

# *Silences and Silencings: Remembered/Forgotten Pedagogies of School and Family*

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After a cruel childhood, one must reinvent oneself.  
Then reimagine the world.

– Oliver (1995, p. 52)

## Silent/silencing pedagogies

Millions of children in North America are growing up in families where they witness violence against women (most commonly their mothers), and where they themselves experience the violence of physical and sexual abuse. Although I did not grow up in North America, as a child I was part of one such family, and have borne the burden of trauma, shame, secrecy, and emotional pain long into my adulthood. Susan Griffin (1992) writes that “the desire to know and be known is strong in all of us” (p. 148). This is surely true in my case, but I write this paper for another reason. No longer a child, but a mother, a teacher, a teacher educator, and curriculum theorist, I have decided to break my silence in order to discuss the impact of the curricular silences and silencings on those who, like me, have experienced childhood sexual abuse. I do so as an adult who is responsible for my own child, for the children I teach, as well as for all our children, in the sense that all of us, as members of what we hope is, or could someday be, a just and caring society, are collectively responsible for the well-being and protection of each and every child.

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Unfortunately, a great many educators are themselves ill educated regarding the prevalence, nature and long term impact of sexual abuse on children. Thus, they come to their classrooms ignorant of the physical and emotional suffering of so many of their students. I believe that if educators were better educated about the sexual abuse of children they might be more willing to discover, question and break their own curricular silences, and work to stop the implicit and explicit silencing of abused children through “normal” curriculum practices. So in this paper, I set out to define what constitutes childhood sexual abuse, explain just how widespread a form of violence it is, and strive to fully describe the trauma it generates.

I make the case that childhood sexual abuse is a pedagogy of violence, of captivity, of (self) hatred, and of control, which often takes place within the institution of family. Pedagogy takes place in diverse sites, not only in kindergartens, schools and universities. I define pedagogy as that which acts upon and acts with human beings in such a way as to transform their embodied consciousness, thereby producing meaning in the process. I agree with Carmen Luke (1996) that:

Learning and teaching . . . are the very intersubjective core relations of everyday life. They exist beyond the classroom and are always gendered and intercultural. (p. 8)

The pedagogical practices of mothers and fathers are the most significant in a child’s early life, and the curriculum of family life is intertwined with everyday schooling practices to an extent that many curriculum theorists have not fully realized.

In this paper, I also discuss why educators may find themselves engaged in normative curricular practices that silence their students, and why it feels difficult, and perhaps even dangerous, to challenge these everyday practices. In the conclusion, I make the case for a pedagogy of peace that could act as a counternarrative to the terrifying and destructive pedagogies of childhood sexual abuse. I do not provide any concrete or prescriptive curriculum proposals or plans. Rather, I wish to open up a space of curricular possibility, a space of meaningful conversation, and of hope.

Such a space did not exist for me when I was a child. The silence I lived everyday at home was never broken at school. School days were filled with all the usual events that played over the surface of my young life like small ripples of water on a deep, dark pool. Tests, examinations, homework, learning poetry by heart, school plays, sports days, watching boys’ fights in the schoolyard, reciting the Lord’s Prayer, hopscotch on sunny days: None of this could touch my inner awareness of the life I lived at home. At school, no mention was ever made of the traumatic lives of girls like me. The more closely I held my secrets about the abuse I suffered, the more poisonous these secrets became. As an educator, I now realize that such curricular si-

lences functioned to erase my embodied knowledge of violence against women and children.

Just as patriarchy is reinscribed through canonical literature, so it is further stabilized through national mythologies in history texts, social studies texts. . . . expressly designed (when designed at all) to silence traumatic narratives—to avoid talk about human experience that touches all, frightens most, and threatens to blow apart national mythologies which have so shaped identities and reified inequitable power relations. (Edgerton, 2001, p. 11)

I shall now relate a story that might seem insignificant and a matter of personal idiosyncrasy, but which I tell to illustrate one small, subtle example of the kinds of curricular silences and silencings that work to erase narratives of childhood sexual abuse.

As part of my Bachelor of Education degree, I had to complete a project for a social studies course. The task: Choose curriculum materials from the education resource library, and write a paper on the appropriateness of the materials for elementary school students, and how they might be successfully used in an elementary school lesson. I looked through all the curriculum resources in our library, searching for something I would like to research further. On one of the upper shelves, I found a brand new, unused curriculum package that had been recently developed by the local Board of Education for students at the primary and intermediate levels. The materials explored the topic of “woman abuse.”

This was perfect for me, I thought. The elementary social studies curriculum focused on self, family and community, and this particular curriculum package dealt with all three areas. The teacher resource book provided disturbing statistics on the number of elementary children who had witnessed their mother or another adult female in their family being battered or physically assaulted, as well as statistics on the number of women who died or were seriously injured by “domestic” violence in Canada each year. If the local Board of Education’s statistics were correct, approximately just under half of the school district’s students would have witnessed such violence at home. The aim of these curriculum materials was to teach elementary students that family members did not have the right to physically harm or terrorize one another, and that such violence was not an acceptable part of family life. Obviously, this was a pertinent issue for my future students.

The curriculum package also contained an age-appropriate video dramatization of a fictional family in which the father physically assaults the mother. The drama modelled simple procedures for children in such situations, explaining what they should and should not do to keep themselves safe. For example, the video demonstrated that children should not try to stand between their mother and father, in the hope of protecting a parent during a physical assault. It advised that, if at all possible, they should get

out of the house during an assault, taking any other siblings with them. Children were told to try to reach a neighbour's house so that they could call 911. If it was not possible to escape, they should stay away from the violence in another part of the home. Later, they could tell an adult whom they trusted, such as a teacher, about the violence at home.

At the time, I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the courage and vision of the curriculum planner who had developed these materials and lesson plans for the younger students in our school district. The information could be lifesaving. At the same time, I was also filled with sadness that no one had shared such information with my sister and me. We had grown up in just such a violent home. We believed that this was a natural part of family life, that no one would care if we, or our mother, were hurt, and that there was no one who could have helped us anyway. But now, looking at these new curriculum materials, it seemed as if times had changed. Still, despite my generally positive feelings about the materials, I was troubled by the way in which the video represented the student's disclosure of the battery to their teacher. I particularly wanted to discuss this aspect of the curriculum package further in my paper.

Urged by our social studies professor to discuss our planned projects before writing our papers, I made a few notes and visited her office. As soon as I mentioned the topic of my paper, her expression clouded. She grew hesitant, and said that she would "have to check if it was O.K." to write about this issue, and that she would get back to me. It is important to note that I had not planned to actually *teach* about the topic of violence against women. We had only been instructed to *write* about social studies resources that were available to Bachelor of Education students in the university library. One week passed and then two, and as I sat in class I realized that I would not hear back from my professor about whether or not it was alright to write on this topic.

So, I went back to the library, selected blander curriculum materials that were almost twenty years old, and again visited my professor in her office with a new bunch of ideas. This time her face brightened when I suggested different topics. I decided not to make waves: I did not write about how to create pedagogical spaces where children who had witnessed violence against women could learn basic information on safety, and develop an awareness of healthy relationships and personal boundaries. At the end of the semester, despite receiving an "A+" for the course, I felt betrayed by the professor, and was upset that I could be so easily dissuaded from following my principles. I wondered if I would ever have the guts to teach in such a way as to acknowledge and bear witness to the violence that rips through so many young students' lives.

The curricular silencing I experienced during my Bachelor of Education program, worked to undermine and repress my self-knowledge. Once again I felt the old familiar shame flood back; secrecy and silence were the best means of navigating this new educational context. Once again I had been signaled to keep this embodied knowledge, which has so fundamentally shaped my life and my personal sense of being, to myself.

### A bystander pedagogy

Was I, a neophyte educator, too wrapped up in my personal trauma, rather than our culture's collective trauma? There are those who would believe that teaching about violence against women and children would automatically turn the classroom into a therapeutic space, an inappropriate venue for the expression of personal grief and anger. However, I am not espousing the idea that a classroom should be a purely therapeutic space. Rather, I intend to think about ways of creating a space where students can begin to question and resist normative discourses that foster violence against women. In this context, the classroom would be a place in which to work towards social justice. This work is, of course, quite definitely political in its intent.

To say that such social justice work has no place in a classroom is to nourish the violence of the abusers, and to rationalize the acts of the perpetrators of abuse and incest, making the classroom itself a site of further violence (Edgerton, 2001). By refusing to name this violence and abuse, a patriarchal curriculum increases the collective trauma, and forces the embodied knowledge of generations of women and children underground. When students are forced to bury their experiences of trauma in order that they might "fit in," they must sever their emotions from their intellect. As a result, such students become what Daly (1998) calls "crippled human beings" (p. 148). For generations, the curricular rituals of public educational institutions have worked to suppress any acknowledgement of survivors' experience, knowledge, and history.

When I was in my Bachelor of Education program, the only instruction we received on child sexual abuse was designed to protect us, a class of future teachers, from potential lawsuits. Indeed, this aspect of the curriculum was taught by a professor, a lawyer, whose area of specialization was education and the law. We were taught how and when to report suspected sexual abuse in a manner that would not infringe upon any regulations or laws. We were also taught how to avoid any allegations of child sexual abuse that might arise from the ways that we dealt with our students. But we were not taught how to identify sexual abuse, or how to live and work with students who had been sexually abused.

Very few programs and resources have been developed to educate teachers and parents about the nature and effects of child sexual abuse. Rather,

the focus is on self-help—teaching children to come forward and disclose abuse. Paradoxically, in continuing to concentrate on teaching children to speak up on their own behalf, educators and designers of curriculum materials place the onus for disclosure of sexual abuse and self-protection onto the abused child (Heineman, 1998). This is clearly problematic as children who have been sexually abused may have a heightened sense of fear and distrust of adults. They may not even realize that what is happening to them is sexual abuse (Travers, 1999). They may also have learned to survive through the processes of denial and dissociation, and by passing as “normal” in order that the abuse may remain undetected (Danica, 1996; Heineman, 1998). Children know that they live in a world where they have less power than adults, both in school and at home. Being highly attuned to the power relationships that exist between them and the adults who surround them, sexually abused children often actively resist disclosure. They hide and suppress any experiences and feelings that they feel will “too greatly disturb their images of themselves, their parents, and the parent-child relationship” (Heineman, 1998, p.91).

Of course, listening to the children we teach and care for is a key factor in the prevention of child abuse, as is teaching them about sex education, including sexual abuse. But educators also need to develop an awareness of the state of captivity in which many sexually abused children live, and be cognizant of the huge pressure the parents, one of whom may be the abuser, may put on the child to recant (Salter, 1995). Indeed, abused children are exquisitely aware of the danger they may be in if they choose to disclose abuse.

Children should *not* be in the business of reporting sexual or physical abuse. For children in this miserable situation—of having to explain to one or several adults that they have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused—the world has gone terribly, terribly wrong. (Heineman, 1998, p. 93)

Like many girls at school and almost all victims of childhood sexual abuse, I was clearly a submissive learner. I sacrificed my needs and silenced my voice, in order to serve and please the teacher, and to “pass” in order to maintain secrecy and hide my shame. James MacDonald (in MacDonald (Ed.), 1995) describes a student’s experience of the coercive nature of everyday school activities:

The exercise of unequal power, the use of praise or blame in group settings, and the judgmental aura of the school activity clearly communicate that the personal meanings of the person are not legitimate for common sharing with others. Further, the expression of personal meaning under these circumstances involves high risk on the part of the student. (p. 119)

In this kind of pedagogical climate, the relatively powerless student will certainly be disinclined to discuss disturbing topics, such as violence and abuse, no matter how great their personal import.

Despite the mistaken but widespread notion that children will simply disclose abuse to trusted adults in authority, such as teachers, most children reach adulthood with the secrets of their abuse intact. Still, many adult survivors of child sexual abuse continue to believe that school may be the “only realistic intervention point” for sexually abused children (Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989, p. 70). However, as I have highlighted above, the obstacles to disclosure are many.

The kinds of discussions that need to take place in our teacher education programs and schools are not taking place. Our teacher education programs do not adequately instruct pre-service teachers about the pervasiveness and nature of sexual abuse, and the devastating effects of abuse on the children with whom we work. Rather, neophyte teachers are schooled in the ways of the law in order that they might protect their future professional status. There is little discussion of their responsibility as teachers to their students beyond the minimal requirements of reporting suspected abuse to social services. There is also a fear of even examining available curriculum materials and exploring possible pedagogical approaches to this topic within the relative safety of a Bachelor of Education program. Unfortunately, this unquestioning acceptance of the curricular canon, in which social norms and values are connected, virtually ensures the replication and validation of violence against women and children.

In short, student teachers are *trained* to be bystanders, to side with perpetrators of trauma, rather than become advocates for victims of trauma. Judith Herman (1992) writes:

[W]hen . . . traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides. It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He speaks to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering. (pp. 7–8)

The desire of educators, in schools and in teacher education programs, to not know—to see, hear, and speak no evil—is the futile desire to remain a bystander, to remain morally neutral. It is a refusal to bear witness to children’s suffering, and to assume any collective responsibility at all for restoring justice. This refusal to bear witness can be seen in teachers’ fears of embracing conflict in the hope of social change. It can be seen in their refusal to engage deeply with pedagogical practices that explore and work toward ending violence against women and children.

This refusal to bear witness to children who have been sexually abused is not new. Perhaps Freud is the most notorious example of a professional who refused to bear witness to the suffering of his own patients (Herman,

1981). Feminist analyses go some way to understanding the silences of professionals: Often it is left to those who have survived childhood sexual abuse to claim their right to theorize their experiences, and to provide such analyses for others (Daly, 1998). In so doing, survivors are breaking the ultimate taboo—that of speaking of childhood sexual abuse.

As I discovered, the problem for survivors of childhood sexual abuse who are also educators is how to speak up and yet still belong. Many teachers, student teachers, teacher educators and curriculum theorists number in the ranks of those who were abused as children. So our refusal to bear witness to children who have been sexually abused is also a refusal to bear witness to our own selves, to the children we once were.

### Soul murder: A pedagogy of violence

I began my paper by stating that millions of North American children are growing up witnessing violence against women, and being sexually and physically abused. This is not mere hyperbole. It is perhaps a natural reaction for educators, especially those who have had no personal experience of family violence or of sexual abuse, to not be able to imagine that the sexual abuse of children and violence against women is so prevalent. (“This couldn’t be happening to so many of my students,” is a common reaction.) But the sexual abuse of children and “domestic” violence against women are largely invisible crimes. My head always swims while I read statistics on the sexual abuse of children, and violence against women. They are simply overwhelming, obscene.

It is estimated that 1 in 5 children are sexually abused (Sanderson, 1995). Approximately 1 in every 3 or 4 girls are sexually abused (Sanderson, 1995; Adams, 1994; Lewis, 1999), and between 1 in 5 or 7 boys are sexually abused (Adams, 1994; Mendel, 1995; Lewis, 1999). Recent statistics on violence against women are also appalling. About half of all women have been victims of rape or attempted rape, and about half of all women who had ever been married or lived in common law relationships reported that their previous partners had assaulted them (Carter, 1999).

The reporting rate for sexual assaults on children is extremely low. Only between 2 to 6% of cases are reported (Lewis, 1999). It is no wonder as in 98% of cases the perpetrator of the sexual abuse comes from within the family (Sanderson, 1995), and children often find little support from the non-offending parent. After the disclosure of a daughter’s sexual abuse by her father, one half of non-offending mothers responded protectively; one quarter of non-offending mothers responded with disbelief, or did nothing; and one quarter of non-offending mothers rejected their daughters (Strand, 2000). So children have a great deal to lose if they do report abuse to an adult.

There are yet further obstacles to reporting abuse. More than 90% child sexual abusers are male (Sanderson, 1995), but the psychiatric profession is almost completely male dominated; 97% of psychiatrists are male (Lewis, 1999). Also, 86% of all childhood sexual abuse survivors suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Carter, 1999, p. 8). This further compounds the difficulties they may have in reporting sexual abuse. Approximately 60% of sexual abuse survivors have had episodes of amnesia concerning the abuse (Salter, 1995; Mendel, 1995), and more than one third of women are amnesiac about childhood sexual abuse in cases that required hospitalization (Mendel, 1995).

Although the sexual abuse of children is a largely invisible crime, it is a truly devastating one. Educators must grasp that the impact of childhood sexual abuse extends far beyond the minutes or hours or days in which the acts of abuse take place. The sexual abuse of children creates a shadow of trauma over a victim's life that remains well into adulthood. Indeed, the sexual abuse of children is such an extreme form of violence it has been described as "Soul Murder" (Shengold, cited by Jacobs, 1994, p.55).

Soul Murder is neither a diagnosis nor a condition. It is a dramatic term for a circumstance that eventuates in crime—the deliberate attempt to eradicate or compromise the separate identity of another person. The victims of soul murder remain in large part possessed by another, their souls in bondage to someone else. (Shengold, cited by Jacobs, 1994, p. 55)

In short, childhood sexual abuse is a crime in which the victim loses her self.<sup>1</sup> Although the victim may not be killed, the perpetrator brings about her psychological death (Adams, 1994). The usual comprehensive definitions of child sexual abuse cannot begin to describe the true nature of the violence and the devastating long-term consequences of the pain and suffering that the perpetrator inflicts upon the child. This suffering does not end after the disclosure of the abuse. Indeed, depending on the victim's circumstances it may even intensify (Ainscough & Toon, 1993; Carter, 1999; Herman, 1992; Hooper, 1992; Martens & Daily, 1988; Salter, 1995; Strand, 2000).

Hooper (1992) describes childhood sexual abuse as the exploitation of a power relationship over children for the sexual gratification of an adult or significantly older child (p. 72). Hooper (citing Glaser & Frosch, 1992) continues:

[T]his pertains whether or not this activity involves explicit coercion by any means, whether or not it involves genital or physical contact, whether or not initiated by the child, and whether or not there is discernible harmful outcome in the short term. (p. 72)

Clearly, as minors, children are in no position to give their informed consent to any sexual activities with adults. And, as Herman (1981) points out, given the tacitly coercive or violent contexts in which sexual abuse occurs, neither are children in a position to *refuse* consent. What is clear is that sexu-

ally abused children are “intentionally chosen and deliberately hurt” (Heineman, 1998, p. 7).

Most children who are sexually abused do not in fact describe what they have experienced as “sex” (Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989). Rather it is experienced as violence, and a betrayal of the sacred trust between adult (often the child’s parent) and the child. From a feminist perspective, this violence is only comprehensible with an understanding of how the differences in power between men, women and children are played out not only within the “public” institutions of our culture, but also within the “private” realm of the family. It is the pervasive dominance of men over women, and adults over children, in our patriarchal economic, legal, medical, educational, and religious institutions that makes possible and sustains such continued widespread violence against women and children (Carter, 1999; Danica, 1996; Doane & Hodges, 2001; Herman, 1981; Herman, 1992; Hooper, 1992; Jacobs, 1994; Langlois, 1997; Lewis, 1999; Mendel, 1995; Sanderson, 1995; Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989; Strand, 2000). Thus, any study of the nature and effects of the sexual abuse of children and violence against women is “legitimate only in a context that challenges the subordination of women and children” (Herman, 1992, p. 9). Judith Herman’s (1992) groundbreaking work on trauma is developed from just such a feminist perspective. Her research has been so influential to feminist scholars, and medical and legal professionals working in the field of child sexual abuse that I will outline the most important of her ideas here.

### Trauma: Pedagogy of captivity

Herman’s (1992) work examines the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse on a survivor, effects that will usually be felt well into adulthood and throughout a survivor’s whole life. The long-term suffering of survivors is not insignificant: the levels of trauma and subsequent post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by those who have been sexually abused in childhood are similar in kind and degree to the trauma experienced by those who have survived acts of genocide, war combat, internment in concentration camps, political imprisonment, and torture (Herman, 1992). However, given the masculinist culture of all our important institutions—medical, legal, educational, etc.—it is not surprising that the trauma suffered by women and children in sexual and domestic life is greatly minimized. Indeed, the minimization and trivialization of the pervasiveness and devastating effects of sexual abuse, as well as the continued promulgation of limited legal definitions of what constitutes sexual abuse, function to undergird and to further the violence of the masculinist culture itself.

There is a widespread tacit acceptance of the sexual, physical and emotional abuse of children (all children, but especially girls), as well as the

battery, assault and rape of women in our culture. The number of children—the majority of them girls—who are sexually abused is phenomenally high, while the number of perpetrators—mostly men—who are criminally prosecuted and punished for such crimes is phenomenally low.

Herman (1992) describes psychological trauma as “an affliction of the powerless” (p. 33). She writes:

Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning. It was once believed that such events were uncommon. In 1980, when post-traumatic stress disorder was first included in the diagnostic manual, the American Psychiatric Association described traumatic events as “outside the range of usual experience.” Sadly, this definition has proved to be inaccurate. Rape, battery, and other forms of sexual and domestic violence are so common a part of women’s lives that they can hardly be described as outside the range of ordinary experience. (p. 33)

Trauma occurs in situations where the victim feels utterly helpless and powerless to control events, and where she feels a “threat of annihilation” (p. 33). Traumatic experiences, such as childhood sexual abuse and the battery of women within the institution of marriage, destroy the victim’s sense of human dignity, selfhood and bodily integrity. Repeated and continuous exposure to such violence and trauma over time (as is often the case of child abuse and domestic violence, as opposed to the trauma suffered in a car accident or natural disaster) increases the degree of post-traumatic stress disorder that the victim will suffer later in life (Herman, 1992).

Thereafter, the victim, faced with her own helplessness in the face of cruelty and violence experienced over an extended period of time, is left with a sense of alienation, shame, and guilt, and also an inability to name their experience and make sense of these past violent acts (Carter, 1999; Danica, 1996; Doane & Hodges, 2001; Herman, 1981; Herman, 1992; Hooper, 1992; Jacobs, 1994; Lewis, 1999; Mendel, 1995; Sanderson, 1995; Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989; Strand, 2000).

After experiencing childhood sexual abuse, twenty years later 80% of female survivors are still searching for a way to make sense of their experiences; 50% of female survivors can make no sense of their experiences at all. (Salter, 1995, p. 207)

Lacking an adequate language for her experience, feeling cut off from others, and burdened with the crippling emotions of shame, guilt, and inferiority, the survivor must live on as best she can with the distressing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

However, the effects of trauma are not limited to the destruction of a victim’s sense of self. Tragically, the experience of trauma tears apart the victim’s “systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community” (Herman, 1992, p. 51).

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. (p. 51)

This tearing apart of the victim's systems of attachment, the breaching of the bonds of family, friendship, love and community, is not just a consequence of having lived through a traumatic event. Indeed, in order for a perpetrator to commit acts of violence and terror over time, he must *first* sever his victim's attachments and bonds to other human beings. In other words, breaking the victim's human attachments and bonds is a *prerequisite* to the battery of women and the sexual abuse of children. Herman (1992) calls this breaking of human bonds in order to create a situation in which prolonged and repeated trauma occurs "captivity" (p. 74).

According to Herman (1992), captivity describes a situation in which the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in his victim's life.

A single traumatic event can occur almost anywhere. Prolonged, repeated trauma, by contrast, occurs only in circumstances of captivity. When the prisoner is free to escape, she will not be abused a second time; repeated trauma occurs only when the victim is a prisoner, unable to flee, and under the control of the perpetrator. (p. 74)

Political prisoners and prisoners of war in internment camps, victims of torture, hostages, and those who have survived concentration camps have experienced this kind of captivity. It may also be experienced by members of religious cults, the sex trade, and the porn industry. And, Herman claims, by great numbers of women and children who live with violence and sexual abuse within their families.

Of course, the powerful, dominant socio-cultural mythologies of the loving, nuclear family work against widespread public recognition and acknowledgement of the oppressive nature of many women and children's experiences of violence and abuse within the home. Further, the absence of any of the visible trappings of captivity—high walls, armed guards, etc.—mean that the invisible chains of captive women and children often go unnoticed.

In most homes, even the most oppressive, there are no bars on the windows, no barbed wire fences. Women and children are not ordinarily chained, though even this occurs more often than one might think. The barriers to escape are generally invisible. They are nonetheless extremely powerful. Children are rendered captive by their condition of dependency. Women are rendered captive by economic, social, psychological, and legal subordination, as well as by physical force. (Herman, 1992, p. 74)

What keeps women and children in a state of helplessness and psychological captivity, however, is what keeps other types of captive people, such as political prisoners and hostages, psychologically captive. In all cases of

captivity the perpetrator acts coercively, tyrannically and capriciously; he isolates, humiliates and terrorizes the victim; he destroys the victim's autonomy by controlling as many aspects of the victim's daily life and bodily functions as possible (including eating, sleeping, washing, dressing); he threatens the victim with death or serious physical harm in order to create a sense of disempowerment; and, limits and controls the victim's contact with other human beings in order to create a sense of disconnection. Even those who actively and forcefully resist such methods of control ultimately break under extreme duress (Herman, 1992).

### Misogyny: A pedagogy of (self) hatred

One of the most devastating aspects of the sexual abuse of daughters by fathers is the destruction of the mother-daughter bond.<sup>2</sup> The mother-daughter relationship is "the primary parental attachment that underlies psychosocial development and the construction of the female self" (Jacobs, 1994, p. 15). The mother may feel rage, hostility, mistrust, anger, resentment and jealousy at being "replaced" by her daughter. She may feel guilt, shame and grief because of her inability or unwillingness to intervene in the sexual abuse. Unable to face the reality of her life, and fearful of the husband, her "captor," the mother's negative emotions are often directed at the victimized daughter (Ashley, 1992; Martens & Daily; 1988). At the time when the daughter needs the benevolence of her mother the most, she may find herself alone. The captive daughter, powerless to break the cycle of abuse by the father on her own, must also contend with the loss of the intimate mother-daughter relationship.

Under conditions of repeated abuse the daughter often responds to the mother by rejecting her completely. Instead, she identifies with her abuser, the one person who gives her attention and shows her any kind of "love" (Herman, 1992; Jacobs, 1994). Thus, the daughter's sense of identity, femininity and sexuality develops in a climate of male violence and control that is characterized by a hatred of females (Jacobs, 1994). In her study of incest victims, Herman (cited by Jacobs, 1994) found that:

With the exception of those who had become conscious feminists, most of the incest victims seemed to regard all women, including themselves, with contempt. (p. 15)

Paradoxically, although it is the father who perpetrates the abuse, the daughter grows to mistrust and hate women. She also develops a masochistic sense of femininity in which her needs and desires are subjugated to the needs and desires of males, and in which love is equated with suffering (Jacobs, 1994). Thus, the sexual abuse of girls functions as a violent and deeply misogynistic, patriarchal pedagogy.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the concept of discipline is used to describe the “form of social power which regulates everyday life by working on the body” (Lewis, 1999, p. 35). An individual’s body is constantly manipulated and trained, until it responds and performs in ways that reflect her social positioning. Griffin (1992) calls this process the creation of a “second body,” which “almost like a suit of clothes, exists as an outer layer to the natural body of birth” (p. 192). By the time a sexually abused girl has become a woman, she has already fully internalized and embodied the masculinist, misogynistic beliefs of the broader culture, and may remain “captive” for life. Perhaps her second body is more of a straitjacket than a suit of clothes. How is such a girl supposed to engage with normative curricular practices at school that work to yet further restrain and constrict her embodied sense of intellectual freedom and growth?

### The abusers’ rituals: A pedagogy of control

Methods of breaking and controlling human beings, of rendering people captive, are remarkably consistent no matter what the context of the victim’s captivity may be (see Walker, cited by Herman, 1992, p. 76). In fact, “professional captors” such as interrogators and pimps use the same methods in an organized manner. What I find most chilling, however, is Herman’s (1992) assertion that in cases of the battery of women and the sexual abuse of children, the perpetrator employs exactly the same coercive techniques as the “professionals.”

Even in domestic situations, where the batterer is not part of any larger organization and has had no formal instruction in these techniques, he seems time and again to reinvent them. (Herman, 1992, p. 76)

Such consistent behaviour on the part of captors towards their prey may be understood within the framework of ritual. As in ritual, the captor follows similar patterns and routines from one context to another, but each captor embellishes and improvises on the themes: isolation, terror, control, humiliation, disempowerment, disconnection, and so forth. The captor’s ritualized behaviour acts as a “technology of transformation” (Driver, 1998, p. 47), a phenomenally powerful, embodied, politically and ethically charged practice that establishes social order, and changes relationships with the wider community of living beings. As such, it is, of course, a form of pedagogical practice.

Ritual, as a form of pedagogical practice, is never ethically or politically neutral. Those rituals that are directed toward harmful, destructive or unethical ends, and are performed for the purpose of decreasing individual and communal harmony, peace and freedom, can have devastatingly powerful and transformative effects. Rituals are not merely passive reflections of

political and ethical practice, they *are* political and ethical practice, simultaneously celebrating that which they constitute in the very act of performance.

Ritual may be employed to create and maintain not only the physical and psychic being of the participants, but also their economic and social status (LaChapelle, 1988). Through the performance of ritual, it is possible to create and maintain structures of violent power. This is achieved by channeling aggression to establish and fuel ruling classes, and by harnessing the awesome processes of brutality and colonization to conquer, dominate, domesticate and devour the Other, whether that Other be a culture, an ethnic group, a social minority, or a single human being.

The ritual world is a personal one, not the impersonal realm postulated by science. It is a world in which personal agents direct their interactive performances toward the reordering of social relationships. . . . Since the transformative potential of rituals is very high and not always directed toward ethically justifiable ends, it is fearsome. The totalitarian uses of ritual in our own time (and before) have shown that it holds the power to transform people not only into creatures of freedom but also into destructive armies and mass murderers. (Driver, 1998, p. 191)

It is always important to remember that rituals of violence and domination are enacted by people who, even if acting “alone,” always belong to social groups. Such social groupings of people are borne out of shared or imposed, subjective interpretations of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, physical embodiment (such as age, health/illness, dis/ability), and so forth. These groupings, into which individual people are classified and divided, are regulated through the unimaginably complex workings of each culture’s institutions—legal, medical, educational, governmental, religious, scientific, familial, etc.—each of which have their own customary rituals of order, control, and evolution.

Although sexual abuse and incest is thought of as a socially taboo activity that is supposedly discouraged and criminalized, in any ritualized activity, marginal behaviour that would not be permissible outside of the ritual space is tolerated and accepted, encouraged even (Driver, 1998). (For example, Herman (1992) asserts that childhood sexual abuse is not so much prohibited as regulated by our legal systems.) Ritual is a liminal activity, and hence operates not *outside* social norms, but on the chaotic *borders* of social order.

It is important to note here that there is a subtle difference between saying there is widespread *acceptance* of an established ritualized order, in which girls and woman are brutalized, and the widespread *belief* in such an order. Rappaport’s (cited by Driver, 1998) work on the performance of ritual highlights this crucial difference. Here, he explores the finely nuanced difference between “acceptance” and “belief” in those who participate in Church liturgy:

Liturgical orders are public, and participation in them constitutes a public acceptance of a public order, regardless of the private state of belief. Acceptance is, thus, a fundamental social act, and it forms a basis for public orders, which unknowable and volatile belief or conviction cannot. (p. 148)

Rappaport continues . . .

It is an entailment of liturgical performances to establish conventional understandings, rules and norms in accordance with which everyday behaviour is supposed to proceed, not to control that behaviour directly. (p. 148)

Similarly, all of our society's important institutions—educational, academic, medical, familial, etc.—are comprised of complex, interwoven ritualized performances, which establish differential, unequal gender relationships. Participation in such institutional rituals supports a culture in which violence against women and girls is accepted, and becomes a naturalized part of everyday life. To speak out against this “natural” state of affairs—these all too familiar mythologized notions of gender relations—is to risk punishment for disrupting the habitual ritualized performances that sustain our public institutions. No wonder most educators feel a sense of trepidation or inertia when even thinking about how to question and challenge established these curricular norms and practices that function to erase traumatic narratives of physical and sexual violence against women and children.

### Forgetting/remembering

As any musician, athlete, massage therapist, or survivor of trauma will attest:

The body remembers, the bones remember, the joints remember, even the little finger remembers. Memory is lodged in pictures and feelings in the cells themselves. Like a sponge filled with water, anywhere the flesh is pressed, wrung, even touched lightly, a memory may flow out in a stream. (Estes, 1992, p. 200)

Somatic memory is a powerful but unruly form of recollection. Survivors of trauma, including survivors of childhood sexual abuse, do not remember traumatic events from the past in the same way that they remember other events. Cognitive theory has informed the work of many researchers studying childhood sexual abuse, especially regarding the qualities of traumatic memory.

During traumatic events, memory is encoded in fragments rather than in narrative episodes (Heineman, 1998; Sanderson, 1995).

If, as many argue, . . . memory is state-dependent, then the affective experience of terror will result in the attendant sensory images being stored in the subcortical areas of the brain as a series of “flashbulb” images. Unlike memories that

undergo modification and structuralization as they are processed by the cerebral cortex, these “autobiographical memories” are characterized by a “frozen” quality, as if the sights, sounds, and smells of the original experiences have been seared into the brain exactly as received. These terror-driven memories are viewed as less vulnerable to the distortions that can and do accompany the encoding of narrative memory. (Heineman, 1998, p. 98)

Most survivors of childhood sexual abuse have at some time experienced protective, dissociative and amnesiac states, in which they are mentally “not present” during actual abuse in order to absent themselves from trauma, or in which they block out painful memories of abuse, sometimes for decades (Heineman, 1998; Herman, 1992; Lewis, 1999; Sanderson, 1995). Sleeth and Barnsley (1989) describe these states as a form of “self-estrangement” (p. 112), and frequently, they are described in the literature on childhood sexual abuse as “abnormal” and therefore as a form of pathology (see Herman, 1992, p. 96).

However, Lewis (1999) describes the survivor’s ability to enter dissociative states at will as a highly creative, if not always consciously chosen, response to an extremely difficult situation. Dissociation begins with self-hypnosis and then entry into a trance state, a place of transcendence where the abused child can feel no pain (Herman, 1992; Lewis, 1999).

The survivor experience then is in important ways a mystical one, in that it involves states of consciousness, reported experiences, and visions reported by mystics. . . . In short, survivors are unwilling, uninitiated, unprepared, unschooled mystics. (Culbertson, cited by Lewis, 1999, p. 32)

Although survivors may have successfully blocked out painful memories, everyday sensory experiences can trigger the return of memories of trauma in the form of “flashbacks” many years later. Anything that takes the survivor back to the time of the abuse may trigger a flashback: the smell of a certain cologne; the sight of a blue pick-up truck; the sound of a slamming door. These returning memories are fragmented, powerful, overwhelming, and are relived exactly as they were encoded during the time of the original trauma. In traumatic memories, imagery and bodily sensation flood back, whereas verbal narrative and a sense of the time and duration of the event are missing (Herman, 1992), as is a sense of overall cohesiveness (Heineman, 1998). It is quite likely that the survivor may disbelieve these memories, and even choose to fight them.

Yet, in fighting terrifying memories of trauma, the survivor perpetuates a dualistic way of relating to herself and to the world. She discounts her own bodily experience. The transcendent states of dissociation that enabled her to survive the abuse now work to maintain her sense of disembodiment, preventing her from accessing her full life experience, her emotions, and her feelings—including all her fear, pain, and rage. Sensory perceptions,

especially those that might trigger flashbacks, are pushed to the background of awareness and into a mode of semi-consciousness or unconsciousness. Rather than reconnecting with the body, and thinking through the body, the survivor may view the body as “something to get beyond or dominate” (Downing, 1992, p. 76). Recognizing the difficulty of developing a non/dual relationship to one’s self, a self that fully includes one’s body, Tanya Lewis (1999), a feminist scholar and survivor of childhood sexual abuse, writes:

Reconnecting my body and feelings leaves me with a heightened awareness of the depth of social inscriptions of the body. In my efforts to regain traumatic memory, to integrate body, mind and feeling, and to negotiate my way through the world, I am constantly encountering the edges of what is possible in normative discourses. (p. 96)

Normative discourses of embodiment, gender and race often work against the survivor’s healing process, reinforcing the split between mind and body.

During experiences of sexual abuse, rape, incest or sexual assault, sensations and emotions are inscribed into the body, making it the pedagogical site of a curriculum of gender oppression. For example, in colonizing his daughter’s body a father acts within the institutional frameworks of “family” to inscribe differential gender relationships. The family is, of course, a public institution, regulated and controlled by the state and its members. But whenever a survivor’s embodied trauma is re-experienced, she reconnects with traumatic memories that have not yet undergone the processes of structuralization and modification in the way that non-traumatic memories do. These terrifying flashback memories may at first seem to make no sense.

Usually non-traumatic memory is shaped and developed in community, through shared narrative rehearsals with others. A meaningful world is created by telling and re-telling memory narratives that are brought to life through acts of communal authorship. However, in the family of a sexually abused child (especially when a family member is the abuser), narratives of abuse, isolation, terror, pain, loneliness, and fear are not told and re-told, and shaped through shared familial authorship. The fifth birthday party, learning to ride a bike without training wheels, the family vacation by the sea—these are the memories that are repeatedly shared in oral narratives and recorded in visual narratives in family photo albums. More often than not, the survivor is faced with a wall of secrecy and cold silence about the abuse when interacting with her family. The secrecy and silence are, of course, maintained and reinforced by routine experiences with the everyday school curriculum. The processes of remembering, more often than not, occur in isolation and in a hostile environment.

But as Kundera (cited by Edgerton, 2001) reminds us: Forgetting is a form of death (p. 8). Choosing to not forget, choosing to actively remember, is to choose life. Kundera (cited by Edgerton, 2001) employs the term “organized forgetting” to describe the methodical process of choosing to forget, which is practiced not only by individuals, but also by families and the other diverse public institutions of which societies and nation states are comprised (p. 8). Thus, remembering, and then speaking of personal trauma, can be viewed as a radically political act, an attempt to break icy, normative silences, and to make meaning in support of wider social justice.

### Pedagogy as poetics of peace

The study of childhood trauma, as well as those everyday rituals that comprise and give shape and meaning to family and school life, are much neglected, but clearly important, areas for educators. The exploration of trauma and ritual is necessarily an interdisciplinary endeavour, drawing on fields as diverse as curriculum theory, critical and feminist theory, anthropology, sociology, psychology and cognitive science. The interdisciplinary difficulties of such work, however, must not compromise our search for deeper, more complex understandings of the trauma of childhood sexual abuse, understandings that could spur educational change and facilitate the development of healing and empowering curricula that are oriented towards social justice.

Both preservice and practising teachers require opportunities to develop a greater understanding of childhood sexual abuse, what it is, the trauma it causes, and the lifelong effects of such trauma. Given the horrifying prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and “domestic” violence, it is vital that suitable preservice and professional development programs be developed for, with, and by educators. Just as educators are required to come to the workplace with a good grasp of issues of racial and sexual discrimination, disability rights, and so forth, so must we be provided with (and create opportunities) to examine the ways in which educational institutions—through the practice of everyday regulating and silencing pedagogical rituals—are implicated in furthering the trauma of students who have experienced sexual abuse and violence.

Silence and secrecy are the defining features of childhood sexual abuse, and are often as or more damaging than the abuse itself. Sadly, our classroom practices and curricular canons have tacitly functioned to maintain this silence and secrecy (Daly, 1998). Further, many educators naively trust that their curricular language and practices are always fair, neutral and transparent. They frequently fail to question the ways in which language and pedagogical practices make marginal people invisible, in particular, the ways in which their language and practices silence narratives that run counter to

the normative discourses that underpin childhood sexual abuse and violence against women.

I write that we need “suitable” preservice and professional development programs for educators. But what would such programs look like? Clearly, in dealing with issues of childhood sexual abuse, we are still at the beginning of our own educational journey. Merely “adding on” to existing sex education programs will not suffice; neither will simply urging our students to disclose cases of sexual abuse to their teachers within the hostile, “bystander” culture of school. What is required is a profound shift in the way that educators explore normative pedagogical discourses. We must begin to break silences, entering into dialogue with one another, with professionals from other fields, and with survivors of childhood sexual abuse (as well as their advocates) in order to discover where the problems lie, to formulate new questions and then bring about change. I provide no prescriptive blueprints here for what must, of essence, be a profoundly organic, collective process.

Such a process requires that educators understand the uses and limits of existing curriculum materials, board and ministry training packages, documents and frameworks, forgoing easy, pat answers in order to allow room for curricular growth and innovation. Educators may have to approach their pedagogical practice differently. Rather than seizing, fixing, and defining curricular problems, an altogether different sensibility might prove more useful; one of gentle acceptance of the unknown; one of an opening toward the Other, the sexually abused child. After all, in beginning to explore this area of curriculum, in breaking deathly silences, educators are also breaking long held sociocultural taboos. As survivors of sexual abuse and violence already well know, those who abuse, and those who silently look on or simply turn the other way while abuse occurs, are highly unlikely to support or approve of this kind of work.

Educators may find it helpful to think of this kind of social justice work as a pedagogy of peace. Maxine Hong Kingston’s (2003) work has greatly enriched my understanding of the term “peace.” She writes that peace has to be “supposed, imagined, divined, dreamed” (p.61). Like our ideas of curriculum, peace must be constantly struggled for, reinvented, re-imagined, retold, and reframed, and can only be found in this never-ending reiteration. Its truth lies in its motion. By willingly engaging in a struggle for, a movement towards, a pedagogy of peace, educators refuse to replicate the practices and discourses of silence, violence, terror and trauma that pervade our culture. Insidiously traumatic pedagogical rituals can then begin to give way to rituals of peace. Such a shift in thinking and in doing has great significance for all those who have experienced or witnessed the trauma of violence and sexual abuse.

Simply knowing that I am far from alone as a survivor of sexual abuse is of little comfort to me, or to many other survivors. Sandra Butler (cited by Lewis, 1999) expresses my sentiments when she asks:

[H]ow do we bear what we know? How do you bear all the ways you are hated, all the ways you are treated with contempt, all of the ways your life is less than it should have been? How do you feel that? (p. 77)

For survivors, these are crucial questions. For a long time, I had no answers. Gradually, I have come to realize that what helps me bear what I know, the ways I have been hated and treated with contempt, is the making of meaning. "Language is a place of struggle," writes bell hooks (1990, p. 146). "Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance." (p. 146)

For a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, this statement provokes new questions. How can mere words describe one's traumatic experience?

How does one translate a language that is neither written nor spoken, especially considering that translation can itself be a tool for domination, or can simply be a dull and coarse substitute for what is translated? (Edgerton, 2001, p. 4)

In attempting to translate a language of violence, an embodied language of hatred, rage and fear, into a written text, I am forced to dig through the rotten, corporeal debris of my childhood. I must face the self-knowledge that was rejected, the painful clues that were denied, and the disgusting secrets were hidden in order to turn psychic detritus into compost, "the 'prima materia' from which all real growth comes" (Harvey, in Brussat & Brussat, eds., 1996, p. 435).

Even though in speaking publicly I may invite stigma and risk my credibility as a scholar (see Herman, 1992), the need to make sense of my experiences—experiences shared by so many others—drives me on. The processes of meaning making can only take place in community, however. Within the familial community of most victims of childhood sexual abuse, there is no language for the abuse. Most abused young children assume guilt for the situation, and blame themselves for what happened, living without a language to describe their circumstances.

[T]his is how child abuse continues to exist; by not telling our stories when it is finally safe to do so, we allow child abuse to continue in our families and in our communities. Silence literally kills. It kills us first, and goes on to destroy those around us. Our silence protects, not ourselves, but the abusers. (Danica, 1996, p. 137)

It is personally *and* collectively healing for survivors of childhood sexual abuse to speak their stories, to bring structure and meaning to that which seems meaningless and bereft of hope, thereby risking growth and change. The weaving of story is not merely a salve for those who need to "get things

of their chest.” It is so much more than a temporary emotional balm. “Forgotten” memories, whether they are personal or collective memories, are weapons. Griffin (1992) believes that these weapons may detonate now, or many generations in the future, causing suffering and devastation to our children.

In attempting to create meaningful narratives, to give shape and sense to constantly surfacing memories, a survivor is challenged to “become a theologian, a philosopher, and a jurist” (Herman, 1992, p. 178). And, I would add, a pedagogue. In struggling to articulate a language that can give meaning to the trauma of childhood sexual abuse, survivors begin to reconnect with their embodied experiences, thereby breaking down the duality of body and mind, and re-embodimenting their intellect. In seeking to give voice to the fullness of their lived experience, they can—we can—perhaps also move to a space beyond the further limiting duality of victim and survivor. Together, in community, survivors and educators can—indeed, they must—find ways to challenge the curricular and pedagogical silences and secrecy that so nurture the sexual abuse of children and violence against women.

Clearly, this search for meaning is a hermeneutical process that connects heart and mind. More than a pedagogy of peace, it is pedagogy as *a poetics* of peace. By considering pedagogy as a poetics of peace, educators finally have answers to Butler’s (cited by Lewis, 1999) questions: How do we bear what we know? How do you bear all the ways you are hated, all the ways you are treated with contempt (p. 77)?

[W]orks of art make the overwhelming experience of trauma, suffering, bodily pain, and the inevitability of death bearable, and so, render them partially comprehensible. (DeSalvo, 1997, p. 80)

By re-imagining pedagogy as a poetics of peace, we—educators and students, including those who have been sexually abused—can begin to befriend our estranged selves through meaning making. Such a practice can help us overcome our sense of loneliness, separation, and division. Those who write of peace must first know devastation, declares Kingston (2003). Survivors of childhood violence and sexual abuse bear both wounds and hidden gifts for our society. For they—we—do indeed know devastation.

## Endnotes

1. I use the feminine pronoun here and throughout the text primarily as a matter of convenience. Far greater numbers of women and girls are victims of violence and sexual abuse. However, as the above statistics on childhood sexual abuse so clearly show, boys—although not victimized in such great numbers as girls—are also sexually abused in childhood. The traumatic effects of abuse are just as devastating for boys as for girls.
2. The dynamics of the sexually abused child-father-mother relationships are thoroughly documented in the literature on sexual abuse (Ainscough & Toon, 1993;

Ashley, 1992; Carter, 1999; Daly, 1998; Danica, 1996; Downing, 1992; Herman, 1981; Herman, 1992; Hooper, 1992; Jacobs, 1994; Langlois, 1997; Lewis, 1999; Martens & Daily, 1988; Renvoize, 1993; Salter, 1995; Sanderson, 1995; Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989; Strand, 2000; Travers, 1999).

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