Around the world there are challenges to the way we administer government. Some of these have to do with brute force that is backed by self-interest. However, there are those intrepid souls who think we are all better than this. This series of monographs and edited collections of original essays seeks to explore the very best way that governments can execute their sovereign duties within the sphere of ethically-based public policy that recognizes human rights and the autonomy of its citizens.

Proposals to the series can include policy questions that are nationally or internationally situated. For example, regional migration from victims of war, terrorism, police integrity, political corruption, the intersection between politics and public health, hunger, clean water and sanitation, global warming, treatment of the "other" nationally and internationally, and issues of distributive justice and human rights.

Proposals that discuss systemic changes in the structure of government solutions will also be considered. These include *corruption and anti-corruption, bribery, nepotism,* and *effective systems design.*

Series benchmark: 110,000-150,000 words. Special books can be somewhat longer.

More information about this series at http://www.springer.com/series/6234

Wanda Teays
Editor

Analyzing Violence Against Women

Springer

Editor
Wanda Teays
Philosophy and Applied Ethics
Mount Saint Mary's University
Los Angeles, CA, USA

ISSN 1566-7669
Library of Public Policy and Public Administration
ISBN 978-3-030-05988-0 ISBN 978-3-030-05989-7 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05989-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019932112

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

In memory of Stanley G. French

Chapter 6
Resisting Sexual Violence: What Empathy Offers

Sarah Clark Miller

Abstract The primary aim of this essay is to investigate modalities of resistance to sexual violence. It begins from the observation that the nature of what we understand ourselves to be resisting—that is, how we define the scope, content, and causes of sexual violence—will have profound implications for how we approach the possibilities of resistance. I critically engage one model of resistance to sexual violence: feminist philosophical scholarship on self-defense, highlighting several shortcomings in how the feminist self-defense discourse inadvertently frames sexual violence. Holding these criticisms in mind, I expand the landscape of resistance to sexual violence by considering new possibilities that empathy might offer. The work of two contemporary women of color feminists—Roxane Gay and Tarana Burke—launches further exploration of empathy's alternative modes of resistance. In focusing on empathy between survivors of sexual violence, we can expand our understanding of the possibilities of resistance by redistributing and broadening our attention in three main ways: from action to affect and attitude, from a spatially and temporally limited event to something more expansive, and from the individual through the interpersonal to the structural.

6.1 Introduction

This article begins from a desire to unseat the assumption that when we resist sexual violence, we already fully understand that which we are resisting. Challenging this assumption is urgent, as the nature of what we understand ourselves to be resisting will have profound effects for how effective our resistance can be. The ultimate aim of this article is to bring greater clarity and expansion to the methods and modes of resistance to sexual violence that empathy can cultivate. The project might thus be best understood as an exercise of investigating possibilities. My aim is to consider

---

S. C. Miller (✉)
Philosophy and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, USA
e-mail: scm24@psu.edu

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

W. Teays (ed.), *Analyzing Violence Against Women*, Library of Public Policy and Public Administration 12, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05989-7_6

underexplored angles on resisting sexual violence that originate in the empathic engagement of survivors with themselves and with one another. In the first section, I note that how we conceptualize sexual violence matters deeply for the likelihood of widespread, resistant engagement with sexual violence—let alone effective resistance. We must therefore think carefully about how we define the scope, content, and causes of sexual violence.

To demonstrate this point, I examine one well-mapped method of resistance to sexual violence: feminist philosophical work on self-defense. I highlight several shortcomings of the implicit framing of sexual violence that one finds in theories and praxes of self-defense: a prioritization of sexual violence as an act; a prioritizing of resisting rape rather than the broader spectrum of forms of sexual violence; a framing of sexual violence as a discrete, temporally bound event; and a focus on individual responsibility.

Holding these issues in mind, I then turn to the possibilities of resistance that empathy might offer. Roxane Gay and Tarana Burke—two prominent contemporary women of color feminists—creatively and brilliantly construct alternate modes of resistance through empathy. Gay's exploration of the mindset of "not that bad," that sexual violence survivors evidence when they diminish their own experience of the trauma and suffering, reveals the foundational role that empathy plays in learning how to resist the affects and attitudes of rape culture. A second major contribution comes from Burke, who boldly situates empathy at the core of the #MeToo Movement, detailing how it can initiate and support the healing of survivors, while also challenging the very continuation of sexual violence. At certain moments, I bring Gay and Burke's work into conversation with philosophers and psychologists to amplify and extend aspects of their rich insights. Concentrating on cultivating empathy between survivors of sexual violence, as well as cultivating self-reflexive empathetic engagement, expands our understanding of the possibilities of resistance by redistributing and broadening our attention in three main ways: from action to affect and attitude, from a spatially and temporally limited event to something spatially and durationally sustained, and from the individual through the interpersonal to the structural.

6.2 The Nature of That Which We Resist

When we aim to resist sexual violence, what exactly is it that we are resisting? Another way of approaching this same issue is to ask what kind of thing sexual violence is. Is it an act? Is it an attitude? A system? A form of power? All of the above? The nature of what we understand ourselves to be resisting will have profound repercussions for how we resist. This is true in multiple senses. While one can imagine how this would hold for various instantiations of oppression currently operating in the world, it is perhaps particularly true for those instances about which there is consistent disagreement. Sexual violence is one such example. There is substantial cultural, scholarly, political, and historical dispute regarding precisely

what sexual violence is—which acts constitute it, when it occurs, how often it takes place, who can be subject to it, and ultimately, how to define it—as well as when, why, and how it is morally wrong (Cahill 2001, 10–12 and 167–169). Even within the feminist scholarly literature, there is considerable disagreement regarding the nature, harms, and wrongs of rape.

Recent feminist history saw the emergence of two main feminist camps that regarded the nature of rape in fundamentally different terms. One camp, most famously represented in the work of Susan Brownmiller, understands rape as primarily a form of violence rather than sex (Brownmiller 1975). Another camp, represented in the work of Catharine A. MacKinnon, holds that most rape is not seen as violence (from the dominant perspective) because the eroticization of domination that defines masculinity within compulsory heterosexuality authorizes, in effect, sexual aggression as simply sex (MacKinnon 1989, 178). Other, more recent theories of rape and sexual violence have found both of those views wanting, as represented, for example, in the work of Ann Cahill (2001).

Cahill argues for an understanding of the wrongness of rape that is richly informed by the continental philosophical tradition and that reads rape through the lens of women's embodied experience and the cultural significance of the female body in order to advance "an understanding of rape as embodied experience that… reject[s] the dichotomy of sex/violence while simultaneously naming rape and sexual violence as fundamental threats to embodied subjectivity" (Cahill 2009, 363).

To note that there is a dispute regarding what exactly constitutes sexual violence does not mean that it is ultimately undefinable or that there is no way to identify when it has occurred. To my mind, an adequate feminist approach to sexual violence must be a pluralist one, leaving ample room for the debates and tensions that arise between different conceptualizations of sexual violence. It is in the points of tension and the deliberation it takes to sort through them that admirable nuance comes to exist. Those points of tension can engender understandings of sexual violence less likely to be epistemically hubristic and more likely to evidence ample sensitivity to context, culture, and history. This does not mean that absolutely any theory of sexual violence goes, however. Pluralism is not relativism.

In order to demonstrate the point that how we understand sexual violence has profound implications for the nature and possibilities of resistance, I turn to an established literature on resistance—the feminist scholarship on self-defense and sexual violence. By critically engaging this literature, we can see how self-defense as a mode of resistance has implicitly shaped the accompanying concept of sexual violence, to which it understands itself to be responding. I will highlight three ways in which this is the case.

While much of the literature regarding women and self-defense has come from the disciplines of Psychology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (examples include McCaughey 1997; Hollander 2004, 2016; Weitlauf et al. 2000; Marcus 1993), feminist philosophers have also made important contributions. The work of two feminist philosophers, Ann J. Cahill (2001, 198–207, 2009) and Sylvia Burrow (2009, 2012), stands out for the skillful, nuanced, and insightful analyses they provide. Part of what I will accomplish in this section is to point to the limitations of

self-defense as a means of resistance to sexual violence because of the unwitting framing of sexual violence that it incorporates. I want first, however, to pause and note that both the literature on self-defense and the practice itself are valuable. Both attend to transforming how women and other sexually oppressed people experience their own bodies and to expanding their agential abilities. As a result, theories and praxes of self-defense can reduce the harms of sexual trauma. In the context of a rape culture, self-defense carries immense and diverse value. Even so, it is important to call attention to how self-defense as a means of resistance frames sexual violence in potentially deleterious ways.

I will concentrate here on Cahill's work on self-defense because of the debate regarding self-defense as a means of resistance that arose in response to the last chapter of her 2001 book, *Rethinking Rape*. The exchange between Cahill and critics Susan Martin (2002) and Carine Mardorossian (2003) is valuable for how it delineates some of the main lines of critique of self-defense as a means of resisting sexual violence. Cahill continues this discussion in a 2009 article in which she provides the following summary of Martin and Mardorossian's criticisms: "(1) That self-defense only increases women's fear and reifies the threat of rape; (2) That self-defense unfairly places the burden of rectifying the effects of a rape culture on its most likely victims, that is, women; (3) That self-defense is an ineffective response to the threat of sexual violence that contemporary Western cultures present to women" (Cahill 2009, 366–367). Mardorossian (2003) issues critiques one and two; Martin (2002) issues the third. Cahill offers thoughtful and largely convincing responses to all three criticisms, drawing on and reaffirming her distinctive embodied approach to understanding sexual violation in the process.

This debate forms an important backdrop for identifying the problematic ways self-defense theories and praxes implicitly shape the concept of sexual violence. It is as if leading with self-defense as a means of resisting sexual violence funnels attention toward certain aspects of sexual violence, while overlooking or downplaying other very important features. I will zero in on three main features of the conceptual framing and its related limitations: sexual violence as an act; sexual violence as an event; and sexual violence as an individual phenomenon.

A focus on resistance through self-defense implicitly conceptualizes sexual violence as a physical act or series of acts that must be resisted through embodied defense. This is the first main concern regarding theories and praxes of self-defense. There is, therefore, an unfortunate prioritizing of physical elements over affective, attitudinal, and cognitive elements. The implication is that physical action is necessarily the primary site of resistance to sexual violence. This form of resistance is implied through what self-defense classes aim to teach, namely, how to physically fend off perpetrators of sexual assault. In addition, self-defense training is often framed as a form of response to stranger rape, which in the United States is statistically much less likely to occur than acquaintance rape. RAINN (the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) reports that 28% of rapes are committed by a stranger, while 45% are committed by an acquaintance, and 25% are committed by a current or former intimate partner. Thus, while 28% of rapes are committed by a stranger, 70% are committed by someone the victim knows (RAINN 2018), which renders the prioritization of stranger rape in self-defense training, when it happens, unfortunate.

There are several responses that proponents of self-defense might offer. One promising counterargument is the idea that while self-defense trains students in relation to specific possible future acts, it also teaches trainees new ways of comporting their bodies in everyday life, as well as "a different way of living one's body" which gives rise to "distinctly feminist ways of interacting with the world" (Cahill 2009, 367–368).

These distinctly feminist ways of interacting with the world can take hold regardless of whether one ever needs to defend oneself from sexual violence in the real world. Thus, while the method of training may be based in learning how to defend oneself against physical sexual assault, that which the training imparts can generate new forms of embodied living that have implications far beyond the specificity of an imagined future physical assault. Maintaining this position, Cahill argues that feminist self-defense courses therefore "have the potential to position women differently with regard to hegemonic heterosexuality in general" (Ibid., 368). While feminist self-defense courses may hold the potential to train students in defense methods that exceed the specificity of physical acts, one might question how likely that is to take place when responding to forms of physical assault is a primary purpose of the training.

A slightly different way to articulate this general line of objection is to ask what falls from view when self-defense is prioritized as a main means of resistance to sexual violence. What gets lost is that sexual violence is far more than a series of physical acts. Put simply, not all forms of sexual violence involve physical attack. Sexual violence also takes affective, attitudinal, and cognitive forms. If we prioritize resisting physically, we may be less likely to tend to the incredibly important modes of resistance that are primarily affective, attitudinal, or cognitive in nature. Of course, these different modes are necessarily intertwined with one another and with the physical, too: you are likely to be more successful defending yourself physically if you possesses not only the physical acumen to resist attack but also an opinion of yourself as being worthy of defending—which I take to be primarily a matter of psychology (or perhaps moral psychology, in this particular instance). In contrast, the prioritization of physical defense in self-defense can have the unintended pernicious effect of making other forms of resistance less visible and perhaps also less socially intelligible to survivors and non-survivors alike.

Taking sexual violence to be primarily a matter of physical acts or events also impedes an understanding of rape as existing along a continuum of behaviors. In order to effectively resist sexual violence, we need to resist these other forms of sexual violence, too. Just as the modes of violation may be physical, affective, attitudinal, or cognitive (and very likely some complex mixture of these components), so, too, must the modes of resistance span and interweave these modalities. Self-defense thus represents only one element of a much larger landscape.

The second concern about self-defense observes that concentrating on self-defense can result in an implicit framing of sexual violence as a single, temporally-bound, spatially-discrete event, rather than as something that is durationally

sustained (or incessantly repetitive) and spatially extended. Rape exists as a form of sexual violence that has an event-based structure: it takes place in a particular location during a certain timeframe. When women train to resist individual acts of sexual violence, they train to resist significant events of attempted violence that are spatially located and temporally discrete. If a man jumps out of the bushes and attacks, how will they resist? Can they be coached to respond beyond freezing in fear? Instruction in self-defense addresses this issue (and, of course, other issues, too). Without a doubt, this form of training can be a very positive thing. But rape is only one violent, visible outburst of a much broader system of heteronormative, patriarchal culture. Resisting rape alone won't work to dismantle that system. Many of the forms of assault that rape culture evidences are spatially expansive and temporally incessant: street harassment, internalization of sexist attitudes, and the pervasive sense of feeling unsafe while walking alone at night on a deserted city street are examples that come to mind. There is, therefore, the danger that feminist theories and praxes of self-defense will be only minimally effective because they set the spatially- situated, temporally-limited moments of sexual violence as their prime target, neglecting the wider structures and ongoing onslaught of rape culture.

The final concern echoes worries that other feminist theorists have raised about self-defense (cf. Mardorossian 2003), though in a different register. Directing attention to self-defense as a means of empowerment in the face of a culture with widespread practices of sexual violence implicitly centers attention on the individual, at the expense of tending to systemic or structural elements. (For a defense of self-defense against the assumption that it is individualistic, see Hollander 2016.) That which is imagined and, in a sense, prepared for are future situations in which individuals would defend themselves against potential perpetrators. It is a form of preparation that emphasizes individual modes of resistance. In contrast with this approach, I want to argue that it is imperative to conceptualize sexual violence as more than the individual acts that constitute it. Such an approach locks in certain agential, ethical, political, and epistemological perspectives that limit the scope of what we can see and understand. It therefore, in turn, limits the extent to which we can resist. An individualizing conceptualization of sexual violence is not only problematic because it fails to disclose the fullness of the phenomena and their accompanying harm. It is also problematic because what we do not properly see and understand, we cannot hope to adequately resist.

This is not to say that individual resistance isn't important. There are situations in the United States where being equipped with an ability to fight back physically could render a person safer and less likely to be sexually assaulted. There are benefits to learning how to take up space with one's body, to make clear that those who encroach will be repelled. It is important to note, however, that a perspective more carefully attuned to matters of structural injustice reveals the uneven distribution of the need for such skills. Where and by whom such skills are required, as well as who is encouraged to acquire them, will differ based upon context and access to social power. For example, given the extensive history of the racialized use of rape accusations in the United States, a wealthy white woman who physically defends herself against a poor black male assailant is likely to fare better socially, politically,

and possibly legally than a poor black woman who fends off a wealthy white male assailant.

In addition, the prioritization of the individual resistor that self-defense requires creates an unjust distribution of responsibility for both the prevention of and resistance to sexual violence. It places responsibility on individual women who must train to be ready to fight off future potential perpetrators. Should they fail to acquire these skills, the thinking could go, they could be thought to be culpable for their lack of preparedness and the sexual assault that could result. This approach reinforces decades of thinking regarding what women should do so as not to invite rape—wear skirts of a 'reasonable' length, walk in groups at night, never get intoxicated, and now, train to be prepared to physically defeat or escape from rapists. Overall, the individualizing of rape implicit in self-defense discourses problematically occludes structural and institutional components of sexual violence. Resisting and restructuring these aspects of rape culture is necessary for ending sexual violence.

This section has hopefully demonstrated three points regarding how discourses on self-defense and sexual violence need to evolve: from action to affect and attitude; from something that is necessarily a spatially and temporally limited event to something more spatially and durationally sustained; and finally, from a focus on the individual to include institutional and structural components, too. I turn next to two contemporary women of color feminists, whose work on empathy holds the promise of exactly these transformations.

6.3 Resisting the Mindset of "Not That Bad"

In the introduction to the recent collection, *Not That Bad*, Roxane Gay (2018) illuminates a significant, underexplored aspect of rape culture that must be countered and transformed in order to effectively resist sexual violence. After describing the gang rape she suffered when she was 12 years old and the irreparable damage and radical shifts in her self-concept and understanding of the world it issued in her life, Gay turns to an awareness she later began to assemble of the widespread nature of sexual violence through the stories of women she met who were also survivors:

> As I got older, I met countless women who had endured all manner of violence, harassment, sexual assault, and rape. I heard their painful stories and started to think, *What I went through was bad, but it wasn't* that *bad.* Most of my scars have faded. I have learned to live with my trauma. Those boys killed the girl I was, but they didn't kill all of me. They didn't hold a gun to my head or a blade to my throat and threaten my life. I survived. I taught myself to be grateful I survived even if survival didn't look like much. (Gay 2018, ix)

Gay's writing evidences a certain logic of surviving sexual violence: by engaging a comparative exercise designed to minimize the magnitude of one's own trauma, one characterizes what others have experienced as more serious, as a more egregious or greater form of injury. In this mode, survivors can experience a somewhat perverse sort of gratitude as a mode of recovery from trauma—gratitude that the nature of

their violation was not more extreme. What happened could have been worse. It was, survivors tell themselves, all things considered, not that bad.

This framing of sexual violence as "not that bad" represents a diminishment of the horror and harm of one's experience in the service of survival. Surviving sexual violence—continuing to live in its aftermath—may involve a considerable investment in this idea that what one went through could have been worse. This form of minimizing offers a certain form of salve: if another's trauma is greater than yours, then yours is more likely to be something that you can bear. Gay articulates this point powerfully: "Allowing myself to believe that being gang-raped wasn't 'that bad' allowed me to break down my trauma into something more manageable, into something I could carry with me instead of allowing the magnitude of it to destroy me" (Gay 2018, x). Claiming a reduced footprint for one's trauma creates space for the development of other aspects of oneself around and beyond the trauma itself. Regaining the ability to develop new elements of identity and meaning in one's life can be central to recovery. Understanding one's own experience as not that bad can help to generate this kind of space.

The psychology of "not that bad" can serve as an essential tool of survival. But diminishment of one's sexual violation is decidedly a double-edged sword. While diminishment of the "not that bad" variety can begin to open space for possible identities and meanings for one's life beyond that of traumatized victim, it can also operate as a tool of abuse and denial for both oneself and others. As Gay observes, if gang rape is not that bad, then it follows that a spectrum of other forms of sexually violent and demeaning treatment—rape while unconscious from date rape drugs, attempted rape, sexual assault by an intimate partner, non-penetrative sexual assault, being groped on public transit, catcalls, termination for not complying with a boss's sexual demands, lewd comments in the workplace, the demand that one be grateful for receiving unwanted sexual attention because one is fat or disabled or old—must also be tolerable. If sexual violation exists on a continuum and gang rape is not that bad, then a whole host of extremely harmful behaviors that precede it on the continuum are likely to be minimized, waived away, denied, and ignored.

Thus, the idea that what one has suffered is not that bad can tacitly legitimize many iterations of sexual violation, not only for oneself as a survivor but also for others. The mindset of "not that bad" can serve as an interpersonal measure of the seriousness of the violations that others experience. Such minimization therefore functions as an unwitting yet unfortunately effective means of furthering rape culture. Gay notes that when we see a form of sexual violence as not that bad, even if we are doing so in order to cope with something horrible that has happened to us, we inadvertently condone other forms of sexual violation: "Buying into this notion made me numb to bad experiences that weren't as bad as the worst stories I heard. For years, I fostered wildly unrealistic expectations of the kinds of experiences worthy of suffering until very little was worthy of suffering. The surfaces of my empathy became calloused" (Gay 2018, x). The damage of the "not that bad" mindset accumulates–its numbing effects building–until survivors of sexual violence are unable to feel their own pain, as well as the pain of others. Many survivors continue to know the reality of the pain of their violation on some level, even as they

attempt to diminish it in order to survive. By minimizing their own suffering, they come to be deadened not only to that which has harmed them but also to the suffering of others. As they become empathically compromised, the threshold of legitimate suffering seemingly moves ever higher.

This extensive exploration of the "not that bad" mindset is important for multiple reasons. Most salient for present purposes is the detailed picture that emerges of the set of attitudes and emotions that sustain it—attitudes and emotions that ultimately license sexually harmful forms of treatment of oneself and others and that lead one to accept various forms of sexually violating behavior from others. That is, until one doesn't. Articulating her inceptive moment of resistance, Gay writes: "The list of ways I allowed myself to be treated badly grew into something I could no longer carry, not at all" (Gay 2018, x). With the "not that bad" mindset laid bare, that which it is imperative to resist comes clearly into view.

Gay's reflections on her own shift in this regard are instructive:

> I don't know when this changed, when I began realizing that all the encounters people have with sexual violence are, indeed, that bad. I didn't have a grand epiphany. I finally reconciled my own past enough to realize that what I had endured was that bad, that what anyone has suffered is that bad. I finally met enough people, mostly women, who also believed that the terrible things they endured weren't that bad when clearly those experiences were indeed that bad. I saw what calloused empathy looked like in people who had every right to wear their wounds openly and hated the sight of it. (Gay 2018, x–xi)

Gay shows us two crucial, intertwined elements of what we must confront when we resist sexual violence: (1) the affects and attitudes we hold toward our own suffering as survivors of sexual violence and (2) how we feel about and approach the similar suffering other survivors experience. The slowly growing realization that Gay articulates—absent any cathartic epiphany or quick transformation—that the suffering of all victims of sexual violence is "that bad" is ultimately a realization that our own and others' suffering as survivors is morally significant. It has moral weight. In short, it matters.

In order to know and feel that one's suffering matters, survivors have to first know that they matter. Knowing that you matter morally is the bedrock upon which the significance of your suffering rests. Rape culture chips away at the sense that women and others who are sexually oppressed have equal moral standing specifically as women and members of other sexually oppressed groups. This is importantly different from knowing that you have moral standing in a general sense—as a human being, for example. What is under attack and what must be resisted is more specific than one's humanity. Those who are raped are, of course, human—but they are a particular sort of human—female, Black, trans*, disabled, queer. Here, one finds intersectionality at the root of resistance: It is not one's general humanity, but rather the specificity of human identity that makes one a mark for sexual violation. So, the form of mattering morally that needs to emerge is one that addresses this specificity and one that is intersectional through-and-through. Garden-variety universal moral standing will be insufficient.

In the realm of sexual violence, the failure to recognize a survivor's suffering as morally significant displays the experiences, attitudes, and emotions that most need

to be resisted. We will not resist that which we believe is not that bad. When we upend these false beliefs and accord our suffering and the suffering of other survivors the moral weight both deserve, resistance becomes possible. What does it take to come to see our own experience of sexual violence as "that bad"? What fosters the transformation in perspective that permits such a realization about one's own past? And what fosters it regarding other's experiences of sexual violence? I would argue that both metamorphoses are crucial modes of resistance. And, building on Gay's work, I would argue that that which makes these particular modes of resistance possible is empathy.

6.4 Empathy and Resistance

Tarana Burke, civil rights activist and founder of the #MeToo Movement, articulates the power of empathy to fuel resistance to sexual violence. Burke originated the phrase "me too" over a decade ago (before the advent of hashtags) to support young girls of color who were survivors of sexual violence. According to Burke, the #MeToo Movement has a two-pronged aim: to provide survivors what they need to begin healing and to work to end sexual violence. Empathy plays a significant role in both of these goals. Both goals contribute in important ways to the process of resisting sexual violence.

Empathy can be understood through multiple disciplinary lenses. Most relevant to our present purposes is empathy as a psychological concept and as a concept intertwined with philosophical accounts of moral agency (as found, for example, in the work of moral sentimentalists). We can gain a greater sense of empathy's significance for resisting sexual violence by connecting Gay's insights regarding empathy and resistance with Burke's trailblazing incorporation of empathy at the heart of the #MeToo Movement. What exactly is the work that empathy does? How does it foster resistance to sexual violence?

Elaborating further on the origins of the #MeToo Movement, Burke states that "'Me Too' started, not as a hashtag, but as a campaign from an organization that I founded: Just Be Inc. …And empowerment through empathy was the thing that I felt helped me. …[O]ther survivors who empathize[d] with my situation help[ed] me to feel like I wasn't alone and gave me entry to my healing journey" (CBS News 2017). Burke highlights how empathy between survivors can initiate the possibility of healing, the first aim of the #MeToo Movement, as she sees it. Empathic connection with others who have also experienced sexual violence can help survivors to feel less alone. Empathy here functions in a psychological sense as the recognition of the significance of another's suffering or distress—in this case the specific suffering experienced when one is a victim of sexual violence. Emotional resonance between survivors can support survivors who have yet to begin to heal through the knowledge that they are not alone: Others have experienced similar suffering. The process of having a knowing Other bear witness to one's pain can provide a powerful opening to recovery.

Empathic connection between survivors not only initiates healing for those who have been sexually victimized but also provides a means of resistance. Healing, in fact, can be a mode of resistance. By identifying and connecting with the significance of another's suffering or distress, survivors not only open the door to healing but also generate the conditions of resistance through the cultivation of their agency. Healing itself is a potential means of resistance, inasmuch as those who are healing are more likely to have the emotional and cognitive resources necessary to resist. Empathic connection between survivors thus potentially creates the conditions of the possibility of resistance by promoting healing. Healing from sexual violence helps survivors return to increased and, in time, full agency. And it is from a position of increased agency—in which we can name and seek self-determined ends—that we are most likely to be able to resist.

In the literature of interest to both philosophers and psychologists, empathy is connected with moral agency in another important sense—as constitutive for moral development. Social psychologist Martin Hoffman mapped five categories in the development of empathic distress (Hoffmann 2000, 63–86), including egocentric empathic distress, quasi-egocentric empathic distress, and veridical empathic distress. While there are identifiable stages of development of empathy in childhood, according to Hoffmann, our empathic abilities continue to develop throughout the entirety of our lives (72). Of greatest interest is the final category that Hoffmann articulates—"empathic distress beyond the situation" (80)—which holds particular relevance for the present discussion. Hoffmann writes:

> At some point in development, owing to the emerging conception of self and others as continuous persons with separate histories and identities, children become aware that others feel joy, anger, sadness, fear, and low esteem not only in the immediate situation but also in the context of a larger pattern of life experience. Consequently, although they continue to feel empathically distressed in response to another's immediate pain or discomfort, they can also respond with empathic distress to what they imagine to be the other's chronically sad or unpleasant life condition.
>
> This mental representation of the other's plight – his or her typical day-to-day level of distress or deprivation, opportunities available or denied him or her, future prospects – may fall short of what one considers a minimal standard of well-being (socially determined). (80)

Hoffmann's work provides the opportunity to frame an indispensable insight regarding the relationship between empathy and resistance. The concept of empathic distress beyond the situation calls attention to the importance of framing the connection between empathy and resistance in a broader, structural framework. When we read the empathic distress that survivors feel toward other survivors' suffering through Hoffmann's concept of empathic distress beyond the situation, how a survivor's empathy relates to the broader conditions of rape culture can be seen. The nature of the distress and the mechanisms that foster identification between survivors of sexual violence is interpersonal—clearly an important level of interaction for healing survivors. But what the ability of empathic distress beyond the situation points to is how empathy connects with structural oppression. When sexual violence survivors respond to other sexual violence survivors empathically, what they are responding

to, I would contend, is the distress that other survivors feel as a result not merely of the particular incidence of sexual violence they experienced (relating to the immediate situation, as Hoffmann would conceive of it). They are also responding to that event of sexual violence set in the broader situation of the "day-to-day level of distress and deprivation" that those who are sexually oppressed experience living in a rape culture.

With this piece in place, an important implication for the mindset of "not that bad" appears. As we saw above, Gay's discussion of the mentality of "not that bad" highlights how sexual trauma can induce a limitation on survivors' empathic capacities. The impact on empathy is bidirectional: one loses core components of the ability to empathize both with one's own suffering and with the suffering of others. With Hoffmann in mind, an additional harm of sexual violence falls into place: sexual violence can arrest and destroy aspects of one's empathic development. If one is gang raped at the age of twelve and subsequently adopts the mentality of "not that bad" as a coping mechanism, how this occurrence impedes the development of one's empathy in the process may gravely hinder a survivor's ability to detect aspects of structural injustice, as the capacity to engage empathic distress beyond the situation allows one to meaningfully situate individual cases of sexual violence in broader structural contexts of rampant misogyny and patriarchal culture. As the most advanced empathic capacity, development of the ability to experience empathic distress beyond the situation is an ability that people continue to master throughout the entirety of their lives.

This means that healing opens the possibility for survivors to recover not only their ability to recognize and give proper moral weight to their own suffering and to the suffering of other survivors of sexual violence, but also the ability to recognize and give proper moral weight to the structural oppression in which perpetrators carried out their violation and the violation of others. The recovery of the ability to detect and engage empathic distress beyond the immediate situation forms the bedrock of the capacity to resist sexual violence.

By returning to Burke, we can uncover one final insight regarding the interaction of empathy and agency in the name of resisting sexual violence. Recall that Burke articulates at least two meanings of "Me Too": "On one side, it's a bold declarative statement that 'I'm not ashamed' and 'I'm not alone.' On the other side, it's a statement from survivor to survivor that says 'I see you, I hear you, I understand you and I'm here for you or I get it.'...When you experience trauma and meet other people that have a similar experience, and you show empathy for each other, it creates a bond" (as quoted in Santiago and Criss 2017). Burke's reflections help us to zero in on another way that empathy between survivors of sexual violence connects with agency to produce resistance. Certain forms of empathy can help to foster the development of solidarity (Hemmings 2012; Rodino-Colocino 2018; Ferguson 2009; Zack 2005; Bailey 2008), as well as collective agency (Bratman 2014; Gilbert 1990). The bond that Burke credits empathy with creating between survivors can form the bedrock of collective resistance.

Surely, you can resist on your own, but it is a lot easier to do so when you feel identification and connection with those who are in some significant sense similarly

situated in terms of certain oppression-based experiences of trauma. It is also through this connection that survivors are then able to speak up with bold declarations that they, too, are sexual violence victims and they are not ashamed of this status. They can do so secure in the knowledge that they will not be alone in their bravery of claiming the status of survivor. And, through empathic access to others' experiences of systemic oppression, they can do so in ways designed to disrupt structural forces.

Burke helps us to see that the relational bonds that empathy fosters can disrupt the highly isolating, seemingly atypical (though in reality, shockingly common) experience of sexual violence, as well as how sexual violence blocks healing and furthers rape culture through the mechanisms of the "not that bad" mindset that Gay identified above. There is power in the empathic engagement of sexual violence survivors (Locurto 2018). The power available through empathic connection, as we have seen above, is multifold. Understanding another's situation through empathic connection between survivors is a keystone in healing and also as a linchpin of how empathy can function as a tool of resistance.

6.5 Conclusion

Empathy emerges as an unexpected motor of resistance to sexual violence in and through the trailblazing work of Roxane Gay and Tarana Burke. Empathy does work that self-defense cannot. Through empathy, resistance becomes a process not only of act, but also of affect, attitude, and cognition. Empathy shifts our attention from a conception of sexual violence as spatially and temporally contained to an understanding of the long-term, widespread healing that sexual violence requires. And empathy explicitly moves us from an individualized model of suffering to the possibilities of healing and insight that interpersonal and structural perspectives offer.

For Burke and Gay, empathy for oneself as a survivor of sexual violence and between survivors ultimately serves to interrupt and disrupt the ethical, political, and cultural mechanisms that sustain sexual violence. Burke also reminds us that while the larger goal of ending sexual violence overall is important, it is also imperative to focus on smaller daily disruptions of sexual violence. This day-to-day disruption is part of the work that empathy is particularly effective at accomplishing (Burke 2018). Burke advocates for a focus on healing, made possible by empathy between survivors as well as the opportunities for resistance—intrapersonally, interpersonally, and structurally—that empathy offers, including the ways it can facilitate solidarity and collective agency.

Reading Gay through the lens of Burke, what Gay articulates above can be read as part of the indispensable work that the #MeToo Movement has accomplished. Through the #MeToo Movement, vast numbers of survivors move from a mentality of "not that bad" to come forth and say, "This is how bad it was for me" and to be met with the empathic response of fellow survivors, saying, "I see you" and "Yes, it

was that bad for me, too." What emerges is a structurally-informed sense of the widespread occurrence of sexual violence. This is a vital way of bringing rape culture into sharper focus so as to be better able to dismantle it.

Bringing Burke and Gay directly into conversation with one another, we see how the #MeToo Movement helps us to understand exactly how crucial it is to resist casting one's own or another's experience of sexual violence as not that bad. In different ways, both remind us that naming and claiming are tools of resistance: naming what happened to one as sexual violence and claiming the moral significance of one's suffering. Doing so in and through empathy for oneself and through the process that empathy uniquely affords of lovingly witnessing one another's suffering is deeply powerful. Validating our own and other survivors' experiences disrupts the everyday business of rape culture. Doing so will not necessarily end sexual violence, but it can jam a main mechanism of the rape culture machine: the necessity of victims denying the moral significance of the harm they suffer. Empathy can bring survivors out of the isolated level of the individual to the supportive level of the interpersonal and ultimately into greater, powerful understandings of the structural forces that sustain rape culture.

References

Bailey, Alison. 2008. On Intersectionality, empathy, and feminist solidarity. *Peace and Justice Studies* 18 (2): 14–36.

Bratman, Michael E. 2014. *Shared agency: A planning theory of acting together*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Brownmiller, Susan. 1975. *Against our will: Women, men, and rape*. New York: Penguin Books.

Burke, Tarana. 2018. Lecture at The Pennsylvania State University. State College, PA. March 22, 2018.

Burrow, Sylvia. 2009. Bodily limits to autonomy: Emotion, attitude, and self-defence. In *Embodiment and agency*, ed. Letitia Meynell, Sue Campbell, and Susan Sherwin, 126–142. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

———. 2012. Protecting one's commitments: Integrity and self-defense. *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 26 (1): 49–66.

Cahill, Ann J. 2001. *Rethinking rape*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

———. 2009. In defense of self-defense. *Philosophical Papers* 38 (3): 363–380.

CBS News. 2017. 'Me Too' creator Tarana Burke: 'We have to make movements ourselves', October 20. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/me-too-tarana-burke-we-have-to-make-movements-ourselves/. Accessed 25 May 2018.

Ferguson, Ann. 2009. Feminist paradigms of solidarity and justice. *Philosophical Topics* 37 (2): 161–177.

Gay, Roxane. 2018. Introduction. In *Not that bad: Dispatches from rape culture*, ed. Roxane Gay, ix–xii. New York: Harper Perennial.

Gilbert, Margaret. 1990. Walking together: A paradigmatic social phenomenon. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 15: 1–14.

Hemmings, Clare. 2012. Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation. *Feminist Theory* 13 (2): 147–161.

Hoffmann, Martin. 2000. *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hollander, Jocelyn A. 2004. 'I can take care of myself': The impact of self-defense training on women's lives. *Violence Against Women* 11: 776–791.

———. 2016. The importance of self-defense training for sexual violence prevention. *Feminism and Psychology* 26 (2): 207–226.

Locurto, Tina. 2018. How did she go from a tiny blurb to *Time* magazine's front cover? *Centre Daily Times*. http://www.centredaily.com/news/local/education/penn-state/article206556229.html. Accessed 25 May 2018.

MacKinnon, Catharine A. 1989. *Toward a feminist theory of the state*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Marcus, Sharon. 1993. Fighting bodies, fighting words: A theory and politics of rape prevention. In *Feminists theorize the political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, 385–403. New York: Routledge.

Mardorossian, Carine M. 2003. Review of *Rape on the Public Agenda: Feminism and the Politics of Sexual Assault*, *Rethinking Rape* and *New Versions of Victims: Feminists Struggle with the Concept*. *Signs* 29 (1): 265–269.

Martin, Susan E. 2002. Review of *rethinking Rape*. *Violence Against Women* 8 (7): 901–912.

McCaughey, Martha. 1997. *Real knockouts: The physical feminism of women's self-defense*. New York: New York University Press.

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network. 2018. *Perpetrators of sexual violence: Statistics*. https://www.rainn.org/statistics/perpetrators-sexual-violence. Accessed 1 June 2018.

Rodino-Colocino, Michelle. 2018. Me too, #MeToo: Countering cruelty with empathy. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 15 (1): 96–100.

Santiago, Cassandra, and Doug Criss. 2017. *An activist, a little girl and the heartbreaking origin of 'me too'*. https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/17/us/me-too-tarana-burke-origin-trnd/index.html. Accessed 25 May 2018.

Weitlauf, Julie, Ronald Smith, and Daniel Cervone. 2000. Generalization effects of coping-skills training: Influence of self-defense training on women's efficacy beliefs, assertiveness, and aggression. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 85 (4): 625–633.

Zack, Naomi. 2005. *Inclusive feminism: A third wave theory of women's commonality*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.