RIPPED-FROM-THE-HEADLINES: SEXUAL VIOLENCE & CELEBRITY CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. MEDIA

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Copyright Statement

Abstract

This thesis examines the imbrication of sexual violence and celebrity culture in contemporary US media. Even before #MeToo, celebrities who publicly shared their experience of sexual violence and/or engaged in advocacy work have been instrumental in shaping cultural understandings of sexual violence. Similarly, the celebrification of victims and survivors has coincided with the celebrification of activists and feminists in mainstream media. The public fascination with famous men implicated in sexual misconduct as well as with everyman perpetrators of violent sex crimes reveal how the celebritisation of sexual violence can be lucrative. This study interrogates the ways in which celebrity culture reconfigures victimhood, criminality, and advocacy. It makes an original contribution to celebrity studies and feminist media studies by exploring the links between celebrity culture and sexual violence.

The thesis deploys an innovative methodological framework, which combines critical discourse analysis with diagrams, to map this economy of visibility. It draws on a transmedia corpus to track the discursive circulation of sexual violence in mainstream media. The corpus thus includes TV series, films, documentaries, true crime texts, celebrity memoirs, interviews, and social media posts. *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC 1999-) is the central node because of its unique focus on sex-based offences. Its trademark 'ripped-from-the-headlines' episodes provide an entry point to analyse the celebrification of victims, perpetrators, and advocates. The concept 'celefiction' is theorised to operationalise the role of fictional characters in media representation of sexual violence. It also highlights how contemporary celebrity culture is a transmedia phenomenon.

The focus is primarily on contemporary US media to examine the ubiquity of sexual violence in the public sphere, although the case studies resonate beyond the US border. The thesis offers a comprehensive analysis of the celebrification of victims, perpetrators, and advocates. It finds that celebrity mediations of sexual violence articulate social anxieties related to gender, sexuality, race, and class, as well as the changing nature of fame. The nexus of celebrity culture and sexual violence thus shapes cultural understandings of sexual violence, victimisation, and feminism. Overall, the thesis draws attention to the ways that sexual violence and celebrity culture are often mutually constitutive, and explores the hidden matrixes of power they share.

À elle & à ma mère

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2016, NBC aired an episode of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC, 1999-) called "Making a Rapist" inspired by Netflix's true crime series *Making a Murderer*. The episode starts with a cameo from Joe Biden, who was then Vice-President of the United States. He stands alongside Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay) at a fictional press conference held in the police precinct. He commends the detectives for their excellent work and expresses his admiration for Benson as they shake hands. Far from being an anecdotal incident, the verbal and physical interactions between the real-life politician and the fictional character are symptomatic of the convergence of entertainment and politics in contemporary US culture. The politicisation of fiction is also evident in Benson's speech, in which she explains the issue of the rape-kit backlog to prevent wrongful convictions through better DNA testing. The function of this scene is threefold: it sets the scene to the ripped-from-the-headlines episode, promotes Hargitay's *End the Backlog* campaign, and endorses the Democrats' 2016 presidential re-election bid. Sexual violence is thus mediated through four different configurations of fame – a beloved fictional character specialised in sexual assault investigations (Benson), an actor renowned for her anti-sexual violence charity work[1] (Hargitay), a famous politician known for his policies tackling violence against women[2] (Biden), and a celebrified sex offender (Steven Avery). This example illustrates a complex system of visibility that shapes cultural understandings of sexual assault.

Two concomitant celebrity culture dynamics are exemplified in this episode: the celebritisation of sexual violence and the celebrification of perpetrators and advocates (Driessens 2012). 'Celebritisation' refers to the expansion of regimes of fame to new domains of public life. I use the expression 'celebritisation of sexual violence' to point to the ways in which cultural representations of sexual violence have become increasingly

[1] Hargitay founded the Joyful Heart foundation in 2004. Its aim is to end sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse.

[2] While he was Senator (1973-2009), Biden sponsored the Violence Against Women Act. He oversaw the White House Council on Women and Girls and the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault during his Vice-Presidency and launched the rape prevention campaign *It's On Us* (2009-2017).

linked to celebrity culture. For instance, "Making a Rapist" bridges media representations of rape in fiction, true crime, political news, and celebrity news through its focus on celebrities popularised in these genres. It raises the following question: why does sexual violence plague celebrity culture? Even though this is not a new question, it has been sharpened with #MeToo and sexual assault allegations against prominent men. The episode, which pre-dates #MeToo, shows how media representations of sexual violence can turn victims, activists, and perpetrators into celebrities. It also highlights how celebrities can enhance their brand through claims to victimhood and/or advocacy and how, conversely, allegations of sexual misconduct can jeopardise celebrity status. Celebrity victims, perpetrators, and advocates and celebrified victims, perpetrators, and advocates thus constitute six distinct modes of celebrification. These permutations of fame and sexual violence invite the following question: how does celebrity culture reconfigure victimisation, crime, and feminist activism? Finally, the series' trademark 'ripped-from-the-headlines' episodes (RFH hereafter), which dramatize real-life cases, reveal how the celebritisation of sexual violence can be lucrative. It begs the questions: if both celebrity culture and sexual violence operate on the commodification as well as the emotional and physical exploitation of people, to what extent are stardom and sexual violence mutually constitutive?

This thesis examines the imbrication of sexual violence and celebrity culture in contemporary US media. I use an innovative methodological framework, which combines critical discourse analysis with diagrams, to map the celebritisation of sexual violence. I draw on a transmedia corpus to track the discursive circulation of sexual violence in mainstream media. The corpus includes TV series, films, documentaries, true crime texts, celebrity memoirs, interviews, and social media posts. The transmedia corpus allows for an in-depth analysis of various modes of celebrification, whilst interrogating the transmedia nature of contemporary fame. *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (*SVU* hereafter) is the central node because of its unique focus on sex-based offences. Its RFH episodes provide an entry point to analyse the celebrification of victims, perpetrators, and advocates. I theorise the concept 'celefiction' to operationalise the role of fictional characters in the celebritisation of sexual violence. The thesis offers a comprehensive analysis of the celebrification of victims, perpetrators, and advocates. It finds that

celebrity mediations of sexual violence articulate social anxieties related to gender, sexuality, race, and class, as well as the changing nature of fame. The nexus of celebrity culture and sexual violence shapes cultural understandings of sexual violence, victimisation, and feminism. Overall, the thesis draws attention to the ways that sexual violence and celebrity culture are often mutually constitutive and explores the hidden matrices of power they share.

Visibility of sexual violence, an overview of literature

This project builds on scholarship analysing the ubiquity of cultural representations of sexual violence in the public sphere (Cuklanz 1996; Cuklanz 2000; Projansky 2001; Moorti 2001; Horeck 2004). These seminal feminist works track the circulation of media representations of rape across a transmedia corpus. For instance, Lisa Cuklanz bridges analysis of rape in the news and fiction to show the ways in which legal reform and social change have been taken up and legitimised through mainstream media (Cuklanz 1996). Sarah Projansky (2001) dissects ideological formations of gender and sexuality in films, television, and rape prevention and education videos. Sujata Moorti's work on depictions of rape on prime-time television, network news, and talk shows reveals the complex discursive construction of race and gender in US television (2001). Tanya Horeck (2004) weaves analysis of representations of raped women in poetry and literature, cinema, television, and feminist writings. She argues that these images of rape articulate cultural fantasies of sexual, racial, and class difference. The circulation of cultural representations of sexual violence across media and genre reveals the scope and reach of hidden matrices of power.

What emerges from these pioneering feminist media analyses of rape is a complex system of visibility articulated around the following paradox: narratives of rape are ubiquitous in the public sphere because they grapple with power dynamics, yet they uphold dominant ideologies. As Horeck argues, "rape is at once essential, yet disruptive to, the social order" (2004:11). Her analysis historicises the links between sexual violence and body politics. Dominant masculinity is legitimised through the need to protect and/or avenge violated women, yet the sexist construction of women as property is not challenged. Accounts of sexual violence thus expose the gendered hierarchies that buttress the socio-cultural

contract even as they define it in patriarchal terms. The figure of the raped woman in popular culture also captures anxieties related to race and class. Attempts to depict a universal experience of sexual violation are exclusive as they are centred on white and privileged women. These tensions are what makes representations of rape a "public media spectacle" (Horeck 2004:11). Thinking of sexual violence as a public spectacle reinscribes media representations within their broader social context. According to Guy Debord, "the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images"[3] (1992a:16, my translation). I build on Horeck's analysis and use the term 'spectacle of sexual violence' to refer to how images of sexual violation mediate power relations. I expand this framework to account for the socio-cultural changes that have marked the last two decades. The first is the shift from media representations of rape to other forms of sexual violence and the second is the intensification of celebrity culture.

Sexual violence

These early feminist media analyses of sexual violence have emphasised rape because of the centrality of this issue in second-wave feminist writings and activism (Cf. Brownmiller 1975), which led to changes in cultural understanding of sexuality and important legal reforms (Cuklanz 1996). These scholars show how media investments in narratives of rape reflect these social evolutions and their limitations. By historicising media representations of rape, Projansky (2001) and Horeck (2004) highlight shifts and continuities in cultural understanding of sexual violation. Their analyses make use of the feminist wave metaphor to intervene in key debates around postfeminism (Cf. Projanksy 2001) and the failed promises of second-wave feminism (Cf. Horeck 2004). However, their historical approach shows how the discursive construction of rape extends far beyond the media event under investigation. Their insights thus challenge a linear history of feminist struggles. The present project broadens their framework to other forms of sexual violence.

[3] « Le spectacle n'est pas un ensemble d'images, mais un rapport social entre des personnes, médiatisées par des images »

I draw on Liz Kelly's definition of sexual violence as a continuum (1988). It locates rape on a spectrum of socially sanctioned male aggression, which ranges from microaggressions like sexist remarks to murder. This model is not a hierarchy of the severity of violence, but rather a holistic framework that draws connections between experiences of harassment, violation, abuse, and assault. The continuum of violence considers different forms of violence (physical, psychological, economic, etc.) and contexts (domestic, workplace, education, public space, etc.). This model draws attention to violence as not episodic and/or expressions of deviance, but as part of a pattern of gendered oppression that is normalised and intersects with other forms of oppression. Throughout the thesis, I use 'sexual violence' as a generic term to refer to this continuum of violence. I prefer this term to Kelly's original expression 'violence against women' because I am interested in how sex-based violation is an expression of and a pillar of hegemonic masculinity. As my case studies will show, this is the case even when this type of violence is perpetrated against men, trans, and queer people. I use the term 'sexual violence' instead of 'gender-based violence' because my interest in the nexus of celebrity culture and patriarchy stems from how they both operate on the sexual exploitation of people and the commodification of sexuality. As woven in through the case studies, I use descriptors of the type of sexual violence they deal with, such as 'sexual harassment', 'paedophilia', or 'sexual assault'.

Celebrity culture

While celebrity culture is not a new phenomenon, it is one of the most vibrant and dynamic aspects of the contemporary mediascape. Because of their visibility and status, celebrities occupy a central role in the production of meaning in modern everyday life. Stars can be read as texts that capture the workings of social ideologies at play in media representations. According to Dyer (1979; 1986), stars exemplify social types: as cultural icons they embody collective representations of gendered norms and behaviour. In other words, celebrities can be read either as role models or cautionary tales who offer recognizable normative images of masculinity and femininity. Celebrities also play a key role in the construction of racial and national identities (Negra 2001; Jackson 2014) and mediate class disparities (Tyler and Bennett 2010; Mendick et al. 2018). Celebrities are

key actors within the economy of attention (Thrall et al. 2008) and, as such, play an important ideological and epistemological role in shaping public discourse (Marshall 1997). They articulate a distinct modality of public personhood (Turner 2004) and possess an important visibility capital (Heinich 2012). They are thus key in mediating political issues such as sexual violence. The spectacle of sexual violence in contemporary US media thus requires an analysis into the role of celebrity culture in mediating sexual violation.

Dyer's approach allows us to think through the ways in which celebrity culture is gendered through the articulation of the politics of the 'ordinary' social sphere with the 'extraordinary' realm of fame. The deep investment in stars' idiosyncratic characteristics is an important vector for the fascination they exert. As stars are enveloped by an aura of mystery and unpredictability, uncovering the private self behind the public role becomes the main drive in celebrity culture and sustains its economy. Gossip columns are one of many examples of media productions that revolve around exposing details about the private lives of famous people. However, scandal does not play out in the same way for male, female, and queer celebrities. The last two are generally more highly pursued and pay a higher price for their exposure, whereas men are often able to reframe this kind of unwelcome media visibility into an opportunity for rebranding. Similarly, Sarah Jackson's analysis of press coverage of black celebrities reveals the racial double standard of celebrity scandal (2014). She argues that African American celebrities are judged more harshly than their white counterparts when they take a political stand. Reframing these statements as controversies or mere celebrity provocations limits their critique of US culture. It is symptomatic of broader anxieties in relation to racial and class disparities. As a result, celebrities represent something other than themselves: the identities they perform shed light on the ways in which modern subjectivities are gendered, racialized, and classed. I draw on this scholarship to analyse the intersections of celebrity sexual assault scandal and the spectacle of sexual violence.

Economies of visibility

The concept of spectacle illuminates the consumer culture logics that underpin regimes of visibility (Debord 1992a; 1992b). Because visibility is a currency in the contemporary

market-driven mediascapes, representations of sexual violence become objects of consumption. This complicates the assumption that sexism can be best tackled through a recourse to a politics of visibility. Whilst media representations of sexual violence highlight its pervasiveness, spectacular exposition of sexual violence hasn't brought about social change. These debates around the adequacy of visibility as a viable political strategy are not new (Cf. Horeck 2004). In fact, the history of feminism is marked by a sustained critique of how the media frames issues of gender and, at the same time, how feminist movements depend on mainstream media to assert their legitimacy (Hamad and Taylor 2015; Taylor 2017). Feminist celebrity scholars have thus developed frameworks that view feminism and celebrity culture as interconnected rather than mutually exclusive (Wicke 1994; Projansky 2014). Similarly, the present project addresses the dynamic relationship between spectacular fame and the spectacle of sexual violence. In other words, what does celebrity culture say about sexual violence? And what does sexual violence reveal about celebrity culture?

The thesis thus maps out a system of visibility that emerges from the nexus of the spectacles of sexual violence and celebrity culture. The term 'system' focuses on the articulation between the individual and collective. A critical analysis of the spectacle of sexual violence as a system of visibility attends to the singularities of individual stories to show patterns symptomatic of consistent ideologies. Similarly, celebrity is "a *system* for valorising meaning and communication" (Marshall 1997:x, emphasis original). In other words, ideologies become tangible through regimes of fame. This conceptualisation of visibility as a system supports an analysis attuned to nuances of visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility. It reveals that which is marked as worth seeing, obfuscated, or so conspicuous it becomes unnoticeable (Voirol 2005a; 2005b). Donald Trump's 2016 election mere weeks following reports of sexual allegations is one of many contemporary examples that demonstrate the need for a minute analysis of the intersection of spectacular fame and spectacular sexual violence. It attests to a shift of paradigm, one that is not predicated on a politics of visibility, but rather on an economy of visibility.

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018a; 2018c) defines a politics of visibility as the practices through which a political vision can come into being. Vision is aspirational, future-oriented, and inherently collective. The politics of visibility is thus a process through which

marginalised communities demand to be seen in dominant culture. It articulates a demand for social change. In contrast, an economy of visibility structures the contemporary mediascape and daily consumption practices. As Banet-Weiser argues, "economies of visibility fundamentally shift politics of visibility so that visibility becomes *the end* rather than a means to an end" (2018c:23, emphasis original). It thus constrains the political to the visible and obfuscates the ways in which it is conditioned by structures of power. For instance, Banet-Weiser (2018c) shows how popular feminism engages with liberal feminism by shedding light on gender inequality but puts forward solutions that are corporate-friendly. Circuits of visibility are driven by profit, competition, and consumers. They can thus accommodate identity claims and demands for representation but prevent fundamentally rethinking structures of power. To paraphrase Nancy Fraser (2013), economies of visibility privilege a politics of recognition over a politics of redistribution.

Thesis outline

The thesis presents a systematic analysis of the economies of visibility that underpin the spectacle of sexual violence and stardom. *SVU* constitutes the central node to the analysis because it effectively captures the tensions between the politics of visibility and economies of visibility. The series aims to raise awareness of sexual violence through fictional representation, as stated in each of its episode's opening credits. Whilst its frequent RFH episodes can be deployed as a political strategy to critique celebrity culture, this mode of storytelling is first and foremost a marketing strategy to succeed in the competitive landscape of television. RFH episodes present an opportunity to delve into the dual meaning of representation, as an aesthetic rendition of a crime *and* as a political project. In addition, *SVU* provides a unique entry point to disrupt cultural hierarchies of fame and explore the imbrications of entertainment and politics. Its sustained exploration of celebrity culture through the medium of fiction interrogates the multifaceted and ever-expanding logics of fame beyond the entertainment industry. Throughout the thesis, I engage with celebrity taxonomies (Rojek 2001; Nayar 2009) to interrogate the differentiated value of celebrity. My analysis challenges the cultural hierarchies that legitimise celebrities known for their achievements, like actors or politicians, over people famous for being (in)famous, like fictional characters or celebrified criminals.

Chapter 1: Methodology lays out the methodological approach that will be deployed in this thesis. I use an innovative methodological framework, which combines critical discourse analysis with diagrams, to map the economies of visibility that bolster the spectacle of sexual violence and celebrity. I introduce the theoretical concepts that operationalise my data collection and analysis. These are 'celebrification', 'celebritisation', 'celefiction', and 'ripped-from-the-headlines'. This conceptual framework supports my argument that celebrity is a transmedia phenomenon. I discuss the methodological implications of this approach to celebrity culture and explain the rationale of the transmedia corpus designed to track the discursive circulation of sexual violence in mainstream media. The corpus includes TV series, films, documentaries, true crime texts, celebrity memoirs, interviews, and social media posts. The chapter concludes with ethical reflections, namely the challenges of doing a feminist analysis of celebrity culture and my reasoning for working on infamous perpetrators of sexual violence alongside celebrified victims and advocates. These ethical considerations set out the remaining thesis chapters organised in three parts to address how celebrity culture reconfigures victimhood, criminality, and advocacy. The remaining chapters work in pairs and follow a mirrored structure to interrogate different modes of celebrification.

Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims deals with celebrities who used their public status to disclose their experience of sexual violence. I argue that these testimonies exemplify what Sean Redmond (2008) has termed the celebrity confessional – i.e. moments of revelation and affective display that allow the celebrity to consolidate their personal brand through a performance of intimacy and ordinariness. The chapter centres around *SVU*'s fictionalisation of Maria Schneider's account of being assaulted while filming *Last Tango in Paris*, Rihanna's fraught attempt to tell her experience of domestic violence, and Gretchen Carlson's sexual harassment lawsuit against her employer and former CEO of Fox News. In a context where the celebrity confessional is increasingly the dominant mode of consumption of fame, the chapter interrogates the potentials and limitations of celebrity narratives of sexual violence to trouble sexism in celebrity culture. It shows how cultural hierarchies of fame are gendered and how they constrain claims to victimhood. Women's public testimonies of sexual violence are generally met with disbelief, but white heterosexual women are more successful in making their voice heard. Rihanna's example

shows how race and class are used to discredit domestic violence victims, while Schneider's case shows how sexual orientation and mental health undermine claims to victimhood.

Dominant narratives of victimhood are further explored in Chapter 3: Celebrity *Victims*. It centres around victims of sexual violence thrown into the limelight through the mediatisation of the case and/or trial. The chapter opens with two *SVU* episodes ripped from the pages of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and *13 Reasons Why*. Lisbeth Salander and Hannah Baker are celefictions whose rape revenge arc reveals additional layers to the injunction for sexual violence victims to become survivors. I show how the figure of the survivor sustains neoliberal economies of visibility. The *13 Reasons Why* and *SVU* RFH episode also presents a fictionalised account of Amanda Todd, a 15-year-old student who committed suicide after being a victim of sexual violence and cyberbullying. This chapter argues that for sexual violence to be spectacular, celebrity *victims*' testimonies need to be equally spectacular. This becomes tangible by addressing the multiple layers of fictionalization.

Despite its focus on sexual assault victims, *SVU*'s RFH episodes focus mainly on *celebrity* perpetrators and celebrity *perpetrators*. Chapter 4: *Celebrity* Perpetrators focuses on the former, i.e. powerful men who have been implicated for sexual assault. Rather than a loss of celebrity status, I posit that celebrity desecration is merely a new mode of media visibility that still cultivates interest in the celebrity's private life, albeit for different purposes. My analysis revolves around *SVU*'s RFH episodes on Jimmy Savile, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, and Roger Ailes. These fictionalisations enable a critique of celebrity culture, but only to a certain extent. The perp walk and celebrity *Schadenfreude* constitute a diagnosis of power. However, they are shaped by meritocratic ideologies and don't challenge structural inequality. It then turns to *SVU* episodes dealing with Bernardo Bertolucci, Roman Polanski and Woody Allen to argue that the figure of the famous male artist lends itself to a rhetoric of injury and victimisation. This enables them to maintain their celebrity status despite criminal accusations.

Chapter 5: Celebrity *Perpetrators* focuses on perpetrators of sexual violence who have become famous for their crimes. It offers a theoretical framework to grasp the celebrified

rapist popularised through true crime and the news. Celebrified perpetrators are constructed as monsters, yet 'monstrosity' is a heterogenous category. The chapter weaves in *SVU*'s RFH episodes of Ted Bundy, Earl Bradley and Larry Nassar with true crime texts to show the multiple incarnations of the monstrous serial rapist. This transmedia corpus provides insights into how some perpetrators of sex crimes become celebrities, and why some are more infamous than others. I argue that celebrity *perpetrators* who capture anxieties related to heterosexuality, class and race, and trouble the meritocratic logics of celebrity culture, are more likely to be celebrified. I then turn to two fictionalisations of Brock Turner's trial, one in *SVU* and one in *13 Reasons Why*, to show that not all celebrified *perpetrators* are constructed as monsters. Turner and his fictional counterparts benefit from sympathetic media coverage because they embody the ideal neoliberal subject.

Chapter 6: *Celebrity* Advocates builds on the previous chapters to explore the intricacies of postfeminism, neoliberal feminism, and carceral feminism. I return to *SVU*'s fictionalisation of Gretchen Carlson's and Megyn Kelly's accusations against their former employer Roger Ailes to interrogate the commodification of feminism. Their celebrity confessional texts, which include celebrity memoirs, interviews, and open letters, offer important insights into the tensions between postfeminism and neoliberal feminism. I pursue this analysis of celebrity advocacy through an in-depth analysis of Mariska Hargitay's star image. I argue that Olivia Benson's fame exceeds the realm of *SVU* in her embodiment of carceral feminism. The chapter argues that postfeminist, carceral, and neoliberal discourses converge through the figure of the (super)heroic survivor. As result, self-help and the prison industrial complex are presented as the only solution to sexual violence.

The final chapter of the thesis, Chapter 7: Celebrity *Advocates*, explores resistances to this triangulation of feminism, neoliberalism, and celebrity culture. It revolves around anti-rape activists who have become spokespeople for the movement to end sexual assault on university campuses. The analysis is supported by *SVU* episodes dealing with campus sexual assault, as well as *It's On Us*, a nation-wide rape prevention campaign instigated by the Obama-Biden administration, *We Believe You*, a collection of activist testimonies edited by Annie E. Clark and Andrea L. Pinto, and Emma Sulkowicz's *Carry that Weight*,

an art performance piece. The chapter argues that celebrity *advocates* need to comply with the demands of the celebrity confessional to legitimise their interventions in the public sphere. At the same time, they manage to withstand to some extent the dominant narratives of the (super)heroic survivor. Their testimonies bring to the fore the experiences of victims and activists from marginalised communities and draw attention to the imbrication of neoliberal feminism with structural inequality.

In its systematic analysis of stardom and sexual violence in contemporary US media, the thesis makes an original contribution to the field of celebrity studies. This is the first study to interrogate the celebrification of victims, perpetrators, and advocates. In addition, the focus on RFH and celefiction constitutes an innovative way to conceptualise and study celebrity. This framework interrogates the role fictional characters play in the broader processes of celebrification and branding of feminism. As a result, the scope of the thesis accounts for the celebritisation – or the intensification of celebrity culture – of cultural representations of sexual violence. The case studies span across the last two decades. The thesis thus provides context to the emergence of #MeToo and engages with debates that have arisen since. It shows how the public sphere is gendered (Boyce Kay 2020) and how personal accounts of sexual assault have become a new testimonial genre (Serisier 2018). Mapping modes of celebrification and celebrity desecration reveals the cultural, economic, and political mechanisms that sustain the spectacle of sexual violence. This economy of visibility uncovers a new facet of the entanglement of popular feminism and popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser 2018c). Overall, the thesis draws attention to the ways that sexual violence and celebrity culture are often mutually constitutive.

CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY

The celebritisation of sexual violence

The distinction between celebrification and celebritisation (Driessens 2012) has been particularly helpful for my methodological framework. Celebrification, according to Driessens, refers to processes by which individual people become famous. In contrast, celebritisation tackles the "meta-processes […] of celebrity" (Driessens 2012:641). Celebritisation can be understood as the "societal and cultural changes implied by celebrity" (2012:643). This term captures the socio-cultural configurations that shape regimes of fame and these need to be contextualised in time and space. Celebritisation encompasses two dimensions of celebrity culture: the scope of celebrity culture as an ever-expanding phenomenon (quantitative), and the shifts in nature of fame (qualitative) (Driessens 2012:644). I find Driessen's multi-dimensional approach to celebrity culture compelling for its transversality, situating individual celebrities in relation to the cultural value of fame and its encroachment in contemporary societies.

I theorise celebrity culture as a complex system of visibility. Therefore, the thesis is articulated around the distinction between celebritisation and celebrification. Celebritisation is key to thinking through how media representations of sexual violence have become increasingly linked to celebrity culture. Media representations of sexual violence cannot be solely attributed to celebrity culture; yet, the celebrity victim, celebrity perpetrator, and celebrity advocate are widely recognised figures in the contemporary mediascape. In addition, celebritisation calls for an analysis of celebrity culture in terms of networks. I thus developed a methodological framework that documents the ways in which sexual violence has been celebritised. I use diagrams in each chapter to map all my case studies and how they relate to one another (Cf. Appendix 1, Appendix 2, Appendix 3). This use of cartography fulfills a double theoretical and methodological function: it illustrates the nexus of two systems of visibility – the spectacle of sexual violence and celebrity culture – and offers a way to critically analyse this celebritisation of sexual violence.

These maps also delineate different modes of celebrification which call for a multi-modal discourse analysis of fame. This approach is inspired by Anthea Taylor's analysis of celebrity feminism (2017) who makes a case for differentiating celebrified feminists from celebrities who identify as feminists because they operate on distinct regimes of fame. Taylor herself draws on Patrick McCurdy's study of celebrity environmental activism (2013) which makes a distinction between celebrities who became activists – i.e., *celebrity* activists – and activists famous for their politics – i.e., celebrity *activists*. While my case studies partake in the celebritisation of sexual violence, I use the maps to address the ways in which celebrity culture reconfigures the spectacle of sexual violence. Chapter 2 deals with *celebrity* victims – i.e., celebrities who publicly shared their sexual violence testimony – while Chapter 3 looks at celebrity *victims* – i.e., victims of sexual violence thrown into the limelight through the mediatisation of the case and trial. Chapter 4 studies *celebrity* perpetrators – i.e., celebrities who have been accused of sexual assault – and Chapter 5 revolves around celebrity *perpetrators* – i.e., sex offenders who became famous because of the crime they committed. Finally, Chapter 6 is centered around *celebrity* advocates – i.e., celebrities who become spokespeople for anti-rape campaigns – and Chapter 7 addresses celebrity *advocates* – i.e., activists famous because of their advocacy work. Attending to processes of celebrification reveals how individuals become part of this system of visibility whilst also showing its instability and hierarchies. Indeed, not all celebrities are famous in the same way.

As my gaze oscillates between *celebrity* victims / celebrity *victims*, *celebrity* perpetrators / celebrity *perpetrators*, and *celebrity* advocates / celebrity *advocates*, I am also aware of the feminist critiques of celebrity typologies that revolve around processes of celebrification, such as the ones developed by Rojek (2001) and Nayar (2009). For example, Lorraine York (2013) contends that Chris Rojek's typology of celebrity is a value system that grants more value to 'achieved celebrity' famous for their merit or talent than 'ascribed celebrity' or 'famous for nothing' celebrity. In other words, Rojek's typology functions as a cultural hierarchy of fame whereby some ways of becoming famous are deemed more valuable and legitimate than others. Moreover, these hierarchies of celebrification are sustained by gendered assumptions around labour, authenticity, and the legitimacy of fame. For York, "the celetoid is the celebrity of whom one does not

approve and whose labour, such as it may be, remains invisible to that onlooker" (2013:1332). Similarly, Su Holmes and Diane Negra (2011) argue that these gendered hierarchies transpire through the very lexicon employed within celebrity studies: while 'fame' suggests a well-deserved form of recognition for hard work or talent cultivated over time, 'celebrity' connotes an undeserved fleeting visibility in the public sphere despite the absence of any particular aptitude. As Brenda Weber notes, "fame marks aspiration; celebrity brands ambition. Fame indicates valour; celebrity stains scandal" (2012:18). These semantic considerations point to long-standing anxieties over women's presence in the public sphere. Consequently, the interchangeable use of star/dom, celebrity and fame can operate as a feminist strategy to disrupt gendered hierarchies of celebrity, a position I will adopt throughout this thesis.

Transmedia celebrity

My cartography of the celebritisation of sexual violence also addresses how fame is a transmedia phenomenon. Most of celebrity studies scholarship is premised on the notion that fame is constructed through a wide range of media texts, which has only intensified with digital media cultures (Jenkins 2006). However, the implications of transmediality for celebrity culture remain undertheorised in the field. The multi-media and multi-textual qualities of fame are evoked mainly to argue in favour of comparative approaches to fame attuned to different media industries (Turner 2004; see also Holmes and Redmond 2010). Such studies are effective in uncovering the intricate and minute configurations of fame. For instance, Su Holmes and James Bennett (2010) draw attention to the multiplicity and diversity of television fame. While I do agree with the authors that the limits of transmedia formation of celebrity must be investigated, it is equally important to study the resonances of celebrity culture across media platforms. This is especially true since the consumption of celebrity news, and media more generally, occurs through multiple devices and technologies. Furthermore, media events like #MeToo require a methodological framework that can trace their reverberations through a complex mediascape.

Henry Jenkins defines transmedia storytelling as "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (2007: paragraph 2). Transmedia

storytelling is thus located at the nexus of the production and consumption of discourses. It stems from the horizontal consolidation of media conglomerates as well as participatory cultures (Jenkins 2006). More generally, transmediality refers to the proliferation of content across media platforms. As a result, the first implication of transmediality for the study of celebrity culture is the multiplication of data.

Dyer's semiotic analysis of film stardom organises a heterogenous corpus of media texts using the following five categories: "*promotion*, *publicity*, *films* and *criticism* and *commentaries*" (1998:60, emphasis original). Promotion entails any material produced by the industry to advertise a star's activities or the film they feature in. Promotion, then, is distinct from publicity such as celebrity gossip. Films are the main texts through which a star image is constructed, which is further developed through writings produced within the cinephile community. This classification is relevant to construction of celebrity beyond film stardom, and still valid despite the advent of digital media cultures. For instance, social media support both promotional and publicity texts while collaborative hypertextual platforms like wikis enable fans to share their own criticism and commentaries. The impact of transmediality on celebrity culture is an intensification and diversification of the logics identified by Dyer more than four decades ago. Mapping the celebritisation of sexual violence thus means organising the data in a way that accounts for the heterogeneity of the corpus of media texts analysed.

A second implication of transmedia cultures for regimes of fame is the specific ways in which transmedia celebrity reactivates tensions between the individual and the collective, the private and the public. These paradoxes of transmedia cultures are captured in recent critical work on *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. This case study illustrates the cross pollination of contemporary celebrity culture and branding across media platforms – television, social media – and genres – reality TV, celebrity news, advertisement (Ferreira and Machado 2020). The intersection of the Kardashian family brand with individual family members' storylines also highlights the contradictions in celebrity culture which are profoundly derivative yet revolves around the fetishization of idiosyncrasy (Gmiterková 2018). This double pull, which is rooted in the synergy of media industries, is reminiscent of tensions between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenization observed in the context of global media cultures (Appadurai 1990) or the television

industry (Gray 2008). In other words, celebrity culture sheds lights on transmediality as both "expansion-as-commerce" and "expansion-as-democratization" (Freeman and Gambarato 2019: 4). In my corpus, celebrification means not only the possibility to access the public sphere and share one's story of sexual violence, but also to seek commercial opportunities that arise from this form of publicity. Mapping celebrity storytelling thus reveals patterns in themes and modes of expression.

This leads to the third effect of transmediality on celebrity culture, namely the place it carves out for the commodification of the personal. York defines celebrity agency as "a web of relational, contextual agendas" (2013:1341) that structure and constrain the industry of celebrity, rather than a quality that individual celebrities possess. For York, celebrity is the "sum of industrial relations of power" (2013:1340) and celebrity agency is one of the many forces that operate within the industry of celebrity. This understanding of celebrity agency as an agency embedded in industrial interactions rather than individual actions enables an analysis of the spectacle of sexual violence attuned to the complex operations of visibility. Indeed, the question is less whether a star possesses the means to intervene on her own public image, and more about the contextual configurations that allow certain celebrities to be more visible and heard than others. The industrial shifts at play in transmedia cultures afford celebrities more agency in producing promotional material in the form of confessional texts (Redmond 2008) or gain publicity through emotive performances (Nunn and Biressi 2010). Recent studies on celebrity transmedia authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Lecznar 2017) or Lena Dunham (Murray 2017) illustrate the complex operation of the celebrity confessional as personal testimonies that are shared through various media channels.

This multifaceted celebrity confessional effectively captures what is at stake in transmedia storytelling. Theorists of transmedia culture reminds us that:

> The true function of any single piece of transmedia content is not simply to enrich, enhance, or augment its companion pieces, but in fact to give one piece of content (a film, a web series, a comic book, a novel, etc.) a new, previously missing dimension that forever shifts the meaning of that piece of content into something else entirely (Dalby 2017, quoted in Freeman and Gambarato 2018).

In other words, each celebrity story of sexual assault is a piece of this wider system of visibility. Appendix 1, Appendix 2, and Appendix 3 situate each fragment within the web of celebritised sexual violence. They also account for the construction and circulation of celebrity across media.

A transmedia approach to celebrity culture poses a significant methodological challenge: given the ubiquity of sexual violence in contemporary culture, as well as the proliferation of content across platforms, how might one approach the task of sampling? To remedy this, I developed two concepts – 'ripped-from-the-headlines' and 'celefiction' – to operationalise the selection of case studies in a way that is rigorous and systematic. This constitutes an innovative methodological and theoretical approach to celebrity studies. I explain in the following section what each concept entails and how these facilitated the corpus constitution.

Ripped-from-the-headlines

Ripped-from-the-headlines (RFH) is a storytelling technique frequently found in popular culture. It refers to any fictional cultural text – TV series episode, film, comic strip, etc. – inspired by true events. There is a long legacy in the US entertainment industry of using fictionalised accounts of real-life events to discuss social issues, which dates to the 1930s. In its early years, Warner Bros. owed its commercial success to films that combined entertainment with education. Building their brand around the tagline "Torn from today's headlines!", the studio's early blockbusters were characterised by their social commentary on a range of issues arising in the period marked by the Great Depression and leading up to the Second World War (Yogerst 2016). The position of Warner Bros. in the cinema industry means that the gritty realism of their RFH films were key in the development of film genres – like social romance dramas, crime films, or adventure films (Yogerst 2016) – an influence that persists to this day.

In the US television landscape, RFH was revived in crime series in the 1950s but it was popularised with NBC *Law & Order* and its various spinoffs (Collins 2009). What is remarkable about the *Law & Order* franchise is the short turnaround with which news headlines are turned into a fictional episode, with sometimes only a few weeks between the real-life events and the RFH episode air date. As a result, "the body of *Law & Order*

seasons resembles a timeline of American crime references" (Collins 2009:88). This serves two purposes: it consolidates the *Law & Order* brand, and it helps the franchise build a long term and faithful audience. The RFH theme is built into the series' formula. Its opening credit sequence features a sequence of newspaper and tabloid front pages featuring photos of crime scenes. RFH is also used to create a buzz around new episodes, and this marketing technique has only intensified over the years with social media. In the context of digital media cultures, hyperlink gives 'ripped from the headlines' a literal meaning. It exemplifies how transmedia production spans across fictional and non-fictional texts (Freeman and Gambarato 2018).

RFH episodes, however, are not a factual retelling of real-life cases. They almost always feature a different resolution and frequently combine elements of different news stories. This is not only a production strategy to avoid potential lawsuits but constitutes what Tanya Horeck calls a "narrative hook" to entice viewers (2019a). The series builds in clues within the narrative to help the fans identify which real-life event the episodes refer to. One of the pleasures of watching *Law & Order* stems from finding these cultural references within the fictional story. In this way, RFH storytelling is a precursor to the gamification of the viewing experience which Horeck theorised in relation to representations of sexual violence in binge-watchable TV series (2019a) and true crime (2019b). Streaming TV series, Horeck argues, hail their viewers into active audiences through complex storylines and affective narrative hooks. Like in a videogame, each episode of *Law & Order* is a self-contained mystery which viewers elucidate before unlocking the next episode. The *Law & Order* franchise is not streaming TV as it still follows the weekly broadcasting schedule of prime-time TV. However, previous series are available on a range of streaming platforms outside of networked TV. On any given day, one could get sucked into a *Law & Order* marathon and connect with other fans of the series on social media and online discussion forums.

The series format also invites viewers to emulate the on-screen detectives as they become amateur sleuths of cultural artefacts. This model of engagement is what Jason Mittell (2015) calls "forensic fandom", which refers to viewing practices that revolve around active engagement with the form and content of TV series. Each RFH *Law & Order* episode revolves around two central enigmas: finding out who the fictional perpetrator is

and identifying which real-life case inspired the episode. As fans attempt to decipher the answers to these questions, they interrogate the internal logic of the story, identifying similarities and discrepancies. They compile their findings on blog posts, online forums, and social media. For instance, the *Law & Order* wiki (lawandorder.fandom.com) contains a database of all RFH and crossovers across the franchise. As marketing apparatus and participatory culture, RFH is thus the key to fully grasp the extent of the transmedia *Law & Order* universe.

Because of the way it articulates fiction and news events, RFH storytelling is necessarily enmeshed within transmedia celebrity culture. For cultural references to be recognisable, they need to pertain to crime stories implicating celebrities or celebrified victims or perpetrators. As a narrative strategy, RFH thus finds itself at the nexus of the celebritisation of crime and the celebrification of individuals through TV series. Since 1999, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* has continuously addressed the intersection of stardom and sexual violence through its RFH episodes. This trend has only intensified since the sexual assault scandal implicating Harvey Weinstein and countless other powerful men in the entertainment industry and beyond. In the aftermaths, many TV series came up with their own RFH #MeToo storyline: *The Bold Type* (Freeform, 2017-2021), *The Good Fight* (CBS, 2017-), *The Morning Show* (Apple TV+, 2019-) to name only a few examples. Each episode interrogates specific aspects of the imbrication of sexual violence and celebrity culture. Taken together, they offer a compelling transmedia corpus to interrogate the celebritisation of sexual violence in popular media.

Celefiction

If RFH storytelling is a feature of transmedia cultures, so are famous fictional characters. I borrow the term 'celefiction' from Pramod K. Nayar's typology of fame (2009) to theorise this specific configuration of fame. Celefictions are recognized by a wide audience, they arouse the same kind of affective responses as their non-fictional counterparts, and they are produced and consumed through mass media. Examples of celefiction relevant to my thesis include Lisbeth Salander, from the Millennium book and film series, Hannah Baker and Bryce Walker from the novel and TV series *13 Reasons Why*. For Nayar, however, celefictions are not celebrities, rather they are an example of

what Chris Rojek calls “celetoids”, i.e. “any form of compressed, concentrated, attributed celebrity” (2001:20). Celefictions’ fame might be more durable than other short-term celebrities who are forgotten as suddenly as they appeared in the media. Moreover, another fundamental reason why celefictions are not celebrities is because “the personality or character they represent is *all there is*. That is, there is no inner or private self behind the public face” (Nayar 2009:20). What is puzzling in the case of celefiction then is that their stories arouse interest despite this lack of private expression behind the public face as they are, after all, only fictional. Thus, Nayar argues that celefictions could be read as the archetype of a postmodern condition whereby “the images, the simulation is the reality” (2009:20). Nayar’s concept of celefiction is useful for my research as it allows for the inclusion of fictional characters in the study of celebrity culture “*as part of everyday life and culture*” (2009:2, emphasis original). I argue, however, that celefictions operate *as* celebrities *despite* their lack of private expression behind the public face.

To understand celefiction as postmodern simulacrum is to imply that audiences confuse fiction and reality, which is not the case. The sincere and intense affective relations audiences cultivate with the characters are real. Just like celebrity, celefictions provide a language to make sense of the world we live in, in all its complexities and contradictions. The plethora of online quizzes telling us which fictional character we are from X or Y TV series shows the reach of celefiction in everyday life. Equally real is the viewers’ active involvement in the process of celebrity personification – i.e. celebrities’ capacity to continue performing their own persona in different contexts (Chouliaraki 2012). In the case of TV and film celefiction, this is paradoxically achieved through the cultivation of the tension between what is fictional and what is real. The corporality that the actors share with the characters they portray is a primary site where this tension is expressed, but it is the audience who dissolve the superimposition of the character’s persona with the actor’s. In other words, it is the viewers who attribute meaning to celebrity performance through what Michel de Certeau would call multiple acts of cultural poaching, or ‘*braconnage’* (1990) and, consequently, give to the fictional characters the legitimacy of their existence.

Celefiction are thus transmedia beings *par excellence*. Commenting on Nayar’s discussion of celefiction, Marshall states: “their celebrity status underlines their power to move outside of their primary text into public discourse and through public spaces - an

extra-textual movement which fundamentally defines what a celebrity embodies" (2014, paragraph 3). Building on Nathalie Heinich's theorisation of celebrity as visibility capital (2011), Marshall uses the word '*personnage*', the French term for fictional character, to show the mechanisms at play in the construction of fame in serial media texts. The common etymology of person, *personnage*, and persona speaks to the transmedia nature of fame, and fictional characters' unique position in it.

Celefiction are hybrid social beings whose corporality redefines the contours of fiction, and media genres more broadly. They populate all spheres of the contemporary mediascape, but TV celefiction are fascinating examples that best exemplify the articulation of persona and seriality. Writing on the adaptations of 1950s French novels to the small screen, Sabine Chalvon-Demersay (2005a; 2005b; 2012) makes a strong case to consider celefiction as a type of television fame. Chalvon-Demersay writes: "[fictional characters] were cast into the realm of television stars and in turn became stars"[4] (2015b:96, my translation). She argues that TV celefiction come to life through the mediation of a screen. They exist alongside other social actors whose public persona similarly depends on the multiplication of their image through information and communication technologies. As the consumption of TV series evolved with new technologies, the TV has been replaced by a laptop, a tablet or a smartphone (Cf. Bennett and Holmes 2010; Combes 2011; Wiard 2015). TV celefictions are thus integral to contemporary transmedia celebrity.

The actor and the fictional character share a body and the TV series format enables familiarity between characters and their audience over sustained periods of time (Chalvon-Demersay 2011; 2015a; 2015b). Seriality thus blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality through a form of affective transference that binds the actors with the characters they embody (Marshall 2014). Moreover, actors cultivate the affective connections between their on- and off-screen persona to consolidate their public image. Indeed, affective labour is a long-time strategy within celebrity culture as emotions and feelings become a currency through which authenticity is sold within both the economy

[4] "[Les Célébfictions] ont été projetés au milieu des stars de télévision et sont devenus à leur tour des stars".

of brand culture (Banet-Weiser 2012; 2018c) and the economy of experience (Illouz 2018).

SVU offers a compelling example of a key celefiction around which popular representations of sexual violence converge. Olivia Benson, portrayed by Mariska Hargitay since the series premiered in 1999, is hailed for her continuous and vocal support of sexual assault victims. Her fame is mediated by *SVU* fans as much as it originates within the series. Moreover, Benson and her colleagues are key to unlocking the affective relationality at play in *SVU* transmedia storytelling. Indeed, RFH episodes aim to produce a sense of complicity with the series' audience, which can be in turn be generative of feminist solidarities. However, the political potential of these fictionalised accounts is actualised only if the audience is able to identify the real-life sexual assault scandal the episode refers to. As a result, the series' main characters will often make sarcastic comments linking the fictional case they are investigating to the real-life events. These intertextual comments both claim similarities with real-life sexual assault scandals and reify the fictional nature of the stories told within the scope of the series. Similarly, guest stars and cameos function as a playful reminder of celebrity culture beyond the series while capitalising on the interventions of real-life celebrities in the realm of fiction. Both intertextual comments and cameos revolve around humour and irony to ground the form of authenticity labour carried out by celefictions.

Critical discursive analysis of fame

'Celebrity' and 'fame' are polysemous and any attempt at conceptualising these terms underscores different aspects at play in the representation, production, and consumption of celebrity culture. There is a consensus in the field that celebrity is not an idiosyncratic quality, rather it is discursively constructed (Holmes and Redmond 2010). As a result, text-based analyses dominate the field of celebrity studies (Turner 2010). These are inscribed within the legacy of Dyer's seminal work on film stars, which studied star images as ideological signs (1998 [1979]; 1986). Celebrity texts are a gateway to analyse the ideological underpinnings of popular culture. As P. David Marshall (1997) argues, celebrity culture stems from the development of modern democracies: celebrities, as embodiments of a hyper-individualised ethos, are key figures around which power is

articulated. This body of work sets the tone for a programme of research that is concerned with celebrity culture as a vehicle of contemporary power formations. Celebrity studies is firmly grounded within cultural studies, a field characterised by its commitment to "demarginalization" and to analyse operations of power and resistance in the everyday consumption of media texts (White and Schwoch 2006:13). It is therefore no surprise that text-based methods, and specifically critical discourse analysis (CDA hereafter), features prominently within celebrity studies scholarship.

CDA approaches media discourses as sites of power and struggle. It aims to investigate how social inequality is expressed and legitimized through language (Wodak 2001). Its premise is that media representations are both instruments of power as well as a means through which reality is socially constructed (Van Leeuwen, cited in Wodak 2001:9). The aim of CDA is to uncover how language sustains power dynamics and makes ideologies seem natural or common sense. The object of study for CDA is the mediation of ideologies through texts (and across a broad range of social contexts), including verbal and written communication as well as images and sounds (Wodak 2001). In this regard, CDA is comparable to other text-based methods such as semiotics. Yet, what distinguishes CDA from other text-based approaches is its commitment to analysing discourses while taking into account the social context in which they are produced, circulated and received. For Dyer, ideologies "are the terms in which the production/consumption dialectic is articulated" (1998:34). In other words, reading and contextualising the construction of the star image provides insights into both the ideological reach of celebrity culture and specific celebrities. For this reason, CDA is a well-suited method to address celebrity as ideological formation.

However, analysing fame exclusively as a textual quality runs the risk of obfuscating other dynamics at play in celebrity culture. For instance, Graeme Turner (2010) calls for innovative research to interrogate the formation of celebrity as an industry, as a commodity, and as a cultural formation with a social function. One of the key questions he raises pertains to the impact celebrity has on culture (Turner 2010). This question bears important theoretical and ethical ramifications as it interrogates the human cost of celebrity culture. For instance, Turner cites Jade Goody and Britney Spears as examples of celebrities who have been negatively impacted by the very industries who made them

famous (2010:13). He also discusses cultural studies approaches to fame to challenge media effects theories. He makes a case for the urgent need to address the prevalence and intensification of regimes of fame in contemporary culture, and how they impact consumers. He thus recommends developing a multi-disciplinary approach that bridges production, representation, and consumption of fame. According to Turner (2010), to study the political economy of celebrity requires a research apparatus that moves beyond celebrity as text. I share Turner's concerns; however, I suggest that textual analysis does not necessarily fall short in addressing them. CDA is a method that is finally attuned to the intricacies of contemporary economies of visibility.

CDA, with its attention to intertextuality and interdiscursivity, allows me to address the transmedia nature of fame in more detail. CDA is amenable to my networked approach to celebrity studies because both draw attention to processes that are hidden or taken for granted. According to Norman Fairclough, "in human matters, interconnections and chains of cause and effect may be distorted out of vision. Hence 'critique' is essentially making visible the interconnectedness of things" (1985:747). CDA achieves this by paying attention to patterns of communication while the cartographic approach I developed organises the material around cultural resonances. In what follows, I explain my methodology which combines CDA and data visualisation to account for the scope of celebrity culture and its complex manifestations.

The central node: *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*

Law & Order: Special Victims Unit's (*SVU*) unique focus on sexually based offences offers a particularly compelling and rich corpus, and thus constitutes the central node of my thesis (Cf. Appendix 1, Appendix 2, Appendix 3). Its longevity marks it as a compulsory text for any feminist study of the representation of sexual violence in popular media cultures. To this date, 494 original episodes have aired since the series premiered in 1999. Its trademark RFH episodes constitutes an annotated chronology of the mediatisation of sexual violence in the US over the last 20 years. My data sampling thus started with the list of *SVU* RFH episodes compiled by viewers and fans of the series on the *Law & Order* wiki, which includes hyperlinks to Wikipedia articles detailing the

specifics of each case[5]. I cross-referenced each identified RFH episode from that list with the *SVU* episode catalogue listed on IMDb and the episode summaries on *SVU*'s Wikipedia page. This triangulation of user-generated sources enabled me to ensure the best factual accuracy. I supplemented this inventory of *SVU* RFH episodes by immersing myself within the *SVU* universe.

Because of my focus on the celebritisation of sexual violence, I focused primarily on episodes dealing with specific cases. As a rule, these are identified in the *SVU* wiki database using the name of the perpetrator, with a few exceptions using the name of the victim. In rare instances, the cases are catalogued through references to a notorious event. For example, the victim of the Steubenville High School rape case remains anonymous to this day, but her story has been fictionalised in RFH TV series episodes of *SVU* (S14E20), *Degrassi* (S13E23-24; S13E37-38), a film *The Assault* (Lifetime, 2014), and a novel *What We Saw* (Hartzler 2015). I discarded the few episodes centred around hate crime, murder, kidnapping or abuse that didn't involve sexual assault. I also did not take into account events that were not focused on specific people, such as RFH episodes on the COVID-19 pandemic in season 22. This systematic sampling process still resulted in over 200 episodes, which attests to the textual richness of *SVU* and its relevance as central node of the cartography this thesis carries out. However, its sheer scale still made this set of episodes difficult to manipulate. Consequently, I applied a technique inspired by snowball sampling to this corpus of texts.

Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is used in audience-based research to recruit participants on a referral basis. It is a respondent-driven sampling technique whereby participants share contacts of people they know who meet the criteria and might be interested in taking part in the research (Tenzek 2017). Through this referral process the pool of participants grows. The visual representation of this recruitment technique is an arborescence, or tree-shaped

[5] List of Law & Order : Special Victims Unit Ripped From the Headline episodes: https://lawandorder.fandom.com/wiki/List_of_Law_%26_Order:_Special_Victims_Unit_Ripped_from_the_Headline_episodes Date accessed: 25 July 2021.

graph, which translates the social network of the participants. In my snowball approach to texts, I focused on *SVU* RFH episodes which led to other media texts. These include:

- Episodes which present a fictionalised account of several real-life cases, e.g., "Reasonable Doubt" (S15E22) blends elements of the allegations against Roman Polanski and Woody Allen.

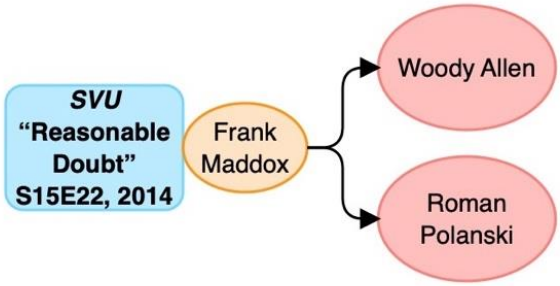


Figure 1: Example of RFH of two real-life cases

- Episodes of cases that have been fictionalised in other TV series, films, novels, e.g., "Devastating Story" (S16E18) was inspired by Emma Sulkowicz's *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)*, which was also the inspiration for *The Bold Type* episode "Carry the Weight" (S1E10).

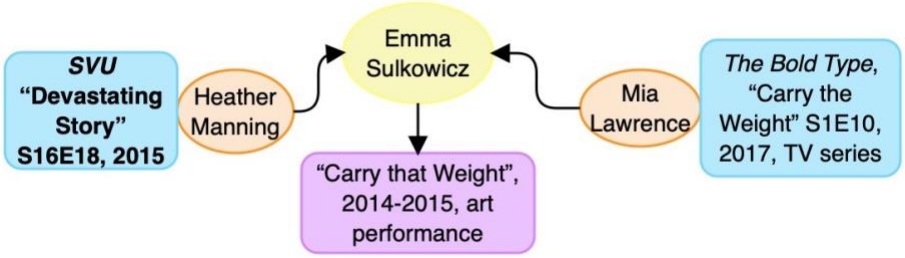


Figure 2: Example of multiple RFH from different TV series

- Episodes which rely heavily on other media texts, e.g., "The Newsroom" (S18E16) draws on Gretchen Carlson's op-eds in *The Huffington Post* (2015) and *Vice* (2017b), as well as Megyn Kelly's memoir *Settle for More* (2016). Incidentally, the *SVU* episode precedes by a few months the publication of Carlson's memoir *Be Fierce* (2017a) and the film *Bombshell* (2019) presents a RFH account of the same case.

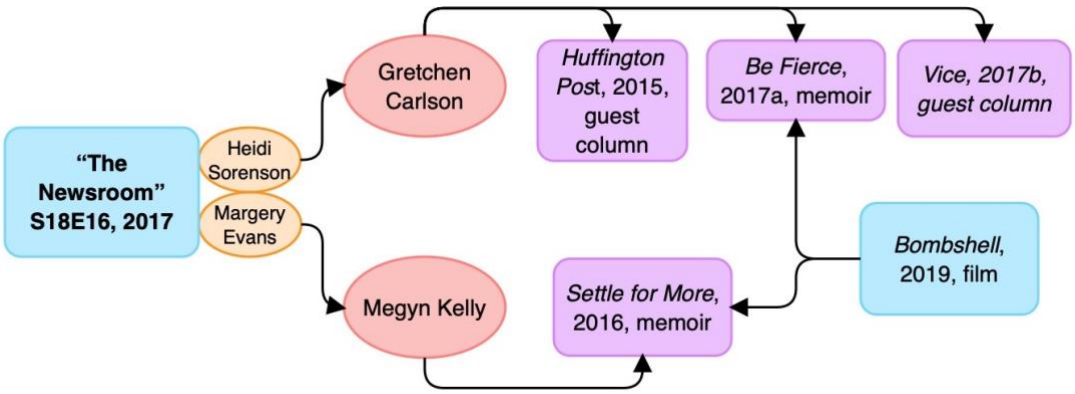


Figure 3: Example of RFH as multimedia nodes

- Episodes which are inspired by celefiction, e.g., "Branded" (S12E06) and "Contrapasso" (S19E03) are inspired by *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, the novel (2005) and two film adaptations (2009; 2011).

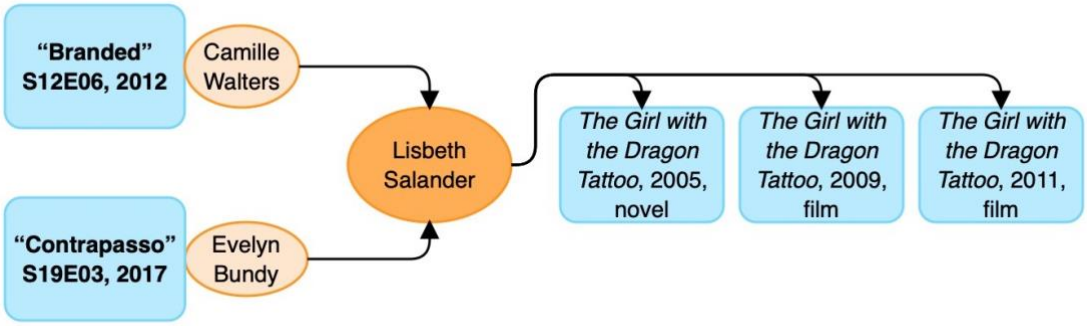


Figure 4: Example of ripped from fiction

In practice, the snowball approach to text-based analysis is an elaborate quest for intertextual clues within *SVU* episodes, using paratextual elements to conduct a targeted search. This snowball approach is applied in several rounds and an arborescence emerges, with some of its branches merging at different levels. For instance, the *SVU* episode "No Good Reason" (S19E04) is inspired by *13 Reasons Why*, the novel (2007) and the TV series (2017-2020). The second season of *13 Reasons Why* concludes with a rape trial verdict that is almost a verbatim reproduction of the real-life verdict of the *People v. Turner* (2015), which was already turned into an *SVU* RFH episode "Rape Interrupted" (S18E05) (Cf. Appendix 2 and Figure 9). This example shows the scope and circulation of cultural references at play in the celebritisation of sexual violence. The result is a

transmedia network of what Banet-Weiser calls "feminist flashpoints" (2018b), i.e., media events that open up and constrain discourses around sexual assault in the public sphere.

The question of genre

The corpus that emerges from this snowball sampling is heterogenous in terms of media type and content. There seems to be a tradition in cultural studies to build case studies relatively homogeneous in terms of genre. This is a valid approach to ensure generalisability and comparative analysis. In addition, CDA privileges a corpus of texts within a clearly defined genre. Indeed, CDA situates texts in relation to their context of production, and well-defined genres help establish the boundaries of analysis. As Reisigl and Wodak (2001) argue, intertextuality and interdiscursivity are necessarily connected to the question of genre. At first glance, my multimedia corpus might seem at odds with the sound principles of cultural studies and CDA. However, as I discussed at the beginning of the present chapter, cultural studies is a discipline which defines itself around its commitment to analysing relational dynamics of power. Cultural studies is characterised by an ongoing investment in innovative research methods that contribute to the expansion of the field. As White and Schwoch argue, in terms of methodological framework, cultural studies should be approached as "a site of innovation, since the idea of a negotiated method facilitates the development and response to social, cultural, and intellectual transformations; it proposes strategies of intellectual invention instead of disciplinary containment" (2006:7). Using CDA in conjunction with data visualisation allows me to address the cultural processes through which power is organised.

The cartography illustrates the ways in which feminist flashpoints emerge from the convergence of a range of media texts across cultural hierarchies. Mapping the corpus allows me to flatten these cultural distinctions and dedicate equal attention to texts which would be deemed 'high-brow', such as political performance art, documentary, film, and other texts which would be considered 'low-brow' such as TV series, celebrity news, magazines, newspaper, blogs, interviews, memoirs, social media posts, etc. In addition, I am not rejecting the case study approach because it is inductive and attuned to micro attributes of texts. Juxtaposing several case studies pieces together specific systems of meaning to give rise to more complex patterns. The cartography enables me to retain the

specificities of each media genre whilst reinscribing each case study within a system of visibility, riddled with tensions with regards to representation of sexual violence, victimhood, and feminism.

More specifically, what emerges from this corpus is an analysis of the celebrity confessional (Redmond 2008) as a specific genre of public speech. The celebrity confessional lends itself to all dimensions of the celebritisation of sexual violence; whether it is to share personal stories of sexual violence, defend one's reputation against sexual violence allegations, or engage in anti-sexual assault activism. As Wodak and Meyer argue, "power is signalled not only by grammatical forms within the text, but also by a person's control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text" (2001:11). This sheds lights on the ways in which the celebrity confessional becomes the main genre through which narratives of victimhood are mediated and granted cultural value. Furthermore, the cartography shows how this performance of the self is mediated through various media channels, from talk show interviews to social media posts. I acknowledge that this approach to media genre might obfuscate industrial logics or nuances in representation. However, designing a methodological framework for research always involves striking a delicate balance between scope and depth.

Media cartographies

While CDA draws on intertextuality (Kristeva 1986) in the way it attends to the implicit or explicit traces of other texts within the text analysed, my snowball-inspired approach is slightly different. CDA uses texts as a units of analysis and relies on a corpus constituted through systematic sampling criteria such as date range, type of publication, keywords, etc. However, this approach is of limited use when the intertextual clues require minute textual analysis attuned to the intricacies of each RFH case, and the corpus amounts to roughly 150 hours of audio-visual content. My approach thus attempts to solve these issues by slightly tweaking CDA without compromising its rigour.

CDA follows the legacy of grounded theory (GT) (Glaser and Strauss 1967), whereby a constant dialectic movement between data collection, analysis, and theorisation is the core dynamic of knowledge production. In more conventional approaches to CDA, this means providing elements to contextualise the text. I take this approach quite literally with my

methodological approach which maps how each text relates to each other. In fact, it is the cartography that drives my selection of case studies (Cf. Appendix 1, Appendix 2, Appendix 3). More than just a data visualisation tool, the diagrams produce the analysis because they articulate the resonances and tensions between case studies. It follows two GT sampling principles: axial coding and discriminating sampling. The former recommends finding the most extreme differences between the texts analysed, while the latter entails selective coding to highlight under exploited categories or relationships between categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Diagrams are indeed recommended by grounded theory scholars to illustrate relationship between categories (Titscher et al. 2000).

The downside of this non-random approach to sampling is its lack of generalisability. This is however not a limitation since I am not conducting a quantitative analysis of the *SVU* RFH episodes. Furthermore, snowball sampling ensures reproducibility of the project. Other scholars would draw a similar analysis by using the same methods, albeit with different case studies. Finally, the RFH snowball method is a methodological toolkit that could be used to interrogate the nexus of celebrity culture with social issues other than sexual violence.

This approach also makes a compelling case for a horizontal approach to knowledge production because of its reliance on user-generated sources, as well as my own cultural references. It highlights the continuity between scientific and everyday expertise. As Titscher et al. argue, "everyday knowledge is not structurally different from scientific knowledge. It is an indispensable resource for the scientific process and must be made useful to it." (2000:73). My methodological framework thus espouses CDA's commitment to challenging power hierarchies and pushes it to its fullest potential.

CDA's central tenet is that power is productive, not just coercive. The method thus accounts for media texts as sites of struggle, that are also sites of competing meanings and ideologies. Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) approach to CDA is abductive because, following the legacies of grounded theory, the categories of analysis emerge from the dialectical movement between theory and data. Their main concern is how authority is constructed through discursive strategies like references, predication, argumentation,

perspectivation, intensification and mitigation (Meyer 2001:27). In other words, they look at how key figures are identified and named, and whether their attributes are negative or positive. They also look at how processes of inclusion or exclusion are delineated through specific arguments, privilege certain perspectives over others, and use rhetorical devices to amplify or mitigate certain political positions (Meyer 2001: 27). Reisigl and Wodak's approach is thus uniquely equipped to interrogate the politics of visibility: "who gets to speak"? (Sykes 2017) and "whose personal is more political"? (Phipps 2016).

In addition, their attention to intertextuality and interdiscursivity is key to contextualise CDA within the socio-political events. This discourse-historical approach is key to celebrity studies as fame is geographically and culturally circumscribed through local, national, regional and global contexts. For instance, some celebrities I discussed in this thesis benefit from an international recognition – like Weinstein – whereas others are limited to specific regional contexts and/or communities. For instance, I became aware of the celebrity *advocates* discussed in Chapter 7 because I was involved in student-led anti-sexual assault activist groups during my undergraduate studies at McGill University (2009-2013). This example shows how fame can span across two countries (the US and Canada) but be circumscribed to certain communities (higher education student activism). Indeed, as Samita Nandy (2015) argues in her analysis of the Canadian star system, the cultural and political resonances between the US and Canada are multiple and complex. Any analysis of fame thus needs to account for "the national specificity of a celebrity, their global reach and the local or 'glocal' way in which they are made sense of" (Holmes and Redmond 2010:5). Yet, this example also demonstrates that this enterprise is necessarily shaped by the researchers' own positionality and celebrity attachments (Redmond 2014). The valorisation of knowledge production rooted in the everyday and their inevitable partiality are two notions widely theorised in feminist studies. In the following section, I discuss the implications of my cartography of the celebritisation of sexual violence for feminist theory.

Feminist cartographies

Diagrams are widely used in scientific fields to make visible specific features of the phenomena analysed. They support written explanation beyond the constraints of written

words. As a form of scientific visualisation, diagrams thus constitute an epistemic practice (Priest, De Toffoli, Findlen 2018). While there has been little theorisation of the use of diagrams in feminist theory, their use is more ubiquitous than one would expect. Sam McBean's genealogy of the feminist diagram encompasses maps and charts, but also what she calls "diagrammatic imaginary" (2021:219) which refers to metaphors which are often translated into diagrams in teaching. McBean (2021:219) provides the following examples of such diagrammatic imagery include Adrienne Rich's 'lesbian continuum' (1980), Marilyn Frye's 'bird cage of sexism' (1983), Peggy McIntosh's 'knapsack of white privilege' (1989), Judith Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' (1990), and Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1991).

These widely cited examples of diagrammatic imagery reveal the dynamic nature of diagrams. Each of the above-mentioned examples have been taken up in academia and beyond and have supported a rich theorisation (Cf. Hancock 2016 for a genealogy of intersectionality for instance). Diagrams are social practices as they are informed by scientific and cultural contexts they are produced in, and in turn, shape the field (Priest, De Toffoli, Findlen 2018). Indeed, their function is more than mere illustrations, they can be manipulated to generate new hypotheses (Priest, De Toffoli, Findlen 2018). McBean remarks that maps and charts are not often addressed in critical engagements with feminist theory. Her analysis retrieves Ti-Grace Atkinson's diagrams (1974) from the feminist archive. These charts map women's oppression as well as the tactics women might use in a revolution against the patriarchy. Diagrams are thus political tools that diagnose power dynamics of the present and sketch possible feminist futures.

McBean's genealogy of feminist diagrams shows how these are well suited to analyse power dynamics. They reveal the work of ideologies and how texts have been shaped by their cultural contexts. This use of diagrams as epistemological tools to address power dynamics can also be found in cultural studies. For instance, the circuit of culture (Du Gay et al. 1997) is a theoretical framework that allows us to think through five key aspects of the cultural dimensions of any given media artefact – i.e., representation, identity, production, consumption, regulation. The circuit of culture has been adapted to the study of celebrity by Redmond (2019). His circuit of celebrity affect addresses how affect, aesthetics, and embodiment generate sensory connections between fans and celebrities

that are suffused with power. More than visualisation, the circuit of culture and the circuit of celebrity affect trigger an analysis of complex cultural and media phenomena. They highlight how each cultural dimension informs and impacts one another, and how cultural and political economy are mutually constitutive. As a result, my use of cartographies and CDA supports an analysis of visibility as a series of interlocking systems of oppression.

There are three maps with one for each part of the thesis. Appendix 1: Cartography of Celebrity Victims maps the circulation of sexual violence testimonies analysed in Chapter: 2 *Celebrity* Victims and Chapter 3: Celebrity *Victims*. Appendix 2: Cartography of Celebrity Perpetrators outlines the case studies that underpin my discussion of the celebrification of perpetrators developed in Chapter 4: *Celebrity* Perpetrators and Chapter 5: Celebrity *Perpetrators*. Finally, Appendix 3: Cartography of Celebrity Advocates records the advocacy work analysed in Chapter 6: *Celebrity* Advocates and Chapter 7: Celebrity *Advocates*. All three use *SVU* as a central node to map out systems of visibility. The chapter's mirrored structure is reproduced in the map. The upper section of each map deals with how *celebrity* victims, *celebrity* perpetrators, and *celebrity* perpetrators negotiate their claim to victimhood. The lower section is dedicated to celebrity *victims*, celebrity *perpetrators*, and celebrity *advocates*. This spatial organisation brings each of the paired chapters together.

Colour coding is used to compute different types of celebrification that make up this transmedia corpus. The blue rectangles represent works of fiction and titles of *SVU* are in bold. The purple rectangles indicate celebrity confessional texts while light grey rectangle represent organisations. People are identified with an ellipsis. Because this project is interested in the politics of fictionalisation, fictional celebrities are highlighted in shades of orange. Light orange indicates fictional characters whose fame is constrained to one work of fiction whereas the darker orange marks transmedia celefiction. In addition, ellipses representing fictional characters are smaller and attached to the work of fiction they stem from, whereas celefictions are identified with standalone ellipsis to visually mirror other types of celebrities. Celebrities from the entertainment industry are in red. Celebrified victims, perpetrators, and advocates are in yellow. Finally, arrows are used to visually represent the process of fictionalisation at play in RFH. The RFH episode points

to the real-life case it draws on. Overall, these cartographies delineate the complex operations of visibility at play in the spectacularisation of sexual violence.

Feminist ethics

Working on the celebritisation of sexual violence requires a methodological apparatus that addresses the ways in which social inequalities are reproduced and legitimised. CDA is well-suited for this purpose because it is "*problem- or issue-oriented*, rather than paradigm-oriented" (Van Dijk 1995:17). In other words, the aim of CDA is not to uncover the linguistic dimension of texts, but rather to reveal how power is legitimised through communication. CDA is thus a method that is explicitly political as it attempts to generate strategies to challenge dominant ideologies. Van Dijk writes: "Critical Discourse Analysis, thus, emphasizes the fact that the scholarly enterprise is part and parcel of social and political life, and that therefore also the theories, methods, issues and data-selection in discourse studies are always political" (1995:19). This raises an important question in terms of feminist ethics: why study a few celebrities rather than the majority whose voice is systematically silenced and marginalised? The answer is twofold: analysing systems of visibility reveals processes of exclusion, and a critical analysis of the celebritisation of sexual violence reveals the fallacy of a feminist politics of visibility.

Many feminist media scholars have addressed the challenges of writing about sexual violence in the aftermaths of #MeToo. Thinking of #MeToo as a media event contributes to its depoliticization, while casting it as publicity rather than politics (Savigny 2020). Another way in which #MeToo can be depoliticised is when the only focus is on individual perpetrators (Boyle 2019). Similarly, to focus on the stories of famous women is to hide the underlying structure of power, especially the ways in which the movement against sexual violence is co-opted by white women to exclude women of colour, sex workers, and trans people (Phipps 2020). In sum, these critiques point to the ways in which feminist flashpoints centre the experiences of white cis-gendered able-bodied women. These critiques, especially the latter one, are not new. The exclusion of women of colour from feminist mobilisations against sexual violence has been well documented by scholars like Angela Davis (1981), Kimberlé Crenshaw (2005) and Ange-Marie Hancock (2016) to name only a few.

A critical analysis of the unmarked

One solution to this conundrum is to re-politicise #MeToo by contextualising it within histories of feminist activisms. For instance, Savigny (2020) suggests that we focus on the stories of women who are not celebrities, and on the micro-level and cumulative experiences that legitimise sexism and rape culture. However, ordinary women are not exempt from the logics of fame, as my analysis of celebrified *victims* (Chapter 3) and celebrified *advocates* (Chapter 7) will show. Furthermore, such a stance eschews the thorny questions that arise from the celebritisation of sexual violence. For these reasons, I chose to focus on celebrity narratives rather than focusing on media representations of marginalised communities. My choice to focus on those who benefit from a large capital of visibility is both a methodological and a political one.

Mapping a system of visibility reveals the power structure that upholds it. Devoting critical energies to elements of contemporary life that are taken for granted foregrounds the ways in which these work as instruments of power. Analysing the spectacle of sexual violence as a system of visibility allows me to address the political economy of whiteness, heterosexuality, cis-gendered and able-bodied identities. Throughout the thesis, I ask, "who gets to speak?" and "whose voice is heard?" so as not to lose sight of whose voices are delegitimised, silenced, or excluded. As Savigny argues "who deserves to be heard and to speak, to have dominant roles in society, and indeed the fact that there is a need for dominant roles at all, is bound up with the ways in which we focus on individuals and their attributed worth within our social structures" (2020:46). To use a photography metaphor, the epistemological move I suggest is to address the celebritisation of sexual violence as a negative to uncover the real picture of sexual violence. As Ruth Wodak (2001) argues, the production and consumption of discourses need to be situated in time and space to gain insights into the workings of ideology, but also to carve out some opportunities for resistance. It is because of this dual commitment to theory and pragmatism that "CDA is not only a scholarly practice, but also a scholarly *program* of research" (Van Dijk 1995:19, emphasis original). My methodological apparatus is equally a research method *and* a means to elaborate a political project.

The triangulation perpetrator, victim, advocate

Including chapters dealing with perpetrators alongside chapters dedicated to sexual assault victims and advocates is another complex epistemological choice I dealt with. On the one hand, focusing on perpetrators obfuscates victims' experiences. On the other hand, centring the analysis solely on victims and advocates runs the risks of objectifying them. Karen Boyle (2019) justifies the inclusion of Harvey Weinstein in the case studies and the title of her book on #MeToo by insisting on the political importance of naming perpetrators, especially when non-disclosure agreements were the tools mostly used to maintain a system of abuse. In addition, she argues that writing about sexist violence runs the risk of making men's violence a women's issue if only victims' stories are included.

However, she recognises that building an analysis of sexual violence around individual perpetrators can reify the figure of the exceptional and monstrous other, which paradoxically exonerates them from their crimes. She offers the following solution to rectify this: "by placing this discussion of Weinstein, Kavanaugh, Savile and others in a broader context informed by feminist scholarship on representations of male perpetrators, the individual monster begins to look like a decidedly generic figure" (Boyle 2019:119). Boyle masterfully manages these connections throughout her book. Chapters 4 and 5 emulate this through the use of cartography and maps, as well as through academic writing and through the mirrored chapter structure *celebrity* perpetrator and celebrity *perpetrator*.

Finally, the categories I use, namely victims, perpetrators, and advocates, which inform the selection of case studies and the structure of the thesis, support one of my key arguments: for sexual violence to be spectacular, claims to victimhood need to be equally spectacular. As I proceed through each chapter, I discuss how different configurations of fame and sexual violence – *celebrity* victim, celebrity *victim, celebrity* perpetrator, celebrity *perpetrator*, *celebrity* advocate, celebrity *advocate* – seize and enact victimhood. What interests me is the way in which each of these six figures are informed by one another. My aim is to map out the ways in which claims to victimhood circulate within a system of visibility. For this reason, I find the triangular model (featuring what Karpman conceptualises as the 'drama triangle') helpful to think through the triangulation of victim, perpetrator, advocate.

In clinical psychology, the drama triangle is a social model of interaction developed by clinician Stephen Karpman (1968) to address dysfunctional relationships at play in a conflictual situation. There are three roles in this model of interpersonal conflict: victim, persecutor, and rescuer. These roles are not static, and participants rotate through each of these characters during the dispute. The drama triangle thus maps the shifting attribution of personal responsibility and control over the conflict. The applications of this model are very different from my research aims. Indeed, political interventions in the public sphere to address the ubiquity of sexual violence cannot be equated to individual strategies for conflict resolution. Nonetheless, I find Karpman's model interesting for the ways in which it conceptualises each role as dynamic and interrelated. In addition, the drama triangle is a compelling visualisation of the ways in which claims of being victimised trigger different positions. The three-part structure of the thesis is inspired by this triangulation as it addresses how victimization is invoked to authenticate three configurations of fame in relation to sexual violence: celebrity victims, celebrity perpetrators, and celebrity advocates. Each contribute equally to the spectacle of sexual violence.

CHAPTER 2: *CELEBRITY* VICTIMS

One of the main ways in which sexual violence is cast in the public eye is through *celebrity* survivor narratives. The contemporary mediascape brims with moments of "mass disclosure" like #MeToo (Cobb and Horeck 2018) which foreground the sexual violence testimonies as political strategy in the hope that it will spark political action and foster social change. Though #MeToo and its aftermaths may feel like an important feminist reckoning unprecedented in its reach across socio-economical spheres, the hashtagged testimonies represent only a fragment of the stories of sexual violence which have been circulating in the public sphere since the 1970s (Cuklanz 1996; 2000; Horeck 2004; Projansky 2001). Breaking the silence to end endemic sexism is a political strategy that has been deployed over several decades by feminists.

In fact, Tanya Serisier argues that "feminist anti-rape politics is founded on the belief that producing and disseminating a genre of personal experiential narratives can end sexual violence" (2018:4). She understands 'speaking out' as a form of "narrative politics" (Serisier 2018:4) rooted in the legacies of second wave feminism which offers a specific grammar to the telling of one's story. In other words, rape narratives form a specific testimonial genre with distinct themes, characters, and story arc. Her analysis of public rape testimonies highlights their common narrative structures through which "a victim transforms herself into a survivor through her act of speaking out" (2018:15) and thus embodies the neoliberal ethos of self-transformation. Serisier's nuanced analysis shows that personal accounts of sexual violence that circulate in the public sphere are not politically neutral. While 'speaking out' shapes cultural understandings of sexual violence and feminist politics, it also articulates specific modalities of public personhood.

SVU deploys a similar understanding of feminist anti-rape politics: each of its 494 original episodes aims at raising awareness on the issue of sexual violence by featuring fictional sexual assault storylines. Every episode opens with an extra-diegetic voice that announces: "In the criminal justice system, sexually based offences are considered especially heinous. In New York City, the dedicated detectives who investigate these vicious felonies are members of an elite squad known as the Special Victims Unit. These

are their stories." It herewith foregrounds the stories of fictional sexual assault victims and the professionals who investigate and prosecute these crimes. I argue that the series' commitment to publicly share fictional stories of sexual violence to foster social change constitutes a variation of the narrative politics of 'speaking out' analysed by Serisier. RFH episodes re-mediate specific ideological operations of sexual violence testimonies, thus constituting their own grammar of 'speaking out'.

SVU is a police and legal procedural drama, which resorts to a formulaic narrative arc through most of its episodes: a crime is committed, the SVU squad investigates, the rapist is caught and stands trial which often leads to a conviction. The series' narrative formula is not only shaped by the industrial imperatives of network television and the commercial success of the original *Law & Order* and other police legal TV series. It also grounds these cathartic storylines in the politics of a testimonial genre that equates telling one's story with social justice. Indeed, a victim has to tell their story for justice to be served and, as a result, the series includes cross-cut sequences that weave in multiple victims' depositions. Similarly, the series features frequent rape-kit tests and forensic exams so that a victim can share the story of their assault even if they are unconscious or dead. In addition, the structure of the episodes reflects this emphasis on the importance of victims coming forward since most of the assaults occurs outside the diegetic frame of the series[6]. The visual representation of injured bodies are also the means through which the series attests to the veracity of the plaintiff's claims. This is significant as the series operates in a competitive discursive arena where sexual violence testimonies are often met with doubt or disbelief.

The frequent fictionalisation of real-life cases constitutes another narrative strategy to legitimate the testimonies of sexual assault victims. RFH episodes are contingent on the already publicised sexual violence testimonies and rely on verisimilitude to legitimise the feminist commentary made by the series' fictional characters. Here, fiction is not antithetical to reality, rather it is a mode of storytelling through which the affective reality of sexual violence is made visible. The series thus resorts to codes of televisual fiction to

[6] This was the case until recently. In its most recent seasons, the series has increasingly included depictions of assaults in its pre-opening credit sequence.

establish ‘speaking out’ as a precondition for justice and anti-rape advocacy. As a result, *SVU* episodes present a narrative structure that is both informed by, and shapes, the grammar of breaking the silence and its narrative politics. As Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver argue, “who gets to tell the story and whose story counts as ‘truth’ determine the definition of what rape *is*” (1991:1, emphasis original). Throughout the chapter, I show that the affective reality of spectacular sexual violence stories shapes popular understandings of sexual violence and victimhood.

While I am not contesting the political importance and relevance of such personal stories, I offer a critique of feminist politics solely defined in terms of visibility. I am particularly interested in the spectacular quality of breaking the silence and its narrative politics. In what follows, I interrogate the ways in which both sexual violence and victimhood become culturally invested issues that articulate the discursive effects of power on body politics. Drawing on Horeck’s conception of rape as a “public media spectacle” (2004:5) which operates as cultural fantasies of power, I ask: is victimhood also a public media spectacle? For Horeck, fantasy and spectacle are not antithetical to reality; on the contrary, “cultural images of rape serve as a means of forging social bonds, and of mapping out public space” (2004:4). In other words, media representations of sexual violence function as a dramatization of the complex operations of power. It resorts to codes of fiction to articulate the affective links between violence and its representations. If victimhood is a spectacle, what is the role of fiction in mediating the affective reality of sexual violence and the constraints of the ‘speaking out’ narrative genre? Because of its sheer volume of episodes focusing exclusively on sexual assault storylines, *SVU* provides a compelling case study to interrogate the spectacle of sexual violence and victimhood. In addition, RFH is a mode of storytelling that weaves in fictional and real-life ‘speaking out’ narratives. It thus functions as cultural node through which different narrative politics of sexual violence intersect.

The impact of the celebrity industry on sexual assault victims constitutes the central storyline of a number of *SVU* episodes, including “Funny Valentine” (S14E16), “Theatre Tricks” (S13E11) and “The Newsroom” (S18E16) (Cf. Appendix 1). The first presents a fictionalised account of the heavily mediatised domestic violence incident perpetrated by singer Chris Brown against singer Rihanna in 2009. The following two tackle the

emotional and physical exploitation of actress Maria Schneider by her co-star Marlon Brando and director Bernardo Bertolucci on the set of *The Last Tango in Paris* in 1973. The third episode also attends to the sexual harassment allegations by television anchor Gretchen Carlson against Fox News chairman Roger Ailes and the subsequent 2016 lawsuit. These episodes facilitate a discussion of the grammar of 'speaking out' against domestic violence, sexual assault, and sexual harassment across several spheres of the entertainment industry – namely music, cinema, and television. In addition, the timeline of these RFH episodes speaks to the changing terrain of the intelligibility of sexual violence narrative in the media.

In the following analysis, I consider RFH as a mode of storytelling that enables a critique of the impact of stardom on victims of sexual violence. First, I argue that RFH constitutes a narrative politics of 'speaking out' that points to the ways in which sexism sustains celebrity culture. However, its potential for feminist critique is limited because it turns postfeminist victimhood into a spectacle. This is most salient in the figure of the young *celebrity* victim who needs to 'appropriately' manage the transition to become a celebrity, a woman, and a survivor. I show how Rihanna and Maria Schneider embody a resistance to this postfeminist model of victimhood. I then move on to discuss the ways in which celebrity confessional frames postfeminist victimhood within a rebranding of feminism. An analysis of Gretchen Carlson's celebrity confessional reveals that postfeminist victimhood requires the commodification of victimhood and feminism to resolve the tensions that stem from the branding of victimhood.

For Sean Redmond (2008), the celebrity confessional – that is, any moment in which a celebrity engages in revelatory acts – is the dominant way in which fame is constituted. He argues that the celebrity confessional or celebrity scandals are moments of exposure that carry the promise of an authentic revelation which could give access to the celebrity's 'true' self beyond their public image. The celebrity confessional is a performance of authenticity and intimacy in which celebrities reflect on the business of being famous, engage in self-criticism, and display some degree of emotional interiority, thus consolidating their celebrity brand. As a result, an essential field of inquiry for feminist celebrity scholars is the monetary circuit generated by scandal, revealing who benefits from those moments of exposure (Banet-Weiser, 2018c). Furthermore, the gender politics

at play within the celebrity confessional also need to be interrogated because of the double standard of celebrity scandal that frames the male celebrity as a tortured artist and the female celebrity as a tragic figure.

(Post)feminist victimhood

The narrative structure of the series reflects the simultaneous promotion and disavowal of feminist values. As Sujata Moorti and Lisa Cuklanz argue, "*SVU*'s episodic structure and its ripped-from-the-headlines narrative style defies a singular understanding of feminism" (2017:21). The series displays a complex engagement with feminism. It endorses the second wave feminist precept that speaking out against sexual violence will lead to social change. At the same time, the main protagonists promote carceral feminism to end sexual violence. This state-sanctioned feminism contains the narrative politics of feminism to the public sphere but presents privatised solutions to systemic issues. For example, main characters Olivia Benson and Amanda Rollins embody a form of "lean-in feminism" (Sandberg 2013) which tackles inequalities in the workplace while upholding neoliberal ideals of the entrepreneurial self as the solution. They are portrayed as hard working and competent detectives: rather than being associated with achievement of the women's movement, these qualities alone account for the place they occupy in the police station's masculine environment. If feminist goals have been attained in the fictional SVU squad, Benson, and to some extent Rollins, voice feminist understanding of sexual violence and act as spokespersons for disenfranchised victims. Consequently, the *SVU* protagonists embody a form of femininity entrenched in the rhetoric of choice and agency. In contrast, sexual assault victims are almost exclusively secondary characters, and they typify a femininity subjugated to sexual violence.

This coexistence of subjective and victimised femininities on screen and the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist concerns are characteristic of postfeminist media culture (Genz 2009). *SVU* episodes thus bring to light a specific postfeminist grammar of 'speaking out'. The series foregrounds a narrative genre that frames sexual violence and feminist politics within a "postfeminist sensibility" (Gill 2007). Telling one's story in the realm of the series is a profoundly embodied experience: rape-kits and/or post-mortem exams are given the same if not more importance than the victim's oral statement. In

addition, the focus on DNA as irrefutable evidence reinforces the idiosyncratic quality of sexual violence testimonies. The injured body becomes a canvas on which the value of femininity and feminism are inscribed. This triangulation of victimization, femininity and feminism (Genz 2009) is further consolidated through the rhetoric of choice and empowerment of individual accounts of sexual assault, which becomes most salient during trial scenes. Benson will often assist the A.D.A. to get the victim to testify in court, insisting that disclosing one's experience of sexual violence is cathartic and produces individual empowerment. If speaking out is a personal decision, it is presented as the most legitimate choice because it implies a shift from objectification to subjectification. In other words, it enables the transformation from victim to survivor which constitutes a particularly marketable modality of public personhood.

Indeed, *SVU*'s marketability is inextricable from its production of weekly episodes centred around sex crimes for 20 years. The postfeminist narrative politics of the series posits fictional sexual violence victims as subjects whom female audiences can identify with. At the same time, the routine violation of female bodies on screen turns sexual violence into a spectacle and victims into objects of consumption. As Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra argue, "the construction of women as both subjects and consumers, or perhaps as subjects only to the extent that we are able and willing to consume, is one of the contradictions of the core of postfeminist culture" (2007:8). Consequently, the postfeminist grammar of 'speaking out' articulates the tensions of the hypervisibility of sexual violence in the public sphere in an explicit manner. While first-person accounts of sexual violence raise awareness on the issue and produce individual empowerment, the cathartic storylines depoliticize sexual violence by making it more palatable and marketable within neoliberal testimonial culture. Thus, within postfeminist media culture, 'speaking out' is the key component of the narrative genre which constructs victimhood as both a feminist and neoliberal project of the self.

Gender, race, and celebrity victimhood: Rihanna

This dynamic is salient in the episode "Funny Valentine" which presents Micha Green, Rihanna's RFH fictional counterpart, as already victimised (Cf. Appendix 1). Green is a 19-year-old rising singer who is hospitalised after her boyfriend and duet partner, hip-hop

star Caleb Bryant, brutally assaults her. *SVU* portrays Green as subjected to the whims of the men in her life whose controlling influence derives from the celebrity culture in the music industry. Like Rihanna, Green refuses to press charges against Bryant because she doesn't want to jeopardise her career or be seen as a victim. The ways in which regimes of fame operate in mediatised sexual assault trials is evoked through intertextual comments. For example, sergeant Munch sarcastically comments that "[Caleb Bryant and Micha Green] should go on a double date with Chris Brown and Rihanna". This intertextual example points to the multimedia and multi-textual nature of celebrity culture. As a result, the critique of celebrity culture voiced by the fictional characters becomes affectively real. Through fictional storytelling, *SVU* also cements the celebrification of Rihanna as a domestic violence survivor. Similarly, detective Tutuola qualifies Bryant's live apology as something "right out of Kobe [Bryant]'s handbook", referencing the basketball player's public confessions amidst an equally highly mediatised sexual assault trial. These references to real-life celebrity trials are a shorthand for *SVU*'s critique of the intersection of sexual violence and fame.

The episode also features three cameos from US celebrities – Perez Hilton, Sue Simmons and Wendy Williams. More than just a strategy to increase ratings, these celebrity cameos are another narrative element that mediate the affective reality of *SVU*'s critique of stardom. Perez Hilton, founder of celebrity gossip blog PerezHilton.com, appears as himself in two clips from a fictionalised version of his blog. The first clip shows detectives Amaro and Tutuola arresting Bryant outside a nightclub, which has gone viral. The second clip displays the leaked police photographs of Green's tumefied face. While Perez Hilton did not release the pictures of Rihanna's injuries[7], he is instrumental in setting the media circus around the case in the fictional world of *SVU*. Through this cameo, Perez Hilton draws attention to the ways in which celebrity gossip sustained a gendered regime of surveillance.

Real-life news anchor Sue Simmons is the second celebrity cameo and her live reports of the case for fictional news broadcaster WPQG punctuate the episode. Simmons is first

[7] The pictures were broadcast by TMZ, another celebrity gossip website and PerezHilton.com's main competitor.

seen relaying on camera that Green is withdrawing her complaint after the photographs are leaked. Later in the episode, Simmons covers the anti-domestic violence demonstration outside the courtroom where Bryant's trial is taking place. Finally, Sue Simmons breaks the news of Green's tragic death in the episode's last scene. Simmons is known in the New York metropolitan area for hosting WNBC the news program on weeknights and her presence on *SVU* gives the TV series a veneer of authenticity. It also casts both fictional characters and real-life journalists into the same celebrity production circuit, with television channel NBC being the major stakeholder within this economy of fame. In a similar way, real-life television host Wendy Williams' interview with Bryant and coverage of Green's album launch party acknowledge the crucial role the talk show hosts played in the mediatisation of this case[8]. It also highlights the politics of the celebrity confessional and the key role these moments of revelation play in mediating a critique of fame by the celebrities themselves. However, this critique is undermined by the racial stereotypes that permeate the episode.

The episode contains a number of references to black culture that mediate the ways in which this episode addresses the racial politics of the case. For instance, Bryant claims that Green has been "shaftmatised" by his public apology, invoking the iconic suave detective John Shaft from the 1971 and 2000 blaxploitation films *Shaft* to assert his virility. In the context of an episode dealing with domestic violence, this cultural reference constructs black masculinity as predatory. It evokes the myth of the 'black rapist' guided by bestial pulsion to prey on white women, a racist trope which fuels the ways in which sexual violence has been constructed in US media (Moorti 2001). As a result, black women are constructed as promiscuous and thus unrapable (Davis 1981). This racist trope is fully fleshed out in the episode's denouement.

The episode remains faithful for the most part to real-life events, which gives credibility to the ways in which *SVU* addresses the intersection of sexual violence and celebrity culture. Echoing Rihanna and Brown's reconciliation, Green and Bryant get back together and elope to Green's birthplace in Bermuda, an island reminiscent of Rihanna's native

[8] Chris Brown made his first public appearance after his arrest on *Larry King Live* on 2 September 2009. Rihanna spoke about the case in an interview on the show *Oprah's Next Chapter* on 19 August 2012.

Barbados. However, unlike Rihanna who was still in a relationship with Brown when the *SVU* episode aired[9], Bryant murders Green in the last scene. Here, fiction becomes a mode of storytelling that raises the stakes of the series' commentary on female stardom and sexism. While the episode unequivocally presents Green as victim of domestic violence, its ending suggests that she died because she resumed her relationship with Bryant. It implies that Green was undeserving of fame because of her poor choices which led to her tragic death.

SVU's tone-deaf critique of the intersection of gender, race, and fame comes into sharp focus through another RFH element. In the episode, protesters are seen in the backdrop of Sue Simmons news coverage of the case chanting and carrying signs that read "No More". This is a direct reference to the *No More* campaign which aims to end domestic violence and sexual assault by "increasing awareness, inspiring action and fuelling culture change" (NoMore.org). *No More* is the flagship campaign of the Joyful Heart Foundation, the charity founded and chaired by Mariska Hargitay, and it regularly produces public service announcements featuring the main cast of *SVU*. The convergence of Detective Benson's feminist agenda with Mariska Hargitay's advocacy work in this episode reifies Benson-Hargitay's brand of feminism. Both the fictional character and the actress frame the act of speaking out against sexual violence as female celebrities' duty because they are accountable to their girl fan base. In one scene, Benson exhorts Green to publicly stand up and say "No more". The singer's failure to follow Benson's advice is a narrative shorthand to imply that Green, and by extension Rihanna, is not a good celebrity role model.

Sexism in the film industry: Maria Schneider

SVU presents a more compelling critique of the intersection of sexism and stardom in other episodes. For instance, "Theatre Tricks" (S13E11) is the first of two *SVU* episodes to address the controversy surrounding *The Last Tango in Paris* (1973) (Cf. Appendix 1). It fictionalises Maria Schneider's sexual assault accusation against filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci and actor Marlon Brando while filming the infamous scene in which Brando's

[9] Rihanna and Chris Brown publicly announced they had broken up in May 2013. (Hilton 2013)

character uses butter as a lubricant to anally rape her character. The RFH episode deals with the investigation of the on-stage rape of the rising actress Meghan Weller during an interactive performance of Dante's *Inferno* adapted by Ted Scott. The second episode inspired by this headline is "The Newsroom" (S18E16) which opens with a morning show interview with the actress Davina Delucci. She details being raped on camera by her co-star and director Dante Marino while filming a sex scene.

These RFH episodes constitute a significant intervention to legitimise Schneider's testimony, after being silenced for three decades. Throughout her career, Schneider denounced the toxic environment Bertolucci had created on the set. In the documentary *Sois Belle et tais-toi* (Seyrig 1976) and again in a 2007 interview with the *Daily Mail*, Schneider talked about how she was systematically excluded from any decision making, including writing the rape scene into the script. However, it was only in 2016 that the director's emotional and physical abuse of Schneider drew public outrage in the entertainment industry and beyond, when a clip from a 2013 press tour resurfaced in which Bertolucci admitted that the filming of the scene was non-consensual. This web *SVU* RFH and celebrity confessional is illustrated in Figure 5 below. The uneven reactions to Schneider's and Bertolucci's respective testimonies invites historical considerations as to the acceptability of celebrity first-person account of sexual assault. The political potential of the RFH mode of storytelling lies in the series' capacity to tackle this controversy as early as 2012 because it precludes defamation liability.

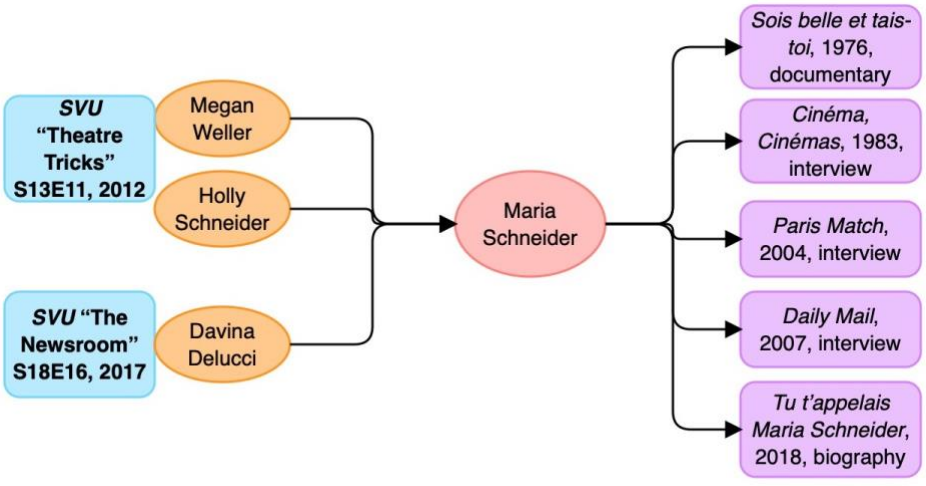


Figure 5: SVU RFH of Maria Schneider and her celebrity confessional texts

Furthermore, these two RFH episodes mirror the *Last Tango in Paris* on-set assault by obscuring its affective reality into the story of the play or film. For example, Schneider recalls: "during the scene, even though what Marlon was doing wasn't real, I was crying real tears. I felt humiliated and to be honest, I felt a little raped, both by Marlon and by Bertolucci" (Das 2007). In the fictionalised theatrical performance, the spectators witnessed the rape but thought it was part of the show. Similarly, Delucci explains: "for ten years audiences thought they were watching a love scene, but they were watching a rape. My rape". The narrative potential of the fictionalised episodes is twofold. First, Weller's and Delucci's respective rape testimonies offer an unequivocal critique of the emotional and physical exploitation of young actresses in theatre and film industries. These fictionalised accounts mediate the affective reality of rape in a way that leaves little room for ambiguity and thus legitimise Schneider's experience. Second, the passing reference to Dante constitutes an intertextual link between the two episodes that consolidates the series' metafictional commentary on the *Last Tango in Paris* controversy.

Another point of similarity between Schneider's testimony and its two fictionalised accounts is their ability to shed light on the depth and pervasiveness of sexism in the entertainment industry. The three assaults were set up by the actresses' respective colleagues. In the *Daily Mail* interview, Schneider explains "the scene wasn't in the original script. The truth is it was Marlon who came up with the idea. […] [Bertolucci and Marlon] only told me about it before we had to film the scene and I was so angry. I should have called my agent or had my lawyer come to the set because you can't force someone to do something that isn't in the script, but at the time, I didn't know that" (Das 2007). Delucci's story equally involves a lead actor and a filmmaker who abused his directorial authority. She recounts: "We were scheduled to film the love scene later that day. Dante told me the scene was being re-written. […] He didn't go into detail. He just told me to respond to the moment organically. […] We were on a couch. Kissing. Then Dante got aggressive. Before I know what was happening, he was raping me. I couldn't fight him off. I was frozen. […] And I was too afraid to say anything. […] He was my director. My boss." Delucci's account also evokes the infamous casting couch on which professional opportunities are traded for sexual favours. It thus places the on-camera assaults on a

continuum of sexist violence entrenched in Hollywood in which some agents of celebrification, such as directors and producers, also become perpetrators.

The figure of the male *auteur* further sustains this gendered hierarchy, which authorises the emotional and physical exploitation of actresses in the name of art. Bertolucci was praised for the graphic depictions of sex in *Last Tango in Paris*, which, according to critics, challenges social conformism and depicts the dark side of the sexual revolution. For example, Joan Mellen writes that the film "is an indictment of the bourgeois family which dominates culture and society, suppresses feeling and 'civilizes' the 'savage' in us all by representing bodily needs" (1973: 10). Similarly, Scott's adaptation of Dante's *Inferno* opens with a monologue in which a female character invites the audience to "strip off your inhibitions. See carnal pleasure and join in. Touch the world of the flesh. The world of the forbidden. Lust, beauty. […] Release your darkest desires. Taste… Touch… Take…" Scott's adaptation thus further develops themes of Bertolucci's filmography, and both frame their provocations in terms of sexual and carnal desires. However, their artistic endeavours are at the expense of the actors they work with.

According to Schneider, Bertolucci mined her and Brando's personal life for inspiration. In a 2004 *Paris Match* interview, Schneider says that she and her co-star felt used by the director who submitted them to intensive improvisation sessions, forcing them to share childhood memories. For Schneider, this emotional exploitation "proved to be more indecent than nudity scenes" (2018: 181, my translation)[10]. In the fictionalised episode, Scott justifies writing Weller's rape into the play by claiming, "I draw inspiration from life. I'm going for the meta." Yet, this self-referential practice is unidirectional, and the auteur draws the line at their private life. For instance, Bertolucci explains that he edited out a shot of Brando's genitalia because he strongly identified with the actor: "I cut it out of shame for myself. To show him naked would have been like showing myself naked" (Mellen 1973:13). Bertolucci's and his fictional counterpart's willingness to incorporate real-life elements into their creative work is thus gendered. It sustains *auteur* apologism,

[10] "Nous avons été mal dans notre peau [Brando] et moi lorsque nous avons vu le film pour la première fois. […] Pas tant par les scènes physiques que par ce que nous y disions. Bertolucci nous avait fait faire un gros travail d'improvisation, nous obligeant à livrer des souvenirs de nos enfances respectives. *Cela s'est révélé être plus impudique que les nudités*. Marlon en a été très irrité. Il a eu le sentiment d'être trahi. " (Schneider 2018 : 181, emphasis added).

a standard practice which calls for the separation of the art from the artist persona and is often used as a defence to excuse criminal acts of iconic male artists (Marghitu 2018). I further explore auteur apologism through my analysis of *celebrity* perpetrators in Chapter 4.

Neoliberal victimhood: Gretchen Carlson

In addition to its reference to Maria Schneider's sexual assault testimony, the episode "The Newsroom" also presents a fictionalised account of the sexual harassment suit filed by former anchor Gretchen Carlson against Fox News chairman Roger Ailes (Cf. Appendix 1). In her complaint, Carlson claims that her contract with the network was terminated because she refused Ailes' sexual advances. The *SVU* episode equally tackles workplace sexual assault. It opens with a segment of fictional *HNT Morning Live* in which detective Benson explains the challenges victims face in reporting sexual violence when the crime is committed in the workplace, which Davina Delucci further develops through her rape testimony. Triggered by Delucci's story, news anchor Heidi Sorenson reveals to Benson that she was repeatedly harassed and eventually raped three months ago by the head of the network Howard Coyle. Sorenson almost immediately recants her allegations, but after being fired from HNT a few days later, she files a criminal complaint against Coyle. The fictionalised account heavily draws on Carlson's lawsuit to shed light on the intersections between sexual violence, sexism, and ageism within the television industry.

Carlson is a public figure known for discussing sexism in the workplace on numerous occasions. In addition to her on-air commentaries on the gendered double standards for news anchors' dress codes, Carlson wrote an opinion piece about sexual harassment published by *The Huffington Post* (Carlson 2015). Moreover, the *New York Times* article breaking the news of the lawsuit against Ailes emphasises Carlson's educational and professional background to establish her feminist credentials and legitimise her sexual harassment testimony (Koblin 2016). For instance, the report states that her undergraduate student exchange at Oxford University was dedicated to studying the work of Virginia Woolf and her 1989 Miss America victory speech praised the beauty pageant jury for valuing her intelligence as well as her appearance. The *SVU* episode similarly highlight Sorenson's involvement in female leadership and empowerment programs including her

participation in the "Women in New York" event where she met Benson, to authenticate her sexual assault claims. By mirroring the real-life media coverage of Carlson's lawsuit, the series contributes to a grammar of 'speaking out' that deploys feminism as a brand to mediate the affective reality of sexual violence, something I will develop in Chapter 6: *Celebrity* Advocates.

The RFH storytelling also expands on some of the themes that are only alluded to in the coverage of Carlson's sexual harassment testimony. Indeed, the anchor's dismissal from her Fox News afternoon show *The Real Story with Gretchen Carlson* occurred two days after Carlson broke an industry taboo by celebrating her 50th birthday on air. However, Carlson's celebrity confessional texts – which include a *New York Times* exclusive interview (Koblin 2016), a *Variety* guest column (Carlson 2017b), and a memoir (Carlson 2017a) – solely focus on gender discrimination. If the intersections between sexism and ageism were not discussed in the real world, the fictional characters of *SVU* make explicit that Sorenson was victim of discrimination based on age and gender. For instance, a producer explains to the detectives that the television industry "is a brutal business for women. There's a shelf life. No matter how much plastic surgery they get." Coyle further normalises the ageist discrimination of female television anchors by portraying Sorenson as manipulative. He denies the charges, claiming that Sorenson "is ageing out of the demo. She's obviously looking to leverage us". Coyle's rebuff not only echoes Ailes' public statement claiming that Carlson's lawsuit is a retribution for being fired, it also offers a more nuanced understanding of the sexist premises of female stardom.

In addition to shedding to light on the pervasiveness of workplace sexual harassment, *SVU* cultivates parallels between real-life and fictional sexual violence testimonies to offer a critique of the use of sexual violence by agents of celebrification. Carlson's lawsuit revives interest on four sexual harassment testimonies first published in a biography of Ailes (Sherman 2014), while also inciting more women to come forward. In a *New York Magazine* article published three days after Carlson went public, Sherman (2016) reports that more than a dozen approached Carlson's lawyer to testify against Ailes' long history of sexual harassment. The article includes six accounts and document a pattern of sexual violence that started at least in the mid-1960s. Ailes would ask early career media workers and models to wear a garter and stockings and pose for him in exchange for an

employment opportunity. In addition, they reveal being blackmailed into silence by Ailes with a tape. In the fictional world of *Law & Order*, five women come forward following Sorenson's public rape allegations. Their depositions are edited into a montage sequence, which reveals Coyle's predatory pattern of behaviour. Furthermore, their testimonies echo almost word for word, Sherman's interviews with Ailes' victims. For instance, in her deposition, Sorenson recalls: "[Coyle] would demand that I wear lacy panties, thigh-high stockings. Before I went on the air, I'd have to give him a private fashion show and pretend to seduce him, and he would tape me." The series thus enacts a re-reading of Ailes' anonymous victims through Coyle's fictional victims. These embodied testimonies reveal the affective reality of sexual violence and are thus crucial to authenticate the series' critique of celebrity culture.

A few metafictional comments consolidate the episode's commentary on the intersection between sexism, ageism, and sexual violence within the television industry. For instance, Sorenson explains to Benson her reasons for reporting the rape: "He screwed me in private, that's one thing, but he just screwed me in public. […] I know what it looks like. That I'm doing this because I got fired, but that's not the reason." Sorenson thus pre-emptively takes apart accusations of manipulative and calculating behaviour while also responding directly to critics who doubted Carlson's claims. Consequently, Benson's reassuring assertion "Oh, I believe you" is addressed at both Sorenson and Carlson, and the threat "Let's get this guy" is directed at both Coyle and Ailes. Another metafictional commentary gestures at the similarities between Sorenson's and Carlson's experiences during the trial. The fictional news anchor is asked if she is "aware of the recent spate of sexual harassment complaints, with women in your position scoring settlements in the tens of millions". This question cites the $20 million settlement and the public apology issued by 21st Century Fox to Carlson. Finally, the star image of Sorenson and Carlson align once more in the episode's last sequence. Sorenson has agreed to a settlement with HNT that amounts to "a few millions" and she founded the charity Step Up to mentor and empower teenage girls, which is reminiscent of Carlson's *Be Fierce* which is a campaign focusing on female empowerment. Sorenson ponders if she will write "a tell-all" while Carlson published her memoir *Be Fierce: Stop Harassment and Take Your Power Back* a few months later (2017a), which I will discuss in Chapter 6: *Celebrity* Advocates.

From victimised girl to women-survivor: Rihanna and Maria Schneider

So far, I have shown how the fictionalisation of real-life celebrity testimonies constitutes a grammar of 'speaking out' which tackles the imbrications of sexual violence and female stardom in an explicit manner. Intertextual comments, popular culture references and celebrity cameos are used as narrative tools to establish the verisimilitude of *SVU*'s commentary on celebrity culture. RFH episodes such as "Funny Valentine", "Theatre Tricks" and "The Newsroom" also highlight the intertextual nature of fame across media texts. This mode of storytelling thus foregrounds the role of fictional TV series in the celebrification of sexual assault victims and mediating the affective reality of sexual violence. The narrative freedom of fiction permits a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which power operates on female stardom while also raising the stakes of its commentary on celebrity culture through alternative endings. Because fiction is precluded from any defamation liability, the political potential of fictionalisation lies in the series' capacity to call out the pervasiveness of sexual violence within celebrity culture and to denounce crimes committed by famous agents of celebrification. Consequently, RFH episodes deploy a grammar of 'speaking out' that contributes to the intelligibility of celebrity sexual violence testimonies in the public sphere. However, I argue that their critical potential is limited because of their reliance on a grammar of 'speaking out' that reifies a postfeminist neoliberal project of the self. As Melanie Kennedy argues, to analyse different modalities of fame is to reveal the concomitant processes of becoming a woman and becoming a celebrity (2014; 2018), or in this case, becoming a woman, celebrity, and survivor. This is most salient in the figure of the tween *celebrity* victim who embodies tensions around female stardom.

Through their respective stories, Rihanna, Maria Schneider, and their fictional counterparts speak to the transformative potential of public narratives of sexual violence. Their testimonies exemplify a narrative in which the victim becomes a survivor. For example, Green's outright rejection of victimhood "I don't want the world to see me like that. Like a victim" echoes a 2012 interview with Oprah in which Rihanna explains: "I don't want people to think I'm weak or look at me as a victim" (*Oprah's Next Chapter*

2012). Similarly, in an interview for the *Cinéma Cinémas* series, Maria Schneider resists being defined by the *Last Tango in Paris* controversy:

> Maria Schneider: No. I don't want to talk about *Tango*. [Silence]
>
> Journalist: You are not able to separate the film's strength from what you experienced.
>
> Maria Schneider: [Sigh] It's a film, that's all. […] I do not want to be forever associated with it. Everywhere, the *Tango* is always with me. Well. [Silence] Basta. [Silence]. Besides, I prefer to talk about *The Passenger*, which is a film closer to me. If we are to talk about me, let's talk about this one.[11] (*Cinéma Cinémas* 1983, my translation)

The journalist's statement suggests that Schneider's refusal to discuss *The Last Tango in Paris* amounts to a rejection of the very media event that made her famous. It implies that Schneider's celebrity persona is inextricable from the film because it contributed to her celebrification and, as such, will always be a feature of her celebrity confessional. Consequently, Rihanna and Schneider's refusal to be victimised attests to the oppressive media surveillance these celebrities experienced. Furthermore, the actress' reference to *The Passenger*, filmed two years after *Last Tango in Paris*, reorients the conversation towards her ongoing professional and personal development. It illustrates the ways in which discourses around sexual violence exhort Schneider to "move on". The transition from victim to survivor is significant for young female celebrities whose star images revolve around becoming a woman and a celebrity.

Gendered assumptions around labour and authenticity sustain a hierarchy of fame that posits achieved celebrity as more legitimate than attributed celebrity. In the discursive operations of fame, talent and accomplishments mark the former while the latter refers to a state of being "known for their well-knownness" (Boorstin 1961:57). The achieved celebrity is thus constructed as an active subject whose cultural value is realised through their actions. In contrast, the attributed celebrity is relegated to the realm of representation and undeserving publicity. Consequently, managing the transition from attributed

[11] Maria Schneider : Non. Je ne veux pas parler du *Tango*. [Silence]
Journaliste : Tu n'es pas capable de faire la part de la force du film et de ce que tu as vécu toi.
Maria Schneider : [Soupir] C'est un film, c'est tout. […] Je ne veux pas qu'on me rattache toujours à ça. Partout, j'ai toujours le *Tango* avec moi. Bon. [Silence] Basta. [Silence] Et d'autre part, je préfère qu'on parle de *Profession : reporter*, qui est un film plus près de moi. Si on veut parler de moi, qu'on parle de celui-là. (Cinéma Cinémas 1983)

celebrity to achieved celebrity is particularly decisive for young female celebrities (Kennedy 2014; 2018). The postfeminist ethos of self-discipline is framed as the aspirational ideal the rising star should strive to, and the figure of the 'trainwreck' celebrity is construed as a warning sign. The cultural hierarchy of fame also supports a postfeminist grammar of 'speaking out' that relies on the neoliberal subject to overcome the passivity of victimhood to become an active survivor[12]. The 'trainwreck' celebrity is once more invoked as a caveat to the celebrity role model; it represents the postfeminist victim's failure to deal with the impact of both stardom and sexual violence. The fictionalised account of Rihanna's domestic violence testimony makes explicit these cultural anxieties around the 'appropriate' transition from girl to woman, attributed to achieved celebrity, and victim to survivor.

At-risk girl

In the *SVU* episode, Green becomes a spectacular victim through the media spectacle that crystallises cultural anxieties about female tweenhood celebrity. In Green's obituary, Sue Simmons describes the singer as a 19-year-old whose "fairy-tale ascent began ten years ago when a home video of her singing found its way to legendary music producer John 'Brass' Blanken". The latter is presented as a godfather figure: he removed Green from her dysfunctional family, sponsored her education and professional development and, in Benson's words, "made sure she was a good girl". References to Green's good fortune, young age and enviable rise to fame reinforce the tragic quality of her death. Her promising musical career is thwarted by an unfortunate series of events – the assault, the mediatised trial, and the murder. If Green is victimised, she is also held responsible for failing to negotiate her passage into adulthood despite benevolent mentors.

Within the episode's narrative arc, the main conflict does not revolve around Green and Bryant's toxic relationship; rather, it pits Green against the SVU squad, particularly detective Benson and A.D.A. Barba. When Green refuses to testify at the trial, they offer the singer their guidance. Barba stands up for Green, reminding his colleague that she is a 19-year-old "who thinks she's in love" and is confronted with a particularly dire

[12] Incidentally, the feminist defence to privilege 'survivor' over of 'victim' centres around agency and empowerment, and challenges the passive state implied by the latter term.

situation: “It would be tough enough for a grown woman, but for a teenage girl in the glare of the spotlight…”. On several occasions, Barba is critical of the mediatisation of the case and the impact of celebrity culture on sexual assault victims. Benson displays a similar empathy for the young celebrity and offers her professional expertise. For instance, in the scene following Bryant’s arraignment, Green’s manager and Brass are discussing the case with Barba and Benson, talking about Green in the third person without acknowledging her presence in the room. Benson is the only one to address Green directly, in a compassionate manner: “Micha, we know that when men do this once, they do it again. The bottom line is that you are not safe”. She also gently reminds the star that she is a role model to whom women and girls look up. In sharp contrast to Benson’s professionalism, immaturity taints Green’s lack of experience, and young age. For example, Green defends Bryant and blames the SVU squad during a red-carpet interview:

> Micha Green: I’ve forgiven Caleb. We’ve moved past what happened. But the police keep targeting him. They wouldn’t even let him come here with me tonight.
>
> Wendy Williams: Well, they say it’s for your own protection.
>
> MG: I love Caleb, and he loves me. The New York Police Department can’t tell me who I can and cannot love.

Green is thus portrayed as being unreasonable and ungrateful for Barba and Benson’s ongoing concerns for her well-being. When Green and Bryant elope to Bermuda, Benson is defeated and claims with certitude that “the inevitable” will happen. The detective’s belief frames the episode’s dénouement and implies that Green died because she did not end her relationship with Bryant and privileged her celebrity brand over her safety.

In “Funny Valentine”, Green’s voice superimposes itself onto Rihanna’s, creating both harmonies and dissonances between the fictional character’s and the celebrity’s respective testimonies. This polyphony of voices reveals some of the industrial forces that shape the opportunities and challenges Rihanna faced in attempting to tell her story. The *SVU* episode produces a critique of celebrity culture that paradoxically holds Green, and by extension Rihanna, responsible for male violence. Green, and by extension Rihanna, is infantilised by Benson and her colleagues. They condemn her refusal to comply with the expected survivor narrative. Barba and Benson thus personify a white feminist discourse,

which positions images of black victimhood as an object of consumption while disavowing its complicity with a racist regime of media surveillance (Ferreday 2017b).

Indeed, Green and Rihanna are both portrayed as "at-risk" girls (Harris 2003) sexualised by the music industry. For instance, Perez Hilton's cameo description of Micha Green as "the singing phenomenon with the voice of an angel and the body of a vixen" exemplifies the gendered dichotomy that opposes achieved celebrity to attributed celebrity in representations of female tween celebrities. In addition, Green and Rihanna are constructed as particularly vulnerable because of their ethnicity and nationality – their black, Caribbean islander and migrant heritage is emphasised in the media coverage of the incident, which perpetuates postcolonial notions of victimhood (Houlihan and Raynor 2014; Nell Edgar 2014). These media discourses portray them as inherently victimised because of their gendered and racialized identity, thus justifying the hyper-surveillance of the assault by the media, real-life LAPD and fictional NYPD. Consequently, the RFH episode can be read as an archetype of the industrial interactions that shaped Rihanna's celebrity agency in the aftermaths of the assault. It produces a grammar of 'speaking out' which upholds white postfeminist notions of victimhood and thus foredooms Rihanna's personal narrative and creative labour to mere celebrity provocations. Indeed, the rhetoric of hard work is central to the postfeminist grammar of 'speaking out' for it delineates achieved celebrity from attributed celebrity. This is most salient in the ways in which Maria Schneider's career has been discussed in the media.

(Un)deserving famous ingénue

Maria Schneider's celebrity persona crystallises most of the anxieties around female tween celebrity victims. She is first introduced by the French media as the illegitimate teenage daughter of famous actor Daniel Gélin, which casts her into the realm of ascribed celebrity. This narrative of undeserved fame is further developed in the media coverage of the *Last Tango in Paris* release. The public outrage around the film's release stains Schneider's ascent to fame and circumscribes her public image to attributed celebrity. For instance, a 1978 *Paris Match* article "Maria Schneider: cinema's lost child" summarises Schneider's career as "the scandal, but also the fabulous success of *Last Tango in Paris*"

(Chateauneu 1978, my translation)[13]. Schneider's fame is attributed to the scandalous success of the film which capitalises on the actress' sexualised physical appearance, rather than her acting skills. She is described as a "cover-girl" who possesses the "eroticism of an unripe fruit" and is admired by the "gray-haired men who fancy Lolita"[14]. The emphasis on Schneider's lineage and physical attributes infantilises the actress and frames her career within the realm of ascribed and attributed celebrity. Schneider criticised the impact this type of media discourse had on her personal life in a 2007 interview with the *Daily Mail*: "I was treated like a sex symbol – I wanted to be recognised as an actress and the whole scandal and aftermath of the film turned me a little crazy and I had a breakdown" (Das 2007). This downward spiral is central in the discursive construction of Schneider as a 'trainwreck' celebrity who failed to manage the transition into achieved celebrity and survivor-womanhood.

Schneider's struggles with drug use and addiction are recounted in the biography written by her cousin Vanessa Schneider (2018). The book weaves a personal account of the actress' life with a reflection on the impact her career and fame had on her and her family. Through this hybridisation of two genres – autobiography and memoir – Vanessa Schneider reveals her enduring childhood fascination with the actress 17 years her senior, but also the emotional toll supporting her cousin through numerous drug-related hospitalisations brought on her teenage years. Vanessa presents Maria as her personal hero; her story contrasts her uneventful daily routine with descriptions from afar of her cousin's extraordinary life. Their age difference further accentuates this embodied narrative of looking up to tween celebrity survivors. Vanessa's (auto)biography offers a compassionate account of her cousin's struggles, as well as a critique of rampant sexism within the film industry. It nonetheless reasserts Maria's failure – or perhaps refusal – to become a role model, thus rejecting the expected survivor narrative.

The book, like much media coverage of Schneider's career, draws on the metaphor of the rising star hindered in her ascent by misfortune. These narratives revolve around the

[13] "Maria Schneider, ce fut le scandale mais aussi le fabuleux succès du *Dernier Tango à Paris*" (Chateauneu 1978)

[14] "Elle est alors une sorte de Brigitte Bardot pour temps de contestation générale, seins encore enfantins sous la courte tunique, un érotisme de fruit vert, longues jambes de pensionnaires moulées dans les hautes bottes que chérissent les grisonnants amateurs de Lolita" (Chateauneu 1978)

assumption that an immediate celebrification is unsustainable. For example, an article published seven years after the *Last Tango in Paris* describes the then 20 year-old actress as "a child unknown the day before, who brutally took off to the peak of her glory with her acid charm and her halo of depraved ingénue" (Chateauneu 1978, my translation)[15]. The fleeting fame metaphor is supported by the figure of the woman-child, forever caught between childhood and womanhood, between attributed and achieved celebrity. The eulogy Brigitte Bardot wrote for Schneider's funeral relies on similar tropes and describes the late actress' career as both sudden and short-lived:

> With her eternal woman-child face and her wild little cat-like character, she conquered the world with the dazzling speed of a burning meteorite, pulverising everything in its wake! Blazing yet ephemeral trajectory, offering her velvet body to Marlon Brando at the pinnacle of his glory, she shocked, her impudence scandalised, but her insolence marked forever an era she now personifies (Schneider 2018: 41, my translation).[16]

Whilst celebrating Schneider's achievement and praising her irreverence towards an industry which thrives on the exploitation of young female bodies, Bardot's tribute also reifies Schneider's on- and off-screen star image as debauched ingénue.

In the same way that Rihanna's at-risk persona frames her artistic performance as mere celebrity provocations, Schneider's wrecked ingénue persona overshadows her resistance to the exploitative regime of celebrity culture. In 1975, *Elle* magazine publishes the transcript of an interview in which Schneider opposes the codes of the celebrity confessional:

> Catherine Laporte: Do you like your job as an actress?
>
> Maria Schneider: It's not really work.
>
> CL: What do you do when you are not filming?
>
> MS: I hang about.
>
> CL: And when you are filming?

[15] "une gamine inconnue la veille et qui brutalement s'envolait au somment de la gloire, avec son charme acide et son auréole de perversité ingénue." (Chateauneu 1978)

[16] "Avec sa bouille d'éternelle femme-enfant et son caractère de petit chat sauvage, elle a conquis le monde avec la fulgurance d'une météorite enflammée qui pulvérisa tout sur son passage! Passage éclatant mais éphémère où, offrant son corps de velours à un Marlon Brando au faîte de sa gloire, elle choqua, scandalisa par son impudeur, mais marqua à jamais par son insolence une époque qu'elle a désormais personnifiée." (Schneider 2018 :41)

MS: I also hang about. […]

CL: Are you a politically engaged actress?

MS: I am nothing.

CL: Are you uncomfortable in your own skin?

MS: What do you think…

CL: You don't like interviews?

MS: No, I have nothing to say (Schneider 2018:76-77, my translation).[17]

While Schneider's disavowal of acting as 'work' was mostly commented upon by the media as symptomatic of the "whirlwind" of drugs and sexual "provocations", "in which she almost lost herself" (Chateauneu 1978, my translation), I argue that this interview gestures towards the actress' sustained critique of the film industry.

Indeed, Schneider's impassivity not only challenges the journalist's intrusive questions. It also subverts the marketability of celebrity performance of intimacy. Through a display of utter indifference, Schneider effectively resists the ways in which the media take advantage of the affective spectacle of tween stardom. In dismissing acting as work, Schneider also responds with irony to the 'realism' defence voiced by directors such as Bertolucci, Sam Peckinpah and Alejandro Jodorowsky to justify their unsafe choreography of rape (Wolfe 2017). In arguing that not discussing the sexual assault scene with the actress beforehand led to more realistic representations, the filmmakers imply a distrust in the actresses' professional skills.

Schneider clarifies her critique of the sexist premise of female stardom the following year in an interview with Seyrig (1976) and develops her position in subsequent interviews. She attributes the lack of interesting female roles and the on-set exploitation of young

[17] "Catherine Laporte : Vous aimez votre métier d'actrice?
Maria Schneider : Ce n'est pas vraiment du travail.
CL : Que faites-vous quand vous ne tournez pas?
MS : Je traîne.
CL : Et quand vous tournez?
MS : Je traîne aussi. […]
CL : Êtes-vous une actrice engagée?
MS : Je ne suis rien.
CL : Êtes-vous bien dans votre peau?
MS : À votre avis…
CL : Vous n'aimez pas les interviews?
MS : Non, je n'ai rien à dire." (Schneider 2018:76-77)

female actresses to an overwhelmingly masculine workforce – from casting directors to technicians to directors to film critics. She repeatedly points out the great age discrepancy between male and female leads and its consequences for early career actresses. For instance, speaking up against Bertolucci's manipulative practices, she states: "Brando felt cheated, violated, abused. Me too. But he was fifty and I was twenty"[18] (Schneider 2018 :227, my translation). Schneider's resistance to being victimised is thus supported by an eloquent critique of the ways which the exploitation and sexualisation of young girls and celebrity culture are mutually constitutive. However, her feminist analysis of the film industry is obfuscated by the very gendered hierarchies of fame she denounces.

Heterosexist stardom

Schneider gained international recognition through the media coverage of the controversy surrounding the release of *Last Tango in Paris* that cast her as a sexual icon of the 1970s. Schneider's activism is erased because her celebrity status derives from the sexist and heteronormative structures that permeate film stardom. As a publicly out bisexual woman, Schneider challenges the heteronormativity that stems from the misogyny at play in the film industry. Yet, her sexual orientation is noticeably absent from accounts of her sexual assault. It is evoked only in articles that portray her as a fallen ingénue. This association of bisexuality with sexual and celebrity provocations is symptomatic of broader power dynamics. Indeed, bisexual women occupy a liminal position in the media: they are both hyper-visible as a male sexual fantasy and invisible for their potential to unthink heterosexuality (San Filippo 2013:16). In addition, the hyper-sexualisation of bisexual women upholds rape myths centred around disbelief and victim blaming (Johnson and Grove 2017:443). Schneider's status as a (bi)sexual icon rendered her illegible as a sexual assault victim until Bertolucci corroborated her claims.

The political dimension of her sexual assault testimony remains unintelligible for the most part until after her death because her critique of the film industry resists the demands of the celebrity confessional. The hostility she expresses in interviews are coded as a failure to comply with the codes of therapeutic culture centred around public displays of

[18] "Brando s'est senti grugé, violé, abusé. Moi aussi. Mais il avait cinquante ans et j'en avais vingt." (Schneider 2018 :227).

vulnerability and redemption narratives. In addition, her challenge to the celebrity confessional troubles the meritocratic myth of hard work that maintains hierarchies of fame. For instance, her struggles with drug addiction are incompatible with the neoliberal self-care governmentality. Neither do these struggles fit into the dominant cultural politics of victimhood. Similarly, her resistance to being victimised is in direct opposition with the cultural imperative that sexual assault survivors move on as part of a broader neoliberal ethos of self-management.

Schneider's critique of the film industry's sexism and heteronormativity is mostly absent from US-based news outlets. Accounts of her sexual assault testimony published by Anglophone media in 2016 only briefly allude to her mental health and struggles with drug use while entirely leaving out her bisexuality or resistance to being victimised. Her testimony is thus polished in a way that makes it more suitable for the dominant narrative of victimhood at play in therapeutic cultures prevalent in the United States' mediascape. The omission of her activism and sexual orientation is central to the posthumous reconstruction of Schneider's celebrity image into a symbol of tragic victimisation. This explains how her story gained sudden traction in the recent discursive conjecture leading to moments of mass disclosure like #MeToo and #TimesUp.

Celebrity sex work: Holly Schneider

Throughout this chapter I have shown that the grammar of 'speaking out' promoted by *celebrity* victims relies on a neoliberal rhetoric of self-management, appropriate choices, and hard work. Gretchen Carlson and her fictional counterpart Heidi Sorenson use the settlement money to set up advocacy programs. They both capitalise on their victimhood to legitimise their brands as feminist role models. Their advocacy thus revolved within the scope of the neoliberal project of the self, which I will develop further in the chapter on *celebrity* advocates. In contrast, Micha Green's immaturity and bad choices relegate by proxy Rihanna's artistic performance to mere celebrity provocations. Similarly, Maria Schneider's struggles with drug addiction are incompatible with the neoliberal self-care governmentality. In addition, her critique of the film industry troubles the meritocratic myth of hard work. It highlights one of the key paradoxes of female stardom: fame requires the sexual exploitation of female bodies, but sex work is reprehensible. In other

words, there are contexts in which the commodification of bodies is deemed acceptable and others in which it is not. The denouement of "Theatre Tricks" reveals the complex ways in which sex work and sexual violence remains a constituent of female stardom.

In the course of their investigation, the detectives discover that Meghan Weller was not only raped during the performance but also harassed sexually by a fan and assaulted sexually by the director of the play (Ted Scott) during a rehearsal. The detectives also learn that Holly Schneider, Weller's housemate, slept with Scott to get an audition. She also sold sexual favours on a website called "sugarbabyz" to pay rent. Both Weller and Holly Schneider experience the breadth of the emotional and physical exploitation of actresses. However, the latter internalises this violence and becomes the perpetrator. Indeed, in the episode's last scene, Holly Schneider reveals that she created a profile for Weller on Sugababyz which read "Ingenue seeking patron. Let me give you a private audition" as part of her plan to set up the on-stage rape. Her motivation was twofold: she was feeling jealous of Weller's success and wanted to get revenge for Scott's abusive behaviour. Holly Schneider confesses to the crime, without any sign of remorse:

> It was my audition! [Meghan] just came to help me run lines, and as soon as Ted saw her, he wanted her. And you didn't say no. Do you know what I had to do for that audition? Down on my knees with that pig, and with Crane and all those guys [from "sugarbabyz"]. And I am so tired of being the ugly duckling. And I wanted you to know what it felt like to feel dirty and used. To want to give up.

While this episode tackles the ways in which female stardom and sexual exploitation are mutually constitutive, its critique of celebrity culture is undermined by a disavowal of feminism, spelled out in the following exchange between two detectives:

> Amanda Rollins: With all the abusive men in her life, and Meghan's betrayed by a woman. Didn't see it coming.
>
> Olivia Benson: You'd like to think that we could look out for each other.

Rollins' comment suggests that a feminist analysis of the case was misleading and that pursuing this line of investigation would have prevented them from apprehending the culprit. For Benson, the absence of female solidarity explains the failures of feminism. This RFH episode exemplifies the grammar of postfeminist victimhood I discussed earlier

in this chapter. The series addresses the extent to which sexism is institutionalised in the entertainment industry, but its denouement depoliticises this critique by adopting an anti-feminist position.

While I do not contest the fact that Holly Schneider's actions constitute a criminal offence, I want to trouble the series' discursive construction of 'good' and 'bad' victims for it upholds a grammar of 'speaking out' centred around a neoliberal project of the self. Holly Schneider's sex work is the logical development of an industry that thrives on the commodification of female bodies. However, it does not constitute a form of labour which can sustain the transition from attributed to achieved celebrity, nor does it support the transformative narrative from victim to survivor. Indeed, for *celebrity* victims, publicly sharing their stories of sexual violence is the main way in which they can (re-)secure their achieved celebrity status. They will no longer be known for being victims of sexual violence, but for having overcome and capitalised on their misfortune. The stakes of fame are different for celebrity *victims* whose visibility in the public sphere depends solely on their victimhood.

Conclusion

The chapter explores the limits of a feminist politics solely defined in terms of visibility. It weaves three different RFH episodes of *SVU* to show fictional and real-life 'speaking out' narratives intersecting. On the one hand, RFH is a mode of storytelling that enables a critique of celebrity culture. It hints at how female stardom is premised on the sexual, psychological, physical exploitation of aspiring young women. The three case studies show the continuities between sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of RFH episodes and real-life celebrity confessional reveals how discourses around victimhood and survivorhood map onto existing hierarchies of fame. *Celebrity* victims of sexual violence legitimise their celebrity status by espousing a postfeminist ethos of self-discipline and self-transformation to demonstrate an 'appropriate' transition from attributed to achieved celebrity, girl to woman, and victim to survivor. This postfeminist grammar of 'speaking out' makes explicit the cultural anxieties around female stardom, which I further detail in Chapter 6: *Celebrity* Advocates. In addition, my analysis of Rihanna's and Maria Schneider's

celebrity confessional texts reveals how the construction of the *celebrity* victim upholds racist and heterosexist discourses. I develop this analysis in the following chapter dealing with sexual violence victims who have been celebrified.

CHAPTER 3: CELEBRITY *VICTIMS*

This chapter attends to celebrity victims who are known because of the crime that was committed against them. I discuss the processes by which sexual violence victims have been celebrified and consecrated into feminist icons. In contrast to *celebrity* victims who deploy postfeminist victimhood as a strategy to secure their achieved celebrity status, celebrity *victims* are inherently attributed celebrities. In other words, their celebrification solely depends on the mediatisation of their experience of sexual violence. If the spectacle of victimhood is inextricable from the spectacle of the sexual violence itself, how does it shape the grammar of 'speaking out' voiced by celebrity *victims*? The grammar of 'speaking out' these celebrified sexual violence victims propose operates on a regime of fame centred around what I call an excess of celebrity persona: even without personifying her testimony, a sexual violence victim can still be celebrified. While *celebrity* victims' visibility capital relies on the media reproduction of their name and facial features for their testimony to be marketable, most of the celebrity *victims* analysed in this chapter are either celefiction or anonymous. Their celebrification revolves around the mediation of the crime committed against them. Their experience of sexual violence is thus embodied through multiple fictionalisation yet remains affectively real. Celefiction and RFH reveal an ever-expanding economy of visibility revolving around the spectacle of sexual violence and victimhood.

This configuration of fame is not new, but moments of mass disclosure like #MeToo have given it a new reach. Therefore, the case studies span across the last two decades to establish continuities between the pre- and post-#MeToo era. *SVU* episodes ripped from the pages of popular works of fiction are an entry point of choice to explore this excess of celebrity persona. First, I analyse the ways in which Lisbeth Salander from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Hannah Baker from *13 Reasons Why* have been portrayed in *SVU* episodes "Branded" (S12E06), "Contrapasso" (S19E03), and "No Good Reason" (SE1904) (Cf. Appendix 1). These celefictions operate on a regime of fame that encompasses a series of novels and two films in the first case, and a novel and a TV series in the second. The celebrification of Salander and Baker as rape victims thus takes place at the nexus of a transmedia corpus. Through an intertextual analysis of this corpus, I

show how Salander's and Baker's celebrity personas coalesce around their rape revenge arc. This fictionalisation of rape revenge narratives articulates victimhood as a neoliberal subjectivity. "No Good Reason" is also a tribute to Amanda Todd, a 15-year-old student who committed suicide after being a victim of sexual violence. Reading Todd's and Baker's first-person narratives as rape testimonies and suicide notes against their *SVU* counterparts reveals another additional layer to the neoliberal grammar of victimhood. I then turn to the role of technology in mediating the affective reality of rape. I analyse the media through which Baker's and Todd's stories are told, and their implication for the celebrification of sexual violence victims. While these accounts contribute to the spectacularisation of sexual violence and the celebritisation of victimhood, they also offer opportunities to challenge dominant survivor narratives.

Rape revenge ripped-from-fiction: Lisbeth Salander

SVU features two fictionalised accounts of Stieg Larsson's novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005) and its screen adaptations of the same name, the Swedish film (2009) and the Swedish-US film (2011) (Cf. Figure 4). Of the complex storyline of the novel and both films, the police procedural TV series retains only Lisbeth Salander's rape revenge narrative arc. A ward of the state since her childhood, Salander is sexually assaulted by her guardian Nils Bjurman on several occasions. Because of previous altercations with the police, Salander decides to take matters in her own hands and secretly records one instance when Bjurman violently raped her. She later returns to his apartment, incapacitates him with a taser, strips him naked and ties him to his bed in the same way Bjurman handcuffed her when he assaulted her. She sodomises Bjurman with the same sex toy he used to rape her. Salander then shows him the hidden camera footage and blackmails her guardian to regain control of her finances and life. Finally, Salander tattoos "I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST" (Larsson 2005:246) on Bjurman's torso. Both film adaptations include graphic scenes that faithfully translate the assaults from the novel to the screen.

"Branded" is the first *SVU* to draw on the international bestseller and its film adaptations. Detectives Benson and Stabler investigate the assault of Bill Dixon found drugged with ketamine, hogtied, stripped, sodomised with board game pieces, and branded "RUINER"

with a wire hanger across his chest. The SVU squad are called to another crime scene where another man, Victor Ramos, lies trussed and bound in his apartment, with the word "TRAITOR" spelled across his thorax. The police officers arrest Camille Walters while she attempts to assault and carve "HELL" on a third man's torso, Alexander Gammon. In the course of their investigation, the detectives discover that Dixon, Ramos and Gammon worked at a summer youth camp 14 years ago, where they gang raped Walters who was then a teenager. Walters' rape revenge actions bear similarities with Salander's. They are prompted by traumatic events of an extreme violence committed by caretakers who betrayed their trust. Walters and Salander's resort to this privatised form of justice is motivated by a general mistrust of authority figures, due to their experience with the foster care system as well as more recent incidents with the police. Indeed, Walters and Salander are very competent hackers whose activities fringe the limits of legality. This episode thus effectively rips Salander's rape revenge scene and elements from the protagonist's characterisation from the pages of the novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

Furthermore, the series and the two *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* film adaptations visually quote from one another in the *mise-en-scène* of the acts of retribution. In the 2009 film, Bjurman regains consciousness after being tased and finds himself lying in a foetal position on the carpeted floor of his bedroom, handcuffed and bound with a rope to the bedpost. The sequence alternates high angle shots of Salander looking down on Bjurman and low angle shots from the latter's point of view. This camera work reinforces the reversal of power dynamic by casting Salander as the perpetrator and Bjurman as the victim. In the 2010 TV series episode, Dixon is discovered by his wife laying on the floor of their dining room in exactly the same position as Bjurman in the Swedish film. The camera mirrors her standpoint as it pans over the kitchen table and looks downwards to reveal her husband's half-naked and tortured body. In this scene, the high camera angle victimises Dixon while the forward tracking shot conveys his wife's surprise to find him in this state of vulnerability. Staging the assault in this way sets the scene for the overturn of events the detectives uncover during their investigation.

The 2011 film also uses the perspective of an onlooker to render the narrative tension brought by this unexpected turn of events. The sequence opens with a floor-levelled tracking shot through the hallway towards the bedroom door left ajar. Here again, the

camera oscillates between low and high angle shots to translate this inversion of roles between the perpetrator and the victim. The *SVU* episode is thus part of a broader cycle of screen adaptations of the *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. However, the series' references to source texts are limited only to the rape revenge storyline and traits Lisbeth Salander shares with her fictional counterparts. Consequently, RFH episodes constitute a specific form of fictional adaptation. Due to the short 40-44 min televisual format, it is highly selective of the plotline elements it cites from the original text. It also privileges alternative endings over the original storyline to accommodate copyrights liabilities and to preserve the series' brand.

Indeed, the police procedural drama cannot condone rape revenge storylines within its narrative economy. This RFH episode thus substitutes Salander's successful attempt at gaining control over her life with Walters' arrest and trial. Because the statute of limitations expired, A.D.A. Gillian Hardwicke cannot prosecute Dixon, Ramos and Gammon for raping Walters, but she still charges Walters for assaulting the three men. Benson requests leniency for Walters who she feels "is the real victim here" given her history of abusive foster homes and lack of support network that would have enabled her to report the crime when it happened. In taking Walters' defence, the detective empathises with rape victims such as Walters and Salander who were betrayed by authority figures and failed by the state. Benson expresses her moral conundrum in the following argument with the state attorney:

> Benson: So Camille goes to prison for a posttraumatic reaction to being gang-raped, and those bastards are gonna walk away free?
>
> Hardwicke: Before you get too weepy for the defendant, bear in mind, she sodomised two men and seared their chest with a scorching coat hanger.

Hardwicke's position can be read as the series' metafictional commentary on *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* rape revenge arc. *SVU* promotes a carceral feminist grammar of 'speaking out' which relies on victims coming forward for state-sponsored justice to be

served. It also requires victimhood to be marketable which becomes unlikely if the victim is convicted of a crime[19].

The series resolves the issues *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* rape revenge poses through the narrative freedom afforded by fictionalisation. Through its RFH episodes, *SVU* remediates Salander into a more palatable incarnation of victimhood. In the novel and film adaptations, Salander's persona is constructed as the archetype of the postfeminist neoliberal subject gone rogue. Throughout her life, Salander has been let down by the very institutions that were supposed to guarantee her safety and well-being. Consequently, she learned to be self-sufficient and is shown to actively embrace the self-actualising rhetoric of neoliberal subjectivity. For instance, she is an autodidact who utilises her great intellectual capacities to teach herself hacking and investigating skills, which leads to two employment opportunities, the first at Milton Security and the second as a research assistant for Mikael Blomkvist. In addition, Salander espouses the cultural imperative that constructs victimhood as antithetical to the productive neoliberal self. After Bjurman's first assault, she ponders her options and swiftly rejects contacting a crisis centre because they "existed, in her eyes, for *victims*, and she had never regarded herself as a victim. Consequently, her only remaining option was to do what she has always done – take matters into her own hands and solve her problems on her own" (Larson 2005:223). Salander embodies a heightened version of the active risk-taker and self-reliant postfeminist victim. Furthermore, this self-reflexive moment foregrounds the rhetoric of choice and agency that is central to neoliberal subjectivity. Because Salander's former guardian "had imprinted in her consciousness that every action has its consequences" (Larsson 2005:156), her rape revenge constitutes a carefully crafted privatised response to the systemic issue of sexual violence.

However, this informed decision to retaliate through criminal actions does not sit harmoniously with the world of *SVU*. The tensions between private revenge and public justice are extensively developed in the series' second RFH episode entitled

[19] The spectacle of incarcerated victimhood is not inherently unmarketable, as the commercial success of *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-2019), *Wentworth* (SoHo, 2013-) and *Unité 9* (Radio Canada, 2012-) attest. However, it requires a specific grammar of victimhood that falls outside the scope of this project.

"Contrapasso". The SVU squad investigates the gonadectomy of Jason Karr in a hotel room. They link the assault to Julie Wade, Nora Galen and Evelyn Bundy who were sexually harassed and raped 20 years ago by Karr, their former high school teacher. The three women admit to setting up a meeting with Karr in the hotel room to confront him. However, when Karr claimed they seduced him, Bundy ordered Galen and Wade to leave the room, drugged Karr and castrated him with a knife. In her confession, she explains that "she lost it" when Karr denied his crime and spontaneously enacted Dante's 'contrapasso' which she explains as the "punishment a sinner gets in hell is the opposite of his sin". Consequently, the series remediates Salander's calculated vengeance into an impulsive action triggered by trauma. This is also the case for Walters whose retaliation was prompted by PTSD flashbacks when she was reminded of the baby she gave up for adoption following the rape. Walters's maternal instincts reframe her rape revenge into a more palatable act of passion. In addition, Walters and Bundy are respectively charged with two counts of trespass and one count of assault for which they will do time. Through these RFH episodes, more specifically their alternative denouement, the series negotiates the tensions that arise from the neoliberal postfeminist grammar of 'speaking out' it promotes. The spectacle of victimhood it displays polices excesses of neoliberal subjectivity embodied by Salander.

Revenge by suicide: Hannah Baker and Amanda Todd

Another way in which *SVU* reasserts its neoliberal postfeminist grammar of 'speaking out' is through the ways in which it deals with sexual assault storylines depicting suicide. The episode entitled "No Good Reason" is loosely based on the novel *13 Reasons Why* (Asher 2007), the TV series of the same name (Netflix 2017-) and the real-life media buzz around Amanda Todd's suicide. *13 Reasons Why* tells the story of Hannah Baker, a student at fictional Liberty High School, who committed suicide and leaves behind a set of recorded tapes which implicate twelve people who hurt her in various ways, including bullying, sexual harassment, stalking and rape. Amanda Todd's 2012 YouTube video entitled *My story: struggling, bullying, suicide, self-harm* is a digital suicide note in which the 15-year-old Canadian student recounts her experience with sexual assault and cyberbullying. Todd's story and *13 Reasons Why* respectively generated a lot of media

attention in the United States, Canada and beyond. The former framed suicide as the tragic consequence of "the dark side of notoriety" (Dean 2012) that resulted from Todd's topless picture circulating on social media. The latter was criticised for its graphic depiction of rape and suicide, as well as portraying suicide as "the ultimate revenge fantasy" (Schwindt 2017).

SVU capitalises on these media events through an episode that is at once RFH and ripped-from-fiction. The detectives investigate Amanda "Mandy" Fowler, a high school student who is gone missing after being cyberbullied by her peers. In her last videoblog post before her disappearance, Fowler explains that her reputation is ruined because a picture of her at a party is being circulated on social media. The photo shows her passed out on a sofa, half-undressed with insults written in black marker all over her body. She then reads aloud some of the hateful comments that were texted to her and ends her videoblog by asking: "Whoever did this, and you know who you are, please just tell me why. Why?" The detectives eventually trace Fowler's whereabouts through social media. When they find her, she reveals that she was raped at the same party where the picture was taken, but she has no recollection of who the perpetrator is. Benson and her colleagues thus endeavour to uncover his identity. The episode thus reverses the premise of Baker and Todd's narrative: instead of telling her audience the reasons that drove her to run away, Fowler demands an explanation. More than just an effect of the police procedural genre, this shift in the storyline reflects the ways in which *SVU* constructs a grammar of 'speaking out' that frames suicide as a failure to move on from victim to survivor.

Indeed, as the case progresses, Fowler refuses to testify in court because she is still bullied online by students from her school who blame her for the arrest of three of their classmates. Fowler posts a video claiming that she doesn't care anymore: "No more being the victim. And I feel great because I've figured out that you can change the past. I have the power, and I've decided whatever happened, it's done. It's over. It doesn't matter because I'm not that girl, and I'm never going to be that girl again." Rollins describes her behaviour as "pink clouding" thereby implying that Fowler's rejection of victimhood is unsustainable and potentially lethal. The detective decides to reach out to the teenager, reminding her colleagues that "[she] lost a girl five years ago". Rollins may be referring to Lindsay Bennett who committed suicide after being gang raped at a fraternity party in

the 2013 episode "Girl Dishonored" (S14E20). But given the series' RFH trademark, Rollins may also be referring to Amanda Todd who killed herself in 2012. This system of references is represented in the figure below.

Figure 6: SVU intertextuality and RFH

During her intervention, Rollins shares with Mandy her own experience of sexual harassment in her youth and shows her tattoo that spells out her name. She explains its meaning in the following way: "It's my name, Amanda. Just to remind myself that that's who I am, not any of these other [hateful] names that I was branded with". The three namesakes' similar experience of sexual violence and bullying sustains the series' grammar of 'speaking out' which promotes a linear progress narrative of recovery. Rollins and Fowler personify a neoliberal victim who successfully moves on. Survival becomes part of a self-actualisation project; Rollins puts to use her experience of sexual harassment through her work in the SVU squad while Fowler leads an awareness campaign at her school. In contrast, Todd's choice of death over life is implicitly framed as irrational and tragic.

This episode is one of many examples of the ways in which cultural representations of suicide and victimhood are mutually constitutive. Suicide attempts are often used as a narrative device to introduce trauma storylines. For instance, in "Girl Dishonored", Benson and her colleagues are called to investigate a gang rape at a fraternity party when the victim, Lindsay Bennett, tries to jump off the roof of a university building. The detectives' investigation is thwarted by the college administration's efforts to cover up multiple sexual assaults implicating members of the fraternity known as "The Rape Factory". The episode presents a fictionalised account of gang rape of Jane Doe by two varsity athletes in Steubenville, Ohio. The ensuing highly mediatised trial resulted in two rape convictions and three coaches and school officials being charged with obstruction of

justice and tampering with evidence. The telefilm *The Assault* (Lifetime 2014) sets up its rendition of the 2012 Steubenville high school rape case with the protagonist's public attempt on her own life. RFH is a mode of storytelling that accommodates the inclusion of a suicide storyline which was absent from the real-life media coverage of the trial. In the TV series and the film, the spectacle of distressed suicidal subjects sets the scene for a spectacle of victimhood especially poignant because the victims' quest for justice is infringed by the very institutions who should protect them, i.e., the university in the former instance and the high school in the latter. Fictional narratives of suicide can thus sustain a neoliberal grammar of victimhood.

The ways in which suicide and sexual assault narratives jointly produce neoliberal subjectivities is most salient if we read *13 Reasons Why* – the book and the TV series – as both a suicide note and a rape revenge account. As the title suggests, Hannah Baker's 13 audio clips sets out the reasons for her suicide while also holding accountable the people who hurt her: "I hope you're ready, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended. And if you're listening to these tapes, you're one of the reasons why" (S1E1). While she doesn't give instructions for the disposal of her body, Baker lays out the rules for how she wants her story to be heard. The tapes should be listened to and then passed onto the next person on her list. Should her guideline not be respected, the tapes will be released publicly. Baker's wishes constitute in effect a form of blackmail: in exchange for her silence, one should listen to her account of one's own shameful actions. She also uses this suicide note to disclose feelings she felt unable to voice when she was alive. For instance, she confesses to an accident that caused the death of one of her classmates. She also expresses a profound remorse for not being able to stop the rape of fellow classmate Jessica Davis that she witnessed. Finally, she describes how she was raped. These confessions implicate Sheri Holland for criminal negligence, Justin Folley as accessory to rape and Bryce Walker on two counts of rape. Baker's admission of guilt is equally a retaliation against her peers for not taking responsibilities for their actions. Consequently, Baker's story constitutes a rape revenge narrative which also plays out as a revenge fantasy inherent to suicidal ideation, namely that she will be able to witness the impact of her death on the people who wronged her.

Like Salander, Baker is the archetypical postfeminist victim while she simultaneously embodies its contradictions. She is let down by the school who failed to address the culture of bullying that contributed to her suffering, a position her parents strongly defend in the TV series' second season by suing Liberty High School. She feels particularly betrayed by Kevin Porter, the school counsellor, who suggests that if she didn't want to share details of the assault or press charges, her only option is to "move on" (S1E13). Because she feels rejected by her female peers despite their shared experience of sexism and sexual violence, she decides to take matters – literally her life – into her own hands. Her endeavour to tell her truth is both symptomatic of the suffering caused by an atomising culture of bullying and a project through which she reasserts herself as an entrepreneurial, risk-taking, and self-sufficient neoliberal subject. Baker's refusal to 'move on' can be read as a protest to the unsustainable ideals of neoliberal approached to wellbeing (Rushton 2019). Indeed, Porter stands in for a society who offers no meaningful response to the spectrum of sexual violence Baker experienced. Consequently, Baker's vengeful suicide challenges the neoliberal grammar of recovery which requires the transition from victim to survivor.

However, *13 Reasons Why* presents an embodied narrative of trauma which turns rape and suicide into a spectacle. The tapes are a material manifestation of Baker's carefully self-edited persona. Her confessions are consumed by her peers, and by extension the novel's readers and the TV series' viewers, and their circulation cast her as a celebrity within the realm of fiction and beyond. The commercial success of both texts attests to the extent to which her revenge narrative is marketable. It presents a privatised solution to a systemic problem whilst seemingly challenging power structures. This is most salient in the 'butterfly effect' metaphor Baker uses as the narrative thread throughout her story: "You've heard of the butterfly effect, right? That if a butterfly flaps its wings at just the right time, in just the right place, it can cause a hurricane thousands of miles away […] It's chaos theory. But, see, chaos theory isn't exactly about chaos. It's about how a tiny change in a big system can affect everything" (S1E3). Her suicide notes retraces the chain of events that led to her suicide thus laying the blame on individuals: had Justin not taken a suggestive picture of her, she would not have been cyberbullied, Alex wouldn't have written her name on the "Hot / Not" list, Jessica wouldn't have stopped being her friend,

Tyler wouldn't have stalked her, and so on… Showing the ways in which actions and consequences are interconnected gestures towards the gendered power dynamics at play, but it still reifies the primacy of individual choices. In fact, throughout the book and the series, characters remind each other that they are not to blame for Baker's suicide and ending her life was her own decision.

The second season of *13 Reasons Why* is particularly invested in enforcing the neoliberal recovery ethos. During the lawsuit brought by Baker's parents against the high school administration, her character comes under scrutiny. For instance, a guilt-ridden Porter ponders on the stand how his last meeting could have gone differently. In the alternative scenario he conjures, he asks Baker directly if she is thinking about suicide and if she was raped, rather than indulging her veiled allusions. Even if Porter feels he could have done more for the student, his projection implies that had Baker explicitly voiced her suicidal ideations and detailed the assault, he would have been able to support her. The series thus frames Baker's suicide as her own personal failure to ask for the appropriate help and recover. This emphasis on self-responsibility is actualised with the court ruling, which finds the school district not guilty of failing to protect Baker. The verdict suggests that the school's protocol is adequate, and Hannah is to blame for keeping so many secrets. It reaffirms the ways in which 'speaking out' is bound to cultural expectations of healing. The following discussion between Baker's mother and Davis spells out the ways in which neoliberal approaches to mental health informs the dominant narrative of survival:

> Olivia Baker: Sometimes I think if Hannah would have come to me, maybe things would have been different.
>
> Jessica Davis: Maybe it was too painful for her to talk about it. Maybe she kept it all in to protect herself. [sighs] I'm not good at that. The more I think about it, she was really brave.
>
> Olivia Baker: Oh, but honey, we both know that didn't work. Keeping it in, that's not brave. Feeling the pain, facing it… that takes courage. It's okay to let it out. [Jessica sobs] It's okay (S2E8).

By framing 'speaking out' as heroic, *13 Reasons Why* promotes a marketable grammar of victimhood. Indeed, the spectacle of sexual violence can only be consumed if citizen-consumers are alive and healthy.

Despite its narrative premise, *13 Reasons Why* disavows suicide as a viable way to deal with the trauma of sexual violence. This position was made explicit through the producer's response to the controversy surrounding the graphic depiction of Baker's suicide. A link to crisis resources and helplines is included at the end of each episode along with content warnings. The neoliberal self-responsibilised subject is thus activated through the series' narrative structure. These trigger warnings also contribute towards the user-directed watching experience characteristic of streaming TV series (Horeck 2019a). Horeck's analysis of the series compellingly shows how its narrative hermeneutics orients a specific mode of consumption, i.e., 'binge-watching'. This is significant considering the series is geared towards an audience of teen girls. The series' concern with bullying and sexual violence echoes "girls in crisis" discourses that cast young women as victims of various struggles, including poor self-esteem, body image issues, hyper-sexualisation, etc. (Banet-Weiser 2018c:46). The injunction to speak out to move on thus fits neatly into a neoliberal discourse of empowerment. As Banet-Weiser argues, "girl power is not simply a commodity in its own right but also refers to girls as powerful consumers" (2018c:47). In other words, the solution to sexual violence put forward in *13 Reasons Why* is to continue watching the series. In addition to its circular fallacy, this also has troubling implications in the way the series portray the perpetrators, an argument which I will develop in Chapter 5: Celebrity *Perpetrators*.

The differentiated value of victimhood: Hannah Baker, Jessica Davis, Tyler Down

Celefiction is the key to understand how TV series reproduce dominant narratives about who is a 'deserving' victim and who is 'undeserving' whilst seemingly challenging these tropes. On the surface, *13 Reasons Why* and *SVU* display a sophisticated understanding of sexual violence: they draw on Kelly's continuum of violence (1988) and locate rape on a spectrum of socially sanctioned male aggression that takes different forms (sexual, physical, psychological, economic, etc.). Over its 22 seasons *SVU* show the pervasiveness

and multiple declensions of abuse. Similarly, *13 Reasons Why* shows the full spectrum of sexism. Each episode of the first season explores a specific form of violence, ranging from harassment to digitally mediated violence, and eventually culminating in rape. However, Horeck argues that this narrative progression undermines the series' embrace of the continuum of violence because it contributes to its gamification, whereby each episode becomes an episode viewers can "unlock" (2019a). In addition, *13 Reasons Why* fails to explicitly address the imbrication of sexual violence and structural inequality. This manifests through the series' different treatment of the rape victims it portrays: Baker, Jessica Davis and Tyler Down.

Season 2 of *13 Reasons Why* concludes with a graphic scene of male-on-male rape in which Down is brutally raped by a group of student athletes in a school bathroom. Brian Yorkey, the series creator, defended the inclusion of this scene in the following terms:

> When we talk about something being 'disgusting' or hard to watch, often that means we are attaching shame to the experience. We would rather not be confronted with it. We would rather it stay out of our consciousness. This is why these kinds of assaults are out of our consciousness. […] We believe that talking about it is so much better than silence. (Lockett 2018)

His argument echoes a feminist politics revolving around breaking the silence as a political end. The lexical field of shame and disgust also reproduces a cultural hierarchy of victimhood even though it seems to challenge it on the surface. Building on Kristeva's work on the abject, Imogen Tyler argues that rhetoric of disgust produces certain bodies as abject (2013). Disgust thus delineates 'worthy' victims from 'unworthy' victims. Arguably, all three rape scenes are uncomfortable to watch. The series upholds the cultural hierarchy of victimhood in the ways in which it documents Baker's, Davis', and Down's respective physical and psychological traumas.

Baker's legitimacy as a rape victim is never called into question in the first series. Her suicide scene draws on the visual representations of tragic maidenhood (S1E13). In a shot reminiscent of the Lady of Shallott paintings, Baker lays in the bathtub, her pale grey shirt clinging to her body, the red blood contrasting with her pale skin[20]. Through this scene,

[20] This shot was edited out after much protest for the ways in which it glamorised suicide.

Baker's violated body is eroticized. In contrast, the camera angle doesn't show Down's entire torso in the scenes where he documents his physical recovery through photographs (S3E2). This representational choice is thus gendered. Baker's body is objectified whereas Tyler's is not. Paradoxically, it is this gendered objectification that casts Baker as a spectacular rape victim. As a male rape victim, Down is delegitimized. If gender plays into the spectacle of rape victims' bodies, so does race. The series' representation of Davis' semi-naked body at a student-led protest (S3E11) reveals the ways in which gender and rape intersect in the objectification of rape victims. Davis, along with fellow members of her sexual assault survivor club, storms the football field during a match to protest the school's handling of sexual violence. They stand in their underwear, chanting "rape culture has to go", and print hands in red paint on their bodies to symbolize sexual violence. Unlike Baker, Davis' actions are depicted as explosive, unruly, and fuelled by rage. The series implies that Davis, a mixed-race rape victim, needs to be policed, which it visually represents through campus security forcefully removing Davis and her acolytes from the field. This juxtaposition of sequences reveals how the series upholds dominant rape myths, which cast young white female virgins as the 'ideal' rape victim (Projansky 2001).

In addition, *13 Reasons Why* and *SVU* both imply that the legitimacy of sexual violence victims revolves around their willingness to abide by the rules of the celebrity confessional. Anthony Rapp's cameo as the pastor who officiates Baker's funeral (S2E13) visually inscribes celefiction testimonies within the moments of mass disclosure triggered by the accusation against Weinstein[21]. The public confessional is fully exploited at the end of the third season when Davis uses her platform at the school assembly to talk about her experience of sexual violence. Her candid speech triggers other students, including Down, to publicly share their own story in an emotive montage sequence. This sequence visually quotes from a scene in *SVU*'s fictionalization of *13 Reasons Why*. "No Good Reasons" concludes with Benson delivering a keynote at Fowler's high school assembly. During the workshop, Fowler shares her experience of sexual assault. Inspired, other students speak up. These scenes construct 'speaking out' as the only legitimate feminist

[21] In October 2017, Rapp accused Kevin Spacey of making unwanted sexual advances three decades earlier. His interview encouraged at least 14 other men to accuse Spacey of sexual assault.

form of protest because of its proximity to the religious confessional (Redmond 2008) and the courtroom testimony (Serisier 2018). Both series signify that Davis and Fowler have successfully managed the transition into survivorhood through these moments of self-possessed disclosure.

Mediated spectacular victimhood: Hannah Baker and Amanda Todd

So far, I have discussed the ways in which fictional characters implicated in rape revenge narratives embody a postfeminist neoliberal grammar of victimhood. I now turn to the celebrity *victims*' account of their experience to interrogate the mechanism of visibility at play in their celebrification. How can a victim who remains anonymous to this day effectively convey the affective reality of the assault? I suggest that common elements across their personal stories produce a web of affects, in which fictional characters become the voice and face of anonymous victims. Celebrity *victims* and celefictional victims are thus bound together through a shared spectacle of victimhood. I analyse the role of technology in mediating the affective reality of sexual violence. I argue that digital media both enforce a surveillance regime and carve spaces for resistance.

The celebrification of celebrity *victims* is contingent to the spectacle of sexual violence and its aftermaths. In what follows, I analyse the ways in which these displays of assault are technologically mediated. Like Horeck (2018), I resist a moral approach to digital technologies and discuss instead their political potential in light of their usage by and against celebrity *victims*. While digital media can be accessories to perpetrating sexual violence online, they can also operate as spaces of resistance. Hannah Baker encapsulates ambivalent attitudes towards digital media. Technology, more specifically 7 tapes, is what enables her to tell her story on her own terms. The novel *13 Reasons Why* (2009) and the first season of the TV series adaptation of the same name (2017-) revolves around two simultaneous narrations. Clay Jensen mourns the death of his friend and first love, Hannah Baker who committed suicide two weeks earlier. He receives a shoebox containing the cassette tapes Hannah recorded before her death in which she explains her struggles. The printed text reflects this dual narration through the typewriting: Hannah's testimony is italicised and woven into Clay's first-person account in regular font. In the series, the two temporalities of storytelling are materialised visually through stark differences in colour

temperature. Clay is the protagonist that guides the viewers through the present day, filmed with a blue camera filter, which creates a gloomy atmosphere. A yellow camera filter is used to increase the vibrancy and brightness of colours throughout Hannah's flashbacks, thus instilling a sense of nostalgia while Clay – and the viewers – listen to the tapes. The cassettes mediate Hannah's performance of authenticity, which she makes explicit in the opening sentence of her recording: "Hello, boys and girls. Hannah Baker here. Live and in stereo. […] No return engagements. No encore. And this time, absolutely no requests." (Asher 2009:7). Technology thus literally enables the spectacle of her victimhood.

However, for Hannah, not all technologies are empowering, and she resorts to analogue technologies to tell her truth. She outlines the narrative structure of her tapes on a sheet from one of her school notebooks, and a copy of it is later entered as evidence in the discovery file for the lawsuit brought by Hannah's parents against the school (S1E11; S1E12). For Hannah, the traditional pen and paper adds a veneer of veracity to her narrative. It produces textual evidence of the harassment and assault she experienced, with less risk of her truth being corrupted. The assumption that digital technologies are potentially unsafe is explicit in her explanation for drawing a paper map retracing where the events she discusses took place: "A map. Old school again. No Google Maps, no app, no chance for the interweb to make everything worse, like it does." (S1E1). Similarly, her rationale for recording tapes rather than digital files pertains to the authenticity labour required by the so-called old technology: "It's not supposed to be easy, or I would have emailed you an MP3" (S1E1). The effort of accessing the equipment to record the tapes makes her story trustworthy in the same way that listening to the bequeathed tapes is a material manifestation of her testimony. The emotional labour required from her audience to pass the tapes onto the next person further substantiates the affective reality of her narrative.

DIY as a strategy to counter the ways in which digital media can facilitate the perpetration of sexual violence is also used by Amanda Todd in the YouTube video posted before she committed suicide. The 8 minutes-long video shows Amanda waving flashcards at the camera on which she spells out her experience of cyberbullying after nude webcam pictures of her were shared on social media. In her video testimony, Amanda details what

Nicola Henry and Anastasia Powell (2017) call "technologically-facilitated sexual violence" – or sexual offenses enabled by digital media. The absence of a soundtrack draws the attention onto the story as it unfolds for the viewers to read. This emphasis on written words speaks to the permanence of the hateful messages targeting Amanda on social media. In addition, the grainy black and white images give the video a homemade quality, implying that Amanda's story is true because it emerges from the domestic sphere into the public sphere, rather than the other way around. The occasional grammar mistakes on the flashcards equally attest to Amanda's genuine attempt at telling her truth. These imperfections reveal the time-consuming process of DIY-storytelling. Similarly, shots of Hannah recording, decorating, and organising the tapes in the shoebox tacitly challenge the instantaneous logic of social media platforms.

Amanda's use of video remediates the very feature of digital media that was instrumental in enabling cyberbullying in the first place. Video is a technological support that allows her to extend the reach of her story told on flashcards. Indeed, the video quickly became viral in the aftermath of her death, receiving over 1,600,000 views in the 3 days following her suicide (CTV News 2012). This interconnection of old and new media is reminiscent of the visual blueprints of online anti-rape activist campaigns such as *Project Unbreakable*. Launched in 2009 by Grace Brown, this photographic project uses the visual imagery of the selfie to share stories of sexual violence. Each submission features an unnamed individual holding up a poster with a quote from either the perpetrator(s) or people who disbelieved the survivor's account. Juxtaposition of the written sign and a human body holding it – with the face shown or not – creates a distance and allows the survivor to tell their story and not be defined by it. "Functioning both as speech and not-speech, the selfie operates on multiple levels to articulate what is both literally and figuratively unspeakable in culture" (Ferreday 2017a:133). *Project Unbreakable*'s selfie photographs or Amanda Todd's video selfie constitute an embodied way of speaking out - one that resists showing the lived experience of trauma while also resisting its commodification. It uses social media as a tool to generate collective solidarities which can translate into real-life protests. Significance of the poster narrative, part of the social movement repertoire. For example, RFH "Girl Dishonored" pays tribute to selfie activism and more generally digital activism – including the series – metafictional *mise-en-abyme*.

DIY-storytelling thus hybridises old and new media to resists dominant narrative of recovery from victim to survivor. As Ferreday argues, "In a context that positions sexual violence as unspeakable, activist selfies allow for speaking out, but on one's own terms" (2017a:129). This is especially true because Hannah and Amanda's stories are heard posthumously. As I already discussed earlier in this chapter, suicide narratives can challenge neoliberal survivor citizenship. To refuse to be a victim or a survivor is to refuse to partake in a spectacle of trauma on the grounds that is not – or cannot – be commodified. Indeed, to be a suicidal victim is to be non-productive subject, according to the postfeminist neoliberal grammar of victimhood. However, the viral circulation of Amanda's video and the commercial success of *13 Reasons Why* show that these narratives are still marketable. For Amanda and participants of Project Unbreakable, new media can be empowering insofar as they provide the technical support to disseminate stories told through media deemed more authentic. Because selfie activism still relies on a form of looking, it equally raises interrogations regarding the consumption of the spectacle of trauma – in this case, rape and suicide.

Conclusion

This chapter deals with the celebrification of sexual assault victims into feminist icons. Fictional accounts of both cases render the ethical paradox of celebrification apparent: dramatization of real-life cases ensures the perennial visibility of celetoid victims in the public sphere, yet these stories need to be of surviving the aftermaths of the assault. Celebrity *victims* thus reveal another layer of the postfeminist grammar of victimhood, one that is predicated on surviving at all costs. In addition, for sexual violence to be spectacular, celebrity *victims*' testimonies need to be equally spectacular. This is conveyed through intimate and affective registers, which raises important ethical questions.

Each *SVU* episode opens with an extra-diegetic voice that announces, "these are their stories", as part of the opening credits. It herewith foregrounds the stories of sexual assault victims and the professionals who investigate and prosecute these crimes. Even though *celebrity* victims and celebrity *victims* are widely represented in *SVU*, the series' RFH episodes disproportionally focus on *celebrity* perpetrators and celebrity *perpetrators*. In

the next two chapters, I turn to *SVU*'s representation of powerful men who have been incriminated for sexual assault (i.e., *celebrity* perpetrators), and sex offenders who have become famous for their crimes (i.e., celebrity *perpetrators*).

CHAPTER 4: *CELEBRITY* PERPETRATORS

Celebrities accused of sexual violence, hereafter *celebrity* perpetrators, are compelling case studies to analyse celebrity desecration. Misha Kavka (2020) defines desecration as the disrespectful or irreverent treatment of something holy. Celebrity desecration thus refers to the un-making of cultural icons. Ruth Penfold-Mounce's taxonomy (2009) of celebrated criminality is useful to understand the intricacies of desecrations as gendered phenomena. Penfold-Mounce identifies three categories of *celebrity* criminals – 'celebrity suspects', 'celebrity criminals', and 'celebrity deviants'. Celebrity suspects are public figures whose fame is tainted with suspicion of a criminal act. In other words, they are celebrities known for their accomplishments, who risk being known simply for the publicity generated by the criminal allegations. Celebrity criminals are celebrities convicted of a crime by a court of law. Celebrity deviants are celebrities whose public images are built on their rebellious identities. They need not have committed a crime but are expected by the public to be implicated in illicit activities. The organising principle of this classification revolves around the effect of felony allegations onto the celebrity status. Celebrity suspects are still known for their merits and talents, but this status is only precariously retained, and they can slide into public disgrace if they don't manage to dissociate their persona from the stain of scandal. In contrast, celebrity criminals are former achieved celebrities debased by publicity. This transition implies that their public image is no longer linked with their accomplishments but rather dependent on the circulation of their name and image as a currency for gossip and sensationalism. Celebrity deviants are the only type of *celebrity* criminals whose association with crime benefits their brand. The publicity generated by their celebrity provocations or subversive persona is substantiated by a suspicion or conviction of misconduct, thus consolidating their attributed fame into achieved celebrity.

Read alongside Rojek's typology of celebrification (2001), Penfold-Mounce's classification of *celebrity* criminals provides an understanding of celebrity downfall as a reframing of fame rather than a loss of visibility. 'Celebrity suspect', 'celebrity deviant', and 'celebrity criminal' each refer to a specific movement along Rojek's cultural hierarchy of fame, which values talent and merit over publicity. Specifically, each

subcategory of *celebrity* criminals refers to a tension between achieved celebrity and attributed fame. As discussed in the previous chapters, this distinction upholds gendered hierarchies of fame. Like celebrity consecration, celebrity desecration operates according to a cultural hierarchy of fame that relies on gendered assumption around status, labour, and legitimacy. It also reproduces the gendering of 'high' and 'low' culture. Fame is seen as impoverished through the decline of talent, merit and achievement, and the rise of publicity and sensationalism. In addition, the disavowal of attributed fame is tied into gendered consumption practices. The spectacle of celebrity downfall is readily available through gossip and celebrity news, which are associated with the domestic and private sphere. Penfold-Mounce's taxonomy lays the grounds for an analysis of celebrity desecration as a gendered phenomenon. The figure of the *celebrity* perpetrator, however, further complicates this classification.

Penfold-Mounce argues that depending on the type of crime, cultural context and public image strategies, there are three possible outcomes for *celebrity* criminals: they can be deglamourized, remain unaffected or benefit from their association to crime (2009:144). The type of offence and its severity will affect the *celebrity* criminal's capacity to rebuild their public image. For instance, suspicion or conviction of paedophilia leads to irreversible deglamorization (Penfold-Mounce2009:147). However, the successful careers of Roman Polanski and Woody Allen suggest the contrary. Penfold-Mounce argues that the perceived gravity of offences evolves through time and across cultural contexts. An example of this is Donald J. Trump's successful presidency bid despite multiple allegations of sexual harassment (Barbaro and Twohey 2016), when similar sexual misconduct ended other political careers. According to Penfold-Mounce, the determining factor when it comes to celebrity status rehabilitation is the extent to which the association to crime contradicts a celebrity's initial public image. As a result, celebrity deviants are more likely to recover from this form of scandal because this corresponds with audience expectations based on their subversive persona. In this instance, illegal conduct can authenticate their brand. Most of the examples provided by Penfold-Mounce of the celebrity deviant are of famous people consuming illicit substances or behaving in an irreverent manner in public. However, when applied to *celebrity* perpetrators, this

category reveals the ways in which sexual violence and celebrity culture are mutually constitutive.

In their introduction to the *Celebrity Studies* special issue "Desecrating Celebrity", Romana Andò and Sean Redmond argue that the fact that a lot of examples of celebrity scandal revolve around sexual misconduct reveals the "sexual power and ideologies that shape [celebrity culture]" (2020:1). In other words, the pleasure of witnessing celebrity desecration – or celebrity *Schadenfreude* – has the potential to disrupt the meritocratic logics central to celebrity culture. Sexual assault allegations could thus constitute a particularly productive form of celebrity *Schadenfreude* insofar as they allow a critique of the imbrications of sexism and celebrity culture. However, the prevalence of media texts focusing on *celebrity* perpetrators calls for a more nuanced analysis. Even in a post-#MeToo era, *celebrity* perpetrators are given a bigger platform than *celebrity* victims, as illustrated by the spectacle of the Harvey Weinstein trial. In addition, RFH storylines revolve around the figure of the *celebrity* perpetrator, which implies that their story has more cultural and commercial value than the accounts of *celebrity* victims or the celebrity *victims*.

I start with the fictionalisation of Jimmy Savile's fall from grace in *National Treasure* (Channel 4, 2016) and the *SVU* episode "Dissonant Voices" (S15E07) to reveal the complex affective processes at play in celebrity desecration. While these allow for a critique of celebrity culture, they also limit its scope. Similar processes are at play in the dramatization of Dominique Strauss-Kahn's perp walk in *SVU*'s "Scorched Earth" (S13E02) which illustrates the ways in which celebrity *Schadenfreude* is shaped by racist, sexist, and classist discourses. I build on my discussion of *SVU*'s RFH of Roger Ailes in "The Newsroom" (S18E16) in Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims to discuss the ways in which shame is gendered. The same episode provides an entry point to explore the construction of Bernardo Bertolucci's *auteur* persona. I show how the figure of the film *auteur* is gendered. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of *SVU*'s "Reasonable Doubt" (S15E22), inspired by Roman Polanski's rape trial and Woody Allen's child molestation accusations, revealing how the figure of the *auteur* lends itself to a rhetoric of injury and victimisation, which enables famous artists like Bertolucci, Allen, and Polanski to maintain their celebrity status despite criminal accusations (Cf. Appendix 2).

Contained celebrity desecration: Jimmy Savile

In her discussion of the mediatisation of the case against Jimmy Savile, Caroline Bainbridge (2020) argues that the fictionalised accounts of Savile provide the affective space to collectively come to terms with the desecration of this former British icon. She situates the TV drama *National Treasure* (Channel 4, 2016) within an emergent televisual archive of TV series and documentaries tackling Savile's crimes and the institutions that enabled him. Fictionalisation, Bainbridge argues, "enables the creatives to displace the specific associations to individuals onto symbolic condensations that bring to life the broader thematic resonances of a series of cases involving different perpetrators in a range of contexts" (2020:83). In other words, RFH is a narrative tool that moves beyond the intricacies of each individual case to make sense of broader patterns of abuse. It draws connections between several *celebrity* perpetrators to highlight common denominators that enabled them: gendered hierarchies, institutional cover-up, celebrity status, etc. *SVU* RFH episodes like "Newsroom" (S18E16), analysed in Chapter 2, weave together cases from different contexts (Bertolucci, France, 1970s, cinema; Ailes, US, 2016, television) that nonetheless speak to the same sexist dynamics underpinning stardom. Other *SVU* RFH episodes like "Dissonant Voices" (S15E07), which references the Jimmy Savile case and the McMartin preschool trials (Cf. Figure 7), are less successful in addressing the imbrication of sexual violence and celebrity culture. Far from being an anomaly, this episode reveals the tensions inherent to RFH of *celebrity* perpetrators, between condemnation and rehabilitation.

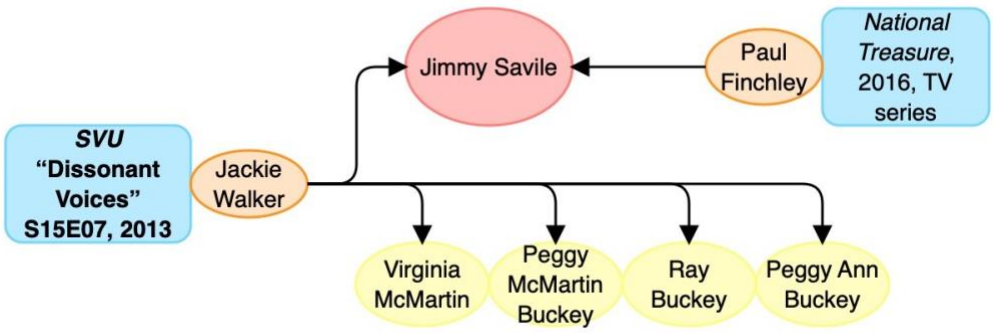


Figure 7: RFH of the Jimmy Savile case

According to Bainbridge, the dramatization of real-life *celebrity* perpetrators challenges the dominant understanding of fame as untouchable. It creates the space to critique celebrity culture and provides affective channels for audiences to process ambivalent celebrity attachments. In the case of Savile, former fondness is disrupted by betrayal, repulsion, and guilt. As Bainbridge shows, the emergent televisual archive around the Savile case seeks to reconcile unequivocal condemnation of Savile's actions with reparative readings. Building on Melanie Klein's psychoanalytical framework, Bainbridge argues that the need for reparation stems from the guilt of having cared for Savile and thus constitutes an effort to salvage these meaningful connections (2020:82). This is realised, in part, by the pleasure of watching remediations of Savile's persona. This framework is thus useful to understand the affective hermeneutics of RFH. Every *SVU* RFH episode builds in storyline elements that trigger feelings such as shock, disgust, disbelief. They also feature cultural reference or narrative clues pertaining to the real-life case behind the RFH. The pleasure of watching *SVU* stems in part from catching these references. This creates the distance necessary for audiences to be able navigate their ambivalent attachment between reprobation and reparation.

At the same time, RFH is also a mode of storytelling that "contain[s] the fallout from a toxic celebrity" (Bainbridge 2020:79). Within Bainbridge's psychoanalytical framework, containment entails the creation of reassuring discourses which facilitate the therapeutic impetus to "move on". In the case of *National Treasure*, this is achieved through the casting of Robbie Coltrane as Paul Finchley, Savile's fictional counterpart. Coltrane's personification of the *Harry Potter* character Hagrid makes him a trustworthy celebrity who can help fans navigate their ambivalent celebrity attachments (Bainbridge 2020:84). In *SVU*, the series' cathartic formula fulfils the same function. Viewers find comfort in knowing that the culprit will be found and prosecuted. Bainbridge's analysis is useful to understand the therapeutic dynamics of *celebrity* perpetrators' remediations. I expand her framework to consider containment as also being synonymous with keeping critiques of celebrity culture under control. Indeed, as Karen Boyle argues about the emergent corpus of reparative readings of Savile, "these documentaries are fundamentally *about* television, as well as *being* television" (2018:391). As Channel 4 and NBC have demonstrated through the commercial success of *National Treasure* and *SVU*, the television industry

can profit from the spectacular downfall of television personalities insofar as it doesn't implicate itself. In other words, RFH's narrative containment facilitates critiques of celebrity culture without fundamentally altering its structure nor challenging the ideologies that underpin it.

This tension is at play in "Dissonant Voices" in which the SVU squad investigates Jackie Walker, a famous TV reality singing coach and music teacher at a prestigious Manhattan pre-school, for molesting two four-year-old male pupils, Jonah Allen and Cooper Burns, and two of his former students, Brooke Allen and Rachel Burns, both now 15 years old, and Jonah's and Cooper's respective older siblings. As they progress in their investigation, the detectives identify similarities with the Savile case. He and Walker seem to display the same predatory pattern of using their celebrity status to groom young children, regardless of their gender, over decades. Walker's proclamation of his innocence feeds into the remediation of *celebrity* perpetrators like Savile as arrogant and repulsive. Scenes where Walker vehemently denies the charges brought against him channel any negative feelings towards Savile and re-direct them at Walker. In a surprising plot twist, the detectives find that Walker was innocent all along. He was framed by Brooke and Rachel as retribution for not giving them a place on the singing reality show. Brooke and Rachel coached their little brothers to falsely accuse Walker and planted DNA evidence in the day-care's music room.

Most of this episode accommodates a condemnation of Savile and the way his fame protected him during his lifetime. This is evoked through explicit comparisons to Savile, as well as lengthy discussions in the precinct about the difficulty of prosecuting a case involving young children and a celebrity defendant. Its denouement constitutes a reparative reading by implying that not all celebrities working on children shows are sexual predators. Narrative containment comes in the form of a storyline validating the painful process of celebrity desecration with a reassuring denouement. It acknowledges the real distress caused by Savile and provides a comforting explanation: *celebrity* perpetrators are only a handful of 'bad apples' and, as a result, are not representative of television celebrity culture. As a result, "Dissonant Voices" embraces a critique of TV stardom but reframes abuse as an individual rather than an institutional issue.

In a narrative *tour de force*, *SVU* even manages to shift the responsibility for Walker's wrongful arrest onto its viewers. This is achieved through the second real-life case that inspired "Dissonant Voices", the McMartin preschool trials. Members of the McMartin family were prosecuted in a series of trials from 1987 to 1990 for assaulting 48 children at the day-care centre they owned. It is one of the longest and most expensive legal cases in American history; yet it resulted in no conviction. The interviews with children were biased and thus couldn't allow the jurors to ascertain beyond reasonable doubt who had committed the abuse (Reinhold 1990). This case is important in US popular culture for it fuelled a moral panic around child-molestation committed by day-care providers, including Satanic rituals (DeYoung 1997). As a result, this RFH revolves around the lack of trust in childcare practitioners, shifting the focus away from the lack of trust in TV celebrity culture.

The denouement forces viewers to re-examine who they consider untrustworthy childminders. It challenges the trope of the 'gay paedophile' and the 'black rapist' by proving that Walker, a black and gay male teacher, is not a sexual predator. As detective Rollins says, in Walker's defence, "He's an openly gay male teacher. He's a celebrity. He gets accused of paedophilia. I mean, the charges may go away, but the stain won't." I return to the homophobic and racist representations of sex offenders in my analysis of the monstrous celebrity *perpetrators* in Chapter 5. For the sake of this argument, Walker's identity is a convenient shorthand for the series to signify to its assumed white and heterosexual viewers that they are perhaps overzealous in their indictment of TV celebrities. Benson's guilt-ridden expression when she realises her team's mistake is an invitation for viewers to re-examine their assumptions when it comes to celebrities suspected of molesting children. The implicit message is that individual 'bad apples' are the root cause of sexual violence, not the television industry nor celebrity culture. This does not contest the fact that celebrity suspects make for a compelling media spectacle, which I further explore in my discussion of celebrity *Schadenfreude*.

The perp walk: Dominique Strauss-Kahn

The 'perp walk' is perhaps the most prevalent way in which criminality is turned into a profitable media spectacle in contemporary US culture. This practice of US law

enforcement consists of transporting a suspect in custody through a public space, allowing the media to get photographs (Gray et al. 2010; Boudana 2014; Bock 2015). Perp walks constitute what Harold Garfinkel has called "status degradation ceremony", which had been popularised in New York City in the 1980s during US attorney Rudolph Giuliani's campaign against white-collar crime (1956:420). Public denunciations fulfil the key social function of building group solidarities as indignation and reinforcing a collective identity through shared feelings of rejection or disgust. As Sara Ahmed (2014) argues, emotions produce social relationships and delineate logics of inclusion and exclusion. For instance, the person laying the blame and their witnesses align themselves to one another by ostracising the offender. Consequently, status degradation rituals such as the 'perp walk' can be read as a form of "secular communion" (1956:421) that mirrors ceremonies of investiture in both structure and social function. For instance, both desecration and consecration rituals emphasise the extraordinariness of the person dishonoured, or anointed, and their actions. However, identification with social values is reinforced through celebration where condemnation involves a breach of these socially sanctioned ideals. Therefore, the dichotomy of profanity versus sacred permeates these status ceremonies. If desecration is the flip side of consecration, status degradation ceremonies are a reframing of celebrity rather than a loss of fame.

In their analysis of celebrity *Schadenfreude*, Steve Cross and Jo Littler (2010) further nuance Garfinkel's analysis of the social function of celebrity downfall. They argue that joyful expressions at celebrity disgrace are inextricable from contemporary neoliberal economic formations. *Schadenfreude*, like condemnation, is a collectively constructed emotion that binds together delighted citizens against disgraced celebrities. Celebrity *Schadenfreude* constitutes a diagnosis of power: "the enjoyment of celebrity misfortune or humiliation fulfils a specific cultural function precisely because it offers vicarious pleasure in the witnessing of the powerful being made less powerful; it is an attempt to address or deal with a severe imbalance of power" (Cross and Littler 2010:399). However, celebrity *Schadenfreude* is imbricated within the logics of meritocracy, its political potential is therefore limited because it does not challenge structural inequalities, nor does it allow for a conceptualisation of equality beyond relations between individuals (Cross and Littler 2010: 400). In that respect, celebrity *Schadenfreude* functions as a form of

contained desecration like the one explored in the previous section. It allows for critiques of celebrity culture without challenging its ideological tenets.

SVU's fictionalisation of Dominique Strauss-Kahn's perp walk in the episode "Scorched Earth" (S13E1) illustrates the limited scope of the critique of celebrity culture. Strauss-Kahn, often referred to in the media by his initials DSK, is the former director of the International Monetary Fund and a French politician whose political career ended abruptly after he was arrested in New York in May 2011. He was accused of sexually assaulting Nafissatou Diallo, a housekeeper at the Sofitel New York Hotel. On the same day, DSK was arrested and escorted out of an Air France plane minutes before its departure for Paris. The fictionalised account heavily draws on the real-life case: the squad investigates a hotel maid's claims that a powerful Italian diplomat raped her. Miriam Deng is, like Diallo, a migrant originally from the sub-Saharan continent while Roberto Distasio stands in for DSK. Distasio is the head of the fictional Global Economic Trust and favourite in the Italian presidential election. The episode thus reproduces the socio-economic inequalities between the complainant and the accused. It offers at first a sympathetic reading of Diallo's experience, acknowledging the challenges she encountered by accusing a powerful man. The members of the squad do their best to protect Deng from the media at the same time as they stage a perp walk for Distasio. "Scorched Earth" thus visually quotes media footage of DSK's perp walk and turns it into a carefully staged media spectacle legitimised by Benson's contempt for Distasio.

However, Distasio's perp walk, much like DSK's, cannot effectively critique celebrity culture because it is embedded within the commercial logics of status degradation ceremony. Sandrine Boudana's analysis of the US and French media coverage of DSK's perp walk (2014) shows that this media ritual legitimises the dominant social order. She shows how the footage of DSK ushered from the plane or transported to and from the courtroom by the NYPD was widely circulated by international and US media. Boudana contends that the perp walk constitutes a carefully staged performance of criminality that bridges Foucault's society of surveillance with Debord's society of spectacle (2014). This media practice exemplifies the ways in which the collective witnessing of another's disgrace casts shame as both a tool for social control and as public entertainment. The demand for images of handcuffed suspects reifies beliefs in a carceral state as a core value

in contemporary US society. This footage also grants perp walks the status of a media event that actively turns shame into a commodity. As a media text with market value, the RFH episode thus constitutes an additional transaction.

The commodification of shame prevents the RFH from constructing a reparative reading of the DSK case. As Myra Mendible argues, "shame as commodity spectacle is most productive (and profitable) when projected on media-worthy objects, on bodies that matter enough to merit attention" (2016:3). Anita Biressi's analysis of the English-speaking print coverage of the DSK trial shows how Diallo was compromised from the start because of the vulnerable position she occupied in the public sphere as a black migrant woman. Called a gold-digger and accused of setting a honey trap, Diallo was vilified in the media. In contrast, DSK stands in for any powerful and famous man who risks financial extortion from opportunistic and media savvy women. Biressi (2018) argues that the imbalance of power between Diallo and DSK is instrumental to challenge the former's credibility and portray the latter as the unfortunate prey of a media circus.

Even as *SVU* casts Distasio as a deeply antipathetic character who does not hide his misogynistic behaviour, the series still undermines Deng's attempt, and by extension Diallo's, to disrupt the gendered, racialized, and classed logics that govern the public sphere. The case against Distasio collapses when Deng reveals she lied about being gang raped on her asylum application. This storyline draws on the problematic trope of the false rape accusation as a manipulative strategy used by women to further their personal and financial gains. The episode falls short in its critique of shame as a gendered spectacle. Deng's lie to maximise her chances at securing a refugee status is portrayed as shameless and thus discredits her testimony. In contrast, Distasio's shameful perp walk is what enables him, and by extension DSK, to claim the publicity surrounding his arraignment was prejudicial to him getting a fair trial. The uneven terrain of media visibility and gendering of shame is what makes the perp walk so potent in reproducing social hierarchies.

The price of shame: Roger Ailes

The desecration of Roger Ailes is a compelling case study to further interrogate the gendered logics underpinning the commodification of shame. I already discussed the

sexual harassment cases brought by Fox News employees against Ailes in Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims. I return to the *SVU* episode "The Newsroom" (S18E16) to show how opprobrium and empowerment are entangled within the same economies of visibility. The figure of the *celebrity* perpetrator can be read as a counterpoint to the figure of the *celebrity* victim. Survivor narratives that circulate in the public sphere are as much about telling one's experience of the assault and its aftermaths as they are about denouncing the perpetrator(s) and accomplice(s) of the crime. Raising awareness on the issue of sexual violence in an economy of visibility presupposes a displacement of one's own shame onto the perpetrator through public testimony and accusation. Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that shame and self-confidence are discursively bound together because shame can be read as a threat to one's self-esteem (2018c:69). Overcoming shame, which is often achieved by accusing individual perpetrators, is central in 'speaking out' narratives that revolve around the transition from victim to survivor. Empowerment and opprobrium are thus two particularly productive affective currencies in an economy of visibility.

This dynamic plays out clearly in *SVU*'s fictionalisation of Ailes' demise. In real-life, this was brought about, with a concerted effort, by Fox News employees who, following Gretchen Carlson's and Megyn Kelly's lead, reported Ailes to an internal investigation and shared these accusations publicly. In the fictional world of *SVU*, Heidi Sorenson confronts Margery Evans after the latter has just perjured herself on the stand. Feeling defensive, Evans claims that her relationship with Coyle is different from the one he had with Sorenson. The following scene shows Evans trying to ascertain Coyle's regard for her. She mentions her career prospects, but Coyle starts to threaten her and eventually sexually assaults her. The whole exchange is filmed through a camera hidden on Evans' clothes. At a great personal cost, Evans becomes a hero as she gathers the evidence necessary to convict Coyle. Through this denouement, shame and empowerment are inextricably bound in a rather dramatic sequence.

Mendible's work on the economies of shame (2016) is useful to think through the commodification of celebrity desecration. Mendible argues that "shame is a hot commodity" (2016:1) that circulates through the images and stories of celebrity scandal. Her analysis of the lucrative economy of public humiliation shows how collective shaming plays out as an illusion of solidarity within an imagined community. She locates

shame within the logics of capitalist exchange to examine the paradoxical ways in which it is commodified. As Mendible argues: "in the logic of abstract exchange that characterises a society of spectacle, we place blame but disclaim obligation. We claim membership in a moral order while remaining morally oblivious" (Mendible 2016:4). In other words, moralistic discourses are marketable and the political responses they call for are equally commodifiable. This is particularly relevant when thinking about the intricacies of the spectacle of sexual violence in an economy of visibility. Analysed through this framework, public denunciations of *celebrity* perpetrators like Ailes seem limited in their capacity to foster social change.

Sara Ahmed argues that shame is an emotion that operates simultaneously on exposure and concealment (2014:104). To shame entails revealing something that was not previously disclosed. Because of this exposition to others' opinion and judgement, the affective response to shame is to hide. The double play of making visible and invisible is thus central to the work of shame. As Harold Garfinkel argues, shame manifests itself in "the withdrawal and covering of the portion of the body that socially defines one's public appearance – prominently, in our society, the eyes and face" (1956:421). This is most salient in phrases that denote humiliation such as 'sinking through the floor', 'lowering one's eyes' or 'burying one's face in one's hands'. Concealment aims to protect the self from a vulnerability generated by exposure to others. To shame is thus to utilise publicity as a way to imperil someone's reputation. Similarly, being shamed is inextricable from the paradigm of visibility because this emotion entails a form of witnessing by others or by the self that stands in for the imagined gaze of an idealised other (Ahmed 2014:105-106). Opprobrium is thus located in a mode of relationality that is orientated both inwards and outwards, between covering and unveiling. This double movement attests to the ways in which *shaming* and *being shamed* are entangled within an economy of visibility.

In her 2015 TED talk, Monica Lewinsky claims that the "price of shame" should be measured by the financial gains made by those whose businesses derive from shaming practices. Within an attention economy (Marwick 2013), these benefits are measured in a range of currencies, including online traffics. In Lewinsky's words: "A marketplace has emerged, where public humiliation is a commodity, and shame is an industry. How is the money made? Clicks. The more shame, the more clicks. The more clicks, the more

advertising dollars" (quoted in Banet-Weiser 2018c:66). She further developed her argument in a 2017 *New York Times* open letter entitled "Roger Ailes's Dream Was My Nightmare". She details how former Fox News president Roger Ailes harnessed the Lewinsky-Clinton affair to attract new viewers and ensure the commercial success of the new cable news network. Under Ailes' leadership, Fox News elaborated a business model that relied on a sensationalistic 24-hour news coverage of the affair and the trial to increase ratings. Lewinsky claims she was preyed upon by a culture that revels in "traffics in shame" (quoted in Banet-Weiser 2018c:66).

Lewinsky's testimony highlights the importance of addressing a culture of humiliation not only in terms of personal costs, but also in economic terms. If publicly shaming women is a lucrative business, it is because it operates on affects such as shame that are conducive to scandal and spectacle. To analyse the commodification of victimhood is to trace the ways in which the circulation of affects maps onto monetary transactions. Tracking this traffic in shame reveals the ways in which misogyny and feminism are interlinked through the spectacle of opprobrium. This commerce in shame is particularly salient in the case of Lewinksy and Ailes: while Ailes profited from shaming Lewinsky in 1998, he paid the price of being shamed in 2016. The timeline of the sexual assault allegations against Ailes reveals significant shifts in the cultural and economic values of shaming rituals.

In 2014, Fox News denied the sexual harassment allegations published in Gabriel Sherman's biography of Roger Ailes. However, when these claims against Ailes were revived in the wake of Gretchen Carlson's 2016 lawsuit, he was forced to resign from Fox News and was succeeded as chairperson by Rupert Murdoch. Several factors can help explain the economic logic underpinning this permutation from shaming to being shamed. Firstly, the year 2014 saw the convergence of feminism with brand culture, from successful 'femvertising' campaigns such as Always' #LikeAGirl (Zeisler 2016) to public performances by self-professed feminist celebrities like Beyoncé or Emma Watson (Hamad and Taylor 2015). This provided the fertile grounds for spectacular display of empowerment, embodied by Carlson and Megyn Kelly as they publicly denounced Ailes' long history of sexual harassment. Secondly, Carlson and Kelly's respective claims to victimhood generated a lot of media traction due to their visibility capital as celebrities.

This celebrity brand transference made sexual harassment allegations more difficult to dismiss and therefore more costly for the company. Finally, these public denunciations became entangled in other business transactions. In 2017, the Murdoch brothers fired Bill O'Reilly, another prominent Fox News personality accused of sexual misconduct. While it was presented as an attempt at changing workplace harassment culture created by Ailes, one can speculate that this decision was part of a broader PR strategy to put forward a pristine record to the UK Office of Communications in their attempt to take over Sky News (Ruddick and Sweney 2017). This case study thus exemplifies the complex intricacies at play in the cultural economy of shame. It also shows the ways in which market opportunities shape the spectacle of opprobrium and empowerment.

Just like Distasio's spectacular perp walk prevented *SVU* from constructing a reparative reading of the DSK case, Evans' unlawful evidence supports Coyle's claim that he was a victim of entrapment. This echoes Ailes' claims that he was the victim of a vindictive employee's "tar-and-feather campaign" (Koblin 2016). Ailes hired as legal counsel law professor Susan Estrich, known for her work on miscarriage of justice for rape victims (Stanley 2016), thus benefiting from her feminist brand to make his claim to victimisation seem valid. He also decried that the media attention prevented him from having a fair trial (Koblin 2016). Both Lewinsky and Ailes say they were victimised by celebrity culture and the financial interests that drive the public traffic of shame. This case study is thus compelling for making apparent the imbrications of public humiliation within an economy of visibility. It illustrates Banet-Weiser's argument that the twinned discourses of injury and capacity function as the central logic of the funhouse mirror that binds popular misogyny and popular feminism within an economy of visibility (2018c). In other words, the spectacular quality of shaming rituals is what enables the recuperation of a rhetoric of victimisation by the perpetrators themselves. This slippage from perpetrator to victim reveals the ways in which victimisation and empowerment are imbricated within a grammar of denouncing. The following section focuses on *celebrity* perpetrators who have successfully managed to mobilise a rhetoric of victimisation and preserve their reputation despite sexual assault accusations and/or convictions.

Martyrs in the name of Art: Bernardo Bertolucci, Roman Polanski, Woody Allen

I conclude this chapter with a critical analysis of the male *auteur* and interrogate the ways in which its construction as celebrity sustains gendered hierarchies of fame. Bernardo Bertolucci, Roman Polanski and Woody Allen are three examples of *auteurs* who have managed to build a successful international career despite being implicated for sexual violence. In fact, these events contribute to their rebellious and misunderstood personas as artists. Artistic genius has historically been constructed as a male attribute (Battersby 1989; Trasforini 2007; Nochlin 2015). Linda Nochlin's work (2015) is useful to understand how art is understood as the expression of an individual's essence. This gives art a spiritual undertone that distinguishes it from the domesticity of craft or artisanship. As Trasforini (2007) points out, art is coded as masculine whereas craft is associated with femininity. The renowned artist is typically male, white, and middle class but the myth of the artistic genius erases these privileges. Genius and talent are thus understood as idiosyncratic qualities, rather than the product of social and cultural hierarchies that associate masculinity with valuable work. Consequently, to interrogate whose work is considered art is to critically address the gendering of genius.

The mythology of the genius as the singular creative force behind a film production permeates the film industry. Film directing is prestigious and this authorises controlling and inappropriate behaviour as part of the creative process. In Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims, I showed how Bertolucci's *auteur* persona was instrumental in delegitimising Schneider's sexual assault testimony. Because the *Last Tango in Paris* director was acclaimed for the very rape scene the actress denounces, her critique of sexism in the film industry was rendered unintelligible. The emotional exploitation of actors was reframed as creative differences. As I already argued, some critics interpreted the graphic depictions of sexual violence as a challenge to dominant attitudes towards sexuality while others condemned the film claiming it was "pornography disguised as art" (Michener 1973). The controversial reception of *Last Tango in Paris* cemented Bertolucci's reputation as a misunderstood transgressive filmmaker. For instance, the criminal and censorship proceedings brought against the film in Italy named Bertolucci as the main defendant. The

court ordered him to serve a four-month suspended sentence in prison and revoked his civil rights for five years. The film's producer Alberto Grimaldi and the lead actors Marlon Brando and Maria Schneider were also named in the suit and sentenced to two months imprisonment for "having concurred to produce an obscene spectacle" (New York Times, 1973). Even if the ruling was eventually overturned in a higher court, the disparities of charges and sentencing puts the weight of the responsibility onto Bertolucci. It reflects a value system that foregrounds the director as the main creative force behind the film. The trial did not only generate a lot of publicity for the film but also consolidated Bertolucci's *auteur* persona by casting him as a freedom of expression martyr.

This articulation of artistic genius as divine creator and social outcast (Trasforini 2007; Nochlin 2015) maps onto gendered hierarchies of fame. Artistic inspiration demarcates talented artists from the rest of society. In addition, Battersby (1989) shows how the secularisation of artistic creation during the Renaissance made art profitable and enabled the figure of the artistic genius to emerge. The gendering of genius is thus a way to prevent women from gaining financial independence or entering the public sphere. However, these dynamics are erased through the mythologisation of the artist. Battersby argues that "creativity was displaced male procreativity: male sexuality made sublime" (Battersby 1989:3). Spiritual transcendence thus becomes a way to legitimise social exclusion, and the film *auteur* its quintessential contemporary incarnation. For instance, Bertolucci's filmography is still considered part of the canon in film studies curricula despite his own admission of manipulating Schneider while shooting the infamous rape scene. The implication is that manipulation was necessary to fulfil his creative vision and produce a *chef d'oeuvre*. Exploitation of actors is deemed acceptable when it is done in the name of art. It constitutes a form of aesthetic alibi (Martin 1992) which posits exploitative behaviour as creative differences. As I've discussed in Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims, this is made obvious in *SVU*'s RFH episode "Theatre Tricks" in which Bertolucci's counterpart brushes off the on-stage assault claiming, "I pushed the piece to be provocative and obviously somebody took it too far". This remark paradoxically excuses the director by separating him from his work, what Stefania Marghitu calls "*auteur* apologism" (2018).

Marghitu defines *auteur* apologism as the celebrity defence that calls for a separation of the art from the artist. This concept helps to think through the ways in which the figure of the *auteur* sustains gendered hierarchies in the film industry. According to this plea, the *oeuvre* of Bertolucci, Allen or Polanski should stand for itself judged independently from any details concerning their personal lives, including the sexual assault allegations against all three filmmakers. *Auteur* apologism absolves individual perpetrators because it implies that art is a universal value that transcends power. Aesthetic alibi and auteur apologism are inextricable from meritocratic discourses that underpin celebrity culture. It implies that male artists have risen to fame because of their innate and extraordinary genius. These discourses support Jo Littler's claim that meritocracy is a system of cultural beliefs that reinforce social hierarchies (2017). This shows how the contention that a work of art should not be indexed to its author persona can be weaponised for anti-feminist purposes. Indeed, *auteur* apologism constitutes an explicit acknowledgement of the artists' criminal behaviour, but it is excused by the belief that the artistic contribution offsets the crimes committed. As a result, *auteur* apologism lends itself to a rhetoric of injury and victimisation.

This dynamic is salient in *SVU*'s "Reasonable Doubt" (S15E22) which presents a fictionalised account of the child molestation charges brought against Roman Polanski and Woody Allen. Allen and Mia Farrow's tumultuous separation provides the prompt to the episode. Amid a tumultuous divorce, actress Catherine Summers accuses her estranged husband and renowned television producer Frank Maddox of sexually assaulting their 8-year-old daughter Chelsea. Maddox claims that his affair with Summers' younger sister Rose prompted her to fabricate the assault allegations as an act of revenge. This echoes Allen's assertion that Farrow's accusations are an act of retribution for his relationship with her adopted daughter Soon-Yi Previn. Allen and his fictional counterpart profess they are the target of their ex-partner's vindictive ploy to win the public's favour. Their defence is thus centred around a narrative of multiple injuries that sustain their claim to victimhood. The first cause of their suffering is love. As Allen stated in a *Times* interview, "The heart wants what it wants. There's no logic to those things. You meet someone and you fall in love and that's that" (Isaacson 2001). In this quote, Allen claims powerlessness against the arbitrary nature of love. Love itself

becomes an injury through the metaphor of the fall. According to Allen and Maddox, the second injustice stems from their ex-partner's vengeance, and particularly the discrepancy between the severity of the harm they caused and the retaliation. Both deny the charges of child molestation brought against them and decry the damages these accusations have done to their reputation. Their third grievance is that they claim to be unfairly treated by the justice system because of their fame. As Allen wrote in a *New York Times* open letter: "The district attorney was champing at the bit to prosecute a celebrity case" (Allen 2014). In *SVU*, Maddox echoes Allen's words stating, "now a man can be accused with no evidence of the most heinous crime, subjected to a show trial, and vilified in the media". *Celebrity* perpetrators thus use their fame to shift the focus away from their crimes and, instead, cast themselves as victims of the media.

While Maddox, like Polanski, is convicted *in absentia* by the jury, *SVU*'s "Reasonable Doubt" doesn't offer a definite closure on the case. This is indicated in the episode title as well as detective Benson and Amaro's opposite view on the case. They have the following exchange in the episode's last scene:

> Benson: If [Maddox] is a paedophile, at least he is out of their lives.
>
> Amaro: And if [Maddox] is telling the truth, Chelsea gets to grow up with a full-blown narcissist who convinced her to lie.
>
> Benson: Either way, God help that child.

This ambiguous ending reflects the media coverage of the case against Allen. It never went to trial, yet the belief persists that Farrow manipulated their daughter into lying. This fuels Allen's claim that he is being victimised by a vindictive ex-partner. According to Jilly Boyce Kay, women's anger has been constructed as irrational and illegitimate (2019). This contributes to the gendering of artistic genius by implying that Summers', and by extension Farrow's, bad mothering could get in the way of art.

Furthermore, the ambivalent ending is an anomaly in *SVU* as almost all episodes end with the identification and prosecution of the perpetrator. In their detailed analysis of *SVU*'s first 16 seasons, Cuklanz and Moorti identified only one episode that ends with no clear account of the crime or criminal (2017). Even if "Doubt" (S06E08) is an anomaly in its violation of *SVU*'s formula, Cuklanz and Moorti argue that it is representative of the

series' fungible understanding of sexual violence. In this episode, "rape is not about power, but transformed into a hermeneutic reading of sex" (Moorti and Cuklanz 2017:48). Similarly, "Reasonable Doubt" transgresses *SVU*'s narrative formula by not offering a definite resolution. As a result, it is left up to the audience to decide whether Maddox, and by extension Polanski and Allen, are guilty or whether they are misunderstood artistic geniuses. The denouement of the episode "Reasonable Doubt" undermines the series' critique of celebrity culture. In addition, it fails to acknowledge how much Allen has benefitted professionally from the publicity around these accusations.

Allen legitimises his claims to victimhood through a self-referential aesthetics in his own work. He exemplifies Penfold-Mounce's 'celebrity suspect' who has successfully managed to deflect this infamy through the codes of celebrity deviance. His *auteur* persona is what allows him to claim a rebel identity, one that authenticates his abusive behaviour in the name of art. For the better part of his career, Allen managed to manipulate the category of 'celebrity suspect' to his advantage by developing an autobiographical film aesthetics[22]. In his film, male lead characters are dealing with complicated love triangles and/or stormy divorces that mirror his relationship with Soon-Yi Previn, the adopted daughter of Allen's ex-partner Mia Farrow. For instance, in *Manhattan* (1979), Allen plays Isaac Davis, a 42-year-old television writer, who dates a 17-year-old high school girl (Mariel Hemingway). In the film, Davis struggles with the fact that his ex-wife (Meryl Streep) is writing a memoir detailing their failed marriage[23]. In *Wonder Wheel* (2017), Mickey (Justin Timberlake) is entangled in a love triangle by becoming romantically involved with a stepmother, Ginny (Kate Winslet), and a daughter, Carolina (Juno Temple). As critics have pointed out, "it is impossible not to see Wonder Wheel through the lens of Woody Allen's life" (Wilkinson 2017). The story is narrated by Mickey, an aspiring playwright, who tells the story by breaking the fourth wall throughout

[22] Allen doesn't have as much control on his celebrity status anymore as Dylan Farrow's testimony has gained media traction in the aftermaths of #MeToo (D. Farrow 2017). Her brother's crucial role in breaking the story of Harvey Weinstein's abuse further authenticated her claims (R. Farrow 2017; 2019). Finally, Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering's recent documentary *Allen v. Farrow* (HBO 2021) revisits the case and focuses on Dylan and Mia Farrow's accounts (Horeck and Negra 2021).

[23] Mia Farrow did publish her memoir *What Falls Away* in 1997 in which she dwells on her relationship with Allen. Among other things, she reflects on his affair with her adopted daughter Soon-Yi Previn and reiterates her accusations that Allen molested their adopted daughter Dylan.

the film. Mickey thus stands in for a younger Allen, Carolina for Soon-Yi, and Ginny for Mia. In the film, Mickey is fascinated by Carolina's youth and beauty, and he wants to save her from her abusive husband and her dysfunctional family, especially Ginny. Through the codes of fiction, Allen casts himself as the victim of Farrow, portraying her fictional counterpart Ginny as a former actress turned deeply unhappy housewife. Ginny seems to constantly be on the edge of a nervous breakdown and turns to alcohol towards the end of the film when Mickey leaves her for Carolina. This constructs Farrow as a vengeful lover and unreliable narrator, which has been Allen's defence strategy in refuting the claims that he molested his adopted daughter Dylan Farrow. These two examples from Allen's filmography show how he circumvents the stigma that comes with the celebrity suspect status and, instead, uses it to authenticate his rebel *auteur* persona and profit professionally from this.

Conclusion

Penfold-Mounce's classification of *celebrity* criminals is useful to think through the intricacies of celebrification and celebrity desecration. Each case study discussed in the chapter shows that accusations of sexual assault are a remediation of fame rather than a loss of celebrity status. Attending to fictionalisation of scandals implicating beloved public figures like Savile reveals the ways in which celebrity culture and sexual violence are imbricated. The desecration of influential men like DSK and Ailes show the power dynamics and economic logics that hinder a thorough critique of celebrity culture. Finally, Bertolucci, Allen, and Polanski are examples of the ways in which infamy maps onto existing gendered and cultural hierarchies and can end up being relatively profitable. While RFH storylines present a coherent critique of the impact of celebrity culture on the prosecution of sexual violence, it remains nonetheless superficial because it focuses on individuals and fails to grasp broader power dynamics. To paraphrase a *New York Times* editorial grappling with the thorny question of what to do with *celebrity* perpetrators, instead of separating the art from the artist, we need to address the interdependence of the artist and the industry (Hess 2017). In the next chapter, I turn to examples of people who have become famous because of the crime they committed in order to address the political economy of celebrified criminality.

CHAPTER 5: CELEBRITY *PERPETRATORS*

As the previous chapter shows, the *celebrity* perpetrator is a prominent figure in the contemporary mediascape, especially in the aftermath of #MeToo. Yet, they remains under-theorised. This is even more true for celebrified sex offenders. Despite the public fascination with celebrity *rapists*, as attested by the popularity of true crime narratives, popular commentaries and academic studies alike fail to account for how and why perpetrators of sex crimes have become celebrities. This reticence can be explained in part by a desire to avoid the uneasy acknowledgement of how these cultural critiques contribute to and depend on the celebrification of perpetrators. Indeed, this mutual dependency has important ethical ramifications when dealing with the systematic silencing of sexual assault victims. An ever-growing corpus of feminist media studies deals with "communicative injustice" (Boyce Kay 2020) which refers to how women are not only silenced but also punished for speaking up. As scholars have shown, the risks of speaking out come in different forms and have dire consequences for the victims-advocates (Cf. Mendes et al. 2018; Serisier 2018; Savigny 2020), which I will further develop in Chapter 6: *Celebrity* Advocates and Chapter 7: Celebrity *Advocates*. As a result, engaging victims' voices rather than perpetrators' is a defensible methodological and political position. While I share this feminist commitment to amplifying victims' stories, I find that we should also look at how perpetrators are celebrified as it sheds additional light on how trauma and victimhood are commodified. This chapter seeks to address this gap in feminist media studies and celebrity studies scholarship and asks: what does the rise to fame of people convicted for sexual assault reveal about shifts in celebrity culture and popular representations of sexual violence?

In her typology of celebrity criminals, Ruth Penfold-Mounce (2009) uses the concept of resonance to interrogate how celebrated criminality operates as a form of governance. She defines resonance to crime as the affective response or reaction to a person or event that stimulates the consumption of cultural commodities linked to crime stories. Resonance refers to more than just an identification process but encapsulates the social and market interactions that stem from the stimulated response to crime. These emotional reactions can be positive, such as feeling admiration or envy towards a lawbreaker's audacity or

adventurousness. They can also be negative when a crime inspires fear, revulsion, or horror. Resonance depends on the type of crime, specifically on the social acceptability of the illicit behaviour, its echoes with current social issues, and its horrific dimension. Penfold-Mounce argues that crimes that engage with social controversies or crimes that evoke generalised public disgust because of their unforgivable and heinous nature are the type of crime that has the most potential to trigger a form of resonance and thus result in celebrity status. In addition, social, cultural, and political context also impacts the resonance of crime. For instance, in the contemporary commercial logic of cultural industries, crime stories are sold in sensationalistic terms, which leads to the celebrification of the offenders. Finally, Penfold-Mounce contends that resonance with celebrity criminals depends on the construction and circulation of their public image. She shows that the commodification of crime incorporates elements of glamour. Criminals who exert the most fascination are the ones who are romanticised based on their charisma and physical appearance, and the ones who embody a form of heroism or anti-heroism. Resonance is thus an effective heuristic concept that encapsulates the ordinary and extraordinary logic of both celebrity culture and crime: celebrified criminality is easily accessible and representative, but singular enough to remain alluring (Reeves 1988; Penfold-Mounce 2009).

According to this typology of infamous criminality, celebrified perpetrators of sexual violence fall into the category of 'iniquitous criminal', which characterises a "criminal individual who achieves celebrity due to their well-knownness for committing unforgivable horror crimes" (Penfold-Mounce 2009:90). Those who committed sexual assault, murder, torture, cannibalism, or those who target vulnerable people are examples of iniquitous criminals (2009:90). The defining characteristic of this category, Penfold-Mounce argues, is the fear, loathing, and disgust they inspire. These affective responses sustain the public's fascination with iniquitous criminals, as attested by the popularity of true crime. Iniquitous celebrities thus represent an important shift in configurations of fame: they are famous even if they don't inspire appreciation or esteem. As Penfold-Mounce argues, "they are the ultimate anti-hero" (2009:91). Following her classification, iniquitous criminals invoke the most intense affective resonance, thus granting them the

most irrevocable and lasting celebrity status of all the types of celebrity *criminals* examined by Penfold-Mounce (2009).

This framework is helpful to explain the rise to fame of people like Ted Bundy whose crimes exert an ongoing fascination because of their serial nature and a combination of rape, murder, and necrophilia. Indeed, Bundy has become a popular culture reference, inspiring several *SVU* and *Law & Order* RFH episodes, biopic films, true crime books, documentaries, and podcasts. Bundy is also a prominent case study in scholarship on infamous celebrities (Nixon 1998; Seltzer 1998; Schmid 2005; Penfold-Mounce 2009). However, the concept of resonance falls short of elucidating the discrepancies in the celebrification of perpetrators. Indeed, the category of 'celebrity *perpetrators*' as constituted through my RFH methodological framework is far from homogenous. It encompasses people prosecuted on multiple counts of rape and murder (like Bundy) or child molestation (like Larry Nassar and Earl Bradley), as well as people charged with sexually assaulting one person (like Brock Turner). My aim is not to pass a moral judgement on which crimes are worst, but to interrogate instead the nuances in the celebrification of perpetrators. Attending to these reveals additional layers in the imbrication of sexual violence and celebrity culture (Cf. Appendix 2).

In the first section of this chapter, I analyse the celebrification of serial rapist and serial killer Ted Bundy and show the discursive links between monstrosity and heterosexuality. I read true crime texts like *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* (Netflix, 2019) and *Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer* (Amazon Prime Video, 2020) alongside fictional dramatization like *Extremely Wicked Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019) and the three-part *SVU* and *Chicago PD* crossover which starts with "We Called Her Jellybean" (S3E21) of *Chicago Fire*, followed by "The Number of Rats" (S2E20) of *Chicago PD*, and concluding in "Daydream Believer" of *SVU* (S16E20). This narrative arc continues in the following season of *SVU* with "Devil's Dissection" (S17E01), "Criminal Pathology" (S17E02), and "Nationwide Manhunt" (S17E14). This web of RFH is illustrated in the figure below.

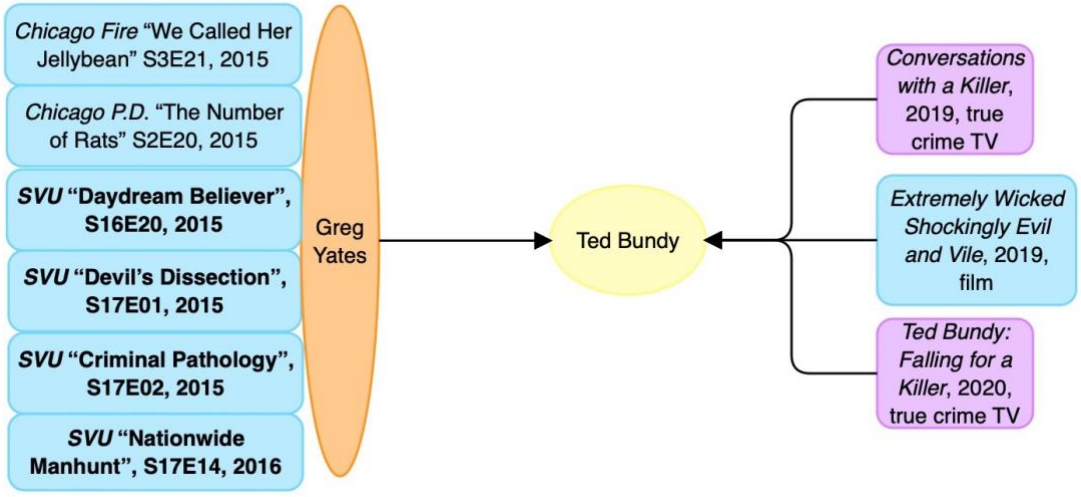


Figure 8: RFH of the Ted Bundy case

The multiple crossovers make it one of the most ambitious storylines of the *Law & Order* franchise as investigations are usually dealt with within one episode. I then turn to *SVU*'s RFH of the Earl Bradley and Larry Nassar cases in "Chasing Demons" (S19E14) to interrogate the specific construction of the monstrous paedophile. The true crime documentaries *Athlete A* (Netflix, 2020), *At the Heart of Gold* (HBO 2019), and *Defying Gravity* (YouTube 2020) provide the additional material to examine the differentiated resonance of the Nassar case. I finally turn to the fictionalisations of the trial against Brock Turner in *SVU* "Rape Interrupted" (S18E05) and *13 Reasons Why* (S2E13) and its corresponding *SVU* episode "No Good Reason" (S19E04) to analyse the discursive limits of monstrosity.

The all-American monster: Ted Bundy

Karen Boyle (2019) argues that 'the monster' is a key trope through which *celebrity* perpetrators are mediated. Monstrosity is a discursive tactic that casts perpetrators of sexual violence as aberrant individuals who are not representative of the broader category 'men'. However, as David Schmid (2005) shows in his analysis of infamous serial killers, 'monstrosity' is far from a homogenous category, and it is because it is such a catchall trope that it is so widely used in true-crime narratives. In fact, this polysemy further contributes to the depoliticization of sexual violence and murder. Schmid (2005:210) draws on Gloria Steinem's concept of "supremacy crimes" to explain how the political

dimension of mass and serial murder is glossed over in media representations. According to Steinem (2013), "supremacy crimes" describe crimes that are motivated only by a sense of entitlement. Their aim is not to seek financial reward or recognition, but rather to uphold systems of oppression. Serial murder is the perfect example of supremacy crime, yet it is rarely acknowledged as such. Schmid's methodological proposition is thus to identify in which instances race, gender, sexuality, and class are acknowledged or silenced to understand how the normal/monstrous dichotomy maps onto existing structures of power.

Heterosexuality & monstrosity

Schmid's in-depth analysis of the celebrity text of serial killers Jeffrey Dahmer and Aileen Wuornos shows how their homosexuality is highlighted only to demonize them, thus bolstering homophobic tropes like the 'depraved homosexual' and the 'tortured gay'. Conversely, Bundy's heterosexuality is repackaged as a 'mask of sanity', a trope in which the appearance of normality is exaggerated to the point it is what makes it abnormal. Bundy's persona is articulated around the contradiction between his charismatic demeanour and his dark soul. Descriptions of Bundy juxtapose attributes like "successful, ambitious, handsome, white, straight, Republican, male, middle-class" (Schmid 2005:212), all of which correspond to ideal masculinity in US culture, with harrowing details of his crimes. This mediation of Bundy's persona is reproduced in RFH storylines. For instance, in the *SVU* episode "Futility" (S4E22), Michael Gardner (Fred Savage) is depicted as a conventionally attractive man who is well integrated within his neighbourhood. However, his evil nature is signalled to *SVU* viewers by his arrest in the episode's first scene. In the following scene, the detectives list a graphic description of the four violent rapes he committed. This structure has the double function of narrative exposition and framing of Gardner as a character who cannot be trusted.

The opening sequence of *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019) similarly casts Bundy's magnetic charm as threatening. It is set in 1969 and retells how Bundy (Zach Efron) met his long-time girlfriend Elizabeth Kendall (Lily Collins). The scene draws heavily on the codes of romantic comedy; it depicts love at first sight between two strangers. Close shots of Bundy and Kendall dancing, the warm lighting and soundtrack

convey the intimacy and exuberance of burgeoning love. The casting of Efron and Collins[24], both known for playing lead characters in romantic comedies, further enhances the association to this genre. However, this romantic encounter is disrupted by elements indicating Bundy's duplicitous and manipulative personality. The sequence includes a long shot from Bundy's point of view as he wades through the crowd and catches the eyes of multiple women. Close-up shots on the women's faces and bodies indicate that Bundy's gaze is predatory rather than flirtatious. This is even more acute in the following scene, which depicts Bundy and Kendall's first sexual encounter. He rips her shirt open, and his hands linger over her throat. The camera opposes Kendall's rapturous expression with his troubled gaze signalled by a flicker of the brows. This opening sequence thus illustrates the 'mask of sanity' trope; what appears like flirtation is in fact predation. This predatory stance, however, is not symptomatic of heterosexuality but rather a sign of Bundy's evil.

True-crime texts about Bundy rely on the 'mask of sanity' trope to disentangle heterosexuality from violence (Schmid 2005). This is particularly acute considering Bundy's 'golden boy' image. As Schmid argues:

> Given the extent to which Bundy was being identified as a representative (that is, hypersexual, irresponsible, exploitative in his relationships with women, contemptuous of the law) straight man, it became imperative for true-crime narratives to compensate for the public reaction by proving that he was no such thing, and to emphasize instead that Ted Bundy was an aberration that told us nothing about heterosexuality at all. (2005:216)

In other words, media representations of Bundy actively disavow any link between him and the culturally valued model of masculinity. They cast Bundy as a monster masquerading as a ladies' man. They imply that his sex appeal is a carefully crafted performance designed to trap women. What these narratives suggest is that uncontrolled sexual impulses rather than heterosexuality are the cause of Bundy's violence (Schmid 2005:21).

[24] Zach Efron played the lead male role in the *High School Musical* franchise (2006; 2007; 2008) which is inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*. His role as Bundy represents as significant break from comedy/romantic drama. Lily Collins' filmography also features predominantly romantic comedies such as *Stuck in Love* (2012) or *Love, Rosie* (2014). She currently portrays the lead character in the series *Emily in Paris* (Netflix 2020-), which indicates the strong commercial value of her romantic comedy typecasting.

Bad vs good heterosexual men

Pitting Bundy against sympathetic law and order figures is another narrative strategy that constructs Bundy as a monster. In true-crime texts, law enforcement figures stand in for 'ordinary' heterosexual men (Schmid 2005). For instance, John Malkovich's portrayal of judge Edward Cowart in *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* is memorable for his delivery of Bundy's death sentence, which oscillates between a whole range of emotions. He expresses sheer horror, qualifying Bundy's crimes as "atrocious and cruel in that they were extremely wicked, shockingly evil, vile and with utter indifference to human life" (2019). He then expresses regret, stating "it is an utter tragedy for this court to see such a total waste of humanity" and continues, sympathetically: "You're a bright young man. You'd have made a good lawyer and I would have loved to have you practice in front of me, but you went another way, partner. I don't feel any animosity toward you. I want you to know that. Take care of yourself." The judge's remarks have been analysed as an instance of male bonding, which obfuscates the gendered aspect of Bundy's crimes (Schmid 2015). However, in the film, any reading of Cowart's speech as homosociality is dispelled by Malkovich's stern performance and the fact that his more sympathetic comments are offered in response to Bundy's emotional reiteration of his innocence whereas transcription of the real-life sentencing show that Cowart's remark was in fact a monologue (Rule 2009).

This dynamic also plays out in crime dramas like *SVU* and *Law & Order* which are populated by police officers, detectives, and district attorneys whose horrified reactions to the crime authenticate the monstrosity of the serial killer. In these fictional worlds, Bundy's fictional counterparts are particularly challenging villains when compared to the series' heroic law enforcement characters. Like Bundy, the fictional serial rapist and killer handle their own defence at the trial. Their arrogance and manipulative attempts at derailing the legal process contrasts with the professionalism of the series' main characters. For instance, in the *SVU* episode "Daydream Believer" (S16E20), Greg Yates proves to be a formidable opponent to assistant district attorney Rafael Barba (Raúl Esparza), a character beloved by fans for his dedication to the law and getting justice for

the victims[25]. The antagonism between Yates and Barba illustrates how the normal/monstrous dichotomy maps onto the opposition law and order/criminality to construct Yates, and by extension Bundy, as unrepresentative of heterosexual masculinity. In other words, crime narratives about serial murder construct heterosexuality and violence as mutually exclusive (Schmid 2005:220). Casting Yates as the villain and Barba as the hero reveals another key tension in the celebrification of serial killers, one which stems from a hierarchy of fame that privileges achievement over publicity.

The worst kind of monsters

The infamous serial killer embodies a specific kind of fame, one that merges attributed and achieved fame. The celebrification of perpetrators is driven by what Mark Seltzer calls "wound culture" which refers to the "public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and open persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound" (1998:1). Perpetrators of violent crimes become celebrified by associating their name and image to spectacular violence and death. Their access to fame stems from the intense media coverage of their crime; they are thus attributed celebrities. Bundy is the infamous attributed celebrity *par excellence* because his trial for the Chi Omega murders was the first to be televised nationally and attracted journalists across the US and internationally. Consequently, popular texts about or inspired by Bundy feature two key motifs: the first is the extreme violence of the sexual assault and murder, the second is the defendant thriving on the media spectacle of his trial after opting for a not-guilty plea and choosing to represent himself. In the *SVU* RFH episode discussed above, Yates is charismatic and revels in being the star of his trial. He constantly seeks the attention of the jury and often goes off-topic in his responses to Barba's questions. Realising this, Barba uses Yates' egotistical trait against him by asking a media examiner to detail the full extent of injuries inflicted on the victims. Yates' self-congratulatory expression is equivalent to an admission of guilt, and he is convicted on all counts to life imprisonment. Barba's skilled prosecution and his visible contempt for Yates' exhibitionism reflect broader social discourses that condemn 'being famous for being famous'. This castigation of attributed

[25] Barba is the longest-serving assistant district attorney in the *Law & Order* franchise and appears in eight seasons.

fame is necessary because Yates, like Bundy and other infamous perpetrators, are recognised for their grisly 'achievement'.

Popular discourse on crime constructs celebrity *perpetrators* not only as monsters, but as the worst kind of monsters. If being described as a monster grants attributed fame, being known as one of the greatest of one's kind is the gateway to achieved fame. Praise and contempt are two sides of the same coin. The merging of attributed fame and achieved fame is exacerbated by popular representations of crime, which conflate the perpetrator's actions with their identity (Schmid 2005:16). They are known for what they have done and their whole life story is mobilised to shed light on their crimes. Perpetrators need to produce an autobiographical account which confirms that they are indeed monsters. These revelations are a type of celebrity confessional (Redmond 2008) insofar as they revolve around the celebrity *perpetrator* claiming an expertise on their life and reflecting on their celebrity status. As Schmid remarks, Bundy's awareness of his own fame allowed him to exploit his status as expert on his case, which in turn made him even more famous (2015:217). He proclaimed himself "the ultimate Bundy expert" (Nordheimer 1978, cited in Schmid 2015:216) and exploited this position to enhance his celebrity status by seeking interviews with forensic experts and journalists. Michaud and Aynesworth's true crime book *Ted Bundy: Conversations with a Killer* (1989) and the subsequent Netflix series *Conversation with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* (2019) exemplify Bundy's access to achieved celebrity status through the celebrity confessional.

Considering this, Barba's antipathy towards Yates' fame seeking behaviour not only bolsters celebrity culture hierarchies that favour achievement over publicity, it also delineates legitimate from illegitimate achieved fame. Indeed, Yates' life story echoes Barba's in many ways. Both come from underserved communities; Barba was born and raised in a Latino neighbourhood of the Bronx, while Yates navigated the North Carolina foster care system. Both managed to get a scholarship to study at prestigious universities; Barba studied the law at Harvard and Yates medicine at Duke University. However, Barba used his successful career to serve US justice system while Yates used his to prey on nurses. This difference of life trajectories is explained through Yates' deviant childhood. As a child, he displayed violent behaviours like killing animals and pyromania. Fearing for the safety of their younger daughter, Yates' parents decided to give him up for

adoption. Similarly, true crime texts representing Bundy use anecdotes to cast his childhood as an unstable one to explain his pathology (Schmid 2015:214; Netflix 2019). These retrospective readings locate the root cause of violence in deviant childhood and/or dysfunctional family units. Through these narratives, evil becomes an idiosyncratic quality. Their function is to "individualise the phenomenon of serial murder, making sure that society at large is not implicated in the actions of the serial killer" (Schmid 2015:207). This origin story of evil contributes to the merging of attributed and achieved fame. According to this logic, Yates and Bundy are well-known serial killers because they are inherently monstrous. This reframes their crimes as a symptom of their identity rather than an accomplishment. Consequently, their all-American persona is marshalled into a feature of their 'mask of sanity' and undeserved fame. The emphasis on the superlative functions through a narrative of exceptionalism: monsters remain in the realm of the extraordinary and, as a result, are not deemed representative of society. This leaves intact the meritocratic values underpinning the American Dream embodied by Barba.

Monstrous paedophiles: Earl Bradley and Larry Nassar

Schmid's framework is useful for it troubles the category 'monster' and reveals its multiple permutations. It shows how these are informed by and sustain ideological formations. These dynamics are also at play in the celebrification of infamous rapists, albeit with additional nuances. Most mainstream media are geared towards an assumed white middle class audience for whom murder and mass murder are extraordinary. In contrast, sexual violence is ubiquitous to the point that the term 'rape culture' has become popularised to describe contemporary US society. I attend to the nuances and feminist theorisations of rape culture in Chapter 7: Celebrity *Advocates* and, for the sake of the current argument, I define rape culture as a culture in which sexual violence and misogyny is pervasive and normalised. Consequently, it becomes even more imperative to construct celebrity *rapists* as abnormalities to maintain the mutual exclusivity of heterosexuality and violence. The figure of the monster and casting sexual violence itself as an extraordinary event serve this purpose. The *SVU* episode "Chasing Demons" (S19E14) illustrates this double pull through an RFH of the case against Dr Earl Bradley and the case against Dr Larry Nassar.

Fairy-tale monsters

Markus West stands in for Bradley and Nassar as a child physician accused of using his position to sexually assault underaged patients. Bradley is a former paediatrician who was convicted in 2010 for molesting and raping 127 children at his Delaware community practice. Nassar was the osteopathic physician for the US Gymnastics Olympic team and a professor at Michigan State University until he was prosecuted in 2017 and 2018 for sexually assaulting at least 265 girls under the guise of medical treatment. Like Bradley, West had a well-stocked playroom in his practice which he used to lure children away from their parents. Like Nassar, West's friendly exterior is only a façade designed to gain the trust of his patients and their parents. The representation of West in *SVU* thus echoes media coverage of the cases against Bradley and Nassar, which presented them as gothic monsters. As Jason Lee (2009) argues in his analysis of celebrity paedophiles, child molesters are constructed as villains ripped from the pages of fairy tales who trap children with the promise of sweets and toys.

The true crime texts dealing with the Nassar case fully fledge the 'paedophile as monster' trope. Nassar's 'guy next door' demeanour is understood as a 'mask of sanity' which hides his true evil. The victims interviewed in *At the Heart of Gold* (HBO 2019), *Athlete A* (Netflix 2020), and *Defying Gravity* (YouTube 2020) describe Nassar as very caring and involved in the community. His goofiness made him approachable, and they confided in him. These qualities, however, were part of Nassar's grooming process. He exploited his position as a medical professional to assault his patients, sometimes with a parent present in the room. His pro bono consultations further increased this power dynamic as the athletes and their parents felt they owed him. Finally, his trust-worthy persona gave him access to vulnerable girls. In sum, Nassar is a master of deception. Judge Rosemarie Aquilina captures this in her post-sentencing remark to Nassar: "Your decision to assault was precise, calculated, manipulated, devious, despicable" (CNN 2018). The permutation of normality into evidence of his monstrosity echoes Schmid's analysis of celebrity serial killers (2005) and my discussion of Bundy in the previous section. This is further enhanced through representations of sexual violence as an extraordinary event.

The peculiarity of rape

Because *SVU* is centred around sexual violence or gender-based violence, every episode finds new creative ways to represent violence as unusual rather than ubiquitous. In "Chasing Demons", the exceptionality of sexual violence is conveyed through three distinct tropes: male rape, the conflation of paedophilia with homosexuality, and the racist history of rape. Bradley and Nassar are both white men who targeted almost exclusively girls. However, their fictional counterpart is a black doctor who only assaulted boys. Given that media representations of sexual violence depict for the most part women and girls as victims (Cohen 2014), this creative choice feeds into popular beliefs that male rape is rare or even absurd (Doyle 2019). Rather than exploring the socio-cultural conditions that prevent men from reporting sexual assault, the episode infers those assaults on boys are an oddity. Where the horrific resonance of Bradley and Nassar's crimes comes in part from the hundreds of patients assaulted, the shock factor in West's case stems from the perceived anomaly of male rape. In addition, this storyline upholds homophobic discourses by associating paedophilia with male-male rape. This is a recurrent motif in *SVU*. Cuklanz and Moorti identify several episodes where same-sex sexual assault is used interchangeably with paedophilia or incest, implying that "the most monstrous and shocking perversions are cumulative and cannot really be distinguished from one another" (2017:71). They also argue that *SVU* espouses a colour-blind feminism which manifests itself through the relative absence of men of colour and the overwhelming whiteness of its fictional New York City. When men of colour are portrayed as assailants, the series eschews any analysis of the intersection of sexual violence, gender, and race by redirecting the storyline on another crime (2017:84). The episode "Chasing Demons" exemplifies these three tropes through its focus on one of *SVU*'s recurring characters' struggles with the case against West.

The episode starts with Brian Cassidy, a long-time colleague of the SVU squad and Benson's former boyfriend, testifying at West's trial for the prosecution. During the cross-examination, West's defence attorney accuses Cassidy of being racist towards his client. Infuriated, Cassidy vehemently denies these claims and says he wishes West were dead. The judge is forced to declare a mistrial and the following day, West is found dead in his

apartment, with forensic evidence linking Cassidy to the murder. Cassidy's behaviour at the trial could have been an opportunity for *SVU* to engage with racism and police brutality, topics widely discussed at the time the episode aired in 2018. Instead, the series redirects its focus towards Cassidy's personal struggles. West's death before the new trial implies that he is a monster who got what he deserved. Instead, the viewers are invited to review their knowledge of Cassidy to determine whether he is guilty of West's murder or has been framed. In the episodes' final reveal, Cassidy confides in his colleague that he was assaulted as a child by his baseball coach. The main narrative function of this revelation is twofold. First, it emphasises the long-lasting impact of sexual assault trauma. Even if Cassidy didn't murder West, the intensity of his PTSD decades later suggests that the possibility he could have committed such an extraordinary crime is a real one. Second, this storyline highlights how this one event defines Cassidy's entire life story. It is what motivated him to become a SVU detective, and it explains his impulsive character, which *SVU* fans have gotten familiar with over the seasons. In other words, Cassidy's identity results from one specific event in his childhood, thus reinforcing the idea that sexual assault is a singular event with extraordinary impact on one's life.

True crime texts about Bradley and Nassar also represent sexual violence as an extraordinary occurrence, even though the sheer number of patients they assaulted would suggest otherwise. Much like the celebrified serial killer, this is achieved through the conflation of the celebrity *rapist*'s actions with their identity. Every detail about who they are is mobilised to explain their despicable actions, including their medical profession. In addition to being a façade for their evil identity, the 'mask of sanity' also hides their incompetence as medical professionals. The 'mask of sanity' is thus a trope used to disavow Bradley and Nassar's representativity of the medical corps. Incidentally, media coverage of Bradley highlights his eccentricities, ranging from his poor social skills in his interactions with adults to the ostentatious childish decorations of his home and his practice (Ellacott 2013). These descriptions assert Bradley's status as an impostor who paraded as a doctor in an elaborate strategy to prey on minors. True crime emphasis on how they assaulted children under the guise of mock medical procedures implies that they are bad doctors at best, frauds at worst. Thus, the doctor-patient power dynamic is not

questioned. By framing Bradley and Nassar as monstrous frauds, these texts uphold understandings of sexual violence as unusual and singular.

Different kind of monster: Larry Nassar

SVU's dual RFH raises another interesting dynamic that pertains to the celebrification of rapists. As my analysis has shown until now, there are many similarities between the Bradley case and the Nassar case. The serial nature of their crimes and the fact that they targeted minors should grant each case an equivalent resonance. However, the Nassar case attracted significantly more media coverage than the Bradley case. Nassar's sexual assault and abuse of authority was the subject of three documentaries, *At the Heart of Gold: Inside the USA Gymnastics Scandal* (HBO 2019), *Athlete A* (Netflix 2020), *Defying Gravity: The Untold Story of Women's Gymnastics* (YouTube, 2020), two celebrity memoirs (Denhollander 2019; Haines 2019) and two true crime books (Pesta 2019; Barr and Murphy 2020). In contrast, Bradley has been less invested in popular culture with only one self-published true crime book (Ellacott 2013) and a few true crime blog posts (Cole 2017; Fisher 2020). This differentiated uptake by popular media is surprising when read through Penfold-Mounce's framework: the resonance of each case should be equal, if not higher for the Bradley case because of the very young age of the victims and the staggering number of patients who filed a class action suit against him. The suit represented 1,402 patients who were almost exclusively minors (Barrish 2013) who were on average 3 years old (Moyer 2015).

The reason why the Nassar case resonates more in popular culture than the Bradley case is threefold. Firstly, it emerged at a time when the US was engaged in a nation-wide debate about sexual violence on campuses. The case against Nassar started to unfold in 2015 while Michigan State University was under a Title IX investigation. Campus sexual assault was a topic widely discussed in mainstream media that year due to concerted efforts by activists across US universities and colleges. In addition, the White House-sponsored campaign *It's On Us* featured several celebrity PSAs which propelled consent education into mainstream media. I return to this feminist flashpoint in Chapter 7: Celebrity *Advocates*. Secondly, the trial took place directly in the aftermaths of #MeToo and offered an opportunity for spectacular displays of victimhood. As part of the plea

deal, Judge Aquilina allowed over 150 women assaulted by Nassar to read their victim impact statements at the trial. Edited excerpts were widely circulated on social media and in mainstream media (Moghe and del Valle 2018). These statements personify #MeToo testimonies shared anonymously on social media. Finally, the Nassar case triggers anxieties with regards to the meritocratic ideals that underpin sport celebrity. This, I contend, is the most important factor that explains the differentiated resonance of the Bradley case and the Nassar case in popular culture.

Global sport events like the Olympics are media events around which sport celebrity culture and promotional culture converge (Jackson and Andrews 2012). Athletic competitions dramatize neoliberal discourses about performance, health, and the nation. As one commentator points out in At the Heart of Gold (2019), people love watching gymnastics at the Olympics for the pleasurable spectacle of athleticism – which combines physical prowess with drama, music, performance. In many ways, "[sport celebrity] mirrors the idealised version of capitalism; that is, it is based on competition, achievement, efficiency, technology and meritocracy" (Jackson and Andrews 2012:263). Reading Olympic athletes as celebrities whose fame depends on their sport achievements and physical and acrobatic prowess explains the resonance of the Nassar case. Several of the women who accused Nassar were Olympians and members of the US women's national gymnastics team. As the team doctor of the national gymnastics team, Nassar was instrumental in ensuring the physical wellbeing of these elite athletes. Nassar was thus an agent of celebrification within this configuration of fame insofar as their capacity to compete at media sport events depended on his medical expertise. Nassar's abuse of his medical profession thus jeopardises a system of fame based on physical achievements. In other words, this case resonates because it threatens the meritocratic values that underpin discourses about fame.

The cover up orchestrated by USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University to protect Nassar further triggers anxieties with regards to meritocracy and celebrity culture. The gymnasts' Olympic dream is a theme recurrent in *Athlete A*. In fact, the film opens with Maggie Nichols' testimony in which she explains that she wasn't selected for the 2016 US Olympic team as retribution for reporting Nassar to USA Gymnastics. This story supports the documentary's main argument, which is that the Nassar case was a tragedy

for the ways in which a few 'bad apples' jeopardised sport celebrity. Similarly, interviews with students who dropped out of college in the aftermath of the assault reproduce an understanding of fame based on merit. In the US, higher education remains the privilege of a few. Sport scholarships are one of the ways in which students from marginalised communities can gain access to a university degree: in exchange for competing in a varsity sport team, they get full or partial coverage of their tuition fees. These kinds of investment reflect the importance of college athletics in the US. The nation-wide varsity competitions circuit is highly lucrative and attracts corporate sponsorship. Amateur collegiate sport constitutes a respected alternative to a professional sport career. It also provides the opportunity for universities to consolidate their prestige and brand. As a result, Nassar personifies a threat to the meritocratic ideology of both sport celebrity *and* higher education. I return to the imbrication of meritocracy and fame in my discussion of campus sexual assault activism and Title IX in Chapter 7: Celebrity *Advocates*. Nassar needs to be constructed as a monster because the revelation of the role institutions played in enabling his abuse undermines the myth of the American Dream. As a former gymnast argues in *Athlete A* (2020), "We [the US] consider ourselves the best in the world at everything. […] But this notion that we would sacrifice our young to win… I think disgusts us a little. We would never have said that that was the case". Nassar and Bradley are both constructed as monsters, but the former's celebrification is intensified because he endangers the very ideological pillars on which US nationhood is constructed.

(Post)feminist true crime monsters

Reading *SVU*'s fictionalised account of the Nassar case alongside its true crime accounts reveals a key tension in the celebrification of rapists in the #MeToo era. In *SVU*, West perpetrated the assaults alone. In contrast, *At the Heart of Gold* (HBO 2019) and *Athlete A* (Netflix 2020) explore in detail the role of institutions like USA Gymnastics, the FBI, and Michigan State University, in covering up Nassar's crimes. These true crime texts are examples of a recent trend in true crime which shows an awareness of feminist critiques of the genre. According to Horeck (2019b), these texts use the codes of true crime, but they focus primarily on the victims, and they situate the crimes within a broader social context. Similarly, Hannah Hamad's current research on the Yorkshire Ripper (2020a;

2020b; 2020c) interrogates the gendered dimension of the murders in relation to their gendered media representation. She analyses the BBC Four miniseries *The Yorkshire Ripper Files: A Very British Crime Story* (2019) as a "feminist revisionist remediation of the Yorkshire Ripper case" (2020c) whose primary concern is to approach the events through women's point of view. The series includes interviews with women who survived the attacks, lawyers, journalists, activists, and academics. As Hamad argues, the series is an example of true crime which resists the silencing of the victims and sheds lights on the ways in which cultural sexism hindered the investigation. It also highlights how the feminist movement in the UK was invigorated by these murders and their media coverage (Hamad 2020).

Due to the contemporaneity of Nassar's trial with #MeToo, these true crime texts are decidedly feminist mediations of the case, rather than revisionist. They centre the voices of the victims in through interviews (HBO 2019; Pesta 2019; Netflix 2020; Barr and Murphy 2020; YouTube 2020) or the victims' celebrity memoirs (Denhollander 2019; Haines 2019). In addition, the three miniseries (HBO 2019; Netflix 2020; YouTube 2020) include audio-visual footage from the victims' impact statements read at Nassar's sentencing. These experiential first-person accounts reveal the scale of the abuse and its impacts on the women and their loved ones. *At the Heart of Gold* (HBO 2019) and *Athlete A* (Netflix 2020) also feature interviews with journalists leading the investigation into the large-scale cover-up of Nassar's crimes orchestrated by USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University. These, alongside testimonies from law enforcement and attorneys, provide a detailed understanding of the institutional structures that enabled Nassar to assault hundreds of patients over two decades. However, even as these texts conduct a systemic analysis of sexual violence, they still uphold an understanding of sexual violence that locates its origins in evil individuals.

Gothic and soviet monsters by proxy

Athlete A (Netflix 2020) details the culture of emotional and psychological abuse in the sport, which enabled sexual predators like Nassar. The documentary attributes the abusive methods of coaching to Béla and Márta Károlyi, two Romanian gymnastic coaches who

trained Nadia Comăneci in the 1970s[26] and subsequently became influential figures in the US women's national gymnastics team. They owned the Karolyi Ranch, a complex of gymnastic facilities, which was used by the national gymnastics team as their main training centre from 2001 to 2018. According to the gymnasts interviewed in the film, the Károlyi method involves the recruitment of gymnasts from a young age and a strict training and dieting regimen. This combination, they explain, made them particularly vulnerable to psychological and physical abuse. Nassar, they recall, brought them sweets and a friendly ear which brightened the otherwise toxic training atmosphere at the Karolyi Ranch. In other words, Nassar's 'mask of sanity' was activated through his proximity with the Károlyis, whose monstrosity simultaneously derives from gothic and Cold War imagery.

The Károlyis are constructed as vampire-like figures. Their cultural origin – ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania – become a xenophobic shorthand for this gothic monstrosity. In these true crime narratives, cultural difference is emphasised as a way to explain their tyrannical training philosophy. Despite their influential role in the world of gymnastics, the Károlyis are portrayed as ill-integrated within US society. Their ranch is located in the Sam Houston national forest in Texas, and its remote location contributes to their symbolic exile from civilisation. For instance, the description of the Karolyi Ranch by Scott Reid, one of the lead investigative reporters into USA Gymnastics cover-up, could be ripped from the pages of a gothic novel: "You're going down that red dirt road, deeper and deeper into the forest. It's like straight out of a movie. You finally come on this compound of a gym and a couple of houses and a dorm. There are snakes everywhere, and bugs and it's hotter than Hell. It's just this Texan nightmare." (*Athlete A*, 2020). By comparing the Karolyi Ranch to Dracula's castle, true crime narratives construct its owners as inherently malevolent people. It thus partly exonerates USA Gymnastics for the Nassar cover-up by implying that it wouldn't have happened had the national training centre been located in an urban setting.

[26] At only 14, Nadia Comăneci won her first gold medal at the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montréal, making her the youngest gymnast to win an Olympic gold medal

The emphasis on the Károlyis' cultural background also draws on Cold War imagery to demonise the couple. International sport competitions are events that activate nationalist ideologies. Sport rivalries are symbolic expressions of international political and economic tensions (Straub and Overton 2013). The Olympics are carefully staged competitions between nations and its media representations reveal the cultural logics that underpin the formation of these "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006). The description of the Károlyis' coaching methods is in line with this nationalist discourse: their emphasis on strict discipline and repetitive and methodical training evokes the "Soviet sport machine". Borrowed from the warfare imagery, the "Soviet sport machine" metaphor dehumanises the athlete (Sabo et al. 1996). The spectre of inhumane Soviet state-sponsored training methods is conjured to explain the psychological and physical abuse inflicted on the athletes by the Károlyis. In these true crime narratives, the former USSR, personified by the Károlyis, is a convenient scapegoat to blame for the abusive culture in the sport. The figure of the monster individualises the issue of violence and doesn't implicate US society in the commodification of young female bodies.

The construction of the Károlyis as monsters illustrates the postfeminist logics at play in contemporary true crime. These texts held institutions like USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University accountable for their failures to address the sexist culture within their walls, and for covering up Nassar's crimes. They recognise the need for feminism to fight sexual violence and suggest policy and legal reforms and ways to shift the sexist culture in elite sport. At the same time, these structural critiques are undermined by displacing the blame onto monstrous acolytes like the Károlyis. The reason for this is that elite sports abide to the celebrity culture logics. Famous gymnasts like Nadia Comaneci or Simone Biles are a source of national pride. Olympic athletes are achieved celebrities *par excellence*. An in-depth feminist critique of the ways in which girls and young women's bodies are exploited by coaches and doctors would undermine the meritocratic logics of sport celebrity, and the nationalist logics of Olympic celebrity. Monstrous accomplices thus accommodate a postfeminist critique which doesn't fundamentally question the sexist premises of fame.

Not all monsters: Brock Turner and Bryce Walker

If Bundy, Bradley, Nassar, and their various fictional counterparts are presented as indubitable monsters, not every celebrified *rapist* receives this treatment. Some, like Brock Turner benefit from a relatively large amount of 'himpathy', which Boyle defines as a set of discourses that shift the focus away from women's experience of sexual violence and onto speculation with regards to men's motivations (2019:62). 'Himpathy' is thus used to distinguish 'bad' men from 'not so bad' men and 'good men' (Boyle 2019:62). This leniency is manifest in the light sentence he received: six months of jail time, three years of probation in addition to being permanently registered as a sex offender and completing a rehabilitation program. Season 2 of *13 Reasons Why* concludes with Bryce Walker being sentenced to three months of probation for raping Jessica Davis. The series includes its own RFH as fictional Judge Purdy summarises real-life Judge Persky's sentencing remarks (Levin 2016). They both emphasise the defendant's expression of remorse, his young age, and the fact that it is his first offence to justify their decision. In *SVU*'s RFH episode of the case against Turner ("Rape Interrupted", S18E05), the judge presiding over Ellis Griffin's trial quotes almost verbatim the sentence given by judge Purdy in *13 Reasons Why*. Andrew Drake, Walker's counterpart in *SVU*, receives an equally light sentence of probation in the series' RFH episode of *13 Reasons Why* ("No Good Reason", S19E04). This RFH network is illustrated below:

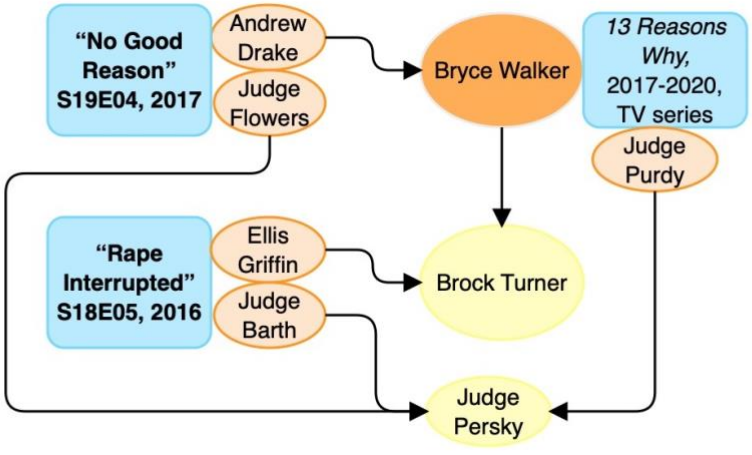


Figure 9: RFH of the Brock Turner case in SVU and 13 Reasons Why

What emerges from this web of RFH episodes is a shared concern over celebrified perpetrators who don't fit within the monstrous *celebrity* perpetrator trope explored in the previous section. *13 Reasons Why* and *SVU* centre around the voices of the sexual assault victims and even though the series attempt to bring justice to them, they still uphold gendered constructions of meritocracy.

Turner's sentence was decried by survivor groups and feminist legal scholars who organised a campaign to recall Persky (Hirshman 2019). The controversy around the sentence did not dispute his golden boy status, and in fact reinforced it by casting Turner as the archetype of dominant masculinity. Supporters of the 'Recall Perksy' campaign portray Turner as a representative of entitled and privileged male millennials, whereas as its detractors regret the waste of a promising young man's future. Similarly, the quote from Turner's father protesting the prison sentence "This is a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action out of his 20 plus years of life" (Miller 2016) was widely circulated to support or to denounce Persky's sentence. Similar pleas are uttered by Walker's parents and Griffin's father. For instance, the latter says to Benson: "He is my son. He is 22 years old. He graduated *suma cum laude* from Dartmouth, he has a six-figure job, and you want to destroy his life because he had sex with some drunk girl?". Even as the series presents this statement as tone deaf, it still captures social anxieties that arise from the demise of ideal neoliberal subjects.

Indeed, these intertextual elements reveal the discursive links between meritocracy and 'himpathy'. Media coverage of Turner's trial mentions his good academic record at Stanford University and his promising swimming career. This shows how merit is attached to ideals of masculinity within neoliberal discourses. As Boyle argues, "when it comes to young men […] their value can lie in their potential as well as (or even in place of) their existing achievements" (2019:114). The corpus of fictional representations of the *People v. Turner* trial show that representatives of this culturally valued masculinity are all white, heterosexual, and from upper middle-class families. This shows how the qualities attached to the golden boy – charm, physical attraction, personal and professional achievements – maps onto gender, race, class, and sexuality. This in turns influences discourses about who deserves an opportunity for reform.

Season 3 of *13 Reasons Why* reveals an additional layer of the ways in which 'himpathetic' discourses uphold structural inequality. The main narrative arc of that season revolves around the mystery of Walker's disappearance almost a year after his conviction. Season 3 builds on the successful scavenging hunt format of its previous two seasons but raises the stakes as viewers try to elucidate who murdered Walker. The season weaves in two timelines, the present investigation into Walker's death, and the immediate aftermath of the trial 8 months before. In the flashbacks, Walker is shown attempting to atone for crimes. We see him experience bullying at his new school and use this newfound understanding of the harm he caused others to help former classmates at Liberty High. Tender scenes with his mother equally contribute to humanising the character, which makes his death more tragic. In contrast, Montgomery 'Monty' De la Cruz, who brutally raped Tyler Down in the season 2 finale, is not portrayed as worthy of redemption. His Season 3 arc reveals that he grew up in an abusive working class immigrant family and that he is a closeted gay man. Rather than humanising the character, these narrative elements feed into homophobic discourses that associate homosexuality with violence, and xenophobic representations of Latino men as bigots and abusers[27]. While *13 Reasons Why* explores alternatives to carceral solutions to end sexual violence, which I shall explore in more detail in my critique of carceral feminism in Chapter 6: *Celebrity* Advocates, it doesn't disrupt the sexist, racist, classist, and homophobic underpinnings of 'himpathy'.

Conclusion

Celebrity perpetrators occupy an important position in popular culture. They personify the fascination with certain types of crime, like sexual violence. Celebrity culture is a key vehicle that transforms sexual violence into a spectacle. *SVU* is remarkable in the landscape of crime fiction because it centres the voices of victims in every single one of its episodes. Indeed, most of the sexual assault victims report the crime to the precinct themselves. By not murdering its victims, *SVU* resists the sensationalism of

[27] The other Latino character in the series is the sympathetic Tony Padilla, who embodies a positive representation of gay masculinity, but even he is shown to be struggling with anger management issues which led him to have a criminal record.

representations of misogynist crimes common in the true crime and crime fiction genres (Hamad 2020). However, *SVU* still contributes to the mythologization of perpetrators through RFH episodes dealing with celebrified sexual offenders. This fascination is channelled through the figure of the monster which casts sexual violence as an individualised problem that doesn't implicate US society. In other words, abusers are portrayed as 'bad apples', acting in isolation. When the assaults are contextualised within broader institutional dynamics, the figure of the monster constructs them as anomalies, albeit well-integrated ones.

Reading true crime texts alongside fictionalised accounts of the same cases reveals the multiple iterations of monstrosity. Popular representations of celebrity perpetrators draw on the figure of the monster to separate them from normative heterosexuality. Bundy's fame derives in part from how he embodies the representative / monstrous tension. This tension maps onto the ordinary / extraordinary tension, which constitutes a defining feature of celebrity culture. Monstrosity is constructed intertextually through references to fairy tales (Bradley) or gothic literature (the Károlyis). In the case of Bradley and Nassar, the figure of the monster is crucial to construct paedophilia as an extraordinary crime. The celebrification of Nassar stems from the remediation of his crimes required to maintain the meritocratic illusion of sport celebrity, and the nationalist value of Olympic celebrity. The Nassar case raises important questions with regards to postfeminist true crime. Finally, the multiple fictionalisations of Turner's trial show the continuity of the sexist, racist, and classist logics of monstrosity in identifying who benefits from 'himpathy'. These RFH episodes also constitute a dramatization of carceral feminism. I pursue these reflections in the next chapter, *Celebrity* Advocates, and interrogate the intricacies of postfeminism, neoliberal feminism, and carceral feminism.

CHAPTER 6: *CELEBRITY* ADVOCATES

A cacophony of feminisms

In their in-depth analysis of *SVU*, Sujata Moorti and Lisa Cuklanz argue that the series offers "a cacophony of feminist understandings of sexual violence while operating within a postfeminist televisual setting" (2017:15). Their analysis demonstrates how Olivia Benson embraces multiple strands of feminism at once. Whereas Benson's ongoing commitment to law-and-order institutions casts her as a carceral feminist icon, her success in a predominantly masculine workforce (and televisual genre) attests to the lean-in feminism she embodies. Conversely, her espousal of privatised solutions and a rhetoric of empowerment to end sexual violence makes her a key neoliberal feminist figure (Cuklanz and Moorti 2017:41-44). In this chapter, I build on their analysis and extend it beyond the main character to interrogate the ways in which sexual violence becomes spectacular through various iterations of advocacy, feminism, and fame.

Building on Sarah Banet-Weiser's work (2018c), I use the term 'popular feminisms' to refer to spectacular manifestations of feminism, circulated through mainstream media and endorsed by celebrities. However, these discourses and practices remain plural, heterogeneous, and caught within a struggle for visibility between different strands of feminism (Banet-Weiser 2018c:1). I understand 'postfeminism' as a complex entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist values (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Genz 2009; Genz and Brabon 2018) which fostered the rise of popular feminisms. Much of literature on postfeminism has attended to the prefix 'post' in relation to feminism, backlash, temporality, school of thought, etc. For the purpose of this chapter, I am more interested in postfeminism as a feminist discursive formation, i.e., not to think feminism and postfeminism as mutually exclusive, but rather as "a process of resignification that is capable of re-inscribing what it also transposes" (Genz 2009:26). 'Neoliberal feminism' (Rottenberg 2018) constitutes a particular iteration of popular feminism, one that stems from postfeminism, but is resolutely feminist in its renewed commitment to neoliberal discourses. In other words, the tension between espousal and disavowal of feminism is symptomatic of postfeminist media culture (Zeisler 2016); yet it also conditions new

postfeminist configurations. Finally, 'carceral feminism' refers to feminist discourses that understand sexual labour as sex-trafficking, and in doing so expand the neoliberal agenda (Bernstein 2007). My interest in carceral feminism stems from the ways in which it advocates for solutions to sexual violence rooted in the prison industrial complex (Bumiller 2008) and from the ways in which it shapes popular feminist discourses.

This theoretical framework is useful to explore moments of intense visibility of sexual violence in the public sphere, like #MeToo, and the ways these are framed by popular feminisms and neoliberal discourses. As Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad argue, #MeToo is "contained by a postfeminist sensibility" (2018b:618), and as a result, is limited in its capacity to challenge the neoliberal and patriarchal order (Loney-Howes 2019). Investigating anti-sexual violence *celebrity* advocacy is ideal to interrogate not only how neoliberalism deters critiques of the patriarchy, but also how neoliberalism might need feminism. The critical literature on celebrity advocacy reveals similar concerns as it interrogates the tensions that arise around the political and social commitment of celebrities. In his overview of the scholarship on celebrity advocacy, Dan Brockington (2015) notes that most studies explicitly or implicitly share the same moral concerns. He questions if celebrity advocacy produces a greater awareness of the cause they defend or if it rather mostly benefits the celebrity in the formation of their own image and personal brand. He suggests that we should rethink the dichotomy between celebrity and activism, and between entertainment and politics (see also Thrall et al. 2008).

This line of query has guided recent feminist media studies scholarship, which seeks to rethink the assumption that fame and feminism are mutually exclusive (Hamad and Taylor 2015; Taylor 2017; Hobson 2017; Murray 2017). These works highlight how media representations have always been a key feminist concern and, at the same time, feminist movements have always relied on the media to establish their legitimacy. As Janell Hobson (2017) argues, some celebrities can also offer compelling theorisations of the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality accessible to a general audience. Drawing on McCurdy's work on celebrity activists (2013), Taylor (2017) argues that critical attention to the processes of celebrification – i.e., how one becomes famous – disrupts an understanding of celebrity and feminism as mutually exclusive categories. Following these theoretical suggestions, the present chapter analyses *celebrity* advocates – i.e.,

established media personalities who use their visibility to tackle sexual violence – to interrogate how they popularise carceral and neoliberal feminism and, in the process, gesture towards a new postfeminist future. The subsequent chapter explores the work of celebrity *advocates* who became famous because of their anti-sexual violence activism and ask: how might celebrity be a gateway to feminism? And how might feminist activists need celebrity culture?

These tensions are particularly salient in the RFH *SVU* episodes for they revolve around already mediatised cases. These episodes are thus invested in the celebrification of people known for their work against sexual violence. By attending to the metafictional citation practices at the core of the RFH episodes, I can trace the emergence of feminist celebrity brands across a range of related media texts. In addition, the process of fictionalisation of a complex story into 45-minute episodes is akin to a magnifying glass that renders legible resonances and tensions between each strand of feminism. In-depth discursive analysis contextualises each RFH *SVU* episode in relation to other media texts, thus constituting a rich web of media texts that provide a unique entry point to address the celebritisation of anti-rape advocacy and the tensions within popular feminisms. The episodes "Making of a Rapist" (S18E02) and "The Newsroom" (S18E16) are representative of the ways in which the series grapples with the cacophony of feminisms characteristic of *SVU*. The first two deal with the convergence of celebrity culture and popular feminism in the context of celebrity-led anti-sexual violence campaigns. Throughout the chapter, I ask: what kind of cultural work does popular feminism carry out? As I proceed through my analysis of *celebrity* advocates, I unpack the nuances between various popular feminist sensibilities, namely postfeminism, carceral feminism, and neoliberal feminism.

I start my discussion of *celebrity* advocates with "The Newsroom" (S18E16), which, as also explored in Chapter 2: Celebrity Victims, is a fictionalised account of the sexual harassment case against former Fox News chairman Roger Ailes, where Harold Coyle stands in for the latter, Heidi Sorenson for Gretchen Carlson, and Margery Evans for Megyn Kelly. The celebrity memoirs *Settle for More* (Kelly 2016) and *Be Fierce: Stop Harassment and Take Your Power Back* (Carlson 2017a) are included in the present analysis, in addition to guest columns Carlson wrote for *The Huffington Post* (2015) and *Variety* (2017b) and episodes from Kelly's new podcast *The Megyn Kelly Show* (2020). I

also discuss the film *Bombshell* (2019) whose script is based on the aforementioned memoirs and interviews. These media texts provide helpful elements to contextualise the *SVU* episode. Analysed as a whole, this corpus offers compelling insights into the resonances and tensions between postfeminist and neoliberal feminist advocacy (Cf. Appendix 3 and Figure 3).

I then turn to the episode "Making of a Rapist" (S18E02) to continue my analysis of *celebrity* advocates. I also develop the concept of 'celefiction' to think through the ways in which Olivia Benson's fame exceeds the fictional realm of *SVU*. Benson embodies a unique brand of carceral and neoliberal feminism, which is further enhanced through Hargitay's celebrity persona. Together, they exemplify the convergence of celebrity culture and public policies. I rely on marketing materials produced for various anti-rape campaigns sponsored by Hargitay's Joyful Heart Foundation. I also take into account the 2017 documentary *I Am Evidence* in which Hargitay features to promote her charity's work to end the rape-kit backlog (Cf. Appendix 3).

Neoliberal feminists: Megyn Kelly and Gretchen Carlson

The episode "The Newsroom" displays a complex interplay of postfeminist and neoliberal feminist rhetoric which is most salient through the narrative arcs featuring Heidi Sorenson and Margery Evans. These stories both oscillate between a complete disavowal and acknowledgement of feminist solidarity, while framing sexual violence as a private issue. For instance, following her interview with Olivia Benson on workplace sexual harassment, the "HNT Morning Live" host Heidi Sorenson privately discloses to her that she was raped by the head of the network Harold Coyle a few months ago. However, Sorenson immediately recants her allegations for fear of losing her job at HNT. After being fired, she reaches out to Benson to sue Coyle for rape and explains:

> When I went to Harold, he forced me onto my knees, and he said I had to show him how serious I was. I actually thought that would work, that I'd get my job back. He screwed me in private, that's one thing, but he just screwed me in public […] I know what it looks like. That I'm doing this because I got fired, but that's not the reason.

Sorenson's account highlights how she understands sexual violence as produced by sexist structures of power and gestures on how these may impact other women. Yet, her

motivation to come forward stems from the injuries Coyle inflicted on her professional career. More than just symptomatic of the character's trauma, these contradictions reflect the kind of cultural work postfeminism carries out. It acknowledges structural inequality and collective mobilisation, but ultimately reframes those in individual terms.

According to Catherine Rottenberg (2018), neoliberal feminism is a strand of feminism that converges with neoliberal and conservative agendas to resolve some of the ongoing tensions that have emerged from the postfeminist era. These include challenges to the model of liberal democracy in the form of neofascist movements, increased distribution of precarity, and continued racial and gender inequality. Rottenberg's analysis shows the ways in which postfeminism provided the fertile grounds for neoliberal feminism to emerge. They both rely on a rhetoric of choice, empowerment, individualism, self-monitoring, and self-discipline. However, postfeminism remains more ambivalent where neoliberalism resolutely makes a claim to feminism.

In the episode, Margery Evans embodies this slippage from a postfeminist to a neoliberal feminist subjectivity in a compelling way. She is younger than Carlson and at the start of her televisual career. Even though she is aware of the network's profoundly sexist and ageist regime that affects anchor-women, she believes that she is immune to it. She lies to detectives during the investigations and perjures herself on the stand during the trial, denying that Sorenson ever confided in her about the rape. However, when Coyle attempts to assault her, Evans changes her testimony and gets audio-visual evidence to support Sorenson's lawsuit. Like Sorenson's, Evans' feminism is not rooted in solidarity, but emerges from injuries to her person. The resolution sought is private – i.e., a lawsuit and a settlement – rather than a challenge to structural inequality. Furthermore, Evans' realisation that she is not immune to Coyle illustrates the shift from a postfeminist stance to one that acknowledges the pervasiveness of sexism which requires a feminist response.

My brief analysis of Sorenson and Evans' character arc reveals the complex entanglement of rape and iterations of various strands of feminism, which is dramatically at play in the episode. It is exemplary of the ways in which the series as a whole grapples with the erosion of the divide between the public and the private sphere, an almost utilitarian embrace of feminism along with the disarticulation of structural inequalities. Prompted

by the issues raised through this *SVU* episode, I ask, along with Rottenberg: "why might neoliberalism need feminism? What does neoliberal feminism do that postfeminism could not or cannot accomplish?" (2018:7). These ambivalent feminist politics are not specific to *SVU,* and they can also be found in Gretchen Carlson and Megyn Kelly's celebrity confessional texts, which I turn to for the remainder of this chapter. *Be Fierce* (2017a) and *Settle for More* (2016) are good examples of the ways in which neoliberal feminism seizes the issue of sexual violence.

Neoliberal feminist subjectivity in *Settle for More* and *Be Fierce*

Be Fierce is an example of what Diane Negra calls the "advice-oriented memoir" (2014). It blends the genres of celebrity memoir, self-help, and journalistic essay of workplace sexual harassment. Carlson addresses the readers in various forms, sometimes using the pronouns 'you' and other times using 'we', drawing the readers in a unifying women's experience. She also weaves in her story with excerpts from interviews she conducted with women of various professions. This gives the impression that she invites her readers to identify with her and the women she interviewed as part of a collective consciousness-raising work. Despite its allusion to a collective identity, her memoir remains typical of neoliberal feminism because it produced political claims that are orientated towards individual happiness, and thus remain fundamentally unthreatening (Negra 2014). *Be Fierce* hails imagined readers as aspirational female subjects whose commitment to sexism is internalised as part of a broader need to achieve work-life balance. Thus, in its very literary form, Carlson's memoir typifies the neoliberal feminist ethos. Ultimately the solution that is put forward is to "be fierce", repeated like a mantra throughout the book and its title.

Settle for More doesn't address its readers as directly as *Be Fierce*. However, it still fits the "advice-oriented memoir" genre analysed by Negra and centres around a famous neoliberal feminist subject. Its linear narrative follows Kelly from her childhood to the peak of her career at Fox News as she overcomes family tragedy and professional challenges and details her experience of being a working mother. Like Carlson, Kelly reframes happiness in managerial terms. As Kelly writes, "the hard time reminds you it is possible to change your life. To do better. To be better. To settle for more." (2016:319).

While the book doesn't shy away from discussing difficult life events such as grieving a parent, a burn-out, a divorce, and different instances of sexual violence, these negative affects are explored only to support a narrative of surviving by overcoming adversity.

Rottenberg argues that neoliberal feminism produces different subjectivities, characterised by different temporal and affective orientations. The early-career neoliberal feminist subject is invited to carefully plan and invest time, energies, contacts and resources to achieve the desired work-life balance. In contrast, the assumption is that mid- or late-career neoliberal feminists have mastered this balance. They are thus enjoined to live in the present as fully as possible. However, *Be Fierce* and *Settle for More* trouble this distinction between two forms of neoliberal feminist governmentality along generational lines. The assumed reader of Carlson's self-help journalistic memoir is a sexual harassment victim who wants to know what her rights and options are. The book thus invites the reader to ground herself in the moment in order to assess her strategy to build a brighter future for herself. Most chapters from Kelly's memoir conclude with an exhortation to appreciate one's present happiness as the consequence of overcoming past challenges. It thus frames resilience as an investment for the future, which is explicit in the following quote: "as with any turmoil in your life, none of it is for nothing if you survive it and take stock" (2016:296). Both *Be Fierce* and *Settle for More* espouse the "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" principle, which is central to the construction of the neoliberal survivor who takes initiatives for her self-care provisions and wellbeing, as I have already argued in Chapter 2: Celebrity *Victims*. Consequently, the affective and temporal orientations of the neoliberal feminist-survivor is one that is both grounded in the present through self-care yet still looks ahead by reframing resilience in aspirational terms.

This dual temporality of neoliberal survivorhood sustains the positive affective regime characteristic of neoliberal governmentality (Ahmed 2010). As Rottenberg argues, "positive affect helps produce subjects who are not only induced to constantly work on themselves and their emotional states but also to cultivate the upbeat, entrepreneurial, responsibilised, and individuated disposition" (2018:114). The neoliberal feminist-survivor is thus a heightened form of the subjectivity described by Rottenberg because it frames the managerial self in terms of survival. As Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad (2018a)

have argued in the context of austerity, injury and vulnerability are acknowledged only to be disavowed though a form of governmentality that repackages adaptability, creativity, and optimism into features of the managerial self, thus silencing critiques of structural inequality. For instance, Carlson's memoir doesn't shy away from descriptions of trauma and injustice, but the trope of writing as therapeutic activity explicitly reframes these negative affects through a positive outcome. Each chapter explores different impacts of sexual harassment and concludes with an intimation to "be fierce". It is this juxtaposition that makes the book such a compelling neoliberal feminist text.

Neoliberal feminism and celebrity advocacy

These orientations towards assuming positive affective regimes and bouncing back are also what make celebrity advocacy such a potent media spectacle. The exposed injury is transformed into an injunction to positivity and a universalising discourse of resilience centred around the self rather than social transformation (Gill and Orgad 2018a). It is reminiscent of authenticating strategies deployed by celebrities involved in humanitarian campaigns which revolve around the theatricalization of suffering (Chouliaraki 2012) and private responses to the failures of the welfare state (Littler 2008). The affective registers of Carlson and Kelly's celebrity confessional turns their vulnerability into a spectacle, which in turn allows them to articulate their individual experiences within a broader ethos of altruism.

This process is most salient in the ways in which Carlson describes the inception of her book through a grammar of heroism whereby becoming a celebrity advocate is an inescapable effect of her fame and a duty:

> In my home office, I began to print out the stories of women who contacted me. Soon they formed piles on my desk. I didn't know what I would do with them, or what I could do for them, but the voices filled my mind and my dreams. They took me out of my own problems, and set me squarely at the centre of a cultural battle. […] I decided to start a movement – a preposterously bold idea. But if not me, who would pick up this cause? Who would speak up for these women and give them a voice? (Carlson 2017a:9)

This quote illustrates how the articulation between Carlson's experience of sexual harassment and her fame is a key factor in establishing the authenticity of her advocacy

work. In a swift movement, Carlson claims a connection with the women who shared their stories with her yet distances herself from them through a rhetoric of heroic rescuing.

As many scholars have argued in their discussion of celebrity humanitarianism, this process of othering is central in authenticating the celebrity's performance of altruism (Repo and Yrjölä 2011; Christiansen and Frello 2015; Christiansen and Richey 2015). Indeed, celebrities use a rhetoric of benevolent luck and fortune when explaining the reasons for their participation in humanitarian campaigns. According to Littler (2008), they rely on what Luc Boltanski calls a "politics of pity" (2007) – i.e., a set of principles and practices which turns suffering into a spectacle by reinforcing the distinction between those who suffer and those who don't. Whilst the context and aims of celebrity humanitarianism differ from neoliberal feminist advocacy, the simultaneous claim to affective proximity and distantiation is a common feature. It sustains an imperialist agenda for the former, and a femonationalist stance in the latter.

Building on the work of Sara Farris (2012; 2017) on the association of nationalist ideologies and feminist values, Rottenberg argues that neoliberal feminism constitutes a geographical and affective turn inwards for US society through which liberal democracy addresses its deterrents. It also reasserts itself as a model for the rest of the world by producing responsibilised subjects who effectively conflate their entrepreneurial individualities with emancipation. The celebrity advocates I examine are exemplary of this convergence of neoliberal and femonationalist agendas. Their claim to survivorhood does not only authenticate their performance of altruism, but also distinguishes them from the victims who haven't yet managed this transition. Carlson and Kelly's celebrity advocacy still revolves around a politics of pity; however, it is more subtle yet more pervasive. The process of othering operates, simultaneously, along racist, classist, and ableist lines and through temporal orientations: the neoliberal feminist-survivor's others are her past victimized self, as well as any other subject excluded from this journey by structural inequalities. It is quite telling in that respect that Kelly frames her resilience as a feature of her "life as an American woman" (2016:296). This is how anti-sexual violence celebrity advocacy becomes one of the pillars of neoliberal feminism. I would also go as far as to suggest that the most representative moment of the US society's inward turn is #MeToo and #TimesUp.

The grammar of neoliberal feminist advocacy

This discussion of the complex entanglements between celebrity advocacy, femonationalism, and neoliberal feminism raises semantic questions with regards to feminism. As Rottenberg writes, "this imbrication of feminism with non-emancipatory projects is a powerful reminder that feminism has always been an unstable signifier" (2018:170). She argues that neoliberal feminism co-opts the language of social justice whilst neutralising its political content through a shift towards the managerial self. I have already demonstrated how the "The Newsroom" hints at the complex operations of neoliberal feminism, transposing a grammar of social struggle into one of empowerment. An analysis of Carlson's confessional texts highlights how this plays out in more detail. This corpus is striking in that it was written by a celebrity who owes her fame to the Miss America pageant and the right-wing Fox News. Yet, Carlson explicitly thinks sexual harassment as symptomatic of gendered structures of power.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Carlson draws links between her experience and those of the women she interviewed, which is reflected in the ways in which *Be Fierce* blends the genres of celebrity memoir and investigative journalism. In addition, she draws on a feminist lexicon to articulate the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in the workplace. For instance, the book contains a bullet point definition of this form of violence and offers practical advice on managing toxic work environments, reporting, and dealing with the aftermaths. Carlson also inscribes her memoir within a history of sexual harassment legislation and feminist scholarship, referencing Catharine MacKinnon's work, to assert her feminist credentials. Her memoir ends with a list of resources to fight sexual assault and abuse. These include Mariska Hargitay's Joyful Heart Foundation discussed in the second part of this chapter. It also features organisations and activist writings discussed in Chapter 7: Celebrity *Advocates*. Figure 10 below illustrates these connections:

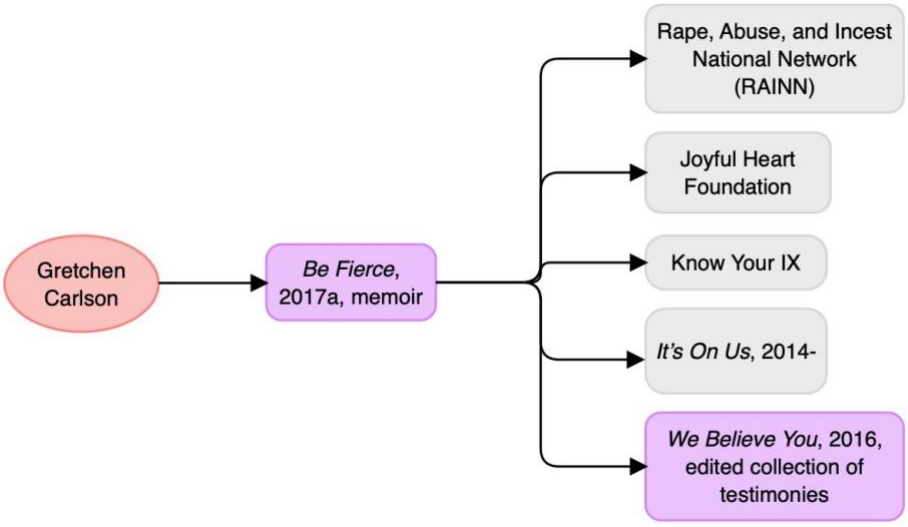


Figure 10: Case studies from Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 listed in Gretchen Carlson's memoir (2017a)

Carlson's feminist credentials are further solidified through references to Liz Kelly's well-theorised continuum of violence (1988) which draws parallels between sexual harassment, domestic violence, and rape, Carlson repeats that these forms of violence are all about power. She also details how the Senate's treatment of Anita Hill "activated a passionate women's activism" (2017a:45) and explains her motivation for writing the book: "I began to see that together, we could do something about it and create a meaningful fight for women's rights in our time" (2017a:10). What is striking in these last two quotes is the deliberate use of liberal feminist vocabulary usually absent from the neoliberal feminist texts analysed by Rottenberg, including Kelly's memoir.

Similarly, where Kelly strongly refutes any notion of speaking from a privileged position, Carlson acknowledges that sexual harassment disproportionately impacts women already marginalised and, as such, her experience is not representative. She writes for instance:

> I think it is fair to say that women working non managerial jobs in fast food establishments probably can't afford to lose their jobs, and accepting harassment is a matter of protecting their livelihoods. Few have the resources or clout to fight their circumstances, so I believe it is incumbent on all of us to fight on their behalf. (Carlson 2017a:20)

At first glance, Carlson demonstrates an understanding of class inequality that appeals to a feminist solidarity. However, other structural inequalities such as race are obscured. This oversight is quite telling given the complex entanglements of race and class in the

US. It reifies gender as category of oppression to which racialized and classed power dynamics are subsumed. In addition, the solution is not to challenge structural inequality but rather to speak for these women. What Carlson, her presumed readers, and the fast-food workers have in common is their identity as women. 'Womanhood' thus becomes a universalising category that sets the anti-rape feminist agenda as the interests of white cisgender middle-class able-bodied women (Cf. Moorti 2001; Hancock 2016; Phipps 2020; Serisier 2020).

This example is quite telling for it shows the ways in which neoliberal feminism borrows from liberal rhetoric on privileges and fighting for social justice, but immediately annuls its political meaning by interpellating its readers into a neoliberal feminist subjectivity. The pronoun 'us' in this quote does not refer to collective mobilisation but rather to individualised instances of advocating for others. The solutions put forward by Carlson are articulated in individualistic terms that put the onus on women. Structural inequality is thus disaggregated into a question of personal initiatives. Similarly, emancipation is reframed as the achievements of one woman at a time (Rottenberg 2018:67). This dynamic is also at the core of the feminist politics of *SVU* as each episode revolves around discrete stories and justice is served one victim at a time. Carlson's manipulation of liberal and feminist lexicon illustrates the ways in which neoliberal feminism deters its critics. As Rottenberg argues, "neoliberalism hollows out the very vocabulary with which to address the increasing precariousness of more and more people and populations both in the United States and across the globe" (2018:127). Equal rights, liberation, and social justice are replaced by concerns for happiness, balance, and self-responsibility. Feminist rhetoric is thus repurposed to serve a depoliticised and edulcorated version of feminism.

Another compelling example of this dynamic is the shift from feminist 'struggle' to 'movement', as is apparent with Carlson's aim to launch a public movement. She thus inscribes her book in a legacy of social movements, but her use of the term refers instead to a lighter version of political mobilisation, one that is more akin to a trend as it operates on individualised actions rather than collaborative campaigns. In the conclusion of the book, readers are invited to ask themselves:

> What are the next steps you will take in your own life? How will you be a stronger advocate for others? What conversations will you have – starting now? What organisations will you join – or start? What blog will you pen? How will you make your voice heard? When I started out, I knew I was not just going to write an "issue book". This is a movement. Won't you join me? (Carlson 2017a:207)

This quote illustrates the slipperiness of social justice rhetoric as it is co-opted by neoliberal feminism. Collective organising is evoked, only to be eclipsed by personal brand building initiatives. This convergence of politics and brand culture (Banet-Weiser 2012) is another way in which neoliberal feminism entrenched itself into the social fabric through celebrity advocacy.

A new gender norm

My analysis of celebrity advocacy provides an additional nuance to Rottenberg's conceptualisation of neoliberal feminism. One of her central arguments is that the collapse of the private and public spheres has created the tensions for the emergence of neoliberal feminism. Neoliberalism interpellates upwardly mobile subjects into generic human capital where the only values or identity markers retained are market-driven ones. Yet, women are still confronted with gender inequality in the workplace and at home. For Rottenberg, neoliberal feminism thus presents an attempt at resolving these contradictions by positioning the work-life balance as the ultimate goal. As a result, "the notion of balance helps 'disarticulate' structural inequality by promoting individuation and responsibilisation" (Rottenberg 2018:21). Through this new gender norm, neoliberal feminism further contributes to the erosion of the public/private divide.

It is thus interesting to extend these considerations to *celebrity* advocates and interrogate the ways in which neoliberal feminism and celebrity advocacy converge through this collapse of the private and the public. As I have argued in Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims, the celebrity confessional (Redmond 2008) is a gendered space which facilitates the transformation of personal experiences into a personal brand. In addition, 'authenticity' is carefully crafted through a balance of publicity and privacy, both of which are manufactured and caught up in process of commodification of the self. Personal experience thus becomes a currency in an economy of visibility. It also reworks the

entanglements between the personal and the political so that the neoliberal feminist tenet becomes the "political is the personal". It also raises the question "whose personal is more political?" (Phipps 2016). Reading celebrity advocacy through the lenses of neoliberal feminism makes visible another layer of the complex processes of exclusion at play within this strand of feminism.

The main process of exclusion identified by Rottenberg revolves around reproduction and care work. Because these remain gendered, they hinder the conversion of upwardly mobile women into generic (genderless) human capital. As a result, the bulk of domestic work is outsourced to another class of women who are deemed exploitable because their precariousness casts them outside neoliberal feminist subjectivity. In other words, discourses of work-life balance veil an iteration of feminism that is exclusionary. As I have shown earlier in this chapter, under the veneer of self-reflexive awareness of her class privileges, Carlson's feminist politics remain equally elitist. In Carlson and Kelly's confessional texts, the main issue with sexual harassment is not so much that it is a form of gendered violence, but rather that it constitutes another gendered obstacle to the production of generic human capital.

For instance, Carlson writes that challenging workplace harassment "is about going to work every day without the fear that being a woman is going to get in the way of doing your job" (2017a:20). This quote is striking for the ways in which it gestures towards a genderless ideal where subjects are stripped of any idiosyncratic markers except their capacity to perform in a neoliberal economy. At the same time, it also reactivates an essentialist take on gender through a postfeminist stance by implying that feminism is still needed even though it should be obsolete. According to this corpus, sexual harassment is gendered only insofar as it helps to superficially explain its occurrence. In other words, the gendering of sexual harassment isn't brought up to contextualise it within structural power dynamics, but rather to lay the blame on individual perpetrators whose actions seem arbitrary and due to ignorance at best, or symptomatic of a 'bad apple' at worst.

This new gender norm is particularly salient throughout Kelly's memoir where she details how Ailes sexually harassed and attempted to assault her at the start of her career at Fox News, as well as her experience of being publicly harassed by Donald Trump in the runup

to the 2016 US presidential election. The crux of her retelling of both events is the emotional toll it took on her and her family. She locates her injuries in the challenges of being taken seriously as a professional, in her loss of confidence, and hindering her capacity to enjoy and do her work. Gender is evoked only to assert her commitment to neoliberal feminist ideals. In other words, her professional success is attributed to her resilience gained from being a woman, thus obscuring how profoundly gendered this culture of confidence is (Gill and Orgad 2017a; 2017b; Banet-Weiser 2018c). Similarly, her acknowledgement of how power operates within the structure of the institution to silence victims of sexual harassment is immediately repurposed through the language of neoliberal feminism. She repeats throughout the memoir that it was her capacity to rise through adversity that was the valuable lesson to be learned in her quest to "settle for more". She explains how, as a result, she gained an excellent mentor in Ailes and a powerful interlocutor to showcase her anchoring talents in Trump.

Neoliberal feminism's concerns with sexual harassment

In what follows, I argue that the unsettling juxtaposition of the ideal of genderless human capital and the essentialist conception of gender, which significantly informs these *celebrity* advocate narratives, is an attempt to resolve two tensions inherent to neoliberalism. First, it addresses the question of ongoing gender inequality in the workplace. Neoliberal feminism's investment against sexual harassment thus further entrenches the neoliberal ideal of productive and fulfilled workers. Second, celebrity neoliberal feminists concerns with sexual harassment stems from the threat that the trope of the 'casting couch' poses to the legitimacy of their fame. Indeed, the suspicion of having exchanged sexual favours for professional advancement would imperil their status as achieved celebrity.

In neoliberal feminist terms, sexual harassment impedes women's productivity and professional development. It threatens the neoliberal feminist goal of achieving a work-life balance and, more importantly, it jeopardises the self-responsibilised subject's capacity to invest in herself. The following quote from *Be Fierce* articulates this tension in a stark way: "When I speak to women who've also been sexually harassed […] I often see myself in them. I am most struck by what powerhouses they were in their careers until

they got sidelined by some random jerk" (Carlson 2017a:42). Workplace sexism thus challenges the meritocratic ideology through which neoliberalism asserts its legitimacy (Littler 2017).

This is one of the main ways in which the expressions of neoliberal feminism I analyse differ from the ones Rottenberg tackles. While discourses around the felicitous work-life balance effectively resist the integration of women into generic human capital, the fight against misogyny and sexual violence in the workplace aims to facilitate this conversion. More than the violence itself, the issue of institutional sexism is the unnecessary harm it does to "good" neoliberal subjects that prevents them from reaching their full (productive) potential. My analysis doesn't disprove Rottenberg's conceptualisation of neoliberal feminism, but rather shows how quickly permutations of neoliberal feminism develop and dominate feminist issues.

The entanglement of sexual violence with the 'casting couch' is the second issue neoliberal feminism attempts to resolve. The suggestion that some women build their successful career by exchanging sexual favours threatens meritocratic ideals at the core of neoliberalism and destabilises the new gender norm promoted by neoliberal feminism. Most importantly, the 'casting couch' trope compromises *celebrity* advocates' legitimacy by implying a complicity with the very industrial powers they denounce. This is why the neoliberal ethos of hard work and self-care is so crucial for *celebrity* victims to become *celebrity* advocates, and why it features so heavily throughout Carlson and Kelly's confessional texts. Indeed, as I have shown in Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims, gendered hierarchies of fame produce a postfeminist grammar of victimhood that requires the transition from victim to survivor in order to (re)secure their achieved celebrity status.

While the 'casting couch' might seem to be an issue specific to *celebrity* advocates, the *SVU* episode and the film *Bombshell* make a compelling case for how this concern applies to all upwardly mobile women. "The Newsroom" includes a montage of victims of Coyle that features not only prospective anchors, but also production assistants and management staff. The film reproduces this scene by showcasing a dynamic sequence of women talking to one another. The rhythm of the montage accelerates as they name their attackers, and the sequence culminates with a concert of names over shots of New York City buildings.

Through camerawork and editing, the film shows the scope of sexual harassment across the industry and beyond. This scene from *Bombshell* echoes a similar scene in the *SVU* episode "The Newsroom", which itself resonates with the ways in which the stories of the women interviewed by Carlson merge into one throughout *Be Fierce*. It also evokes the power of word to mouth in organising resistance. This image of an "underground army" powered by "fearless soldiers" is ripped from the pages of *Settle for More* (2016:306-309). It is this convergence of heroism and neoliberalism that I want to turn my attention to before concluding this section for it is central to understand how neoliberal feminism resolves, albeit temporarily, the issue of the 'casting couch'. It also explains the extent to which neoliberal feminism depends on celebrity advocacy.

A celebrity feminist superhero

While all the texts from this corpus are deeply invested in a grammar of heroism, Kelly best exemplifies the ways in which the convergence of postfeminist and neoliberal feminism deters their critiques. Unlike Carlson, Kelly refuses to embrace victimhood or feminism as a brand, yet she still has become a well-known celebrity advocate against sexual harassment. This paradoxical ascension to celebrity advocacy is not a coincidence, but rather an effect of how neoliberal feminism operates. Her rejection of victimisation, and her insistence on being appreciated solely for her professional success casts her as the neoliberal feminist subject *par excellence*. This is most salient in the film *Bombshell*, the script of which relies heavily on *Settle for More*. The fictional Kelly vehemently "refuse[s] to be the fucking poster girl for sexual harassment" (2017) because she would be remembered only for being victimised and not for her achievements as an anchor-woman. In other words, incorporating a feminist or *celebrity* victim identity into her public persona would jeopardise the neoliberal ethos of hard work she, as the achieved celebrity, embodies thereof.

Even though she disavows the feminist label, she still has become "an improbable feminist icon" through her public feud with Trump (Fox 2016 cited in Rottenberg 2018:155). Her pivotal role in the lawsuit against Ailes further consolidated this new persona. As Rottenberg points out, Kelly has been consecrated into a celebrity feminist icon not only because she publicly challenged powerful men on their sexism, but because her stance

resonates with other neoliberal feminists like Sheryl Sandberg or Anne-Marie Slaughter (2018:155-156). She addresses the double standard famous women are subjected to, and confronts the issue of workplace sexual harassment without compromising the neoliberal project of the self which this strand of feminism is so invested in. This powerful illustration of the convergence of postfeminist and neoliberal feminist rhetoric is what makes her brand of neoliberal feminism so appealing.

In addition, her refusal to be a spokesperson paradoxically authenticates her heroic feminist brand. She doesn't identify as a celebrity advocate and her memoir doesn't provide practical insights into how to fight sexual harassment. Moreover, she admits her ignorance on that topic. She writes for instance, "I wish I could tell you I now have the solution that would prevent this from happening at another company. But I don't have it all figured out" (Kelly 2016:311). As I have shown earlier, affective displays of humility or vulnerability are authenticating strategies for celebrity advocates. It allows Kelly to negotiate her celebrity status through a performance of ordinariness, thus making her brand of neoliberal feminism appealing to a wide range of readers.

This is further reinforced through her embodiment of heroism centred around the familiar trope of rising through adversity by speaking up for oneself. In fact, Kelly explains in her memoir that she came forward because that was the only way she could remain true to herself. The language of ethics and activism is co-opted by neoliberal rhetoric as speaking out is reframed as an investment in herself and in the future. Indeed, in *Settle for More* and *Bombshell*, the sight of her daughter is what triggers Kelly to denounce Ailes to the Fox News owner:

> My child, who will take this world by storm. My girl, who I pray will not have to make the same choices I did. My daughter, who deserved to have her mother stand up and say, *This man will not do this to another woman at Fox News. Ever.* I picked up the phone and called Lachlan Murdoch. (Kelly 2016:308, emphasis original).

This quote synthetizes in a compelling way the neoliberal feminist futurity discussed earlier in this chapter. What is at stake in Kelly's feminist solidarity is her daughter's capacity to become a neoliberal subject. In addition, her prayer represents an investment in a postfeminist future.

This analysis shows the ways in which neoliberal feminism needs celebrity feminists to further entrench itself, and sexual violence is a very productive issue to achieve this. Famous women are in a good position to take on the sexist structures that undermine the neoliberal order, without compromising its fundamental tenets. While responsibilised and entrepreneurial individualities are reified, the co-optation of feminist and social justice vocabulary, as Rottenberg argues, makes a critique of neoliberalism difficult to sustain. Previous scholarship has emphasised how neoliberal feminism emerged from postfeminist media cultures (Rottenberg 2018; Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg 2019). My analysis demonstrates that looking at the entanglements between celebrity advocacy and neoliberal feminism reveals the postfeminist future envisioned within this reacquaintance with feminism.

Carceral feminists: Olivia Benson and Mariska Hargitay

Olivia Benson's brand of feminism fleshes out this postfeminist horizon that neoliberal feminism only alludes to. Throughout the series, Benson has consistently espoused carceral feminism which presents the policing, prosecution, and imprisonment of perpetrators as the solution to end sexual violence. According to this strand of feminism, sexual violence is an issue that can be rationalised and managed through punitive state-sponsored institutions, such as the police and the prison industrial complex. It implies that, with the appropriate resources and policies, feminist mobilisation against sexual violence will be obsolete as perpetrators are arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned. The *SVU* episode that best captures this carceral postfeminist futurity is "Making a Rapist", which I already discussed in the introduction as a fictionalised account of the true crime series *Making a Murderer* (Netflix 2015-). Here, I return to the premise of the episode – the issue of the rape-kit backlog – to explore the complex entanglements of carceral feminism and celebrity advocacy.

At the core of the episode is an untested rape-kit, which is the forensic evidence collected by medical professionals following an assault. The story told is one of a tragic consequence of a miscarriage of justice that Benson attributes to the rape-kit backlog, which refers to the hundreds of thousands of untested rape-kits kept in US police departments and crime lab storage facilities. Indeed, the episode's denouement suggests

that Sean Roberts would not have been wrongfully convicted for a rape he did not commit, had this DNA evidence been available 16 years ago. He would not be suffering with PTSD from the physical and sexual abuse inflicted by fellow inmates, and as a result, he would not have raped and murdered another woman a few days after being exonerated. Through this neat causal chain, the episode thus presents the end of the rape-kit backlog as a key feminist priority to both solve and prevent sexual violence.

This position is further developed by Mariska Hargitay in the documentary *I Am Evidence*, where the actor explicitly frames the rape-kit backlog as a carceral feminist issue, arguing that DNA evidence can be used to corroborate a survivor's story, identify a known suspect or a serial offender, and exonerate an innocent person. Forensic evidence is thus repurposed as a feminist strategy to respond to, as well as prevent, sexual violence by facilitating the incarceration of rapists. Rape-kit testing also becomes a feminist tool to challenge the systematic disbelief rape victims' accounts are often met with, or what Hargitay called "an epidemic of unbelief" in her Best Documentary Emmy Award acceptance speech for *I Am Evidence* (2019). The virus metaphor effectively casts sexual violence and disbelief as manageable issues that can be eradicated with the appropriate knowledge and technologies. The reliance on forensic evidence as a way to ascertain the truth reifies the legal framework which relies on externally verifiable facts (Serisier 2015).

According to Kristin Bumiller (2008), this expansion of criminal and medical approaches to sexual violence, and their convergence with feminism is symptomatic of the ways in which the neoliberal state has co-opted anti-rape feminist activism. She argues that the professionalization of rape and domestic violence intervention and prevention has led to an understanding of sexual violence as "a chronic yet treatable problem" (2008:13). *SVU* espouses this vision with most episodes ending with the successful prosecution of the perpetrators. This cathartic denouement does not only fit within industrial norms of prime-time television. It also signifies an understanding of sexual violence as an issue that can only be addressed through the expertise of those working in the police and legal professions. This position is also salient in *I Am Evidence* as well as the Joyful Heart Foundation's campaign *End the Backlog*. Whilst both texts highlight the shortcomings of the medico-legal institutions involved in the prosecution of rape, they call for their reform rather than abolition. For instance, they attribute the backlog to a lack of laws and policies

for consistently testing rape-kits, as well as a lack of resources, including funding, training, and outdated or unclear lab protocols. According to this logic, a more efficient management of rape-kit testing would be a significant improvement to the criminal justice system's response to sexual violence.

The rationalization of sexual violence through its criminalization and medicalization is the central tenet of carceral feminism that emerges from "Making A Rapist" and Hargitay's campaign to end the rape-kit backlog. It acknowledges the scale of the issue but shifts the focus from structural inequality to individuals. Bumiller shows how this understanding of violence makes victimhood inextricable from the domains of criminal justice and medicine. This logic of violence produces a binary conception of victims and perpetrators organized into two mutually exclusive categories: "those who can be medicalized, controlled, and reformed and those who must be removed beyond the territory of a civilized society" (Bumiller 2008:14). Carceral feminism thus upholds the same biological determinism of the 'bad apple' trope I analysed in Chapter 4: *Celebrity* Perpetrators and Chapter 5: Celebrity *Perpetrators*, which attributes sexual violence to the actions of perverted individuals rather than to power dynamics (see also Cuklanz and Moorti 2017).

Indeed, even if the series evokes the role of institutions such as prisons in reproducing violence, it ultimately reifies this individualist narrative. Roberts' admission of guilt at the trial illustrates this feminist carceral logic. He pleads: "Things happened to me in prison… things I swore I'd never do to anyone else… I ended up doing to Ashley. I didn't want to do it. It just happened." The fatalism inherent to his explanation could lend itself to a critique of carceral feminism on the grounds that violence inevitably produces violence. However, this critique is immediately neutralized in the following scene where Benson comforts the woman whose testimony led to Roberts' first conviction, by repeating that she is not responsible for the rape and murder of Ashley. This stance is further consolidated as detective Tutuola rejoices that a "bad guy went down" and A.D.A. Barba who reiterates his faith in the justice system despite difficult cases. Indeed, the series does not only assert Roberts' responsibility but also make a case against the rehabilitation of sex offenders into society by depicting this as a project doomed to fail. This episode is representative of how the series accommodates critiques of the carceral

state, but ultimately disavows them through an essentialist take on the root causes of violence, attributing them to aggressive genes and/or poor life choices.

Carceral feminism thus constitutes the flip side of neoliberal feminism analysed in the previous section and is best captured by the following quote from Ericka, a survivor interviewed in *I Am Evidence*, and reproduced in the trailer and other marketing material: "I am evidence that regardless of what happens to you, you can get through it. You can move past it. You can grow. You can change for the better. I am evidence that there is more to that box, there is a human being there. It is not just a kit. This is a person." (2017). By re-centring individual experiences, it seems to push against the rational approach to sexual violence characteristic of carceral feminism. However, this quote shows how the self as a site of struggle is as crucial to carceral feminism as it is to neoliberal feminism. The medico-legal system depends on a wounded 'I' to administer justice. This traumatised self is also the premise to the neoliberal impetus of transforming oneself from victim to survivor.

Carceral and neoliberal feminism thus operate through the same neoliberal governmentality: self-care and responsible choices cast survivors as aspirational neoliberal subjects, whereas lack of self-control and harmful choices justify the exclusion of perpetrators from society. In addition, both understand sexual violence in economic terms: while neoliberal feminism's concerns with workplace sexual harassment is the threat it poses to upwardly mobile women and achieved celebrities, sexual violence is, for carceral feminism, a public health crisis that endangers the economy by harming its workforce. Neoliberal and carceral feminism address gender inequality without challenging the capitalist order. Finally, a neoliberal rationale underpins the solutions put forward by these two strands of feminism. Neoliberal feminists such as Carlson repurpose the ethical and legal discourse of rights into a neoliberal governmentality, advocating for legal actions as a way to achieve individual empowerment and happiness. This stance often goes hand in hand with carceral politics that legitimise the exclusionary and exploitative politics of the prison industrial complex that strip prisoners of basic rights.

These entanglements of neoliberalism, feminism and carceral politics shed new light on the economy of visibility discussed in the introduction. Neoliberal feminists' claim to the

right to being a fulfilled upwardly mobile career person (Carlson 2017:77) is the visible counterpoint of a process of civic rights destitution and socioeconomic marginalisation that remains insidious and unspectacular for the most part[28]. As a result, sexual violence is a productive issue to activate a postfeminist future, one marked by the triumph of generic human capital that is either praised through neoliberal feminist memoirs or made invisible, as is the case for the unpaid labour undertaken by inmates (Cf. Feldman 2019). Carceral and neoliberal feminism are thus two facets of the same neoliberal governmentality. In the last section, I return to Mariska Hargitay's celebrity advocacy work to show the extent to which celebrity feminism, neoliberal feminism, and carceral feminism are mutually constitutive.

Benson's celefiction feminism

Mariska Hargitay's fame is inextricably linked with the character she has been portraying on *SVU* for more than 20 years. In celebrity news, Olivia Benson is always invoked to discuss the actor's personal and professional life, as demonstrated by a qualitative analysis of news articles focusing on Hargitay's advocacy work conducted by Leandra Hernandez (2018). In a reversal of the original model of stardom, real-life reflects fiction. Hernandez' textual analysis shows how Hargitay's advocacy is influenced by the cases Benson deals with on-screen, and the two thus become interchangeable in media discourse (2018). This trend only intensified in more recent articles which I analysed as part of this thesis. For instance, a 2019 *New York Times* article marking *SVU*'s 20th season describes Hargitay as a "crusading star" who "[grills] perps in gloomy interrogation rooms" (Kaplan 2019). Benson's detective skills and dedication to fight sexual violence are transferred onto Hargitay. Through this use of metonymy, the fictional character does not only stand in for the actor but also legitimises Hargitay's advocacy work.

Conversely, Hargitay's activism sanctions Benson's celebrity status. As a *Rolling Stone* article discussing Benson as the quintessential representation of the good cop puts it, "the fact that in real life, Hargitay has used her platform to advocate for eliminating rape-kit

[28] This is not to say that popular culture is not interested in incarceration, but rather that the loss of civic rights isn't spectacular until it is dramatized and aestheticized through celebrity culture and entertainment (see for instance Harmes, Harmes and Harmes 2020).

backlog only adds to the character's bona fides" (Dickson 2020). This quote uses Hargitay's off-screen activism to authenticate the fictional character's legitimacy as a cultural reference. Hargitay herself cultivates the porosity between her and her character's fame in interviews, often using the pronoun 'I' in ambiguous ways. A striking example of this occurred during an interview with Seth Meyers where Hargitay explained Benson's love for Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the following way: "As I become lieutenant, and started thinking about who do I look up to? Who do I – who is Olivia Benson's inspiration?" (Late Night with Seth Meyers 2019). In this quote, the first-person pronoun introduces a slippery relationship between Benson's inspirations and Hargitay's own celebrity attachments.

However, rather than conflating Hargitay's and Benson's celebrity, I attend to the complex operations of star formation, identifying resonances and divergences between the actor and the fictional character. As Edgar Morin writes, "the transferences from actor onto character, and from character onto actor, signify neither total confusion, nor actual duality" (1957: 38, my translation). In other words, neither Hargitay nor Benson subsume the other since both are instrumental in the construction of Hargitay's star image and Benson's status as pop culture icon. This conceptualization of stardom echoes Dyer's seminal theory of stardom (1980; 1986) as a structured image constructed through a range of media texts. This framework locates the discursive construction of fame within a network of texts, which in turn provides insights into celebrity feminism embodied by Hargitay and Benson. Through this discursive web, the star image emerges as polysemous and at times contradictory "as some meanings and affects are foregrounded, and others are masked or displaced" (Dyer 1980:3). Consequently, I retain the distinction between actor and fictional character for it is in the interstices of their respective celebrification that we can locate the articulation between neoliberal and carceral feminisms.

Benson through celebrity counterpublics

Analysing Benson through the concept of 'celefiction' (which I theorized in Chapter 1) is useful in order to grasp her celebrity status and the related fan attachments. Widely recognized as a "pop culture icon", she is praised for her empathy and professionalism despite the demands of her quest for justice on behalf of survivors of sexual violence

(Kaplan 2019). These qualities are emphasised in the *SVU* fandom for whom Benson is a celebrity role model distinct from Hargitay. For instance, in an essay entitled "Olivia Benson Believes Me" (Clark and Pino 2016:206-209)[29], an anonymous writer shares how watching *SVU* helped them come to terms with their own experiences of sexual violence. They describe how Benson's expertise allowed them to name the crime perpetrated against them, how they found her acknowledgement of fictional victims' trauma validating, and how her dedication inspired them to become a victim witness intern at the district attorney's office. For them, "Olivia Benson is much more than a TV character – she's a support system and role model. I can count on her." (Anonymous H, Clark and Pino 2016:209). This example shows the pedagogical role of *SVU* and its capacity to raise awareness through its treatment of sexual violence, positing Benson and her SVU colleagues as key references on this issue. As Stacey Hust et al. demonstrated through their survey of 313 college students (2015), exposure to *Law & Order* can help *SVU* audiences challenge rape myths and engage in prevention behaviours such as sexual consent negotiation and bystander intervention. Most importantly for my argument, the anonymous essay illustrates how affinities with fictional characters produce opportunities for feminist identification.

This corpus of fan-authored critical commentaries of the series constitutes what Samita Nandy, Kiera Obbard and I (2020; 2021) have termed 'celebrity counterpublics', which refers to the reappropriation of celebrity narratives by fans to counter dominant regimes of fame, often for political purposes. Celebrity counterpublics are not necessarily representative of the whole fandom since they are produced and consumed through the same mass media outlets that produce celebrity culture. They nonetheless are interesting texts to analyse the intersection of the production and consumption of fame. Celebrity counterpublics are a useful standpoint to analyse celebrities whose fame is more elusive because it depends mostly on fictional texts (Marshall 2020) and conflicted understandings of feminism (Kannen 2020; Marshall 2020; Patrick 2020). Reading counterpublics alongside the media construction of Benson's celebrity image (Hernandez

[29] The essay was published in *We Believe You*, an edited collection of stories of campus anti-rape activists which I will discuss in the following chapter.

2018) and the textual analysis of the series (Moorti and Cuklanz 2017) enables a more thorough grasp of the tensions inherent to Benson's feminism.

Through a blend of personal narrative and critical take on fame, celebrity counterpublics exemplify for the *SVU* fandom the feminist readings researchers have theorised for other popular genres such as romance novels (Radway 1991) or true crime (Browder 2006). They also demonstrate the crucial function pop culture icons play in interpersonal relationships, whether it is by facilitating intimacy (Ralph 2015) or formulating shared values and a vision for the future (Mendick et al. 2018). An interview with *SVU* fans (Volpe 2018) captures both the therapeutic dimension of celebrity attachments to Benson and its capacity to generate solidarities and envision a feminist future. An *SVU* fan and moderator of the fan Twitter account @SVU_Diehards reveals how the series has provided an outlet for sexual assault survivors to disclose their assault to her. Whether it is to emphasise escapism through fiction or *SVU* as a "silent witness" to personal struggles (Volpe 2018), these fan publications emphasise the role Benson played in their healing in the hope that others can find the same comfort.

In their study of digital feminist activism, Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller (2018) show how sharing and reading personal accounts of sexual assault online constitutes a form of mediated feminist consciousness raising. Celebrity counterpublics deploy similar practices as they engage with fictional and RFH sexual assault narratives to share their own. In the process, they cast Benson as a feminist celebrity role model. Not only can fan storytelling provide an important counterpoint to dominant regimes of fame, they are also key to further authenticating celebrities. It would be interesting for future research to explore whether the affective resonances between stories aggregated in the *SVU* fandom become a political resource generative of solidarities and collective organising in the same way that #MeToo and other digital campaigns have (Mendes et al. 2018). While an in-depth analysis of celebrity counterpublics as mediated feminist consciousness raising within the *SVU* fandom is beyond the scope of this project, these publications by *SVU* fans show the importance of considering celefictions like Benson to understand feminist iterations in popular culture.

Neoliberal carceral feminism

Analysing celebrity counterpublics narratives show how Benson's subjectivity is articulated around a specific blend of neoliberal and carceral values. This is most salient in "True Believers" (S13E06), which the anonymous writer identifies as the *SVU* episode which triggered their feminist awakening. In it, Benson comforts a victim after a challenging trial culminating in a non-guilty verdict in the following way: "Sending him to prison isn't gonna heal you. Healing begins when someone bears witness. I saw you. I believe you" (Anonymous H, Clark and Pino 2016:209). This quote is frequently cited in the *SVU* fandom as exemplary of Benson's feminism as it becomes a rallying cry for victims to stand for one another. For instance, in "5 Things Detective Benson Taught Me" (Beaven 2016), the above quote is used as a reminder that victims are not alone in their experiences of sexual assault and that they can find solace within the *SVU* fandom and beyond. Benson's quote seemingly disavows feminist politics centred around the incarceration of sex offenders and favours instead feminist solidarities built through an ethics of witnessing.

Benson embodies this form of feminist politics centred around speech and listening and she consistently demonstrates empathy and care towards rape claimants throughout the episodes. However, as I have argued in previous chapters, a feminist politics revolving solely around victimisation is inherently limited. Benson frequently expresses feminist literacy on issues of sexual violence, but this seems to be more fuelled by her experience of being a child of rape than by a cogent critique of structural inequality. While she often points to the flaws in the justice system, she never questions its relevance nor extends this critical framework to police work. As Moorti and Cuklanz (2006; 2017) show in their detailed analysis of Benson's personality traits and appearance, Benson is a product of postfeminist media cultures: while she voices feminist positioning through the dialogues, she takes for granted feminist gains in her workplace and beyond. The series thus articulates a commutable definition of feminism, one that at times reiterates anti-feminist sentiments or racist rape myths even as it seems to disavow them. Moorti and Cuklanz (2017) also show how feminist characters within the series are depicted as antagonising, their one-sided views and opportunistic activism contrasting with Benson's self-

reflexivity and nuanced opinions. Benson thus embodies a soft feminism, one that is passionate yet not contentious since it revolves around individuals' wellbeing and changing the "culture", an ill-defined notion that isn't always synonymous with structural inequality, as I will discuss in my analysis of the campaign *It's On Us* in the next chapter.

Benson's feminism relies on a neoliberal ethos similar to the one promoted by Carlson and Kelly. It is particularly visible through the narratives produced by Benson's celebrity counterpublics. Trauma is the main lexical field within these publications. They emphasise the importance of believing survivors and healing rather than addressing the root cause of violence. For instance, in "5 Things Detective Benson Taught Me" (2016), Beaven lists the following feminist life lessons: "1. Remember that you are not alone"; "2. Fight for what you believe in"; "3. Choose survival"; "4. Don't let bad experiences make you jaded" and "5. There are still good guys". The blog post reifies the neoliberal narrative arc of victim to survivor, which I analysed earlier in detail, mirroring the privatised solutions to sexual assault espoused by Benson. These include pressing charges against the perpetrator as part of healing process, self-defence classes, and psychotherapy (Moorti and Cuklanz 2017). This post also amplifies Benson's anxieties that violence might be in part encoded in genes, something that repeatedly comes up through the series as she ponders whether she could have inherited her biological father's violent predisposition. It normalises an idiosyncratic explanation of sexual assault that relies on the biologically deterministic belief that 'bad men' perpetrate violence. Through an emphasis on healing, Benson's brand of feminism upholds an understanding of sexual assault as something that can be managed through the medical and criminal apparatus.

A pop feminist hero

This particular articulation of neoliberal and carceral feminist politics is also productive of heroic narratives. If exceptional and perverted individuals are responsible for sexual violence, then the responsibility to stop them falls on heroes. This fatalist hero / villain duality is embedded within the *SVU* storyline blueprint, but it is literally embodied through Benson. Competent, brave, resourceful, yet haunted by her mother's trauma and her longing for motherhood, she personifies the female gentleman detective (Schaub 2013 quoted in Moorti and Cuklanz 2017). She is labelled a "role model" (Anonymous H, Clark

and Pino 2016), a “champion” (Volpe 2018), a “powerhouse” and a “hero” (Beaven 2016). Even her personal style contributes to her heroic characterisation. Her monochromatic outfits have remained consistent over the 22 seasons despite a few changes over the years, trading for instance her signature leather bomber jacket for a suit jacket when she gets promoted in Season 16. This visual aesthetic consolidates her fame and meets the superhero outfit criteria: it is practical yet stylish and makes her easily recognisable and newsworthy (Cf. Buff 2018).

Benson’s personality traits and appearances are key to understand the complex feminist entanglements at play within her brand of heroism. As Linda Mizejewski (2005) argues, the savvy balance between functional and chic fashion codes women investigators as postfeminist heroines in a masculine genre. The fitted jacket, snug tank tops, and smart trousers allow Benson to meet the physical requirements of police work whilst setting her apart from her male colleagues. These items of clothing signify her successful integration in a masculine profession, while feeding into a narrative of gendered exceptionalism. Indeed, for most of the series, Benson is depicted as a singular feminist hero who doesn’t partake in sustained friendship or solidarity with other women (Cuklanz and Moorti 2006). She seems content with male camaraderie and remains distant from her female colleagues eschewing opportunities for mentorship or friendship (Cuklanz and Moorti 2017). While she goes above and beyond to support victims who come to the precinct, these relationships are short-lived and limited to an episode each. This visual encoding of Benson’s heroism obfuscates the feminist legacies which made it possible for her and other women to join the police. If the outfits are noteworthy for their practicality, they also revive the obsession of the crime genre with female bodies.

Unlike other police procedural dramas, *SVU* resists for the most part turning assaulted female bodies into a visual spectacle, but it still manifests an investment in Benson’s body as site of tension through which the narrative unfolds (Magestro 2015; Moorti and Cuklanz 2017). Changes in her outfits delineate precinct work from undercover missions or her private life. As a fan-authored line-up of Benson’s most fashionable moments (Buff 2018) reveals, undercover work and dates are coded through low cut clothing. More skin exposure denotes an increased peril. How Benson’s body is staged is thus a shorthand to indicate her vulnerability throughout the series. In 22 seasons, Benson is cast as a victim

of sexual violence on multiple occasions. In addition to being obsessed with her mother's unresolved rape case (S01E11), she is stalked (S01E08), sexually assaulted (S09E15), kidnapped, held hostage, and nearly raped on two separate occasions (S14E24; S15E01; S15E20). While she is never raped, these instances raise an important question about Benson's brand of heroism. As Magestro writes in her analysis of Benson as victim, "what chance any other potential sexual assault or rape victim would have when even Olivia Benson, with all her training and resources, with the forewarnings and awareness of the threat, is still vulnerable to sexual assault" (2015: 128). I read Benson's vulnerability as intrinsic to her heroic feminism: it calls for carceral politics because sexual violence is understood as inevitable, and it relies on neoliberal self-help discourses to overcome trauma.

The tension between heroism and vulnerability is key to understand Benson's articulation of celebrity feminism. She is an ordinary hero whose fragility is relatable. As a main character, she does what few other fictional victims can do: she gets to move on with her life and thereby transcend her status as victim. The series explores in depth the aftermaths of the above-mentioned assaults (S10E01; S15E03; S15E10). She refuses at first the label victim and dismissed the possibility that she is suffering from PTSD. She eventually starts psychotherapy and testifies at her assailant's trial in Season 15. This gives a new impetus to her advocacy as she urges victims to come to terms with their trauma by seeking therapeutic support and pressing charges. Beyond the demands of the police procedural drama, the trial episode is interesting because it forces Benson to testify as a victim. Her victimhood becomes public record, thereupon substantiating what the series has repeatedly argued through its fictional and RFH stories: victimhood is a public matter whereas justice and recovery are spectacles.

Benson embodies an augmented version of the neoliberal mantra "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger". Her brand of heroism is rooted not in surviving trauma, but rather in blossoming through it. Becoming a hero becomes the endpoint of the victim to survivor journey. In one of her most quoted statements, she explains: "people who have gone through unfair, horrific experiences […] have this will, and when they get support, a chance, they can not only survive, they can thrive." (S15E02; see also Beaven 2018). She invites victims to not dwell in the past and look towards the future. Just like Carlson and

Kelly, Benson's celebrity feminism entails a postfeminist futurity that does not necessarily require a fundamental shift in power structures. Unlike Carlson and Kelly, it does not revolve solely around neoliberal feminist politics and its idealised generic capital, but rather deploys a conjunction of neoliberal and carceral feminism to maintain the status quo. It posits sexual violence within a self-regulatory binary that does not require further feminist intervention for every villainous perpetrator will find their rightful adversary in a victim turned survivor turned hero.

Hargitay's celebrity feminism

Benson's unique brand of heroic feminism extends to Hargitay as their star persona merges on- and off-screen. As I argued earlier, this is something that Hargitay actively cultivates through various media outlets amenable to the celebrity confessional (Redmond 2008). These carefully crafted moments of exposure are key in negotiating the ordinary / extraordinary tension at the core of the branding of fame. In press or talk show interviews, Hargitay purposefully dresses, makes references, or uses grammatical structures that introduce an ambiguity between her on- and off-screen persona. Her Twitter and Instagram accounts[30] display the usual behind the scenes posts, but it is also permeated by news from her foundation as well as uplifting messages and resources aimed at survivors of sexual violence. As some commentators have noted, "scrolling through Hargitay's online presence is like taking a trip into an alternate universe powered by Olivia Benson" (Green and Dawn 2009:139). These similarities are not a coincidence, but rather a deliberate strategy through which Hargitay promotes the series and her charity work, whilst consolidating her heroic feminist brand.

Hargitay needs Benson to authenticate her celebrity feminism because she has not publicly shared personal experiences of sexual violence. As my analysis of Carlson and Kelly has shown, celebrity feminism depends on claims to victimhood. Indeed, the proximity to trauma is a key feature of identity construction in contemporary testimonial culture (Ahmed and Stacey 2001). Celebrity confessional texts such as memoirs and other genres of life-writing are key outlets for the discursive construction of celebrity feminism

[30] Twitter: @Mariska; Instagram: @therealmariskahargitay.

(Taylor 2016; Murray 2018; Yelin 2020) for they lend themselves easily to narratives that replace political subjects by traumatised subjects (Berlant 2001). Benson's story of victimisation and its genesis in the crime genre thus constitutes a productive alternative in the absence of a celebrity testimony of sexual assault. *SVU*'s tagline "These are their stories" contributes to this spectacle of trauma, uniting the fictional detectives and viewers through the collective act of bearing witness to the crimes committed, which is further extended through RFH episodes. Benson's heroic vulnerability is thus a powerful substitute to construct Hargitay's feminist brand in a way that doesn't disrupt the dominant discursive construction of celebrity sexual assault victims as spokespeople for feminism.

Hargitay and Benson's shared corporal identity is one of the main ways through which the actor capitalised on the character's experience of victimisation. Hargitay's social media accounts are curated in a way that build on Benson's heroic aesthetic. They feature many selfies in which Hargitay, wearing the detective's signature dark blazer or coat, looks straight at the camera with a serious expression, conveying strength and dedication to a cause. This is reinforced in the captions with the use of hashtags specific to Hargitay's charity such as #EndTheBacklog, and more general digital markers of activism like #MeToo, #SAAM[31], #ItsOnUS[32], and more recently #BLM, #WearAMask, and #VoteForChange. Through such staging, these posts mirror *SVU* promotional material where members of the SVU squad stand next to each other, presenting a united front of heroes ready to serve. Benson thus provides the iconography through which Hargitay anchors her activism in the real world.

Another way Hargitay authenticates her claim to victimhood by proxy is through social media showing her smiling alongside other celebrity feminists such as Ashley Judd, Roxane Gay, Trevor Noah, or Taylor Swift[33]. This proximity to celebrities who have

[31] SAAM stands for Sexual Assault Awareness Month, which has been taking place in April since 2001 in the US.

[32] *It's On Us* is a prevention campaign launched by the Obama administration in 2014 to tackle sexual assault on university and college campuses. I will analyse this campaign in more details in the following chapter.

[33] These celebrity feminists have already been well theorized: Ashley Judd (Majic 2021); Roxane Gay (Taylor 2017); Trevor Noah (Obbard 2021); Talyor Swift (Isaken and Eltantawy 2019; McNutt 2020).

publicly shared their experience of sexual assault or domestic violence authenticates Hargitay's feminism through what P. David Marshall calls a process of "celebrity brand transference" (2017). Affective connections to celebrities are transposed onto the ideas they endorse – such as feminism – thus generating further social and economic capital for them. For instance, an interview on Trevor Noah's *Daily Show* (2018) allowed Hargitay to promote her documentary *I am Evidence* and the connected Joyful Heart Foundation campaigns, whilst also benefitting from Noah's intersectional feminist image (Obbard 2021). Photo ops with feminist public intellectuals, like Roxane Gay, or members of the Times Up Foundation, like Ashley Judd, inscribe Hargitay's feminist brand in broader feminist scholarship and activist legacies. Through these aestheticized celebrity encounters, feminism becomes a lifestyle mediated by the consumption of television (Hargitay; Noah), music (Swift), literature (Gay) and non-fiction (Judd; Gay).

In these celebrity encounters, Hargitay often positions herself as a fan in order to ground her feminist brand in the mundane. For instance, she assumes a deferential attitude in the caption accompanying an Instagram selfie of Gay: "Oh yeah, that happened. #BeingBelieved #FanOfRoxane #FeminismGoals #BensonBFF" (@therealmariskahargitay 2019). By positioning herself as a fan of Gay humbled by their meeting, Hargitay breaks down the celebrity/fan hierarchy. In addition, she appeals to Benson to further root her feminist brand in the everyday. Indeed, the caption implies that it is Benson, not Hargitay, who is best friends with Gay. Because fans become acquainted with Benson through the mundane medium of television, she provides an accessible counterpoint to Hargitay's celebrity status. This performance of ordinariness upholds the individualist and meritocratic ideology on which celebrity culture is based, whilst appearing democratic (Dyer 1998). Navigating the (extra)ordinary tensions at play in celebrity culture is what allows Hargitay to give credibility to her surrogate claim to victimhood. By positioning herself as a fan and mentee of Gay's critical feminist insights and Benson's professionalism, Hargitay secures her status as an achieved *celebrity* advocate rather than an ascribed *celebrity* advocate, who would be known merely for her connections to *celebrity* victims.

Indeed, Hargitay's feminist persona, carefully crafted as heroic yet mundane, complicates the claims that feminism becomes devoid of politics as it becomes a brand (Gill 2016;

Murray 2017). Her celebrity feminism is rooted in the work undertaken by her fictional character and her charity. For instance, a *New York Times* profiles commemorating the *SVU*'s 20th season introduces Hargitay in the following terms:

> What started as a job for Hargitay has become her life's work. Since taking on Benson in 1999, Hargitay, 55, has also spent much of her life offscreen working for victims of sexual assault. She trained to become a rape crisis counsellor, and in 2004 she founded the Joyful Heart Foundation, a non-profit that helps survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse. (Kaplan 2019)

This excerpt depicts Hargitay as a dedicated and hard worker who, like Benson, is skilled at what she does. Once more, the fictional character authenticates the actors' status as an achieved *celebrity* advocate. This constructs Hargitay as an authority figure in tackling sexual violence or, in *SVU* showrunner Dick Wolf's words, a prophetic aura as "the mother of the #MeToo movement" (Kaplan 2019). Analysing Hargitay's persona in conjunction with the celefiction Benson is thus crucial to grasp their influence on popular understandings of sexual violence.

The Joyful Heart Foundation

Mariska Hargitay's advocacy revolves around carceral politics as much as neoliberal feminist politics, and thus constitutes a privileged standpoint to look into the articulation of these two strands of feminism and their mediation through celebrity feminism. The Joyful Heart Foundation website and social media accounts[34] are organized around two axis – education and advocacy – that reflect the organization's mission. All four social media accounts present a similar blend of neoliberal and carceral feminism: they juxtapose survivor testimonies with *SVU* cast interviews, PTSD self-care tips with reports of arrests and convictions, mindfulness retreats with sexual assault statistics. The contents and interactions taking place on each platform are shaped by their digital architecture (Mendes et al. 2018) and a more detailed content analysis of each platform is warranted although it is beyond the scope of this project. Nonetheless, the Joyful Heart Foundation's online presence illustrates the seamless shift from the feminist tenet "the personal is

[34] Website: joyfulheartfoundation.org; Twitter: @TheJHF; Facebook: @joyfulheart; Instagram: @thejhf.

political" to a postfeminist iteration "the political is reduced to the personal" (Loney-Howes 2019:32).

This shift is reflected in the education program, which aims to raise awareness on sexual violence, domestic violence, and child abuse. It relies on the politics of 'speaking out' discussed in Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims whereby speaking out will end sexual violence. According to the website, "if we talked about sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse more […] it's likely that more survivors would come forward and that we, collectively, would meet them with the support and resources to help them heal more fully" (joyfulheartfoundation.org). Silence around these issues, rather than patriarchy, is understood as the root cause of sexual violence. Whilst this quote emphasises the importance of collective responses to sexual violence, it nonetheless reifies a neoliberal narrative of resilience through the focus on healing. This is not to say that survivors should be left dealing with the consequences of these crimes on their own, but rather that community-based response to such violence should also include sustained responsibilisation of its members by interrogating their complicity with structures of power that enable such violence to be committed in the first place.

The advocacy program of the Joyful Heart Foundation also espouses similar politics centred around individuals. It pushes for policy changes at the state and federal level to improve the criminal justice system's response to sexual violence. The rape-kit backlog is the main focus of the Joyful Heart Foundations' advocacy work, which encompasses the production and promotion of the documentary *I Am Evidence*, the *End the Backlog* campaign and the *Shelved* PSA campaign. While communication materials emphasise the fact that bringing cases to justice is not the only path towards healing and it remains the survivors' choice, the foundation's advocacy program, much like its education program, revolves around an implicit understanding of responses to sexual violence as prevention. The assumption is that policies that facilitate the incarceration of sexual offenders are effective prevention strategies to protect the safety of survivors and communities. Here again, responsibility and reparation are understood in individualistic terms that rationalize responses to sexual violence in medical and criminal terms.

The rape-kit backlog, as it is mobilised through the Joyful Heart Foundation's education and advocacy programs, renders visible the key tension around which Hargitay's activism operates. Namely, that the worst thing that could happen to a rape victim is to have their story forgotten because of institutional failures to record it in legal and medical terms. The sexual assault testimonies, verbal and embodied, are at the nexus of neoliberal and carceral feminist logics. According to this logic, celebrity advocacy thus entails becoming an agent of celebrification by helping rape victims enter the public sphere, through various channels including the documentary *I Am Evidence*, Hargitay's and the Joyful Heart Foundation's social media accounts and website, sexual violence prevention campaigns, policy reports, etc. This shows the reach of the celebrity confessional beyond the realm of the entertainment industry, and beyond established celebrities (Cf. Appendix 3).

Conclusion

This chapter explores how sexual violence and feminism becomes spectacular. It addresses the resonances and nuances between three popular feminist sensibilities, namely postfeminism, carceral feminism, and neoliberal feminism. Celebrity advocacy tackling sexual violence is ideal to interrogate how neoliberalism deters critiques of the patriarchy, but also how neoliberalism relies on feminism. My analysis of Gretchen Carlson's and Megyn Kelly's celebrity confessional are the archetype of neoliberal feminist discourses. They draw attention to ongoing gender inequality in the workplace yet present individualised solutions to structural inequality. Their testimony is also helpful to understand how neoliberal feminism attempts to resolve the sexist premise of female stardom analysed in Chapter 2: *Celebrity* Victims. The suggestion that some women build their successful career by exchanging sexual favours threatens meritocratic ideals at the core of neoliberalism and celebrity culture. Unpacking the entanglements between celebrity advocacy and neoliberal feminism reveals the postfeminist future envisioned within this reacquaintance with feminism.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyse carceral feminism as the flip side of neoliberal feminism. Olivia Benson's feminism is representative of how *SVU* accommodates critiques of the carceral state but disavows them through an essentialist understanding of violence. Sexual violence is thus constructed as an issue that needs to be managed through

the medical and criminal apparatus, and the heroic actions of advocates like Benson. Her heroic feminism calls for carceral politics because it understands sexual violence as inevitable, and it relies on neoliberal self-help discourses to overcome trauma. In the following chapter, I turn to activism to tackle campus assault to explore how celebrified activists negotiate the demands of the celebrity confessional.

CHAPTER 7: CELEBRITY *ADVOCATES*

Celebrity culture and social movements

The previous chapter explored the convergence of neoliberalism and feminism through *celebrity* advocacy tackling sexual violence. The figure of the (super)heroic survivor, of which is Benson considered a fully-fledged example, calls for a two-fold privatised response. First, self-help discourses obfuscate the need for structural change. Second, the prison industrial complex is presented as the only solution to the perceived inevitability of sexual assault. Celebrity *advocates*, i.e. activists who became famous because of their efforts to end sexual violence, further complicate this triangulation between feminism, neoliberalism, and celebrity culture. They occupy a liminal space in celebrity culture and, as such, constitute compelling case studies to interrogate the political affordances of celebrity storytelling. In what follows, I expand on the concept of 'celebrity counterpublics' (Moro, Obbard & Nandy 2020; 2021) and question the extent to which celebrity storytelling strategies could be redeployed for social change. In other words, this chapter will address the extent to which interventions of celebrified activists in the public sphere bear the potential to resist the spectacles of sexual violence.

Thinking celebrity storytelling as part of a social movement repertoire is useful to grasp the tensions between celebrity culture and activism. In current debates on new social movements, the term 'repertoire of contention' refers to sets of protest scripts and organising strategies that inform activists' actions and claim making (Tilly 2006). These are historically and culturally specific as they are shaped by political regimes and opportunities, as well as previous successful protests. Celebrity endorsement is an effective strategy to galvanise attention on sexual violence, as demonstrated by the reliance on celebrities in campaigns like *It's On Us*, *End the Backlog*, or *No More*. Demonstrations like the Amber Rose SlutWalk (Chidgey 2020) or the Women's March (Kennedy and Mendes 2018) points to the key role celebrity feminists play in contentious politics and the centrality of testimonial cultures at those events. Scholarship on celebrity activism has emphasised how brand culture co-opts social movements (Brockington 2009; Lam and Raphael 2017; Farrell 2019) because it raises important political and ethical

questions. Without losing sight of these important theoretical concerns, I turn to celebrity *advocates* to interrogate the political potentials that may be located at the intersection of activism, storytelling, and celebrity culture.

The convergence of grassroots activism and capitalist celebrity culture legitimates the need to conceptualise social movements beyond political action and protest events (Snow 2004; Taylor and Staggenborg 2005). As theorists of new social movements have pointed out, the paradigm of contentious politics does not capture the "cultural and discursive tactics" (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004:267-268), of which speaking out against sexual violence is a prime example. Lifestyle feminism cannot fully capture these tactics either, which is characterised by a savvy media consumption geared towards feminist content, such as *SVU*, without an active involvement in feminist organisations (Haenfler, Johnson, Jones 2012:13; see also hooks 2000). Therefore, what is needed here is an analysis that moves beyond an understanding of celebrity feminism and grassroots feminism as mutually exclusive categories, where the former is dismissed in favour of the latter (Hamad and Taylor 2015) and interrogate instead how "celebrity and activist culture *condition each other*" (Chidgey 2020:4, emphasis original).

The campaign *It's on Us*, which can be traced back to Benson and Hargitay through Joe Biden's celebrity persona, is a good case study to problematize the refashioning of celebrity narratives into activism (Cf. Appendix 3). It deploys similar features as the one I discussed earlier in my analysis of Benson-Hargitay's advocacy. However, it pushes against dominant iterations of neoliberal feminism, which make use of neoliberal state apparatus through legal and police procedural genre in *SVU* and the policy-driven celebrity campaigns such as *End the Backlog*. Instead, *It's On Us* is an example of the neoliberal state that uses the movement against sexual violence to further a neoliberal agenda (Bumiller 2008). *It's On Us* thus provides a compelling example of lifestyle movement (Haenfler, Johnson, Jones 2012), which shares with grassroots movements a dedication to social change yet plays out mostly in the private sphere.

I then turn to personal accounts of activists who have gained visibility for their mobilisation against rape culture on US campuses, like Annie E. Clark, Andrea L. Pino, and Emma Sulkowicz. I show that their contributions are perfect examples of celebrity

counterpublics. Their advocacy is profoundly influenced by celebrity advocacy, including *It's On Us*, and informed by popular culture references such as *SVU*. Through public performances, interviews, and publications, they draw on the affective register of the celebrity confessional and emulate the sexual assault testimonial genre. However, they are more effective in resisting the demands of the celebrity confessional, specifically a (super)heroic take on survivorhood. They thus offer interesting insights into the emergence of affective solidarities in the interstices of feminist activism and an ever-expanding celebritisation of the public sphere.

Feminist lifestyle movement: *It's On Us*

It's On Us is a national campaign aimed at preventing sexual assault on US campuses. It was launched by the Obama administration in September 2014 and consists of a series of public service announcements (PSAs) inviting university and college communities to take a pledge to end sexual violence on their campuses. The first two official PSAs series, featuring Obama, Biden, and more than 30 celebrities from the entertainment industry, were swiftly followed by PSAs produced by students and local campus associations. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, celebrities frequently support charities tackling social issues (Cf. Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser 2012; Raphael and Lam 2017; Farrell 2019). However, what is striking in the case of *It's On Us* is that it troubles the logics of celebrity charity work. Most non-profit organisations enrol celebrities to get more donations, social media engagement, or petition signatures, all of which legitimate their bid to policymaking institutions. In this model of celebrity do-gooding, calls for action to resolve social issues stem from civil society, for which celebrities are spokespeople, and are aimed at the government. The Joyful Heart Foundation's *End the Backlog* campaign is an archetype of this model of celebrity advocacy. It was launched in 2010 to raise funds and support the work of grassroots organisers and community leaders to address the rape-kit backlog and to push for legislations and policy reforms at the municipal, state, and federal levels, with Hargitay standing in as a human megaphone.

In contrast, *It's On Us* is a US government initiative following the release of a report from the White House Task Force to Prevent Sexual Assault (2014). The program was designed in partnership with Civic Action, a non-profit organisation that raises awareness on key

issues related to gender equality, access to education and discrimination, and civic engagement. In their programs, celebrities are used to disseminate and promote the findings of government-sponsored research projects through PSAs and social media campaigns. *It's On Us* thus blurs and reshuffles the relationship between civil society, including celebrity *advocates*, and the US government as it promotes the latter's agenda. This reversal of celebrity advocacy is symptomatic of neoliberalism's encroachments into US society and hollowing out of liberal democracy. As Wendy Brown (2015:26-27) argues, the Obama administration did not only subsume liberal democratic values to economic growth, but also successfully branded itself as progressive whilst obfuscating the ways in which it turned social justice into a commodity. Brown's analysis shows how the state borrows management techniques and discourses from business. I further develop this thesis, arguing that *It's On Us* presents a compelling articulation of entrepreneurial governmentality and progressive policies, setting the tone for *celebrity* feminism for years to come, culminating in #TimesUp. I discuss first the extent to which *It's On Us* is indebted to feminist and campus grassroots organising, and then demonstrate how it allows the state to shift responsibility onto individuals whilst seemingly addressing structural inequality, thus constituting a compelling example of lifestyle movement.

Feminist legacies

The original 2014 PSA series draws on bystander intervention programmes and defines sexual violence as a societal problem rather than an individual pathology. This rape prevention model relies on educating and providing witnesses with the skills to intervene in sexual assault situations. In this respect, it significantly differs from other rape prevention programs which understand sexual violence as an individual issue and put the onus on women to protect themselves from sexual violence (Projansky 2001). In contrast, *It's On Us* espouses a feminist understanding of sexual assault, which its mission statement defined as "not only a crime committed by a perpetrator against a victim, but a societal problem in which all of us have a role to play" (*It's On Us Organising Guide* 2015). This dual stance on micro- and macro-politics is reflected in the PSAs, which call attention to the role bystanders play in preventing sexual violence and supporting survivors in the aftermath of an assault. In line with bystander intervention, it approaches

people as allies rather than potential victims or perpetrators. It emphasises actions that seeks to transform passive bystanders into active witnesses. This is evident through the lexicon of intervention used: 'stop', 'get in the way', 'stand up', 'step in', 'take responsibility'. It thus challenges an essentialist understanding of sexual violence. In an attempt to showcase an intersectional practice, research and best practice reports available on the website further highlight the importance of developing materials attuned to different socio-cultural contexts.

In many ways, the campaign echoes feminist theorisation that attributes sexual violence to a 'rape culture', which refers to the cultural normalisation of sexual violence (Phillips 2017; Gay 2018). The White House Task Force on Protecting Students from Sexual Assault emphasises the ubiquity of sexual assault on campuses (2014) and presents bystander intervention as a prevention strategy that draws attention to society as a whole, recognising that institutions and attitudes enable sexual violence and protect perpetrators. For instance, one of the suggested pledges – "It's on us to create an environment where everyone feels, and is, safe" (*It's On Us Organising Guide* 2015) – resonates with the feminist understanding of rape culture as one which fosters environments where sexual violence is accepted if not encouraged (Phillips 2017; Gay 2018). The feminist activist legacy is equally visible through the language used in the campaign organizing tools which defines *It's On Us* as a "cultural movement" and a "rallying cry" in the "fight against sexual assault" (2018).

The campaign pledge is another way in which *It's On Us* draws inspiration from feminist activism. The slogan "It's On Us" can also be read as an attempt to compound the feminist motto "the personal is political". It calls for a collective response to this issue, as shown by the repetitive utterance of the pronoun 'us' to emphasise the shared responsibility to end sexual assault. The official PSAs revolve around the same format: a dynamic montage of celebrities delivering the same core message, looking straight at the camera, speaking with a tone intense and urgent. Despite the unique characteristics of their star texts, the celebrities' idiosyncrasies are subsumed, albeit temporarily, to the unifying message of the campaign. This is conveyed visually through the t-shirt with the campaign's logo worn by the *celebrity* advocates. College and university *It's On Us* chapters reproduce this visual aesthetic in their own campaign videos recorded on *It's On Us* YouTube channel

in a playlist entitled “PSAs From Around the Web”. While the students often swap the *It’s On Us* branded t-shirt for their campus sweatshirt, what emerges through this corpus of PSAs is a distinct feminist repertoire of contention inspired by the *celebrity* advocates.

For instance, *It’s On Us* events organised by student associations constitute a more festive version of Take Back The Night marches, a classic mode of feminist organising on campuses (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005; Whittier 2018), which is effectively represented in popular culture, including several *SVU* episodes. In addition, the heavy reliance of *It’s On Us* on social media can be traced to other instances of feminist digital activism addressing sexual violence (Mendes et al. 2018, Loney-Howes et al. 2021). Specifically, the confessional style of the *It’s On Us* PSA series and social media campaigns is reminiscent of campaigns like 2011 *Project Unbreakable* (Ferreday 2017a) or 2012 *Who Needs Feminism?* (Mendes et al. 2018), which mobilise affect through selfies or photographs posted on Tumblr, Instagram, YouTube, and websites. As Mendes et al. argue, the highly stylised signs, which contributors hold in front of them, relate their experience of sexual violence in a visceral manner (2018:45). *It’s On Us* constitutes a response to these “pain memes” (Dobson 2015) by using an equally emotive visual language and the same social media platforms where these trauma narratives can be found. Additional media content found on itsonus.org includes videos and photographs of events organised on university campuses, where students are seen holding handcrafted signs relying on the same visual conventions used by *Who Needs Feminism?*, which is not incidental since the campaign was launched at Duke University and quickly spread to other campuses (Seidman 2019). *It’s On Us* needs to be contextualised within feminist digital activism, which itself draws on a long tradition of feminist craftivism as a way to convey the affective register of personal testimonies (Mendes et al. 2018:45).

Social marketing

While *It’s On Us* relies on a digital feminist repertoire of contention, it is also informed by what Jo Littler calls “social marketing” (2008). She defines this as the expansion of business marketing techniques to the voluntary sector to implement communication strategies and expand their outreach. *It’s On Us* explicitly embraces this mode of advocacy as evidenced by the recognisable campaign logo and visual aesthetics. The

creation of a campaign brand is justified in the following terms: "We need a clear understanding of the intent of the campaign and clear guidelines on how we communicate the IT'S ON US brand […] to ensure clear, consistent messaging over time and across partners" (*It's On Us Organising Guide* 2015). The organising guide contains detailed instructions regarding the language and tone used in the campaign, the ways in which the campaign should be advertised on social media, and the form campus events should take. The guide also includes custom badges and posters to be downloaded, typographic requirements for font and a list of things to avoid when using their logo. These regulations are further justified in the guide in the following terms: "IT'S ON US is being created as a modular consumer brand that can adapt and serve as a vessel for self-expression. As such, there are guidelines for how, where and when to use the brandmark". This juxtaposition of marketing and activism indicates the commodification of social justice theorised by Brown with regards to the Obama administration.

Indeed, the main goal of the campaign is to get individuals to take a pledge as a way to instigate social change. Through its emphasis on the power of individuals to enact social change, *It's On Us* perpetuates a narrative of power ownership. Rather than understanding power as a cultural and structural arrangement that privileges and oppresses people in different ways, power becomes something that people acquire. As a result, the structural power relations that produce sexual violence are obfuscated. Racism, classism, and colonialism are never addressed in the campaign material. Sexism is only hinted at in the "White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault" report (2014), even though *It's On Us* is specifically aimed at men to enlist them as allies. The Task Force urges "men's groups, Greek organizations, coaches, alumni associations, school officials and other leaders to use the PSA to start campus conversations about sexual assault" (2014). However, this targeted audience is not mentioned on the campaign's website nor in the organising guide. The repetition of the ungendered pronouns 'us' and 'you' further conceals an analysis of sexual violence in light of sexism and heteronormativity.

Consent culture

The tension between a collective and individual identity throughout the campaign is symptomatic of the privatisation of activism. The collective 'us' refers more to the sum

of individuals taking responsibility for their own actions rather than an interconnected community bound together by the complex operations of power. The campaign's underlying belief in the power of individuals to enact social change is even more pronounced in the following PSA released in September 2015. Entitled "One Thing", it focuses on consent to define sexual assault in a clear and simple way. In this PSA series, celebrities explain that sex without consent is rape, and that consent can't be granted through a monetary transaction or coercion, but instead has to be freely given. In doing so, the campaign takes a sidestep from the bystander intervention approach developed in its first year and reorients the campus sexual assault discussion back to individual choices. The catch phrase "if you don't get it, you don't get it" is repeated throughout the series of PSAs. It implies that consent needs to be understood in order to be obtained. The double meaning of the verb 'to get' here gestures towards key values within neoliberal governmentality: self-mastery and making free, deliberate, and educated choices for which one bears full responsibility. The wordplay also conflates understanding consent with acquiring consent. This ambiguous transactional subtext requires an analysis that situates consent within broader neoliberal discourses.

The centrality of consent in the second year of *It's On Us* reflects changing understandings of sexual violence. It follows the historical change of the definition of 'rape' by the US Department of Justice, from "the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will" to "the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (2012). Even though there is no uniform legal definition of sexual violence across states, this change at the federal level is an important benchmark for policy and lawmakers. It also shapes discourses about sexual violence in the US and abroad. The *It's On Us* "One Thing" PSA was quickly followed by rape prevention campaigns centred around the notion of consent, like the viral video 'Tea and Consent' produced by the UK Thames Valley police in 2015. In it, initiating sex is compared to making tea to insist on the simplicity of consent. The video has since been used by many universities as part of their sexual violence prevention toolkit (Bennett 2016). In addition to its clarity, a definition of sexual violence revolving around the notion of consent also allows to

encompass a whole range of experiences of sexual violence, beyond heterosexual penetrative sex.

However, as Pamela Haag argues, the antinomy of consent and coercion is the "presuppositional opposition by which rights and sexual personality are governed in American culture" (1999: xiii). It is rooted in US liberal legacies and casts consent (and lack thereof) in contractual terms. Sexuality is expressed as ownership and right to privacy over one's own body, and sexual assault as a violation of it. Geneviève Fraisse suggests that if freedom is conflated with consent through this discursive construction, then equality is understood as mutual consent, which is central to the modern social contract (2007). Because individual freedom shapes understanding of equality, consent (and lack thereof) become a private issue and eludes the question of power. In these terms, the issue with rape culture is not structural and interlocking inequalities rather it is about a conception of personhood that precludes an understanding of sexual assault as an expression of power in the Foucauldian sense. Indeed, in the "One Thing" PSA, celebrities address their audience through a mirror. Here, the looking glass can be interpreted as a metaphor of reflexivity. The self becomes an object of self-monitoring and self-policing as sexual consent becomes another way through which the neoliberal self invests in its wellbeing.

The focus of bystanders in the first *It's On Us* PSA series also needs to be re-contextualised within an expanding system of surveillance and control. In his study of anti-bullying texts, Doug Meyer coined the term 'gentle neoliberalism' to describe 'discourse that presents itself as addressing a social problem […] in a purportedly humane way, while simultaneously encouraging more surveillance" (2016:358). Meyer argues that, in the context of bullying prevention, encouraging bystanders to report and intervene reinforces the scope of control of surveillance regime rather than challenging systems of inequality. The campaign *It's On Us* employs a similar rhetoric of intervention to the one analysed by Meyer, with expressions like 'be on the lookout', 'step in', 'stand up', etc. all of which invite an increase in the monitoring and policing of individual behaviours. This is not to say that individual intervention and acts of solidarity are problematic. However, it is crucial to contextualise these acts of solidarity within a broader framework of

surveillance. *It's On Us* shows how neoliberalism has redefined modes of activism and how, conversely, political endeavours negotiate a neoliberal paradigm.

As Tanya Serisier shows in her analysis of consent humour, educational videos like 'Tea and Consent' or 'One Thing' are aimed at an ignorant subject who is singled out, and in the case of the former, ridiculed for still not understanding consent (2021). The ideological function of the insistence on consent's conceptual and practical simplicity is to uphold class hierarchies which pits a sophisticated middle-class subject who possesses the cultural capital with regard to sex against an ignorant other who needs to be responsibilised (Serisier 2021). The imagined audience of *It's On Us* is the one targeted by Hargitay/Benson's carceral feminism. Building on Bumiller's work (2008), Serisier argues that consent humour relies on the discursive construction of sexually deviant others that need to be policed. As a result, the deriding of those who don't understand sexual consent justifies the carceral solutions to sexual violence. Consent humour shifts the focus away from normative heterosexuality and precludes an intersectional feminist analysis. This uninformed subject is also the counterpoint to the responsibilised white upper middle-class feminist subject embodied by *celebrity* advocates like Carlson or Kelly, who offer consent education on university campuses as a solution to sexual violence.

Lifestyle feminism and redemptive masculinity

The high level of scrutiny aimed at sexual assault on campus is not coincidental. The postfeminist futurity, envisioned by Kelly and Carlson, depends on higher education institutions to produce ideal neoliberal workers. Reflecting on the changes in higher education during the Obama administration, Brown explains that these seemingly supported an equal opportunity agenda but were actually applying business models to produce "human capital" more efficiently (Brown 2015). Analysed through this lens, the main goal of *It's On Us* is to prevent unnecessary harm to the future workforce. As Obama stated in his allocution at the Grammy's Award Ceremony, "It's on us to create a culture where violence isn't tolerated, where survivors are supported, and where *all our young people, men and women, can go as far as their talents and their dreams will take them*" (2015, emphasis added). Sexual assault represents a threat to the meritocratic American Dream, which explains why campus sexual assault has been such an invested issue in US

mainstream media and popular culture. Over 15 *SVU* episodes are dedicated to the issue of sexual violence on campus and a significant number of celebrified victims and advocates that are analysed in this thesis rose to fame through their campus activism.

As many feminist scholars have theorised, campus sexual assault has provided the fertile ground to grapple with new concepts such as 'date rape' or 'acquaintance rape' (Bevacqua 2000; Phillips 2017), but the backlash to these changing understandings of sexual violence have been equally striking. For instance, Katie Roiphe's 1993 book *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism*, which contends that US campuses are plagued by "date rape hysteria" and argues for a shift of "victim feminism" to one of empowerment whereby women took responsibility for their own sexual agency, is often cited as an exemplary case study in feminist theorisation of postfeminist media culture (see for instance Projansky 2001; Genz and Brabon 2018). *It's On Us* remediates the anti-feminist sentiment of postfeminist texts like Roiphe's by acknowledging the need for ongoing sexual assault prevention. The bystander and consent education approach challenges Roiphe's claim that an over-investment in sexual violence will produce victimised female subjects. However, they rely on the same rhetoric of individual empowerment and choice that underpins Roiphe's 'power feminism'.

Indeed, *It's On Us* is an example of lifestyle movement (Haenfler, Johnson & Jones 2012), which is distinct from social movements because they promote individual actions rather than collective actions to achieve social change. Political tactics are understood in private terms, they take place in the realm of the everyday and entail mostly identity work. In other words, social change will be implemented through personal life choices: being an active bystander and a consent-savvy one. In addition, lifestyle movements operate on a diffuse social structure, whereby the collective identity derives from an aggregation of individual choices rather than a concerted political effort. This is most salient in the campaign pledge which constitutes a political end in and of itself. Cultural codes and norms are the target of the campaign, rather than structural and institutional change. In other words, *It's On Us* exemplifies prefigurative politics - i.e., attempts to live one's political ideal on a small scale without necessarily leading to participation in protests or making demands on the state.

Cultural entrepreneurs are central to the emergence of lifestyle movements (Haenfler, Johnson & Jones 2012). Known for their charisma rather than leadership roles in social movement organisations, these cultural entrepreneurs are recognised as authority figures and spokespeople (Haenfler, Johnson & Jones 2012:11). *Celebrity* victims and *celebrity* advocates are uniquely positioned to take on this role because they already provide the ideological framework to promote lifestyle movements through the celebrity confessional. As Alexandra Budabin (2015) notes with regard to Mia Farrow's 'Genocide Olympics' campaign, celebrities are not only able to raise awareness on an issue, they also hold normative and prescriptive power. The confessional style of *It's On Us* facilitates a performance of authenticity at the core of the identity work required by lifestyle movements. This affective register is supplemented by the celefictional connection embedded in celebrities' public personae which mediates the integrity of these cultural entrepreneurs.

Celebrities featured in the *It's On Us* PSAs come from a wide range of sectors of the entertainment industry, including film and TV, music, and sports. Nearly half of these celebrities are actors whose fictional characters are not estranged from sexual assault storylines. For instance, Connie Britton and Minka Kelly are known for their roles in *Friday Night Lights* (2006-2011), a sports drama series that deals with the high school football culture in a small US town, and which was referred to in the media coverage of the real-life 2012 Steubenville gang rape involving high school football players (Clark Estes 2013; Hoffman 2014)[35]. Another example of *celebrity* advocates who draw on their start text to authenticate their cultural entrepreneur status are Kerry Washington and Darby Stanchfield from *Scandal* (2012-2018) whose characters are forced to reassess their admiration for a university professor who raped several of his students in a Bill Cosby RFH episode (S5E7)[36]. OIivia Munn's star image is a proxy to *Greek* (2007-2011) and

[35] *SVU* episode "Girl Dishonored" (S14E20) is a RFH of the Steubenville rape case. It is analysed in Chapter 3: Celebrity *Victims*. It is not analysed in the present chapter because Jane Doe and her fictional counterparts are portrayed only as rape victims, not anti-rape activists. The link is nonetheless identified in Figure 11 and in Appendix 3 in dashed bubbles and grey arrows to show the complex web of RFH at play in the corpus.

[36] *SVU* also has its own Bill Cosby RFH episode entitled "Star-Struck Victims" (S17E16). This episode is not analysed in the present thesis because Chapter 4 already deals with six *celebrity* perpetrators. The link is nonetheless identified in Figure 11 and in Appendix 3 in dashed bubbles and grey arrows to show the complex web of RFH at play in the corpus.

The Newsroom (2012-2014)[37], both of which point to the role of campus fraternities and sororities in promoting campus sexual assault, through a culture of toxic 'brotherhood' and parties renowned for their alcohol and drug use. These tropes and high-profile incidents provide the inspiration for *SVU* RFH episodes. These examples are not anecdotal. Rather, they show the intricate and tightly woven set of cultural references upon which the feminist lifestyle movement is built. These are illustrated in the figure below:

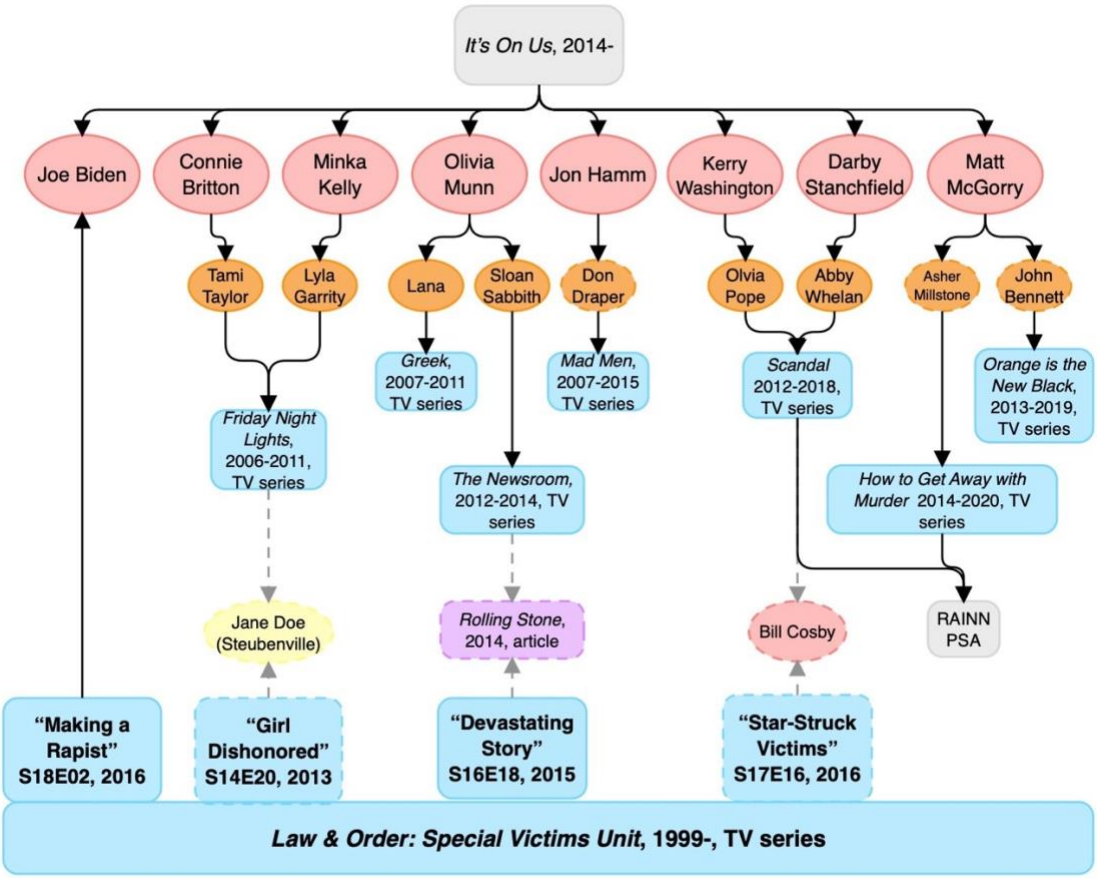


Figure 11: Celebrities participating in It's On US 2014 PSA and their celefictional & RFH connections

[37] *The Newsroom* episode "Oh Shenandoah" (S3E5) aired two weeks after the *Rolling Stone* article "A Rape on Campus" was published. It is not a RFH per se since the episode was written, filmed, and edited prior to the publication of the article. However, the two were discussed as such in the media (Cf. Poniewozik 2014). It is not analysed in the present chapter because the article was retracted after its editorial process was audited due to discrepancies in the story. This controversy discredits Jackie's testimony and activism. The link is nonetheless identified in Figure 11 and Appendix 3 in dashed bubbles and grey arrows to show the complex web of cultural references at play in the corpus.

This lifestyle feminism is riddled with tensions and contradictions. On the one hand, *It's On Us* shifts the focus from survivors to the perpetrators through a focus on bystander intervention, consent education, and the support from *celebrity* advocates who embody a redemptive masculinity. Jon Hamm's participation in the campaign is notable for the way it allows the actor to reconcile his on- and off- screen persona. His endorsement of *It's On Us* balances out the despicable actions of his *Mad Men* (2007-2015) character, Don Draper, a womaniser who frequently abuses his position of power in sexual encounters. Similarly, Matt McGorry's involvement with *It's On Us* and RAINN[38] PSAs enhances his self-professed feminism (Sola 2015). It also provides a political counterpoint to the characters he portrays in *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019) and *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-2020). In the former, McGorry portrays John Bennett, a prison guard in an ambiguous relationship with an inmate, and in the latter, he plays Asher Millstone, a law student complicit with a gang rape. The intertextual personae of Hamm and McGorry effectively trouble an understanding of consent as individual agency by shedding light on the conditions of enunciation. These three storylines illustrate the importance of contextualising sexual encounters in power dynamics. However, these crucial nuances are lost in the *It's On Us* PSA and its reliance on individual choices forecloses such readings.

To conclude this section, *It's On Us* is a good case study to demonstrate the concurrent politicisation of entertainment and spectacularisation of politics. In the context of the US, campus sexual assault has been framed both by the reformulation of political activism in economic terms and by the responsiveness of advocates to social marketing strategies. On the one hand, the proclaimed heritage of bystander intervention challenges neoliberal understanding of sexual violence that focuses on individual victims and perpetrators. On the other hand, the emphasis on brand and image increases the campaign outreach by

[38] The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) is the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the US. It regularly produces PSAs in partnership with celebrities like Mariska Hargitay. In 2015, it collaborated with the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) to produce a PSA featuring cast members of *Scandal* and *How To Get Away with Murder* to promote their services to sexual assault survivors. This PSA followed the broadcast of episode S2E7 of *How To Get Away with Murder* and episode S5E7 of *Scandal*, each of which revolved around a rape storyline.

formulating its value in economic terms. I have demonstrated throughout this section that the campaign relies on as much as it challenges the neoliberal conception of the self.

This tension is a feature of lifestyle movements, which exist alongside, within and outside social movements. Lifestyle feminism can be a gateway to grassroots organising with celebrity fans producing their own *It's On Us* video and campus event. Conversely, as cycles of protests fluctuate with shifting political opportunities, lifestyle movements play a crucial role in sustaining mobilisation for social change over time. By virtue of being a government initiative, *It's On Us* certainly gave legitimacy and publicity to the fight against sexual violence. My aim is thus not to dismiss lifestyle movements but instead to interrogate their convergence with and divergences from social movements. This critical paradigm is what is at stake in celebrity counterpublics, which I explore in the following section. I look at how cultural entrepreneurs like *celebrity* advocates inform celebrity *advocates'* collective organising, delving into the tensions that arise when leaders of social movement organisations are consecrated into lifestyle icons.

Celebrity counterpublics: *Carry That Weight* and *We Believe You*

The mix of lifestyle and protest politics can be found in *We Believe You: Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out* (2016), a collection of testimonies written by 36 campus sexual assault survivors and activists, edited by Annie Clark and Andrea Pino, two activists known for their leadership in student grassroots organising against campus sexual assault. The bulk of the book explores the link between healing and everyday practice of resistance and activism. The editors define "everyday activism" as "the radical notion that everyone can play a part in ending violence and oppression by resisting rape culture, supporting survivors, and challenging our institutions" (Clark and Pino 2016:155). Believing survivors, for instance, is an act of everyday resistance against the dominant regime of disbelief survivors are met with (Clark and Pino 2016:155). Social change occurs on a small scale, in the private realm of beliefs, values, and personal ethics. As Clark and Pino write, "thanks to the everyday conversations we were having, we were already activists" (2016:159). It is reminiscent of the identity work as a site of social change promoted by *It's On Us*, as well as the feminist strategy of breaking the silence, with the key nuance of making claims for institutional change.

The influence of *It's On Us* in these students' activism is made explicit by some contributors, like Lauren (Clark and Pino 2016:164-167), who retells how she organised a Blue Lights walk on campus to identify and plan the location of brightly illuminated telephones connected to emergency services. At the event, they showed the *It's On Us* PSA, which led to the students producing their own video and later collaborating with the administration to produce the university's official *It's On Us* PSA. This is a good example of student-led grassroots organising that uses celebrity advocacy to support their initiative and gain traction with the university. It also makes visible the kind of safety labour that women undertake daily to prevent sexual violence (Vera-Gray 2018). The Blue Lights walk is an example of a tactical repertoire belonging to grassroots activism, inspired by rallies like Take Back the Night, with yet a stronger emphasis on individual everyday practices and strategies to stay safe. This safety work spans beyond the episodic sexual violence awareness event, and thus brings additional nuances to conceptualisations of lifestyle feminism.

The celebrity counterpublic confessional

Indeed, Lauren and the other contributors of *We Believe You* give a detailed account of the intensive affective labour anti-sexual assault activism entails, and draw on the celebrity confessional techniques to do so. Their stories involve a degree of publicity: in addition to the edited collection, some of them are interviewed in the documentary *The Hunting Ground* (Kirby and Ziering 2015) and profiled in prominent newspapers like the *New York Times* (Pérez-Peña 2013) and magazines like *Vogue* (Johnson 2014) while others shared their stories in scholarly publications (Willingham 2017), student newspapers (Wilder 2015), and feminist blogs (Rodriguez 2015). These pieces operate on three main axes that characterise the celebrity confessional according to Redmond (2008). They use an affective register to convey their intimate experiences, they are self-reflexive with regards to their experiences and their roles as spokespeople, and they critique the dominant regimes of fame and the silence and doubt personal accounts of sexual assault are often met with. Because of this affective and self-reflective mode of storytelling characteristic of the celebrity confessional, lifestyle feminist narratives feature prominently in this corpus.

The celebrity confessional, and its corresponding neoliberal victim-to-survivor trajectory, is a particularly fruitful mode of storytelling to manage the transition from attributed to achieved celebrity. As in the case of *celebrity* advocates, this involves articulating an identity that revolves around a functional, if not fully fledged, survivor self. The book's subtitle *Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out* demonstrates the activist genealogy of the term 'survivor' as well as its inextricability from the 'speaking out' genre. As Mendes, Ringrose and Keller (2018) show in their discussion of feminist digital campaign organisers, this type of personal narrative inspires acts of solidarity as survivors build networks around their shared experiences. The chorus of activist voices, which transpires through *We Believe You*'s structure and *The Hunting Ground*'s editing, also highlights the "highly affective, invisible, precarious, and time-consuming labour [of feminist campaigns organising]" (2018:73). Making this labour visible legitimates their fame as activists refashion their survivor identity into one that upholds their advocacy work. Consequently, these accounts present a unique blend of grassroots and lifestyle feminism, which is crucial for the activists to authenticate their achieved celebrity status.

While the activists draw on the codes of the celebrity confessional to substantiate their fame, they also resist it in significant ways through innovative articulation of lifestyle and grassroots feminism. This shows how anti-sexual assault campus activists use different feminist repertoires to reconcile different discursive constructions of social change, which are at times contradictory. As the authors of *We Believe You* contend, it is both gratifying and politically urgent to see their experiences represented in the media. However, misrepresentation by mainstream media can be equally damaging for the movement and add onto the traumatic experience of not being believed. In an anonymous contributor's own words "I think there's some disconnect between how rape survivors are painted in the media and [how] we feel" (Clark and Pino 2016:105). As a result, they develop various discursive strategies to resist dominant media representations. This entails resisting the 'ideal survivor' trope by sharing the stories of marginalised survivors who are too often dismissed by mainstream media. Resisting the spectacle of sexual violence involves refusing to contribute to the sensationalisation of sexual violence for some and sharing the harrowing details of the assault and trauma for others. It also means proposing alternatives to the carceral solutions popularised by *celebrity* advocates. In any case, the

activists try to reclaim the discursive space to share their experiences while attempting to shift the burden of rape prevention away from survivors. The challenge is to render the uniqueness of each survivor-activist story whilst highlighting their resonances. This implies a delicate balance between amplifying the idiosyncrasies of each voice whilst developing an ethics of collective listening and solidarity.

Resisting the 'ideal survivor' narrative

The authors of *We Believe You* grapple with their ambivalent relationship with news media. Media coverage is a key strategy to establish their legitimacy, obtain leverage for their claims, and recruit new members (Earl and Rohlinger 2017). The media shape the public agenda by framing the causes and solutions to political issues (Rohlinger and Vaccaro 2013). For instance, Mendes' (2011) analysis of news articles in the British and American press provides a detailed understanding of how mainstream media have shaped public understandings of feminism. Most importantly, her analysis shows that the embrace of feminist values spans across the political spectrum of the publications analysed, but so does the backlash against feminism. This attests to the far reach of postfeminist discourses. In *We Believe You,* the activists express their gratitude to the media that help shed light on the pervasiveness of campus sexual assault and their protests. At the same time, the media privileges the stories of white cisgender women attacked by strangers, thus perpetuating biased representations of sexual violence that fuel the backlash to their movement. The betrayal is even more acute when this backlash is published by progressive news outlets like the *New York Times* and left-leaning popular magazines like *Slate* or *Vogue*.

For instance, Princess Harmony Rodriguez, a trans survivor and activist, explains: "The media is the most useful weapon, with its power to share our stories with the world and threaten the university's brand. Unfortunately, the media also helps shape the problematic image of the 'ideal' survivor" (Clark and Pino 2016:139). She argues that as media coverage of the anti-sexual assault campus activism increased over the period of 2013-2016, the stories profiled were overwhelmingly those of white, cisgender, heterosexual, and financially privileged women who didn't know their assailant and were not intoxicated when the assault occurred (Clark and Pino 2016:138-139). Rodriguez'

remarks also apply to fictional representations of survivors and activists. Content analysis of crime TV series, including *SVU*, have shown that the survivors featured are predominantly white women (Parrott and Titcomb Parrott 2015) who are attacked by strangers (Britto et al. 2007). In addition, in these series victim blaming is frequent yet subtle (Rader and Rhineberg-Dunn 2010). Even in the post-#MeToo TV landscape, representations of survivors from marginalised communities are absent (Kornfield and Jones 2021).

The activists recount the various ways in which their stories were simplified or silenced. Clark (2016:302-303) explains how her bisexuality was erased from the profile which the *New York Times* (Pérez-Peña 2013) and *Vogue* (Johnson 2015) did on hers and Pino's activism. 40 years after Maria Schneider, bisexuality is still used to discredit survivors of sexual violence or erased altogether. In either case, the effect is that sexual assault is framed as an issue only because it poses a threat to the cis-heteropatriarchal order. The total silencing of trans survivors in mainstream media makes this even more salient. Rodriguez recounts how reporters refused to publish hers and other trans survivors' stories upon hearing about their trans identity (2015; Clark and Pino 2016). These are only two accounts among many, which shows the ways in which the media's framing of sexual assault sustains systems of oppression along the lines of gender and sexual identity, even in the progressive outlets.

Kamilah Willingham's open letter "Dear Emily Yoffe" (Clark and Pino 2016:310-320) further illuminates how the issue of sexual violence fuels postfeminist discourses along racial lines. She responds to a piece Emily Yoffe published in the left-leaning magazine *Slate* (2015b) in which Winston, the man who assaulted Willingham, is depicted as a promising black man whose future was ruined because of Willingham's accusations. Yoffe's argument echoes the ones put forward by the judge ruling in support of Brock Turner and Bryce Walker, which I discussed in Chapter 5: Celebrity *Perpetrators*. As Willingham persuasively argues, Yoffe uses the perpetrator's race to construct him as a 'true victim', publishing her piece at a time of heightened awareness of police brutality against black men with the rise of Black Lives Matter (Clark and Pino 2016:312-313). Yoffe draws on the trope of the 'angry black woman' (Harris-Perry 2011) to discredit Willingham by portraying her story as unreliable, if not opportunistic. Indeed, the

Sapphire archetype allows Yoffe, a white woman, to position herself as a calm and rational voice (Trudy 2013). This gives weight to her critique of the documentary *The Hunting Ground*, which she discredits for its bias against perpetrators. For Yoffe, the concern over campus sexual assault has been exaggerated and obscures 'real' rape by focusing on drunken ambiguous sexual encounters (2015a). Not only does this postfeminist discourse put the onus on women to carry safety labour, it also upholds the figure of the "true victim" which excludes black women.

The fact that Yoffe's rebuttal of the film is centred around Willingham's story is significant for it exemplifies 'misogynoir', which refers to the specific intersection of anti-black racism and sexism directed at black women (Bailey 2010; Trudy 2014; Bailey 2021). Portraying Willingham as an 'angry black woman' delegitimises her sexual assault testimony by insinuating that she is a self-serving activist. In addition, the insinuation that Winston and Willingham were romantically involved and that the assault was an "ambiguous sexual encounter" (Yoffe 2015) echoes misogynoir media representations that hypersexualise black women. Throughout the article, Yoffe compares the court transcripts with Willingham's testimony on *The Hunting Ground*, highlighting discrepancies to argue that Willingham is a manipulative liar and thus embodies a dangerous form of womanhood. While Yoffe accuses the filmmakers Dick and Ziering of putting "advocacy ahead of accuracy" (2015), the rest of the article implies that it is Willingham who does a disservice to the survivors interviewed in the film, most of whom are white, and to viewers more generally, by tainting their testimony with the suspicion of false allegations. This example shows how sexual assault is used to uphold racist discourses under a thin veil of progressive rhetoric.

In her response to Yoffe's article, Willingham shows how the 'ideal victim' trope is particularly damaging for black women because it dehumanises them. She offers an emotive testimony, providing a detailed account of the struggles she faced in the aftermath of the assault, the university hearing, and the trial, as well as the panic attacks triggered by the publication of Yoffe's piece. Willingham's trauma narrative effectively challenges misogynoir by centring her humanity. Whilst calling the journalist out on the problematic aspects of her article, Willingham remains nonetheless compassionate and calls the journalist in. She writes: "I don't hate you. I am angry with you, though. I think you're

capable of doing better. I think you're capable of not actively doing harm in the world" (Clark and Pino 2016:320). Willingham addresses Yoffe as a potential ally and her compassion helps to dispel the 'angry black woman' trope. Moreover, Willingham eloquently calls for an analysis of sexual violence that goes beyond the binary categories of oppressor / oppressed and villain / victim, and invites Yoffe, and by extension the readers, to take into account interlocking systems of power (Clark and Pino 2016: 311).

This understanding of intersectionality is further discussed by Pino to argue that "there is no single 'assault narrative' and it is dangerous to assume there is one" (Clark and Pino 2016:337). The aim of the book is thus to tell stories which are dismissed by mainstream media. She explains how they actively sought contributions from queer survivors and survivors of colour whose experiences have been side-lined in the conversation about sexual violence. *We Believe You* explores in detail the intersection between race, sexual orientation and migration (A. Zhou, Clark and Pino 2016:106-111), police brutality, white supremacy and Latin American culture (Pino, Clark and Pino 2016:130-132), systemic transmisogyny in the EMT, police, the university as well as the campus anti-rape movement (Rodriguez, Clark and Pino 2016:133-137), to name only a few examples. The authors write in a range of affective registers, including sorrow and anger, to convey the betrayal they felt from seeing the media and members of their own communities embrace the 'true survivor' trope.

These celebrity *advocates* contribute to the new-found visibility of women's anger in the public sphere (Boyce Kay 2019), specifically the rage against the ubiquity of sexual violence (Orgad and Gill 2019; Boyce Kay and Banet-Weiser 2019). Their frustration also records how white, cisgender, and heterosexual survivors are centred in mainstream feminist discourses, despite women of colour, queer and trans people leading the movements against sexual violence (Phipps 2020). To make their voices heard, they thus need to carefully navigate the ways in which they express their feelings of frustration, for anger has been regulated in a way that excludes activists from marginalised communities, including black women (Lorde 1981; Cooper 2018) and trans people (Stryker 1994). In *We Believe You*, anger coexists with compassion, as the authors call in those who have let them down. Rodriguez describes how she came to terms with the campus feminist support groups that excluded her and other trans survivors, acknowledging their contributions to

the movements as well as their flaws. Similarly, Willingham's letter to Yoffe concludes with a plea for her to revise her position, appealing to her humanity and intelligence. This empathic register makes their critiques of the feminist anti-rape movement more palatable. It also renders visible the mundane emotional labour that reporting an assault and activism entails.

Finding alternatives to carceral feminism

Finding alternatives to carceral feminism is a key element in the inception of *We Believe You*. In the United States, students who are victims of a crime have the choice to report it either to the police or to the university. Many choose to appeal to their school to avoid a criminal prosecution which can be traumatising. This is especially true for survivors from marginalised communities often targeted by the police, like survivors of colour and LGBT* survivors. For these reasons, Clark and Pino respectively decided to report their assault to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They met while they were grappling with their painful experiences of rape, and the poor response from the administrators. They, along with three other students, filed a Title IX and Clery Act complaint against the university in 2013. Title IX (1972) is a federal legislation that ensures the right to education free from gender-based discrimination at any institution or program receiving federal funding. The Clery Act (1990) is a federal statute that requires colleges and universities receiving federal funding to keep records of crime statistics occurring on and in the vicinity of their campuses. It also requires these institutions to record measures put in place to make their campuses safer, including protecting students from perpetrators. Clark and Pino's complaint successfully triggered an investigation by the US Department of Education forcing the university to revise its sexual assault policies to protect its federal funding. This strategy, originally suggested by Catherine MacKinnon in the 1970s (Johnson 2014; Whittier 2018), proved successful and Clark and Pino set an informal network of survivors filing similar complaints across the US higher education sector, which they formalised in 2013 when they co-founded End Rape on Campus (EROC), an advocacy group which supports campus sexual assault survivors finding therapeutic and legal assistance. They also advised the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault and worked with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand on the Campus

Accountability and Safety Act (2014), a bipartisan bill which would have prescribed reform to the sexual assault investigation and prosecution process on campuses had it been successfully voted into law[39].

The Title IX complaints as an alternative to criminal prosecution attests to the innovative ways anti-rape celebrity *advocates* use brand culture to further their own political agenda. Title IX doesn't address sexual violence specifically, but it has been used by activists such as Clark and Pino to bring attention to universities lacking transparency in their reporting policies and adjudication of cases of sexual harassment or violence. It is not a way for survivors to seek justice per se because survivors need to concede that their case is beyond criminal prosecution in order to resort to Title IX. However, class action against colleges and universities under Title IX builds an argument for discrimination through the institution's failure to deal with reports of sexual assault. It shifts the focus away from the individual perpetrators and instead targets institutional reporting mechanisms. The efficacy of the Title IX complaints lies in the serious threats they pose to the reputation of universities or colleges. Even if sexual violence occurs on every campus, no higher education institution wants to see their name tarnished by a sexual assault scandal. The list of nearly 200 colleges and universities under the Title IX investigations compiled by the editors of *We Believe You* (Clark and Pino 2016:26-30) shows the ubiquity of sexual violence across the education sector. The document is also a compelling indication of how university brands can be used as leverage for political and social change.

While Title IX is a civil rights law, the Clery Act is a consumer protection law that requires colleges and universities to be transparent with the way they compile and address crimes on their campuses. As a result, the logics of brand culture are already embedded within this law. This has the advantage of making it relatively straightforward in theory to demand accountability from the institutions and request policy changes. Students can use neoliberal rhetoric to argue for their rights as wronged consumers. However, as Ahmed (2021) argues, rewriting one's story of sexual violence in a way that is legible to institutions of higher education requires a highly affective and time-consuming labour. In

[39] The bill was first introduced in Congress in 2014. A revised version was presented by Senator Claire McCaskill in 2017. The bill was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, but failed to reach a floor vote either in the Congress or Senate.

addition, the commodification of academia provides incentives for universities and colleges to underreport these crimes. This is especially true when the involvement of lucrative stakeholders like university sport teams or fraternities offsets the risk of a Clery Act penalty. This was the case, for instance, in the cover-up by Michigan State University of Larry Nassar's assaults of hundreds of athletes and students, which eventually led to the highest fine to be given under the Clery Act (Bauer-Wolf 2019). The pitfalls of the commodification of higher education are explored in *The Hunting Ground* as well as numerous *SVU* episodes, including the RFH episode of the Larry Nassar case (S19E17) discussed in Chapter 5: Celebrity *Perpetrators*. The documentary and the episodes present a compelling representation of the ways in which the neoliberal university enables a rape culture.

Where *SVU* unequivocally pushes for a carceral solution, *The Hunting Ground* and the authors in *We Believe You* espouse a more nuanced approach. This is because the documentary and the collection of autobiographical essays make visible the work that drafting official complaints entails, especially when the object of that complaint is a traumatic event. They describe how isolated they felt trying to navigate the administrative meanders of their university sexual assault policy. They recall the various ways in which their complaints were stalled. This reveals what Ahmed (2021) calls the "institutional mechanics", which refers to the various bureaucratic procedures and policies that one needs to comply with for a complaint to enter the system. She argues that these institutional mechanics are nonperformative in that they make it look like the complaint is being addressed when the administrative procedures can not only halt progress of a complaint, but they also leave intact the structures of power that the complaints are about. In other words, the Title IX or Clery Act complaints shed light on the discrimination mechanism at play within the institution, without altering the ways in which these legal frameworks can be manipulated by the universities to serve their own interests. Furthermore, the format of official complaints requires them to be written about individual cases, thus obfuscating patterns of harassment and assault (Sulfaro and Gill 2019). Celebrity *advocates*' stories of how they came into confrontation with their institutions thus shows how anti-feminism is a structure of hearing whereby feminist critiques are automatically dismissed as soon as they are understood as complaints (Ahmed 2014;

2021). Conversely, they show how complaint is a form of feminist pedagogy (Ahmed 2014; 2021) that directly challenges the neoliberal university.

While the individual Title IX and Clery Act complaints are limited in their capacity to end sexual assault and harassment in academia (Sulfaro and Gill 2019), the complaints recorded in *We Believe You* and *The Hunting Ground* constitute an important account of sexual and gender-based violence on university campuses. As Ahmed argues, complaints generate tangible evidence that attest to a history of violence in a particular institutional setting (2014). As a result, the political values of the Title IX and Clery Act complaints lies in the story they tell about concerted activist efforts to address sexual violence, using a variety of tools and contentious repertoires. As Shayoni Mitra argues: "the liminality of the legal status of such [Title IX] cases points to something equally important – a collective commitment by survivors, activists, and students to the futurity of the educational experience, one that is predicated on physical safety and intellectual freedom in a college environment" (2015:391). Celebrity *advocates* thus model, in practice, an alternative to the postfeminist futurity of *celebrity* advocates, one that is predicated on an ethics of collective listening and solidarities.

Resisting the spectacle of sexual violence

Celebrity *advocates* use the codes of the celebrity confessional to show the intensity and range of the emotional labour that anti-sexual violence advocacy entails. Theirs are intimate accounts that use affective registers to convey the authenticity of their trauma. However, contrary to the heroic imagery at play in *SVU* and *Bombshell* for instance, the writers of *We Believe You* remind us that activism happens mostly behind closed doors. The authors adopt different narrative strategies to convey the unspectacular quality of their stories. Some authors reflect on how sexual violence is turned into a spectacle by the media. For instance, Anonymous V notes a fascination for "all the gory details" of assault stories, arguing that these mostly function to create a distance between the readers and the narrated trauma (Clark and Pino 2016:48). As a result, their refusal to share the details of the rape is a compelling response to the problematic representation of sexual violence. For others, like Brenda Tracy (Clark and Pino 2016:72-73; 258-271), telling the rape

down to its most harrowing details is an active resistance to the ways in which her story was quietly buried by the police and Oregon State University.

In her recent work on sexual harassment and assault in academia, Ahmed argues that the institution is what one comes up against in the process of making a complaint, either because the institution ignores the complaint or because it will not push for the structural changes needed to tackle sexism in academia. For Ahmed, "[this] frustration can be a feminist record" (2021:7). In other words, the way celebrity *advocates* communicate their experiences, whether through prudent or detailed narratives, says a lot about how their complaints were not heard nor dealt with. In this instance, affective registers constitute data on how other students and activists might navigate the administrative meanders of the Title IX and Clery Act complaints. However, these processes are not designed to remedy the power imbalance that is the root cause of gender-based violence (Sulfaro and Gill 2019). These testimonies are thus a form of feminist pedagogy (Ahmed 2020; 2021) that impart celebrity *advocates* with the institutional knowledge and tools to address sexual violence in academia. These personal accounts also document the shortcomings of policies like Title IX, whose goal is to create a safe learning and working environment for women and people of colour (Sulfaro and Gill 2019). As they express their frustration, celebrity *advocates* theorise two tenets of neoliberal survivorhood they come up against: safety labour and the 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger' trope.

While campus activists are committed to helping others with institutional complaints, they are very critical of the ways in which these processes of complaint put the onus on victims to produce evidence and to move it forward. As Anonymous XY puts it, "rape is the only crime where the victim is guilty until proven raped" (Clark and Pino 2016:183). She recalls how, following the university adjudication in her favour, she had to contact the Title IX coordinator multiple times to ensure the sanctions against her assailant were implemented. Similarly, campus activists staunchly contribute to and promote prevention campaigns like *It's On Us* and Blue Lights walks. They nonetheless raise concerns on how these anti-rape repertoires are aimed at survivors. They put the onus on women to ensure their own safety, whilst simultaneously obfuscating other interlocking systems of power. In Anonymous XY's own words, "campus advocacy is great but a lot of campus services are geared toward college-aged, hetero women, and it's victim-centric, as if the

victims are the ones who need to be changed […] How about telling men not to rape?" (Clark and Pino 2016:183-184). These critiques eloquently show how the 'ideal survivor' trope upholds spectacular forms of activism because they rely on a self-responsibilised neoliberal subject.

Because of the heavy personal cost of safety labour, some activists offer bystander approaches as a solution to share the burden of (self-)monitoring. For instance, *We Believe You* includes a transcription of the speech Lily Jay, a student activist, gave at the *It's On Us* White House launch to introduce the campaign. The speech emphasises allyship as a key force to foster social change. Jay argues for a form of allyship that is moved by an ethics of collective solidarity rather than vicarious trauma. In her own words: "Only non-survivors can ensure that when we look back, we can say that compassion, not trauma, changed the world" (Clark and Pino 2016:283). Jay formulates an understanding of feminist activism that does not only invest in mundanity but also challenges spectacular forms of victimhood. This demand on survivors to constantly perform their trauma – to be believed, to authenticate their activism, to make political demands – comes at a tremendous cost for them. She explains how liberating it was to hear from her peers that "you don't need to stay hurt to convince us to care" (Clark and Pino 2016:283). Resisting the spectacle of victimhood thus allows celebrity *advocates* to disentangle victimhood from activism and, as a result, to re-politicise bystander approaches to sexual assault.

This re-politicisation of sexual assault prevention campaigns can also means challenging the "becoming stronger in the face of adversity" narrative. Throughout We *Believe You,* celebrity *advocates* offer a compelling theorisation:

> We need to stop assuming that trauma builds character. Sometimes it does. But it also builds fear. It builds pain. It suffocates and it paralyzes. I didn't return from challenges as a stronger person. […] I know it makes other people feel better to imagine that my trauma has made me stronger, but here's the thing: this experience belongs to me, not them (Wilder, Clark and Pino 2016:81).

The main issue with the spectacularisation of trauma is that it is not about helping the survivor heal but rather it is a form of horrified entertainment, a way of breaking the dull

routine of everyday life. In many ways, then, the spectacle of sexual violence constitutes the flipside of celebrity *schadenfreude* discussed in Chapter 4: *Celebrity* Perpetrators.

Celebrified trauma narratives, like celebrity scandals, bind citizens together through shared feelings of condemnation, shock, and horror. However, these feelings often fail to transform into concrete action[40]. The social function of celebrity downfall is to reckon with inequality without challenging the status quo (Cross and Littler 2010) in the same way that spectacular victimhood constitutes a diagnosis of violence that does not require structural change. In both cases, social issues are understood in individualistic terms, and so are the solutions. This facilitates a distantiation which prevents collective accountability. The story of triumphing over adversity provides a satisfactory answer at the individual level, which does not require acknowledging one's own complicity with interlocking systems of oppression at the root of sexual violence. As Clark and Pino write, "our stories are not meant to be 'inspiration porn'. They are merely the truths and daily realities of violence" (2016:84). They highlight how the visibility of trauma in the public sphere can be a form of non-hearing when it is turned into a spectacle. Because overcoming adversity is a feature of celebrity storytelling (Marshall 1997), these celebrity *advocates* also explicitly challenge the demands of the celebrity confessional.

Collective listening and solidarities

Throughout this thesis, I unpack the assumption that speaking out will lead to social change, showing how the testimonial genre is particularly amenable to neoliberal discourses. However, Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (2001) remind us that the political potential of testimonies lie in their relationality. Whether in media or in scholarship, the focus of inquiry is too often on the testimonies themselves rather than on the ears that bear witness. Situating personal accounts within broader discursive contexts allows us to interrogate "whose personal is more political" (Phipps 2016:303), but also how political claims are not heard or, as Ahmed writes, "how we are not heard when we are heard as complaining" (2021:3). Listening, opening oneself to other truths, is thus an important

[40] I am indebted to Indigenous writers and activists who, at the time of writing, are eloquently calling out expressions of shock and surprise in Canadian media coverage of the thousands of unmarked graves of children who were abused in residential schools (Cf. Ellen 2021). See also Ahmed on the reconciliation in Australia (2004).

feminist practice (Ahmed and Stacey 2001; Ahmed 2021). In its format and content, *We Believe You* enacts the ethics of feminist listening.

We Believe You juxtaposes and weaves in together different stories that deploy different narrative strategies. Some feel very intimate, while others are more reserved. Some contributions are life stories, others are letters, drawings, paintings, poems, interviews, etc. Some chapters are self-contained personal accounts, while other chapters are fragments of stories edited together to address a specific theme – for instance, their relationship to the attacker, reactions of friends, how they became activists, etc. Fragments are sharp pieces that are profoundly unique but can also be pieced together to form a whole. Weaving in fragments accounts for the individual testimony as much as the collective history of complaints (Ahmed 2021). This editorial choice puts into practice what it means to lend a feminist ear as it highlights the resonances and contrasts between each story. It illustrates the multiple experiences of sexual violence and validates a whole range of responses, including when they contradict each other across chapters. Its feminist politics stems from the ways in which it invites contributors, editors, and readers to consider different truths. It is through collective listening that celebrity advocates can find sustainable alternatives to the heroic survivor.

Affective solidarities in action

An example of such collective listening is the *Mattress Performance (Carry that Weight)* by Emma Sulkowicz, which they started in September 2014 as part of their senior thesis piece. The performance involved Sulkowicz carrying a mattress around the Columbia University campus where they studied until the student who raped them in their dorm room was expelled by the university. They carried the mattress until their graduation ceremony in May 2015. The performance manifesto stipulated a few simple rules: that they must carry the mattress at all times when on the university premises and that they could not ask for help to carry it but would accept it when offered. They gained national recognition when they were profiled in *New York Magazine* (Grigoriadis 2014) and the *New York Times* (Smith 2014). *Carry that Weight* is a compelling illustration of what it means lending a feminist ear beyond words, and how this form of ethical listening to personal stories can lead to collective mobilisation.

Shayoni Mitra's analysis of *Carry that Weight* (2015) shows how the performance presents an innovative way of representing rape. As Sabine Silke has argued sexual assault is an event that resists representation because its defining characteristics are physical sensations, including pain, and psychic violation (2002). Consequently, the mattress as a site of Sulkowicz's violation becomes metonymic for their assault. Turning it into a performance, from private to public event, allows "the performer-survivor [to] narrativize her timeless, dimensionless, violation. As performance, the ephemerality and inexpressibility of Sulkowicz's pain is now materialized in the mattress itself" (Mitra 2015:388). Mitra also shows how *Carry That Weight* by Emma Sulkowicz enacts a powerful critique of the adjudication of sexual violence, specifically how the burden of proof falls on the shoulders of the victim. The performance addresses the failings of Columbia to respond to Sulkowicz's complaint against the rapist, a Columbia classmate. Consequently, the mattress symbolizes both the trauma that Sulkowicz carries around and, in legal discourse, the evidence needed to assert their claim as plaintiff.

Furthermore, the performance is thus both a personal narrative and a call to collective action. As Mitra writes: "The mattress, as externalized representation of pain cannot be accessed as an archive of trauma unless it is activated by the gesture of carrying" (2015:389). Handling the mattress is how Sulkowicz's testimony becomes legible to the audience, on campus and beyond. Indeed, on 29th October 2014, the First National Day of Action for Carry that Weight Together took place, a day of collective action where participants across 130 schools and universities in the US carried mattresses and pillows as a symbol of support for survivors of sexual violence (Nathanson 2014). *We Believe You* contributors recall organizing such protest on their own campus (Cf. Diaz, Clark and Pino 2016:178-182) thus showing how *Carry That Weight* has become part of the repertoire of campus feminist activism.

Carry that Weight is what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018b) calls a "feminist flashpoint", a moment at which feminism is thrown into the limelight. Feminist flashpoints provide points of reference for re-organising cultural understandings of sexual violence, but they can also ignite activist burnout and vicarious trauma. Anonymous V discusses the challenges of dealing with their own trauma as well as other people's in the following terms: "To me, Emma [Sulkowicz]'s mattress project is the physical manifestation of my

ruminations. I thought about her mattress project and how terrible it must be to carry around every day. It forces her to think about her assault for twelve hours a day." (Clark and Pino 2016:174). They cite the controversial *Rolling Stone* article "A Rape on Campus" about a gang rape at the University of Virginia (Erdely 2014), and organisation of the *The Hunting Ground* screenings as other examples of emotionally charged feminist flashpoints. It is thus no coincidence that *Carry that Weight*, "A Rape on Campus", and the feminist activists featured in *The Hunting Ground* have all been the object of a RFH *SVU* episodes (S14E20; S16E18; S19E5). As I have argued earlier in the chapter, celebrification occurs when trauma is the most spectacular.

However, considering *Carry that Weight* as part of a feminist repertoire of contention *and* as a popular feminist flashpoint opens an interesting nexus of activism and celebrity culture. As Mitra argues, any activist events or political performances "are practices of citationality, each image, symbol, reference, precedent, demand, charter, speech, manifesto echoing an earlier aspiration. To think politically is to think relationally and collectively." (2015:393). Mitra captures what is at stake in a repertoire of contention as a web of actions and discourses that connect protests throughout time and space. More importantly, for this thesis, Mitra's vision of activism evokes the political potential of RFH storylines as activist stories become cultural references, connected through various iterations across genre and media.

An example of this can be found in the episode "Carry the Weight" of *The Bold Type* (S1E10) in which fictional *Scarlet Magazine* Jane Sloan is tasked by her editor Jacqueline Carlyle to do a follow up interview with a sexual survivor and activist Mia Lawrence. Like Sulkowicz, Lawrence started a performance to protest the unsuccessful prosecution of the man who raped her. When Sloan approaches her, Lawrence has been standing in Central Park for months, carrying the scales of Lady Justice, allowing sexual assault survivors to hold the weights for a moment if they offer. Throughout the episode, Carlyle repeatedly reminds Sloan that rape is a delicate topic to report, and that Lawrence's life should not be turned into clickbait like it was when Lawrence initially began her performance. Through this fictionalized account of *Carry That Weight*, the series asks: What happens after intense media coverage? Sloan's struggle to find an appropriate angle for her profile is a metafictional interrogation on how the media, journalism, and fictional

TV series alike, should report on sexual assault stories beyond the cyclical news buzz. This example illustrates how situating each story in relation to one another can re-politicise a web of feminist media flashpoints.

These networked stories – celebrity testimonies, RFH episodes, celebrity counterpublics – enables us to fully grasp the reach of celebrity culture, but also how a circuit of visibility might be reframed through more ethical modes of feminist listening. As Mitra (2015) argues, the political value of *Carry that Weight* is the very action of carrying rather than the mattresses themselves. In other words, actions, even symbolic ones, exceed the time and space of the performance and resonate in other contexts. Repertoires of contention and RFH episodes invite us to rethink the relationship between the individual and the collective, between personal stories and mass media. The action of carrying a symbolic object is what connects real-life protests with fictional protests. It invites rethinking the binaries art / activism, art / popular culture, and politics / entertainment. Focusing on the process rather than the product allows us to address the complex operations of celebrity culture and activism. Indeed, as my discussion of *celebrity* advocates and celebrity *advocates* has shown, celebrity storytelling upholds carceral and neoliberal ideologies, but it can also act as a gateway to activism.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that anti-rape activism needs celebrity culture to legitimise survivors interventions in the public sphere. If activism is the main trajectory for celebrified victims to move into the realm of achieved fame, it is difficult to sustain because it is labour intensive, risky, and often unpaid labour. This is especially true when activists need to position themselves as feminist subjects from marginalized communities. Yet it is possible to see glimpses of hope throughout the corpus. Indeed, anti-rape activists challenge, to a varying degree, the neoliberal injunction of becoming a survivor. In addition, activist initiatives bridge various protest tactics to create a strong repertoire of contention, which contributes to the visibility of sexual violence in the public sphere. Personal accounts of activism show how mundane and unspectacular forms of resistance can be effective in bringing structural change. Finally, *SVU* is relatively absent from this chapter's corpus. This reflects how fast and far-reaching celebrity culture permutates

beyond entertainment. Neoliberalism's co-optation of social justice rhetoric can make it difficult to critique. However, the cumulative remediation of celebrity culture and sexual violence through RFH and celefiction can generate rich and productive discussions, something which I have experienced first-hand as I was researching and writing this thesis.

CONCLUSION

This thesis interrogates the imbrication of celebrity culture and sexual violence. It specifically deals with the celebritisation of sexual violence by interrogating the ways in which celebrity culture reconfigures victimisation, crime, and feminist activism. Each chapter of the thesis explores a different facet of the celebritisation of sexual violence through a detailed analysis of the celebrification of victims, perpetrators, and advocates. Cultural hierarchies of fame are at play in each configuration, albeit expressed in distinct ways. *Celebrity* victims capture the triple logics of postfeminist victimhood which revolves around the injunction to manage the transition from girlhood to womanhood, victimhood to survivorhood, and attributed fame to achieved fame. Surviving assault at all costs is the achievement that legitimates celebrity *victims'* claim to fame. Achieved fame prized through the figure of the (super)heroic survivor is embodied by *celebrity* advocates. Even as they attempt to resist this postfeminist grammar of victimhood, celebrity *advocates* still comply with this cultural hierarchy of fame. The media treatment of *celebrity* perpetrators and celebrity *perpetrator*s enables a critique of celebrity culture; however, achieved fame permeates celebrity desecration as a remediation rather than loss of celebrity status and the construction of the exceptionally monstrous perpetrator.

What emerges from this analysis is a complex system of visibility that draws attention to the intersection of celebrity culture and sexual violence yet obfuscates the power structures they both rely on (Cf. Appendix 1, Appendix 2, Appendix 3). Through these narratives of sexual violence, the 'ideal survivor' is constructed as a white, educated, cisgender, heterosexual woman. She endorses privatised solutions to sexual violence by speaking out, investing in her well-being, and embracing a rhetoric of confidence and empowerment. In addition, she advocates for the incarceration of individual perpetrators as a long-term solution, even though the prison industrial complex is a tool of neoliberal capitalism that further entrenches inequality and breeds violence. Conversely, the perpetrator is constructed in such a way that any link to culturally valued white heterosexual masculinity is disavowed. This is mediated through the trope of 'the monster', a multifaceted figure that casts sexual violence as an extraordinary occurrence and upholds racist, homophobic, and ableist discourses.

These findings are supported by an innovative methodological framework which bridges critical discourse analysis with diagrams. CDA approaches discourses about sexual violence as sites of ideological struggle. It reveals how power is legitimised through fictional representations of sexual violence and celebrity culture. CDA thus enables a critical analysis of the celebritisation of sexual violence. It reveals the political fallacy of a feminism focused only on visibility. By mapping complex systems of visibility, this thesis makes a significant methodological intervention into ongoing academic debates on visibility and identity politics and their limits. The charts show the abundance of data pertaining to the spectacle of sexual violence. They organise this transmedia corpus in a systematic way to reveal resonances and dissonances in the celebritisation of sexual violence. The prevalence of sexual violence in the contemporary mediascape means that these maps only represent a fragment of wider systems of visibility. However, this limitation is offset by the networked case studies approach which fleshes out the multiple layers and textures at play within these economies of visibility.

A key argument of the thesis is that fictional and real-life celebrities shape cultural understanding of sexual violence, victimhood, and feminism. My critical exploration of celefiction and RFH episodes contests a typology of fame that dismisses celetoids, fictional characters, and celebrities from the entertainment industry as politically irrelevant. Within this system of visibility, celebrity and celefiction are blurred. This collapse of fact and fiction could feed into valid concerns with regards to post-truth and conspiracy theories. However, the thesis shows the political potential of using fiction to interrogate thorny contemporary issues. This approach could be exported to other TV series presenting their own #MeToo storyline such as *The Good Fight* (CBS 2017-), *The Bold Type* (Freeform 2017-2021), or *The Morning Show* (Apple TV+ 2019-). These TV series present rich RFH storylines developed over several episodes. They could thus constitute alternative nodes to *SVU* to explore the celebritisation of sexual violence. For instance, *The Good Fight* includes RFH episodes dealing with the sexual assault accusations against Trump, Jeffrey Epstein's child prostitution trial, the sexual assault on the set of *Bachelor in Paradise*, etc. These topics are all addressed in *SVU*'s own RFH episodes. *The Good Fight* even features a RFH episode of an unaired episode of *SVU* tackling allegations against Trump. Therefore, the methodological approach can not only

work with other cultural texts as nodes, but also connect (and analyse) different systems of visibility.

The thesis also makes a significant contribution to feminist scholarship through its sustained analysis of the celebritisation of sexual violence. It provides the backdrop against which post-#MeToo TV series and films can be analysed. *Unbelievable* (Netflix 2019), *I May Destroy You* (BBC One 2020), and *The Assistant* (2019) are three examples that attest to an emergent trend in film and television featuring 'unspectacular' narrations of sexual violence. For instance, the gritty aesthetic of *The Assistant* stands in stark contrast with the glossy superhero-inspired *Bombshell* analysed in Chapter 6: *Celebrity* Advocates. In addition, the toolkit developed throughout the thesis could very effectively address the politics of RFH in episodic versus long form televisual storytelling. For example, *SVU*'s episode "Mood" (S19E02) and *Unbelievable* are both a fictional account of the true story detailed in the article "An Unbelievable Story of Rape" (Miller and Armstrong 2015). *Unbelievable* is more effective than *SVU* in developing a critique of spectacular sexual violence. This is partly because its slow-paced narrative development counterbalances the gamified hermeneutics characteristic of Netflix (Horeck 2019c). This example shows that even if *Unbelievable* resists, to some extent, a feminist politics that centres around visibility, it is still shaped by the economies of visibility that turn sexual violence into a spectacle.

The methodology developed throughout the thesis is relevant beyond the study of the spectacle of sexual violence. Indeed, RFH storytelling is not restricted to sexual violence and the methodological apparatus developed for the present thesis could be applied to other TV series to interrogate the celebritisation of urgent social issues. *SVU* features episodes dealing with violence in the prison industrial complex, transmisogyny, and Black Lives Matter, to name only a few examples. The contemporary televisual landscape brims with examples of TV series and films that use RFH as a narrative hook, which attests to the commercial value of this formula. In addition to dealing with sexual violence, the above-mentioned TV series also use RFH storytelling to address other social issues such as discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, aggressive immigration policies, gun violence, the rise of far-right movements, etc. Further research is needed to analyse

systems of visibility built around forms of violence other than sexual violence. The thesis' innovative methodology can assist such critical and political endeavours.

The thesis also offers important insights to theorise contemporary fame as a transmedia phenomenon that reaches beyond the entertainment industry. An application of these findings for academia emerged as I was writing the methodology chapter. Franco Moretti's theories of narratology and pioneering work in digital humanism could offer interesting insights to bridge textual analysis and diagrams. However, it felt unethical to engage with Moretti's work in a thesis dealing with the celebrification of sexual violence, knowing that he had been accused of sexual assault and harassment by several of his graduate students (Liu and Knowles 2017a; Dickerson and Paul 2017). While researching the accusations against Moretti, it became apparent that his celebrity status was a factor that prevented students from reporting him (Liu and Knowles 2017b; Klein 2018; Seymour 2018). This raises an important question with regards to the politics of knowledge production. Namely, how do we engage with scholarship produced by high-profile scholars who have been accused of sexual misconduct?

On the one hand, the aim of a PhD dissertation is to show awareness of key debates in the field which requires, to some extent, the citation of well-established scholars. On the other hand, this thesis aims is to show how the expansion of regimes of fame to other social spheres contributes to silencing victims of sexual violence. For instance, my analysis of Larry Nassar in Chapter 5: Celebrity *Perpetrator* shows how his celebrification triggered institutional responses in sport and academia protecting him from prosecution over several decades. Nassar and Moretti are not anomalies. The research conducted by the 1752 Research Group (Bull, Chapman and Page 2018; Bull and Rye 2018) shows how the issue of sexual violence is widespread in academia. Not engaging with Moretti's scholarship could thus be an act of solidarity with colleagues and students who experienced this form of abuse. Indeed, as Ahmed argues, academic citations are political practices through which intellectual genealogies are established and institutionalised (2017). Citations are indicators of how academic value is attributed. This is exacerbated under the audit culture of contemporary neoliberal universities (Burrows 2012) which focuses on citation metrics (Feldman and Sandoval 2018). For these reasons, I decided against incorporating Moretti's scholarship into the thesis and instead found more

productive interlocutors in scholars exploring the use of cartography and diagrammatic imagery for feminist theory. These works proved to be crucial in designing a methodology to tackle visibility as interlocking systems of oppression.

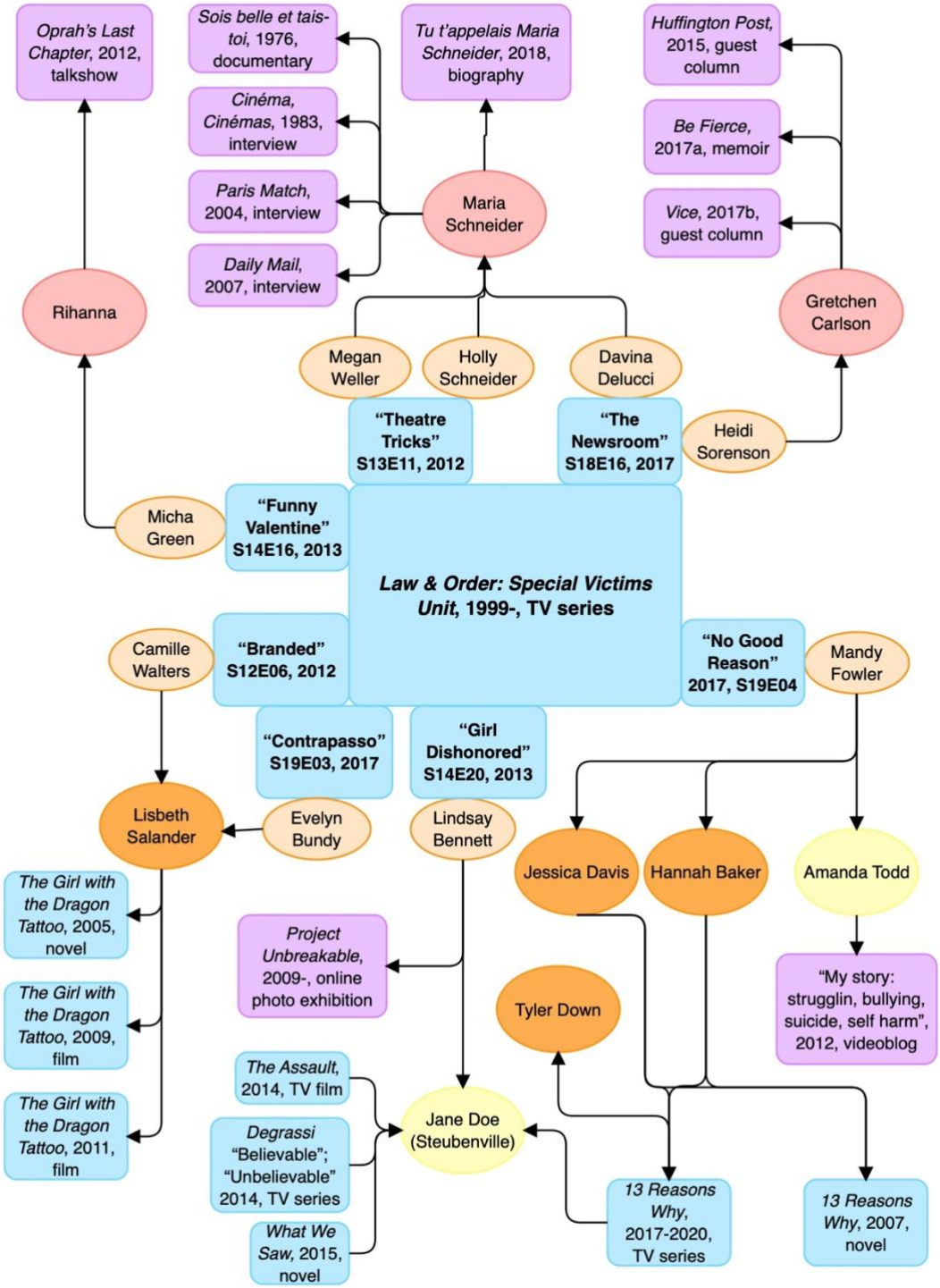
My dilemma around Moretti's scholarship makes tangible the thesis' main arguments. First, contemporary celebrity culture is complex and transmedia. Regimes of fame are not restricted to cinema and television and neoliberal capitalism has facilitated their expansion to all spheres of social life. For instance, the thesis includes discussion of celebrities like actors, singers, filmmakers, news anchors, but also fictional characters, athletes, politicians, and criminals. Because of the scope of the project, some distinctions between regimes of fame might have been collapsed through the analysis. The networked case studies deployed throughout the thesis aim to strike a balance between scope and depth, but particular operations of fame may have been lost in the process. The example of Moretti attests to the celebritisation of academia and, at the same time, emphasises the need to attend to the specificities of academic celebrity. Indeed, the politics of citation is an economy of visibility unique to this milieu, and this shapes the ways in which scholars are celebrified.

This leads to the second argument, which is that discourses about sexual violence need to be analysed in relation to the economies of visibility they stem from. The thesis shows that the hermeneutics of celefiction and RFH sustain a critique of celebrity culture, albeit a contained one. For instance, *SVU* features several RFH episodes centred around the trope of the predatory professor and/or mentor. Another example is the episode from *Scandal* briefly analysed in Chapter 7: Celebrity *Advocates*. In these two instances of RFH storytelling, fictional characters point to the role of universities in enabling and protecting perpetrators. However, these episodes ultimately conclude that 'bad apples' are the root cause of sexual violence rather than structural inequality. My analysis of *celebrity* perpetrators shows the prevalence of these contained critiques of celebrity culture. RFH is first and foremost a marketing strategy and blaming the television industry for sexual violence would be an untenable stance for *SVU*. Similarly, I argued in Chapter 5: Celebrity *Perpetrators* that true crime and cultural critiques of crime are reticent to address how and why celebrity *perpetrators* become famous because it would require them to address

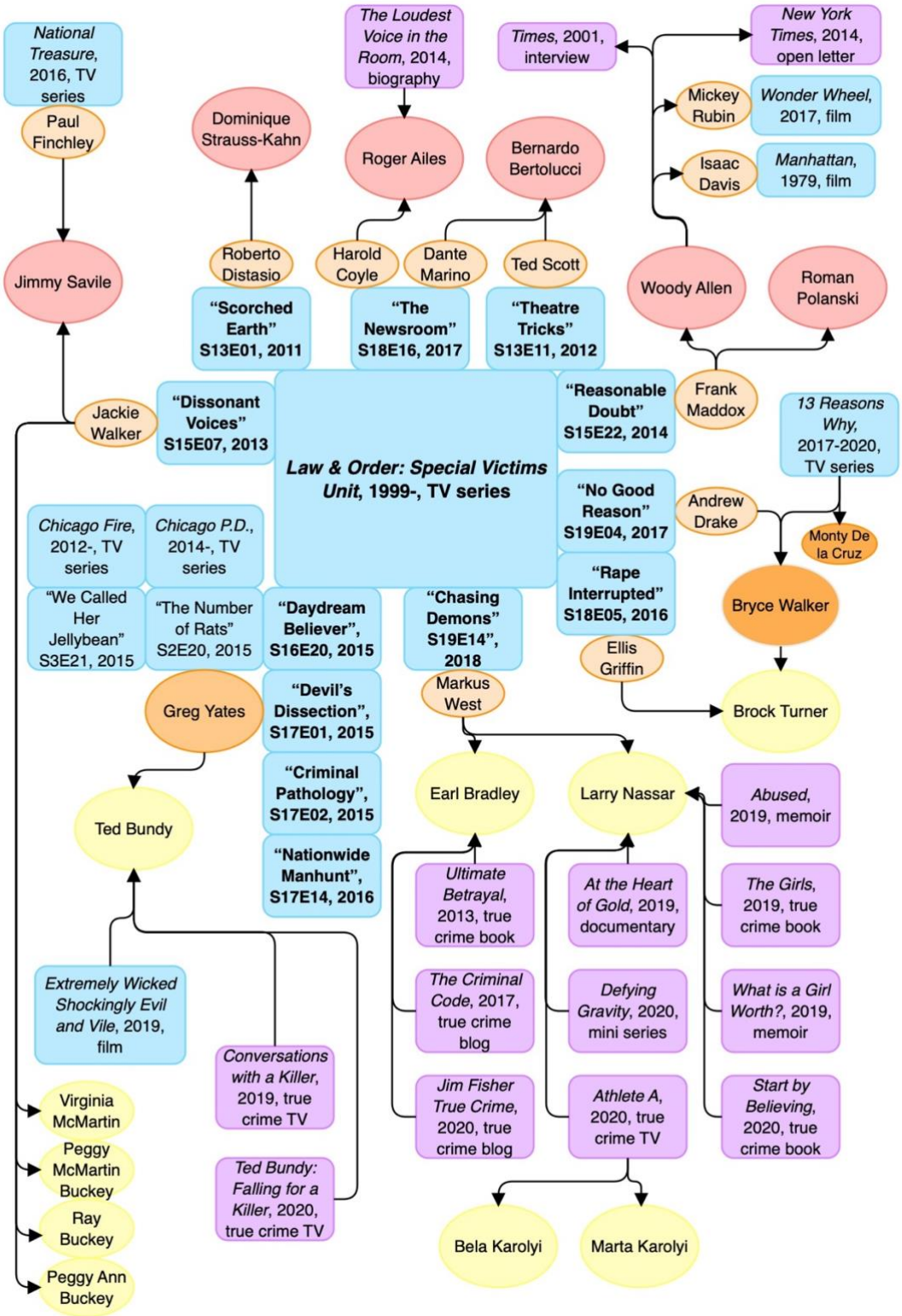
their role in their celebrification. These findings reflect why it is important to analyse systems of visibility that produce knowledge about sexual violence.

My reflections on how to deal with academia's problematic canon reveals another layer to the ways in which economies of visibility map onto the politics of knowledge production. This thesis shows how cultural understandings of sexual violence are shaped by their context of production. Similarly, theoretical concepts and methodological frameworks need to be analysed in relation to the systems of visibility in which they are produced. Writing about the reckoning of Moretti's fraught legacy within feminist digital humanism, Lauren Klein argues that "the problems associated with ending harassment are not limited to academic structures alone. They also derive from flaws in cultural and conceptual structures as well" (2018: paragraph 6). In other words, the obfuscation of gender and race in Moretti's scholarship lay bare the sexist and racist logics of its context of production. The present thesis attends to what the hidden matrices of power celebrity culture and the spectacle of sexual violence have in common. Extending this framework to address the imbrications of sexual violence, celebrity culture, and meritocratic construction of academia is a politically urgent project. These considerations left me wondering: to what extent are the critiques of gendered hierarchies of fame developed throughout this thesis useful to address sexual violence in academia? What are the systems of visibility that underpin celebrity culture in academia? These are some of the questions I propose to investigate in future research.

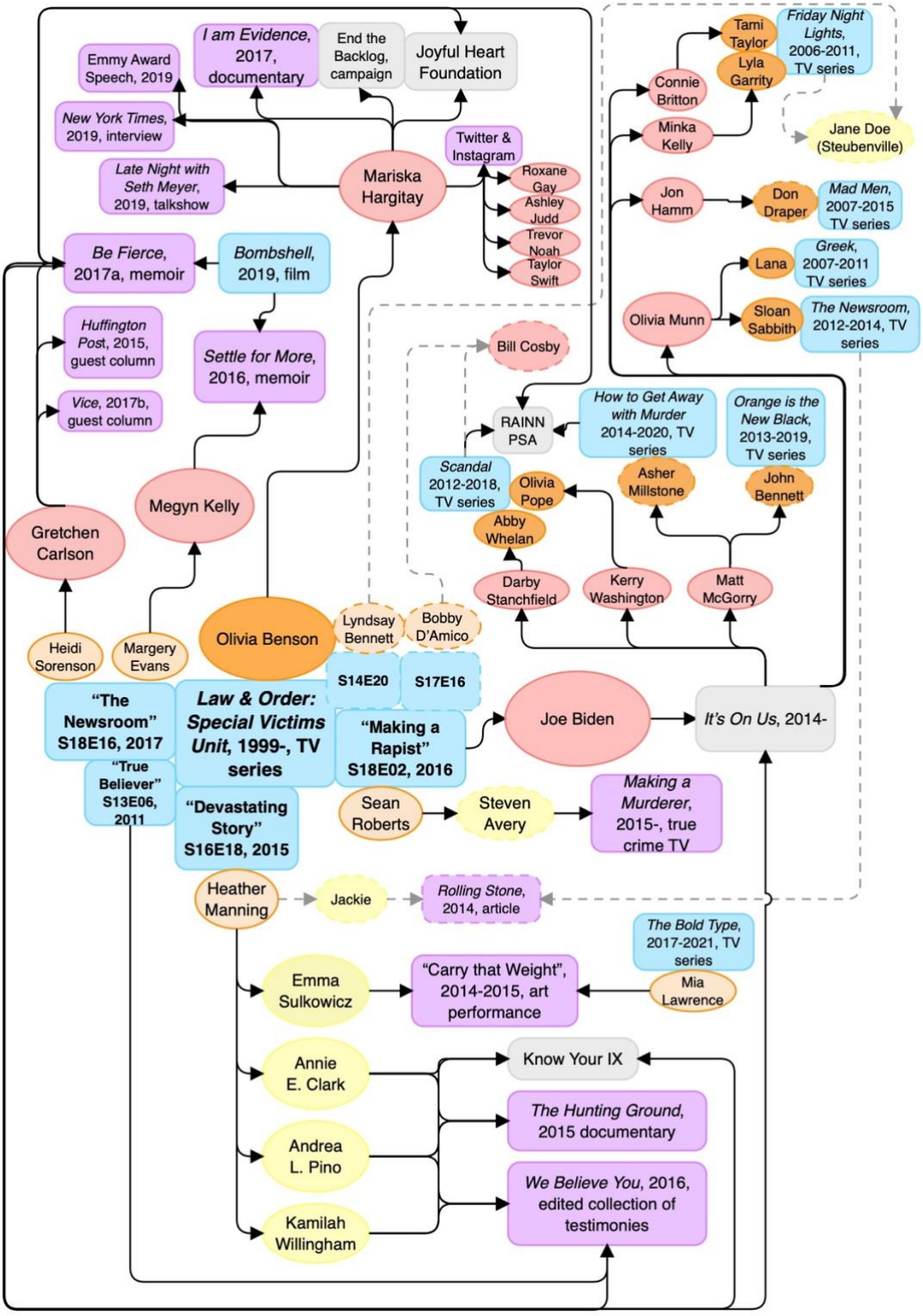
APPENDIX 1: CARTOGRAPHY OF CELEBRITY VICTIMS



APPENDIX 2: CARTOGRAPHY OF CELEBRITY PERPETRATORS



APPENDIX 3: CARTOGRAPHY OF CELEBRITY ADVOCATES



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