

**A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Health and Well-Being  
of Women Previously Trafficked**

by

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### **Abstract**

Using narrative inquiry, I inquired into the experiences of health and well-being of women previously trafficked in Canada. Narrative inquiry is considered a research methodology and a method of understanding human experiences as storied phenomena under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By engaging in monthly visits and ongoing conversations over nine months, the participants and I slowly co-created a relational space where we co-composed stories that reflected their experiences and our relationship. As we lived alongside each other, the entanglement of our stories shaped ways to inquire into experiences. Drawing on the experiences of three participants, T, Wolfie, and Phoenix, made visible the complexities and the multiplicity of these entanglements. Their experiences of health and well-being have brought forward insights into the dominant narratives about identities that are based on preconceived notions. Their experiences challenge the politics of pity and risk-management strategies within anti-trafficking strategies in Canada. They call forth the need for attentiveness as they seek narrative coherence in their lives amidst liminal spaces and silences. As they told some of their stories without words, I was called to think about who I am in requiring that their silence be broken to understand their meanings of health and well-being. By retelling and reflecting on the stories that they shared in our conversations, I identified two narrative threads that make known the distinct entanglements of their experiences. Attending closely to their lives brought forward the personal, practical, and social significance of this work, which has implications for advancing nursing knowledge and practice and the social responsibilities we hold as people and nurses in the everyday encounter with women who have been previously trafficked.

## Preface

This thesis is an original work by Corinne Rogers. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. Project name: “A Narrative Inquiry Study on the Experiences of Health and Well-Being of Women Previously Trafficked,” No. Pro00117222, February 14, 2022.

I have approached the writing of this dissertation mindful of my responsibility to T, Wolfie, and Phoenix, their lives and what they said and left unsaid. Long before I would come to meet T, Wolfie, and Phoenix, the heaviness of my intentions to do this work was raw and entangled with the stories I live by and to who I am in relation. Thus, my responsibility to T, Wolfie, and Phoenix includes a responsibility to make known who I am throughout the inquiry process. This responsibility held tensions alongside possibilities. As a narrative inquirer, I understand that as the participants and I came together, we co-composed the inquiry. They patiently and graciously invited me to hear, read, and write differently.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my husband, Patrick, whose love was a light in the darkness, who quietly supports my learning by giving of himself. I also dedicate this work to my daughter, Kasey, whose creativity inspires me and my son, Daniel, whose passion for teaching fills my cup. Finally, I dedicate this work to Morgan, my daughter in-law, who fits perfectly in our family, and I love that very much.

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## **Prologue**

Imagine a place . . . where you bend and sway, leap and land, right where a story begins. (Thomson, 2008, p. 1)



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Narrative Beginnings

*For several months I had been working at the safehouse for women who were rescued from trafficking in Southeast Asia, and my work was coming to an end. It pained me greatly to think about driving to the safe house to say goodbye to the staff and women. I still recall the waves of tension that tightened my chest, disrupting each breath that I called forth in that moment. I was coming face to face with my decision to leave Southeast Asia and move back to Canada. I was once again facing who I am and my becoming in freely moving back and forth across oceans. This self-facing made me think about the privilege<sup>1</sup> that my Canadian passport afforded me. For many years I had engaged in international work, and each time my work has afforded me the possibility to think about diverse people in different places, as well as to think about who I am. This sense and identity-making weighed heavily on me as I thought about the impact my final goodbye might have on the staff and women at the safe house. A goodbye that ached. I struggled to go back to the safehouse to explain why I was leaving. This time it was less about my privilege and perhaps more about the lack of privilege afforded to the women. Whereas I could walk freely through the locked gate, the women at the safe house waited behind the locked gate. Their experiences were marked by waiting, seclusion, and uncertainty.*

During my time at the safe house in Southeast Asia, I was tasked with addressing the healthcare needs of women rescued<sup>2</sup> from trafficking. I wondered if they ever thought that it was odd that they found themselves in a safe house behind a locked gate with a White<sup>3</sup> nurse trying to help them. How did they make sense of their situation, their circumstances, and their past, present, and future? I wondered if I was just another stranger whom they met in unfamiliar rooms, behind doors and locked gates?

Though I was well-versed from previous pre-field orientations in the importance of taking the time to say goodbye when I left fieldwork, I could not gather the courage to drive to the safe house again and look into the women's eyes and tell them I was leaving. My courage was disrupted, my breath constricted. I could not fathom walking through the locked gate, despite having done so countless times. Looking back upon my experience, I could see that the tensions I felt when I walked through the gate were not new to me; the tensions, marked by

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<sup>1</sup> I understand my privilege as it emerges out of a way of knowing, where my responsibilities of care are “socialized, legalized and politicized not to think too much about the socially constructed nature of privilege or the costs to others” (Vincent & Julie, 2013, p. 441).

<sup>2</sup> I come to challenge the word *rescue* later in my dissertation. I use it here because that was the language that the agency used.

<sup>3</sup> In using the word *White*, I acknowledge the influence of colonialism.

privilege and uncertainty, had been present all along. I understood the gate's purpose in creating safety for the women rescued from underground networks of organized crime and syndicates. However, it seemed so strange that the women would find freedom while they were locked up. I increasingly wondered who had made the decisions on what a safe space was and how it could be maintained. Some of my tensions brought forward issues of power for me. What part did the women play in their decisions on being rescued? Who constructed what that rescue looked like? Who imagined their forward-looking stories? Were they seen as victims and clients of or accomplices to their trafficking experiences? I wondered how the power and uncertainty shaped their experience in the waiting and how much that would shape how they would engage with care providers in the future.

The locked gate was opened when staff would enter or leave or if the women had to leave for supervised medical and legal appointments or when women were repatriated to their country of origin. Between these appointments, they waited. It was often in the moments of waiting that they needed to begin to compose a different story. Their moments of waiting required the learning of new marketable skills that volunteers taught them, that protected them from being re-trafficked. I often wondered if anyone had ever asked the women what skills they wanted to learn and what skills they felt they needed for their forward-looking story. I wondered if anyone ever asked them what they thought was necessary to shift their future.

### **My Experience in Between the Comings, Goings, and Leaving**

#### **The Tensions of Intentions**

So many questions and tensions were part of my movement through the locked gate of the safe house. These moments called me back to my time in Indonesia after the tsunami in 2004. During this time, I came face to face with the moral thoughtlessness of my intentions to work overseas and my ignorance of the impact of my contributions on people waiting in displacement camps. I still remember the tightening I felt in my chest. It was one of the first signs I sensed that something was not right. Over time I came to see that I needed to disrupt my perceptions—the perceptions that I held the knowledge, resources, and expertise to help. In thinking about these experiences, I am drawn back to how the stories of others on the edges of communities have informed who I am. I am called back to some of my early childhood experiences.

## Living Authentically

My father, an active member of my community, strived to build a community where members could experience authenticity.<sup>4</sup> In this community the members could share their various ways of knowing about agriculture, artisan crafts, and other activities that enhanced the sense of community for themselves and their families. In experiencing these moments of community building, I came to understand that certain persons were storied on the edges of our community. As a child, in tagging along with my father, I experienced moments of living authentically through his intentionality in seeking relationships with people positioned on the fringes of our community. I recall one particular man who lived on a remote property north of our community.

The property was dotted with rusted farm equipment and other pieces of equipment that he had collected over his lifetime. I had never seen this man before in our community, but somehow my father knew of him. Eventually, I realized that my father's love for horses formed a connection with this man because he, too, loved his horses. His horses were his family and his sense of community. Over the course of many seasons, the man trusted my father enough to sell him one of his horses. Though my father and I never talked about it, this transaction involved more than purchasing a horse for my sister to ride. I knew that the selling of this horse meant that this man had come to trust our family enough to take care of one of his horses - a member of his family. I encountered another way of knowing about being and living out as I listened to my father and the man walk alongside the rusted farm equipment lined up along the side of the long dirt road.

In being vulnerable, my father and the man had found a way to create a forward-looking story in which they seemed open and curious. In these moments I wondered if they came to understand how each of them positioned and located the other on the edges of their ways of knowing. I often wondered, did the man story<sup>5</sup> my father as a gatekeeper to a community of which he could never be a part or enjoy? Did my father story the man on the edges of our

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<sup>4</sup> To me, *authenticity* is linked to narrative coherence. To Carr (1986), narrative coherence is a process of "telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story about what we are about and what we are" (p. 97).

<sup>5</sup> The stories we live by, tell, retell, and live out are a portal through which we enter the world and by which we experience the world, make sense of the world, and make personally meaningful (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Thus, in our sense making we may story others in the world through the stories we live by. In other words, we may story others in a certain way as the stories they live by encounter the stories we live by. Thus, to story another is to make known who they are in the stories we live by and who we are in the stories they live by. Doing so makes story a verb; it is an action within the transactions of experience with the world and others.

community as someone who needed saving, needed help? Did my father buy the horse from the man as a way of helping him financially, or did my father understand what it meant to be able to take one of the older man's horses home with us? The significance of this transaction was not lost on me as a young child. My family was also storied as living on the fringes of our community because we were not cattle or grain farmers like the rest of the farmers in our community. Additionally, the community perceived that my family had money. I wondered if my father's own experiences of being storied on the fringe of our community led him to want to help this man and his horses.

### **The Tensions from the Casting Room**

I recognize that these previous experiences informed my intentions to live out of my authentic self so that I, too, could walk alongside others. These intentions would bring me to Southeast Asia after I completed my master's degree in nursing to work alongside women rescued from trafficking. My primary role was to help women by addressing their emergency healthcare needs and helping them to negotiate their needs within the local healthcare system. However, in my intention to remain authentic and vulnerable, I struggled not to story the women as victims who needing rescuing. I am brought back to the experiences of Chantou,<sup>6</sup> a woman whom I was called to help after she had jumped out of a third-story window to escape her employer. The employer had imprisoned her in their home and forced her to take various pain killers and anti-inflammatory medications to work up to 20 hours a day. I first met Chantou at the public hospital's emergency department, where she was waiting to be placed in a half-body plaster cast. Her eyes were glossed over as she stared at the ceiling while the physician and various nurses shuffled around the stretcher. Chantou did not speak the local language but did speak some English. As those around her frantically planned what would happen next, Chantou continued to stare at the ceiling. I negotiated with the physician the care for which the safe house was financially responsible and affirmed that I would remain with Chantou during her care and then transport her home upon discharge.

In the casting room, Chantou remained in a supine position on the stainless-steel table. She was naked above the waist, with her neck on a wooden block, waiting for the technician to

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<sup>6</sup> It was difficult to think of a pseudonym, difficult to choose a name to replace her real name. It seemed inappropriate to use another name to protect her identity. In writing about her without using her real name, I worried that her identity and who she is would continue to be made invisible in the same way that women trafficked are given fake names and identities to be made visible for some but not for others.

apply the plaster cast to prevent further trauma to her fractured vertebrae. While Chantou waited, I watched her body shiver against the table that mirrored the positioning of her body. As the technician applied the plaster, I thought about her decision to jump out of the third-story window. I thought about the necessity of the plaster cast to stabilize her injury in the same way that the locked gate of the safe house was necessary to keep the women safe. Both served an essential purpose; however, both made known the ways that women previously trafficked are simultaneously seen and made invisible.

Though some viewed Chantou as a victim of trafficking who needed care, her decision to jump from the third-story window was questioned as irresponsible and possibly a sign of self-harm. I recall sitting beside Chantou at the safe house shortly after discharge. She started to tell me about her children, whom she had left back in Cambodia. She explained that she came to this part of Southeast Asia to work as a domestic worker to send money back home. She spoke of her short time with the employer who had taken her passport away, forced her to take medication against her will, and kept her behind the locked gate of the courtyard surrounding the house. Chantou spoke of how afraid she was that she would never see her children again. Thus, she had decided that she would jump out the window into the neighbor's yard on a day when her employer would leave her alone in the house. Chantou decided that being with her children was more important than sending money home and being injured by the fall. She said she could not live with the idea of never seeing her children again.

In thinking about her decision to jump, I once again faced who I was, who I was becoming, and how I saw the women at the safe house. I wondered, how do we not know who these women are from our prescribed post-rescue rehabilitation and repatriation plans? I wondered if I knew them well enough and if I knew who I was amidst the social, political, and economic structures that grant me the privilege to enter and leave the lives of those whom I wanted to walk alongside. Who was I as they found themselves amidst negotiating a new forward-looking story? Would they see me as a gatekeeper as they tried to access much-needed healthcare services?

In the complexity of these questions, I encounter *moments* (Huber, 2008) that compel me to explain, tell, and understand them further. As I attend to these moments, I realize that I am not confined to the answers to these questions, but that I can learn about what is paused, silenced, and misread in my life and the lives of others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These moments are

“a place of possibility” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 77), where there is a moral call in my listening, learning, and actions (Morris, 2001). In the complexities of these moments I remain open to allowing stories to work under my skin, thereby negotiating and changing the stories I live by that shape my intentions to work with others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).<sup>7</sup> These negotiations shift the compass of my identity making and hold the possibility of transforming how I walk alongside others in places and spaces of vulnerability.

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<sup>7</sup> I introduce stories to live by within this chapter but will attend to it in further detail in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Research Puzzle

#### Thinking Alongside the Experiences of Women Previously Trafficked

My time alongside Chantou shaped this research project. As I think alongside her experiences, I wonder how Chantou's life unfolded long after she left the safe house. I wonder how she retold or now retells her stories of trafficking when she seeks care to manage the long-term complications from her injuries. Additionally, who is she becoming over time as she tries to make sense of what happened to her? Have healthcare providers paused, silenced, and misread her story of trafficking and identity making? Has this in turn influenced her access to care and her forward-looking story? From these wonders and tensions emerged my research puzzle that called forth the following puzzles: What are the experiences of health and well-being across the life course of previously trafficked women who live in Canada? What has it been like to access healthcare in the post trafficking period for these women? Have they faced challenges in accessing care? Have they experienced barriers, including stigma? What are their experiences with healthcare providers? Do they hold a particular understanding of health and well-being through the stories they live by, their experiences of trafficking, and their sense and identity making? Has their particular understanding changed over their life course? How do they navigate the spaces and places where their understanding comes alongside other understandings of health and well-being? Additionally, what other understandings of health and well-being do they encounter?<sup>8</sup>

These research puzzles directed me to the “place of possibilities” that narrative inquiry offers (Clandinin, 2013, p. 77); specifically, how the relational space and place of narrative inquiry offers a way to see anew how women previously trafficked tell stories of sense and identity making across their life course; how these women negotiate disrupted lives, dreams, and identity making as their lives unfold post-rescue; how they negotiate life events such as

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<sup>8</sup> The World Health Organization's [WHO] (2022) definition of health is important and includes that health is more than the absence of disease; it also entails people's physical, mental, and social well-being. Health is a fundamental right, health is necessary to gain peace and security, and health also holds a social value. However, this definition does not address the diversity of understanding health and well-being. In this work, I do not situate my understanding of health from the above, but rather situate myself within the diversity of understanding of health and well-being and how it is always becoming over a life course.

marriage, having children, social spaces; and how this speaks of their health and well-being as they continue to make meaning from what they experienced while they were trafficked.

The barriers that women previously trafficked face in accessing health care, which includes shame, stigma, and fear (Barrett, 2010), influence their experiences of health and well-being. Additional barriers based on gender include social status, a disproportionate burden of mental illness and caregiver responsibilities, and vulnerabilities to normalized gender-based violence (Action Coalition on Human Trafficking [ACT Alberta], 2019; Lam & Lepp, 2019). As a result of these barriers, women previously trafficked have health issues related to obesity, nutritional challenges, substance use, and reproductive health (George et al., 2019). Furthermore, the stereotyping of the experiences of females who are trafficked, alongside the sensational imagery of the anti-trafficking awareness campaigns, narrows the efforts of healthcare providers to a focus on the needs of these women during their initial entry into and exiting from trafficking (ACT Alberta, 2019; Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RCMP], 2010). These stereotypes further silence how these women live out access to health care over their life course. Thus, the homogenization of the experiences of women who have been previously trafficked alters how they see themselves as they try to make sense of their previous trafficking experiences.

### **Background: Trafficking of Women**

The extent of the trafficking of women is difficult to determine because of the multifaceted nature of the activities involved in the issue, its definition, and its reporting. Categorization of trafficking by the “type of work performed is a common although misleading practice” (Burke, 2018, p. 6). These categorizations make invisible the various forms of exploitation that women experience. The United Nations Offices on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC] 2000) defined *human trafficking* as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, coercion, fraud or deception, abuse of a position of vulnerability, giving payments or benefits, and abduction, all with the aim of exploitation” (p. 3). The trafficking of bodies for various work mimics the exporting and importing of goods, and women are particularly vulnerable as the global commercialization of their bodies and care work ensures the feminization of migration. Thus, in this dissertation I describe the various forms of human trafficking that the women experienced.

The first attempts of the UNODC (2009) to identify human trafficking patterns began in 2006 across 155 countries. In 2009, when the UNODC identified the type of trafficking in 51



countries, it identified sexual exploitation as the most common form, at 79%. Additionally, across 61 countries, 66% of persons trafficked were women, and in 31 countries 13% were girls (UNODC, 2009). Even more significant, across 41 countries where UNODC identified the gender of the traffickers, the number of females increased. In 2018, of every 10 persons trafficked, five were adult women, and two were girls (UNODC, 2020). Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the socioeconomic inequalities across the globe (UNODC, 2020). A 6.1% decline in 2021 of global per-capita gross domestic product to 3.3% in 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to the most severe recession since the end of World War II (United Nations, 2022). This recession exasperated the factors associated with the feminization of migration: of the estimated 244 million international migrants worldwide, 44.3% are women. Women are disproportionately represented in migration and are vulnerable to trafficking as the global economy pulls women across borders to provide for their families through low-wage feminized care work (Burke, 2018; Camlin et al., 2014). Additionally, the most common route to trafficking, especially sex trafficking, is fraudulent employment recruitment (Hodge & Lietz, 2007). For example, traffickers, who use recruitment agencies as a cover, target families in extreme poverty by promising a secure income for women through domestic employment abroad. As they coerce families to seek these opportunities, debt bonds disguised as processing fees ensure that women who seek work abroad are trapped in cycles of exploitation to pay off their debts (UNODC, 2020), which thus increases the number of women exploited and vulnerable to all forms of trafficking.

Canada is a source, destination, and point of exchange for the trafficking of persons; 95% of the persons trafficked in 2019 were girls and adult women, 89% of whom were under the age of 35 (Ibrahim, 2021). Additionally, in 2019 the trafficking of persons increased 44% over previous years (Ibrahim, 2021). In Canada, the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program amplifies gender inequities in that women are disproportionately forced into criminalized migration when they leave their places of employment because of abuse. These women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation in domestic and sex work if they cannot secure a short-term temporary resident permit (TRP) or an open work permit (ACT Alberta, 2019), because these permits rely on their ability to provide “reasonable grounds to believe” that they are experiencing abuse (Government of Canada, 2022, Standard of Proof–Reasonable Grounds to Believe section, para. 2). Though the “reasonable grounds to believe” standard is more than mere

suspicion but less than the grounds applicable in civil matters, it is not exempt from fees. The initial 180-day TRP is exempt from fees, but if TFWs wish to remain and work in Canada, they need to extend their work permits, which is costly (Government of Canada, 2016, Issuing a VTIP TRP section, para. 2). The Government of Canada is meeting minimal standards as a Tier 1 country for the elimination of trafficking (Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, n.d., Canada: Tier 1 section, para 1), but the attachment of fees to TRP extensions continues to support the discourse on the politics of care, pity, and risk management that I introduce in the next section. Thus, for TFWs who leave abusive employment placements, the financial burden of remaining in Canada or returning to their countries of origin creates a pathway into the world of criminalized migration and trafficking.

The vulnerabilities of TFWs to trafficking are also evident in Alberta in that 50% of the referrals to ACT Alberta relate to labour exploitation, and 14% experienced both labour and sex trafficking (ACT Alberta, 2019; A. Warnock, personal communication, September 16, 2021). Although TFWs might qualify for Alberta health care, many who cannot secure a TRP or open work permit have precarious migration status. TFWs suspected of being trafficked can be issued a 180-day victims-of-trafficking-in-persons (VTIP) TRP, but the elusive nature of trafficking clouds their ability to meet the standard of proof (Government of Canada, 2022). Amplifying the barrier of receiving a VTIP TRP and care is the time it takes for persons to exit trafficking; it averages as many as seven attempts over three years (A. Warnock, personal communication, September 16, 2021). Additionally, women who are sexually exploited are vulnerable to the stigmatizing and criminalizing of sex work as a result of the universal stereotyping of the sex trafficking of females (RCMP, 2010). Women are particularly vulnerable because of oppression from police and the exploitation and violence that they experience from their partners, clients, or both (Lam & Lepp, 2019). Thus, making known the experiences of health and well-being of women previously trafficked across their life course can help to reimagine TFW policies and build the capacity for more inclusive and comprehensive healthcare programs.

### **The Politics of Risk, Pity, and Care**

Some post-rescue reintegration practices that governments and rights-based anti-trafficking agencies favor are implemented without regard for the wishes of the women trafficked whom they aim to help (McDonald & Timoshkina, 2004, p. 16). For governments, these reintegration practices, in essence, are impartial “politics of risk management” (Aradau,

2004, p. 275) to prevent the further illegal migration of persons and reduce the number of undocumented migrants because these individuals are storied as socioeconomic burdens and national-security risks. Coupled with the politics of pity, these reintegration practices also reveal that women are made invisible post-rescue, specifically when rights-based anti-trafficking agencies triage women into predetermined thresholds of victimization (Aradau, 2004). These thresholds categorize women along a continuum of victimization and pain that indicates their level of involvement with their exploitation. Storied as somewhat responsible for being trafficked or perceived as not being victimized enough, as Chantou was, these women are triaged as illegal migrants not deserving of care. On the other hand, if they are storied as victims of trafficking, they are rescued and deserving of care that their rescuers predetermine. Furthermore, sensationalized representations of the trafficking of females clouds the use of the politics of pity and risk management because “institutional accounts of injustices towards women homogenize their experiences” (Young, 2005, p. 20). This homogenization serves to uphold a singular experience for all women within policies and practices of rights-based anti-trafficking agencies. This becomes problematic because women are then rescued against their will (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018), because their rescuers view their trafficking experiences through a narrow understanding of systemic processes and social structures that oppress women. Finally, this homogenization paralyzes law, social, and healthcare services into a dichotomy of care politics in which efforts focus only on the women trafficked under coercion and force (Gerassi, 2015).

This dichotomy of care politics echoes throughout the “debate on the interpretation of the statistical overrepresentation” of the types of trafficked women seeking care (Gerassi, 2015, p. 2). For example, “trafficking situations are not always marred by violence or an intention to deceive as episodes of violence and trafficking may be interrupted by periods of calm, child-rearing or even love and consent” (ACT Alberta, 2019, p. 2). Thus, women are storied as authors of their exploitation from the misreadings of these periods of calm that dot their trafficking experiences. Therefore, I hope that this narrative inquiry offers a place to reimagine the politics of care by highlighting how the politics of pity and risk management unfolds in the health and well-being of women previously trafficked across their life course.

### **Knowledge Gap: As It Is More Than Just Leaving**

Alongside the scarcity of meaningful data is the call from service providers for long-term research to guide support for women previously trafficked, especially when their trafficking

experiences are outside the stereotypical discourse and influenced by contexts of constraints in the intersection of labour, domestic, and sexual exploitation (ACT Alberta, 2019). This call for long-term research is further amplified when the long-term care of women rescued from trafficking is described as “as long as it takes” (A. Warnock, personal communication, September 16, 2021). Thus, understanding the experiences of women who live out this descriptor of care across their life course is timely to make known their long-term care needs.

A focus on experience can advance our thinking about the health and well-being of women trafficked outside the narrow understandings that currently restrict the efforts of service and healthcare providers (ACT Alberta, 2019). It is important to understand women’s health and well-being during the initial and exiting moments of trafficking and consider their health over time as they make meaning and create forward-looking stories (ACT Alberta, 2019).

### **Turning Towards Stories**

#### **Stories to Live By**

Stories to live by are the compass of what we believe and live out in the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Narratively understood, stories to live by refers to identity, and what we do in the world is inseparable from our identity making (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 95). Connelly and Clandinin conceptualized identities as narrative constructions that have histories and are multiple, depending on life’s situations (p. 95). Identities can be static or dynamic, because how we live out our identities constitutes the world, which in turn constitutes our identities. Through this inseparable relationship, we make sense of what is happening to us and we might shift who we are. When we encounter the living out of the stories others live by, and others encounter the living out of the stories we live by, what we believe and who we are is always becoming, always shifting.

We can shift the stories we live by as we encounter other ways of knowing and being in the world. When we shift what we believe and live out in the world, we live as “shifting selves” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 131). The spaces and places where we live as shifting selves are in the social<sup>9</sup> and, in turn, are relational. Connelly and Clandinin’s (1999) conception of stories to live by is meaningful to this work, because it grounds how I think *with* the space between myself and the participants. As the participants and I listen and live out who we are and what we

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<sup>9</sup> The conceptualization of social includes interactions with others in the world and larger influences on a person’s inner life, environment, and unique personal history

believe, within the research relationship, the possibility of understanding our identity and sense making can be made known as we live as shifting selves (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 13). What is also meaningful to this work is that these possibilities of understanding are not unidirectional within the research relationship. Thus, there are possibilities for learning, changing, and shifting identities for the researcher and the participants. I wonder how this relational living will make known new stories in which we live as shifting selves and, in turn, how this influences the phenomenon under study and our research relationship (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 13). Thus, through the telling, retelling, and living out of the stories to live by, the research relationship is always becoming.

As I imagined the always-becoming relationship between myself and the participants, I wondered how *who I am* to the participants would influence what they would share about their experiences of health and well-being as women previously trafficked. What past and/or current relationships influenced the shifting of the stories they live by, their identity making, and how they made sense of what happened to them? Additionally, how did our living out of the stories we live by inform the becoming of the research relationship and who we are to each other in our respective lives? Finally, I wonder how and where our stories will take us across time, places, and relationships where stories to live by can shift (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Shifting the Stories We Live By**

At times we resist shifting the stories we live by in an effort to maintain our composed identity in response to change (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Therefore, listening to and learning from the stories others tell makes known how we live our resistance or willingness to shift the stories we live by. In the past, I have experienced both resistance and willingness to shift the stories I live by. These experiences have made known who I am as I made sense of what was happening to me. Additionally, these experiences brought forward the knowledge I value and hold. As I tell and retell my experiences of walking through the locked gate to get to the safe house, where I would care for women previously trafficked in Southeast Asia, I retell my resistance to live as a shifting self.

In this telling and retelling, I recognize my misreadings of the lives I encountered on the other side of the locked gate - which extends from the story I lived by at the time. I recall walking through the locked gate, thinking that I could care for all the pain and suffering in the stories of the women and that I could create new hope for their future based on the solutions I

would bring to their lives. Looking back, I can now see my misreadings. I operated from the perception that the women needed my help. It would be much later, upon my return to Canada, that I would recognize that these misreadings of the women's lives amplified my misguided intentions. I remember wondering whether I had ever asked any women if they needed help or what health and well-being meant to them. In not asking, in not thinking *with* their stories, I misread who they were and how they composed their lives. Although returning to these misreadings and mis-educative experiences (Dewey, 1938) is complex and hard, I recognize that not doing so can halt the continuous movement of experience.

When experiences halt the continuous movement of experience, it is mis-educative (Dewey, 1938). Dewey's principle of continuity sets forth conditions of experience as mis-educative if they have "the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (p. 13). Martusewicz (2004) argued that "transformations [that] reproduce conditions, e.g., ideologies, attitudes, relationships or practices, or social and economic structures that may be harmful to others" (p. 4) are mis-educative. Similarly, Dewey (1938) argued that "growth, or growing as developing, not only physically but intellectually and morally, is one exemplification of the above principle of continuity" (p. 28), and experience will lead to other experiences. Though Dewey thought along mis-educative and educative experiences within the contexts of education, these conceptualizations are meaningful to think alongside in this work.

In returning to my own misreadings and mis-educative experiences and how I live out my sense making of my stories of walking through the locked gate of the safe house, I return to questions of *Who am I?* in attending to the experiences of health and well-being of women previously trafficked. Would the participants and I experience misreadings of who we are to each other? How would we negotiate these misreadings? Would we remain open to our misreadings? I wonder how my experiences and perceptions of the locked gate of the safe house, alongside the stories of the participants, will unfold and co-compose new stories within our always-becoming relationship. I hope, in remaining open to my misreadings and mis-educative experiences, that I remain awake to my sense of the stories I live by within the relationship with the participants in this study. This is important and messy work of thinking narratively with stories - work that can lead to the possibility of seeking narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) despite the disruptions, silences, and tension.

## **Narrative Coherence and the Direction of Identity and Sense Making**

Carr (1986) explored continuity in narrative coherence as a fragile process of “telling and retelling, to ourselves and others, the story about what we are about and what we are” (p. 97). The seeking of narrative coherence in the stories we tell and live by helps us to make meaning from our experiences. Camia and Zafar (2021) suggested that autobiographical meaning making enables individuals whose life narratives are disrupted to try to make sense of these experiences. Life narratives such as forced migration and trafficking disrupt self-continuity, health, and well-being. A disruption to the sense of continuity is the “feeling that an individual cannot be related to their former self anymore, sometimes perceived as an estrangement from, and lacking a sense of ownership of who can spend time with their body, thoughts, and feelings” (Camia & Zafar, 2021, p. 2). When the disrupted life narrative is severe it profoundly disturbs a sense of continuity, narrative incoherence dominates (Camia & Zafar, 2021, p. 2). Thus, when we seek narrative coherence, we try to make sense of what has happened to us from a distant part of life to the current and future self.

The seeking of narrative coherence is not a return of the current self or to the pre-trafficked self; instead, it is the sense making from experience to find a way to negotiate the construction of self with the use of the conjunction and in identity making (J. Crisp, personal communication, May 10, 2021). For example, a woman who has experienced trafficking might come to identify herself in ways that connect, reconnect, or disconnect her past, present, and future selves. Concerning Chantou’s experience, I wonder which stories she now lives by that speak to maintaining her sense of narrative coherence. I wonder how the construction of her continuity is unfolding in her life now and whether it includes the conjunction. I wonder if she experiences the estrangement of her former self and ownership over her body and how this impacts her current health and well-being.

The conceptualization of narrative coherence matters in understanding the stories of “intersections of knowledge, context, and identity-making” (Huber et al., 2013, p. 186). The stories of narrative coherence also matter as they make known the conscious or unconscious seeking of a sense of continuity when we try to make sense of who we are, what we believe, what happened to us, and what is happening to us in the world. Therefore, in paying the closest attention to what others share and live out, we understand that “what we say to others tells us what is happening to us - what we are thinking, and what may be wrong with us” (Coles, 1989,

p. 30). In paying the closest attention, I am again awakened to how the continuous movement of experience can be disrupted by how I live out my identity and the stories I live by within the research relationship. Thus, Dewey's (1938) principle of the continuity of experience alongside Carr's (1986) conceptualization of narrative coherence is meaningful to this study because both highlight how the stories we tell can make known the particular direction of experience and narrative coherence within the research relationship and across the life course.

In other words, "growth is not enough" for the continuity of experience (Dewey, 1938, p. 36); in the same way, seeking narrative coherence is not enough. It is the particular direction of both that matters, and the inquiry into the stories make known particular directions of experience and narrative coherence that matters. Narratives that appear to "resist narrative coherence can turn out to be extraordinarily rich studies about the life course" (Hyvärinen 2010, p. 105) as the individual is making meaning of past narratives within the present. Here, I wonder how a mis-educative experience can lead to the continuity of experiences, because these experiences can fold back onto past experiences, and from this particular direction, meaning is made. I wonder if this is the growth Dewey (1938) conceptualized as well. In thinking with the relationship between the participants and me, how will my stories, the participants, and our stories make known other ways of understanding the particular direction of experience that led to further experiences and narrative coherence?

Dewey's (1938) conceptualization of the direction of experience calls me to think *with* the direction of growth that leads to a continuity of experience. Dewey's following questions bring me back to think alongside his conceptualization of growth as we consciously and unconsciously seek narrative coherence: "What conditions does growth create for further growth, or does it set up conditions that shut off a person who has grown in a particular direction from continuing growth in new directions"? (p. 36). Dewey asked further what the effects of growth are in a particular direction upon the attitudes and habits<sup>10</sup> that alone lead to the continuity of experience (p. 36). Thus, the direction of experience is important to think about within this work, but the inquiry into the stories we live by lived out through our habits and attitudes is also important, because they too lead to the continuity of experience (Dewey, 1938). Here, I wonder whether the stories of our research relationship will make known how we can pay

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<sup>10</sup> Dewey's (1922) conceptualized habits through experience where we live out what we believe and our identity. Thus, habits are the ways we are inclined to be in the world.



attention to the direction of growth. Additionally, how do the habits of our everyday lead to the continuity of experience? These questions are more than understanding a progression of events and are embodied in the research relationship. Finally, these questions highlight further the need for a relational ontology at the center of this narrative inquiry that creates a space and place for living relationally.

### **Stories Held by the Body**

The stories that we tell, retell, and live out help us to make sense of our lives. Boon (2015) added that the stories we tell are “stories our bodies tell, stories we tell about our bodies and are our way of being in the world” (p. 3). Further, how do stories of the body, both “fleshy and enfleshed narratives, come to matter” (p. 3). Boon came to this conclusion while studying consultation letters, the common mode of 18<sup>th</sup>-century encounters with physicians. Specifically, she focused on the consultation letters of Dr. Samuel August Tissot, a physician during the Age of Enlightenment. Boon concluded that these “narratives offered a unique window into the nature of corporeal experience and cultural understandings of embodiment when the medical encounter, at the time, was largely limited to the external examination of the body” (p. 4). By putting pen to paper, she elaborated on how individuals in their suffering (fleshy narratives) came to understand their bodies as sites of political engagement (enfleshed narratives). Through understanding their bodies as sites of political engagement, these individuals also came to claim their bodies’ stories as they understood their orientation within the social, cultural, and political landscapes of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Boon, 2015).

Boon (2015) explained that these fleshy and enfleshed narratives are articulations of bodily selves experienced and can help individuals to understand their orientation in the world. This intimate relationship of the lived body and the textual body matters (Boon, 2015) because it makes known the stories held by bodies. As Boon described it, bodies tell stories, and we tell stories about our bodies; thus, before these stories are lived, told, and taken in written form, they are held by bodies. Boon’s conceptualization of the intimate relationship of the lived and textual body is meaningful to this study, because the telling of the stories held by the body through text can be a space and place where these stories can be claimed and re-claimed to retain ownership of the body Ephron (1983, as cited in Boon, 2015). I wondered whether the participants’ stories would speak of an intimate relationship between their lived and textual bodies. Would this further speak to the stories that their bodies hold? Do their stories of being trafficked bring forth

other stories that they claimed and re-claimed to retain ownership of their bodies? Are their stories left unclaimed? As we co-composed the narrative accounts, would they or I see our bodies as sites of political engagement as we come to understand our orientation within the social, cultural, and political? Finally, how would the lived and textual body inform how we negotiated who we are to each other within the research relationship?

### **Turning Towards the Words of Others**

#### **Theorizing of Bodies**

In understanding that the stories the body holds and their meaning matter, I have come to recognize that the theorizing of bodies matters as to how bodies are theorized in the world. It matters because bodies are living the impacts of meanings that constitute bodies; in turn, they constitute the world that composes their materiality (Sullivan, 2001). This is not to say that questions regarding what bodies are is not important, but the theorizing of the body's materiality positions the theorizing of the relationship of bodies and the environment secondary and, in turn, the experience of this relationship as secondary.

As poststructuralists and phenomenologists seek to theorize bodies, questions central to their theorizing relate to whether bodies are discursive or nondiscursive. Sullivan (2001) posited that understanding bodies as transactional reveals that the discursive body is compatible with attending to bodily lived experience (p. 50).<sup>11</sup> Sullivan described transaction, Dewey's (1938) second criteria of experience, "as much by connection and continuity as distinctiveness and particularity and, thus, distinctiveness and particularity cannot be understood apart from connection and continuity" (p. xxiii). Furthermore, transaction begins and ends with experience. It is not secondary or an afterthought when the conditions of the transaction between bodies and the world have been satisfied through what bodies are. Because "all human experience is ultimately social, it does not go on simply inside a person, and there are sources outside an individual that give rise to experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). In other words, bodies live "as

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<sup>11</sup>The dualism of nondiscursive and discursive bodies stems from the idea of bodies being constituted in and through their transactions with the world (Sullivan, 2001). Discursive bodies use the process of creating verbal meaning through words. In contrast, nondiscursive bodies create meaning through sensory, figurative, cognitive, and emotional nuances outside of cultural, political, and social meaning and norms. My intent is not to discuss whether bodies are discursive or nondiscursive, but to explore Dewey's (1938) transactional whole of experience and explain that it is not secondary or an afterthought when the conditions of the transactions between bodies and the world have been met through what bodies are. Therefore, meaningful to this work is to learn from lived experiences. This begins and ends with experience, of bodies telling, re-telling, and living out the impacts of meanings that constitutes bodies.

much in processes across and ‘through’ skins as in processes ‘within’ skins” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 128).

In positing that bodies live across, through, and in skins, Dewey and Bentley (1949) challenged the scientific community not to limit their understanding of human beings to the interactions between one component of the living process within the skin and other components within it. The skin is “not a rigid border holding back the body from the outside world or the outside world from the body” (Sullivan, 2001, p. 2). Dewey and Bentley encouraged a “transactional view within the skin where interactions between the body and the world are made known as transdermally transactional” (p. 130); the body is actively living in the world because it is through and in its skin. This conceptualization challenges us to view the body as no longer “wholly passive and gradually molded into shapes adapted to living by independent environmental conditions, mechanistically treated” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 130). The conceptualization matters because it describes borders. At this border I imagined how the participants and I would actively shape each other’s *stories we live by* and whether our relationship would be constitutive from within, by, and outside our skin. Finally, I wondered what new stories our bodies would hold and take forward from these experiences.

A “transactional view of the skin of bodies” (Dewey & Bentley, 1949, p. 128) gives equal credence to how bodies are living, the impacts of meanings that constitute bodies, and how this living out constitute the world that composes their materiality, unlike various metaphors used to theorize about the relationship between the body of the world.<sup>12</sup> Thus, stories held by the body come to matter as they are lived out in the world, which, in turn, composes the materiality of the body that holds stories. This understanding is meaningful to this work as it grounds the space and place between myself and the participants within Dewey’s (1938) continuity and transaction of experience, where stories held by the body and meaning matter as they start with experience and end with experience. It also offers a way of listening and learning about lived experiences of health and well-being through the stories that the bodies of women previously trafficked hold and how they reflect their identity and sense making.

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<sup>12</sup> The metaphors used to describe bodies’ relationship with the world include *melting pot*, *tossed salad*, *gardens*, *stew*, *orchestra*, *jazz bands*, and *fabric*. These metaphors have ontological and epidemiological implications for understanding how bodies are constituted by the world and in turn how bodies live out the meanings within these metaphors that constitute bodies. I do not situate my understanding of the relationship between bodies and the world within these metaphors. Instead, I hoped to remain open and curious to how the participants would see themselves and position themselves in the world through their stories of identity and sense making.

Dewey (1938) further conceptualized the continuous reconstitution of bodies through their interconstitutive relations (Sullivan, 2001) as *situations*. Dewey (1938) described transactions when sources outside an individual give rise to experience by interacting with internal conditions of the body. *Situations* then form from the interplay of these two sets of conditions. Dewey used adjectives to describe *situations* (Mesthene, 1959), as the body is not static but actively living in *situations*. So, when we understand transactions as encounters from the *stories we live by*, we live in *situations*. We are living in this interplay and how we live in this interplay varies.

Dewey further described conceptions of situations and transactions as inseparable, as an experience is always what it is because of a transaction between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes their environment (Dewey, 1938). The conceptions of situations and transactions are inseparable but distinct from each. As I continue to imagine the living out of this interplay within the research relationship, I think *with* the conditions outside of our bodies and the stories our bodies hold that are not yet known. Will the way we live out this interplay give rise to further experiences? (Dewey, 1938). I wonder how the participants and I will live in these moments, and live out “connections and continuity, distinctiveness and particularities of transactions” as our research relationship is always becoming (Sullivan, 2001, p. xxiii). Finally, I wonder if we will notice how the living out of the *stories we live by* informs our narrative coherence and growth and bring forth new stories of interplay? These questions lead me to think reciprocity.<sup>13</sup>

### **Stories of Trauma Held by the Body**

In continuing to think alongside stories held by the body and how they matter, I come to wonder with the stories of trauma held by bodies. Yehuda and Bierer (2009) described that trauma marks the genetic material of human bodies and is passed down to subsequent generations; they extrapolate this to non-human bodies.<sup>14</sup> Wozolek (2021) posits that “joy, hope,

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<sup>13</sup> I will explore reciprocity in Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup>The residence time of sodium in oceans is one example of non-human bodies that Sharpe (2016) posits is marked by trauma across time. Specifically, how “the salt and water of the ocean holds the violence of slave ships as energy continues to cycle” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 40). Though there are possibilities in understanding that non-human bodies much like human bodies are marked and hold trauma, as Wozolek (2021) posited “violence is not just something shared affectively” (p. 62). My intention here is to think alongside the stories of trauma that the body holds and that this calls for more than just attending to the entanglements of trauma across space and time.

and love, to name a few, are non-human bodies and exist within violent intra-actions” (p. 25). The trauma the body experiences through violence can be carried forward through the *stories we live by*, our identity, sense-making, and our relationships. The making sense of the manifestations of trauma in and through the body depends on making unconscious meanings conscious and an attempt to create a more coherent narrative (Etherington, 2003).

Wozolek (2021) outlined the possibilities and tensions in attending to stories of violence and how individuals make sense of what has happened to them from the multiplicities of violence. Wozolek (2021) posits that multiplicities of violence traverse context, histories, politics, culture, and bodies in ways that are interconnected through an assemblage. The assemblage of violence “attends to the idea that every act of violence is predicated on and exists in relations to the past, present, and future iterations of violence” (Wozolek, 2021, p. 111). Yet, Wozolek does not come to narrative inquiry as a way to attend to the multiplicities of violence. I wonder how the relational space of narrative inquiry would inform the understanding of multiplicities of violence. Wozolek comes to the multiplicities of violence through quantum entanglements and by leaning on Karen Barad’s understanding that matter and meaning are fused. Thus, the intra-actions, in which non-human bodies (joy, happiness, anger) and human bodies come together create a constitutive agency among the bodies involved. It is not that Wozolek presented hope and violence as dualities in understanding the assemblages of violence; rather, “hope and violence can be and is always already connected through quantum entanglements; where particles are so deeply entwined that one cannot change how the other moves, over distance, well after being separated” (p. 42). My purpose is not to deconstruct the idea of quantum entanglements but to think alongside these entanglements in the space and place between myself and the participants in this work, especially in thinking narratively with the stories of trauma held by bodies of women previously trafficked. I return to think alongside entanglements in chapter nine.

Wozolek elaborated further that non-human bodies such as hope are not always already fused with violence and that a person’s hope is porous and malleable by someone else’s understanding of hope. The entanglement of hope and violence is an interesting conceptualization to think *with* as I wonder if these stories will be made known. Will the stories of the participants resonate with the entanglements of hope, joy, love and violence. Will the stories their bodies hold make known spaces where the entanglements of joy, hope and love are

unclear, grey or unknown? How will the participants' living out of the stories of trauma shift my understanding of hope. How do we ensure the *stories we live by* stay porous and malleable to each other's understanding of the complexities of the effects of trauma on, in and through the skin? Here I wonder what relationships past and current, have made known or silenced the effects of the stories of trauma held by bodies. I wonder how participants make sense of the experiences when the effects of the stories of trauma held by their bodies was silenced, restored or merely talked about rather than cared for. I wonder how the participants and I can nurture the research relationship so the stories of trauma that their bodies hold are given voice. In telling the memories of traumatic experiences held by the body, it is important to "acknowledge that this is a mode of sense-making" (Meretoja, 2021, p. 27), and it is always becoming across time and in relations. Thus, the relational space of this narrative inquiry, offers a way to acknowledge participants' becoming.

In this becoming, in this *be-ing*, the relationship between the researcher and participants can shift to a mutual becoming to each other and for each other (Clandinin et al., 2018). This relational shift is a turn towards an "other-oriented ethics grounded in sustainable empathy" (Meretoja, 2021, p. 28), where one respects the other and does not aim merely to talk about memories of trauma. Furthermore, from this mutual becoming, the experiences of sense-making from sharing the stories of trauma held by the body are not "subsumed under dominant narratives that reinforce stereotypes" (Meretoja, 2018, pp. 112 - 113). When we posit experience as the starting point of narrative inquiry, singularities told, retold, and lived are not subsumed under fixed meanings to dilute narrative agency, erasing others, their imaginings, and possibilities not yet made known. Additionally, subsuming singularities does not align with attending to the always becoming of the transactional whole of experience and the continuity of experience. Thus, it brings forward an "ethics of questioning, questioning ourselves, questioning our relationships with others and questioning the ethics of larger spaces" into the space between the researcher and the participants (Bergum, 1999, p. 167). Finally, in this questioning, the relational space in the narrative inquiry is grounded in relational ethics that attends to the uncertainty, complexity, and spontaneity of human experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

Yet how do I ensure, from this turn to the theorizing of how bodies are in the world, that the relational space of this narrative inquiry produces a "non-violent understanding" (Meretoja, 2021, p. 26) of the health and well-being of previously trafficked women; where their stories

have the power to transform the general as opposed to a violent understanding that appropriates the stories of others into a fixed and dominant meaning? Dewey's (1938) criteria of continuity of experience offers a way forward as "every experience takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Thus, listening and attending to the stories of trauma held by the body is more than preventing the retraumatization from telling these stories. It is attending to the stories held by the body by *being* awake. My hope is that the participants and I co-create a relational space so that the stories held by their bodies are more than just talked about.

My hope calls me back to experience, to begin with experience, and end with experience. Yet, it also calls for more. It is not enough to insist on the "necessity of experience, nor even of activity in experience" but to attend to the direction of experience (Dewey, 1938, p. 27), as the stories of trauma held by bodies and meaning matter. Furthermore, that this shift in the relationship makes room for understanding the stories of trauma held by the bodies of women previously trafficked, their meaning, who they are in claiming and reclaiming these stories, and who I am as these stories matter.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Why Narrative Inquiry?

Experience is the fundamental ontological category from which a narrative inquiry proceeds (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The philosophical perspectives of narrative inquiry as a research methodology reach into Dewey's (1938) understanding of experience that is marked by the criterion of interaction and continuity. This fundamental understanding of experience reveals an ontology and epistemology reflected in the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry: "temporality (across time), sociality (private and public relations), and place (where lives are lived and where the research takes place)" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 167). These dimensions ground the conceptualization of experience as a storied phenomenon in which experience is a source of the stories we live by and that we tell, retell, and live out every day (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, through the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry, this methodology creates a way to consider the narratives that shift the individual narratives of the everyday (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The ontological commitment in narrative inquiry is a relational commitment where researchers and participants co-compose stories in living out what they tell of their respective lives (Caine et al., 2020; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Additionally, the epistemological commitment in narrative inquiry informs a view of experience as continuously becoming, in relation, across contexts, place, and time to make known who we are (Clandinin, 2013).

In narrative inquiry, stories are not the object of inquiry or a fixed text; rather, they are often verbs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, in situating narrative inquiry as a "pragmatic methodology is not only a focus on the individual's experience but also on the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted" (Clandinin, 2007 p. 42-42). This directs me to the ideas of Addams (1902) regarding sympathetic knowledge, which is a "mingling of epistemology and ethics where knowing one another better reinforces the common connection of people such that the potential for caring and empathetic moral action increases" (p. 2). This orientation produces a unique epistemology essential for developing knowledge while actively knowing others (Addams, 1902; Clandinin, 2013). As Dewey et al. (1998) advised, "Go to experience and see what the thing is experienced as" (p. 118). Thus, this work is a commitment to living alongside



participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and narrative inquiry's commitment to relational ethics becomes central (Clandinin et al., 2018).

### **Relational Ontology and Reciprocity**

The relational ontology of narrative inquiry highlights the necessity of living out and co-composing the conditions of reciprocity needed to understand the stories held by bodies. Addams (1902) stated that relationality requires that scholars be part of communities and individuals' lives to understand how contexts shape lives. In actively knowing others through reciprocal proximal relations, Addams (1902) wrote:

That experimentation is transactive, changing both the investigator and the investigated. Theory is thus continuous with and arises out of experience. It rejects the standpoint of the neutral observer as both epistemologically bankrupt and morally pernicious, (pp. 57).

This understanding of reciprocal proximal relationality situates the studying of experience in an epistemology that acknowledges a co-composing of knowledge. Narratively, this relational ontology calls forth a being in the midst of the lives of others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In doing so, "one sees from the point of view of the participants in the particulars of what is happening to them" (Greene, 1995, p. 10). Furthermore, Greene (1995) calls us to look "not only in the everyday but at what surrounds and grounds the everyday, what reaches back in time and what extends forward into the undiscovered, what is not yet" (p. 292). Thus, the studying of experience as continuously becoming, in relation, across contexts, place, and time (Clandinin, 2013) is the studying of experience in common.

Experience is not merely uncritically reproduced but is also tested in proximity to individuals or communities (Siegfried, 1996). Addams (1902) stated that honoring multiple voices of experience is essential to tap into a "community's intelligence" (p. 28) in addressing social-justice issues; "the code of ethics of individuals is made known through the context of the family, the family in the context of society and society in the context of shaping larger social justice issues" (Addams, 1902, pp. 92). Recognizing this interrelatedness, "social advancement could only authentically be found in lateral progress where the social gains are held in common" (Addams, 1902, pp. 92). Thus, it is here that Jane Addams's principle of reciprocity is meaningful to this work.

Addams' (1902) principle of reciprocity addresses the complexity of attending to multiple standpoints. This *principle of reciprocity* calls for “reflexivity in our responsibilities in lateral progress as the contributions of knowledge from others are valued in such a way that each side receives and gives something to each other” (Siegfried, 1996, p. 227). For Addams, “social relations are essentially a reciprocal relation” (Addams, 1985, p. 25). Criticisms of Addams’s conceptualization of reciprocity stem from understanding transaction outside of a pragmatic view.<sup>15</sup> (Sullivan, 2003). This misunderstanding of Addams’s conceptualization of reciprocity stems from viewing transactions as unidirectional (Sullivan, 2003) and outside of an always-becoming relationship where a way of listening, learning, and being is co-constructed.

The idea of lateral progress for all was poignant in Addams’ (1902) understanding that outsiders must actively know individuals and communities. In this active democracy, Addams explained that we understand our responsibilities in promoting lateral progress, in which social gains are held in the common and not in the lives of a few. Democracy, in this sense, attends to imposing our wills upon others as we critically engage in experiences through relational proximity. Furthermore, when we also view the promotion of lateral progress as a way of life, it is sustained in the public realm. In the public realm, imposing our wills on others is made known along with the context of this imposition. Thus, the relational proximity of the narrative inquiry space and place is essential to understanding how context shapes the ethics that determine whom we see first and who we are when we impose forward-looking stories on women previously trafficked.

In bringing forward Addams’ conceptualization of reciprocity and lateral progress I am drawn back to the always becoming and shifting of the continuity of experience in much the same way it was for Addams herself as she lived in the community of Hull-House. As I draw on Dewey alongside Addams’ shifting of the stories she lived by, it is not enough to insist on experience or the activity of experience, but the direction of these experiences that leads to further experience (Dewey, 1938). Thus, the direction of Addams’ lived experiences speaks to

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<sup>15</sup> Rivka Shpak Lissak criticism does raise important questions regarding the possible negative effects of transaction on minority groups. My intention here is not to deconstruct these possible negative effects but to state that they matter. Specifically, they matter in how the body is theorized, which matters to how we theorize how bodies are in the world. This is evident as I think alongside Lissak’s criticisms of Adams, situated in her theorizing of how bodies are in the world. Sullivan (2003) suggests that Lissak’s pluralism operates within the salad bowl metaphor, where individuals interact with each other in the world but are never porous to each other (p. 46). Thus, this understanding of being in the world is not Adams’s conceptualization of transaction and does not lead to the conclusion that Adams was racist or that her notion of reciprocity was a guise for assimilation.

the co-composing of the mutual reciprocity she lived out alongside those she lived with and how this experience shifted her understandings of who she was in relation to her responsibilities in promoting and understanding lateral progress across her life course.

As I imagined the space and places of relational living within this narrative inquiry, the necessity of co-composing a mutual reciprocity *between* myself and the participants is made known – to is lived. In co-composing a mutual reciprocity, the researcher and participants shift to a relational ethics, where a mutual becoming to each other and for each other is situated in approaching each other as learners. In approaching each other as learners, power imbalances are attended to within the co-composing of a mutual reciprocity that is always in the becoming. So as to make known how we view others through historical, spatial, and social power imbalances when the apportioning of responsibilities of care occurs without attending to the grooming of certain populations for trafficking. Neo-Colonialism continues to groom certain populations for trafficking and, at the same time, directs the rescue narrative of rights-based anti-trafficking agencies. In thinking with Chantou’s story, I wonder how her experiences highlight the historical, spatial, and social grooming of her gender and ethnicity to trafficking. The relational ontology of narrative inquiry creates a way to attend to the lives of others as intermingled with our lives historically, spatially, and socially.

Finally, in the boundary space between my participants’ and my stories, I need to pay attention to the confines of my impulse to improve without first understanding (Bateson, 1994). In this boundary, I hope the co-composing of the reciprocity of proximal relations between the participants and I “over time, creates a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Thus, in this relational ontology of narrative inquiry, experience is made known in common and brings forth a mutual reciprocity not yet known, that may make known further possibilities of shaping and shifting the *stories we live by*.

### **Key Assumptions of Narrative Inquiry**

When we think about stories, the stories and experiences are objects. However, in thinking *with* stories, experiences incur an obligation on the listener as tensions between ways of knowing awaken us to a moral call of responsible living (Morris, 2001). This obligation on the listener to thinking *with* stories underscores the following key assumptions of narrative inquiry: human experience is narrative, human experience is always in the social, and “experiences taken collectively” are temporal (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 33). Human experience is a

“changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social and material environment” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). This interaction is more than cognitive or physical; it is also always becoming; and to understand these interactions, we turn towards experience.

This first key assumption of narrative inquiry is that humans tell, retell, and live out stories because they are a “portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). Human life is shaped by these stories of identity making and sense-making as we try to understand the world around us. Thus, narrative inquiry as a methodology understands human experience as a storied phenomenon as humans are inherently storytellers.

The second key assumption of narrative inquiry is that human experience is social. Stories that people live and tell are the “result of the confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). The stories of women previously trafficked shift and are shaped by larger social, political, and economic narratives. In understanding the social influences through their experiences, I encountered sacred stories (Crites, 1971) that spoke to each participant’s sense of self and the world. In Crites’s (1971) work, I encountered the idea that sacred stories lie deep in the consciousness, too deep to be spoken. Sacred stories orient life and a sense of self and make meaning of the world. The active consciousness is the fulcrum between mundane and sacred stories; thus, just as some mundane stories of the everyday sound out greater than others, so do the sacred stories that inform the stories we live by. Sacred stories inform the actions and experiences we live out in the everyday and our making sense and clarification of our sense of the conscious world (Crites, 1971). However, Crites (1971) proposed further that they are narrative in form and told indirectly through the actions and experiences of people. The relational ontology of narrative inquiry makes a space for understanding these sacred stories. In the actions that both parties choose to know each other truly, the negotiations of the research relationship shift to a mutual becoming to each other and for each other (Clandinin et al., 2018). This shift in the social alters the phenomenon under study. Thus, sacred stories indirectly made known in the social can create new possibilities to make sense of the self and the world.

The third key of narrative inquiry is that “experiences taken collectively are temporal” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 33); that is, experience is always becoming over time. Experiences taken collectively are grounded in “the term voices rather than voice as narratives are continuously shaped over time by the knowledge, experiences, values and feelings of the persons who are telling them” and the context in which they occur (Moen, 2006, p. 61). This assumption has ontological implications for the understanding and viewing of experience and the conception and generation of knowledge. Experiences, people, and stories are not “outside of time where they can be held still for the studying; on the contrary, they are in time” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 10). The study of people, the study of stories, is not just an accounting of experience but also the “lived immediacy of that experience” where the narrative inquiry itself “alters the phenomena under study” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 45). Thus, the outcomes of a narrative inquiry are not generalizations but are open to new possibilities and new interpretations because experience continuously evolves over time.

### **From Field to Final Research Texts**

In drawing on narrative inquiry as a research methodology, I understand that it is more than just the telling of stories; it is also a way of composing life from a relational space (Huber et al., 2004). Thus, narrative inquiry “is more than an analytic tool or a representative device as it is not only a focus on the individual’s experience but the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, pp. 42). As the participants and I began to live in the relational space of narrative inquiry, we slowly co-created a relational space to co-compose stories of our relationship. The intersecting of our stories, the co-creating of a relational space was transactional and thus shaped the ways in which we inquired into experience.

To recruit participants, I first spoke with the staff of ACT Alberta, a nongovernment organization that aids individuals trafficked in Alberta. I recruited three participants through available postcards at ACT Alberta. Their recruitment aligned well with the relational ontology of narrative inquiry because it required time to negotiate and develop a relationship with each participant over a nine-month period from May 2022 to February 2023. Drawing on the stories of the three participants, named T, Phoenix, and Wolfie, revealed their experiences of health and well-being along their life course.

The participants identified as female; they were 28, 28, and 29 years of age; and they were trafficked in Canada. I attended to diversity in gender by acknowledging the various ways in which the participants self-identified their gender. Two of the participants were sexually exploited, and one of these participants was digitally trafficked. The third participant was labour trafficked. Additionally, one of the sexually exploited participants was trafficked because of her disability.

I initially engaged with them to determine their interest in participating and ensure that they met the following criteria: They were 18 years of age or older, identified as female, were previously trafficked, and currently lived in Canada. Human trafficking, for the purposes of this project, is related to labour and/or sexual exploitation. During the conversations I communicated to the participants that their voices, their experiences with health care, and their stories could have the capacity to change current practice for women who have been previously trafficked and seek care. It was evident in Rogers and Caine's (2022) recently completed scoping review that the voices of women who have been trafficked and seek care post trafficking are absent. Their voices are missing in the development of programs and policies that guide equitable and meaningful access to care. Additionally, narrative inquiry offers a place for both the researcher and the participants to change and grow, and this project offered such a space.

Once a participant chose to participate in this work, I met with them individually, responded to any questions or concerns that they might have regarding consent, and negotiated formal monthly meetings—a maximum of 10—that included tape-recorded conversations (Appendix B). I asked ACT to stop the distribution of postcards and informed other potential participants that I had closed the study to enrollment. I communicated with each participant that our research relationship would end once we had negotiated the narrative accounts and that it was important that the participants and I remain alert to the eventual closure of our relationship.

I was aware that some of the participants might not have had time to devote to a research study because their time was valuable and they needed to support themselves and their families financially, and I attended to this by allowing the participants to negotiate the frequency, place, and times of the meetings. As well, I offered an honoraria of a \$20 gift card for each formal meeting, to a maximum of 10. I invited the participants individually for coffee or a meal close to their place of work or residence, or I took coffee or a meal with me if they chose to meet at their homes or in an office space at ACT. At times I also conducted our meetings via zoom, which I

negotiated with each participant. Several guiding questions informed the flow of my conversations with the participants (Appendix B). Finally, I negotiated a plan of communication with them, depending on their access to telephones and the Internet.

In addition to my fieldnotes, I invited the participants to share photographs, images, or other forms that represented the meaning of health and well-being to them. The stories told and lived out in my relationships with participants shaped the nature of the field texts that we co-composed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These field texts (primary data sources) included audiotaped conversations with the participants alongside the images or song lyrics that they chose. Wolfie chose an image, and T and Phoenix chose song lyrics. Initially, I intended to ask the participants if they would be interested in meeting as a group over coffee or a meal to share their stories, song lyrics, or images with other participants. My intention was to create a space where further wonderings could inform other forms of interim and final research texts. In thinking alongside my intention, I asked myself whether meeting as a group of participants would be beneficial to T, Phoenix, or Wolfie? In my intention, I realized that I wanted to live out a place of the narrative inquiry where T, Phoenix, and Wolfie were not co-composers of the final research texts. In wanting the participants to meet, I was already envisioning our collaboration over a visual representation of their stories. I was restorying their experiences as homogenous so that one representation of all that they had experienced and continued to live out was revealed. In my mind I knew that I would need to negotiate consent for a group meeting, but somewhere deep in my way of knowing I wanted and wished for a specific final research text. In this questioning of my intentions, the words of Clandinin (2013) reverberated through my way of knowing: that the experiences of participants always receive the first priority and care. When I asked T, Phoenix and Wolfie if they would like to meet each other, they all agreed. Unfortunately, the budget for this work did not include an honorarium for lost wages and travel costs of participants who would need to take extended time off work to meet as a group. Thus, meeting as a group would not care for some of the participants in the ways that they needed to be cared for.

### **Moving from Conversations to Field Texts**

Through visits and conversations, the participants and I started to live in a relational narrative inquiry space. Our relationship was the foundation of field texts that represented our becoming moments, places, and time (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). The participants and I negotiated the level of collaboration in composing the style of field texts, because their rich

details filled in the spaces created by their memory accounts of events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The fieldnotes contained descriptions of conversations such as time, place, and context; found poems; and images or song lyrics. Found poems initially emerged from the transcripts of the audio recordings. I brought these found poems<sup>16</sup> back to the participants to ensure that they honored their experience and voice.

I used journal entries to complement the field texts to think alongside my experiences in the narrative inquiry space and attend to the positioning of my field texts, which had implications for the way that I thought with the field texts. My journal also served as a space and place for me to attend to the borderlands of different ways of knowing that emerged from my conversations and relationships with the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Field Texts to Interim and Final Research Texts**

The writing of detailed fieldnotes anchored my reflexivity to the relational space. I transitioned from field texts to final research texts through interim research texts. Field texts mark the experiences of a specific time, place, and context; however, the interim research texts are a beginning of the retelling process (Clandinin, 2013) and of the reliving of the research relationship, the complexities, tensions, becoming, and mutual caring. Interim texts “take on different forms and vary according to the circumstances surrounding the life of the inquiry and particularly the research and scholarly life of the inquirer” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133). Interim research texts, known as narrative accounts, also preserve a connection between the research puzzle and the final research text and the consistency and coherence of the research (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I composed narrative accounts by continuously reflecting upon and interpreting the fieldnotes, journal entries, field texts, found poems, song lyrics, images, conversations, visits, and transcripts. Throughout the study I engaged with a response community; their insights were particularly important during the writing of the narrative accounts.

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<sup>16</sup> Composing found poems was a metaphorical double-knitting process for representing and thinking with the stories shared by the participants (Edge & Olan, 2020). The act of making a found poem from research texts served as a way to inquire into and think with the participants’ identity and meaning making when reading, sharing, reacting, interpreting, and co-composing (Edge & Olan, 2020). Found poems are formed from first noticing the words the participants used in sharing their stories within in the transcripts. In sharing, re-reading, thinking *with* and responding to the initial found poems, meanings were co-stitched together *with* the participants. The words and ideas of the initial found poem are arranged in an organic manner of creating, crafting, and exploring (Edge & Olan, 2020). The final found poems also co-created “liminal spaces between what was and what is, to create both the time and space” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 72) so I could live alongside their stories.



The movement between the various field texts within a relationship can cause relational tensions (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009); yet these tensions called me to be mindful and attentive to how “a relationship embeds meaning in the field texts and imposes form on the research text ultimately developed” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 94). For Phoenix, song lyrics created a space and place of meaning making and bridged her style of storytelling to the found poems and eventual interim research texts. More important, she invited me to hear her differently and to care for her stories differently. Part of Phoenix’s narrative account included song lyrics that intentionally overlapped portions of the interim text. This intentionality was more than just a creative way of writing interim texts; we lived out this intentionality within certain songs that she read out loud during our conversations. Thus, she made the lyrics transparent in the interim texts; they are of a different font and size and intentionally placed within the narrative account to reveal how they helped me to hear her and care for her. As we lived out this relational space, a new rhythm to our relationship came forward, which in turn rooted meaning in the narrative account.

The interim texts for Wolfie took on an entirely different form based on how our relationship evolved over time. The two columns of the interim texts revealed the back-and-forth co-composing of our relationship and the image that we co-composed to represent what health and well-being meant to her. The natural development of our research relationship had a rhythm as well and extended throughout the writing, reading, and rereading of the interim texts between the columns. Finally, T chose the lyrics of a song that had meaning for her and her daughter, as T’s health and well-being were intimately connected to the health and well-being of her daughter.

Various font styles and blank spaces and pages were carefully placed to slow down the reading of the interim texts and provide a visual of the tensions, spaces, and places of becoming in our relational space. Some blank spaces represented the negative spaces of landscapes, meanings said and unsaid, and the way that bodies of the participants hold the stories of each participant. Direct quotes from each participant were italicized to keep the conversational space within the narrative accounts.

The initial drafts of found poems from the transcripts of conversations created spaces and places of becoming; specifically, the becoming of sense and identity making, language, ideas, actions, and hope. The found poems also became a collage of living alongside our meaning

making within our transactional relationship (Rosenblatt, 2005). Therefore, the found poems were aligned to the right margin to represent this living alongside other interim texts. This epistemological commitment is further guided by the reader's/writer's orientation to a text and the purpose of the text and experience (Rosenblatt, 1994). Thus, narrative inquiry creates a relational space to reveal the orientation and the purpose of the research text. What is revealed, learned, and thought *with* within this relational space is not simply knowledge about the trafficking experiences of T, Phoenix, and Wolfie, but a living alongside their experiences that informs the form of the interim research texts.

I then shared the individual interim research texts with the participants to honor their experiences within the relationships that we negotiated. The experiences of participants always receive first priority and incorporate changes to the interim texts into the final research texts (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that the writing of a final research text is full of tensions because the researcher turns towards the voices of the participants while anticipating the audience of the research. I gave the participants all of the research texts to ensure that I honored their voices. I discerned resonating threads from the narrative accounts that revealed meaning that echoed in my understanding of the experiences of the participants and how they negotiated their health and well-being throughout their life course.

Using narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of women who were previously trafficked was challenging. The first challenge was to negotiate trusting relationships with participants, who might have feared building relationships with others. Second, because of the nature of the conversations, the participants struggled emotionally, mentally, and physically at times with retelling their stories. I drew on my previous experience in working with women trafficked in Southeast Asia to attend to the risk of retraumatizing participants. As a registered nurse, I am trained to deal with people with potential suicidal ideations, flashbacks, and mental-health disturbances. Furthermore, the recruitment of participants through the agencies with which they were connected created a network for referral if they encountered difficulties during the inquiry. I relied on my network of connections, as well as those of my supervisor, with local agencies such as the Boyle McCauley Health Care Centre and other clinics. I referred the participants for assistance only with their permission. It was important to ensure that the participants knew that our relationships would end; I gradually prepared for this to ensure that

they felt honored and not exploited (Clandinin, 2007). Relational ethics rather than prescriptive protocols guiding the ending of the research relationships.

### **Thinking with Relational Ethics**

The relational spaces in narrative inquiry are spaces of belonging and negotiating for both researchers and participants. These spaces of belonging are always marked by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care (Clandinin, 2013). Specific ethical concerns to which I attended while I worked alongside women previously trafficked included sharing research texts, using pseudonyms, and obtaining informed consent (Appendix A). This thinking *with* ethical concerns is a reflexive matter rather than a fixed prescription (Clandinin, 2013). Even more important was the negotiation of my dual role as a narrative inquirer, which involved an “intimate relationship with participants and my professional role in the scholarly community” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 538). As the research relationship unfolded with each participant, we negotiated these concerns as I continued to lean into the ethics of care and the relational ethics of narrative inquiry (Caine et al., 2020).

A feminist ethics of care, which was initially developed as an alternative to universal ethics, has many forms. Some feminists have described a feminist ethics of care as a “normative lens to view ethics and it is seated and reproduced in actual human societies” (Robinson, 2011, p. 2). Though there is agreement on its general features, the call to reject the conceptualization of care in the feminine is complicated. It is also problematic alongside the understanding that gender is socially constructed. Specifically, it is “misleading to identify feminine traits that conceptualize care when these traits could also be associated with men due to their exposure to similar socialization processes that instill a feminine disposition to care” (Siegfried, 1996, p. 203). However, interpretations of experience are not value free or impartial, and the “fact that some values are demonstrably typical of some women’s situations” (Siegfried, 1996, p. 209) is not reason enough to reject the conceptualization of care in the feminine.

An ethics of care, although a necessary starting point for narrative inquiry, is not sufficient to sustain a commitment to living alongside participants (Caine et al., 2020). Specifically, when care is conceptualized through a relationship of dependency between the caregiver and the receiver of care, an ethics of care centers on fixed prescriptions for care (Jaggar, 1991; Robinson, 2011). When the researcher is the caregiver and the participants are the receivers of care, we must attend to the identities we mark on others and ourselves and the

assignment of care responsibilities in response to these identities (Hutchings, 2000; Walker, 1998). These fixed prescriptions of care can alter the phenomenon of interest because it alters the way in which the researcher lives alongside the participants. Though an ethics of care is initially necessary in the relational ontology that narrative inquiry offers, Caine et al. (2020) suggested a move towards relational ethics because a “mutual becoming in the reciprocity and responsibilities of care to and for each other” (p. 272) is important.

As reciprocity and responsibilities evolved differently with each participant, Addams’ (1902) sympathetic knowing continued to inform me. Addams described mutual becoming as emerging between epistemology and ethics, where “the knowing of one another better reinforces the common connection of people such that the potential for caring and empathetic moral action increases” (p. 2). Through this becoming I cared for the participants and their stories in our research relationship, but the relationships were interdependent rather than dependent when we conceptualized the care in the feminine. Finally, this relational ethics offered a way to remain open to uncertainty, mutuality, curiosity, and being present in living alongside the participants.

Caine et al. (2020) conceptualized five dimensions of relational ethics. As I lived alongside the lives of women previously trafficked and the uncertainties that developed from sharing the research texts, using pseudonyms, and obtaining informed consent, I drew upon these dimensions. Co-composing the research texts was complex and messy work during which I gave the participants an opportunity to address their concerns when they did not recognize themselves in the interim and final research texts. I attended to the voices of the participants through one of the dimensions of relational ethics, in which “spaces are co-created with participants to make known their and our not knowing and liminality” (Caine et al., 2020, p. 272). The forms that the participants chose to describe their stories and experiences of health and well-being across their life course informed the co-creation of liminal spaces. Furthermore, co-creating “liminal spaces between what was and what is, to create both the time and space” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 72) offered a way to live alongside participants in ways that I had not imagined. For example, one of the participants used song lyrics to tell and retell her stories. The lyrics invited me to hear her as she wanted to be heard and see her as she wanted to be seen and informed me on how she wanted me to care for her and her stories. These liminal spaces created a way for the participants to tell stories about who they are, stories that hold meaning for them. Finally, in these liminal spaces the research puzzle came back into view.

Relational ethics is most apparent in the living (Clandinin et al., 2018); it calls us to think with the implications for the evolving researcher-participant relationship because researchers do not make known, forecast, or negotiate many terms with the participants ahead of time (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The completion of ethical review forms does not address the fact that ethical matters can shift through the inquiry (Appendix A). As narrative inquirers we enter the borderland where the ethical review process encounters the relational spaces of our relationships with our participants. The continuity of experience is “not merely perceptual: it is ontological” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40). Consent was relational, and we continuously negotiated it to ensure that the relational space of narrative inquiry was always becoming.

In my role as a narrative inquirer, I remained curious about the possibilities of world travel (Lugones, 1987). Lugones (1987) offered a way of making known when we are playful, open, authentic, and imaginative; when we understand authenticity within the “transactional whole of experience” (Shusterman, 2008, p. 298). This is where I attended my *be – ing*, to the playful, open, and imaginative possibilities of traveling to the worlds of participants (Lugones, 1987). Throughout this work I returned to and lived out stories of vulnerability, and identity making that have shaped the stories I live by. At times, ethical issues arose as I simultaneously attended to both the building of a trusting, authentic relationship in which I cared for the women and their stories of trafficking, their dignity, their anonymity, and their confidentiality and my academic and professional obligations related to the timing of ethics approval and funding or academic deadlines (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Wolf, 1996). However, I was intentional in building trust and rapport with each participant.

### **Relevance to Nursing**

The negative experiences that women previously trafficked have with healthcare providers influences their access to care. These experiences include dealing with stigma, the lack of trust, discrimination, and feelings of disconnection or judgment from healthcare providers (Barnert et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2016; Price et al., 2019; Rajaram & Tidball, 2018).

Additionally, some women have described health care providers as gatekeepers to care (Bick et al., 2016), especially when nurses categorize patients and ascribe their identities within the healthcare system (Latimer, 2003). These imposed categorizations have requirements and expectations that patients try to meet to access care (Latimer, 2003). It is important to note that resolving such issues is more than improving bedside care, a concern of many health-science

disciplines; it also means ensuring and enhancing the comfort of clients during all life processes (Meleis, 2018,). Thus, this research is critical in informing nursing practice when stories of continuity and narrative coherence from women previously trafficked disrupt dominant narratives that determine how healthcare professionals view lives and bodies.

### **Cartesian Thought and Nursing**

A dominant narrative that determines the view of the body in health care is Cartesian thought. The Cartesian conceptualization of the human body directs how medical-science professionals assess and treat the body, even within the biopsychosocial dimensions that currently direct bedside care. The Cartesian paradigm dissolves the difference between the lived body and the “*dead body*, where the former becomes but a special case of the latter” (Leder, 1992, p. 122). Thus, Cartesian thought situates our knowledge about the living body within the knowledge that we develop by examining the dead body. The implications of this classification of physical things influence assessments, treatments, and research activities concerning humans. Though required for some nursing assessments, the simple placing of the body in the supine position alters the nurse’s view of the body from subject to object. Leder (1992) challenged the reach of this ruling paradigm by stating that the body is not merely an object in the world, but also “a lived body constituting this world-as-experience” (p. 123). This conceptualization of the body directs nurses to think with the anatomy and physiology of the body as always “intertwining with the body’s intentionality” (Leder, 1992, p. 125). Viewing the body as passively being in the world rather than being active dismisses the stories of self-continuity and narrative coherence related to the trafficking experiences of women. Thus, when rescuers view women’s bodies as needing rescue from trafficking, they work *on* rather than work *with*.

### **Implications for Nursing**

If nursing practice, knowledge, and research are situated in the understanding that the body is active, the body’s intentionality and the stories women previously trafficked tell and retell of their health, well-being, continuity, and narrative coherence “embody their existential grasp of the world” (Leder, 1992, p. 125). This reorientation offers new possibilities for the co-composing of patients’ and nurses’ identities. For example, the existential account of the world of women previously trafficked does not replace their biological account, but it is “intertwined with their ontological freedom” (p. 125). Ontological freedom “is the subjectivity that the body holds to construct their identities, dreams, and future desires as lived out in relation

to situation” (Young, 2005, p. 16). The “*situation* is to recognize that the body’s meaning is bound by how we choose to construct and embody our identities” (Moi, 2001, p. 65). The participants were not passively in the world as stereotypical images, the dominant narratives of sex trafficking, depict them; rather, their lives, thoughts, dreams, and hopes hold meaning and possibilities.

The decentering of the “dead body” position does not mean that Cartesian thought is rejected, but that it refuses “the status of a ruling paradigm” because it has continued to alter the discourse of many theories about the body (Leder, 1992, p. 125). Nurses might come to understand that the meaning of health and well-being for women is situated beyond their bodies. The nurse-client relationship can lead to the co-composing of identities from which they can co-compose nursing care (Berendonk et al., 2020). In this reorientation, nurses might become attentive to the identity-making stories that are told and lived out. Additionally, nurses can think *with* and about the social processes and structures of the healthcare system, which creates a way to change how women previously trafficked are identified, triaged, and cared for within the healthcare system. This includes possibilities for reshaping the curriculum for health- and social-care professionals away from the continued influences of Cartesian thought; as well as away from a focus on the victimization of women who have been trafficked. This understanding can be a point of tension as nurses recognize the power dynamic between themselves and their clients that positions the clients in a subordinate role. However, these points of tension hold the possibility of thinking in new ways to enable people to play an active role in the care they receive.

### **Justification of the Research**

In studying human experience, narrative inquirers are called to justify their research projects and their decision to focus on narrative understandings of experience. In justifying the use of narrative inquiry to explore the experience of the health and well-being of women previously trafficked across their life course, I attended to the personal, practical, and social significance of this narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I returned and attended to these justifications throughout this research project as they called me to retell and relive my narrative beginnings and think with new ways of knowing, living, and becoming both personally and professionally.

### **Learning With Telling**

In living alongside women previously trafficked, I hope that I created a space in which I cared *with* their stories. I imagine that, as Lopez (1990) described it, “the stories people tell have a way of taking care of them, and if we care for the stories that come to us we recognize the times when we need a story more than food to stay alive” (p. 60). As I tell and retell my stories of seeking narrative coherence, I continue to think with the metaphor of the locked gate. The locked gate calls me to wonder beyond my positioning; it calls me to wonder with the unfolding lives of the participants, their becoming, long after they exited trafficking.

### **Learning with Listening**

Narrative inquiry is an “experience of the experience of people studying people in relation; nor is this experience left in the field or on the pages of the field texts but is alive at the end just as it is in the beginning” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). In relation, both the researcher and the participants learn, become, and change. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding participants’ experience, but it is also a way of caring for their experiences, including the silences, pauses or sighs between their sentences, and their dreams and hopes for the future.

One need only spend time within healthcare spaces to witness the taken-for-granted position of the human body in various physical and theoretical supine positions. In this position, nursing care is confined to working on the bodies of patients rather than *with* the bodies of patients, which puts a “price to nonconformity” (Young, 2005, p. 21). This price is evident in the language that nurses use to communicate nursing interventions and patients’ goals within the nursing process, such as “the nurse will” or “the patient will.”

Narrative inquiry can make known the knowledge that is valued and silenced when women previously trafficked are cared for from this taken-for-granted position. The goal of changing current practices serves as the practical justification for a narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). However, it is more than just providing better bedside care; it is more than replacing what is “invisible with a carefully regulated visibility” (Hall, 1996, p. 471) in which a binary is established to measure and improve bedside care. Listening to the stories of the health and well-being of participants across their lifespan makes possible the re-imagining of care. Here, nurses can come alongside the bodies, minds, and spirits of women who seek care.



## **Learning with Action**

Narrative inquiry illuminates the contradictions and inconsistencies in how we view ourselves and others. At the borderlands of knowing others and other ways of knowing, narrative inquiry offers a space and a place of dwelling in which the epistemological and ontological implications of our actions and policies are made known (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), in which the unfolding stories of women previously trafficked can offer counter stories (Nelson, 1995) to the values and assumptions of the politics of risk and pity that shape the anti-trafficking politics of care. Their counter stories are narratives of resistance, narratives of autonomy that allow individuals and communities to challenge and revise the paradigm stories from which we work (Nelson, 1995). Thus, from such counterstories we learn with the actions of anti-trafficking agencies as they border the stories that women previously trafficked tell and live out. In learning with the actions of the past is a space and place of learning and growth for the future. This enhancing of personal and social growth is one of the purposes of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This narrative inquiry provides a space and place to think *with* the contradictions and inconsistencies of how we see or make invisible the health and well-being of women previously trafficked across their life course.

### **Meetings, Visits and Conversations**

In the following chapters, I will introduce each participant and share the co-composed narrative accounts. T was the first participant to join. I met her through ACT Alberta. She had picked up a recruitment card I had shared with the staff. T is a single mother of a young daughter. She lives in Alberta under a six-month work permit. The father of her daughter has left her in a precarious living situation. She is currently looking for a new place to live. T explained that the father of her daughter has stated on many occasions that he wished that T would get deported, so that T never sees their daughter again. T shares that she is unsure as to where the investigation is regarding the person who trafficked her to Alberta as a domestic and childcare worker. I met Wolfie a few months later. Wolfie is a model who used to work as a Mortician. She lives with her boyfriend and is starting her own business. She was sexually assaulted and digitally trafficked. Phoenix contacted me almost one month after Wolfie. Phoenix is married and is a mother of three children and has one step-daughter. She was diagnosed with Autism at a very young age and was sexually trafficked by the father of her children.

Each participant chose their own pseudonym that was of significance to them. I met with each participant in various places familiar and unfamiliar to each of them and I. Through meetings, visits, and conversations with each respective participant, the telling, re-telling, and living of stories was lived out. The stories T, Wolfie, and Phoenix regarding their health and well-being are broad to allow for an understanding of the complexities of experience. Furthermore, their stories and our relationship informed the unique form and co-composing of the individual narrative account of each participant. A specific font and intentional formatting were used to delineate my journal entries within the narrative accounts. Within T and Phoenix's narrative accounts my journal entries, wonders, questions and thoughts are embedded among their account and left centered, while found poems were italicized and right centered. Phoenix's narrative account includes the lyrics of several songs, she read out loud to me, alongside the stories she shared. Direct quotes from all three respective participants are italicized but have not been placed within quotation marks to maintain a flow to the conversations between the participants and me. There is also intentional use of negative space(s) between words, phrases and sentences of all narrative accounts. These spaces became an important space to think *with* what participants said and left unsaid. Wolfie's account is divided into left and right sides as to depict the conversations we shared. The left side of Wolfie's account includes my journal writings, alongside Wolfie's found poems, images and stories on the right side of the page.

## CHAPTER 4: CONVERSATIONS WITH T

### In the Waiting Once Again

In the waiting prior to meeting T for the first time, I found myself sitting on my deck listening to the chorus frogs singing from a small pond on the other side of the fence. T would be the first participant. As I imagined our time together, the warmth of the spring sun shone on the wooden boards of the deck. I could hear the deck boards moan and crack when the chorus frogs were interrupted during their morning routine. Though the singing of the chorus frogs began to bring me back to other springs of my childhood, my mind, body, and spirit was inundated with emotions.

I was anxious, nervous, excited yet all at the same time feeling cautious, unsure, and hesitant as I thought about meeting T for the first time. I felt the heaviness of my intentions to do this work. My intentions to help others felt wrong. This heaviness was not new to me; I remember my narrative beginnings. These emotions had disrupted me so many times during my previous community development trips to Indonesia or when I drove to the safe house in Southeast Asia to assess women who had been recently rescued from traffickers. This heaviness was layered with questions. Why should I be the one completing this work? Are my intentions to complete this work sufficient? How do I not cause harm? Had I learned enough from leaning into this heaviness during my past experiences overseas? Had I learned to ensure I would not cause harm by working *on* T rather than alongside and *with* her? It was interesting to me how easily these questions re-surfaced from my past experiences. I thought to myself; *there it is again*.

The uneasiness of the unknown

mixed with

the easiness of the familiar.

It disrupts me once again.

Yet, in this disruption, the song of the chorus frogs calls me back to a previous springtime during my childhood. Each spring I would put on whatever rubber boots that were in the garage so I could walk in the spring run-off filling the roadside ditches in front of my house. It was a yearly ritual. This ritual had a certain step that had to be followed to extend my time in the roadside ditches as much as possible. First, you had to look in the kitchen pantry for plastic grocery bags. It was essential that the bags had no holes. The purpose of the plastic bags was to keep your feet dry should your boots fill with cold spring run-off. This step was key in allowing me to venture deeper into the dark waters of the ditch. The dark, cold spring run-off was always inviting even though I knew gravity would alter its flow to the nearest creek. Yet, being in the middle of the spring run-off always brought a sense of uneasiness; no matter how well, I planned to negotiate its depth, I always knew the dark and cold spring water would rush over the rim of my rubber boots leading me to slosh home with cold wet feet, to try again the next day.

As I bring forward this childhood memory alongside my imaginings of meeting T for the first time, I wonder about my relationship with T. Even though our relationship has not yet made itself known it seems to be *in the midst* (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006) long before we actually meet in person. In this beginning, I wonder how curious we will be towards each other as we

negotiate this new research relationship? A curiosity, I imagined, similar to my returning, day after day, to the spring run-off flowing down the roadside ditches. A curiosity to venture deeper that continues to grow and become stronger even though the dark cold spring water would rush over the rim of my rubber boots. Will I be curious enough to venture deeper into T's world, to live alongside her and learn together with her as she shares her experiences of health and well-being as a woman previously trafficked.

I am disrupted once again.

This familiar disruption from the uneasiness of the unknown mixed with the easiness of the familiar makes known the *stories I live by* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Rather than lament the heaviness of this all too familiar feeling, I am reminded to lean into it, to remain open, to imagine, to be humble, and willing to travel into T's world.

Easier said than done.

### **First Meeting**

T decided that we should meet in a park near her home. The playground is a familiar place for T and her daughter. Many parents are gathered around as their children negotiate the playground equipment. It is a warm spring day with the green grass finally emerging. T's daughter did not show a keen interest in playing at the playground, so we decided to walk around the outskirts of green space surrounding the park. In doing so we would have more privacy. Her daughter would tire of being pushed in the stroller, so I held her hand as she walked with us. It was difficult to meet T as my insecurities as a new researcher invaded my mind, and the heaviness returned regarding my intentions in doing this work. It felt like I was being intrusive. The heaviness was raw. I thought to myself, *there it is again, the uneasiness of the unknown mixed with the easiness of the familiar*. I stumbled with my words as I tried to explain the

research project, my interest, and the logistics of consent. I wondered if T noticed. The conversation felt somewhat forced and unnatural in the sense that it was not me but the researcher speaking. This voice, my words were not me. Yet, I could sense she wanted to share more. T's desire to share more invited me to slow down and be present alongside her as we walked around the green space. It invited me to be present in holding her daughter's hand. It reminded me to lean into the heaviness and be curious rather than fear it. So, I reminded myself of her daughter's hand wrapped around my fingers, changed the pace of my walk to match T's gait, and feel the warmth of the sun on my jacket while I followed T's lead. I didn't want her to feel pressured to share her story today. Today, was just about meeting each other for the first time.

Then she began to share her story.

T shared that she was starting a new job as an office administrator on Monday at a mining company. T also shared that she would be moving by the end of the month. She is moving downtown to be closer to the daycare that she found for her daughter. She interviewed many daycares and found that she really appreciated how this daycare would provide structure for her daughter. She shared how her daughter would have a chance to try yoga, go outside and learn how to take naps. T describes that she values how the daycare staff are teaching her daughter to nap during the day.

T shares how she was lured to work as a nanny, in Canada in 2017, for a woman who, *made many false promises*. This person, T shares, told me *everything that I wanted to hear about visa requirements, reimbursement of flights and background checks*. She was paid 800 monthly to be a live-in nanny for three children, two of which had autism. She also had to care for three dogs. She went on to say that her employer would leave for days and weeks on end, leaving T with the children. T shares that *the mother-in-law of her trafficker knew what was happening and said to T that if anything happens to not get her involved as she would claim she didn't know anything as she is too old to go to jail*.

When T communicated to her employer that this was not right, her employer threatened to turn her into the authorities and have her deported as T did not have a proper work visa. She finally escaped her employer through the help of another Canadian she met through a dating app.

The following found poem from the transcripts of our conversation outlines her journey to Canada, the conditions she lived under in her trafficker's home and her final escape.

*Search, to look for employment, any country.  
 A few interviews  
 This person that I came over for, made things seem easy.  
 She told me everything that I wanted to hear.  
 Visa requirements, reimburse flights and background checks.  
 She needs someone to cook, clean and take care of her children.  
 Daytime would be my time to do whatever I wanted to do.*

*But it(work) turned into seven days a week.  
 She would come home one day a week.  
 Make sure there's food then take off again.*

*In minutes of arriving, I showed her everything (my documents) I had, and she took pictures.*

*Why?  
 In case you try to run, I have your information.  
 In case you try to run I will give THEM your information  
 So, they can arrest you and deport you.  
 She took them and put them in a little cubby.  
 My passport, my documents and my birth certificate*

*There are cameras in the house.  
 Tracker on the vehicle  
 Why?  
 I wanna see what you're doing and I wanna listen.*

*I am afraid to talk to anyone.  
 Always threatening immigration and deportation*

*Three kids, 2 with disabilities, two dogs sometimes three  
 Sometimes six kids and 6 to seven dogs  
 Never allowed to leave.  
 27 months, no time off  
 She always leaves.  
 Me with the kids  
 That is not ok.*

*Always threatening immigration and deportation  
 Go ahead then, you said you were going to file the paperwork for the work visa.*

*I will file the paperwork, but you will pay for it  
 Three times she filed incomplete paperwork.*

*She gives up.  
Lies, but her mother-in-law knew what she was doing.  
To my face, if anything happens, don't get me involved.  
I don't know anything, I don't wanna go to jail, I am too old.*

*Meet my boyfriend.  
Do you need help?  
I can come get you.  
I was afraid.  
I said no.  
If you ever need help, if you ever wanna get away  
Just let me know.*

*I thought of just leaving the one day after I dropped the kids off at school.  
BUT  
I thought of the kids, nobody would pick them up.  
All they had was me.  
I just figured out a way to make sure that she was there to watch her kids.*

*I came up with a plan.  
I will tell her.  
I am going back to see my mother.  
she said If you are going home, I am going with you.  
Why?  
I wanna make sure you come back.  
My boyfriend is gonna go.  
Why do you have a boyfriend.  
Why would you choose him to go with you to visit your mother and not me?*

*I promise I'm gonna come back.  
You better come back.*

*I walked out of that situation into another one.*

Soon after escaping her trafficker, T describes her search for work as a nanny. During this search she met a young lawyer couple that was looking for a nanny. In sharing her story with them about her previous experience they convinced her to seek help through a local anti-trafficking NGO. T shares that this would be the first time that she would hear the word trafficking being used to describe what had happened to her. T's words provide a sense of her experience of hearing, for the first time, the word *trafficking*.

*I needed to find a job.*



*I don't know that I can find a job because of my situation.  
 I don't have a work visa.  
 Interview with a lady; I met her downtown, she is lawyer.  
 I need you to take me back and tell my husband exactly what you were telling me  
 They just looked at each other in complete shock.*

*What you are telling us is bizarre  
 You were paid 800 a month to take care of 3 kids, 2 with learning disabilities 24/7  
 Plus, pets and sometimes the boyfriend's kids and pets  
 It is not okay.  
 That's human trafficking.*

*I was trafficked?  
 It shook me the first time I heard the words.  
 It really did make sense with everything.  
 They explained it to me.  
 There are different forms of trafficking.  
 Everything really, really made sense at that point on.*

T shared how she was encouraged to report her story to the local authorities. During her encounter with local authorities, she knew right away nothing was going to be done. The officer's tone, line of questioning and demeanor communicated to T that he didn't believe her. T reiterates what the police officer told her. *You should have been smart enough to know and that I am young enough that I can just go back to my own country to figure my life out on my own, as there is nothing they can do.*

T shares further that when she told the father of her child - the man who helped her escape, what the police officer told her; her partner said that no one would believe her. She explains.

*I didn't really go forward with anything as he told me no one's gonna believe me because you are a black girl... Your lawyer friend is a white lady with money. It was the first time anybody had ever said anything like that directly to me before, but what does that have to do with it? He would also say that I could tell the truth all I wanted but a white woman crying in court versus a black woman crying in court, the judge will show the white women more empathy. You really think so? Nobody's gonna believe me? He told me the judge will throw it out. But I told him that everyone helping*

*me is white, why wouldn't a white judge believe me, if I am standing, there telling my truth. I have no reason to lie.*

### **More than Just Leaving**

My second meeting with T was through a zoom call. We decided it would be easier to meet this way until she was more settled in her new home. We completed her timeline that day. T brought me back to why she left Canada and her plans to escape her trafficker. As she shared her journey to Canada, I thought about how lonely it must be for her to be so far away from her family. Yet, she shared with me how she wanted to be away from her family. She shared how she couldn't handle being constantly blamed, by her mother, for her grandmother's stroke and death.

*I was mainly responsible for everyone.  
High school, track and field getting on the honor roll.  
My mom would force me to call my dad, saw him three times.*

*I wanna finish college, standing in line to register and pay.  
I will go see grandma after I am done.  
Registration took all day, went home instead,  
my brother called and said grandma was stuck,  
She couldn't move.*

*She had a stroke while I was standing in line to register.  
I was guilted into taking care of grandma until she passed.*

*College plans on hold  
Mom blamed me for what happened.  
I wanted to leave the country.  
I couldn't  
I couldn't be around her(My mom) anymore  
I couldn't take the insults and all that.  
I couldn't  
I couldn't handle it anymore.*

T describes how her brother would find their grandmother in her home. She had a stroke and passed away a while after. T explains that she was blamed for her grandmother's stroke and passing. This took its toll on her, so she decided she needed to leave and find work overseas. It was interesting to me how I assumed she missed her family and might want to return home. Why do I so easily re-story her in this way?

T shares that the constant threat from her employer to report her to immigration dictated her every move. Yet, in planning her escape she shares how she didn't want to leave her trafficker's children alone as it was commonplace for their mother to leave them in T's care for weeks on end. T wanted to leave when she knew that the children would be in the care of an adult. Thus, for T, planning her escape was not only about her health and well-being it was intertwined with the health and well-being of the minors in her care.

The next morning after my time with T, I returned to my deck to spend time writing in my journal. I found myself thinking with what T had shared the day before; that her health and well-being was tied to the health and well-being of the trafficker's children. As I read over her words again and again, I looked up and noticed the sunflowers growing in my garden. The sunflowers I planted at the beginning of the summer were drawing my attention as they were growing so tall. I looked forward to the much-needed shade they would provide in front of my kitchen window. In coming back to T's words, I read over her words below that gives a sense of the continuous presence of the tensions T experienced while planning to escape and long after she escaped her trafficker.

*There were people who empathized with me.  
Some people blamed me too.  
Everybody basically told me the same thing.  
I needed to press charges and get back if not all, some money.  
But what about her kids?*

T explained that her health was important but entangled throughout her plans to escape were her concerns over the care of the trafficker's children. T shared that there were opportunities to escape, especially after she dropped off the children at school or when her trafficker was absent for weeks. Later T shared that her concerns for the health and well-being of her trafficker's children would resurface when she thought about pressing charges. T shared that she was told by her family to press charges against the mother of the children and ask for the wages owed to her. T explained that she was concerned about who would take care of the children if the mother was incarcerated. These concerns weighed heavily on T as she thought about her and her daughter's health and well-being. T questioned further how she could seek wages owed to her would when she knew that this would also influence the well-being of the children. Though T shares that the monies owed to her would be instrumental for starting her life over again, she felt her trafficker's children would suffer if their only parent ended up in jail.

### Accessing Care

Once again, I am bringing warm drinks for T and I to share as I negotiate the snow and ice on the walkway up to her apartment building. T and I often visit in the afternoon, in her home, while her daughter naps. We sit on her couch, catch up on our lives and how her daughter is doing. The conversation these days also includes her application for the renewal of her work visa. T explains the arduous process, and her hopes that she will receive a full year. As we both sip on our warm drinks, we begin to talk about the birth of her daughter. T became pregnant during her relationship with the man that helped her escape. T shares that she did receive publicly funded prenatal care, but she was worried about the access to care she would have after the birth of her daughter. T shares her experience of preparing for her the birth of her first child.

*So, I was just trying to figure it out.  
How do I go about being pregnant?  
In a country where I don't have  
status or healthcare?*

T shares with me a conversation she had had with her physician concerning the fees she would be charged for the delivery of her daughter. *So, when you have your baby, you can expect a bill. Don't think you can chicken out. Please go to the hospital, don't try to have the baby at home, or anything like that.*

In thinking alongside this conversation between T and her physician, I wonder if she thought about having her daughter at home. I wonder how many women previously trafficked give birth at home due to the financial burdens they will face in delivering in a hospital. In this conversation with her physician there was no space to consideration T's desire to have a *peaceful birthing experience*.

T's story takes me back to my prenatal care and birthing experiences. I recall the multiple options I had regarding the birth of my two children. I had the choice, which local physician would follow me through my prenatal care. I remember drawing up a birth plan of what I desired regarding the use of pain medication, who would be in the room and what I needed to pack to bring to the hospital, so that I would have all I needed to experience the joy of bringing a child into this world. My husband and I even discussed the option of a home birth. All these options were silenced for T as she lived out a precarious immigration status. In the spaces and places where T accessed health care, she was a pregnant woman who was worked

on

rather than worked

with.

The following provides a sense of how T negotiated access to care for the delivery of her daughter.

*I am two weeks overdue.  
blurred vision, can't see, my arms are really shaky.  
Drove myself to the hospital.  
Doctor asked, are you crazy?*

*They know I have no status, no healthcare.  
So, we are going to need you to bring 10,000.00 cash to the hospital when you come back  
For you to have your baby  
I am going to induce you.*

*Where am I gonna get 10,000.00 cash?  
The doctor was rude to me, super rude.  
Hopefully, they scrap the 10,000.00.  
Just let me have a peaceful experience to have my baby.*

As I live alongside the tensions of T's experience, I find myself trying to reconcile T's words through the following entry in my journal.

The physician's decision to ask for a 10,000.00 deposit from T to have her baby delivered silenced any desires T has of having a peaceful birthing experience. The peace, T seeks in giving birth to her daughter is made unreachable, as the care she requires would come at a price that T cannot afford to pay as an undocumented women trafficked to Canada. I imagine how T's experience might be different if this physician had known the

compassion T had shown to her trafficker by making sure her children would be in the care of an adult? I wonder how T negotiated the tensions between the words of the physician who provided her free prenatal care and the words of this physician asking for a cash deposit to deliver her daughter. On the one hand, she is warned not to chicken out, as the physician stories who she is and that she will make this wrong by delivering her daughter at home. On the other hand, this perceived wrong choice is the only choice as she does not have the financial means to pay for the delivery of her daughter. Yet, it is perceived as the wrong choice for T because of her precarious immigration status and lack of income, but for other women not in T situation, giving birth at home is a place of privilege.

T shares that her desire to have a *peaceful birthing experience* was made unreachable again, just a few hours after giving birth. The following found poem gives a sense of how T, as a new mother is simultaneously made invisible and visible to pre-determined and restrict her access to care.

*Back to a different hospital with a letter stating I was trafficked.  
20 hours of labour  
They couldn't get me numb enough.  
Baby's heartbeat kept dropping.  
An emergency C-section  
So just put me to sleep.*

*Three to four hours later child protective services showed up.  
Nobody said anything to me that they were coming.*

*Questioning me about how I was going to take care of my daughter.  
Cause I didn't have status, can't pay my hospital bill.  
Do you have somewhere to go, a car seat, clothes, diapers, and formula?  
They figured I didn't have the resources to take care of my daughter.*

*They let me go the day after the C-section.  
If you stay more days, it will be almost 5000 a day.  
So, I went home early.  
I didn't feel prepared.  
I had no choice at the time.  
There was no follow-up from child protective services.*

*I was able to make a shake.*

*or*

*A sandwich when the public nurse came to visit.  
There was no bill in the mail for the time she cared for me.*

As I reflect on T's experiences I continued to reflect in my journal.

Why was T worked on rather than worked with? It is easier to story her as at risk of being an unfit mother to her newly delivered daughter. This re-storying of who T was as a mother is situated in how others around her understood her inability to provide a \$10,000 deposit prior to the delivery of her baby. This deposit was a risk management strategy. There was no working alongside T's ability to care for her daughter. The conversation regarding T's ability to care for her daughter is covert with the sending of child protection services at her bedside. Silencing T. Making her visible and invisible. Additionally, the anticipation of a growing hospital bill immediately shapes the length of time T would have access to care post-delivery. In this space and place of impartiality, there was no wondering about how she would manage, no offering of resources or imagining of facilitators to maintain T's access to care.

T shares how she continued to negotiate barriers to accessing care during the Covid-19 pandemic. The following gives a sense of how she negotiated her access to the Covid-19 vaccine.

*Six-week checkup.  
This is the last time I would see my doctor.  
If I needed care, I would be sent a bill.  
If you want healthcare, you must have money.*

*I still have my hospital bill from before.  
Stayed inside the whole time when COVID was everywhere.  
Able to get the first dose.  
Not the second  
Trying other clinics  
Finally, another clinic, got the second dose.*

Though she was unsuccessful at obtaining the second dose at the recommended interval, she was persistent in her desire to be fully vaccinated. It was vital for her health and the health of

her daughter. She received no outside help in negotiating the restrictions to the Covid-19 vaccine given her precarious immigration status. She is alone in Canada, with no legal status and no healthcare card. It was from her own doing, her own desire to be healthy that she persisted until she found a clinic that would vaccinate her without a healthcare card.

### **Arrival Stories**

T and I again share a warm drink on the futon in her living room. The natural light floods the space. Her daughter is napping while we begin visiting. In asking T how her new job is going, T shares how she negotiates questions posed by co-workers about her story of arriving to Canada. She shares how these questions are spaces and places of tension for her.

*How I came to be here is a big part of my story  
When I go to work, people are like  
How long have you been here?  
Where are you from?  
Why did you want to leave your country to come here?*

*Compare stories of coming here  
I don't know what to say.  
I avoid talking about it.  
One- or two-word answers  
Back to my desk  
My experience is something completely different than yours.*

I wonder how these spaces and places influence her ability to form new friendships and relationships at work. As her role at the office unfolds and familiarity with co-workers begins to shape her conversations with them, does she hope to one day share her arrival to Canada story? T shares that she can never share her story. As her story is not like the stories of her co-workers *how do you share an arrival story of trafficking? How do you share a story of*

*continuously*



*re-applying*

*for a temporary work visa*

*wondering*

*if this time you will*

*be*

*deported.*

*I guess he was trying to compare like experiences with the work visa process and about coming over. I cannot for the life of me sit there and have that conversation with him. My experience is something completely different than his. Yeah. I didn't want to sit there. So, I couldn't sit there. So, the conversation was short, and I went back to my desk.*

As I think alongside T's experience of being asked to share her arrival to Canada story, I am taken back to the safehouse. I wonder how the women at the safe house also shared their stories of arrival to Southeast Asia. In reading over my journal, I wonder about the meaning of arrival stories to women and their families back in their country of origin. Are their arrival stories, stories of hope? Arrival stories of opportunity? Arrival stories with difficulties and sacrifice? How did women share their stories of arrival when their stories differ from the stories of arrival that their families imagine? How do they negotiate this space when they are repatriated back?

### **In the Negative Spaces and Places**

It was a typical fall day. It is cloudy with a bit of a chilly wind biting at my face and fingers. It is a cooler day than the wonderful weather of the thanksgiving weekend. This morning I met T and her daughter at a playground just walking distance from her new home. I asked her if she would like to meet today as she had the day off. We usually meet at 1300h while her daughter sleeps, but I imagine as a single mom that time is important for her to take care of all the details of her life before the next work week begins. I didn't want to take that away from her. I share my worries with T, and she shares that she would still like to meet.

I arrive at the park. T and her daughter are already there along with a few other families. The wind is nipping at my back, but my warm drink is transferring precious heat to my fingers. I am hoping the warm drink I brought for T is doing the same for her. It is nice to walk around the playground with her and get to know her a bit more.

T's daughter has grown since the last time I saw her. As she plays in and around the equipment, more parents with their children began to congregate around the playground equipment. We began to share our Thanksgiving weekend stories. I asked her if she had heard about her work permit visa as she was renewing the application the last time we talked. T stated that she received another six months. T explained further that she and her counsellor from the anti-trafficking NGO are confused as to why she did not receive one year. T shares that she is also frustrated as the application process requires a lot of work as she must provide all the information she previously submitted. It is also stressful as she has to take time off work. Additionally, the stress of possibly being deported is difficult for T as she states once again that it is not safe for her or her daughter to return to her home country. Finally, T shares that even

though her visa application is accompanied by a support letter from an RCMP officer as per the requirements, she continues to have to fight to stay in Canada.

I asked her how her relationship with her mom has been, as it has been strained in the past. T said she talks to her mother everyday but mostly her daughter talks to her. T shares that it is important for daughter to get to know her family. T said her mom has 12 weeks of holidays coming up and her mother has suggested that maybe she would come to Canada visit because T's temporary foreign visa, does not permit her to re-enter Canada if she leaves. T shares that she would love to be able to go to the US to visit her aunt who lives in Florida.

We talked a bit more about her hospital bill. T states that it is now in the hands of a collection's office somewhere in Ontario. They used to call her two to three times a week. T would tell them that she does not have the money to pay, and if she did, she would. T also shares that this affects her credit rating and thus she must pay a higher deposit to secure utilities for her home and to sign up for a phone plan. The collection's office no longer calls her as she recently changed her number. As we continue to walk around the park the wind whirls around us. I began to wonder if the moments of silence between us are because of the cold. I found myself thinking if these moments of silence are awkward for her. I hope it's not awkward, but over that past few months I have appreciated that T is a woman who speaks with few words. When she does share, she openly shares, and I am reminded to just settle into the moments of silence and not be afraid of them or be tempted to fill them with unnecessary words. I remind myself to be present, and to follow T's lead.

T shares that she struggles financially but is grateful for how she can provide for her and her daughter. Once the rent and daycare are paid, she has \$200 for the remainder of the month. Currently, she is saving money to purchase a snow suit and warm boots for her daughter. T shared how difficult it was to pay for the medications her daughter needed a few weeks ago. T had to take one week off work as her daughter was too ill to go to daycare; leaving T with less income. As I reflect on T's experiences, I return to my journal writing.

I think about how the prosecution orientated approach to human trafficking plays out in the daily lives of women such as T. I imagine how T's life could be different if a health orientated approach was so that T is not having to fend for herself in her forward-looking story.

Through T's words I find myself questioning if the lived experience of women previously trafficked really count within social support and health systems? Are we curious enough to allow the lived experiences of women previously trafficked to co-author an approach that meets their needs as their life unfolds? What does this say about who we are? What would that say about who, and what knowledge we value? Do our responses to human trafficking make room for the lived experience of the women they serve? I wonder how T's life would unfold if she was granted a permanent residency immediately after escaping her trafficker?

As we decide that it is too cold to stay at the park T shares how she is grateful for her membership at the local recreation center, which she finds very useful. It is a pass for low-income families which allows her to take her daughter to the pool. Her daughter loves to swim. Today, they were heading to the library nearby as her daughter loves to read. As we both find shelter from the wind, I retreat to my car and T finds warmth through the doors of the library I wonder about our conversation today and T's experiences of health and well-being. As I wait for the heater in my car to start warming up my body, I complete the following journal entry.

In making room for the lived experiences of women like T, care can be re-imagined, imagined anew. I think about the children in the playground today. Allowing their imagination to be shaped by engaging with other children and the playground equipment. Some engage without reservations to experience all that can be at this time, in this moment. Some take their time or are more fearful of the spaces and places formed by the playground equipment. It is interesting to watch their bodies twist, turn, stretch, and change direction. The children seem to negotiate their interactions with each other and the equipment, minute by minute, remaining open to respond differently to the negative spaces and places between the bars, ladders, walkways, and swings. In these negative spaces and places, I wonder if they imagine and re-imagine their play more freely around the metal and plastic components of the playground equipment. Their responses seem fluid, change to the circumstances of this time, this moment.

In thinking about these negative experiences, I am taken back to my first art course, where the instructor had placed various objects upside down on a table. They were placed in this way to disturb our default to draw objects right side up. This technique was intentional as our instructor wanted us to draw the negative spaces

between the objects. As I drew the negative spaces between the objects, the objects forms would be made known. The finer details of these objects surface. I wonder if it would be the same, if we engaged with the negative spaces and places of the lived experiences of women such as T, living out a precarious immigration status. What would these spaces tell us about how they negotiate access to care? I wonder how T's life would be different if we thought about the negative spaces and places that T negotiates to provide for her and her daughter. Can we also twist, turn, stretch, and change the direction of our thinking to think anew about the care women previously trafficked need?

### **Looking Forward**

It was many weeks later that T and I would meet again. We both were battling various illnesses that took their toll on both our families. Once all had past T welcomed me to her home that was now decorated with a beautiful Christmas tree standing tall between the two larger windows that always showered her space with natural light. Her daughter was on a play date with a friend. T and I once again enjoyed our warm drinks. Today we spoke about writing a letter to her member of parliament to ask that her hospital bill be forgiven. We sat at her kitchen table with her computer and began to put into words what she needed from her member of parliament to be able to move forward in her life and provide for her daughter. T swings her computer towards me. I type as she shares her story and together, we find the words and sentences that make visible how T lives out, daily, the consequences of the hospital bill now in the hands of collectors. It was difficult to capture all she had gone through and is going through onto one page. Her story and who she is made visible and invisible through some parts of the letter but there was so much more to be said and yet it was left unsaid.

As we worked together on the letter, I wondered what T hoped for in the future. In the future there would soon be another renewal application for her work visa and another period of waiting, hoping to not be deported. I asked T if there was something that she leaned into to get her through all this. T shared with me a song that her daughter learned at daycare. She enjoys watching her daughter sing the lyrics out loud. I imagined her daughter dancing, spinning, and singing in the sunlight coming through the living room windows. T shared that it was the chorus that spoke the most to her. She shares *I put on my armor* each day to provide a comfortable life for me and my daughter. Together she shares they are *unstoppable*. The song's chorus below

gives a sense of T's forward-looking story as she continues to find the strength through her daughter; to do what needs to be done. To keep applying to renew her work visa, use her finances wisely and to provide a home and life that she says, *isn't much but I am grateful for*.

I put my armor on, show you how strong I am  
I put my armor on, I'll show you that I am.  
I'm unstoppable  
I'm a Porsche with no brakes  
I'm invincible  
Yeah, I win every single game  
I'm so powerful  
I don't need batteries to play  
I'm so confident  
Yeah, I'm unstoppable today  
Unstoppable today  
Unstoppable today  
Unstoppable today  
I'm unstoppable.  
Today (Sia, 2016)

## CHAPTER 5: MEETING WOLFIE

### **In the Waiting**

I am sitting in my home office, preparing to meet Wolfie for the first time via a zoom call. While preparing for this day and the many more to follow; I am keenly aware that I am *In the Waiting*. *In The Waiting*, at the center of my focus are the objects I have selectively chosen to decorate the plain white walls of my office. They form the backdrop of the mirrored zoom image depicting what is beside me, behind me and now in front of me. I leaned towards my senses. I am nervous, excited, and anticipating the beginnings of a research project birthed from questions that surfaced during my work with women previously trafficked in Southeast Asia. In leaning towards my nervousness, I am taken back to my proposal writing. I am taken back to my imaginings as I wondered about the spaces and place that I would meet my participants. I imagined familiar places they would invite me to, so we could share a coffee or a meal.

Yet, here I am now.

As I re-read a poem from my journal, a sense a longing and an uneasiness with the

selectively chosen objects mirrored in front of  
 me that remind me of my time overseas. Yet,  
 if I lean into this longing, this uneasiness; I  
 sense the possibilities of listening with  
 learning alongside my participant's stories. I  
 sense the possibilities of being

In The Waiting

In The Imagining

In The Anticipating.....

Yet here I was now.

I am not in a space and place I  
 anticipated would be familiar to my  
 participants.

I am not in a space and place where  
 we can share stories over a meal.

I am not in a space and place where I  
 hold my warm coffee to my face, feeling the  
 steam condense on my eyelashes.

I am in between  
 In between white walls dotted with  
 memories.

Memories of my comings and goings  
 overseas.

Memories of my intentions  
 Memories of my way of knowing  
 Memories of who I am



In the Waiting, imagining, and anticipating. A space and place of waiting that began long before I would meet Wolfie for the first time. A space and place of waiting where my senses yearned for the spaces and places, I had imagined and anticipated within my proposal writing rather than the space and place my senses highlighted through my journal writing below.

Feeling my office chair underneath,  
me. Adjusting the angle of my laptop.  
Focusing on the small camera on the  
top of my laptop.  
Glancing through the window while I  
waited  
Noticing the Indonesian wood carving  
behind me now in front of me in my zoom  
video. Finding myself trying to decide  
whether to focus on the small camera at the  
top of my laptop  
or  
my zoom video where I would meet  
Wolfie for the first time.  
A back and forth between two  
different spaces and places.... yet they are  
one through the small lens on the top of my  
laptop.

In this Waiting, while yearning for the spaces and places I had previously imagined and anticipated before meeting Wolfie, I find myself now, through the small lens on top of my laptop waiting, wondering, and hoping I can create a space and place where I care for Wolfie as I care for the stories shared through the small lens of my laptop camera?

Wolfie remembers later being eager to meet me after discussing the research project with a colleague working for a local anti-trafficking NGO.

*I knew not what to expect at all, but I just knew it was something I had to do, without hesitation or any concern, I knew it was a must. I remember when you were explaining the conditions and consent, I felt very safe in my ability to just say yes. Maybe I just didn't care about what it took and saw the value in this new beginning, seeing it as a great and necessary opportunity to hopefully bring about change. I knew I would need to open up, to set an example in efforts of opening the conversation not only between us, but for the effect of the study itself and the changes I hope to see in society. That said, this goal was in my head, and I wondered if I came across almost too eager. I just wanted to help the cause, the study, the conversation, and of course other victims as that has always been my first and foremost concern.*

Wolfie shares further that our initial conversations were natural. We had such a good understanding right away. We dove right in without any awkwardness or hesitancy even though questions about *who are you* and *how did it all begin* always seem like an awkward or forced way to really get to know someone.

It would be months later, in reading over one of my journal entries and listening again to the audio recording of our first meeting, I am called to the tone of my voice during the first part of our first meeting. It calls me to think about who I am in this space and place. My tone, at first, seems distant. It reminds me of the times my husband teases me about my nurse's walk. A walk, he describes, means business, especially when I need to get things done. I now recognize I have a nurse's voice that mimics the intention of getting things done. Yet, I know this is not me.

Yet, here I am now.

In The Waiting

In The Imagining

In The Anticipating.....

As I continue to listen to the audio recording, I notice a change in my tone as Wolfie's warm smile, bright eyes and laughter

invite me into her childhood memories we begin to document on her timeline. Did Wolfie notice the tone in my nursing voice during our initial greetings, discussion about the research project, and consent? I wonder if she also noticed the change in my tone as she tells and re-tells and lives out the memories that construct her timeline with her warm smile, bright eyes, and laugh.

I enter the zoom call early and wait for Wolfie to join. Within minutes I recognize the familiar notification that she is in the waiting room. With one click of my mouse, we meet for the first time.

We return to her timeline often. The memories that dot her life represented more than times and dates captured in transcripts; it is a space and place where Wolfie invites me to walk alongside in her telling and re-telling. In her telling and re-telling she begins with describing wonderful family moments by the ocean. She shares that she was raised by the ocean and longs to return to live there permanently. The family cabin sits right on the beach and Wolfie describes a game she played often with her cousins called *Were on the beach*. Her face lights as she re-tells and relives these moments through her laughter and smile. She takes me back to the capturing of the yearly family photograph on the stairs leading down to the ocean. A place where she

and all her cousins would line up in a row  
down to the sea.

Through my laptop's camera lens, I  
imagine her childhood memories growing up  
by the ocean. Where she ran along the water's  
edge playing WAR and having jellyfish fights  
with her cousins, playing in the tides, and  
watching the fireworks light up a starry sky  
over the ocean from across the way. I imagine  
her taking her spot on the stairs for the annual  
family photo.

I wondered how Wolfie saw herself  
then and now. Specifically, growing up beside  
her cousins, as each year was another year,  
she and her cousins were making their way  
into the world. I wonder what "growing up"  
means to her, her family, and her extended  
family. Who is the girl in glasses and hand me  
down clothes? Who is this girl shifting  
weekly between her father's and mother's  
home? Wolfie speaks of who she is; the little  
girl on the staircase.

*I see the little girl on the staircase*

*She wouldn't have done this*

*I know you wouldn't have done this*

*This isn't you*

*I'm the same person I'm still me*

*In going back to go forward to where I*

*am now*

*You never changed, still, this person,  
you're still the child that you were back then.*

*I need to be careful in my self-talk  
 When I'm being tough on my myself or  
 saying mean things to myself internally, I'm  
 saying mean things to that little girl  
 If you're mean to her and she leaves,  
 it's really hard to get her back  
 How do I get her back when I don't  
 feel that my body is mine?  
 That is really, really hard  
 I deserve all the goodness in the world  
 I am strong  
 I am resilient  
 This does not define me.*

As I think with the childhood memories that Wolfie invites me, I notice a sketch of a camera hung on a wall behind Wolfie. Is this her sketch? I wondered when it was first realized onto paper. I wondered if its meaning has changed for her since being sexually exploited and digitally trafficked. Returning to my journal, the following entry gives a sense of the tensions within this space and place.

I find myself too afraid to ask about the sketch behind her. Is it too soon? I wonder if she would feel that I am not being present with her by asking about the drawing behind her. Yet, the large lens of the camera in the sketch reminds me of the small lens

through which two strangers are meeting today to discuss the unspeakable.

These tensions bring me back to many other first meetings with women previously trafficked and brought to the safe house I worked in Southeast Asia. While at the safe house, I addressed the healthcare needs of women rescued from trafficking. I often wondered if the women in the safe house thought it was odd that they found themselves in a safe house behind a locked gate with a white nurse trying to help them. I wonder how they made sense of the stranger in front of them. I feel the heaviness, once again, of being another stranger they met in unfamiliar rooms and behind doors. I struggle with knowing that my arrival into the lives of women, recently rescued from their trafficker, might have been *too soon*. I wonder how my *too soon* presence altered the stories I heard from women at the safe house? I wonder if it is too soon to ask Wolfie about the sketch of the camera behind her? For me, the meaning of arriving *too soon* is two-fold; first my presence in the lives of women previously trafficked ignores their consent. Secondly, that my presence is somehow needed to make known their experiences. It is only at the end of this narrative inquiry that I come to know that though our lives are entangled, my experiences and my presence in their lives

does not make know, for the first time, these entanglements as these entanglements have always been whether I am present or absent at a specific time in their life.

These wonders brought with them a fatigue to my mind and body. I could feel my imagining fade away as the fatigue of listening and wondering filled my days. It was important for me to not rush through my wonders so that my imagining (my openness) about other ways of knowing brought forward through Wolfie's words would stay close to me. A closeness that I knew would not restore Wolfie from my way of knowing but kept me in the midst of listening.

We would come to talk about the sketch of the camera after my second face to face meeting with Wolfie. She invited me to her home where we sipped warm tea. The leather of her couch invited me to settle.....

her place.

Her home was furnished with carefully selected décor that had meaning for her and her fiancé. What drew my attention was the small table and chairs by the windows. I was immediately drawn to this place as it reminded me of the places, I had imagined and described in my research



proposal. The blue cushions of each chair complimented the plants that framed the windows. Wolfie shared that this was one of the places she would sit during our zoom calls. I never knew there was a second chair at the table but today this space by the window was more than a space. It was a familiar place Wolfie, and I had come to sit across from each other, settling into the blue cushions and sipping tea. As I was preparing to say goodbye, I was reminded of the sketch of the camera. I asked her if it was a sketch, she had drawn herself. The question at this time and place didn't seem so invasive as I once thought. It just seemed natural to ask. Wolfie stated that she had purchased the sketch from a large retail store and had just sold it. It was then that her fiancée walked in from work. Wolfie introduced us and even though this was the first time we met, I felt that I knew him through my relationship with Wolfie. I could feel tears welling in my eyes. It was so good to meet the man who loved Wolfie just as she is. The man who wants to spend the rest of his life with her.

He stated that he had heard a lot about me. I wonder who I was to Wolfie at this moment? Was I the researcher, was I a friend? I asked if I could hug him. I asked because I wanted to communicate through my hug that I cared. I cared for Wolfie in the same way I

cared about her life. The strength of his hug seems to communicate something back to me, though I never asked but I do want to.

**What is Seen, Unseen, talked about,  
Untalked about, and Unsaid.**

Many weeks later, while driving, my imagining would re-surface as I thought about the next time, I would meet with Wolfie. My body, mind, and spirit needed more time to process and think alongside Wolfie's story. Fatigue had settled into my bones, but I leaned into it and settled into it to allow Wolfie's story to sink under my skin. I delayed my journaling until my imagining would return. My imagining kept me open and porous so that poems from the transcripts of our first meeting were found.

It was in this space I started thinking alongside something Wolfie shared in our first conversation. She shared that what had happened to her is the *untalked about* in her world. Specifically, Wolfie spoke of having a *double life* where Wolfie was a woman previously trafficked on the one hand and then, on the other hand, the daughter of a working-class family. I wonder how she negotiated her identity-making across and through this *double life* where the *untalked about* resides? I wondered if it was too

difficult to find the words, or that words do  
not exist, or that the words cannot be  
verbalized

OUT LOUD with loved ones, or to  
SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT with those  
that see her as a porn star.

Her words return me to the  
“untalkable or untalked about” moments with  
Chantou at the safehouse in Southeast Asia.  
Through Wolfie’s words, I am again brought  
back to the casting room where Chantou’s  
half-naked body lay on the cold stainless-steel  
gurney. Chantou waited for the technician to  
apply plaster to her upper body, to stabilize  
the vertebrae that broke, when she decided to  
jump out of a three-story window to escape  
her trafficker. In the Waiting, I recall the air  
in the room thickening with the *untalkable*,  
*and untalked about*, the seen and unseen.  
These words boomed silently through me,  
through my ill-equipped presence. My initial  
intentions to come to Southeast Asia, once  
again, called OUT LOUD

WHO I AM and

HOW I SEE Chantou.

I felt like an

IMPOSTER

and

OUTSIDER.

So much so that I thought it should not  
be me witnessing this moment in her life.

Yet I am, NOW.

I am here in this space and place, at  
this moment in time, with Chantou, who just  
escaped from her trafficker. I am here in the  
thickness of the air that fills the casting room  
because it is my job. I am here because I  
chose to be here. I am here watching the  
technician apply rolls of plaster cast to  
stabilize her injury. Yet, my choice to be in  
the casting room, brings me to encounter  
tensions and possibilities in thinking  
differently about who I am and who I see in  
the women I care for who have been  
previously trafficked. In bringing this  
remembering forward, I turn to my journal,  
and the following poem gives a sense of the  
possibilities that come from leaning into these  
tensions.

It remains unsaid  
What remains unsaid as we approach  
you as  
Victim  
Survivor  
Advocate

All three are in one?

Through our language we categorize

In these categories we expect a

certain response

A certain way of being

A certain way of speaking

A certain amount of pain

A certain amount of tears.....not

from us but from you.

Who silences the unsaid

What silences the unsaid

Why silence the unsaid

Who are we in silencing the unsaid

Do we even realize we are part of the

unsaid?

We are no longer curious

We either accept you or reject you

Yet, it remains unsaid.

The tensions from being called out for  
 WHO I AM in HOW I SEE women  
 previously trafficked is raw and heavy as it  
 lays thick across my way of knowing. Yet, the  
 more I lean towards these tensions, the more  
 they settled under my skin; the fatigue of just  
 listening is replaced with a more porous  
 listening that comes with slowing down. A  
 slowing down of being in the midst.

The **next time** Wolfie and I are about to meet is now a click away. Again, the camera on the top of the laptop creates a place for Wolfie and I to virtually share a morning tea. As I wait, I am less nervous and more excited to see her again, even though I anticipate today will be a difficult day as we continue to record her timeline. I anticipate a difficult day as she shares the day she was drugged and sexually assaulted for nine hours to produce content that would be digitally trafficked worldwide. The details of her story bring forward all that was

SEEN

UNSEEN

TALKED ABOUT

UNTALKED ABOUT

and

UNSAID.

My surroundings dissolved with every word, and every pause. I am focused on Wolfie. I can feel the waves of nausea and anger through my core as she describes how she was drugged and raped for nine hours. The pauses between her words and sentences are amplified as Wolfie tells and re-tells what happened. In these pauses

time

seems to slow down.

Time

seem to stop.

even though the digital clock on my screen tried to interrupt this moment by indicating that the time has not stopped for the world outside of the small lens of my laptop camera. Again, my surroundings continue to dissolve away. At times her voice trembles. I feel my voice trembling inside myself as I have no words of comfort to share. I just listen. I lean into just listening as that is all I have left from what I am hearing. Later in my journal writing, I hoped my listening silence cared for her story. I wondered if Wolfie sensed that?

In her forward-looking story, Wolfie shares,

*Even after I see my family and their smiling faces as they are happy to see me, a part of me wonders, you know, if there's an awkward goodbye or an awkward moment at all. So, what else is going on? Like part of me always*

*clicks in the back of my head, what are they thinking about right now?*

She wonders if these potential awkward moments or goodbyes hold her family's knowledge or knowing about what happened to her as there is a difference.

*Do they know what REALLY happened to me?*

*Do they know I am still that little girl on the staircase, running along the beach and always giving away her last smartie?*

It would be later as Wolfie, and I worked together on her narrative account that she would share a story about her as a child, recently told to her.

*Apparently, my family always laughed and thought I was the sweetest little kid. Because I would go running around sharing my tiny boxes of smarties, even though all the kids were each given one box. I still insisted on sharing mine. I would never eat the last one. I would always give it away.*

This story brought back those memories of sharing her smarties with her cousins. More importantly this memory brought forward what she has always valued. She realized in this memory that

*I am still that kid.*

Yet, Wolfie wonders



*Do they know that what they may have seen  
online or heard from others is not me? Do  
they know that I never wanted what they likely  
have seen or heard about.*

Some of her loved ones know the truth about what happened to her, and others either don't know the truth or don't know anything. What Wolfie shares gives a sense of the tensions in the difference between knowing and having knowledge of what happened to her.

*I would love to set the record straight  
But I am afraid that they will view me  
differently and be like  
she is broken  
she is gonna be a problem  
she's got baggage.  
Assuming that who they think they see  
in the video is who I am  
I know what you assumed of me and  
what you thought of me  
In the telling  
I take the risk of facing that same  
reaction with people I love  
It will blow up my life all over again.*

*I didn't ask for this, but people tell me  
I could be really famous right now.  
It's bigger than that, I had no control  
over anything to do with my life*

These moments invade Wolfie's sense and identity making as the difference between knowing and having knowledge of what happened to her matters to her health and

well-being. She embodies this difference in her self-talk as she negotiates her health and well-being in her forward-looking story.

Wolfie shares that she must be careful with her self-talk.

*When I'm being tough on my myself or saying mean things to myself internally... I'm saying mean things to that little girl. She doesn't deserve that. She never did. But, if you're mean to her and she leaves, it's really hard to get her back. How do I get her back when I don't feel that my body is even mine?*

Wolfie shares that she no longer sees herself as

victim,

or survivor

but as an

advocate.

The *ray of sunshine* little girl with glasses and hand-me-down clothes became the she-wolf she embodies today. She is committed to a routine of removing her content and the content of others from the internet as they continue to be digitally trafficked. She shares that she is proud of her efforts, but devastated

the effort needs to be made at all. Through this work, she became Wolf.

Wolfie describes what happened to her and others who are part of the legal case against one of the traffickers still at large through the words *faceless* and *dehumanizing*. I wonder how Wolfie negotiates the spaces and places where she is storied as invisible or *faceless* even though she is, at times, positioned as a victim, survivor, or advocate depending on the context. Wolfie and I continue talking about the language people use when they position her.

She shares that there have been times when people expect her to cry and be distraught when she is storied as the victim. Wolfie is made both visible and invisible by the system, language, and discourse from and around such positionings.

*You are just another number, another Jane Doe.*

But,

then,

treat her differently as a

survivor

and even more so as an

advocate. We wonder why these positionings are accompanied by a certain language of relation? We also wonder why are there only three positionings. Are there more? Again, the following excerpt from a found poem from the transcripts of our conversations gives a sense of the language, and its accompanying expectations make her visible and invisible simultaneously.

*I am a Wolf not a Jane Doe, not one of  
those victims  
What is expected of me is to cry on the  
stand?*

*They talk to you in a very different  
way, it sticks you back down*

*As a*

*victim,*

*they ask if you are okay  
but don't seem to really care nor  
believe you.*

*As a*

*survivor,*

*they are really sorry that happened to  
you:*

*“so it turns out, those guys were  
assholes, huh?”*

*As an*

*advocate,*

*people are like oh really? Amazing*

*Why can't you talk to me like a normal  
person*

*I don't know what exactly I am  
supposed to be to you.*

*There're some very large gaps in  
between each of those words,*

*victim*

*survivor*

*advocate.*

In thinking alongside the gaps between the positionings that Wolfie has experienced, in being spoken to and treated differently, I wonder about her experiences of seeking care. Do the gaps between these positionings house requirements that Wolfie has had to meet so she can shift from

victim

to

survivor

to

advocate

to she receives the care she needs. Is the care she receives dependent on her positioning? I wonder further when Wolfie chooses to be seen, unseen, talked about, untalked about and unsaid because of the way others move her along these positionings?

Much later, in a conversation between Wolfie and I regarding her narrative account, Wolfie invites me back to the above gaps between the words — victim, survivor, and advocate.

Wolfie invites me back into these gaps as she invites me into stories of identity-making.

Wolfie shares that she has been thinking, for a long time now, about setting the record straight and sharing her story. She shares how a conversation with her significant other brought forward questions about being an advocate. Wolfie shares further that being an advocate for her would come from her story of healing, growth, and resilience. It is a positioning empowerment. Yet, she shares that if she positioned herself this way, it

would be a positioning that would *be her life*.

Yet, she shares that *it is already my life*.

Wolfie explains further that she had come to a different understanding of being an advocate than she imagined when she started her journey.

Wolfie explains that her story regarding how she was trafficked circulates publicly without her consent or truth. She expresses her frustration as she cannot control how, when, and why her story is circulated. Additionally, various individuals in the media are making money from her story or representing what happened to her. At the same time, she shares, *I am still in the same spot*, waiting for compensation, waiting for assistance, and waiting for justice.

Yet, she did not wait. She could not wait. It is not who she is.

She took it upon herself to help herself and others. An application to access a 30-day emergency fund provided by the government of the state where she was trafficked has taken more than three years to be processed. She has gone into debt to remove her content from the internet so she could get her life back. She is the one that has moved from house to house, changed addresses, and



bought and sold cars repeatedly to stay safe. Yet, many are making money from sharing her story. Even her lawyer is writing a book about his experiences seeking justice for the women involved in this case. At the same time, her lawyer didn't want her to publicly set the record straight and tell her story as it might be detrimental to how others perceived her on the stand. She was told, *don't mess it up*. Yet, her lawyer has her truth; they know what happened to her. *Why can't I tell my story my way?* She questions the need to stay silent. She lives out this silence when positioned as a victim or survivor to serve a specific purpose within a particular context. However, she is not positioned as an advocate nor allowed to position herself as an advocate, as it is not the right time. She was not allowed to take interviews as she was told she would mess up the case. Yet, they have her affidavit. They have her testimony, but they needed and asked for her silence, but for *how long*, Wolfie asked. *Does my life have to be over before I am allowed to tell my story my way?* I imagine how different her life would be if her story, its truth, and its truth alone were enough.

In thinking alongside what Wolfie has shared, I ask her if she saw a difference between how the traffickers used her body and published a

specific narrative about her to make money and those currently circulating and publishing her story to make money? Wolfie shares that she does not see a difference. Her traffickers controlled how, when and where others saw her body and held her identity. Now she shares she has no control over how, when, and where others learn about her story. She is told to trust the judicial process and the system, even though she is also told there are no guarantees. No guarantees of justice, compensation, or assistance.

### **Wolfie Positions Herself**

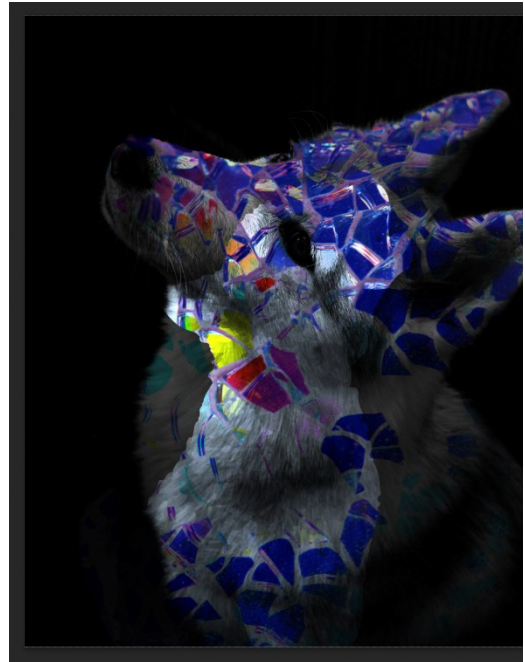
In one of our conversations, I asked Wolfie where her pseudonym came from and if she had a visual representation, she would like to share regarding her pseudo name. It was chosen by a man helping her remove her content from the internet. She states that it is a powerful name that allows her to share her identity when she wishes to do so, especially when dealing with or helping other victims or survivors. Wolfie's words below give a sense of her identity-making as Wolfie alongside a photograph digitally co-created.

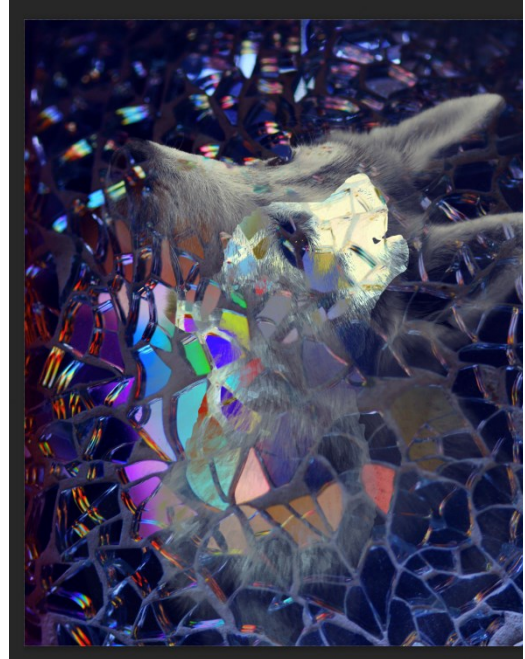
*Don't you dare picture this feeble or  
weak little blonde petite girl.  
Strong resilient hard women  
respecting herself and fighting for others*

*A Panther has walked beside me since  
childhood  
And a Wolf now always behind me  
Both, are within me*

Figure 1

Grayscale of a Dog.





*Note.* Wolfie positions herself: Wolf is now always behind me.

In Wolfie's describes her identity-making and sense-making about the world alongside her upbringing as a Wiccan. As a Wiccan her sense of the world had a lot to do with learning about plants, animals, nature and how we're all equal and how we're all connected. Wolfie was spiritually raised Pagan (Wiccan to be precise). The women of the family have Full Moon parties to celebrate females coming of age. Wolfie was 12. Birthdays were celebrated with flowers and blessings, and spells of protection. Then, at age 16, her father (a shaman) and his long-time Chief called out her animal and spirit guides during a spiritual gathering. She shares how she learned about the animal she

embodied and the animal that walks beside her. She describes further that these animals come and go in your life to teach you different things. For Wolfie, she embodies a wolf while a Panther walks beside her. She shares that the Panther that walks beside her was passed down by her grandfather. She shares the following regarding the Wolf. Part of me still just pictures, kind of a, a Wolf behind me or just it's there, like basically it's like any sort of bad energy or bad vibes or someone wishing me ill will, it's like, it's not gonna work cause I've got that thing. And it's gonna protect me from any of that. And it's just not gonna happen.

I wonder how she lives the stories her body holds of the wolf within her. Further, how has the panther walked beside her? In seeking care, did anyone attend to her spirituality? I asked her if she is herself other than Wolfie? She brings forward memories of Medusa from her art history class, in which she became interested in Greek mythology. Wolfie shares the story of Medusa in her own words.

*You just hear about this monster, right? But suppose you learn the actual art history behind it, like the actual Greek mythology. You'll learn that this beautiful, peaceful, kind woman ultimately became what*

*she was because she was actually raped by Perseus. People blamed her for his actions, and she was cast out of the community, abused and so on. Yet, she was the victim all along.*

Wolfie describes further that she reencountered Medusa during her trial when the Me-Too movement posted the following sculpture of Medusa, standing in front of a New York City courthouse, in which Medusa is holding the head of her rapist in one hand and a sword in the other.

*I thought it was interesting that, you know, there was this ironic happening...I learned the true Greek mythological story of Medusa in the art history class of the very school that cast me out, just as her village did her...Fast forward to the first win I had within the justice system, and all of the sudden, the sculpture of Medusa with the head of Perseus is erected.*

Wolfie shares that her world came crashing down when her traffickers' sent copies of her sexual exploitation guise as a pornography video to her family, friends, school contacts, and business contacts. They tried to blackmail her into sending more girls to them, but she refused.

Figure 2

*Medusa With the Head of Perseus.*



Note. Garbati, L. 12, October, 2020  
<https://www.artnews.com/t/luciano-garbati/>

In thinking alongside Wolfie's  
 connection to Medusa and the positionings of  
 victim

survivor or

advocate

and the gaps between these positionings I  
 wonder how they silence how Wolfie  
 positions herself out of the stories she has  
 learned about Medusa? How does this  
 influence her identity making, her sense

making and her experiences of health and well-being, especially during her nightly routine of remove her content and the content of other women and children previously digitally trafficked.

### **Meeting In Person**

I was sitting in the café, looking at the cars going by on the street. People were going about their day walking by the large picture window as I waited to meet Wolfie in person for the first time. I was nervous and trying to calm myself by just settling into this space. I focused on the aroma of the coffee grinds inviting me into this space. I was worried that our time together would be different than it was on zoom. That meeting in person would be awkward or even just different. I wondered if Wolfie had the same questions swirling in her mind? I could feel my nervous anticipation while my senses tried to focus on the surroundings of the café to keep me in the café and not distracted by the activities on the street. I couldn't pin down what I thought could be different in meeting her in person. Still, it brought a familiar uneasiness from my previous comings and goings in Southeast Asia.

I was always uneasy in my preparations as I either headed back to the small village in Indonesia to work alongside their community development projects or to



the safe house to assess one of the women who had recently been rescued from being trafficked. It was an uneasiness where I was worried about how my comings and goings in the lives of these women would be storied.

In the waiting, in my uneasiness, I worried that my coming and going in Wolfie's life might cause her harm. Specifically, my body language, listening, and words might story her differently than who she is telling me she is. That the stories she shares are shaped, by the ways I care for her stories. This uneasiness is so thick that I question my intentions to come as I have done so many times before. Are my intentions good enough, and if not will I cause harm in my comings and goings in and out of Wolfie's life?

Or change the stories she shares with me? As I wait, a homeless man walks by, then a group of high school students. My attention is then drawn to one of the customers in the café on a business call. I am seated in the corner of the cafe, where two large leather couches wait along with me. Wolfie suggested that we meet here, and I am glad she did. It is the space and place I had first imagined in my research proposal. The space and place I longed for as we met on zoom. The couch's leather invites me physically settle into the softness of the cushions. The

background music asks me to stay in the café and not distract myself with the people walking on the sidewalk. I feel my mind and body settle.

It would be two hours later that we would finally say goodbye. The leather couches dissolved the week's business away so we could enjoy our warm chai lattes. The conversation also invited us to slowly turn our bodies to face one another. As Wolfie shared her passion for the new business she was launching online, her body relaxed, her eyes changed, and she became the Wolfie I had met so many times through zoom. I could also feel my body relaxing and my voice less awkward, and I wondered if she noticed. Today, in the café, we celebrated her engagement differently than before as she explained the meaning of the diamonds in her ring.

During our last conversation on zoom, Wolfie shared a recent special event in her life. She had gotten engaged. My hands automatically clasped my face. I had not thought about my response until Wolfie shared that when her partner had asked her to marry him, she said *I wasn't going to be one of those girls. I always wondered why girls used to put their hands to their face. Specifically, a girl who expresses this typical reaction.* I wondered what Wolfie meant by not wanting to be one of those girls.

Yet, it would be later, when Wolfie and I would meet again for our morning tea through zoom, that she shared more about *not wanting to be that girl*. On her drive home from our in-person meeting, she came to think more about what experiencing this *typical reaction* meant to her identity-making and forward-looking story.

She shares that her never wanting to be that girl meant she never thought she would have a chance to experience this typical *feminine* response in her life since being trafficked. She never thought marriage would be a part of her forward-looking story. To her, such milestones were inaccessible to her; thus, she distanced herself from the possibility of ever experiencing this joy. Distancing herself became her identity-making. Yet, she came to embody the joy of the typical response and embrace its normalcy. She shares with me the joy that overcame her in her car.

*I always said, oh, I'd never be that girl. I didn't think that I'd ever be that girl. Um, but I did. And I was actually thinking about it when I was driving home after our talk, I think I just realized that that was such a "normal", like, "girly" reaction for me to have, which also had me thinking, wow, these are, these are normalities. These are normal, good, happy, positive things. And it just*

*really, really hit me on that drive home you, know? I made it. I'm out of all these crazy difficult life experiences. And now, I'm in a serious, truly happy and loving relationship. And this man loves me like crazy. He sees me. Regardless of what I've been through and like all this stuff. Anyway, all these feelings just came flooding in.*

I wonder how dominant social discourses influence the identity and sense-making of women previously trafficked so that they distance themselves from experiencing these “normal” life milestones. Additionally, how do these life milestones frame Wolfie’s experiences of health and well-being as she continues to be digitally trafficked? In my wonderings, I am brought back to how Wolfie shared the difficulties she experienced in accessing care, and how she has been storied in the social support system.

*All the girls had the same story; That  
we got ourselves into this trouble  
That we went out there to do porn  
My story was kind of neglected  
Grouped in with all of these women  
Hundreds of them*

*I just became another Jane Doe  
Our stories have similarities, but none  
of our stories are the same.*

*For some girls it was their first time  
going out to do something  
I was out there to shoot dresses  
This was the norm at my career at this  
point.  
Nothing unusual with this work.  
Yet, we were all storied as a bunch of  
whores playing stupid games  
This assumption was made, and the  
world went with it.  
That was the story that stuck until  
we had the proof.  
Proof, publicly in court.  
All on the table.*

*Proof of this and proof of that  
But I deleted everything tied to me and  
to other women.  
We're supposed to provide a paper  
trail, but  
I needed the link to come down first  
before having to prove what happened.*

*Years later when you are getting help  
They're like, okay, we need the proof  
to achieve justice  
Finally, when we were able to prove  
ourselves.  
Everyone then decided to listen.  
Even though there was proof all  
along.*

*You could just watch the videos and  
see these women crying.*

*Many intoxicated  
Drugged  
And just struggling through it*

*There are expectations on us and  
towards getting us justice.  
Don't be disgruntled, discouraged,  
they say it will turn the judge off we are told.  
When you haven't seen justice, it is  
hard not to feel discouraged.*

*Victim services, a massive process for  
basically zero help.  
Trying to start over and no one will let  
you.*

*There's supposed to be urgency to  
helping a victim, yet it was never there  
I can't count on the system  
People that are like, "I'm here to help  
you."*

*"I got you."*

*And then*

*They DON'T.*

*They just wanted the tea.*

*They want the story*

*Money isn't going to change anything,  
but it is certainly an energy.*

*An energy that will allow us to seek  
actual help, guidance, and therapy.  
Help with the debt that we've gone  
into  
just to survive.*

*Meanwhile one of my traffickers is in  
jail  
Not worried about finding a place to  
live  
or paying bills  
Getting three squares a day  
He gets moved to another jail when  
his safety and security is threatened.  
What about me?  
How many times did I move?  
Cars and license plates bought and  
sold. Paying to remove my content  
Paying for services  
  
Paying ransoms  
Or else.*

*Then  
There's that moment of hope  
Then.  
They don't help.  
You're disappointed all over again  
and you're like, okay, it's on me.  
Hard pill to swallow.*

*Reliving the trauma day in, day out,  
just constantly.  
The only person that can help is me.  
I need to be okay with me and I need  
to heal for me and no one else.*

Wolfie's story highlights issues with accessing timely and appropriate care at various times. Care that is limited or restricted based on how and when she is positioned as either a

victim

survivor

or

advocate.

Much later, in another conversation with Wolfie, I would return to this found poem. A conversation in which Wolfie describes the times she has been positioned in other ways. This was an interesting stopping



point for me as I returned to an even early conversation Wolfie, and I had regarding these positionings. I remember asking why are there only three positionings; could there be more? In another conversation, I would return to this question through Wolfie's experience of being was positioned differently.

In continuing to think alongside our conversations about typical responses, I wondered about the typical and habitual responses in healthcare that shape the experiences of health and well-being for women previously trafficked. Wolfie has often invited me to understand the importance of reconnecting her mind, body, and spirit to her health and well-being. This reconnection has many layers of sense and identity-making for Wolfie and highlights engrained responses in society and healthcare regarding the use of reconstruction or cosmetic surgery.

### **The First Layer**

Wolfie shares that the woman in her chat group, who were previously trafficked, are going into debt to surgically reconstruct their identities to start over and safely negotiate the public spaces of their daily lives. In these moments, their health and well-being are threatened in public areas where they are recognized. Specifically, when individuals who identify them assume they are free for

the taking, even in public spaces, due to the content produced and distributed about their bodies and identities. However, fragile boundaries are instantly dissolved; Wolfie gives a sense of the threats women previously trafficked digitally negotiate when they are recognized in public.

*It's a matter of life and death.*

*You can't go anywhere without being recognized, brutally harassed, or assaulted*

*Look at celebrities in the news*

*Being brutally harassed by the paparazzi.*

*It's awful*

*Hectic*

*Scary, even.*

*Except celebrities have protection.*

*Feeling invaded on*

*Changing addresses, license plates and cars*

*Over and over again*

*Does not help*

*Desperately trying to restart but people are obsessive*

*Scary*

*You are literally just thinking of anything and everything to survive*

*To not be recognized*

*If that means going under the knife to  
start over  
Putting myself back to where I was  
Being safe and secure  
It is worth it*

*What is a better means of living  
We talk amongst ourselves, the  
survivors  
Body dysmorphia  
Living in a body that is not ours  
It is extreme to go under the knife but  
It would have changed our lives  
The whole point was ultimately just to  
reconnect  
Mind  
Body  
Spirit  
I would never have wanted to change  
myself prior.*

### **The Second Layer**

Yet, for Wolfie, surgical reconstruction of the intimate places of her body brings possibilities of reconnecting her mind, body, and spirit. It is a spiritual journey for her. A reconnection she recently experienced by using a product that could reportedly detox her Yoni. She explained that the suppository was a mix of specific herbs and witchy spices. In her research about the product, she noted that women used the

suppository to purge or clear the person(s) who had previously penetrated their Yoni. She shared that she felt reconnected after the three-day process of detoxing her Yoni. She shares further that this 6-day process was spiritual for her selfcare.

Wolfie longs for the privacy that she notes other women have. She shares that she is envious of the modesty of her sister-in-law. *She has the choice to be modest, she can choose what she shares and with who; including with her partner.*

This level of privacy could be offered to her if surgical reconstruction of her Yoni was available to her as part of her care. Wolfie shares this sense of privacy as important to her health and well-being.

*I am envious  
I sleep naked  
She sleeps covered up  
She had the choice  
She has the choice  
I don't have that at this point  
Everyone's seen it*

As I think alongside Wolfie's experience, I also think about the habitual response in healthcare regarding the surgical reconstruction of the intimate spaces of women's bodies. A response embedded in dominant social, cultural, and economic narratives that story who should have access

to this form of care and who should not. Wolfie shares how surgical reconstruction for specific individuals in society is vital as they negotiate the body and identity they were born with versus the body and identity they identify with. Similarly, Wolfie shares that the digital trafficking of her body has left her with a body that is not her own. Additionally, those who have viewed her content on the internet now have memories and knowledge about the intimate places of her body that she never wanted to share. If she had access to surgical reconstruction, everything that was once seen about her body would be made unseen. The memories and knowledge others hold about her body and identity would be no longer. For Wolfie's health and well-being, her body's intimate places are more than how it is understood in the healthcare system. The intimate places of her body she shares are *now OURs*, hers and her fiancée. She shares that *it is more than gender*, as depicted below in another excerpt of a found poem.

*They put my body on display in a way  
that they wanted to.  
They made me something that I'm not.  
You don't have any privacy anymore.  
Everyone has seen everything.  
Your body is not your own.  
Every inch of yourself on display for  
years.  
Getting millions of views.  
It's just not even yours anymore.  
I am now in a body that isn't mine.*

*The Yoni*  
*It's not just gender*  
*It is our privacy*  
*It is our security*  
*It is ours*  
*Our current*  
*Our past*  
*Our future*  
*It is not that something is wrong with*  
*it.*  
*Everything is fine.*  
*It is just that it doesn't feel private.*  
*Surgery will restore my privacy.*

As I celebrate with Wolfie her recent engagement, her words above sink under my skin. Her longing for privacy is now a longing for *our privacy*. Privacy between her and her fiancée that extends into her identity-making as she imagines and anticipates motherhood.

*God forbid, like, and I don't think it*  
*will, but if, if any of this were to come back*  
*and haunt my children.*

Wolfie longs for privacy that dissolves the memories and the knowledge that others hold about the intimate areas of her body. Wolfie's words invite me to the borderlands, where tensions are made known regarding the access to surgical reconstruction as a care modality. I lean into understanding this form of care, and the possibilities that come from being open to these tensions rather than storying them away.

In thinking alongside access to surgical reconstruction for women previously

trafficked, should they choose this form of care, I encounter the absence of this discourse in my previous work in caring for women at the safe house. The following journal entry gives a sense of the lack of this discourse in my own way of knowing about the care of women previously trafficked.

It's not something that I have ever come across in my work with women previously trafficked; the use of plastic surgery to alter one's body for their safety and security in public spaces and/or to gain some sense of privacy, and/or regain intimacy lost or taken, and/or gain control over what was seen so that it becomes unseen.

So many questions, imaginings, and possibilities surface as I lean towards the care Wolfie shares she needs for her forward looking story. The possibility of surgical reconstruction for women previously trafficked makes known the dominant social, political, and economic narratives that determine who we by who has access and who can the power to determine who has access.

### **Loud Whispers in Public Spaces**

It had been over a month since I last spoke with Wolfie. She had shared that she had a very important wedding to attend to

where she has many responsibilities. I wondered how the wedding went and if she and her fiancé had a chance to enjoy each other's company even though their roles during the nuptials would have them apart for most of the day.

We spent most of our time during the zoom call catching up on our lives. I asked her about how the wedding went. Initially she said all went well but when we started to talk again about the public spaces women digitally trafficked negotiate, she was reminded of a particular moment during the evening portion of the wedding. She explained how she was approached, in the washroom, by three women, that were initially part of her and her fiancé friend group. The following found poem describes the moment and how Wolfie she negotiates, in very public spaces, the tensions that come from the difference between the knowledge others hold of what happened to her and knowing what happened to her.

*They approached me in the bathroom  
and the one girl was just crying.  
I'm like patting and rubbing her back.  
And ultimately, they were like, we just  
wanted to say, so sorry that we haven't been  
nicer to you.*

*This is the same group of people that  
chose to put my trauma quite literally on a  
big screen and watch it together.*

*I was nothing but kind to them.*



*Even though they were catty, rude and  
just straight up condescending and mean to  
me.*

*I never said a word.  
I was just trying to put myself in their  
shoes.*

*We want to include you in things  
because you're such a nice person.  
We didn't want to confront you about  
what happened.*

*Look, I don't want to get into it.  
Its water under the bridge  
Its fine.*

*There are people coming in and out of  
the bathroom and they're drunk  
I can't even leave.  
I don't think this is the place to have  
this conversation  
but  
thank you.*

*Even though you looked me up and  
down when you learned about what happened  
to me.*

*Now you reopen my trauma*

*You are an amazing person  
We all have things in our past, we all  
make mistakes.  
We all have our /hō/ phases in our  
life.*

*Trafficking is not a mistake.  
Someone committed a crime, and I  
was their victim.  
What do you mean?  
We all have*

OUR

/hō/

*phase.*

*This is my life.  
People don't understand what I live  
with on a daily basis.*

*You are assuming, you're still  
assuming.  
This was not an accident or mistake.  
It wasn't supposed to happen at all.  
I'm not gonna sit here and start  
dishing out my story*

*They are hugging me and like  
touching me and being all like.  
You just,  
you gotta hang out with us now.  
We're gonna take you out and hang  
out.*

*I've*

*wanted that for so*

*long.*

*At the same time  
This is making me heavy.  
Excited they came to me  
But it took a hard left turn.  
You still don't understand.*

*You still don't understand.*

The difference between having the knowledge of what happened to Wolfie and knowing what happened to her is a space of other positionings. These positionings can simultaneously make Wolfie visible and invisible in public spaces. During this encounter, her responsibilities during the

wedding made her visible to the three women who confronted her in the washroom. Yet, at the same time she was re-storied as invisible when her trafficking experience was re-storied as, a mistake, that all girls make some point in their lives. Wolfie was made invisible by the knowledge these women held of what had happened to her and who she was on the screen while they viewed her trauma, which was countered by who they had witness today during the wedding.

Wolfie was previously positioned by this friend group as an “unacceptable” /hō/, not worthy of their friendship, care and understanding. Then, during this particular public event, at this time, she was re-positioned as an “acceptable” /hō/, now worthy of their friendship, care and understanding. Yet, both positionings come from the difference of having the knowledge of what happened to her versus knowing what happened to her.

AND

In the waiting.

Wolfie shares with me that she longed for their friendship, care and understanding. Yet, she knows that there is a price to pay for their friendship. The price is two-fold. First, being the reopening of her trauma for all to

see, in the same way this friend group decided to watch her rapes on a large screen during one of their gatherings. Secondly, the rejection she fears will come with setting the record straight about what happened to her. She shares that *If I tell my story, the story. It'll spread like wildfire in that group. Which is both good and bad because it's bringing it up again.*

These are the tensions Wolfie negotiates in her identity and sense making about and, in the world, around her. Yet, all the while, her content continues to circulate online. These are the tensions she also negotiates in the spaces and places created from the difference of holding the knowledge about what happened to her versus knowing what happened to her.

#### **The Victim is Now the Villain.**

As Wolfie continues to share how her health and well-being is influenced by how members of her and her fiancé common friend group story her. In the following excerpt from our transcript, Wolfie describes one of many moments in which she is positioned as the author of her trauma and thus we add a fourth category after advocate, that being the villain.

*I just remember like, I still would go to the parties and stuff like that, that they held. Cuz*

*like obviously, you know, this is my fiancé family, and our friends are important to him. They're important to me. Like I love them, and you know, of course I'll, I'll be there. But let me tell you, getting up the nerve to go to those things .....like I literally some days would be like genuinely in the bathroom throwing up. Cuz, I had so much anxiety, just even so much as seeing these people. Because I was like, I'm gonna step in there and I'm gonna be standing there awkwardly and no one's gonna wanna talk to me and everyone's having fun but talking about me from across the room and like, it's a, it's a place of trauma for me. AGAIN. Because they kind of caused that. I was the bad guy for how long because oh, well if I am going to a party then we can't invite certain other members of our friends' group.*

*The **victim** is kind of now the*

***villain.***

## CHAPTER 6: CONVERSATIONS WITH PHOENIX

### First Meetings

As I wait to meet Phoenix for the first time, I am aware that I am meeting her through my familiarity with the small lens at the top of my laptop. My home office has not changed over the last few weeks except for the pile of papers on the left side of my desk that I need to organize. I will not organize my desk again today, as today is about meeting Phoenix. I am not as nervous as I was with meeting my other participants, which has me wonder if my home office now offers a somewhat more comfortable space for me. I wonder if I am more comfortable with leaning into the tensions that surface from my fears and insecurities of *first-time meetings*. I wonder further if I should even be comfortable? A comfort that allows me to settle into my voice, body language and the small lens at the top of my laptop. At first, being in my home office disrupted my settling into these tensions and this work. It felt uncomfortable as I was anticipated and longed to meet the research participants in the spaces and places of their choosing.

Yet, I am here now.

As I wait for Phoenix's zoom screen to appear, I wonder how this small lens bringing forward a space and place into each other's lives will shape our relationship. I wonder if we will be able to create a safe *first-time* meeting. We greet each other. I begin to explain the purpose of my work and go through the consent form as Phoenix listens. She describes a local artisan café that she visits frequently. She begins to describe her experiences as a young girl with autism, how she is working on saving other women currently trafficked, and how she is asked to share her story at various national and international conferences. Immediately, I sense a tension growing in me. I fight to push it away, but it returns.

Phoenix's mannerisms, her stories of saving other women and experiences of being invited to speak at multiple conferences disrupt my comfort. It is not what she shares that disturbs me but rather how she shares. It takes me everything to listen to her voice, focus on her tone and follow her stories that seem to run into one another without an organized form, reason or pause. My need for coherence, pauses and silence disrupts me physically. I can feel my body language changing, resisting to listen, so as to bring comfort. I can feel my body reaching for my

previous anticipations and imaginings for this *first-time* meeting. I wonder if Phoenix notices the change in me as I fight to listen, to not interrupt, to stay present.

Then I hear it.

It is so silent that it is deafening.

I wonder how I can hear something so silent that it is deafening. How can something so deafening be in the silent. I compare it to when you are alone with no other sounds filling the space around you. If you just listen to the silence and lean into it, the silence becomes deafening. It fills your ears, your mind, and your body. You try to shake your head to free yourself from its grip. Yet, in this deafening silence I hear the fight in me to listen. I hear the fight in me asking for coherence, pauses and silence in Phoenix's storytelling. Why do I want to change how Phoenix shares her lived experiences?

Yet, I am here now.

This is a familiar place.

This deafening silence, many times before, has awakened me. A deafening silence that brings me face to face, once again with my intentions. Once again, I face the deafening silence of my intentions to work overseas and now to complete this work. In re-reading over my journal entry regarding my first meeting with Phoenix, the familiarity with this deafening silence is visible.

My visit with Phoenix reminds me of a story I wrote for one of my courses in the summer of July 2013. In re-reading the story, I lean further into the deafening silence. The day has finally arrived. You would finally arrive. The grass is as green as it is ever going to get this summer. My father unloads you from the trailer after a 3-hour drive. Your eyes were wide open. I was scared. I remember your nervous walk to the corral. This place was so unfamiliar to you, yet for me it was familiar as I had been preparing the corral for weeks. In my preparations I had imagined our first-time meeting. I anticipated this day for so long. Yet, I could sense you were afraid. I so wanted to calm your spirit, but my dad said it was better to give you some space. As soon as we released you into the corral, you ran as fast as you could go. I was afraid you would run into the fence on the other side, but you stopped and continued to run for the next two hours. I was devastated but at the same time glad that you were mine. Glad that you would never let anyone ride you but



me. The next morning, I woke up early to greet you, but you were not in the corral. I frantically searched for you as the cold air began to constrict my lungs.

As I ran back to the house; I caught you running up the road to the top of the hill. I screamed, realizing that you were running away. Immediately I called your name, and you stopped. I called your name as I ran to find the sweet oats that I hoped would bring you back into my world, back to me. I am worth staying for. I am good. I will be good to you, I promise.

I was desperate. I hide the rope behind my back so that you would not realize what I was doing. I ran towards you feeling the rush of adrenaline heighten my senses. I could feel my body shaking, and my voice cracking as I continued to scream your name. I could feel the desperation explode within me as I so wanted to catch you, stop you from leaving. As I continued to scream your name, you heard the oats swooshing in my bucket. You stopped. You began to turn around. I felt my breath come back to me. I stopped screaming and called out your name. Slowly we walked towards each other. As I slipped the collar around your neck while I took advantage of your weakness for those sweet oats, my body violently shook from the effects of adrenaline. I remember having such a difficult time holding onto the rope that would bring you back to the place you were running from. I had little strength in my legs as they tried to maneuver over the tall grass back to the corral. Once we reached the corral, I let you go once again. I do not remember what you did. Whether you stood there or ran to the other side of the field. I do not remember because I fell to my knees, crying for what was almost lost. The adrenaline surged through me again as I realized what had just happened.

As I think about this story alongside my first meeting with Phoenix, I encounter my fear of having the wrong intentions, once again. This is not the first time. This fear is like an old friend, waiting to have tea with me. Yet, it is not at all like an old friend. This fear invades my body and mind with a deafening silence. I can't ignore it. I can't run. I have to stop. I have to turn around. I have to stay and go to this familiar place. A place prepared by anticipations and imaginings. I can't ignore it. I can't run. I have to stop and turn around. I will not fight. I will, as April did on that summer day, come back. I will

choose, with love and curiosity to stay, not because of my own doing, but because there are yet imaginings and possibilities that have yet to be made known as Phoenix and I negotiate who we will walk towards each other.

Yet, here I am.

Once again,

Fighting to hear coherence, pauses and silence in Phoenix's storytelling.

### **Second Meeting**

Phoenix is full of life. She has much to share through her smile and laugh. She seems comfortable in the space and place zoom offers. She describes how she meets many stakeholders involved in human trafficking in Canada and beyond through zoom meetings. Then, she describes her work alongside a couple other women who are freeing a *new girl* from a pimp working out of a hotel. Phoenix shares *new girls are never left alone*. They move from truck to truck. She further shares how she helps other women leave because *she knows what to look for* and that she left her trafficker because of the peer support she received from other women. The support of other women gave her the courage to leave even though she currently struggles with what she calls *her delusional days* when she finds herself missing her trafficker. She shares further,

stories about her autism helping a rape victim graduate from high school and her COVID crazies.

At times it is difficult to follow her story telling where different stories run into each other, alongside each other and through each other.

Then

she shares something that stops me, disrupts me again. Phoenix describes that *no one ever asks what we want to do with our lives...and mean it*. I stop. I stop interrupting. I stop

interrupting as the deafening silence returns. I stop interrupting her not only with my questions but in my mind and body language.

I wonder if no one asks her what she wants to do with her life because they too have also found themselves in the same place, I find myself today; fighting to listen rather than listening to Phoenix in the way she invites me to hear her. I wonder further how this space and place has influenced her health and well-being. I wonder how her stories of health and well-being might be different if she had been asked what she wants to do with her life? I wonder, as Phoenix shares, how her life would be different if, in the asking, there was genuine intention to help her?

Yet, I am here now.

In this stopping place, Phoenix is inviting me to fight a little less with the deafening silence, with my listening, to stop seeking coherence, pauses and silence in her story telling and to be curious in the stories she invites me to hear. I feel a settling into the midst of being a little less. I feel a settling in my voice, by body and mind. Then, I hear the deafening silence fade into the background.

### **Disrupted by Special Education Classes**

In waiting for Phoenix for our next meeting, I decided to send her a few text messages wondering if she was ok and if we needed to reschedule. Later in the day I received a text from her apologizing for not showing up. I told her I was free now and that we could meet in 20 minutes. She replied stating she would meet me in the zoom link. I asked Phoenix if we could continue where we left off from our first conversation regarding the timeline of her life. She agreed and began with explaining the meaning of her pseudo name.

Phoenix describes that her pseudo name was given to her by her dad. She was born on her father's 29<sup>th</sup> birthday and it was on her 1<sup>st</sup> birthday (her earliest memory) she realized that her mother lies. Phoenix shares that her life is framed by the abuse she experienced at the hands of her mother. She describes her first suicide attempt at the age of 15. It was her only way out of her mother's house. She originally left her mother's house at the age of 17 to live with her dad. She would return when she became pregnant at the age of 19 with her first son. She describes how she spent most of her school years in special education classes.

*I was in special ed class. Wasn't allowed in the classroom. I'm one of the autistic closet kids. I was denied an education because nobody wanted to actually sit down and teach me anything. They wanted me to behave perfectly in a classroom and did not understand why I didn't have any of these social cues. If I had, even one little frustration for the day, I was in school suspension for the rest of the day.*

Phoenix then goes on to describe the father of her second child. She describes him, as the most dangerous, because he once told her how to kill people by nailing them to the wall with railroad spikes. She describes how she met him through a friend in 2008. Her trafficking experiences started with him and what she calls *sex games*. She said she had a slave contract with him that included things she was willing to do, things she would be willing to try, and hard nos or things that she never wanted to try. He threatened her life constantly. Every day, she was required to take the bus to service him on his lunch break. She could not leave as she felt he was all she could ever hope for as a romantic partner because of her autism. He tried to sell her multiple times. Phoenix shared that his last attempt was to sell her for \$3000.00.

Phoenix shares that she is now married to a wonderful man. She describes how sad she is that she will not be able to start a family with her new husband as she had her tubes tied at the request of her trafficker in 2009. Though she lost custody of her three children to her mother, is proud to have raised her stepdaughter. Phoenix shares *I often go off on tangents* to which she apologized.

I come to notice when

sentences and stories run alongside, inside, and out from each other that Phoenix's voice elevates. Then there are moments when her voice has a lower tone, and her pace

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especially when she speaks of one specific childhood memory she has brought forward on multiple occasions. She brings me back to her experiences during a shooting at her school. This event impacted her greatly as the student that was killed was in the classroom next to her sister's classroom. She describes how no one realized how much the school shooting affected her. She explains how this student was bullied his whole life and was also a special needs kid like her. Phoenix gives a sense of the invisible spaces and places in the school that Phoenix attended.

*My mom never taught me how to tie our own shoes.  
A lot of kids made fun of me because I didn't know the difference.  
Why would one word make such a big difference.*

*Missing social cues  
Special education class  
Must behave perfectly in the classroom.  
I am an Autistic closet kid, denied an education.  
Because nobody wanted to actually sit down with me.*

*Repeat high school!  
When I was the one that didn't make the choices?  
The adults around me made those choices.*

*I didn't have a right to an education  
I didn't need one, because I was gonna be on welfare the rest of my life*

*The hardest part of having autism growing up  
I didn't really understand other people and me.  
I recognized that nobody understood me  
I was 30 before I figured out that I couldn't tell what people feel.*

As I think alongside Phoenix's experiences in special education class, I find myself remembering my own experiences in a special education class. My experience started when I was told by my teacher, I was not holding my pencil correctly, thus I would need to go to special education class. I spend a few hours a week in the special class learning to hold my pencil correctly and listening to recordings of the pronunciation of words through a bulky headset. Every day I was there, repeating the words I heard, Al was also there. He had double hearing aids and spoke with a muffled voice. He, too, was practicing, out loud, his enunciation of words he would hear through his headset.

I recall being frustrated, angry, and embarrassed with being there. There was more to me than how I was storied by my teacher. Though I may not have behaved perfectly in the classroom such as, holding my pencil correctly, I was smart, but in other ways. I knew that being placed in the special education room would worsen the bullying in the spaces and places that waiting for me outside the door. I remember my whole body wanted to shout out loud that I was not dumb and there was more to me than what my teacher saw on the outside.

I was smart but in other ways.

I wonder what it was like for Al because the only evidence that I was in the special education class was my absence from the regular language arts class. Yet, for Al everyone knew by his hearing aids, short stature, and muffled voice that he was different. I wonder if he too wanted others to know he was more than his hearing aids. I wonder if he felt that no one asked him what he wanted to do with his life? I wonder if he too met people in his life that where, fighting to listen by interrupting him. In bringing this remembering forward I think alongside the tensions Phoenix shares in having a grade nine education and a 150 IQ. She describes that she negotiates these tensions during her interactions with anti-trafficking stakeholders, by *apologizing for her lack of formal education.*

*This is my mantra: Who am I? If I can't do this, I do this, you know, I don't have a college education. I don't have university degree. I have autism and an obsessive knowledge of predators because that was how I protected myself. After the shooting at school, I was going to know about the predators to be able to see them.*

Yet, she shares that she doesn't understand why she didn't recognize her trafficker as a predator. In re-reading over my journal alongside my interruptions during Phoenix's story telling I recognize these interruptions as a way of seeking a linear timeline of Phoenix's life. Yet, Phoenix's storytelling is not linear. It curves, turns, moves forward, backwards, inwards, and out. As I struggle being in the midst of her way of storytelling, I continue to shed my desire for comfort by leaning into being curious and open, and again stop fighting to listen.

Yet, I am here now.

Phoenix describes how she is silenced by the discrimination she faced and continues to face because of her autism. Her rights are silenced and her desire to be a mother is silenced.

*I face so much discrimination  
You think that kind of discrimination doesn't exist anymore  
The way I think is wrong  
I speak wrong  
I communicate wrong  
I socialize wrong  
I have relationships that are wrong*

*I am going to say something wrong  
So, you stop doing everything  
We can turn our emotions off  
Because if I don't, I'll just sit and cry  
Because to stop and think  
about all the ways the world tried to pin me down.  
I'll just sit and cry.*

*Autism means retarded.  
Overdramatic liars who just want attention  
You have no rights  
Right to protection  
Right to my children*

*An endless beloved barrage of lies and slander will break down the resistance of any  
adversary with meta mathematical precision.*

*If I do nothing, I am still doing something wrong.  
You're sick and tired of getting in trouble all the time for doing nothing.  
I don't have my kids because I have a mental health disability  
Autism doesn't make you not a good parent.*

I wonder if Phoenix's has encountered health care professionals who dismiss or restory her as a mother. I wonder if Phoenix holds back and what she holds back during these experiences with healthcare providers. In asking her about her experiences with health care professionals, she shares some of her experiences.

*I was raised, you know, if something's bothering you, you go and you talk to your doctor about it. It took me until I was like 26 years old to find a doctor who understood me. Nurses act like you can't hear them in the emergency room when they're less than 20 feet away. I'm not a drug addict. I don't play games when I'm not feeling good. If I tell you*

*I'm not feeling good, I'm not feeling good. Because I'm one of those people I'm scared if I get sick that I'll miss too much.*

I wonder what Phoenix shares and holds back as she negotiates my interrupting of her storytelling. It would be many meetings later with Phoenix that I would come to revisit these spaces and places in our conversations when I would interrupt her with a question.

In thinking alongside Phoenix's lived experiences of having to behave perfectly in the classroom, I wonder if Phoenix was or is denied care in the same way she was denied an education. I wonder if healthcare providers story her as not behaving *perfectly* in the clinical setting from her story telling? I wonder if she re-lives the autistic closet of her childhood school days as an adult and mother. Does she experience barriers to accessing care when she is misread and re-storied by healthcare providers who do not sit down with her. I asked her if she has a specific image, song or symbol that represents her experiences of health and well-being. She lets me know that she will be sending me the lyrics of two songs.

### **Line by Line**

Shortly after our conversation, Phoenix texts me the link to the lyrics of two songs that she shares represent her lived experiences of health and well-being. It would be in our next conversation that Phoenix describes how music is a familiar space and place of learning for her as she re-tells of how she used to listen to music for hours with her father. She shares that her father taught her to communicate through music *that's how he got me speaking in the first place.*

*When I talked, I made no sense in sentences  
cause I don't understand sentence structure and how words were ordered, how to order  
them to be effective.  
I can't read people.  
Part of social building blocks  
Some of us get and some don't.  
I've been told that I'm rude, condescending, and make things up to get attention.*

*Music  
Now, I can sit and focus on somebody else's thoughts.  
Cause that's what lyrics are.  
So, when you're listening to music, you're listening to somebody's most inner thoughts  
You're listening to an Artist's inner most thoughts.  
The lyrics speak to a part of me.  
A part of me I didn't listen to anymore.*



I imagine the first time her father discovered that Phoenix could use lyrics to communicate. Now, lyrics of certain songs provide a space where Phoenix tries to make sense of her past trafficking experiences, her health and well-being as a female, mother, wife, and woman with autism. In her identity making she shares how she was unsure of who she was after leaving her trafficker. It was more than just leaving for her it was going back and processing who she was and who she is now.

*When you leave, you, you have no idea who you are. You're like, do I like this? Because he said, I like this. Or do I like this? Because I do like this. It's very scary. It's very confusing. And the nightmares come every night, for years.*

Phoenix takes the lead and invites me, line by line, into the lyrics of the songs she has sent me ahead of time. She reads a line and then shares how the words, phrases and sentences that speak to her life story, experiences of trafficking and what health and well-being mean to her. Additionally, in bringing alongside found poems from the transcripts of our conversations Phoenix invites me to her sense making regarding what happened to her at the hands of her trafficker and how it influences her experiences of health and well-being. Through the following lyrics she describes how her trafficking experience brings forward nightmares that disturb her sleep.

I am the nightmare awakened.  
Crawling in your bed tonight.  
Pull your covers over your eyes. (Fight Like Sin, 2016)

Phoenix shares how her sleep is also disturbed when she thinks of her children, who are currently in the custody of her mother. She shares how she  *fights herself, her intrusive thoughts, as she thinks about the night her children were taken*. She describes how painful it is that her children are with her mother. It disturbs her nights and days as she tries to find a new lawyer who will help her fight to get her children back. As she fights for her children, she reads the following

lyrics and shares that she identifies with Hercules and how she doesn't want to fight Cerberus; *I don't wanna do this, but I gotta do this.*

I'm the strong one, I'm not nervous  
I don't ask how hard the work is  
Got a rough, indestructible surface

I take what I'm handed  
I break what's demanded, but

Under the surface  
I feel berserk as a tightrope walker  
In a three-ring circus  
Under the surface  
Was Hercules ever like  
"Yo, I don't wanna fight Cerberus"

(Darrow, 2021).

Additionally, Phoenix describes her fight for her children as her destiny as is her work as a survivor of trafficking. Yet, she shares how she cannot allow what is happening in her personal life to affect her professional life. She reads out loud the following lyrics.

If I could shake  
the crushing weight  
of expectations.  
Would that free some room up for joy.  
Or relaxation.  
Or simple pleasure?  
Instead we measure this growing pressure.  
Keeps growing, keep going.  
Who am I if I can't run with the ball?

(Hound et al., 2022)

Phoenix describes how she navigates the many and constant requests to share her story of being trafficked as a woman with Autism. Additionally, in her destiny to help other women, Phoenix shares how she sets aside her personal needs so that she can meet the expectations placed on her when she is positioned by others as an advocate. Yet, in the spaces and places she shares her story, Phoenix questions if she is being exploited once again, as no one offers to remunerate her for the time it takes to prepare for the re-telling of her story. As Phoenix reads out the following lyrics, Phoenix describes how the sharing of her story affects her health and well-being.

This ain't a story of the fall from former glory.  
 This is more an allegory for what's wrong with my soul  
 Injuries to your soul you are using,  
 People act like it is nothing tragic.  
 But hey now  
 It's nothing tragic, just a little bit of static  
 That can't be cleared up with magic, yes I've tried it, you know.  
 Looking for the magic cure for trauma.  
 I'm such a misfit I've got 52 assistants.

(Darrow, 2021).

Phoenix adds that her ability to meet the expectations placed on her when she is asked to share her story comes down to how much of her trauma she can face in a day. Phoenix gives a sense to how much trauma she can face in a day as she keeps her personal and professional lives separated.

*So many people want my help.  
 Makes me a little bit uneasy. Cause I'm like, why do you want my help?  
 You know, I can show you how not to succeed as an adult.  
 And I can teach you what to look for and I can teach you like warning signs.  
 In sharing my experience  
 It comes down to how much of my trauma I can face in a day.*

*And I'm finding that a lot of people are expecting me  
 To do these things that they're asking me about.  
 for free.*

*And that just further exploits survivors, right?*

*I pull my emotions back  
 Separating the emotion  
 Separating my trauma from me  
 It helps me tell you  
 Teach you  
 I use what's wrong with my soul to teach you  
 In the information I teach you  
 You use the injuries to my soul  
 You act like it is nothing tragic.*

Phoenix continues to invite me to walk alongside her, line by line, through songs that have carried her through so much. These are amazing moments. In these moments the deafening silence continues to fade in the background as

I hear her, for the first time I hear her.

Through the lens of the small camera at the top of my laptop, it is just Phoenix and I and for the first time. It is not that Phoenix has changed her storytelling; it is just that I can hear Phoenix in the way she wants to be heard. She leads me to hear her differently. Through the lyrics, Phoenix brings together her life stories, brings me to her sense and identity making. Her stories runtoeachother,alongsideeachotherandthrougheachother but their meaning is made known through the lyrics she reads out loud to me.

The lyrics Phoenix reads out to me invites me into the spaces between her words and pauses between her sentences that were always present even though I never noticed them before. I just needed to learn to listen for them the way Phoenix wanted me to listen to them. In this moment, it is Phoenix who leads me to listen differently, to hear differently, to live beside her telling and re-telling differently:

LINE

BY

LINE

### **Listening Line by Line**

I hear Phoenix for the first time, the way she wants me to hear her, to hear her story and see her. I listen to the way she wants me to listen about her health and well-being. In doing so I come face to face, once again, with my intentions for doing this work. I come once again to “who I see first” in Phoenix which also tells me who I am. In looking back at my research proposal, I had anticipated and imagined that I would care for the stories I would hear from participants by caring for moments of silence and pauses between sentences, in the efforts of a sigh, and in their dreams and hopes for the future. I had anticipated that these spaces would challenge the stories I lived by in understanding the health and well-being of women previously trafficked.

Phoenix tells and retells her story, without obvious moments of silence, pauses between sentences, or even sighs as I had anticipated when I began to imagine this work. Yet, the silence, pauses and signs are present but through the lyrics she reads out loud to me. I am no longer sitting in front of the small lens at the top of my laptop. I am sitting beside her, letting her guide me in my listening, in my attending. However, in bringing forward my justifications for this research project I go back to the idea of learning “with” listening. In going back, I turn inward, to understanding my responsibilities of caring for the stories Phoenix shares with me. In doing so, I

come to care for Phoenix's stories in *her way* of telling and retelling. The way Phoenix shares her stories is for this time, within this research relationship, for both of us to learn.

In hearing Phoenix for the first time, I come to live alongside her telling and re-telling of sleepless nights, missing her children, and anger towards her mother. I come to live alongside her moments of pride and tension as she shares with me another request to share her story. I come to live alongside her passion to make a difference for other women. Yet, I wonder what stories Phoenix holds back during our time together because it is just too much trauma for her to face in one day? I wonder if she feels the *injuries to her soul* in our time together? Today is more than just learning to listen differently to Phoenix's storytelling, it is about caring for her differently as well. I hope I care differently about her stories and her; in the same way she has invited me to listen differently.

### **The Café**

I arrived. It was another beautiful fall day. The air was warm and there was not a cloud in the sky. My original plan was to meet Phoenix at noon, but she had a funeral to attend so we had to move our meeting up to 1030. As I drove along the street, I noticed older brick buildings dotting the landscape. The old brick immediately caught my attention. Based on the markings on the outside of the brick these buildings had once housed a mechanic's garage, local grocery store and the local bank. Then in the distance was the café Phoenix had suggested we meet. I entered the empty café and was greeted by the owner. The owner, a lady in her early sixties, had decided to use her retirement fund to create a space and place where people can come and exchange ideas. She is an artist at heart and wants to create a space for other artists. As I waited for Phoenix to arrive, the exposed brick and wooden beams had me imagining the history of this village. I began to imagine the stories the bricks, wooden beams and knob and tube once witness and continue too today. The owner's artwork was displayed throughout the café. One piece caught my attention. The owner stated that it was still a work in progress. It was a large piece which had two ladies who stood side by side. One was bare chested along with her midriff and the other work an ornate long dress. I had imagined they were women of the Klondike era. The owner stated that she started this piece as she wished all women could just be bare chested. I thought about that as I sat at a table waiting for Phoenix.

As I sat, I imagined what our limited time together would be like. Would Phoenix be different in how she shared her stories as we were now meeting in person? Would she continue

to share her lived experiences without pauses or moments of silence? Where one story would run into another in a beautiful rhythm that I had come to enjoy. Over time, I found a familiarity with the way she shared her stories. As I waited, I had hoped nothing would change. In hoping that nothing would change I anticipated that we would *settle* into the chairs at the table, into the space of the café, a space created for the exchanging of ideas, of stories.

In hoping for Phoenix and I to *settle* into the space of the café. A type of settling where the walls of the café disappear around our conversation. Phoenix arrived and we hugged. Her hug was strong and inviting. She is much more petite than I had imagined. She was dressed in black in preparation for the funeral in the afternoon. We sat, ordered breakfast, and began to talk about how nice it was to meet in person. As we talked the owner came over with a large silver tray and two silver tea pots. They were once silver and both Phoenix and I commented on their patina. It was a beautiful patina. The owner apologized that the tea pots did not shine as she had promised the original owner that she would take care of them. Yet, the patina covering the entire surface of both tea pots reminded me of stories these tea pots were also once witnesses to. In much the same way as the brick and wooden beams.

Phoenix shared how she spends a lot of time at this café, mostly in meetings on zoom. The owner welcomed her as a frequent customer of the café. She seems to have a familiarity with the café unlike her husband, came into the café and introduced himself to the owner. It is unfortunate that she is having to move. Phoenix shared that she comes here to support the owner and local artist. The three of us were the only customers in the café for the entire morning enjoying a wonderful homemade breakfast. Yet, as we continued to talk, I noticed a change in Phoenix. Her body seems to get smaller. She no longer shared stories that would continuously flow into one another. There were long pauses and silences. The more her husband spoke, the smaller Phoenix became physically. As she was shrinking, I was trying to keep her with me, through eye contact, inviting her to stay with me in conversation. Yet, she was no longer settling into the chair, in this space created for the sharing of ideas, but shrinking away. I felt it the most when she hugged me goodbye.

After Phoenix left, I continued to think alongside the patina of the teapots, brick, and wooden beams. How oxygen, the strongest oxidizing agent, over the years was creating this patina on these objects. As the oxygen and the material of these objects interacted a beautiful patina is left behind, marking their interaction. Though many would not describe this patina as



beautiful as many times it covered with new construction materials. Or in the case of the tea pots, we polish away the patina to reveal the original surface. Yet, for today, in this space and at this time, I wonder about my time with Phoenix and what is left behind in our ways of knowing as we listen and care for each other's stories.

Our time was very short as Phoenix's husband, which she had introduced to me early on zoom, drove up to the café. He came into the café as Phoenix shared that they had to also pick up Phoenix's daughter before heading to a funeral. We enjoyed the time we spent together though it was short. I had planned to go over the lyrics of two songs Phoenix had shared with me early, but we both decided that we would do that another day as today was just about meeting each other, enjoying a meal together and this café that means so much to Phoenix.

The next day over text message, Phoenix sends me the links to two songs. I look forward to her reading them out loud to me at our next meeting time. I do not read the lyrics ahead of time as I want Phoenix to lead me through the songs. It is important that I enter the space these songs offer at Phoenix's invitation. These songs are intimate spaces and places of sense making and I want to care for them as I care for her through the stories she shares alongside these lyrics.

### **Hope**

A month would pass by before Phoenix, and I would meet again through zoom. As I waited in my home office for Phoenix to join the call, I find myself going back to the café. I find myself going back to the patina on the tea set, the art hanging on the walls and the wonderful meal that we shared. Phoenix arrives and begins to share how she struggles with shame and at the same time feeling unashamed. Phoenix explains that she does not celebrate her accomplishments of raising her children, stepdaughter, and as a survivor. She elaborates that she has had so many past negative lived experiences that if she stops and celebrates her accomplishments, she might *jinx it*.

Phoenix shares that she feels like an imposter as she negotiates her insecurities when she attends conferences, meetings and shares her story. She does not feel qualified as she recalls how she was manipulated by her trafficker. On the one hand she is valued in being invited to speak at so many events, yet she shares how she struggles to know who she is and why she was manipulated by her trafficker. As she reads out the following lyrics, there is a new rhythm to our conversation *among* the lyrics of certain songs, her thoughts and the found poems. She begins with the following lyrics.

Why do we keep when the water runs?  
 Why do we love if we're so mistaken?  
 Why do we leave when the chase is done?

(Aitchison, 2020).

and she adds further.

*You know, like I feel unstable. I hate these people and how they're making me feel lately. You don't realize how much people can manipulate you until they can manipulate everything that you feel. And that can, that can be really hard to process as a survivor too. Like, why was I so mistaken? Why did I want him.*

These lyrics lead Phoenix to question who she is in her professional life where she is valued for her lived experience versus her personal life where her insecurities are difficult to negotiate. She reads through the next set of lines.

I have to go, I'm so sorry  
 But it feels so cold in here.  
 I am just now realizing, they don't care.  
 I try real hard, but I'm caught up by my insecurities.  
 Pour me one more, watch the ice melt in my fist  
 I feel so unstable, fucking hate these people.  
 How they're making me feel lately.  
 They're making me weird baby, lately  
 I feel so unstable, fucking hate these people  
 How they're making me loathe  
 They're making me loathe, yeah

(Aitchison, 2020).

and she adds

*You question yourself a lot. Like, why am I doing this? What mistakes did I make? You know, like, if I was so wrong, why did it feel so much like love? And that can be a very hard thing to work past because when you're in it, it feels like it's love. But then when you're out of it, you realize it's not.*

As a wife, she describes what she calls her *love map* which was branded on her by her trafficker. She shares how there are times in her current relationships she has *actually asked people who love her to hurt her* as it is *what I am used to*. She describes it much like a craving or addiction; even though her husband has told her many times he would never hurt her. When she finds herself in this space of sense-making, she shares how she returns to the songs that have helped her previously.

As she continues to try and sense making as to what happened to her, she explains that the bond between her and her trafficker was not love. Phoenix describes this bond as *hope*. She shares that she distinguishes the love she has with her new husband from her experiences of *hope* while being trafficked. Wolfie gives a sense of her experiences in trying to untangle *hope* from love and love from *hope*.

*And you have to let go of the hope.  
Hope that it's love.  
Realize it was just hope.  
You had hope in the wrong thing.  
Love is harder to let go of  
Hope is a lot easier because you realize you didn't do anything wrong.*

*It's not love, inside of trafficking  
It's just you are hoping that they love you  
They do everything possible to prove that they don't  
And you have to let go of the hope.  
Hope that it's love*

*Then you realize it was just hope  
You had hope in the wrong thing  
Love is harder to let go of  
Hope is a lot easier to let go because you realize you didn't do anything wrong.  
You just hoped in this person  
That person, the one who did things wrong.*

*It's not something that's openly talked about outside of survivor circles  
None of us really want to admit.  
it's like an addiction.*

*It is how you will always feel about the person who broke you*

*The person who like brings your will down and makes you subservient  
You will actually crave the one person who broke you.  
You actually ask people who love you to hurt you.  
They find it disturbing.  
You pray being hurt  
Its what you are used to  
It's your love map*

*Why was I so mistaken?  
Why did I want him?  
I was so wrong, why did it feel so much like love?*

Phoenix shares that the first time she heard some of these songs, it was really powerful to her.

*Because it's putting words to why and how these people suck you in so bad.  
Right. Like, I would've walked through fire to kiss you. Oh Yeah. I would've  
walked through explosions to kiss that man. You know, like, do you still think  
about it of what you did? Like do you think about how you destroyed my life?  
How you destroyed our children's lives? And now that I'm older, I can see why.  
Hmm. Yeah. Looking back at it now I can actually see it that I didn't actually love  
him, and he didn't love me. I just hoped he did. And for that hope I was willing to  
let him do anything because I've never wanted to grow up to be my mom. And the  
way that they convince you to take part in this is they're like, oh, it's just a sex  
game and everybody plays sex games. Instead of saying no, what I'm doing is  
wrong. He stunted my growth. I couldn't grow past to see what he was doing.  
Because he would sit there and snip the, the roots out from underneath you every  
time you started to like to figure out what he was doing. So now that I'm older, I  
can see why like, it wasn't love, it was hope. I hoped that he loved me, and he  
preyed upon my hope.*

Phoenix shares

*that's PTSD. It's the different kinds. The first one is like the mental. Just little thoughts that just keep ticking until you just go crazy, and the thoughts never stop. How much can you take of other people, shaming you before you decide that you're not ashamed of you.*

She reads out the following lyrics to describe her PTSD.

Pressure like a  
 drip,  
 drip,  
 drip,  
 that'll never stop  
 Pressure that'll tip,  
 tip,  
 tip  
 'til you just go pop.

(Darrow, 2021).

As I listen to Phoenix reading line by line, I am taken back to one of our earlier conversations, where Phoenix shared that she cannot allow what is happening in her personal life to affect her professional life. I ask her how it affects her health in trying to keep these two worlds separate? I ask her more specifically if there are any songs that speak to this? She says she will share two songs that speak more to her identity making.

### **Autism, it Makes You More Vulnerable.**

It would be a few more weeks before Phoenix and I would meet again. We had some problems connecting as Phoenix was busy setting up her new home and arranging to have her furnace fixed. When we finally get a chance to meet over zoom, she shows me her new home. She apologizes for the mess. She was able to purchase a furnace from 2018, which she states she is fortunate to have as last week the temperature was -38 degrees Celsius.

As she reads through more song lyrics, I find myself settling into this space and place. Following her lead as she explains what certain lyrics mean to her. Her voice is calmer; she settles back into the couch in her new home. The lyrics are a familiar place to her though they are a new place for me to think alongside her experiences of health and well-being. It is a familiar space and place of learning for her as she retells the stories of listening to music with her father.

I am brought back to the first time Phoenix shared the lyrics of a particular song with me and how she led me through the song alongside describing moments in her life through the words of the artist. It was an amazing day that is still lost on me today. Yet today I realized that this form of communication for Phoenix has memory. Memories of her father. Memories of what happened to her. She shares.

*Lyrics just kind of struck me and I'm like, why don't I, I understand what they're saying. Like, why can't I understand this? And I had to listen to it several times to get the meaning of the lyrics. Because I knew that it spoke to me. I just didn't quite understand how. That really connects to me, and it really talks to me. You know, like it really kind of brings it into focus of why did I fall for it?*

Phoenix shares that lyrics allow her to communicate more effectively. She shares *I hope I'm being insightful for you today*. I wonder if she feels that in our past conversations, she hasn't been insightful or that I have placed an expectation on her to be insightful. I hope that is not the case and that I have invited her into my spaces as much as she has invited me.

As we begin to settle into the conversation and Phoenix prepares to read the song lyrics to me again, I notice she settles into a more relaxed position on her couch. I hope that means she is feeling comfortable and safe in discussing such difficult stories with me alongside the lyrics of songs that have helped her make sense of her trafficking experience and how it affects her. Phoenix begins with the first song, reading line by line and adding her story alongside.

I will lay down (lay down)  
 But they're staring, their eyes like two shining stones  
 I see myself (myself) and I look scared and confused  
 Wait, did they just talk?  
 Why is it too loud? (Is it loud?)  
 Do they wish to run to me? (Me) (HOPE, you are the important one)  
 Am I a smoke?  
 Am I the sun?  
 Who decides?  
 (tell me you I am?,  
 What I am, as I do not know)

(Aitchison, 2020).

Phoenix takes me back again to how her trafficker manipulated her. She speaks again of her understanding of this manipulation through the description of *hope* in the above lyrics.

*It's like there's a whole little spiel on that one together. So, it all like leads into itself and it's like, wait, did they just talk? Why is it too loud? Do they wish to run to me? That's the hope again, seizing you. That you're the one that they want and that you're the important one. That comes into the feeling of, you know, like, I don't know who I am. Can somebody else just tell me? Because that's how a lot of victims are.*

Phoenix clarifies her healing journey through the following excerpt of a found poem alongside this the following lyrics she reads to me.

And demon rehab  
I ain't that much of a fan

(Hound et al., 2022).

*Demon Rehab*  
*Confronting why I have these demons.*  
*Facing all my trauma*  
*Healing*

In facing her demons, Phoenix describes how she questions how she can heal by making sense of what happened to her. This sense making is difficult work as she shares that all that was left of her was an outer shell. That the person she was before she was trafficked was destroyed. She leads me through the following line.

Tell me, how can you rehabilitate the husk of a man

(Hound et al., 2022).

and adds her thoughts.

*How can you rehabilitate the husk of a man?*  
*The husk of a man*  
*When the outer shell is all that is left*  
*How do I use my trauma and rehabilitate myself*  
*Everyone has the programs.*  
*That can rehabilitate us.*

In her sense making she negotiates feelings of shame and being unashamed simultaneously. Amplifying these feelings is how she is positioned and treated by certain family members, and how she was loved by her grandmother. She reads out loud the following song lyric.

I'm just a sinner, got my just desserts for dinner

(Diamandis & Aitchison, 2013).

She adds that she was always a special person in her grandmother's eyes even though other family members position her differently.



*You feel that you should have know better.  
This is why I don't tell people that I don't have my children.  
Because he gave them to the women who terrorized me.*

*Not invited to family gatherings.  
I am the bad guy.*

*On the other hand, you are something special.  
It is confusing.  
Only my grandmother treated me like I was me.*

She moves forward through the remainder of the song and stops at the following line.

*Every night feels like a winner, every hole is a goal*

(Hound et al. 2022).

Phoenix invites me to understand how she negotiates making sense of what happened to her alongside having autism as she tries to move forward. Memories of being her grandmother's favorite grand Phoenix when she negotiates the multiple identities others position her within and where she positions herself.

*Every hole is a goal when you come out of being a victim.  
And start to thrive.  
You manage your past  
Feel like a winner  
Doing the right thing  
Everybody agrees with what you are doing.*

*That is when you start to feel like you are moving on  
Ready to be this new person*

*Yet, everyone hates you because of what happened to you  
You should have known better.  
You shouldn't have trusted him.  
We told you  
I am a sinner  
I am the bad guy  
Hard to get past*

*You are so worried about what other people think of you  
Hard on your mental health  
Don't tell anyone I had children*

*I don't want to explain why  
Treated like scum by family.*

*But you are someone special that can teach us  
Come talk to me  
It is confusing  
Why do you want my advice?  
I can tell you what not to do*

*How do you reconcile who you are?  
Through my grandmother  
I was still her favorite  
She loved me while everyone else treated me like dirt.  
When, my children got taken.  
None of them understood how or why  
But she treated me like I was me  
Even after everything*

### **A Forward-Looking Story**

Our conversation ended today with Phoenix describing how her autism influences her understanding of the world around her. The following found poem takes me back to the moments in our conversation where Phoenix shares how her trafficker took advantages of her autism. Every time she would come to a place where she was realizing what her trafficker was doing, he would convolute her sense making. Phoenix describes how vulnerable she was through the following found poem.

*Autism, it makes you more vulnerable  
He made me do everything.  
We're really naive because we're like, oh well people just tell us the truth.  
When in reality we get tricked more than anybody else.  
I couldn't grow past to see what he was doing.  
Because he would snip the roots out from underneath you,  
every time you started to like to figure out what he was doing.*

Today, Phoenix describes her forward looking story. She focused on her destiny to help other women who are being trafficked, getting her children back, having more control over when she tells her story and advocating for the care of boys and men who are trafficked.

*I used to believe that every day was going to be better than the last one  
Now I'm more pragmatic.  
Bad things happen every day everywhere.  
We need to get used to it.*

*to deal with it*

## CHAPTER 7: NARRATIVE THREADS

In this study, I inquired into the experiences of health and well-being of women who were previously trafficked. As I looked across their respective narrative accounts, I was called to inquire into their lives in relation to the social, cultural, institutional, educational, and familial narratives. I was awakened (Crites, 1971) to their continuous identity and sense-making. At the same time, I noticed how the stories of who I am, intersect with who they are and the relational space that we negotiated and lived out together over the past nine months. In re-telling, reliving, writing, and rewriting their experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and by attending slowly to their lives, I was able to pull forward two resonant narrative threads<sup>17</sup> across T's, Wolfie's, and Phoenix's experiences. In thinking *with* these narrative threads, I am called to "a place of possibilities" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 77) where there is a moral call in my listening, learning, and actions (Morris, 2001). In this chapter, I will unpack two narrative threads that resonate across their narrative accounts: (a) living stories *among* liminal spaces and (b) living *among* silence.

### Living Stories among Liminal Spaces

T's, Wolfie's, and Phoenix's experiences make visible the ways in which they live stories about who they are, stories that hold meaning for them, and stories of sense-making. Their stories bring me back to conceptualizations of liminal spaces. Caine et al. (2020) conceptualized liminal spaces between what was and what is; they describe liminal spaces as where we can "attend to our not knowing as we live in spaces and places of transition" (p. 272). Driver (1998) described individuals in liminal spaces as "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by society, as liminal entities, and they elude and slip through the network of classifications of law, custom, convention, and ceremoni[es]" (p. 158). Heilbrun (1999) further spoke of liminality and sees liminal spaces, as "altogether here nor there, not one kind of person or another, not this, not that" (p. 8). Heilbrun came to this conceptualization of liminal spaces through the work of anthropologists Turner and Driver (1998). Turner and Driver approached liminality as a "condition of ritual, necessary, yet outside of the rules and expectations the social imposes on the behavior" of its members (p. 164). Heilbrun described the state of liminality as poised upon "uncertain ground of leaving one place *and* entering another" (p. 3). She grounded

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<sup>17</sup> Narrative threads are understood as echoes that resonate across the narrative accounts of participants' stories (Clandinin, 2013).

her conceptualization of liminality in her work on the biographies of women, their literature, and how the literature of the last two centuries has portrayed women; where feminism has shaped how women view their lives and work. In essence, states of liminality are spaces of transition when the stories we live by encounter the stories others live by, where tensions and possibilities can be made known during these encounters. As I returned to the liminal spaces that T, Wolfie, Phoenix and I co-created, the research puzzles came back into view; their living of the stories of health and well-being were being held *among* liminal spaces. They helped me see the limitations and relevance of previous ways of thinking about liminality, identity making, and narrative coherence. Carr (1986) explored continuity in narrative coherence as a fragile process of “telling and retelling, to ourselves and others, the story about what we are about and what we are” (p. 97). The seeking of narrative coherence in the stories we tell and live by helps us to make meaning from our experiences and informs our identity making. A disruption to the sense of continuity we seek is the “feeling that an individual cannot be related to their former self anymore” (Camia & Zafar, 2021, p. 2). For T, Wolfie, and Phoenix their seeking of narrative coherence which informed their identity making was always connected to their former self. Thus, the conceptualization of narrative coherence matters as it makes known the conscious or unconscious seeking of a sense of continuity when we try to make sense of who we are, what we believe, what happened to us, and what is happening to us in the world.

The stories that T, Wolfie, and Phoenix chose to share make known their experiences of living stories *among* liminal spaces rather than *on*, *between*, and *of this* or *that*. The difference is in thinking narratively about liminality, where there are temporal limitations of the conjunction *and* in Heilbrun’s (1999) description of being in a state of liminality as poised upon “uncertain ground of leaving one place *and* entering another” (p. 3). In this conceptualization the movement of living or the movement *between* spaces of transition is an unsteadiness about “exactly where one belongs *and* what one should be doing or wants to be doing” (p. 66). For T, Wolfie and Phoenix, the stories they live among liminal spaces are entangled *with* their bodies<sup>18</sup>. It is more than living “*betwixt and between*” (Driver, 1998, p. 158) the pre- *and* post-trafficking stories held by their bodies. Rather, the stories they live are entangled with their physical bodies. It is more than an unsteadiness; it is the entanglement of unsteadiness, confidence, silence, noise,

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<sup>18</sup> The conceptualization of bodies is vast and my intention within this work is not to attend to the scholarly work on mind-body dualities.

hope, violence, and love, all at once and all together. Their stories of entanglement remind me of Wozolek's (2021) assemblages of violence, where "hope and violence can be and is always already entangled and traverse context, histories, politics, culture, and bodies in ways that are interconnected through an assemblage". (p. 42). T, Wolfie, and Phoenix tell, live, and share stories that are entangled. These entanglements are neither additive nor divisible with clear demarcations of their influence on each other. T, Wolfie, and Phoenix live *among*<sup>19</sup> entanglements of their stories their body hold and their liminality and through our conversations they invited me to understand anew the meaning of entanglement.

T's experiences of living the stories held by her body *among* liminal spaces across her life course make known stories that hold the meaning of being entangled. As she re-tells stories of being trafficked, she lives *among* stories shaped by her precarious immigration status *among* liminal spaces from the continuous threat of deportation as a single working mother. She described her negotiation of questions from co-workers about her story of arrival in Canada. She explained that these questions create tension for her because she cannot share her arrival story without living the stories held by her body of being trafficked. In these liminal spaces, T lives the stories her body holds regarding these irreducible entanglements. Her mother blamed her for her grandmother's death, which led her to seek a new life in another country, which resulted in her being trafficked. In living stories of who she is to her mother and the woman who trafficked her to Canada, T has distanced herself from an arrival story that she had once imagined. T lives among entangled borders of an arrival story of being trafficked, a working single mother who lives with the continuous threat of deportation. In my field notes, I reflected:

*I don't know what to say. I avoid talking about it and give one- or two-word answers, as my experience is something completely different. Her experiences of living as a woman previously trafficked, held to a comprehensive six-month renewal of her TRP, cannot be told and is lived without re-telling her mother who she is and who she is now as a mother.*

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<sup>19</sup> I come to use the term, *among*, intentionally as T, Wolfie, and Phoenix hold stories in their bodies. They invited me to slow down and understand anew the meaning of this term as compared to *within* or *between*. The stories their bodies hold and live out is more than the spaces created *within* silences, their stories are *among*; making known a becoming without a beginning, end or *between*. This term is italicized as are other terms to emphasis their meaning and to ensure their meanings are not lost throughout this work.

Wolfie has also lived entanglements of stories held by her body. Wolfie longs for the privacy that she noted that other women have. She explained that the digital trafficking of her body has left her with a body that is not hers. Those who have viewed her online content, know, and hold memories of the intimate places of her body that she has never wanted to share. Wolfie shared how the surgical reconstruction of her *Yoni* could help her obtain the privacy she desires. She lives the entangled stories her body holds of where everything that was once seen about her body, including the memories and knowledge others hold about her body. Her experiences are shaped by what has been said, what is said, and what is still to be said. Her liminal spaces are entangled with what could be made unseen, erased, unsaid, and still unsaid about the intimate places of her body. Thus, Wolfie also lives among borders of being left with a body that is not hers and desires to reclaim it surgically.

Wolfie also described the privacy that she desires for the intimate places of her body as OURs, hers, and hers and her fiancée's privacy. Wolfie imagines their life together as a married couple and, one day, motherhood - *God forbid, like, and I don't think it will, but if, if any of this were to come back and haunt my children*. Wolfie does not merely tell these entangled stories her body holds; she also lives these stories *among* her relationships. These stories are, as Carr (1991) described, "told in being lived *and* lived in being told" (p. 126). Yet, as Wolfie tells and lives what privacy means to her within her relationship with her fiancée, she invites me to think about Carr's (1986) use of the conjunction *and* in his conceptualization of stories. The stories that Wolfie tells in living are *among* living. The relationship of telling stories, of living stories is not additive; telling is secondary to living, or living is secondary to telling. Rather, telling is *among* living, and living is *among* telling. For Wolfie, there are no clear demarcations of being *between* living and telling, transitions from leaving the telling to enter living the stories her body holds *between* liminal spaces. For Wolfie her telling and living are entangled and thus hold possibilities for her. She invited me to think about the possibilities through the following found poem - the possibilities of different stories that her body will hold through surgical reconstruction:

The Yoni  
 It's not just gender  
 It is our privacy  
 It is our security  
 It is ours  
 Our current

Our past  
 Our future  
 It is not that something is wrong with it.  
 Everything is fine.  
 It is just that it doesn't feel private.

Phoenix also carries into her relationships entanglements of the stories held by her body. Phoenix lives stories that her body holds of a love map of what was, branded on her body by her trafficker, *among* what is now, the love of her life, her husband. Phoenix shared that she has asked people who love her to hurt her because it is what she is used to. She lives what she described as cravings *among* her current relationship with her husband. Yet, in our conversations she described how she unravels what was of her bond with her trafficker from what is, the love that she has for her current husband, through the lyrics of a song.

Phoenix invited me, line by line, into her sense-making. I learned how she lives the stories of *hope* that her body holds:

*You know, like, do you still think about it of what you did to me? Like, do you think about how you destroyed my life? How you destroyed our children's lives? And now that I'm older, I can see why. Hmm. Yeah, looking back at it now, I can actually see it, that I didn't actually love him, and he didn't love me. I just hoped he did. And for that hope, I was willing to let him do anything because I've never wanted to grow up to be my mom. And the way that they convince you to take part in this, is, they're like, Oh, it's just a sex game, and everybody plays sex games, instead of saying, No, what I'm doing is wrong. He stunted my growth. I couldn't grow past to see what he was doing. Because he would sit there and snip the roots out from underneath you every time you started to, like, figure out what he was doing. So now that I'm older, I can see why, like, it wasn't love; it was hope. I hoped that he loved me, and he preyed upon my hope.*

In Phoenix's untangling of hope from love and love from hope, I hear differently the stories her body holds in this untangling.

### **Living Stories of Identity Making, Narrative Coherence among Liminal Spaces**

T, Wolfie, and Phoenix also live stories of entangled identity-making *among* liminal spaces. Thinking narratively, identity making is not merely a way of telling the stories we live by. Instead, we make known an "inherent structure" that Carr (1991, p. 125) described as *narrative coherence* in the *stories we live by* (Huber et al., 2004). Thus, T's, Wolfie's, and



Phoenix's stories of identity-making brought me back to Carr's (1986) conceptualization of narrative coherence as a fragile process of "telling and retelling, to ourselves and others, the story about what we are about and what we are" (p. 97). Their stories of narrative coherence also brought forward Crites' (1971) conceptualization of *sacred stories* that lie deep in the consciousness, too deep to be spoken, but known through our actions and experiences in the everyday. As T, Wolfie, and Phoenix seek narrative coherence, I live alongside their drawing near to their respective sacred stories through their actions of identity-making to bring clarification to their sense of the world. However, in our living of the narrative inquiry *among* our writing of the narrative accounts as T, Wolfie and Phoenix live stories of identity-making, I think alongside their liminality, where they resist seeking narrative coherence as they make meaning of past narratives *among* the present. They have invited me to understand that here, too, their actions and experiences of resistance to narrative coherence in their everyday, are a drawing near to their respective sacred stories.

T lives stories of identity-making *among* entangled liminal spaces where her seeking of narrative coherence is *among* resisting an "inherent structure" (Carr, 1991, p. 125) that others have imposed on her: a daughter disgraced by her family, a woman previously trafficked to Canada, a single, working mother. T lives these stories of identity-making under the continuous threat of deportation. The threat of deportation is always entangled in her seeking of narrative coherence. Yet, T has positioned herself *among* these entanglements as she continues to make a life for herself and her daughter in Canada. For T, living stories of identity making *among* entangled liminal spaces means that she poises herself to *push* through, to hold, live, and seek coherence and resist threats to her desire to make a life for herself and her daughter. She poises herself for the uncertain ground of a possible appeal of her deportation, while she looks for a new place to rent closer to her daughter's daycare and is saving to purchase a car one day.

*I don't want to go back to my country. It is just not a good place to have a little kid. At the same time, they haven't given me permanent residency, and I am told I can appeal deportation. If I didn't have my daughter, I don't know if I could push through.*

Through her actions and experiences of living under a constant threat of deportation, T makes known her sacred stories - stories of resistance that are fragile yet strong; stories of pushing through yet being pulled out from underneath her; sacred stories of wanting a different life for herself and now her daughter. The lyrics of a song that T shared with me make known the

sacred stories that she draws near and that are at the heart of her actions and experiences of identity making *among* the threat of deportation that imposes on her a different coherence in her life course.

I put my armor on, show you how strong I am  
 I put my armor on, I'll show you that I am.  
 I'm unstoppable  
 I'm a Porsche with no brakes  
 I'm invincible  
 Yeah, I win every single game  
 I'm so powerful  
 I don't need batteries to play  
 I'm so confident  
 Yeah, I'm unstoppable today

(Sia, 2016).

Wolfie and Phoenix also live stories held by their respective bodies *among* what was and that share who they are, their liminality, and how they seek the possibilities of narrative coherence. Wolfie tells stories of being trafficked; the stories of who she was are indivisible *among* the stories of who she is:

*I see the little girl on the staircase  
 She wouldn't have done this  
 I know you wouldn't have done this  
 This isn't you  
 I'm the same person I'm still me  
 In going back to go forward to where I am now  
 You never changed; still, this person, you're still the child that you were back then.*

In her words that form the above found poem, Wolfie has invited me to understand her seeking of an “inherent structure” of coherence (Carr, 1991, p. 125) by reclaiming who she had always been *among* her cousins lined up on the staircase for the yearly photo by the ocean. This is important to Wolfie, because entangled in her actions and experiences of identity and sense-making are her sacred stories of family, belonging, community and authenticity:

*Even after I see my family and their smiling faces as they are happy to see me, a part of me wonders, you know, if there's an awkward goodbye or an awkward moment at all. So, what else is going on? Like, part of me always clicks in the back of my head, What are they thinking about right now? Do they know what REALLY happened to me? Do they*

*know I am still that little girl on the staircase, running along the beach and always giving away her last Smartie?*

In living alongside Wolfie's identity-making and seeking of coherence, she invited me back to the large blank spaces that we intentionally left between the words, *victim*, *advocate*, and *survivor* within her narrative accounts. I learned that these are the liminal spaces in which Wolfie lives. Wolfie reminded me that her story circulates publicly without her consent or truth. For a long time, she has been thinking about setting the record straight and sharing her story. A recent conversation with her significant other brought forward questions about the spaces we had left before the word *advocate*. For Wolfie, being an advocate comes from drawing near to her scared stories of healing, growth, and resilience. It is a positioning of empowerment. Yet, as she lives stories of her identity-making *among* what was and what is, she makes sense, in a new way, of her identity as an advocate and how it constitutes her narrative coherence. She explained that positioning herself as an advocate is a positioning that will take over her life and be her life. Yet, she has recently come to understand that it is already her life. As Wolfie spoke, I was reminded of Heilbrun's (1999) conceptualization of *states of liminality*, where one has never left one place and entered another (p. 76). This is a different understanding of being an advocate than Wolfie first imagined. I sense that through her identity and sense-making *among* what was and what is, she seeks to claim ownership over what is unsaid or still unsaid about what happened. By claiming ownership, Wolfie claims, in the uncertainty and unsteadiness, her sacred stories. Thus, this claiming of her identity matters as she lives out who she is *among* her relationships in a body she shares that has been made to no longer be hers.

As with Wolfie, Phoenix continues to make sense of who she is *among* what was and what is; she lives stories of seeking and resisting narrative coherence. Phoenix chose to share stories with me of being her grandmother's favorite, and these stories were entangled with stories of Phoenix's mother, who currently has custody of Phoenix's children. In turn, the identity of being an unfit mother because she has autism continues to be present. In our conversations Phoenix posed the following question about what was and what is:

*How do you reconcile who you are? Through my grandmother [she responded], I was still her favorite. She loved me while everyone else treated me like dirt. When my children got taken, none of them understood how or why, but my grandmother treated me like I was me, even after everything.*

As Phoenix continues to untangle who she is from what was and what is, this untangling guides how she seeks narrative coherence as a mother who is living with autism and as a woman previously trafficked. She is resisting a coherence in her life imposed on her if her children are not returned to her. In living alongside her desire to have her children back, Phoenix invites me to hear the sacred stories of her motherhood that her grandmother instilled in her:

*Autism doesn't make you not a good parent, 'cause we get obsessed with our kids, like on levels that other parents don't. My stepdaughter thought this was so annoying, but I could tell you where she was at any given minute during the day and during the school week based upon her class schedule.*

Yet, Phoenix's untangling of her identity-making is *among* her choice to live in the entanglements of her motherhood shaped by autism. She has drawn near her sacred stories of love and acceptance from her grandmother.

By living stories held by their bodies, identity-making, and coherence *among* entanglements of what was and what is, T, Wolfie, and Phoenix draw near their sacred stories. Living alongside their stories, they shared nuances of their identity-making from their sense-making in entangled liminal spaces across their life course. In these entanglements, there is no delineation between the pre- and post-trafficked self nor a unidirectional movement among the past, present, and future. Instead, there are possibilities of the presence or lack of "inherent structure" (Carr, 1991, p. 125) in their living of narrative coherence, which they have made known. Thus, for T, Wolfie, and Phoenix, the living of the stories their bodies hold matters because it is more than being *between* what was and what is; as their experiences make known, they are *among* what was and what is of sacred stories. In living *among* identities and sense-making in transition, they are *among* the possibilities of seeking narrative coherence outside of the *between*. In doing so, they live in possibilities not yet imagined. In the same way, they make known the ways in which they live *among* silences from having encounter the stories that others live by.

### **Living among Silences**

As T, Wolfie, and Phoenix shared their experiences, they also made visible the impact of living *among* silences. Depending on the context, in the spaces where the entanglements of their liminality were made invisible or muted silences become amplified. Their stories of living *among* these silences called me to think alongside the conceptualizations of silence within

other scholarly work. Thus, in this chapter, I draw on Neuman and Peterson's (1997) conceptualization of silence alongside Rogers's (2007) understanding of silence as the hidden language of trauma.

In living among silences, be it in its prescribing or self-imposed silencing, T, Wolfie, and Phoenix's stories call me to understand that the silence they lived is more than what has been conceptualized in scholarly work by contrasting silence with voice. When *silence* is conceptualized by contrasting it with voice, speech, or talking, its understanding is limiting. As I draw on Neuman and Peterson's (1997) conceptualization of silence as a wordless telling, alongside Rogers' (2007) understanding of silence as a telling when one cannot say the "unsayable any other way" (p.132), I am called to pay the closest attention how I live alongside T, Wolfie and Phoenix. In doing so, I have become more attentive to what it means to live with silence. As I pay the closest attention, I come to understand that silence is a story of the story's telling that requires me to read and listen without the presence of words (Neuman & Peterson, 1997). In reading and listening without speech or text, I am made aware of other sounds, voices, and other ways of telling from the context of living *in* silences. The call to read and listen to T, Wolfie's, and Phoenix's stories of trauma lived *among* silences makes known how trauma distinctly marks their bodies and how they hold these stories and become "invisible and inarticulated" (Rogers, 2007, p. 44). As Rogers (2007) elaborates, silence is the "placeholder for the unsayable that marks bodies and is one of the languages of trauma" (p. 29). However, for T, Wolfie, and Phoenix, silences holds the implications of *knowing* the unsaid that is in and of itself a wordless telling *among* their identity-making and seeking of narrative coherence. It is not limited as Rogers's (2007) points out a *knowing* that existed long before speech. For T, Wolfie, and Phoenix living *in* silence is telling by not telling, and not limited to a closeness or distance to speech (Neuman & Peterson, 1997). It is a remembering, telling, and living of their sacred stories of narrative coherence *among* entanglements of their liminality. Living alongside participants in silence, I understand silence as entangled with power and agency; "where silence is power, as it calls the other, to listen without words, read without words" (Rogers, 2007, p. 43) and write without words. Thus, within the relational ethics of narrative inquiry, listening, reading and writing without words calls me to consider the moral responsibility of living alongside T, Wolfie and Phoenix's. Within this orientation, silence does not end in the reading, writing, or listening; instead, it continues through the living. Thus, shaping the relational ontology of this narrative

inquiry from the necessity of living out and co-composing of listening, reading and writing of silences, but the living out alongside the entanglements of power and agency among stories of silence.

Within pre-determined categories that often shape their identities, such as victim, survivor, advocate, or villain, T, Wolfie, and Phoenix live *among* silences. However, how they live among silences makes known the relationship of identity-making with the social. It implicates who *we* are as we impose particular narratives, such as victims, survivors, advocates, and villain upon others. I am reminded of Carr's (1991) conceptualization of authenticity as "not a matter of this, that social role or a prescribed role: it consists rather in the recognition that, whatever the role, it is *we* who choose it in the end, one way or another" (p. 93). However, T, Wolfie, and Phoenix's choice to live *among* the prescribing of silences or silencing within these identities is entangled in the social. This entanglement is problematic when the conceptualization of women's identity making is informed by the continued understanding of the development of women through the development of men. In doing so, the possibilities of understanding differently how women previously trafficked live *among* silences from a different starting point of understanding women's development are silenced. As Gilligan (2003) describes:

We have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. (p. 173)

Gilligan (2003) elaborates further that our failure to "see a different reality of women's lives and see the differences in their voices implicates the continued single mode of social experiences and interpretation" (p. 173). The silence T, Wolfie, and Phoenix live is telling of this orientation within the social, that positions women previously trafficked in identities from the mistranslation of the development of women over their life course. From this understanding Carr's (1991) conceptualization of inauthenticity is "a matter of either too little or too much coherence" (p. 93) is a reminder that this impacts narrative coherence.

### **T's experiences of living among silence**

In preparing for the birth of her daughter, T imagined a peaceful birthing experience. T was able to access free prenatal support, but as the time came near, her imaginings of a peaceful birthing experience was made impossible, and her desires were silenced. T shared with me -

*So, when you have your baby, you can expect a bill. Don't think you can chicken out.*

*Please go to the hospital, don't try to have the baby at home or anything like that.*

As her plan to have a peaceful birthing experience was silenced, T was positioned among identities that would serve a specific purpose. On one hand she was positioned as an out-of-pocket admission where access to resources and support would come with a price, while on the other had she was positioned as non-compliant regarding giving birth to her daughter outside of a hospital. T's desire to have a peaceful birthing experience was disrupted once again just a few hours after giving birth to her daughter. Within hours of delivering her daughter by caesarian section, T shares how no one told her that child protection services had been called to her bedside. As a new mother, she was positioned by others as invisible and powerless because she could not pay the \$10,000.00 deposit previously requested by the admitting physician to deliver her daughter. Additionally, T lived *among* the pressures of paying a daily rate of \$5000.00 in the hospital. Thus, she decided to discharge herself early to mitigate a growing hospital bill:

*So, I went home early. I didn't feel prepared. I had no choice at the time. There was no follow-up from child protective services.*

As T lives *among* prescribed and self-imposed silences within her birthing experience, she makes known as Neuman and Peterson (1990) describe, *a story of the story's telling*. In other words, T makes known the narrative coherence that is imposed on her as she becomes a mother. Thus, T's wordless telling – her silence – is a “form of power, and the need to voice represents a loss of power” (Blix et al., 2021, p. 587). Silence and silencing is a form of power, as it implicates who T is within the relationship – between the stories health professionals live by and the stories she lives by. I wonder if health professionals may have also experienced alongside T, tensions, as they sought narrative coherence within their practice, while negotiating the narrow confines of care that silenced T's sacred stories of motherhood, to make way for other identities – identities that leave T negotiating a precarious state of postpartum health and finances, as a new mother, and undocumented person previously trafficked.

### **Wolfie's experiences of living among silence**

For Wolfie the seeking of justice through the legal system has shaped her experiences with silences and being silenced. Depending on the context of the legal system, the identities imposed on her mute how Wolfie lives *among* the entanglements of what was and what is. Even though her lawyer is writing a book about his experiences with the group of women involved in

Wolfie's case, her lawyer does not want her to publicly set the record straight and tell her story to counter the multiple false publications of what happened to her, and the other women involved in the case. This prescribed silence of Wolfie's authenticity as Carr's (1991) describes, is "a matter of either too little or too much coherence" (p. 93), which her lawyer plans to fully exploit in writing a book. Wolfie's perceives that her lawyer benefits from asking Wolfie to not publicly set the record straight. I only know Wolfie's story and wonder what stories continue to be left unsaid through her lawyer's decision to write a book.

Wolfie is also told that her interactions with the media might be detrimental to how the public and members of the legal system perceive her. Wolfie is being silenced by others. However, in living *among* these silences, Wolfie holds to her sacred stories of growth, resilience and living authentically. Through her recent re-understanding of herself as an advocate, an understanding that she had not imagined when she started her journey to healing, she sees that her silence holds power.

### **Phoenix's experiences of living among silence**

When the entanglements of Phoenix's liminality are muted by the context and/or purpose of sharing her experiences. Specifically, when she is asked to share her experiences from pre-determined categories of victim, survivor, and advocate of human trafficking. Within these categories, she is forced to separate who she is as a woman, mother, wife, stepmother, daughter, and granddaughter with autism – the forced separation creates a silence. In living among silences, the lyrics of songs are a space and place where Phoenix makes sense of what has happened to her, what is happening to her, and who she is when others silence her. Living among silence, for Phoenix, follows silencing when others encounter the stories she lives by that *runtoeachother, alongsideeachotherandthrougheachother*. From such encounters, others find it difficult to position Phoenix within particular categories of victim or advocate. Thus, Phoenix is left to live her identity-making among entanglements, where she decides to separate herself from others and what they want her to be. In these liminal spaces, she turns to the lyrics of song to make sense of the entanglements. It is not that song lyrics bridge the gap between who she is from what others want her to be. It is not that song lyrics are between liminal spaces to communicate to the world the silence Phoenix lives in. Instead, for Phoenix, song lyrics are a place and space of being *among* entanglements, silences, liminal spaces, and sense and identity-making. As Phoenix invites me, line by line, to the lyrics of certain songs, she invites me to a



way of telling about the silence when she cannot say the "unsayable any other way" (Rogers, 2007, p.132). She makes known the pain of living, that Carr (1991) described is "a matter of either too little or too much coherence" (p. 93). She makes known the sacred stories she lives by (Neuman & Peterson, 1990). Described is the story of the storytelling, which implicates who I am when I find it difficult to hear what she is saying or wants to say.

Phoenix, living among silences, implicates others who are silencing her and makes known how she protects herself from being re-traumatized in this silencing. Her wordless telling among her telling calls me "to listen without words, read without words" (Rogers, 2007, p. 43) and write without words as she makes known the injuries to her soul when she is asked to share her story.

*So many people want my help.  
 Makes me a little bit uneasy. Cause I'm like, why do you want my help?  
 You know, I can show you how not to succeed as an adult.  
 And I can teach you what to look for and I can teach you like warning signs.  
 In sharing my experience  
 It comes down to how much of my trauma I can face in a day.  
 I pull my emotions back  
 Separating the emotion  
 Separating my trauma from me  
 It helps me tell you  
 Teach you  
 I use what's wrong with my soul to teach you  
 In the information I teach you  
 You use the injuries to my soul  
 You act like it is nothing tragic.*

As Phoenix tells and re-tells of her experiences of autism, being a woman, mother, wife, stepmother, daughter, and granddaughter previously trafficked, she prevents further injury to her soul by muting her perceived failures as an adult. She segregates the pain of her personal life to serve the purpose of a victim or survivor. For Phoenix to meet the expectations of imposed identities, it comes down to *how much of my trauma* she can face in a day. In living among silences, she describes her work as a survivor of trafficking as her destiny. However, she has also recently begun to question if she is being exploited again, as she receives no financial honorarium for her contributions when she speaks about her experiences. Thus, the silences

Phoenix lives with matter to her, as she negotiates the up-and-coming financial burden of getting custody of her children while living with limited resources as an individual with autism.

As T, Wolfie, and Phoenix shared their experiences of living among silences, the muted entanglements became visible. Living among silences of preconceived identities, disrupts their identity-making and seeking of narrative coherence. For T, Wolfie, and Phoenix, these disruptions also impact the relationship between their fleshy and *enfleshed narratives*. As Boon (2015) states, “fleshy and enfleshed narratives are articulations of bodily selves experienced and can help individuals understand their orientation in the world” (p. 3). This intimate relationship of the lived body and the textual body matters (Boon, 2015), as this relationship can be a space and place where stories can be claimed and re-claimed to retain ownership of the body. However, living among silences, all three participants made visible the impact of constituted victim, survivor, and advocate identities to claim, re-claim, and take ownership of the stories the bodies of these imposed and prescribed identities are expected to tell, re-tell and hold.

In closing, as I slowly read and re-read across T, Wolfie, and Phoenix's respective narrative accounts, I see two narrative threads: (a) living stories *among* liminal spaces and (b) living *among* the silence. These threads revealed how they continuously live their identity and sense-making *among* the social, cultural, institutional, educational, and familial narratives. I also noticed how the stories of who I am, are entangled with who they are and the relational space we negotiated and lived out together over the past nine months. In the following chapter, I attend to these entanglements of my narrative beginnings and who I am, a space and place of learning and growing, and return to this work's personal, practical, and social justifications.

## CHAPTER 8: LEARNINGS

I began this inquiry *among* the entanglements of my narrative beginnings, where the tensions of power and uncertainty that shaped the experiences of women previously trafficked and my relationship alongside women who shared these experiences were made visible. Personally, my experiences *with* T, Wolfie, and Phoenix have called me to attend to the entanglements of my identity making *among* my comings and goings, in relation to the lives of women I had once cared for. I experienced significant tensions of my intentions of this work. From a nursing practice perspective, I hoped to make known the knowledge that is valued and silenced when women previously trafficked are cared for from a taken-for-granted position, in which nursing care is focused to work *on* rather than *with* women. I also hoped to contribute to the scholarly body of work regarding the care of women previously trafficked as I lived with the contradictions and inconsistencies of how we see or make their health and well-being visible and at the same time invisible across their life course. Over the course of this narrative inquiry study, I began to imagine *with* the possibilities of reading, listening, and writing of their meaning of health and well-being without words and how this orientation opened a space and place of learning, growing, and co-composing care alongside women previously trafficked.

### **Personal Significance: Learnings *with* Telling**

The experiences of living alongside T, Wolfie, and Phoenix has called me *inward, outward, forward, and backward* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to think about who I am in my comings and goings in the lives of women previously trafficked. Prior to engaging with this narrative inquiry, my stories of seeking narrative coherence called me to think *with* the metaphor of the locked gate. The locked gate called me to wonder beyond my positioning. I understood these moments as being less about my privilege and more about the lack of privilege in the women's lives behind the locked gate of the safe house. However, my experiences of living alongside T, Wolfie, and Phoenix have brought me to think differently about my privilege and the lack of privilege afforded to the women I cared for. I am awakened anew to the entanglements of privilege in relation to identity and sense making. Returning to Barad's work on entanglements is also relevant to the personal significance of this work.

For Barad, entanglements "entail a different ethics than one that presumes that time can be reset, the past erased as we start anew" (Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 13)<sup>20</sup> when considering the

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<sup>20</sup> The reference to Karen Barad's work are part of a published interview with Malou Juelskjaer.

possibilities that come *with* thinking anew *with* entanglements. As Barad elaborates, entanglements are not new or made anew; they are the "always-already materially entangled historical, scientific, religious, philosophical, economic, geopolitical, and other ways of knowing and knowledge practices still yet to come" (Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 13). Though, Barad attends to the containment of quantum physics to the subhuman world, while the natural application of classical physics to human phenomena prevails; what is significant from Barad's understanding of entanglements within the practical significance of this work is the importance of the connections *among* entanglements and to our social and care responsibilities. Barad cautions that starting anew or "turning away from" materially entangled historical ways of knowing (Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 13) is not the ethics for understanding entanglements as these "boundary drawing practices and how they matter, and who and what gets to matter erases worldly entanglements" and our responsibilities in these entanglements (Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 21).

This mattering within the development of anti-trafficking strategies, as values of healthcare and philosophies of care are materialized without considering the meanings of health and well-being of women previously trafficked, across their life course. This orientation, in turn informs how "to do justice to" (Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 13) what women previously trafficked say and leave unsayable. Narratively understood "to do justice to" (Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 13), what women previously said or left unsayable regarding their health and well-being is the coming to their life histories relationally; where the interconstitutive relationship of the entanglements they live *among* and who we are is attended to, thus materializing our responsibilities of mutually caring to and for each other.

This reiterative reconfiguring and reworking make a way to use what we learn for "mutual flourishing" (Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 14). Our responsibilities materialize through the "interconnectedness of ethics, ontology, and epistemology" (Juelskjaer, 2012, p. 15). This reorientation brings me back to Addams's (1902) understanding of sympathetic knowing, where promoting lateral progress for all emerges from our mutual becoming within epistemology and ethics, where "the knowledge of one another better reinforces the common connection of people such that the potential for caring and empathetic moral action increases" (p. 2). This reiterative reorientation holds the personal significance of this work where I am called back to how the metaphor of the locked gate materialized my social responsibilities.

My previous thinking *with* the metaphor of the locked gate was grounded in understanding liminal spaces *between* what was and what is. Somehow, the locked gate was *between* the privilege afforded me and remained metaphorically fixed *between* my entering and exiting freely through the gate. This orientation restricted my understanding of the relational and social entanglements. Specifically, these entanglements of privilege do not begin or end at the locked gate or in my comings and goings. Narratively understood, my experience of these entanglements is *among* lives as lived. In this *amongness*, the interconstitutive relationship privileges are made known and further implicates who I am. As I lean into these entanglements, they shift the stories I live by. I shift. I am awakened anew to the significance of this shift to the living as “shifting selves” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 131). In the relational spaces and places this narrative inquiry offered, shifting the *stories I live by* seeps into my identity and sense making shaped by my understanding of the responsibility of listening, reading, and writing. This shift does not sit beside me or in front or behind me, but sits within who I am.

Previously, I had asked myself, how could I hear something so silent that it was deafening? How can something so deafening be silent? After I lived alongside T, Wolfie, and Phoenix, these questions have shifted: Why must this deafening silence be broken to hear what women previously trafficked say? Furthermore, why must their silence be broken for us to care for their stories, to care *with* them? What does the need to break their silence say about who I am as a nurse and researcher and my *be-ing among* this world? Slowly, the participants invited me into the possibilities of co-composing a mutual becoming (Clandinin et al., 2018). As we lived *among* this mutual becoming, we came to question, wonder, and imagine different possibilities regarding the resources and supports that they need across their life course. For “truly knowing one another to better reinforce the common connection of people has the potential for caring and empathetic moral action” (Adams, 1902, p. 2). As part of this inquiry, I now recognize my default to wanting the silence of women previously trafficked to be broken, to leave nothing unsaid. I now understand that the silences women previously trafficked live *among* do not need to be broken to make known their health and well-being – it took me a long time to realize this. In understanding “silence as a way of be-ing” (Blix et al., 2021, p. 583), I can turn inward toward the relational spaces between myself and others; to listen - not in relation to words, but by “staying *with* and dwelling alongside” (Caine et al. 2013) the silences T, Wolfie, and Phoenix live among. In doing so, I understand that my default to wanting the silences of women

previously trafficked to be broken, can disempowers them, as silences can be a form of power Fivush (2010).

### **Research Implications**

In recognizing my default to wanting the silence of women previously trafficked to be broken, I think about future research puzzles that inform further explorations. Specifically, it would be important to explore why the silence of women previously trafficked needs to be broken through anti-trafficking strategies to bring forth empathy and the potential for caring. I wonder if we come to understand who we are as consumers of such stories in our personal and professional lives, can this self-facing moral space make known new directions for the services women previously trafficked require across their life course?

#### **Practical Significance: Learnings *with* Listening**

The relational space of this narrative inquiry offered a way where T, Wolfie, Phoenix, and I learned, cared for each other and our stories, and shifted our identity-making. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry as an “experience of the experience of people studying people in relation; nor is this experience left in the field or on the pages of the field texts but is alive at the end just as it is in the beginning” (p. 189). Learning *with* T, Wolfie, and Phoenix experiences extends long after our time together, as I think *with* the practical significance of this work alongside others. I know this work is not easy. Who nurses are *among* the entanglements of lives as lived, specifically, when one mutes or silences these entanglements and thereby normalizes the use of the taken-for-granted categories, categories that impose a “price to nonconformity” (Young, 2005, p. 21) on women previously trafficked. Although I will never know, I suspect that much will be forever left unsaid in the lives of T., Wolfie, and Phoenix.

The practical significance of this study informs the shifting of nursing care in two ways: first, by challenging nursing care that is developed in response to preconceived identities of victim, survivor, advocate, and villain. Secondly, it challenges nurses to start with women’s understanding of health and well-being and brings forward the possibilities of co-composing care *with* women previously trafficked.

By first attending to the stories of women, nurses hold the possibility to “truly knowing one another to better” and to “reinforc[e] how the common connection of people has the potential for caring and empathetic moral action” (Adams, 1902, p. 2). This call to shift the

relationship between nurses and the people they care for calls nurses to get to know women previously trafficked not through the dominant narratives of victim, survivor, advocate, and villain, but through the entanglements of the stories their bodies hold, how they live *among* silence and the entanglements of their liminality. Otherwise, viewing the life histories of women previously trafficked through the prescribed dominant narratives dismisses the story of the story's telling. It misses the opportunity for narrative coherence across the life course. In attending in this way, nurses might be able to attend to the meaning of health and well-being that is situated beyond the living bodies of women previously trafficked, through their bodies as "constituting this world-as-experience" (p. 123). Nurses can experience thinking *with* the physicality of the body as always "intertwining of the body's intentionality" (Leder, 1992, p. 125). Furthermore, the existential account of the world for women previously trafficked does not replace their biological account. However, it is "intertwined with their subjectivity that the body holds to construct their identities, dreams, and future desires as lived out in relation to situation" (Young, 2005, p. 16). Thus, T's, Wolfie's, and Phoenix's story of their telling and what is unsaid, poses important questions and challenges regarding who nurses are within their encounters. Specifically, what stories do nurses live by that are grounded in the metaphorical positioning of women's bodies as being passive in the world? Or those who are agentic? It is important to understand that the meaning of health and well-being does not begin and end at the points of entering or exiting trafficking but is shaped by their entire life histories and is situated *among* relationships with the nurse they encounter.

This intentional shift towards understanding that the life histories of women previously trafficked make known the interconstitutive relationship of their "existential grasp of the world" and a nurse's "existential grasp of the world" (Leder, 1992, p. 125) is important. In being attentive to this interconstitutive relationship, nurses can think *with* and attend to who they are within the politics of pity and risk management to inform anti-trafficking care modalities. This reorientation has possibilities for reshaping the curriculum towards a curriculum of life making.

### **Research Implications**

In thinking further with the interconstitutive relationship between how women previously trafficked and nurses 'understand the world and their identities it will be important to explore the tensions nurses' may experience alongside women previously trafficked when social structures organize health services through the selective dissemination of the rights of citizenship? Such

future research could also explore how healthcare providers and women previously trafficked reconcile these tensions to further reshape curriculum and training so as to prepare and enable nurses to attend to these issues through policy and service development.

### **Social Significance: Learnings *with* Actions**

Within the relational space of this narrative inquiry, contradictions and inconsistencies in how I view myself and others within anti-trafficking strategies were illuminated. At the borderlands of knowing these contradictions and inconsistencies, who I am in the epistemological and ontological implications of actions and policies is also made known (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), alongside the unfolding stories of women previously trafficked. The stories that T, Wolfie, and Phoenix chose to share with me are counterstories (Nelson, 1995) to the values and assumptions that shape the dominant narratives of anti-trafficking politics of care. Through their counterstories, the social significance of this work includes a challenge of the politics of pity and risk of anti-trafficking strategies and how these politics shape our social responsibilities in the everyday.

Narratively understanding the politics of pity and risk of anti-trafficking strategies in the lives of T, Wolfie, and Phoenix makes way to think alongside dominant narratives of anti-trafficking strategies, where the silence that women previously trafficked live *among* must be broken to provide care and about how voyeurism is entangled in the breaking of their silence. Furthermore, once broken and filtered by the politics of pity and risk, the care and support structures informed by this orientation create systemic gaps between support systems and the needs made known by women previously trafficked. Thus, if the politics of pity and risk silence the voices of women previously trafficked by breaking their silence, what is considered suitable care? These constraints also inform the changes to a broad spectrum of policy development regarding resources and support services, across the life course of women previously trafficked.

This study offered an opportunity to attend closely to the counterstories of health and well-being within health and social support system shared by T, Wolfie, and Phoenix. Their counterstories highlight the need for moral spaces to think *with* the diverse meanings of the health and well-being of women previously trafficked. This is specifically so when stereotypical images from the politics of pity and risk management mute and silence the entanglements that T, Wolfie, and Phoenix share regarding their identity, sense making, and seeking of coherence. Wolfie made known how the entanglements she lives *among* are muted and silenced when she



described how plastic surgery for women previously trafficked could be offered as essential care to mitigate the unsafe spaces women previously digitally trafficked negotiate when they are recognized in public spaces. Additionally, as Wolfie shares in the following found poem, this essential care matters to her because she seeks to claim and reclaim the sacred stories that guide her health and well-being, which she carries into her and her fiancée's future and anticipation of parenthood.

*The Yoni*  
*It's not just gender*  
*It is our privacy*  
*It is our security*  
*It is ours*  
*Our current*  
*Our past*  
*Our future*  
*It is not that something is wrong with it.*  
*Everything is fine.*  
*It is just that it doesn't feel private.*  
*Surgery will restore my privacy.*

This form of care for women previously trafficked is a *counterstory* (Nelson, 1995), as it does not align with the stereotypical images used to portray and story the prescribed coherence of moving through identities of victim, survivor, advocate, and villain. Women previously trafficked, who do not fit the stereotypical images of the politics of pity or risk management, live *among* the liminal spaces created by the ideologies of such images that also prescribe access to resources and support services when deemed appropriate. Additionally, Wolfie's counterstories also implicate those who hold the power in keeping specific ideologies about women's bodies dominant. Wolfie shares how important it was to her health and well-being to have her digital content removed from circulation. She described going into debt to be able to have her content removed. Wolfie shared how this was essential for her health and well-being and stresses the importance of this service for women who are trafficked digitally. Thus, this study makes known the need for moral spaces to attend to the diverse meaning of health and well-being and the diverse possibilities of changing access to support services, that for now are often unreachable for women previously trafficked.

T's story counters the dominant narrative regarding the essential services to support women previously trafficked. As T lives *among* the silence of work-permit applications every six months, repetitively meeting the burden of proof that she was previously trafficked is left to the

opinion of authorities. T's experiences make known the constraints of the politics of pity and risk management when immigration policies continue to be developed from a punitive framework rather than a health-orientated framework. In working from a health-orientated framework, the affording of permanent residency to women previously trafficked can be viewed as essential to their health and well-being. If it is deemed essential, the automatic granting of permanent residency attends to the constant traumatization of women previously trafficked with each work-permit application. It frees women previously trafficked to seek the resources and support guaranteed through permanent resident legal status. Additionally, the punitive framework that currently informs the processes for applying for work permits and permanent residency, I argue, is the re-exploitation of women previously trafficked as they live, work, and pay taxes in the country to which they are trafficked; yet, as with T, they are not afforded the rights and freedoms of Canadian citizenship. Thus, women previously trafficked, living in precarious immigration status, live *among* the silence of punitive strategies to mitigate illegal migration.

As with T, the silence that Phoenix lives *among* makes known the need for moral spaces within policy development. For Phoenix, living *among* her questions of being possibly re-exploited by organizations who ask her to share her stories speaks to who we are as consumers. I continue to wonder, why does the silence women previously trafficked live *among* need to be broken to stir the "potential for caring and empathetic moral action" (Adams, 1902, p. 2)? Do we consume this form of voyeurism to abolish our social responsibilities to get to know women previously trafficked? As consumers of their silence, do we feel we know who they are and what they need? Who are we that we ask women like Phoenix to share their stories of pain and suffering to stir our empathy, although we are not moved enough to compensate them for sharing.

*So many people want my help.*

*Makes me a little bit uneasy. Cause I'm like, why do you want my help?*

*You know, I can show you how not to succeed as an adult.*

*And I can teach you what to look for and I can teach you like warning signs.*

*In sharing my experience*

*It comes down to how much of my trauma I can face in a day.*

*And I'm finding that a lot of people are expecting me*

*To do these things that they're asking me about.*

*for free.*

Therefore, breaking their silence to meet the requirements of the politics of pity implicates the purpose of stereotypical images of women previously trafficked used by anti-trafficking agencies. However, within this politic there is no need to “truly know one another” (Adams, 1902, p. 2). In our consumerism, our silencing is entangled, is *among* the silence that women previously trafficked live. Their silence does not follow their silencing in the same way that our silencing does not follow their silence, nor is there a *between* that demarks these liminal spaces.

### **Research Implications**

As women previously trafficked live *among* silences entangled with silencing and *among* silencing entangled with silences; their experiences make known implications for future research. Specifically, how does the homogenization of their identities inform institutional injustices women previously face? Additionally, what social structures that organize health care services and systems silence the experiences of women previously trafficked so that citizenship, human rights, and who is perceived to have these rights remains within the politics of pity and risk management? How are these social structures entangled *with* who we are as consumers of the voyeurism within stereotypic images of women previously trafficked? How would the experiences of seeking services for women previously trafficked change if the diversity of their experiences are acknowledged rather than homogenized? These wonderings make a way for future research puzzles alongside women previously trafficked across Canada.

### **One Last Turn**

T, Wolfie, and Phoenix are not passively in the world as depicted from stereotypical images of the dominant narratives of trafficking; rather, their lives, stories, dreams, hopes, and silence, as lived, hold their distinct meanings of health and well-being. Through this work T, Wolfie, and Phoenix made known particular understandings of health and well-being. By retelling and reflecting on the stories that they shared in our conversations, I identified two narrative threads that make known the distinct entanglements of their experiences. Additionally, their bodies hold stories of living *among* entangled liminal spaces and silences. These stories all call me to listen, write, and read without words as they tell their stories without words, calling me to further think about who we are in requiring that their silence be broken to understand their meanings of health and well-being. In considering the implications of these entanglements when they are muted and silenced in the spaces and places where women previously trafficked seek

social support and care T, Wolfie, and Phoenix live *among* silences entangled with silencing and *among* silencing entangled with silences. Thus, challenging the punitive approaches that inform the politics of pity and risk management within anti-trafficking strategies and who we are as consumers of the voyeurism within stereotypic images of women previously trafficked, informing health and immigration policies. This self-facing moral space is the practical and social significance of this work, which implicates our social responsibilities in the everyday and the possibilities of truly *be-ing* in relation *with* others. This moral space is also a place of further wonderings.

### **Limitations**

In this work, I was interested in the complexities and nuances of the experiences of women previously trafficked. This meant that I was only able to spend time with some of the many women who have been trafficked. I have no intention of generalizing their stories and instead I hope that this work is able to raise new questions, wonders, and possibilities. I wanted to challenge how I and how others might think with experiences, to challenge assumptions and a perhaps narrow understanding of possibilities. I looked across diverse experiences of trafficking and each has a unique context, history, and future. There too are many different legal contexts that shape experiences. I came to understand the experiences of T, Wolfie, and Phoenix, yet their lives and experiences are also situated amongst the lives of others, including their families, children, and others. I did not hear the stories of those who are close to them. As my work continues to unfold, I hope that I will continue to engage with T, Wolfie and Phoenix to understand their unfolding lives and how they are continuously retold, relived, and experienced. Understanding changes over time will also add new understandings. This inquiry offers a beginning place, it has underlined the importance of my commitment and desire to pursue further stories and to learn alongside women who have previously been trafficked.

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**APPENDIX A: INFORMATION LETTER AND INFORMED CONSENT**

Information Letter and Consent Form  
*Ethics Study Number: Pro00117222*

**Research Investigator:**

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**Study Title: A Narrative Inquiry Study into the Experiences of Health and Well-Being of Women Previously Trafficked****Background**

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled: *A narrative inquiry study into the experiences of health and well-being of women previously trafficked*. This study is conducted by Corinne Rogers and supervised by Dr. Vera Caine from the Faculty Nursing at the University of Alberta. The results of this study will be used in support of my doctoral research.

**Purpose**

In this study, I am exploring the experiences of health and well-being of women previously trafficked. I am interested in how these experiences have shaped your life.

**Study Procedures**

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to have audio-recorded conversations

with me over 6-to-12-months. Each conversation is estimated to take about one hour. We will meet in public places, such as restaurants, cafés, your home, or in places that work best for you, virtual meetings are also an option. I hope to meet you once every two to four weeks for up to ten conversations. The conditions and places for a meeting will be negotiated between us.

As a participant, you are welcome to talk freely about your past and current life experiences. All the conversations will be audio-recorded and transcribed. I will invite you to take photos of what health and well-being means to you across your life. These photos will help me better understand your experiences. All the photos shared will be returned to you during the conversations. These photographs will not be used in any public documents.

You are also invited to participate in group conversations with other participants of this study to share your experiences. You can also choose not to participate in the group conversation.

You are eligible to participate in the study if you: 1. Are currently living in Edmonton, Alberta 2. Have previously experienced trafficking 3. Identify as a woman, 18 years and older; 4. Plan to live in Edmonton for the next 6 to 12 months. 5. Speak English or French.

### **Benefits**

You will be given an opportunity to tell your life stories within a safe relationship. By telling your stories, you may become more aware of your life history, identity, belief/value, and strengths. You may also obtain a clearer understanding of how your life experiences are shaped. However, it is important to note that there might be no direct benefit to you. By better understanding your experiences we can shape programs and policies in new ways to better meet the needs of women. Your experiences can also shape the learning of healthcare professionals.

### **Payment or Remuneration.**

During each conversation, I will pay for a meal and beverages. You will also receive a \$20 gift card.

### **Risk**

As you tell your life experiences, you may encounter memories and feelings which could be distressing or discouraging to you. Also, you may perceive frustrations and limitations which could be stressful to you. It is acceptable to express negative emotions during the conversations, but if it is difficult for you, you are not obliged to tell me everything. If unidentified issues surface during our conversations, I can direct and connect you to appropriate supports or resources without disclosing any of your information. In addition, you may choose at any time during any conversation to skip questions that may make you uncomfortable.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Should you choose to participate in this study, note that you are under no obligations. Additionally, if you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time up to the point before you give consent to the final narrative account. You may also refuse to answer any questions or talk about particular experiences. You can request to

stop the audio-recording at any time. It is important to note that you will not be able to withdraw from this study once you review your narrative account.

### **Confidentiality & Anonymity**

The information obtained in this study will be used in the writing of my doctoral dissertation. It will also include various presentations or research papers. To avoid any personal identification, the use of any names or places will be modified and you will be given the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym. Before information is disseminated, I will share the narrative account, which reflects your story with you.

Please note that for a minimum of 5 years after the completion of the study, all the data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet or in electronic devices that is password protected. My supervisors and I are the only ones who will have access to the original data. You can ask for a copy of reports or publications on research findings at any time.

### **Further Information**

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact Corinne Rogers at (780) 288 6168 or [cmr1@ualberta.ca](mailto:cmr1@ualberta.ca)

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have any concerns or questions regarding your right as a research participant you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 1-780-492-2615.

Thank you for considering being part of this research. I very much look forward to working with you.

### *Consent Statement*

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

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Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

---

Date

---

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## APPENDIX B: GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself. Have you lived in different places in Canada? Where have you been prior to arriving in Edmonton?
2. Who would you say is part of your family? Do you have children?
3. Do you have extended family? Or friends that are important to you?
4. Have there been moments in your life that you were unwell? Tell me what happened.
5. How have you sustained your health? Are there things you do?
6. What does health and well-being mean to you – what picture comes to mind when you think of health and well-being? Has this meaning changed for you over your lifespan?
7. What challenges have you encountered in relation to what health and well-being mean to you?
8. Tell me about when and how you access healthcare?
9. What was your experience accessing healthcare when you were trafficked – right after you existed trafficking – now?
10. What have been your experiences in accessing healthcare? What could have been done better and what do you feel was done well?
11. Tell me about an experience when your needs were met when accessing healthcare? Why do you think they were not met? What could have been done differently?
12. In thinking about the future how could your healthcare needs be met.