence. Through her artwork, Sulkowicz defies expectations of survivors/victims in public that would have them keep their rapes silent and out of public discourse.

Embodied rhetoric is a process wherein one communicates their experiences to others via gestures, symbols, and verbal and nonverbal actions (e.g. nonverbal, signs, symbols, gestures). As a particular form of rhetoric, embodied rhetoric communicates that which ceases to be communicable in language. The underlying assumption of embodied rhetoric as a form of communication views lived experiences, embodiment, and communication as inextricably tied to

one another because our bodily experiences influence our world perspectives (i.e. of people, events, and places). As an embodied protestor, Sulkowicz constructs her experience as a survivor of sexual violence through the use of her physical body, telling intimate stories of struggle, and by raising awareness that inspires or produces collective action. The materialization of Sulkowicz's rape related trauma into endurance art symbolizes her refusal to remain a silent victim. The performance doubles as public display of her trauma that is both a performance and a protest. In defying the public norms of the university, Sulkowicz also mobilizes her lived experience and materializes her trauma to communicate the literal and metaphorical weight of her sexual assault to spectators on the university campus. Sulkowicz and the *Mattress Performance* presents a unique case for the value of an embodied protestor who works vulnerably toward a future without rape.

The remainder of this chapter explores the multilayered *Mattress Performance*. First, I situate Sulkowicz's performance within a lineage of radical feminist art. Secondly, I contextualize the impediments survivors/victims of color experience while protesting the negligence of higher education institutions, such as Columbia University. The second half of this chapter analyzes *Carry That Weight* as a work that performs the relationship between performance and the rhetoric of social protest and the act of consciousness-raising (C-R) as a tool of resistance. Specifically, I argue that *Carry That Weight*, as performative endurance art, radically displays the rhetorical and performative power of survivors/victims of CSA through embodied performance. *Carry That Weight* performatively challenges the deleterious ways universities/colleges, like Columbia, ignore the lived experience and cultural burdens placed on their racially marginalized student populations.

The Lineage of Radical Feminist Art

Feminist art often performs and resists cultural norms. The history of feminist art “is a history of the body; of the ways a woman’s body can be terrorized, how that violence is internalized, and the subsequent expression of that violence” (Edwards). In 1965, Yoko Ono performed “Cut Piece,” which features her sitting on a stage with scissors beside her. Ono invited audience members up to cut off a piece of her clothing. As audience members became comfortable, the cuts—and the location of the cuts—became more aggressive. Since Yoko Ono’s piece, other performance artists have recreated the concept, such as Marina Abramović’s *Rhythm 0* in 1974. Yoko Ono later released a 77-minute documentary called *Rape*, which “captures the easy terrorization of women in public places” (Edwards). Together both of Ono’s and Abramović’s projects rely on their embodied experiences and performative interactions with others.

Similarly, the work of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta sought to communicate the unspeakable nature of sexual violence. Inspired by the highly publicized rape and murder of Sara Ann Otten, Mendieta “invited fellow students to her apartment where, through a door left purposefully ajar,” where her students found her laying semi-naked with her chest flat on the table facing away from them (Manchester): “Blood is smeared over and drips down her buttocks, thighs and calves and a pool of it is partially visible on the dark floor beside her feet” (Manchester).¹¹ Four years after Mendieta’s work in 1973, Suzanne Lacy produced “Three Weeks in May” which included a map installed in an L.A. mall (Finkle). “[F]or three weeks, Lacy received a report from the police department with data on the previous day’s rapes. She then stenciled the word ‘rape’ in deep red on the map, in the area where the crime occurred”

¹¹ See also: Mendieta’s “Rape Performance” wherein she laid semi-naked once again “splattered with blood in various outdoor locations on the perimeters of the University campus” (Manchester).

(Finkle).¹² In different ways, both Mendieta's and Lacy's work use shock value to raise awareness of the horrors and proliferation of rape.

Notable artwork on sexual violence engages with rape culture directly. Yoko Ono's work is located within the context of every day violence against women. The *Mattress Performance* reflects threads of the radical work of feminist artists like Ono, Abramović's, Lacy, and Mendieta who use "the attention-getting power of art to reach the public and press alike and try to create change" (Finkle). *Carry That Weight* divulges from previous work in that Sulkowicz "centers a body reconstituted after violation (by both her rapist and a legal system that protects him) and the pain of that reconstitution" (Edwards). The *Mattress Performance* communicates the unspeakable violence of rape and rhetorically defies burgeoning gender norms and rape culture.

As a work of endurance art, the *Mattress Performance* responds to the ineptitude and negligence of the CU administration. Fellow students, faculty, and staff are of paramount importance to the *Mattress Performance* because they become part of the art work as bystanders who act or fail to act. When Sulkowicz walks through the busy spaces of the university with a 50-pound dorm styled mattress, CU community members are confronted with Sulkowicz's performance (and social construction) of trauma in the public spaces of the university. The *Mattress Performance* politicizes Sulkowicz's experience of rape and confronts members of the CU community with the illustrative reminder of her traumatic experience in the shared spaces of the university. With the mattress, *Carry That Weight* repeatedly interrupts the cultural silence on CSA and visibly communicates "Rapists Go Here" (NewsHouse Staff).

¹² In 2012, Suzanne Lacy updated her piece in front of the LAPD's Deaton Auditorium contributing in part to a new anti-violence campaign (Finkle).

Protesting while Multiracial in the Male Dominated University

Research on sexual violence related to multiracial identities is scarce. Currently, colleges and universities are not required to report instances of sexual violence by race/ethnicity to meet Title IX requirements. I will be using the most commonly cited statistics (that extend beyond the campus) in an effort to elucidate the magnitude of the issue.¹³ The American Association of University Women (AAUW) finds, “19 percent of white women have been raped in their lifetime, compared with 15 percent of Hispanic women, 22 percent of Black women, 27 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women, and 34 percent of women who identify as multiracial” (Bakare).¹⁴ The CDC further estimates that in a lifetime, 64.1% of multiracial women have experienced acts sexual violence other than rape (CDC). In *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Colleen Murphy argues that one of the challenges of sexual assault is the low rate of reporting by minority students. A lack of reporting instances of CSA restricts the value of commonly cited statistics (e.g. 1-in-4 or 1-in-5 women are affected by sexual violence). Women of color report far less frequently than women who are white because of the racist history people of color have endured with institutions in power.

Murphy’s article briefly comments on Sulkowicz’s *Mattress Performance*. She writes,

Columbia University, for example, was home to one of the most high-profile sexual-assault debates last year, when Sulkowicz, a senior, carried a mattress around the campus to protest how administrators had handled her alleged rape. The focus on cases like that one can leave minority students on the outside looking in. Many of the most prominent faces in conversations about campus sexual assault have been straight, liberal, white women, said Sarah Merriman, a

¹³ For more reading, see *Intersections of Identity and Sexual Violence on Campus: Centering Minortized Students’ Experiences* by Jessica C. Harris and Chris Linder

¹⁴ The AAUW, for example, does not even report on sexual violence against Asian women in their section on “lingering trauma” that disproportionately affects marginalized communities (Bakare). Another statistics of Multiracial women that measures “rape in [their] lifetime,” is approximately 24.4%. For Asian/Pacific Islander women 6.8%; for Latina women 11.9%; for African-American women 18.8%; For American Indian/Alaska Native women 43.1%; and for Caucasian women 17.9% (Connecticut Alliance to end Sexual Violence).

communications coordinator at Students Active for Ending Rape, or Safer.
(Murphy)

To an extent, Murphy is correct. Minority students rarely (if ever) see the stories of other women of color in the media. On the other hand, Murphy problematically assumes that Sulkowicz is a straight, liberal, white woman without any explanation. Murphy seems to rely on two intertwining assumptions: (1) Because Sulkowicz is light skinned, she must be white; and (2) merely because Sulkowicz is privileged, she must be white. Sulkowicz *is* a woman of color, and many college and university students do relate to Sulkowicz’s story and see themselves represented.¹⁵

Sulkowicz was raised in New York City by board certified psychiatrist Kerry Sulkowicz and Sandra Leong. Both of her parents attained graduate degrees, and Sulkowicz then attended Columbia University for her entire undergraduate degree. Undoubtedly, Sulkowicz benefits from both economic privilege and the ability to “pass as white.” The ability to even attend an Ivy League school is a significant economic advantage—or at the least a privilege to access the richest quality of education. The extent to which one can resist cultural hegemonic discourses is more accessible to someone of a higher class with access to higher education. Secondly, white passing is a form of privilege wherein one can blend in with a group they are not racially and/or culturally a part of (Daniel 49).¹⁶ Murphy’s assumptions about Sulkowicz’s “layers of privilege” fail to acknowledge the intersectional ways individuals are influenced by systemic oppression—

¹⁵ Note: To a degree, the research on Sulkowicz’s racial/ethnic background is limited insofar as I have not been able to have a direct conversation with her about how she identifies. Sulkowicz rarely, if ever, discusses her racial or ethnic background in the media. Her father, Kerry Sulkowicz is white and her mother, Sandra Leong is Asian but it is not uncommon for multiracial individuals to identify predominantly with one race/ethnicity. In some cases, it may be a strategic act of survival to identify more closely one race/ethnicity over another (See Muñoz “Disidentifications”).

¹⁶ While Daniels defines “white passing” with respect to Blackness, white passing does not necessarily have to be within a Black/white binary and can instead be a lived reality for many different racial backgrounds.

or the lived oppression and suppression of voices of multiracial people. Although Sulkowicz does not discuss her race in the *Mattress Performance*, ignoring the issue of race/ethnicity all together merely repeats the cycle of institutionalized erasure of difference.¹⁷

The reputation of Ivy League schools often shields the reality of student experiences with CSA. Title IX violations feature a large majority of U.S. Ivy league schools—schools that only recently began permitting women to attend. “Recent allegations of poorly handled reports of sexual abuse at [major institutions like] Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Princeton” is often met with a “veil of protection” from wealthy donors (Marine). Susan Marine reflects on her time working at two Ivy League institutions, Harvard and Dartmouth. She writes,

In my final year at Dartmouth, I began to notice a troubling pattern in the makeup of students reporting sexual violence—nearly one-third of the reports I received within a 3-year span of time were made by Asian and Asian American women, primarily East Asian descent. (Marine 62)

Relatedly, Western countries—and more specifically western white men—historically fetishize Asian women (e.g., pornography, mail-order brides) (Mohanty, Russo, and Torres). As a multiracial woman, Sulkowicz is not only at a higher risk for rape because of her gender, but she also is at a higher risk because she is both a white *and* Asian woman.

As long as institutions of higher education continue to address the issue of rape ahistorically and apolitically, women of color will continually be negated in prevention programs and efforts. “Sexual assault against women of color is an attack on their identities as women *and* on their racial identities” (Olive 1). Approaching sexual violence intersectionally means including the voices of marginalized groups to work towards eradicating rape from public

¹⁷ As a recent example, Senator Mark Kirk mocks Representative Tammy Duckworth (who is of mixed race—half white, half Thai-Chinese) claiming that he “forgot” and couldn’t comprehend how her Thai ancestors could fight alongside George Washington (Burke).

culture. College campuses are often the largest culprits of erasing racial difference by over-institutionalizing it (e.g. “diversity programs”) and/or not addressing race at all. In either scenario, whiteness continues to operate as the normative experience *and* as the only “true” survivors/victims of sexual violence. Performing protest as a survivor/victim of sexual assault is always already a risk. Performing protest as a person of color can be emotionally and physically deleterious as well as life-threatening.

Performing Social Protest in the *Mattress Performance*

Performance can be viewed as experience and experience can be understood *as* performance (Madison and Hamera). In Sulkowicz’s opinion, her performance artwork is at times an experience and in other moments a performance: “It’s just my art work” and “It’s the same thing as if a woman drew a portrait of their rape. It’s a personal thing that they’re doing to try to overcome what has happened to them” (“How art can be used to address Rape Culture”). In the *Mattress Performance*, personal experience doubles as performative artwork and challenges both the separation of private experience from public expression and the physical and discursive status quo norms of higher education. For Sulkowicz, *Carry That Weight* is “an endurance art piece” that “includes elements of protest,” but is not intended to be a protest that inspires a series of protests or a social movement (Taylor “Columbia student carrying mattress”). In an interview with *Elle Magazine* online, Sulkowicz explains further, “It’s an art piece because there’s a lot of symbolism and meaning that using the word ‘protest’ would ignore. I’m not carrying a picture of my rapist; I’m just carrying a mattress” (Duan). Sulkowicz’s own words also explain art as “made out of necessity” (Sulkowicz “Carry That Weight” Interview)—a necessity that stands in for the necessity to heal and to find or create networks of support.

Social protest develops out of necessity in similar ways to art. Art is not always but can be a form of social protest (e.g. *Carry That Weight*). Rhetorical scholarship on social protest explores “how symbols—words, signs, images, music, and bodies—operate to shape our perceptions of reality and invite us to act accordingly” (Morris and Browne 1). Morris and Browne argue that scholarship on social protest requires attention to the “presences and absences” in relation to material conditions and the lived experience (1). Examples include “bodies in pain or pleasure, speeches delivered at a rally, protest marches, movement encampments, letters to the editor, march-ins, self-immolations, media sound bites, (...) and many other theoretical practices that are seen as types of symbols” (1). Sulkowicz’s *Carry That Weight* includes various aspects of social protest. Not only is the protest performed in the social reality structure of the university, it also hails and inspires collective groups to participate in protest, albeit unintentionally. Onlookers in the CU community are welcome to help Sulkowicz carry her mattress and/or create protests influenced by *Carry That Weight*, like the Carry That Weight National Day of Action.¹⁸

In his 1971 landmark essay *The Ego-Function of the life of Rhetoric of Protest*, Richard B. Gregg argues, “The rhetoric of contemporary protest can be more fully accounted for by considering how it operates as ‘self-addressed’ discourse” (44). In *Carry That Weight*, Sulkowicz represents her primary audience—the self. Sulkowicz constitutes her “self-hood through expression; that is, with establishing, defining, and affirming one’s self-hood as one engages in a rhetorical act” (Gregg 44). Discourse directed at one’s self as the primary audience does not mean that Sulkowicz is not also implicating or interpolating others. In other words, the rhetoric of social protest is simultaneously outward-directed (Morris III and Browne) and

¹⁸ More information on the National Day of Action can be found here:
<http://columbiaspectator.com/news/2014/10/30/carry-weight-national-day-action-columbia-and-beyond/>

inward-directed (Greg) as it constructs multiple audiences in the changing spaces of the university. The nature of outward-directed discourse in *Carry That Weight* is explicitly aimed at Columbia University as she displays her grievances with their inaction and injustice. In an inward sense, *Mattress Performance* is a performative (and repetitive) space for her own healing from the trauma of sexual assault.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's *The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron* argues that women's liberation is an attack on the reality structures that sustain women's oppression. The movement, Campbell wrote, was an attack on "the entire psychosocial reality" (71). The psychosocial reality of *Carry That Weight* performs with and against university culture, includes CU's mishandling and suppression of her trauma as legitimate, and negotiates her own relation with the traumatic aftermath of her assault. At the end of her essay, Campbell says, "[W]hatever liberation is, it will be something different for each woman as liberty is something different for each person. What each woman shares, however, is the paradox of having to 'fight an enemy who has outposts in your head'" (73). While written for different goals, Campbell and Greg's essays help explain how the rhetoric of social protests can involve both internalized and externalized purposes and strategies.

The relationship between performance (and performance art), embodied experience, and the rhetoric of social protest are each strong elements of the *Mattress Performance*. Sulkowicz's endurance art cannot be understood only as performance art because it would overlook the ways *Carry That Weight* positions itself against the injustices of Columbia University. *Carry That Weight* also cannot be understood only as social protest because it is a particular type of protest—one that chooses to use confrontational forms of art to spark collective action and solidarity amongst onlookers of the performance. Finally, analyzing *Carry That Weight* without

accounting for Sulkowicz's lived experience as a rape survivor of color would not only delegitimize her experience as important but also fail to understand the rhetorical and performative power of displaying one's vulnerability in the unsupportive public spaces of university culture.

Transforming the Mattress and Materializing Trauma

In the *Mattress Performance*, Sulkowicz uses a navy blue XL dormitory mattress to symbolize and communicate both trauma and strength. *Carry That Weight* is symbolic of “the way that I’ve brought my story from a place that I keep secret out into the public, I think sort of mirrors carrying the mattress out into the light for everyone to see” (Sulkowicz Interview by Amy Goodman). Typically, light represents a sense of hope or clarity whereas the dark symbolizes danger or privacy in the context of sexual violence. Bringing the mattress “out into the light” is a performative act of social protest that unveils and contributes to the consciousness of the discursive public sphere.

The *Mattress Performance* also constructs her as a both an agentic subject and one is “agentless.” Sulkowicz explains,

There's this really strange dialectic going on where I'm powerless because the school has done these things to me, my rapist has done these things to me, the police have treated me like crap and ultimately, I'm forced too—if I want this education—to continue going to school with my rapist. At the same time, because of this piece, for example, all of public safety at my school had to have an emergency meeting with they were told ‘you're gonna get fired if you don't pick up Emma at the shuttle stop.’ There is this weird way in which, I'm powerless and powerful at the same time. (Sulkowicz “Carry That Weight” Interview)

Although Sulkowicz admits that she operates between the spaces of *powerless* and *powerful*, she performs power. Lugging a 50-pound mattress across campus, upstairs, and through bus aisles

(when the busses do not ignore her) not only takes physical power, but it also requires the mental power to endure. *Carry That Weight* brings the mattress into unwelcome spaces and simultaneously brings the vulnerability of her body into those spaces.

The mattress becomes a symbol of power—physical and emotional strength—that materializes being violated in one of the “most intimate and private places” in Sulkowicz’s life (Democracy Now!). We live in a culture that defines the intimate as the vulnerable—as if vulnerability is negative, as if vulnerability is something we ought to avoid. *Carry That Weight* utilizes the intimate as a tool of resistance and building solidarity. Pratt and Rosner argue, “Intimacy does not reside solely in the private sphere; it is infused with worldliness. Nor it is purely personal: intimacy takes on specific political, social, and cultural meanings in different contexts” (Pratt & Rosner 3). The privacy of her bedroom—and the activities, memories, or rejuvenating that happens there—is displayed across campus corridors and walkways, inside cafeterias and classrooms, and through crammed bus isles and building hallways. At the same time that intimacy can be a powerful and connect to others, intimacy—if used against you—can leave you powerless. The privacy of her bedroom and her body collapses the discursive and socially constructed reality that there is a public/private sphere. The once personal space of her bedroom—a space that she was able to choose to open to classmates, friends, and love interests—was violently transformed without her permission. The space of her bedroom is no longer uninterrupted or safe from harm.

The use of a dorm mattress performativity signifies the disruption between the public and private sphere (wherein the personal becomes political) through an enactment of agency. Rape is not just a “topic to discuss,” but a bodily experience with real consequences. If spoken out loud, survivors/victims have the social power to resist and transform the discursive realities of the

university. Sulkowicz tells, and re-tells, her story each time she performs her trauma via the *Mattress Performance*. Like her private space of the bedroom, the mattress now becomes a symbol of the politically and ideologically fraught division between the private and public discursive realms. As an embodied protestor, she must work to communicate her experience to herself and others—to speak her rape out loud, to name it, to see it, to relive it. Because of her rape, Sulkowicz has a perspective that others (non-victims/non-survivors) cannot grasp. Her embodied knowledge about the physical and emotional traumatization of sexual violence becomes essential to eradicating rape in the future. A future without rape requires us to understand our present moment of rape.

At the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler's Center for Feminist Art, an audience member explained to Sulkowicz during a Q&A, "You were able to transform that experience into my consciousness and awareness in a way that I have not experienced that event in my personal life" (Sulkowicz "A Conversation"). As an embodied protestor who has lived through rape and continues to live through the aftermath of her attack, Sulkowicz's *Mattress Performance* raises consciousness merely by telling her story. Sulkowicz's retelling of her own experience as intimately tied to her person raises the consciousness of others who may have similar experiences, be in close proximity as an onlooker, or have read about her story. C-R also transpired in a similar way. C-R groups traditionally involved a small leaderless group of women who shared their private experiences (Campbell; Dubriwny). The act of retelling in C-R groups enables members to identify common threads of common experiences, construct networks of support, and can come to better understand their experiences. Sulkowicz's unintentional rallying of the CU community and college communities nation-wide, reminds allies and other survivor-activists that our work is not done as injustices continue.

Sulkowicz's *Mattress Performance* also verbalizes and visibilizes her trauma to the public sphere of the university. A mattress, is a material object by which we can see, feel, and hear as Sulkowicz struggles to carry the mattress, drops it, and drags it up stairs. As she fills public spaces with her body as connected to the mattress, she constructs social self as a survivor-activist who publically displays her experience as "theory in the flesh" (Moraga 23). The heaviness of the mattress symbolizes Sulkowicz's trauma into a material object. The mattress replays a physical and emotional struggle as she walks through Columbia's campus each day. As more than a catchy mantra, *Carry That Weight* allows onlookers to view the mattress as a literal weight as well as to equate the symbolic with the lived burden of sexual violence.

In an interview on Melissa Harris-Perry's show at MSNBC, Professor Salamishah Tillet applauds Sulkowicz for her efforts while also pointing out,

The reason that she has to turn to art (...) is because the system has failed. The legal system has failed. And so, in many ways, the biggest and most important form of self-expression is your own story and carrying the mattress as a form of protest and resistance. ("How art can be used to address rape culture")

Explaining an intimate event such as rape is not only difficult to put in words, but it also is rarely received positively from societal institutions that perpetuate victim blaming (e.g. police, media outlets, institutions of higher education). There is not a language structure that can fully capture or communicate the mental and emotional pain of sexual violence—let alone the physical pain. Since systems continuously fail survivors/victims of sexual violence *and* because Sulkowicz can never fully communicate the degree of her trauma, the mattress metaphorically symbolizes that which is unspeakable. In choosing art as a mode of expression and mobilizing that art with elements of social protest, Sulkowicz presents the discussion of sexual violence on college campuses in a new light that restarts conversation and confronts guilty parties who failed to provide support for their minority students.

What emerges from *Carry That Weight* is the value of embodied protestors like Sulkowicz who not only performs protest because of her experience, but also who—because of her experience—must perform protest to engage in the public discourse. As an embodied protestor, Sulkowicz directly clashes with the discursive norms of the university process of gender misconduct. Akin to our legal system, dominant discourses of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ableism in the white male spaces of the university prevent some voices from having a chance to speak out without social, political, economic, and bodily consequences. As an embodied protestor, Sulkowicz refuses to acknowledge the division between “private and public” and puts her body on the line in exchange for social transformation. Sulkowicz materializes her trauma to make it communicable and in an effort to symbolize her refusal to participate in the discursive absence of a conversation on sexual violence.

From an Individual Performance to Collective Participation: C-R and Bystanders

On the surface, *Carry That Weight* is an endurance artwork as Sulkowicz intended. The outcome of the performance, however, becomes about more than *Carry That Weight* as art to represent collective responses to act (or not act) in university spaces during situations of CSA. As radical feminist art, the performance plays a critical role in disrupting the university’s “business as normal” culture and invites bystanders to participate. In some sense, it is like folk art, rooted in tradition and/or community. In indigenous communities, folk art is about “carrying on and carrying through tradition during a time of great change. There is stability to be found in traditions and keeping the past alive” (Frank). The *Mattress Performance*, similar to folk art, is invested in the culture (and the cultural erasure of) minoritized groups. Speaking through art and carrying on ideals of tradition and/or community creates stability for many groups who seek

solidarity through strife and struggle. *Carry That Weight* is presented to the local community of Columbia University to act in solidarity with Sulkowicz.

The performative artwork symbolizes happenings of rape and the trauma as a result. In this way, the performance mirrors “bystander intervention,” which tests the culture of complicity in CSA. A bystander is an individual who observes “or witness[es] the conditions that perpetuate violence. They are not directly involved but have the choice to intervene, speak up, or do something about it” (New York State Department of Health 3). A bystander is “present and thus potentially in position to discourage, prevent, or interrupt an incident” (New York State Department of Health 3). Bystander intervention programs attempt to teach others what to do and how to act in perpetrator victim situations that may help prevent sexual violence. *Carry That Weight* is an educational tool that operates like bystander intervention programs that encourage the empowerment of others to step in and act. However, bystander intervention programs have failed to portray the lived experience of rape and have not decreased the number of rapes on college campuses. The institutionalization of bystander intervention programs address student populations as monolithic as well as negates different causes, effects, and experiences of CSA. *Carry That Weight* presents an entire picture of CSA in displaying and communicating the pain of the past assault while pairing it with the present trauma. In this way, *Carry That Weight* presents the complexities of living after rape and heralds fellow students to share the burden.

A major effect of Sulkowicz’s *Mattress Performance* is the collective responses to act (or to remain inactive) as Sulkowicz walks through public spaces (e.g. walkways, buildings, and dormitories) of Columbia University. Carrying the mattress in highly visible spaces communicates a call to “bystander intervention” paired with the lived experience of a fellow student. Typically, bystander intervention programs involve faculty and students sitting in a

training session (e.g. student life organizations) or watching videos and responding to catchy quizzes online before coming to the campus. Sulkowicz, along with her performance, rhetorically communicates defiance and rebellion against the public sphere of the Ivy League as well as the inadequacy of their educational campaigns like *Its On Us*.

In Sulkowicz's *Mattress Performance*, participation happens in myriad ways and is always temporary. In other words, there is an expiration period on their assistance from the moment wherein they begin helping to the moment they stop. After arriving at their final destination or Sulkowicz's, the collective performance ends. Each time Sulkowicz picks up her mattress, the opportunity for collective participation is renewed. There is no guarantee that the same people who provided assistance previously to her class will help once again. Even if onlookers who have helped Sulkowicz previously offer their continued support, the moment in which they are helping (and the destination to which they are going) is a new moment and act of participation. The oscillation between an individual or collective performance constructs solidarity as essential for survivors/victims of CSA to survive.

Participation in *Carry That Weight* is performed not only by members of the university community. Although the "public spaces" of the university are not open to publics outside of Columbia, media interviews and observations transmit this information beyond university walls and have a unique role in constructing the purpose of the *Mattress Performance*. For example, *Elle Magazine* shadowed Sulkowicz on campus for an entire day and asked her questions and reported on where she was going while holding the mattress. What is more interesting, though, is Sulkowicz's communication with media outlets. Across media channels, her story rarely if at all changes, even as her performance through collective groups does. She even mentions that she came to a point where she was merely repeating the same answers to the media over and over

again.¹⁹ Her repetition of conversation with media outlets mirrors her performance that happens day in and day out.

Another form of participation, direct participation on the university campus, emerges during Sulkowicz's time carrying the mattress. Sulkowicz's third rule of engagement does not allow her to ask for help, but only to accept if offered. However, as Sulkowicz discusses with Roberta Smith, people do not always communicate with her. She says,

I think people, even when they're trying to be helpful, though they have a little trouble trying to understand boundaries. Like, if I'm carrying the mattress by myself and someone just jumps in and helps me, they actually are knocking me off balance cause if they jump up behind me and push the mattress up, they're actually throwing it over me and I've dropped it a few times...just cause they don't understand that like, you need to communicate...Well it's obvious that like, this is the language of consent, like they need to communicate with me before they jump in and help. ("A Conversation with Sulkowicz and Roberta Smith")

While explaining what it is like to have people jump in to help, there was a visible moment of realization wherein Sulkowicz understood her participants of the project as literally and metaphorically performing the language of consent. *Carry That Weight* depicts how rape culture and language use is embedded in our everyday actions. The collective participation in Sulkowicz's *Carry That Weight* is nonconsensual since she cannot ask for help. Through the politicization of her embodied experience, onlookers at times participate in *Carry That Weight* nonconsensually. Like bystander intervention programs, *Carry That Weight* encourages people to jump in and offer their help to prevent sexual assault and/or rape.

Over the course of the *Mattress Performance*, the endurance art becomes about more than an individual display of vulnerability and resistance to a collective participatory experience.

¹⁹ The repetition of her storytelling becomes relevant later as it relates to the repetition of her performance – a repetition that only Sulkowicz can participate in.

Carry That Weight becomes a collective performance of struggle and solidarity as onlookers help physically carry the mattress and/or create protests inspired by Sulkowicz's work (e.g. "Carry That Weight Together"). In raising consciousness and politicizing her experience, *Carry That Weight* radically rejects which spaces of the university rape should be talked about and to what extent. Sulkowicz remains the constant in the *Mattress Performance* while others are only fleeting, temporary participants. For Sulkowicz, then, she performs the aftermath of her trauma over and over again which can symbolize the frequency that CSA happens. When new people jump in to help, it may be only their first time, but *Carry That Weight* illustrates that rape continues to happen. For Sulkowicz, although there are different participants, the repetitive questions from the media, the repetitive gestures of lugging the mattress around campus, and the repetitive nature of people jumping in to help and throwing off her balance, continuously remind her that she is always carrying the literal and emotional weight of her rape.

Conclusion

The *Mattress Performance* utilizes elements of the performance, social protest, and the intimate. As a moment of unlimited possibility, *Carry That Weight* performatively reconstructs societal discourses about campus sexual assault as it is intimately tied to one's personhood—their embodied experience. Rape occurs to individual bodies, bodies that have been read, misread, marked, violated, and deemed expendable. Women of color are somehow less worthy of privacy and bodily autonomy. Women of color are not "true victims" because they are "too provocative," "too submissive," or "always desiring." In her embodied protest, Sulkowicz's performance of radical vulnerability, the materialization of her trauma, and the subversive elements of self-care and consciousness raising, communicate the culpability of CU in her rape

and the aftermath of it. As I've argued thus far, *Carry That Weight* as a performative endurance artwork, radically displays the rhetorical power of survivors/victims embodied experiences. The oscillation between performance and social protest crafts a new rhetorical future without rape—one where institutions do not have power of survivors/victims of sexual violence, a future where survivors/victims are believed.

During the course of Sulkowicz's performance, the CU administration issued a statement to the *New York Daily News* regarding gender-based misconduct and sexual assault: "The University respects the choice of any member of our community to peacefully express personal or political views on this and other issues" (Taylor "Columbia student carrying mattress"). CU claims to stand behind their students as protestors, but does not at all mention how they choose to address happenings of sexual violence on their campus. In their memo to the university, CU fails to address the historical and material realities of living through rape. For the CU administration, the mattress in *Carry That Weight* represents a source of bad publicity and frustration as it amplifies and "televises" the administrations shortcomings. CU's support of Sulkowicz is merely lip service to the public in order to avoid criticism and blemish the name of their Ivy League institution.

At the senior class day graduation ceremony in May 2015, Sulkowicz ended her *Mattress Performance*. Alongside a few friends and the cheering of some classmates, she walked her mattress across the graduation stage against the wishes of the university. Reporting on the event for the *New York Times*, Kate Taylor writes,

Ms. Sulkowicz said that as students were lined up before the ceremony in Alfred Lerner Hall, a woman approached her and asked her to put the mattress in a room in the hall for the duration of the ceremony. Ms. Sulkowicz, who had stated she would not walk in the ceremony if she could not carry the mattress, refused. ("Mattress Protest as Columbia University Continues into Graduation")

After walking across the stage, “President Lee C. Bollinger turned away as she crossed in front of him, failing to shake her hand, as he did with other graduates” (Taylor). While Columbia administration blamed it on the mattress and Bollinger’s “inability to see her,” the message was clear, Bollinger did not support her need to bring the mattress across stage. As promised, Sulkowicz carried her mattress until graduation because her assailant was not expelled from campus (nor did he leave). The endurance performance *Carry That Weight* spanned across approximately nine months, and Sulkowicz was seen in campus walkways, buildings, cafeterias, and classrooms carrying her mattress through sunny days, freezing days, rainy days, and snow.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, the *Mattress Performance* became a high-profile case that all news outlets were covering. Numerous blog pieces, social media posts, and scholars/researchers sought to chime in on what the performance was about and whether or not it was ethical. On the topic of race, however, mainstream media was silent. Thus far, I have argued for the interdisciplinary use of concepts from performance studies on the value of embodied epistemology and the rhetoric of social protest to truly critique Sulkowicz’s performance.

While it is important to understand what the purpose of *Carry That Weight* is, it is far more useful to articulate how it is so. Minority students have always had a difficult time on college campuses—to say the least. Colleges/Universities fail to have the necessary infrastructure to support their student survivor/victims of sexual violence. When institutions of higher education do produce “programming” for the prevention of sexual assault, it is typically monolithic in nature and treats all students as if their experiences are or will be the same. Gender and racial minority groups who are affected by sexual violence are impacted differently and victimized more frequently. We need to move towards specific and material solutions and support for our most vulnerable student populations. Until we do, survivors/activists of campus

sexual assault will need to keep telling their stories, building in coalition with other students, and resisting the institutionalization and erasure of their embodied difference.

Writing to be heard: Wagatwe Wanjuki's Campus Sexual Assault Activism

If we members of the movement truly want change, we cannot continue business as usual; in short, playing nice with powerful academic institutions and the government as they function now will not lead to the transformative change needed on our college campuses” -Wagatwe Wanjuki

Wagatwe Wanjuki was sexually assaulted and raped repeatedly by another Tufts University Student during a two-year relationship. Wanjuki filed a report with Tufts University in 2008, but soon realized that the administration did not intend to investigate the incident. As a response, she began reaching out to peers, rallying together survivors, and speaking out in protest against campus rape culture. To this day, Wanjuki argues that “students, survivor-activist[s], and educators don’t have to settle for ineffective bureaucratic method” (Wanjuki viii). Wanjuki was expelled soon after the assault. Tufts University administration claims her expulsion was due to her poor academic performance—even though her grades were satisfactory to meet graduation expectations (Wanjuki “After Tufts Found”). She was 11 credits away from the completion of her bachelor’s degree.

Almost a decade later, Wanjuki’s reflexive honesty about her lived experience influenced public discourse on campus sexual assault (CSA). In her TEDx Talk “The (Literal) Cost of not Believing Survivors,” Wanjuki urges institutions, communities, and the larger society to take responsibility in “mak[ing] sure that we’re not exacerbating the causes of trauma” (Wanjuki, “The (Literal) Cost”). Outside of campus speeches and workshops, Wanjuki is also a major voice for women of color in her public blogs, mainstream and alternative news outlets, and in her social media persona and activism. In each space, Wanjuki rhetorically challenges societal privileging of whiteness in the United States by publicizing her criticisms of several systems (e.g. higher education, court systems, police) that socially construct and profit from systemic oppression of raced and classed bodies. While Wanjuki is no longer a college student, her past,

present, and future plans as a survivor-activist embody protest by narrating her lived experience to raise consciousness about the material ills of Campus Sexual Violence (CSA). For Wanjuki, her story is her activism and her activism is collaborative. She is not only fighting the justice she deserves, but she also focuses her attention on building a bridge—to borrow from Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa—for other women of color and CSA survivors/victims.

In this project, I analyze Wagatwe Wanjuki's multidimensional acts of resistance to campus sexual assault. While she is not necessarily participating in a protest or producing an art piece like Emma Sulkowicz's *Mattress Performance*, Wanjuki's practices of storytelling and consciousness-raising (C-R) communicates the necessity of an embodied rhetoric in acts of resistance. In writing on feminist rhetorics and embodiment, Maureen Johnson and others emphasize the connections between rhetoric and embodiment. "To think about rhetoric, we must think about bodies. . . . By recognizing the inherent relationship between embodiment and rhetoric, we can make *all bodies* and the power dynamics invested in their (in) visibility visible" (Johnson et. al 39; emphasis theirs). The commitments of this thesis thus far have been to feature survivor-activists who have lived through trauma and embody their struggle as they fight for social change. If we perceive the world through our bodily experiences, if our perception of the world is influenced in any way by the bodies we inhabit, if our interactions are impacted by our bodies—whether positively or negatively—then rhetoricians and communication scholars alike ought to study meaning-making and world-making as inextricably tied to our positionality and embodiment in the world.

Research on sexual violence ought to account for difference. For me, "difference" includes but is not limited to race, gender, ability, or class. To clarify, I am not arguing to pay attention to difference in the way that universities institutionalize the term "diversity," but rather

to recognize the intersectional ways power influences our everyday lives. Lisa A. Flores argues that Chicana feminists employ

a rhetoric of difference, in which Chicana feminists construct an identity that runs counter to that created for them by either Anglos or Mexicans, Chicana feminists begin the process of carving out a space for themselves where they can break down constraints imposed by other cultures and groups. (143)

Although not a Chicana Feminist, Wanjuki began raising consciousness about CSA and women of color online. The Internet has been, and continues to be, a space where she can share her story and organize. Not only has Wanjuki crafted a discursive space to reinvigorate the public discussion on CSA, she also has vehemently dismantled the rationale and white-washing behind publicized narratives of CSA.

In what follows, I first provide a contextual, intersectional history of sexual violence. After describing Wanjuki's experience at Tufts University—gathered from interviews, personal (public) writing, and campus talks—I then argue that C-R provides an essential avenue for political engagement that marginalized groups are excluded from. As an embodied protestor, Wanjuki raises consciousness about racialized sexual violence to craft a discursive space wherein she can speak of her lived experience and simultaneously critique the systemic oppression that affects women of color and CSA survivors/victims. The reflexivity of her past and present experiences of racialized sexual violence and silencing mirrors her past, present, and future directions of C-R and activism.

Black Women, the Myth of the Black Male Rapist and Institutionalized Oppression

CSA prevention fails to eliminate rape because it overlooks the historical roots and contemporary connections to the system of colonization and slavery in the United States. The Title IX investigation tracker shows that approximately 318 CSA cases still remain open and

only 62 cases have been resolved in some capacity—whether evidence was insufficient, the case has been dismissed, or a decision was made (“Title IX Tracking Sexual Assault Investigations”). Attempts to be more inclusive on college campuses are often “identity-neutral and power-evasive educational strategies” (Linder 73). Chris Linder argues that if we are to interrupt the dominant narrative, “activists [and educators—as he later mentions] must explicitly name dynamics of sexual violence” that aren’t represented in the mainstream media. A historical approach to the prevention of CSA ignores the “racist history of white communities creating and perpetuating fear of Black men as perpetrators of sexual violence” (Linder 73). Specifically, only addressing the popular narrative of sexual violence—as created by binge drinking, fraternity culture, or athletics—fails to account for identity, history, and interlocking systems of domination (Harris and Linder 10). While much of the history on sexual violence seems distant from the issues of college campuses, colonialism and slavery still inform structures of today’s colleges and universities.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence were used as a tool of terrorization and economic control throughout colonization, slavery, and the Victorian era (Linder; Freedman; Smith). Black women were considered property to their slave owners, and indigenous women were considered “savages” by white colonizers (Linder; Giddings). Racism, as Angela Davis argues, “Has always drawn strength from its ability to encourage sexual coercion” (177). The violent and racist act of lynching, for example, became a form of control afforded to white men that prevented free Black men and women from attaining any socioeconomic success. Lynching was not always a primary tool of enslavement—because slaves were economically valuable to their white owners—but it became a valuable political tool after emancipation (Davis 184-85). Angela Davis explains,

[L]ynchings, reserved during slavery for the white abolitionists, were proving to be a valuable political weapon. Before lynching could be consolidated as a popularly accepted institution, however, its savagery and its horrors had to be convincingly justified. These were the circumstances which spawned the myth of the Black rapist—for the rape charge turned out to be the most powerful of several attempts to justify the lynching of black people. The institution of lynching, in turn, complemented by the continued rape of Black women, became an essential ingredient of the postwar strategy of racist terror. In this way, the brutal exploitation of Black labor was guaranteed, and after the betrayal of Reconstruction, the political domination of Black people as a whole was assured. (185)

The social construction of black men as rapists justified lynching because “who would dare defend a rapist?” as Angela Davis asks (187). “Reliance on rape as an instrument of white-supremacist terror predates by several centuries the institution of lynching” (Davis 183). Although, lynching was not always conducted because of rape, it often stood in as a reason not to oppose the lynching of Black men.

As Gerda Lerner explains, the myth of the Black male rapist did not only affect Black men: “The myth of the black rapist of white women is the twin of the myth of the bad black woman—both designed to apologize for and facilitate the continued exploitation of black men and women”²⁰ (Davis 174). If Black men had uncontrollable “animal-like” urges for white women, then all Black people are invested in bestiality (Davis 182). Black women, moreover, were viewed as “loose women” that Black men wouldn’t settle for. Even though this image of Black women meant their accusations of rape lacked legitimacy, they were not silent. In actuality, Black women were some of the very first anti-rape activists and fought to testify in the public courts (Davis).

²⁰ See more in Gerda Lerner’s *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*.

Black women had to resist more than just the fictional image of the Black man as a rapist. They also were not legally protected in the same ways as white women because Black women were seen as a part of an “inferior” (and de-humanized) race of people. During the Victorian era of the early 1800s, politicians established laws that protected purity and chastity—which roughly translated to laws that protect white women (and whiteness). Purity laws and “seduction laws” were yet another way to sexually devalue women of color and demonize the Black male rapist as an alleged threat to the purity of white women. In *Redefining Rape*, Estelle Freedman explains that seduction laws which centered on the chastity of white women, “applied in cases when a woman had not consented but had not experienced the level of physical violence required to prove rape” (43). Explaining further, Chris Linder writes,

Seduction laws emerged from concerns about white women’s chastity and virtue and centered on white fathers’ economic stability. Patriarchal values insisted that white women were fragile and needed men (their fathers or husbands) to protect them and required that women remain pure to allow their fathers to find a suitable husband for their daughters. (62)

If white men were to protect white women, who were thought of as fragile and allegedly at risk of rape, they needed to be hypervigilant and take matters into their own hands (e.g. lynching). Laws protecting white women justified the ease at which white men could sexually violate Black women. Black women were already viewed as “promiscuous” and in respect to white women, they were also unworthy of protection. Black women’s bodies are hypersexualized and cultural depictions of black women view them as ‘submissive’ or ‘slutty’ (Freedman; McGuire; Harris and Linder). Like the U.S. systems of colonization and slavery, white men were given an all access pass to the bodies of Black women and rarely (if ever) faced any consequences.

Today, whiteness is still protected. Within the spaces of the university, the celebration of whiteness operates implicitly—and at times assumptively or explicitly—in each attempt to create

institutionalized programs that generalize students as “the same” (e.g. rape prevention programs, mental health programs). Labor from disenfranchised people of color is exploited in some of the lowest paying jobs that often erases them from the busiest scenes of the university (e.g. janitorial early morning/night crews, landscaping crews, and food court staff). Not only is whiteness protected within university spaces, but so are white college males. White men expect to freely engage in “20 minutes of action,” as Brock Turner’s father once casually stated. As a contributing writer for *Rewire*, Wanjuki explains the pressing need to recognize the severe and oppressive constraints put on certain bodies:

The fact of the matter is that gender-based violence is a serious issue for Black women, who are on the whole raped at higher rates than white women. Almost 19 percent of black women are raped in their lifetimes (compared to 17.7 percent of white women), and about 40% of Black women report enduring coercive contact of a sexual nature by age 18. Yet, when we see the faces of sexual assault survivors, we most often see white, cisgender women . . . we see, literally, the types of bodies over which we are supposed to be wringing our hands because they are most valuable: thin, beautiful white young women. (Wanjuki “Is There No Room”)

Similarly, Angela Davis challenges our assumptions of rape as a “by-product of maleness.” She asks, “[H]ow do we explain the fact that the countries that are now experiencing an epidemic of rape are precisely those advanced capitalist countries that face severe economic and social crises and are saturated with violence on all levels?” (46). Colleges and Universities are a major domain of the U.S. capitalist economy. In our neoliberalization of the U.S. higher education system, students are becoming customers of their education. Our colleges and universities are a highly visible symptom of capitalism and values particular bodies and celebrates whiteness in similar ways to the era of colonization and slavery.

CSA is not a result of only one system. Patriarchy, a vast and often improperly used term, is the name of just one form of oppression that enables rape and sexual violence to persist.

Instead, “Rape bears a direct relationship to all of the existing power structures,” and a failure to comprehend the relationship of rape to other structures such as race, class, and state power disables us from developing “strategies that will allow us eventually to purge our society of oppressive misogynist violence” (47). To begin to make headway on campus sexual assault, the institution of higher education is not the only system that ought to bare blame. The United States, as a capitalist (and individualistic) society, influences discourses of sexual violence and permeates each of our institutions (e.g. sexual harassment in work places, domestic violence, the use of rape as a tool of terrorization). We must look critically at the way brutalization of Black men depended on the heterosexist valorization of a “pure white womanhood” and the legal exclusion of Black women from public dialogue and political engagement.

The narrative of the Black male rapist and attendant socially constructed stereotypes still present and are embedded in U.S. culture. The importance of thinking intersectionally is largely derived from an understanding of oppressions that are interlocking. An additive model, rather than an intersectional one, would analyze Wanjuki as a woman, a person of color, and as a member of a marginalized class status. Her oppression as a woman who is raped is “added to” her status as a person of color (and often class is left out). In general, the additive model fails to view oppression as it is actually experienced. It is not that Wanjuki is a woman *plus* a person of color *plus* from a low-income household with three separate oppressions that collide. In *Black Women, Feminism, and Black Liberation*, Vivian Gordan argues that Black women are victims of a trilogy of oppression. The trilogy of oppression involves racism, sexism, and economic oppression because “most often these three oppressive forces impact upon Black women simultaneously” (15). To be a woman is one aspect, while being a Black woman comes with a

different set of risks, challenges, and experiences in the world.²¹ Her subjectivities cannot be added or subtracted like a formula that counts her degree of oppression. As a Black woman, her oppression is specific to the embodied experience of her every day.

Differences in how women are affected by gender oppression does not mean that women do not face similar instances of sexism and sexual violence. Rather, I am urging that approaches to preventing sexual violence attend to individual nuances in experience to inclusively support all survivors/victims of CSA. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins states, “Viewing relations of domination for Black women...as being structure via a system of interlocking race, class, and gender oppression expands the focus of analysis from merely describing similarities and differences ... [to focusing] greater attention on how they interconnect” (222). Collins’ call here is essential to assess whose embodied experiences and voices have been silenced by mainstream discourse: “A black women’s standpoint...exists in a situation characterized by domination. Because Black women’s ideas have been suppressed, this suppression has stimulated African-American women to create knowledge that empowers people to resist domination” (Patricia Hill Collins 234). Sharing stories as resistance was an act of sheer necessity for Wanjuki to carve a discursive space to enter in public discussion and critique oppressive systems like the university and law enforcement.

²¹ The differences of lived experiences between women of color (black women in particular) and white women is not *the only* difference I believe we should attend to. As demonstrated by the separate examples of Emma Sulkowicz’s and Wagatwe Wanjuki, merely because they are survivors *of* color does not mean that their experiences of sexual violence were similar. Had both women been black women, that also would not make intersectional analysis useless because the experiences of black women are not the same either. In other words, sexual violence happens to *an individual*. There are, however, commonalities in the way raced, sexed, and classed bodies are identified as well as what negative public discourse (i.e. stereotypes) pre-constructs their persona (e.g. black women are hypersexualized in the media to the extent that it makes them “unrapeable”) (See McGuire; Wanjuki “Foreword”).

In *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*, Vivian M. May explains that “Intersectionality highlights how lived identities, structural systems, sites of marginalization, forms of power, and modes of resistance ‘intersect’ in dynamic, shifting ways” (21). Wanjuki’s story of assault is not only about being a woman. Gender oppression in and of itself fails to account for the how racism and economic oppression also play into her experience. Wanjuki identifies the problem of rape primarily within the institution (Tufts) that allows rape to happen unpunished on their campus. Her attention is not necessarily on the assailant—whom she does not name.²² Thinking and acting intersectionally requires an attention to the overarching systems of oppression rather than resisting the actions of a single person.

Embodied rhetoric is a particular form of rhetoric that depends on an intersectional lens that enables us to see survivors’ stories as intimately tied to their divergent bodily experiences. Embodied rhetoric examines the subjectivity of a particular actor as well as the power structures that socially construct their bodily relationship to cultural stereotypes, assumptions, and intolerance. Performance and Critical Cultural Studies scholar Bernadette Calafell reminds us? of the important legacy from the works of women of color in that we ought to also theorize “through experience or the theory of the flesh” (115). As an embodied protestor, Wanjuki commits herself to finding “theory in [her] flesh” so that she can work to create substantive social change for herself and others (Moraga; Calafell). Within a constellation of discourses that exclude the bodies of black women and their stories from mainstream contemporary culture, Wanjuki continues to tell the story of her life to audiences within and beyond her reach. I argue

²² Wagatwe Wanjuki does not talk about her assailant in any interviews, speeches, or social media posts. Instead, all of her energy is aimed against the institution. While she does not explicitly state why she chose not to release his name, in her writing and activist work, it becomes clear that she is interested in ending the larger structures of systemic oppression for survivors—not correcting her assailant’s behavior. While she was once interested in a university hearing, after being denied access to that hearing, Wanjuki used her energy to find a problem within university culture.

that Wagatwe Wanjuki has to challenge institutional oppression from several different media platforms (e.g. social media activism, building organizations, and protesting the future of campus rape culture) in order to be heard against the white-washing dominant narratives of CSA. Unable to be taken seriously in the mainstream media, Wanjuki has used social media narratives as a sounding board for other negated survivors/victims of sexual violence. In crafting a discursive space of inclusivity and action to pressure institutions to be held accountable, Wagatwe Wanjuki's dynamic forms of social protest raise consciousness in the limitless spaces of social media and in the physical spaces of college campuses.

Wanjuki's work is a testament to the power of Black feminist thought and action. In defying the white masculine norms of university culture, she uses her embodied experience to connect with other CSA survivors/victims. Her dedication to education and advocacy is the primary mode of "bridge building" in discursive, material, and physical space for survivors across the U.S. Wanjuki engages in a radical process of storytelling and C-R by discussing a "private and silent" experience into public discourse of the university. "Stories also serve a powerful additional function for minority communities. Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence or blame themselves for their predicament. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences" (Delgado and Stefancic 49). Storytelling and sharing is a form of C-R that connects listeners', and in this case other survivors/victims and activist, experiences. In starting from her own lived experience, Wanjuki raises the consciousness of others she's worked with and near.

Wagatwe Wanjuki, Tufts University, and Resisting Campus Sexual Assault

"I know firsthand the unique challenges that survivors of color face in a racist society...along the way I have found that the 'mainstream' narratives surrounding the needs of survivors often lack an intersectional approach"
(Wanjuki "Major Anti-Rape Group Praises DNA Ruling").

Outside of the academic community, Black women continue to fight against sexual violence. The INCITE! National Network, for example, began with a small group of women of color comprised of community members and some academics “who were fed up with existing organizations who couldn’t (or wouldn’t) address violence faced by women of color” (INCITE! “History”). On their website, INCITE! is defined as “a national, activist organization of radical feminists of color. We mobilize to end all forms of violence against women, gender non-conforming, and trans people of color and our communities” (INCITE! “Vision”). INCITE! also includes a plethora of resources available online such as books, downloadable materials on organizing and resistance, “tool kits” to prevent law enforcement violence against people of color, and audio/visual recordings of their previous conferences. In many ways, Wanjuki’s C-R and activism mirrors INCITE! On her website is educational information on sex and sexual violence. She also meets with people in the college community to organize and create open spaces for meeting other survivors and survivor-activists. Survivor-activists like Wanjuki and organizations against sexual violence commit themselves to the importance of sharing nonnormative narratives and lived experience to provide voice to marginalized groups shut out from the mainstream.

INCITE! and Wanjuki contribute to the widening of public dialogue on CSA—as it pertains to nonnormative bodies that may be raced, sexed, or classed. “INCITE! recognizes that it is *impossible* to seriously address sexual and intimate partner violence within communities of color without address those larger structures of violence (including militarism, attacks on immigrants’ rights and Indigenous treaty rights, the proliferation of prisons, economic neo-colonialism, the medical industry, and more)” (Scott, Singh, and Harris 129; emphasis theirs). Wanjuki also shares her past experience of sexual violence as well as her strategies to organize

and be heard by major institutions. As someone who once tried her best “to conform to respectability politics” in order to communicate with larger institutions, Wanjuki now knows that working from within the institution or even solely in organizations “cannot be the be-all and end-all solution to fighting for social change” (Wanjuki, “Foreword” ix). Instead, changing the social perspectives on sexual violence survivors/victims must also be analyzed in relation to structures of power that affect (and fail to protect) them.

Wanjuki’s time as a survivor-activist on the campus of Tufts University was brief yet instrumental. Tufts University administration did not investigate Wanjuki’s report in 2008 and failed to offer her institutional support as a student who lived through traumatic intimate partner violence. “I felt like I’m surrounded by people who didn’t care about what happened to me, so it was something psychologically that was a very draining and upsetting thing because you’re also dealing with various triggers and memories all over campus,” Wanjuki explained in an interview (Flanagan and Tso). Wanjuki mentions that her loneliness as a survivor of intimate partner violence was a major reason her academic performance declined when she returned to Tufts.

Not coincidentally, Wanjuki was notified of her expulsion briefly after she began speaking out about institutional failure and denial of Title IX rights to sexual violence survivors/victims: “The person deciding my case was actually the academic adviser of my assailant...I cited Title IX in my appeal, and they said, ‘Well, we looked up the law, and we made sure we have no obligation to help you. Good luck at home’” (Wanjuki “After Tufts Found”). Wanjuki’s expulsion, as she describes it, is laden with power relations that prevent her from seeking the justice she deserves. As a first-generation Black female student who was raped, Tufts deemed her incapable of learning at the level of their institution and was able to get away with it. Wanjuki is supposed to have access to an academic adviser for guidance while at Tufts

and the denial of fair access is detrimental to the success of first-generation college students who must learn to navigate through the barriers of higher education on their own.

In *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*, Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz argue, “When an establishment is confronted with challenges to its structure, policy, ideology, or power, it may adopt one of four rhetorical strategies, avoidance, suppression, adjustment, or capitulation” (55). Tufts administration as an establishment utilizes strategies such as avoidance (e.g. evasion and denial of means) and suppression (e.g. denial of the agitators’ demands and banishment). The administration first evaded Wanjuki’s 2008 report and eventually postponed any further action regarding her case. In an article, Wanjuki writes, “I felt that the administration assumed that my experience was less traumatizing due to my relationship...because it was not ‘violent’ enough for them” (Wanjuki “Campus Safety Committee Fails”). She also argues,

Repeat after me: Every rape is an act of violence. Every rape is a violent rape...it does not matter whether there are cuts, bruises, or scars. Creating a hierarchy of sexual violence makes it easier to promote the status quo where many people believe that certain types of sexual violence are more simply more serious. (Wanjuki “Campus Safety Committee Fails”)

From ignoring Wanjuki’s report to removing her as a part of their student body, the administration at Tufts delegitimized her grievances by denying her access to the tools of higher education. Wanjuki was brought to Internet by necessity to voice her story in her own words.

Suppression was also a major strategy used by Tufts University to justify their inaction. Avoidance proved to be an inadequate strategy of control because “avoidance tactics focus on the issues underlying the agitation, most suppression tactics attempt to weaken or remove the movement’s leaders” (Bowers et. al 61). Suppression on the other hand, “requires a thorough understanding of opponents and their ideology as well as a strong commitment to actively confront and defeat the agitators and their movement” (Bowers et. al 61). During the initial

months after Wanjuki reported her intimate partner violence, she began building networks with other survivors. “Banishment” (i.e. expulsion) as a tactic sought to weaken or destroy a rising student movement by physically removing the presence of one of its strongest campus survivor-activists Wanjuki. Expelling a student from campus avoids any further expenses and support for that individual, but it also failed to keep Wanjuki quiet about the administrations lack of action.

Wanjuki is a threat to Tufts as an institution because she began challenging the administration and highlighting the flaws of their sexual assault policy for other students at Tufts. In *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender, & Race in U.S. Culture*, Joy James writes,

Victims and survivors are encouraged to protect others with their silences. . . . Sometimes, a family or state deflects attention from its flaws by projecting a victim as its nemesis; then punishment becomes performance, electrified by symbols that promote the continuity of the romanticized entity” (151).

Wanjuki is the “nemesis” that Tufts used to deflect attention from using strategies of avoidance and suppression. Her expulsion stands in to reprimand Wanjuki for speaking out. In making the expulsion about her grades, the university proved that they did not have time the incentive) to address the institutional hardships students of color (and survivors/victims).

To empower oneself and others is a radical act of defiance because coalition and social protests (e.g. labor strikes, boycotts, sit-ins) often poke at the weakness of exploitative capitalist systems. Joy James argues that survivors/victims of sexual and racial abuse may “find that sharing stories provides an essential narrative, an ethical text that privatizes pain to border-cross into public activist” (153). From pen and paper to the public screen of the Internet, Wanjuki turned to writing into action through her experiences in publicized articles out of necessity. In the process of writing, Wanjuki also crafted a performative persona; one who resists exclusivity and fights for the social wellbeing of the most marginalized groups. In the remaining sections, I will

explore a few of Wanjuki's forms of C-R as a survivor-activist organizing against CSA. From her earliest activism and organizing, to the *#JustSaySorry* Campaign, to her future archival project, Wanjuki literally and metaphorically crafts a discursive space for survivors' narratives.

From Past to Present: Wagatwe Wanjuki's Organizing

Before Wanjuki became a popular social media activist, she was joining and creating organizations as well as supporting other students' efforts to write campus legislation that protects survivors/victims of CSA.²³ A critical aspect social justice activism depends on acquiring networks, political education, and joining in coalition with other student populations and groups. A future without CSA is only likely if the majority of the campus population is invested in challenging and resisting institutional injustice and oppression. Karma Chávez explains,

When working to understand coalition-building, centering enclaves as a site of rhetorical investigation proves crucial. For activists who engage in coalition building on behalf of multiple or broad social justice and human rights causes, rhetoric functions in two primary ways within enclaves. First, activists interpret external rhetorical messages that are created about them, the constituencies they represent, or both. In the case of coalition-building, these meaning-making processes serve as the rationale to build bridges with allies. Second, activists use enclaves as the sites to invent rhetorical strategies to publicly challenge oppressive rhetoric or to create new imaginaries for the groups and issues they represent and desire to bring into coalition. (3)

Student activists at Tufts were meeting to discuss their frustrations with university policies and inaction on sexual violence incidents. Meetings without university personnel provide students

²³ Note: In an article from *Jezebel* written by other student activists, it says, Wanjuki was not a direct part of the policy battle because she had been dismissed from the university. However, she was there in the very early stages and took to social media and blogging in support of Tufts SAFER efforts. Wanjuki also joined the board of directors in the national SAFER organization (Flanagan and Tso).

with an enclave-like space to re-generate and organize against the powerful avoidance and suppression strategies of the Tufts administration. Coalition-building challenges the oppressive public rhetoric of the university by counteracting it with a rhetoric of lived experience. Participating in organizations and creating new organizations is a rhetorical process of invention that produces counter narratives and new epistemologies.

Tufts University Administration held a “Sexual Violence Community Forum” in a question and answer format to address the university policy of campus sexual assault. According to student activists Alexandra Flanagan and Pheonix Tso, the administration was ill prepared to convene a meeting on CSA policy and appeared to be unfamiliar entirely (Flanagan and Tso). In a detailed report on Tufts and sexual violence, Flanagan and Tso claim that, questions such as “What is Tufts’ sexual assault policy” or “How many people have had disciplinary action taken against them for sexual assault?” were followed by “long beats of silences and visible squirming” as no one on the panel could answer the question (Flanagan and Tso). After assessing the disaster that was supposed to be an informative forum to help students, Wanjuki and two other women stood in front of everyone and introduced themselves as a new student group called Students Active for Eradicating Rape, also known as Tufts SAFER.

Wanjuki’s act of defiance sent a clear message to the administration that their efforts were not enough. Wanjuki and the two other female activists proceeded to read off a list of ways Tufts can improve its policy of sexual assault procedures and demanded the administration meet with SAFER in two weeks. The student activists along with Wanjuki worked to transform the negative space into one that empowered students to make a change in the inadequate policy at Tufts. Additionally, Tufts SAFER student activists reached out to students who were as frustrated as they are to join and contribute to the re-drafting of the student judicial process. In a

Q&A session, there is usually a panel in the front of the room (or on a stage of sorts), and then an audience (usually in auditorium chairs or a lecture hall if it's on a university campus).

Wanjuki and fellow student activists challenged the administration's policies and proved they were more informed—and that their lived experience on campus and of CSA was more knowledgeable—than the institution's. In women's speak-outs, the point is to “make the problem too big and loud and insistent to go away” (Polletta 116). Stories shared “often traced a narrative arc, from powerlessness and passivity to insight, enlightenment, and self-liberation” (Polletta 116). In many ways, Wanjuki's activist strategies oscillate between elements of C-R within physical space (i.e. social justice conferences, political organizing, storytelling, etc.) while in others, she takes more of a tone of speak outs in that she refuses to be dismissed (like at the Tufts Sexual Violence forum). What began merely as writing about her own trauma and dealing with university culture turned into the first step of collective action. The telling and retelling of Wanjuki's experiences can be seen as validating “personal insights as political knowledge” (Polletta). In this sense, Wanjuki literally merged together problems of the personal with the political in an effort to dismantle the bureaucratic calcification of the university's refusal to *hear* their students who become survivors.

Within student organizations like SAFER, Wanjuki told her story to others and helped influence student policy writing at Tufts. Although the university did not include the demands of their students in asking for better services and an improved adjudication process, the very act of sharing stories, writing, and expressing their disloyalty proved fruitful to challenge the university on their own terms. As Wanjuki notes, Tufts University did become the first institution in higher education found to violate Title IX (Kinkade “Colleges Rarely Apologize”). Speaking out in defiance of the university's dismissal of Title IX, Wanjuki says, “You can't use that ignorance

anymore to your benefit—to get away with not taking gender-based violence seriously” (Flanagan and Tso”). Since Wanjuki was denied access to a university trial—the “proper” way to handle a case of sexual violence on a university campus—she has had to resort to other mechanisms to remain visible and to have her voice heard.²⁴ Wanjuki has needed to utilize (and literally produce) different spaces to counter the university narrative—or lack thereof—on CSA.

The Present: Social Media Activism and #JustSaySorry

Wanjuki first made her story of survival public in 2009. In the early years of her writing and social media activism, mainstream media was uninterested in her story until almost five years after she endured intimate partner violence. Even then, Wanjuki found herself drowned out by more “famous” cases—that featured white women—like Steubenville or Vanderbilt. Lisa A. Flores’ rhetoric of difference presents us with the possibility that groups can carve out discursive spaces for story sharing, meaning-making, and resistance (Flores). Women of color, like Wanjuki, have turned to social media “as a counter space to share stories about violence and raise awareness about the ways white feminists frequently ignore their unique experiences with violence” (Linder and Myers 179). Creating a counter space where survivors/victims of sexual violence can speak about their stories literally crafts a rhetorical space for the possibility to build counter narratives, coalitions in solidarity and struggle, and a variety of social protests.

Storytelling and C-R are central to Wanjuki’s online activism as a deliberate political act. The Combahee River Collective writes, “In the process of C-R, actually life-sharing, we begin to

²⁴ Wagatwe Wanjuki was also instrumental in helping find an organization called Know Your IX. Know your IX is one of the major reasons that Tufts was found in violation of their Title IX policy. Overall, Know Your IX is a “resource for students to demand that their universities’ sexual misconduct policies (and the enforcement of said policies) comply with Title IX, a federal statute prohibiting gender discrimination in universities that receive federal funding” (Tso). See more here: <https://www.knowyourix.org/>. The Tufts group wrote legislation that pressured Tufts to re-address their policies.

recognize the commonality of our experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness. To build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression” (107). Storytelling as a form of C-R situates individual experiences within the context of every day systemic oppression. In other words, the narrative becomes about one’s individual trauma of sexual violence *and* the system that perpetuates it. Through the act of a politicized storytelling, the rhetorical practice of meaning-making connects individuals by their shared experiences with institutional injustices (e.g. the police, the courts, higher education).

C-R is also a practice of embodied rhetoric. Because the telos of C-R is invested in the possibilities of coalition building, solidarity, and collective resistance, the act of story sharing creates a counter narrative to the divisive institutional structures that have worked to historically silence groups of people (e.g. colonization, slavery). Wanjuki shares her experience with others to dismantle normative ideals about human value, transform how public discourse that negates marginalized groups, and contribute to the cultural production of new (embodied) knowledges. C-R enables Wanjuki to politicize and contextualize her experience within a larger paradigm of Black female oppression (e.g. the repeated sexual terrorization of Black women’s bodies):

The Internet is where I got the confidence to become a writer and to share my story; for a long time, the media did not care about what happened to me. It is totally thanks to the Internet that I was able to put my story out there in my own words. It gave me a space to really speak up and say that my body does matter and people should know that my story is just one out of millions. (Wallace “Wagatwe Wanjuki: Campus Sexual Assault Activist”)

While the Internet is public space, there is an element of “privateness.” If one chooses, the Internet can be a space of anonymity where one can able to produce and circulate ideas or surf privately. For Wanjuki the Internet is crucial for her healing process as a sexual violence survivor because she was able to find informational and social support that her institution failed

to provide—a space wherein she can feel comfortable to speak up. As a site for C-R and solidarity, the Internet provides an open space that gives voice to groups drowned out of public discussion; it provides visibility as a space to be seen and heard or heard and unseen—a space that is accessible to oneself and wider audiences.²⁵

Colleges and Universities rarely (if ever) take responsibility for the harm they have caused to their student survivors/victims of CSA. Survivors Eradicating Rape Culture (SERC) is an organization co-founded by Wagatwe Wanjuki and Kamilah Willingham that emerged as a response to dismantle rape culture at its root (i.e. the institutional excusal for rapists on college campuses).²⁶ The overarching goal of SERC is to center the experiences of marginalized survivors/victims in public dialogue. SERC works to advocate for survivor-center movements, education the public and inform public dialogue on CSA, center silenced survivors in the public conversation, and use grassroots strategies for political action (Wanjuki and Willingham “About Us”). While SERC participates in many forms of C-R, I will focus my attention on the original recent #JustSaySorry campaign.

The #JustSaySorry campaign originally developed from a twitter hashtag and symbolizes a demand for Tufts and Harvard to apologize to their student survivors. The campaign also calls for institutional accountability to be “the norm, not the exception” (Wanjuki and Willingham “About Us”). Speaking from her experience with Tufts, Wanjuki encourages other student

²⁵ In Wanjuki’s case, the Internet was accessible (and still is today). Not all marginalized groups, especially those who are poor, can afford the same access.

²⁶ “That Harvard Law’s process was biased and that they failed me and other survivors is not in question: they were forced to change their policies as a result of mine and other students’ Title IX complaints. What is in question is the school’s integrity and its administration’s ability to model a culture of respect and accountability. Like the rapists who still haunt our educational communities because of our schools’ inaction, too many college and university administrations deny and minimize the harms they’ve caused rather than honestly confront them. I am continually disappointed in Harvard Law School’s leadership for the way that they, like so many other schools, have passively institutionalized rape culture in their misguided attempts to insulate themselves from public scrutiny and legal liability” (Willingham “A #JustSaySorry Update”).

survivors/victims to identify common instances with her story. Wanjuki and Willingham explain, “In the last couple of years, we’ve seen many schools issuing broad proclamations about everything they’re doing to address sexual assault now that the world is watching, but few acknowledging the harms they’ve cause and enabled behind closed doors” (Wanjuki and Willingham “Why are we demanding apologies?”). As a response to the ever-increasing number of CSA cases, Wanjuki and Willingham are committed to burning one university branded clothing item each week until their universities say sorry or until they run out of clothing.

Social media platforms, like Twitter, create a culture of “hash-tagging” that connect users together on a given subject. Today, the rise of Black Twitter is responsible for generating awareness and critique systems of power that continually oppress black people in the U.S. and outside of the U.S. borders.²⁷ University of North Texas Journalism professor, Meredith Clark defines Black Twitter as,

A temporally linked group of connectors that share culture, language and interest in specific issues and talking about specific topics with a black frame of reference. And when I say "black," that isn't just limited to U.S. blacks, but blacks throughout the diaspora, and I think a lot of what we see reflects on blacks just in the U.S., but I do want to make that distinction clear, that it is not just of a matter of what we talk about here in the United States. (Ramsey)

Black feminists create hashtags like #IStandWithJada or #WhyWeCantWait to craft visible solidarity and “counteract the emotional and psychological trauma of marginalization, colonization, and essentially death” (Linder and Myers 179). Social media becomes a highly visible (and life-saving) space to challenge hegemonic discourses and powerful institutions. Blogging, tweeting, and posting on Facebook timelines is a subversive act that works outside

²⁷ Black Twitter was also largely responsible for galvanizing national attention on the killing of Mike Brown. Witnessing of the killing spoke out on social media with hashtags #Ferguson and #MikeBrown (Ramsey).

bureaucratic institutions (e.g. creating self-owned websites, writing articles for alternative media outlets).

On August 8th, 2016 Wanjuki set her Tufts University sweatshirt aflame. Broadcasted on Facebook live, viewers watched as the old faded grey Tufts sweatshirt slowly burned on top of a small black spherical grill. The camera remained steady as the intensity of the flames increased. In a voice over, Wanjuki explained,

F Tufts. I don't like being ignored. I'm not proud to wear the sweatshirt of an institution that refuses to acknowledge that I exist; that survivors should be helped. . . I really want us to show that Tufts clearly didn't follow the law! They are the first school, in the history of the United States to be found in violation of Title IX when it comes to sexual violence . . . They'd rather have rapists graduate with degrees in their name, than to have survivors and wonderful activists like me to go on and carry the legacy...they supposedly say they are for peace and light, but honestly, Tufts have only brought the opposite—they've only brought darkness and turmoil (Kingkade "Colleges Rarely Apologize")

The #JustSaySorry Campaign evolved as more than a catchy twitter hashtag, and turned into a deliberate platform for speech—speech accessed only after a shocking act of defiance. The burning of her Tufts sweatshirt also highlighted the importance of acting in disloyalty to Tufts University while acting in solidarity with other victims/survivors of CSA.

As a symbolic speech act, Wanjuki's live sweatshirt burning signifies violence, destruction, and/or purification communicated to a mediated audience. Historically, flag burning is used as a symbolic form of speech (and shock value) to express grievances of and outright reject a particular government.²⁸ The act of burning her college sweatshirt symbolically functions like a flag burning. College and University gear (clothing, bags, posters, and etc.) because college and university clothes identify a group of students as a collective student body who have

²⁸ See *Texas v. Johnson*, 491 U.S. 397 (1989).

pride for their school. Wanjuki explains that she loved wearing her Tufts sweatshirt because she was finally part of a community: “I desperately wanted to join after learning about Tufts’ self-declared values of human rights and active citizenship” (Wanjuki, “Forward” vii). The burned object, formerly identified as Tufts University sweatshirt, has morphed into something else—something more than burned cotton and ashes. What is left of the burning no longer represents the connection and pride a student has to their university. Rather, the burning of pride signifies a point of no return—one where fire separates Wanjuki from Tufts.

In demanding an apology from Tufts eight years later, Wanjuki broadcasts to her viewers that she will not give up and encourages other survivors to name their institutions and demand apologies as well. Wanjuki reminds us that the media is a powerful entity that socially constructs “which voices and bodies are valued by society” (Wanjuki “Is There No Room”). Wanjuki encourages us to remember that paying attention to all types of survivors/victims sends a clear and subversive message to major institutions and media outlets. Survivors matter and we must also prevent our public dialogue from “telling rapists that they will not get away with assault just by choosing a victim of a certain race” (Wanjuki “Is There No Room”). Black women, who have historically pioneered anti-rape efforts are still excluded from participating in public dialogue about sexual violence—often because of racist practices and perceptions that fail to see CSA as a manifestation of the racialized practice of rape and sexual violence.

Crafting a Rhetorical Future: “The (Literal) Cost of Not Believing a Survivor”

“When we finally take time to stop and listen, and to comprehend that living life as a rape victim is truly too steep a price, we will have a chance to finally understand what our society loses when we’re too busy ignoring survivors to protect the people who have harmed them”
 -Wagatwe Wanjuki (Kingkade “After Brock Turner”)

In August of 2016, Wanjuki released a letter titled “Dear Tufts Administrators Who Expelled Me after My Sexual Assaults.” To her readers, she divulges the most personal and intimate details of quotidian experiences as a Black female and survivor/activist. C-R as a political practice is also a practice of intimacy—a practice generally discouraged by a U.S. capitalistic culture. Lauren Berlant explains that intimacy involves “an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way” (281). The practice of intimacy is “to engage and disable a prevalent U.S. discourse on the proper relation between public and private” (Berlant 283). For Wanjuki, intimacy is displayed as a radical vulnerability of storytelling and C-R.

In her powerfully vulnerable “Dear Tufts” letter, Wanjuki (re)constructs a public narrative for herself. Addressing Tufts administration, she writes,

Your collective failure to assist me—a young Black woman trying to recover after abuse—reaffirmed how I feared the rest of the world saw me: not valued. After having my body abused and my self-worth diminished by another student, your institutional refusal to do anything implied that you agreed with him. (Wanjuki “Dear Tufts”)

The cost of being a survivor is often times unexpected and insurmountable. Not only is there the emotional trauma—and potentially physical injury—but there are also literal financial costs. After expulsion from Tufts University, Wanjuki had to find a way to pay for private loans that sent her into crippling debt: “My own dreams of pursuing law were long destroyed since Tufts decided to kick me out. Now I financially scrape by through sharing my trauma on different stages year after year” (Wanjuki “Dear Tufts”). “I had one last thing, though, that you took away from me: finally earning a degree from the college that I chose as a naïve 16-year-old high schooler” (Wanjuki “Dear Tufts”). In her TEDx talk at Middleton college, Wanjuki stands on the stage in front of the figure \$124,402.78 and says, “This is the amount of debt I’ve accrued

getting my bachelor's degree. That's a lot of money. And just in case you didn't see, one hundred and twenty-four thousand four hundred and to dollars and seventy-eight cents. That how much I owed last time I mustered the courage to do that" (Wanjuki "The (literal) Cost"). After Wanjuki realized that she cannot be the only survivor of CSA with crippling economic struggles, she began planning her future project.

Originally developed from a hashtag #SurvivorPrivilege, Wanjuki is currently collecting stories that features the voices of survivors/victims of sexual violence (Weiss). As a project that raises consciousness, the #SurvivorPrivilege collection "aims to highlight the often hidden costs of surviving sexual assault" (Wanjuki "Wagatwe Sara Wanjuki"). "These collection of firsthand stories will highlight the reality of being assaulted; the price paid comes in many forms—financial, social, emotional, physical, mental, and the list goes on" (Kingkade "After Brock Turner"). The #SurvivorPrivilege collection crafts a physical discursive spaces wherein survivors/victims of sexual violence can archive their past and present experiences as well as advocate for a *new* future; one that is not repeating the racialized violent history of sexual violence in the United States.

A rhetorical future is a future that has not yet emerged; a future that fails to materialize without the work of a collective; a future that beholds possibilities of meaning-making. To borrow from José Esteban Muñoz' *Cruising Queer Utopia*, I see the rhetorical future of survivors/victims of CSA as an "ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine the future" (1). Wagatwe Wanjuki's social activism is embodied in that she simultaneously acts in protest of her lived past and present, toward an imagined discursive future where all voices have access to public dialogue and social justice. Tufts, as a university, repeatedly fails to help their student survivors of CSA, which affects the potential futures of their students and ignores

the past (not only the past of their Title IX abuses, but also the historical past of embodied experiences of rape in the U.S).

A rhetorical future, collectively envisioned by survivor-activists and allies, requires groups to strive toward a time without sexual violence—a time most have never known. In crafting a future, survivors-activists alike (re)construct their trauma into communicable snapshots that connect themselves and their fellow listeners with an abhorrent past that creates exigency for a new future. The cost of sharing one's story of sexual violence comes at a steep price for victims/survivors of sexual violence. As a Black woman, Wanjuki chances of being believed, let alone heard in mainstream media, is already unlikely. In all of her activism, Wanjuki has had to resist the cultural erasure of herself and other women of color survivors/victims.

Conclusion: Consciousness-Raising, Embodied Epistemologies and the Scholar-Activist

No one ever taught me about sexual violence. I cannot remember a class, a book, or a conversation that explained to me the reality of what I would face as a survivor. I vaguely remember conversations with my mother in which she said something like, “No one can touch you without your permission,” or, “Tell Mommy if someone makes you uncomfortable”—which I suppose is more than most young girls hear. I know now that I was likely surrounded by many women in my family who were sexually assaulted or raped—but no one spoke of it. Maybe they couldn’t find the words. Maybe no one taught them either.

I started my undergraduate career at St. John’s University in the fall of 2011 shortly after graduating high school. I was raped when a close friend of mine entitled himself to my body and then lied about it. He lied to my friends and those friends helped him lie to the school. I was an “indecisive person,” they said. She probably “changed her mind after it already happened,” they guessed. My own journey to learn more about sexual violence in the U.S. led me to an impasse. How do I write about something so dark without discouraging resistance and hope for a different future? I had no idea what this project could become, what it would mean to describe the lives of other survivors, or how. I only knew that I wanted to feature strong women of color who were fighting rape culture in this very moment—women like me who were doubted; women like me who were going through what I went through, before me, with me, and after me.

Throughout this project, I have urged the field of communication studies—particularly within the areas of rhetoric, critical/cultural studies, and performance studies—to attend to the intersectional, embodied experience of sexual violence and its expression in diverse “texts.” The commitments of “Beyond Survival” are to examine how survivor-activists are rhetorically

constructed by popular discourses of being a “survivor” as well as the cultural assumptions survivors/victims have to work against. In the introduction, I stated two questions that would frame my thesis project: (1) how are discourses of resistance deployed by survivors/victims of color on university campuses? (2) What is the importance of survivor/victims of color coming forth with their stories of trauma and sexual violence? To reiterate, the underlying argument advanced throughout this project is three-fold:

1. Protestors who have lived experience, are vital for the expansion of social justice issues and inclusion.
2. Women of Color who are survivors/victims of sexual violence have some of the highest risks (psychic, social, economic, political) to overcome by speaking out as “embodied protestors” who have lived and continue to live through the traumatic experience of sexual violence.
3. As Women of Color, Emma Sulkowicz and Wagatwe Wanjuki perform the rhetorical power of narrative, consciousness-raising, and embodied epistemologies in the fight for social change.

Insofar of the study of communication returns to the foundational principles of democratic engagement and public dialogue—whether verbal or nonverbal—it is irresponsible to ourselves, to our research, and to those we study to overlook the many voices excluded from participating; the voices with a different vision for a democratic future. The lived experience of a survivor-activist, for example, utilizes an embodied epistemology to socially protest the institutionalized oppression of erasure from public discourse. Embodied protestors are committed to building and joining coalitions as well as creating collective spaces to challenge hegemonic discourses.

“Beyond Survival” intends to push us to think about the aftermath of sexual violence—about what is left that inspires, motivates, or moves survivors to become activists. In writing through my experience and that of Sulkowicz and Wanjuki, I perform the possibilities C-R through writing. Along with Sulkowicz and Wanjuki, I too work to subvert divisive cultural

stereotypes and communicate the intimate, the traumatic, and the unspeakable. Through my lived experience of sexual violence, I found myself drawn to the lives of other survivor-activists.

From there, I gathered several different fragments of their lives after sexual violence; interviews, news articles, blog posts, artwork, and social media activism. Like Sulkowicz's and Wanjuki's acts of C-R—I want to craft a discursive space to center marginalized discourses that are integral for social change. Questions of power, discourse, and circulation cannot be thoroughly investigated *without* intersectionality. In what follows I provide a brief summary of the chapters and highlight the main conclusions.

Chapter Summary

“Beyond Survival” is comprised of two main chapters. The first, “Performing Trauma in Social Protest: Sulkowicz’s *Carry That Weight: An Embodied Protest*” featured former Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz as an embodied protestor who performatively displays the physical and emotional burden of sexual violence. The second, “Writing to be Heard: Wagatwe Wanjuki’s Campus Sexual Assault Activism,” detailed the practices of C-R that undergird the activism of former Tufts student Wagatwe Wanjuki. Overall, I argue for the importance of recognizing lived experience as an embodied epistemology—one that is essential for social justice activism.

By focusing on survivor-activists within the context of college/university culture, I was able to demonstrate the multifaceted structural impediments and the ahistorical attempts to create broad anti-rape programs—or programs that institutions *think* are helping to prevent rape—that fail to address the root of the problem. Broadly, I advocate for the legitimacy of lived experience that guides us toward a cultural praxis where knowledge meets theory and theory is in the flesh (Moraga). Although Sulkowicz and Wanjuki’s rapes took place on separate campuses, there are

many threads that can be drawn through and across each chapter to connect the experience of these survivors.

In the first chapter, my overall goal was to give new voice to Emma Sulkowicz's *Mattress Performance*. While the case was highly publicized, it was not because she was a woman of color. Media narratives, seldom (if at all) trace the empowerment of women of color. In my research, I also found that almost all academic work and news articles discussed the positive/negative consequences of Sulkowicz's performance but failed to contextualize her intersectionally. Because of her privilege to "white pass," and absence of her own discussion on race/ethnicity, researchers and writers ignored race as an important part of the conversation.

The *Mattress Performance*, often simplified in the media, was a piece of protest art. I argued specifically that Sulkowicz radically displays the rhetorical and performative power of her embodied knowledge as a survivor of CSA. *Carry That Weight* performatively challenged how colleges/universities like Columbia have chosen to handle the traumatic experience of sexual violence in their communities. For survivors/victims of color, colleges and university culturally smudge difference and approach sexual education programs monolithically. *Carry That Weight* is an illustrative reminder that colleges and universities are merely echo chambers of wider society. With the mattress, Emma Sulkowicz repeatedly interrupted the cultural silence of campuses sexual violence.

In the second chapter, I visited the lived experience of another survivor-activist. Wagatwe Wanjuki was repeatedly raped and emotionally abused in a relationship with another student at Tufts University. Between recounting Wanjuki's experience from her blog posts, interviews, articles, and social justice activism, I attempted to understand the value of Wanjuki's activism for issues of CSA. I advocate for the importance C-R as an avenue toward political engagement

for excluded marginalized groups and individuals. Put differently, Wanjuki raises consciousness about racialized sexual violence in an effort to craft a discursive space where she can speak and be heard. While Sulkowicz raises consciousness by performing in artwork, Wanjuki performatively narrates her experience as a survivor of CSA.

Across both chapters, several themes emerge. Most prominently, the act of raising consciousness is a deliberate commitment to political engagement and social change. Karlyn Korus Campbell argues that C-R is the very centerpiece of a feminist politics. Both Sulkowicz and Wanjuki, in performed, written, and spoken work, are constructing narratives to work through rape and its aftermath. Sulkowicz's story revealed the physical and emotional lived experience and burden of rape. *Carry That Weight* is an artwork of confrontation—one that unapologetically displays the intimate reality of her bedroom in public, political spaces. Wanjuki's story also spoke to the physical and emotional burdens of rape. The (literal) cost of being a survivor changes the course of your life. "Being raped is about more than just that moment or multiple moments, this is an event that can affect you for a very long time *especially* as a college student" (Wanjuki). Together, Sulkowicz and Wanjuki challenge the cultural erasure of survivors/victims on college campuses. Their activism and forms of social protest reject the public-private distinctions. In other words, Sulkowicz's and Wanjuki's narrative challenges the socially constructed public sphere of their respective universities.

Let's Talk about Rape: Implications and Future Research

Sexual violence, as an area of study, provides deep insight into how particular bodies are valued. Too often, women of color have suffered sexual violence without justice or support. The legitimacy of their lived experience is often disputed by hegemonic discourses and racialized

stereotypes. Angela Davis reminds us, “One of racism’s salient historical features has always been the assumption that white men—especially those who wield economic power—possess an incontestable right of access to Black women’s bodies” (175). She continues, “The license to rape emanated from and facilitated the ruthless economic domination that was the gruesome hallmark of slavery” (175). U.S. culture fails to account for racial differences in campus sexual violence. Our institutions of higher education are not separate from the discourses of power that reflect our racialized history of sexually objectifying women and our history dehumanization of minoritized groups like women of color.

Race is a socially constructed concept. Racial hierarchies and stereotypes have been (re)created by hegemonic discourses constructed by white people in power. “Races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado and Stefancic 8). However, the “social construction” of race has real implications for the future of racism. Interlocking oppression that women of color survivors/victims of sexual violence face are often insurmountable. “In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (Crenshaw 242). The problem, as I have argued is that colleges and universities are uninformed—at times by choice. Programs that focus on prevention have still failed to decrease the number of (reported) rapes on college campuses.

I view this project as only the beginning of a longer project to recover and recuperate—to borrow Campbell’s words—the lost, hidden, or negated voices of minoritized students on college campuses. Conversations, legislation, and programming ought to examine rape culture at its roots as well as hear those who have embodied knowledge to contribute to a future without rape.

“Beyond Survival,” as is, cannot fully articulate the myriad ways protestors of color disrupt the public norms of (white) university spaces. Instead, I started with a small inquiry—what does it mean to be a survivor/victim of sexual violence? Do survivors have a responsibility to one another? As I began writing through the chapters, I noticed that Sulkowicz and Wanjuki radically display the politics of the intimate (and the discursive private sphere) to communicate the incommunicable. While Sulkowicz performs in an artwork of social protest, Wanjuki crafts a rhetorical persona as she stands on stages and divulges her past and present experiences with sexual violence.

Further work could take up the role of racism and sexual violence against women to the regimes of social discipline necessitated by capitalism. A study of the history of capitalism in relation to racist gendered power relations, brings us closer to chipping away at the cultural smudging of our most vulnerable citizens. Further work should also take up the connections between performance, embodiment and the rhetorics of survival. In what ways are we performing survival? How is our performance of survival embodied? Regardless the direction, any scholarship on sexual violence must center minoritized students’ experiences as the most vulnerable population in the spaces of elite universities.

Final Thoughts

I often found myself thinking of my own positionality in this project. Academia often posits a false dichotomy: a scholar is either a researcher or an activist, never both because combining those purposes is judged to be a source of bias. However, in this thesis, I have stressed the importance of experiential, embodied knowledge and storytelling as crucial to survival and struggle. My story has a place in that struggle.

My story and those of Wanjuki and Sulkowicz help us to discover how survivors communicate their traumatic experiences of campus sexual assault. We must recognize the value of embodied epistemologies to collectively envision a socially just future for us all. Activist scholarship demands that bureaucratic routines and traditions of university culture must change to account for students, faculty, and staff of color. We must work together diligently to question all forms of power and knowledge production from institutions who have historically oppressed and terrorized minoritized groups of people.

During the course of this project, I hope to have exposed understudied moments of verbal, nonverbal, and embodied communication. In the same way activism can be scholarship, theory and knowledge can be derived from the cultural praxis of lived experience and embodiment. Collectively, we must work against the hierarchical nature of the academy and the monopoly on valuable knowledges. As a graduate student, I am often shuffling between the chaos of bureaucracy and the hierarchy of knowledge production in the University setting. *I am to keep my head down, my voice low, and my “private” issues out of public discourse and spaces. But I am a survivor of sexual violence—a survivor who will verbalize and share my story—and those of activists like Wanjuki and Sulkowicz—with others.*

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Vita

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