



Universitat de Lleida

**ELLY DANICA'S *DON'T*: A WOMAN'S WORD
AND STORYTELLING ON YOUTUBE:
TRAUMA NARRATIVES & VICTIM'S IDENTITY**

Treball de Final de Grau

2020-2021

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Table of contents

1	Introduction	5
2	Theoretical Framework.....	5
2.1	Autobiography: genre	7
2.1.1	Identity and experience	8
2.1.2	Reliable unreliability	9
2.2	Trauma narratives.....	10
2.2.1	Scriptotherapy	11
2.2.2	Cathartic writing	12
2.3	Trauma and religion.....	14
2.4	Social change	15
2.4.1	Performativity, gender and identity.....	15
2.5	Feminist media theory	17
2.6	Dominance and empowerment.....	18
3	Procedure and methodology	19
4	Analytical framework	20
4.1	Narrative elements.....	20
4.1.1	Theme.....	21
4.1.2	Time and setting.....	22
4.1.3	Personal life	23
4.1.4	Turning point	26
4.2	Linguistic features.....	27
4.2.1	Style	27
4.2.2	Tone.....	29
4.2.3	Diction.....	30
4.3	Conceptual meaning.....	34
4.4	Literary devices.....	38
5	Conclusion	40
6	References	42

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to draw a comparison between a literary piece and a YouTube video to see how the identity of a victim is constructed in different types of media. With this purpose in mind, I am going to analyze *Don't: A Woman's World*, an autobiographical novel written by Elly Danica in 1988, and a YouTube video titled "Sexually Abused by Father at Age 14" published by Nioka Smith in 2018. This comparative study consists of a mixed analysis in which linguistic, narrative and literary features are considered to depict how trauma narratives construct a victim's identity. The findings aspire to bring insight into how traumatic experiences are depicted in different formats, bearing in mind both cultural and media restrictions. Moreover, through a feminist lens, this thesis pretends to see how females use these cathartic writings to empower themselves and vindicate their rights despite the implications that may come with it.

Keywords: cathartic writing, feminism, identity, trauma narratives.

Resum

L'objectiu d'aquest projecte és marcar diferències entre una peça literària i un vídeo de YouTube. Per aquest propòsit, s'ha dut a terme un anàlisi de *Don't: A Woman's Word*, una novel·la autobiogràfica escrita per Elly Danica al 1988 i "Sexually Abused by Father at Age 14" un vídeo de YouTube publicat per Nioka Smith l'any 2018. Aquest estudi consisteix en l'anàlisi d'elements narratius, lingüístics i literaris amb la intenció d'entendre com les narratives de trauma revelen la identitat d'una víctima. L'anàlisi desitja aportar llum sobre com les experiències traumàtiques són reflectides, i com les identitats es

construeixen en diferents formats tenint en compte les restriccions d'ambdós. A més a més, aquest estudi pretén veure com les dones utilitzen aquest tipus d'escriptura catàrtica per empoderar-se i vindicar els seus drets tot i les possibles conseqüències que això les pot portar.

Paraules clau: escriptura catàrtica, feminisme, identitat, narratives de trauma.

Resumen

El objetivo de estudio es marcar diferencias entre una pieza literaria y un video de YouTube. Con este propósito, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis comparativo entre *Don't: A Woman's Word*, una novela autobiográfica escrita por Elly Danica en 1988 y "Sexually Abused by Father at Age 14" un video de YouTube publicado por Nioka Smith en el año 2018. Este estudio consiste en el análisis de elementos narrativos, lingüísticos y literarios con la intención de revelar como las narrativas de trauma construyen la identidad de una víctima. El análisis pretende aportar luz sobre como las experiencias traumáticas son reflejadas en narraciones de trauma, y como la identidad de una víctima se construye en diferentes formatos teniendo en cuenta las posibles restricciones que estos pueden suponer. Además, este proyecto quiere ver como las mujeres usan estén tipo de escritura catártica para empoderarse i vindicar sus derechos a pesar de las consecuencias que esto les puede llevar.

Palabras clave: escritura catártica, feminismo, identidad, narratives de trauma.

1 Introduction

Trauma narratives are heart-wrenching texts that belong to the autobiography field and can offer individuals, who have endured extreme situations, some degree of cathartic relief. Autobiographies have a long tradition in literature; however, over the past decades there has been a change in the trend. In the recent years, the world has undergone a series of social changes fueled by feminist movements that have offered women the chance to fight for their rights. One of the ways to empower themselves was by means of autobiographical storytelling. The aim of this thesis is to analyze underlying identity in trauma narratives in order to understand how the identity of a victim is constructed. Moreover, the analysis hopes to bring light into how women fight against male supremacist views and subdue the socially established performativity of gender. Although many scholars have focused on the study of identity, there is a research gap on the way these narratives are presented in social media, and how they might differ from traditional ways of representing what - be specific?. This thesis offers a comparative analysis to highlight similarities and differences that arise from the format variation. It begins by discussing the different aspects that autobiographical texts entail in relation with trauma experience and feminist theory. It then analyzes narrative elements with the purpose of disclosing inherent identity within the texts. Thereafter, a transitivity analysis is conducted so as to find relational processes that portray the victim's identity and ideology. Finally, this thesis examines the literary devices to better understand the meaning that might be underlying beneath the surface level of the texts.

2 Theoretical Framework

Preliminary work in this field focused primarily on the way language constructed narratives in different genres; one of those being the autobiography. There is a vast amount of

literature studies on different texts, but little is known with regard to the construction of women's identity and the various ways women have used and continue to use to narrate their traumatic life experiences and vindicate their rights, especially with the rapid growth of technology in the 21st century. Having said this, in the recent years, there has been a growing interest in women's studies, specifically, in how women have fought for their place under the spotlight, thereby giving voice to the unheard.

Back in 1996, referring to female oppression, Elly Danica said that "unless there is a major groundswell of women's and children's stories that are taken seriously in all sectors of society, I can't see how we will make any progress defeating the excesses of patriarchy and all that this means in women's lives" (quoted in *The Toast*, 2014). Luckily, many attempts have been made with the purpose of overcoming such tyranny, although there is still a long way to go (Eagleton, 2010, 2014; Katrak, 2006; Rooney, 2006). Moreover, Smith and Watson (2010) argue that "the cultural meanings assigned to particular bodies affect the kinds of stories people can tell. (...) For instance, respectable middle-class women up through the nineteenth century could not, and would not, tell explicitly sexual stories about their bodies because the cultural meanings assigned to those bodies had to do with myths of the corrupt nature of female sexuality" (p. 51). Unfortunately, this is still a very sensitive topic today, and many women feel embarrassed and endeavor to tell their stories about sexual abuse.

Elly Danica was one of the pioneers in the defense of women and children's rights with the production of autobiographical novel depicting how victims of sexual abuse live and deal with traumatic experiences. In order to examine how the identity of a victim is constructed, I shall first explain what the autobiographical genre entails.

2.1 Autobiography: genre

Although the origins of autobiography can be tracked back to antiquity, it was not until the 1800s that the term was first coined. An autobiographical text is understood as a first-person account of reality, therefore, non-fictional and truthful. As a genre, autobiography has raised great dispute among scholars who have defined it due to the multidisciplinary nature of the genre (Gilmore, 1994). Today, many texts that would not have been considered autobiographical decades ago are contemplated for study in the world of autobiography. This is mainly because of a deep misconception of the genre due to an established pattern marked by traditional studies (Gilmore, 1994). In the classical sphere, autobiographies were mainly written by white, seemingly heterosexual, upper class men (Gilmore, 1994). This left no room for minorities to make their voice heard. Indeed, Gilmore claims that such notion perpetuates and “maintains identity hierarchies through its reproduction of class, sexuality, race, and gender as terms of difference in a social field of power (p. 2). Thus, individuals who did not conform to societal standards had less chances of seeing their works published. Another scholar who has written about the problematic nature of autobiography is Elbaz (1983) who draws our attention to what seems to be the biggest incongruity with autobiographies, and opens the door for other scholars to question its character. Elbaz explains that:

Autobiography, it is held, purports to represent a “truth” about a given reality (through its duplication), while fiction does not. It will be argued, however, that through the processes of mediation (by linguistic reality), and suspension (due to the text's lack of finality and completion), autobiography can only be a fiction. Indeed autobiography is fiction and fiction is autobiography: both are narrative arrangements of reality (p. 197).

It can be said then that an autobiographical piece should be analyzed through a critical lens, and, although they are supposed to represent reality, reality is subjective and the

discourse can be adapted to suit one's needs. Moreover, Gilmore (1994) claims that "the point for the critics and autobiographers represented here lies in the potential for reconfigurations of autobiographical identity in relation to a variety of discourses rather than in further inspecting autobiography's relation to the real" (p. 3). In other words, the issue at stake is the kind of discourse adopted to display a specific identity and to explain a reality of a situation that can be perverted and used with ideological purposes for other means.

2.1.1 Identity and experience

One of the key factors in one's construction of identity is experience. Smith and Watson (2010) define experience as the "very process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject owning certain identities in the social realm, identities constructed through material, cultural, economic and psychic relations" (p. 31). To put it another way, experience and identity are heavily intertwined and one could not be constructed without the other. Another factor that plays a great role in the development of someone's identity is language. Language affects the way we perceive ourselves and the world. This is called linguistic relativity (Whorf, 1956). Theory on linguistic relativity explains how language influences the way we think. Since languages have limited meaning-making devices, speakers of a certain language might not utter the same speech when describing the same situation. Moreover, Shacter (1996) highlights that our memories change over time. Indeed, the image I have in mind of how my 18th birthday party was is very much different from how it actually was because "securing the authority of some experiences is a tricky rhetorical process of speaking credibly and ethically about a dehumanizing and self-alienating past" (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 35). Remembering our pasts can be a tricky exercise that not everyone can endure, especially if one has undergone some type of

trauma in their childhood or teenage years. Some victims of abuse suppress sections of memory as a way of survival. These subdued happenings can materialize in flashbacks or mental illnesses that make the process of remembering quite tortuous. Moreover, critics explain that experiencing trauma at a very young age produces a sort of psychic chaos that compromises the brain's ability to construct one's identity (Zuk & Wetmore, 1993).

Furthermore, autobiographical subjects "know themselves as subjects of particular kinds of experience attached to their social statuses and identities" (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 31). Without a doubt, the experiences we endure are limited by our social status and identity (i.e. the type of experiences that the king of Spain has had are much different from the ones I have had). Also, since identities are conciliated through memory and language (Smith & Watson, 2010) and our memories are an interpretation of the past, we have to examine and interpret them according to their cultural and historical boundaries.

2.1.2 Reliable unreliability

As mentioned previously, identities are partly constructed by language (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016). Through linguistic relativity, we can understand identity as being discursive. Certainly, we use storytelling to narrate our life experiences to others, and the way we use the different linguistic resources changes overtime and depends on the context, location, interlocutors, etc. Moreover, autobiographical storytelling "is drawn from multiple, disparate, and discontinuous experiences and the multiple identities constructed from and constituting those experiences" (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 40). While this generates conflict, some authors are aware of it and others are not; some resist conforming to identity frames and others satisfy social norms (Smith and Watson, 2010). Life writers who adapt their texts to comply with a certain type of discourse contribute to the preservation of the current status quo.

Moreover, memory is unreliable and “subject to various distortions and biases (...) Each act of remembering may be viewed in a way as an act of re-transcription, re-categorization and to some degree imagination” (Staniloiu & Markowitsch, 2012, p. 103). Many autobiographical authors try to fight memory’s constraints and endeavor to produce a cohesive narrative that compels them to compromise the plausibility of the discourse. Hence, some critics argue in favor of drawing a distinction between the subject, the self, and the persona (Olshen, 1995) which could be beneficial for readers who find pleasure or comfort from reading autobiographies.

2.2 Trauma narratives

The American Psychological Association (2021) defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.” Besides, Balaev (2008) defines trauma as “a person’s emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society” (p. 150). Certainly, experiencing trauma can lead to a disturbance of one’s identity, especially at a young age since identity is not secured yet. Additionally, traumatic experiences create a temporal gap and disassociation between reality and one-self (Balaev, 2008; Ehlers & Clark, 2000; O’Kearney & Perrott, 2006). This is a result of the brain’s survival instinct, which forces victims to find escape ways in order to bear the trauma. O’Kearney and Perrott (2006) claim that autobiographical memory is fundamentally disorganized and strongly dominated by emotions. Moreover, victims can have repetitive intrusive thoughts and flashbacks that disrupt the chronological logic and origin of the trauma. Hence, traumatic experiences

become arduous to depict on account of the incapacity of the brain to decode the event (Balaev, 2008). Since partial memories of the occurrence can be suppressed, achieving an objective recall of the incident can become an elaborate task. Having said this, some individuals are able to achieve conceptual and spatial relationships among memories by drawing connections with non-traumatizing events, thereby achieving a more organized memory (O’Kearney & Perrott, 2006). This can be achieved with the use of scriptotherapy or cathartic writing, which help recover some of these memories. As Balaev argues, literary trauma theory regards unconscious responses to trauma as inherent and advocates in favor of narration to organize and dissipate invasive thoughts, and provide cathartic relief. In other words, when trying to narrate their traumatic experiences and organize them in a coherent way, victims can benefit from the depiction of memories into a textual arrangement. On the whole, this notion of literary trauma theory “makes several important claims about trauma, stating that traumatic experience is repetitious, timeless, and unspeakable, yet, it is also literal, contagious and mummified event” (Balaev, 2008, p. 151). Moreover, Balaev conceives trauma responses as substantially pathologic and involuntary, and favors writing or talking about troubled memories for improvement. This healing process resulting from the act of writing is understood as scriptotherapy.

2.2.1 Scriptotherapy

Recovering from trauma is a lengthy process that may require years of painstaking, constant work and numerous counseling sessions. Many scholars (Nagel & Anthony, 2009; Nance, 2006; Riordan, 1996; Smith & Watson, 2010; Smyth & Greenberg, 2000) advocate for the use of writing to hasten the healing process. As cited by Smith and Watson (2010), Suzette Henke coined the term *scriptotherapy* which can be defined “as the deliberate use of writing designed to enhance therapeutic outcomes” (Riordan, 1996,

p. 263). Other authors (Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Smyth & Greenberg, 2000) maintain that there is empirical evidence proving the effectiveness of scriptotherapy and support the fact that the written assessment of psychological trauma benefits the victim's overall health. In the same way, Smith and Watson (2010) explain that "narrators suffering from traumatic or obsessional memory may see the act of telling as therapeutic in resolving troubled memories, acknowledging how the process of writing has changed the narrator and life story itself" (p. 27). A number of studies have found that scriptotherapy can be used as a great tool to combat trauma or other mental illnesses. Furthermore, this type of textual arrangement can contribute to the acknowledgment and acceptance of issues that the sufferer was not even conscious of in the first place. The theoretical bases of scriptotherapy provide further understanding of the cognitive processes behind it. Riordan (1996) states that:

Verbally labeling and describing a trauma through writing allows an individual to cognitively process the event and gain a sense of control, thus reducing the work of inhibition. Properly framed, writing is thought to assuage obsessive internal ruminations and continued negative emotions that can exacerbate health and psychological problems (...) Through writing, the client can be engaged in an active physical role of practicing disinhibitory and other thinking skills, thereby enhancing the processes associated with positive counseling outcomes (p. 263).

Therefore, scriptotherapy serves a venting mechanism that provides psychological relief and better understanding of the root of the problem; hence why many trauma victims opt to produce narratives telling their story with hope of finding cathartic outcomes.

2.2.2 Cathartic writing

As well as scriptotherapy, cathartic writing may also provide therapeutic relief for those who have experienced trauma. However, writing or talking about trauma is not a pleasant experience and the benefits of cathartic speech might be frustrated by the subjects'

unwillingness to remember accounts of distress (Nance, 2006). Nance explains that “by its nature, trauma initially defies narration by being radically outside of that is seen as normal or possible” (p. 102). In other words, the act of rationalizing what happened and acknowledging it for what it was is an important first step towards the road of recovery. The traditional way of presenting such narratives was writing, but these days, with the emergence and growth of technologies and social media, other forms of reporting life narratives have appeared, blogging being one of those. Nagel and Anthony (2009) argue that “using a blog as a form of journaling is becoming increasingly common. (...) While this type of immediate cathartic release may be similar to placing words on the pages of a journal, the aftermath that follows the use of blogging as journaling may be experienced much differently” (p. 41). Clearly, the type of public response that online blogging opens the door for is very much different than the one you can get under a controlled environment. Social media platforms bestow an immediate response and imply a connection with the audience that is much personal and intrusive than writing a novel. Nagel and Anthony (2009) observe that:

The authors discuss the line between a self-help experience, a cathartic and possibly therapeutic intervention, and concern for the person who may be revealing too much. The therapist can prepare the client for feelings of empowerment, relief, and even exhilaration. They can also prepare for the risks, such as feelings of vulnerability, exposure, and possibly being re-traumatized (p. 41).

Indeed, there is a possibility of revealing too much on the internet, and victims who decide to share their experience online should be aware of the fact that their discourse could be used against them. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that “despite critical concentration on the difficulties of speaking, it is crucial to recognize that (...) they are generally established public orators who have already made the decision to speak, not

only for themselves, but for others” (Nance, 2006, p. 103). Thus, content creators who risk their privacy sharing their accounts online presumably aim at changing essentialist views and promote social development.

Similarly, another aspect that might offer victims some degree of relief is spirituality. Many people who experience trauma view spirituality and religion as a great source of comfort and relief; however, this does not apply to everyone. The complexity of this topic has brought scholars to study and stress the role that religion plays in the treatment of victims for therapeutic outcomes.

2.3 Trauma and religion

Recent studies have focused on the relationship between the psychology of trauma and religion (Brewer-Smyth & Koenig, 2014; Ganzevoort, 2006; Kornreich & Aubin, 2012). Nonetheless, little is known regarding how religiosity might contribute to good mental health, and most research conducted has excluded demographic and biological factors. Ganzevoort (2006) offers a critical overview of studies in this emerging field and concludes that religious faith could be a key factor in the treatment of PTSD¹ and victims’ recovery. However, religion and spirituality also have negative attributes due to the controlling nature of religious institutions and the victims’ vulnerability. Although religious discourse tends to be encouraging and optimistic, it can also have repressive tendencies. Moreover, studies show that some people who suffer from PTSD are likely to become less religious (Ganzevoort, 2006). However, those individuals who benefit from religious practices find “opportunities for cathartic emotional release and social support” (Brewer-Smyth & Koenig, 2014, p. 251). Indeed, faith-based communities can offer deeper understanding and long-lasting resilience to stress. Brewer-Smyth and Koenig explain that, even though religion

¹ Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that may manifest after having experienced a traumatic event. Some of its symptoms include flashbacks, dissociation, or severe anxiety among others.

can produce feelings of guilt and psychotic disorders, it can also offer peace of mind and forgiveness. In short, there is no consensus about the connection between trauma and religion for therapeutic relief. Some scholars advocate in favor of religiosity stating that it has healing properties, whereas others claim that it is used as a tool to control individuals. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that any institution could use a certain discourse to attempt to control society, and that any abuse of power might result in societal oppression.

2.4 Social change

Arguably, most countries have adopted governmental democratic systems with freedom of speech; however, ideological state apparatuses still function as oppressors of society. Such oppression creates obstacles when talking about specific topics that may compromise the authority and underlie the vulnerability of white privileged patriarchic societies. Nance (2006) argues that “by preventing speakers from speaking of injustice in ways that will inspire action, the force of the socially sayable serves to preserve the social status quo that produces the trauma” (pp. 107-108). That is to say, issues such as male supremacist sexual abuse become a social practice unless they are disclosed and dealt accordingly. In her book, Nance studies the relationship between ethics and literature and points out that performativity is the use of language and discourse as actors of change in the world. Although performativity is understood as the use of language to achieve social change (Gond, Cabantous, Harding & Learmonth, 2016), in the following section I will discuss the different interpretations of the term.

2.4.1 Performativity, gender and identity

One of the most supported theories on performativity is Butler’s (1988) poststructural theory on performativity and gender. Jackson (2004) explains that “poststructural theories

are mostly concerned with examining, disrupting, and transgressing structures and categories that have damaging effects on people” (p. 675). Butler’s theory of gender performativity challenges gender normativity in an attempt to shatter well established gender roles (Jackson, 2004). In her study, Butler (1988) proposes a distinction between mind and body in an attempt to break with essentialist views of gender. She explains that gender performativity is continuous and ever-changing, meaning that all individuals subjectively perform gender with their acts. Moreover, Butler questions what it means to be a woman and how society and cultural constructions prescribe how one should act in accordance to their body. Her theory has acquired great recognition among scholars in the field and has been highly influential in feminist theory (Allen, 1998). However, it has also received some critiques from critical social theorists and feminists who are afraid this reconceptualization of gender identity could affect the foundations of the movement. Allen (1998) contends that “if the theory of performativity offers gains to critical theorists, it incurs some losses as well” (p. 466). Arguably, some could say that Butler’s theory inextricably clashes with well-established feminist views; however, it could also affect repressive political interests and disrupt historically acquired gender roles in male supremacist societies. As Jackson (2004) explains:

Performativity is Butler’s theory of gender that accentuates a process of repetition that produces gendered subjectivity. This repetition is not simply a performance by a subject but a performativity that constitutes a subject and produces the space of conflicting subjectivities that contest the foundations and origins of stable identity categories (p. 675).

These claims opened the door to “three main criticisms: the conceptualization of the mind and body relationship as a binary; a privileging of mind over body; and a blindness to the gendered nature of this binary” (Budgeon, 2003, p. 37). However, this essentialist view of gender clashes with the principles of agency and performativity, and

does not conform to today's ever-changing societies with many different gender identities indistinctively of their bodies. Jackson (2004) specifies that "subjects are constantly reproduced (through repetition), they are never fully constituted (...) and because subjects can subversively transform, refuse, parody, or rupture the laws of discourse (...) identities emerge from discourse and power relations" (p. 675). In other words, identity is constantly enacted in the way we behave and can conform or contradict social roles. All in all, even though Butler's theory on gender performativity raised concerns among critical feminists, it also opened the door for later gender studies questioning socially constructed discourse and practices that continually identify and oppress women. Such discourse and practices interfere with the natural creation of the self at many levels and disrupt gender performativity of vulnerable individuals. Consequently, many activists and critical feminists use the power of social media to confront male supremacist views.

2.5 Feminist media theory

Feminist media theory was founded on the basis of feminist theory. Steiner (2014) argues that "it applies philosophies, concepts, and logics articulating feminist principles and concepts to media processes such as hiring, production, and distribution; to patterns of representation in news and entertainment across platforms; and to reception" (p. 359). This feminist approach on media is heavily political and it aims at uncovering underlying issues of power and giving visibility to minorities such as sexual minorities, women of color, or disabled women (Steiner, 2014). Since popular culture, mass culture, and social media depict the way societies are socially and politically constructed, they ought to provide researchers with the necessary empirical evidence to work towards a more inclusive, equalitarian future. Lumby (2011) contends that "scholars in the feminist media studies field might use popular culture not only as an object of study, but equally as a tool

for thinking, particularly for thinking through the state of feminist politics” (p. 97). Thus, feminist media theory can be used as a tool for social and political change that could culminate with the eradication of historically accepted roles. As a result, some feminists have questioned the notion of “power” and aim to re-frame biased dominant views.

2.6 Dominance and empowerment

There is no consensus among scholars when providing a definition for the notion of power in the sphere of the feminist movement. In spite of the several years of battling the cause with different approaches so as to conquer male dominance and female subordination, the current struggle is still materializing in patriarchic societies. Allen (1998) claims that “many feminists seem to assume that “power” equals “domination”; for these feminists, critiquing power entails unmasking male dominance” (p. 457). She explains that these theorists understand power as the ability to dominate, which is inherently manly. Therefore, male dominance leaves women in a defenseless position that frustrates women’s attempts to defy well-established supremacist views (Allen, 1998). In other words, if men are the ones in a position of power, women cannot and will not have the tools to fight against feminine oppression. Allen argues that domination theorists have received great criticism for this portrayal of women as victims, which leaves women in a subordinated and in a powerless position that cannot offer any solution to unravel such a complicated issue. Consequently, some feminists have opposed to the conception of domination as power. Allen elaborates that there needs to be a reconceptualization of the term “power” and highlights that empowered feminists discard the domination view because it assumes masculine ideology. As a result, she argues in favor of using feminine traits or practices to achieve an empowering current in which feminine strength is the principal moving force. Such qualities, as empowerment theorists claim, should be the one of driving forces of the

movement; so as to focus on what we have rather than what we do not. The perplexity of the problem, however, makes intricate this topic so much more challenging.

Several authors have called into question such one-sided arguments on the grounds that they do not represent the spectrum of gender variations such as gender queer, gender fluid, or transgender communities among others. Allen (1998) contends:

Such criticisms are significant and they highlight the importance of developing a conception of power that will be adequate to the task of theorizing power relations in all of their complexity. However, thus far, critics of domination and empowerment theorists have failed to draw attention to the most problematic aspect of each of these conceptions of power: its conceptual one-sidedness (p. 458).

Given the above, many scholars (Allen, 1998; Lumby, 2011; Steiner, 2014) advocate for a more inclusive, broad-minded approach, thereby allowing minorities and other collectives to grow and have a heard voice within the frame of feminist studies without being excluded and categorized for their differences. This empowered and inclusive feminist perspective could allow individuals to construct and perform their identity without societal constraints, thus, granting a more egalitarian environment.

3 Procedure and methodology

The data was selected in accordance to the areas of research: trauma theory, identity, scriptotherapy, and feminist theory. Elly Danica's *Don't: A Woman's Word* is one of the two sources that were selected for the analysis. Danica was chosen not only because of her powerful incest narrative, but also because of speeches and interviews in which she constructs her identity. The other source that will be considered in this thesis is a YouTube video titled "Sexually Abused by Father at Age 14" published by Nioka Smith. The video was selected because of the creator's thematic and demographic similarities with the

author of the novel. This comparative study consists of a mixed analysis in which linguistic, narrative and literary features will be considered to depict how trauma narratives construct a victim's identity.

4 Analytical framework

Hitherto, we have seen different aspects that autobiographical texts entail. Taking them into consideration, the following section will examine the different narrative, linguistic, and literary features inherent in the selected texts: *Don't: A Woman's Word* and "Sexually Abused by Father at Age 14". First, the analysis will center on the narrative elements such as theme, time, setting, personal life, and turning points. Second, the linguistic features will be considered with the intention to draw further conclusions. Third, a transitivity analysis will be conducted in order to examine underlying identity. Lastly, literary features will be acknowledged and interpreted according to their uses within the texts in an attempt to cast light on a topic that still arises confusion today: how is the identity of a victim constructed?

Before starting the analysis, I would like to point out once again that this study is not meant to make generalizations or proclamations of any kind; it is simply meant to report on an issue from a critical perspective.

4.1 Narrative elements

The narrative elements are the key concepts that provide general information about a text. They help us classifying and contextualizing texts. In my case study, the narrative elements that will be considered important for the development of both stories, and will help draw similarities and differences between the two texts.

4.1.1 Theme

The first narrative element that will be dealt with is theme. In Danica's *Don't: A Woman's Word*, the theme can be narrowed down to child abuse, although other subthemes within the story, such as domestic violence, religion, or incest can also be found. The theme and subthemes of this autobiographical novel were quite groundbreaking at the time in which the novel was written, especially considering that it was written by a woman. In 1988, female writers were still publishing under the shadow of the ubiquitous male literature, and stories of sexual nature were considered taboo. Moreover, in *Don't: A Woman's Word*, Danica deals with sexual topics that contrast with religious occurrences and mental institutions that were seen as sacred by the majority of the population. In previous decades, and all throughout the course of history, religion played a great role in the lives of many individuals around the world. This story and its central theme arose controversy among the population which was divided between those who either felt identified with the suffering of the author, or felt compassion for them, and those who believed the piece was the result of the corrupted nature of women.

In "Sexually Abused by Father at Age 14", the theme and subthemes are extremely similar to the ones in Danica's novel. As the theme, child abuse is present in Smith's recall of the story, and the subthemes include domestic violence, addiction, religion, and incest. Although the theme and subthemes are notably similar to Danica's, the story was received elsewhere. This is partly because of the format of publication, a YouTube video. YouTube, as an enterprise, is very committed to censoring and reporting content that they consider offensive or inappropriate. Hence, videos dealing with sensitive topics are regulated and monetized or demonetized accordingly. Smith's video is exposed in a tasteful manner, including a trigger warning and finding a fine balance between what you are allowed to say

and telling the narrative truthfully. Moreover, today, society is much more aware of the struggles of women and actions such as the #metoo movement, which has arisen with the hope to give voice to those women who have been resiliently silent for years. The fact that talking about these topics is much more accepted now than it was in the past has generated a different response to such sensitive topics, thereby the image portrayed by trauma victims is different from the one portrayed by Danica thirty-three years ago.

4.1.2 Time and setting

The time and place in which texts are produced and read affect the reader's perception of both the text and the author. These two narrative elements have an important role in the reception and perception of a text as well. Admittedly, the performance of identity is expressed "at three kinds of location – physical, rhetorical, and political" (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 43). Therefore, when Danica's *Don't* was first published, most of the audience was not ready to cope with the rawness and severity of the circumstances described, generating denial and counterarguments to dismiss the authenticity of the account. Had the novel been published in the 2000s, the image of both the story and author would most likely have been different.

Danica's *Don't* is set in Canada between the years 1950 and 1988. For Canada, the decades between the 1940s to the 1980s were a time of demographic and economic development. As it is cited in the Canadian Encyclopedia (2021), Canada joined the British Commonwealth as an independent state in 1931 and is still a member, although completely independent today. Despite being a time of growth, the 1950s were a period in which women's repression was very present. Appearances, religion and household gender roles were very much prominent, especially after the Great Depression. Women were expected to blindly follow their husbands' path and their fate was damned by gender discrimination.

Furthermore, the protagonist's family emigrated from Holland to find a better life across the pond and, at the time, being an immigrant was not as accepted as it might now be (Canadian Encyclopedia).

Smith's video was updated more recently. Its date of publication, three years ago, frames the video in the late 2010s although the narrative is set in the United States of the early 2000s. In that time, the United States underwent a series of social and economic changes that had repercussions against the whole world. The economic recession or the War on Terror affected the lives of millions of people and the consequences spread worldwide with the help of the globalization process and the emergence of social networks such as MySpace or Facebook. Moreover, religion was boosted with the Bush administration, which conceded federal grants to religious cults and promoted abstinence among teenagers. On another note, ever since the 1990s, United States citizens' quality of life greatly improved and activists fought for the rights of the LGTBIQ+ community and equality among people from all ethnicities (Kuklick, 2019). Despite the fact that the pillars of many of today's movements were built in the early 2000s, white supremacy and patriarchy along with strong chauvinist tendencies played a huge role in such a multicultural society.

4.1.3 Personal life

Elly Danica was born in 1947 in Holland, the Netherlands, in the heart of a humble lower-middle class family. When she was five years old, her family moved to Canada, where she has spent the rest of her life. Her turmoil commenced when she was only three years old, the day her father decided to abuse her for the first time. Little Danica, not understanding what was happening, attempted to explain the incident to her mother, and despite being four years old, no-one believed her. This event instigated years of hatred and rancor

against her among all members of her family. Regardless of the many occasions in which Danica endeavored to explain to her closest family members of the terrible circumstances she underwent, the abuse continued and worsened throughout her teenager years. Her mother even witnessed it in one of the occasions; however, she was never able to acknowledge it because she was also a victim of abuse herself. In order to escape from her father's grasp, she resignedly accepted to marry an army lieutenant who promised to treat her well. Her married life slowly became another nightmare. Her husband, a product of the strong patriarchal and religious beliefs of the time, wanted to have children. Danica, unable to attain such responsibility at that moment in time, refused. This enraged her controlling husband who immediately took her to therapy and threatened to return her to her father. One would hope that therapy helped; however, mental institutions of the time were strongly religious. In the eyes of God, once a woman married, she was expected to have children. If for some reason she did not, she was seen as an ungrateful eccentric individual. Nonetheless, Danica refused to subdue to her husband's yearns. Years later, she explained that she did not want to bring another helpless soul to this evil world; nevertheless, her doctors insisted in giving her medicine to numb her distress and, eventually, she became pregnant. After having her son, she decided it was best for her to leave, divorced her husband and gave her son up for adoption because, as she stated, she was unable to look after him (Doane & Hodges, 2001). With her actions, Danica defied the heteronormative performativity of gender (Butler, 1998) and opposed to the socially constructed gender roles of the time by questioning what it means to be a woman. This decision doomed her to live in despair and wretchedness for many years although it brought her the opportunity to get her life back and start a healing process with the help of scriptotherapy and cathartic writing (Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Smyth & Greenberg, 2000). After publishing her first novel, the reaction of the public brought her great recognition. Peter

Gzowski, a Canadian broadcaster, writer and reporter, interviewed her in his CBC radio program *Morningside*, which won an award for the interview (Hodgson, 2004). After this, she was asked to give multiple speeches and interviews across Canada which culminated with a European tour to promote the Dutch, German and Irish editions of the book (Hodgson, 2004).

Nioka Smith was born in the United States in the bosom of a humble low-middle class family. Her upbringing was marked by a household filled with drugs, alcohol and domestic violence. When she was a toddler, her father was sent to prison for six years and when he came back the violence increased. Smith, being the oldest daughter, tried to protect her mother and other siblings from their abusive father, which distanced them from one another even more. At fourteen, the sexual abuse started and continued until she left home. Despite the pain that she endured, she loved her father and all she wanted was for him to love her back. When Smith was in her late 20s, her father developed a heart condition that culminated in a medically induced coma. She describes this moment as one of the biggest realizations of her life. While she was in the hospital with her beloved ones taking care of her father, she had flashbacks of the abuse, which brought back the pain that she had endeavored to shut for so long. At twenty-eight she had a mental breakdown. She describes it as the turning point in her life. Smith explains that at that moment she clearly heard god say: "I'm going to purify your pain". After that, she spent many years working on her anguish, going to therapy and receiving education. She was diagnosed with PTSD, severe anxiety and chronic depression but that did not stop her from becoming "a Licensed Clinical Christian Counselor, Marriage and Family Therapist, Certified Christian Life Coach, Published Author, Inspirational Speaker, Sexual Abuse Advocate and Licensed Educator" (as cited in Smith, 2018). Moreover, she is also the founder of the DIVAS Unchained Movement, which uses media as a political tool (Lumby,

2011; Steiner, 2014) and sends an empowering message to women and girls who have experienced trauma.

4.1.4 Turning point

The turning point or climax is one of the most important moments in every story. It tends to occur before the ending as a means to create a peak that concludes with a resolution. For Danica, the turning point happened after having her son. At that time, she spent her days drugged with pills or being hangover which, although numbing her psyche, only aggravated the feelings of wretchedness and despair. "I am a selfish monster woman. Not brave. Not wise. A monster. (...) My world is falling apart. I do not know who he is. I know less who I am" (pp. 88-89). Danica, unable to cope with such feelings, decided it was time to find 'a room of her own' and, after leaving her husband and son behind, she found an old church which she could call home. She spent many years living alone and, with the help of other women and books, she finally found her strength and started the recovery process which materialized in the sentence "once I could not remember. Now I cannot forget" (p. 90). This statement goes in line with Balaev's (2008) theory on dissociation and victims' inability to recall traumatic experiences, which explains that severe traumas create a fragmentation of memory that prevents victims from remembering some parts of the occurrence or a traumatic event.

For Smith, the major turning point of her story is the moment of realization she had, aged twenty-eight, when she heard god talk to her. She describes the moment as a clear, powerful message that was sent by god to save her. This occurrence happened after many years of despair and decadence, both physically and mentally that, despite going to therapy, were still haunting her daily. Smith explains that she was at her worst, in a constant fight with her inner devils, when god approached her and recited one of the

psalms saying: “I command my angels to take charge over Nioka, and I will command my angels to lift Nioka up so that she won’t even hurt her foot upon a stone”. After this, her relationship with god strengthened and she was able to start a recovery process with the help of religion (Brewer-Smyth & Koenig, 2014; Ganzevoort, 2006). Smith narrates that it was at this moment in life when she realized her worth and decided she would use her story as means to help and empower other girls and women who might have endured the horror of male supremacist sexual abuse. Just like Danica, deciding to speak about it was a blunt move that put them under the spotlight as empowered feminists (Allen, 1998) who would put themselves in a vulnerable position and use their discourse as a tool for social change (Nance, 2006) rather than staying silent.

4.2 Linguistic features

The linguistic features such as style, diction and tone help us understand the nature and intention behind a text. In this case study, they allow us to identify inherent identity constructions in both Danica’s and Smith’s narratives. The tone is understood as the writer’s attitude, which can be humorous, optimistic, or formal; the diction is the choice of words and it can affect the tone of the writing. The sum of style, diction and tone underlie the overall message of a text. It can also help contextualize it and narrow down the type of audience that the text is directed to. Since some of these features are more telling than others, this part of the analytical framework will be followed by a transitivity analysis.

4.2.1 Style

The style of Danica’s narrative has been described as diaristic dailiness that pieces together the disjointed memories of a traumatic past (Smith & Watson, 2010). This bewitching, daunting narrative is presented in a prosaic poetry that “reflects the complexly associative organizing principle of her coming to language” (Alcoff & Gray, p. 22). As

stated before, trauma narratives suppose a hazardous exercise of remembering by the victim's part because of the dissociative nature of trauma (Balaev, 2008; Ehlers & Clark, 2000; O'Kearney & Perrott, 2006). Comprised of short phrases and sentences, the narrative has a conversational character that feels very personal, and gives the reader the impression to be living each moment along with the narrator. For instance, when she narrates passages of her childhood, the type of vocabulary and style the author uses makes it feel as if it was her old self speaking. The following sentences exemplify how she felt when she was a child, questioning what was happening to her in a natural and heart-breaking naïve way: "Mom? Can you get me a book that tells me why smelly fat men touch me between the legs? Mom? Can you find me a book that explains why daddy gets money from men who make me sticky and try to kiss me on the mouth? Mom?" (pp. 20-21). Moreover, the text is organized in chapters which contain numbered paragraphs. This textual arrangement "acts as a bitterly ironic chapter-and-verse counter-narrative to the Bible" (Alcoff & Gray, 1993, p. 22) that is emphasized by an almost blasphemous or profane choice of vocabulary in a narrative in which God never brought comfort or safety. This negative view of religion is very common among victims who suffer from severe anxiety and PTSD (Ganzevoort, 2006) because they might feel abandoned or betrayed by God.

In Smith's case, the style is personal and conversational. Her narrative has a feeling of closeness, appealing and persuading the listener in many instances. For example, when she mentions some of the flashbacks she was having as a result of her PTSD, she says: "and I tell you, I know why people self-mutilate, I know [why] people cut their little loving and cut themselves because I promise you, I wanted to cut my hand off. Do you hear me? I wanted to cut my hand off!" (11:30). Addressing the reader is a typical trait of oral texts. This strategy gives a natural, believable face-to-face conversation feel, making the overall

experience more personal and interactional, something that is a key factor in social media platforms. Although highly emotional, her speech almost has a TED-Talk style which results in a very empowering recall of her past experiences. Moreover, her narrative is constructed with a generic structure, in accordance to the elements of oral narratives provided by Labov, 1972. The narrative is filled with repetition and stuttering, something that is normal in victims' attempts to deliver trauma narratives due to their incapacity to remember (Balaev, 2008). "I remember on that day at age 14, I remember. I remember, I remember saying and thinking in my head... I'm about to die. This is my daddy this is my biological daddy doing this to me" (05:46).

Some of the stylistic differences between Smith's video and Danica's novel emerge from their difference in format. Smith's video is published on YouTube, a social media platform with restrictions and censorship that decides which content can be uploaded and which cannot. Therefore, some of Smith's recalls could have been constrained by YouTube's policies. It is important to note that, even though social media offer some constraints, it can also be used as a tool for thinking (Lumby, 2011) that offers the opportunity to reach millions of people. Furthermore, social media platforms appeal for a short, straight to the point interaction that users can watch in one sitting. On the contrary, the length of a written text allows that author to play with the language, giving it nuances and details as well as granting creative freedom.

4.2.2 Tone

In Danica's *Don't*, the tone is user-friendly and highly evocative (Alcoff & Gray, 1993). Furthermore, the narrative also has a serious and pessimistic tone, almost Dantesque, with many references to hell and Satan, which critics have described as a personal descent to hell: "Life. This is not life. This is hell. The hell of the hands, choking. The hell of

the penis, pushing. No. The hell of the four-year-old adult. Who doesn't remember. Who never forgets" (p. 10).

Smith's recall of her story is extremely emotional and explicit. The tone of the narrative varies as the story progresses, ranging from sad, serious, empowered, outraged, or hopeful. In Smith's discourse, recovery process she underwent is evident, which moves from a sense of a passive victim to an active survivor (Zuk & Wetmore, 1993). Smith makes use of positive qualities such as strength and resilience, and uses language as a tool to advocate for social change (Gond, Cabantous, Harding & Learmonth, 2016) and help other women who might have endured similar situations.

4.2.3 Diction

Diction is understood as the choice of words and phrases used by an author to convey actions, themes, or attitudes. Along with the tone and style, diction can be used to come to conclusions about a text. Danica's choice of vocabulary is rather simple but it has much deeper connotations. The seriousness is brought by the topic and subject matter.

Throughout the novel, there are many instances of Danica expressing how she feels and perceives the world. For example, when Danica says "you can't afford to feel" (p. 7), the reader can perceive this as a simple sentence but one of the connotations of the verb *to afford* is related to luxury. In this case, feeling, which is something inevitable, is a luxury. Many victims disassociate when undergoing traumatic experiences, disrupting the ability to remember our pasts in a logical, chronological order (Balaev, 2008; O'Kearney & Perrot, 2006). This was the author's case, who as a way of survival, disassociated when the situations were too much to handle. This is captured in the sentence "I peel myself out of my own skin" (p. 53). The aftermath of this disassociation is the loss of partial moments in time, which, although not remembered, are subconsciously carried as a burden that

materializes in different mental illnesses such as anxiety, PTSD, or depression. This can be seen when Danica says “I carry chains” (p. 9) which is a metaphor that describes this emotional weight that always connects the victims with their past experiences (Riordan, 1996). The narrator makes another reference to her incapacity to forget in the sentence “the words are etched in my brain” (p. 60). The verb *to etch* is synonym to *carve* which is attributed to material surfaces such as stone or marble. The fact that she chose this verb to refer to her inability to forget strengthens the notion that remembering is inevitable.

Another instance of inevitability is captured when Danica says: “the eyes of the hunted facing the camera. Caught. Powerless” (p. 41). Danica uses the expression *to be hunted* as if she was a defenseless animal in the wild. Many victims of abuse are portrayed as silent and subordinated; indeed, powerless as an animal right before being caught. This notion is in line with Zuk and Wetmore (1993) who state that incest is a social practice, just as hunting is. The severity of the situation increases as the novel progresses, which goes from being hunted to being murdered. This is exemplified with her expression “there is murder in my father’s eyes when I see him on top of me” (p. 59). Murder denotes something definite and irrevocable just as “something rotten” (p. 11) is. Moreover, something rotten cannot be saved or fixed in any way. Other qualities attributed to the narrator include “filthy kid. Rotten kid. Ugly kid. Your mind is in the garbage” (p. 20), used to discredit and belittle her. Furthermore, her father also refers to her as “dead dog meat” (p. 13) a threatening slang expression that exemplifies how victims are turned down by their oppressors. Another occasion that illustrates this oppression is when her father tells her “learn to be a lady. Keep your mouth shut” (p. 34). This is not only problematic from the victim’s perspective because it invalids their performativity of gender (Butler, 1988), but also contends that women are supposed to be silent, which ends up materializing in the “paralysis of the will” (p. 12). *Will* is understood as a wish or desire, a purpose or

determination. Thus, someone without a will is seen as a “fuck up. Useless” (99), qualities that the author attributes to herself because, eventually, victims internalize their persecutor’s discourse and blame themselves for what happens to them; “I have a wicked imagination” (p. 19).

For Danica, it is very important not to play part in what she refers to as an “indulgence. A sin” (p. 12), therefore, she looks for comfort in religion on numerous occasions. However, she is one of the victims who could not find any support or comfort in religion (Brewer-Smyth and Koenig, 2014). In one of those occasions she states that “there is no comfort so [she prays] for martyrdom” (p. 15). Danica would rather die and become a martyr before scarifying something that she considers sacred, which is her dignity. However, her father’s constant abuse keeps her “stuck in the mundane” (p. 12). Some connotations of the word mundane include lack of excitement, but it is also considered the opposite of heavenly or spiritual. Danica explains that she “[begins] to feel evil, the devil’s handmaiden” (p. 21). A handmaiden is considered to be a female servant, in Danica’s case, she was the servant of her father’s vileness, hence why she refers to him as the devil.

Smith’s text uses explicit and formal vocabulary along with varied religious jargon. From the beginning, she makes sure the audience knows she is “posting this video in complete obedience to [her] God” (00:06). Obedience heavily relies on social power, and, in psychology, it is understood as a form of social influence. This blind obedience commenced when God appeared before her to save her for the first time. Smith has found comfort and support in God ever since, and believes he saved her from losing her mind, hence why she feels like she owes something to him and renders him complete obedience. Many victims of trauma struggle with their pasts and undergo unbearable situations that force them to find ways to relief some of the pain, one of those being

religion (Kornreich & Aubin, 2012). For Smith, it was God saying “I’m going to purify your pain” (00:17) what started a recovery process heavily influenced by religiosity. *To purify* has different meanings and connotations ranging from removing something from a thing or a place, to making ceremonially clean. In this case, it is clear that the utterance has strong religious connotations that provided Smith with the cathartic relief she needed. Smith describes what happened to her as if “something had been ripped out of [her]” (8:09). This is a metaphor for a strong feeling of loss that some victims might suffer after a traumatic event. This loss, whether mental, physical, or emotional, happens after a violent and forceful encounter that produces a *tear* in someone’s psyche, as if someone *ripped out* a part of them. Moreover, this traumatizing event is described by Smith as the “ultimate betrayal” (20:19). Trauma derived from incest has specific psychological effects that other traumas might not unchain. The fact that Smith refers to it as the ultimate betrayal, portrays the mental strains that incest victims endure due to the confusion that this type of abuse creates. Incest victims struggle to understand why and how someone who is supposed to be their protector could commit such monstrosity. This is especially hard for children because they do not have the mental capacity to deal with it. Furthermore, children who undergo sexual violation feel totally disempowered and their mechanisms of identity-construction are compromised due to the prolonged experience of psychic chaos before their self is established (Balaev, 2008; Zuk & Wetmore, 1993). Such feeling of vulnerability aims for the creation of safe spaces both in the real world and in their imagination (Smith & Watson, 2010; Staniloiu & Markowitsch, 2012) during a dissociative process that Smith mentions: “I had a decision to either die from the strongholds that I was dealing with or fight for the power that’s within me” (21:25). The *strongholds* that Smith refers to are the emotional constraints derived from a traumatizing childhood and the mental struggles that result as the aftermath of devastating occurrences. *Strongholds* here

symbolize the safe place that, although brings momentary comfort, eventually dissipates and underlies the latent distress stored in the brain.

4.3 Conceptual meaning

From a critical discourse analysis perspective, conceptual aspects of ideology are reflected in the grammar of a text, which is relevant to conceptualization (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016). Conceptualization refers to the analysis of transitivity in order to understand someone’s representation of the world, thereby underlying ideology. This process is done through a transitivity analysis, based on Halliday’s grammar theory to study the language. Halliday (1994) presents five different processes to classify how we perceive ourselves and the world: existential, relational, material, mental, and verbal. For the purpose of this analysis, I will focus on the relational processes only, since they provide information regarding status and identity (Table 1).

<i>Relational processes identifying Danica</i>	
<i>Participants</i>	<i>Examples</i>
	“this is so you’ll learn <u>you</u> (Id) are a <u>woman</u> (Ir)” (p. 9)
	“ <u>stupid</u> (Id) is <u>female</u> (Ir). <u>Stupid cow</u> (Ir). <u>Stupid slut</u> (Ir)” (p. 9)
	“ <u>it</u> (Id) is <u>your sin</u> (Ir). Now <u>it</u> (Id) is your <u>fault</u> (Ir)” (p. 11)
	“ <u>you</u> (Id) are <u>subject to your father</u> (Ir) in all things” (p. 15)
	“ <u>I</u> (Id) was <u>a victim</u> (Ir)” (p. 16)
	“ <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>a thing</u> (Ir)” (p. 18)
	“maybe when <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>a real Canadian</u> (Ir)” (p. 19)
	“why am <u>I</u> (Id) so <u>unhappy</u> (Ir)?” (p. 25)
	“ <u>it’s</u> (Id) <u>my fault</u> (Ir)” (p. 25)
	“ <u>you</u> (Id) are <u>an evil and obnoxious bitch</u> (Ir)” (p. 32)
	“ <u>troublemaker</u> (Ir). <u>Liar</u> (Ir)” (p. 34)
	“ <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>ashamed</u> (Ir). <u>Afraid</u> (Ir)” (p. 41)
	“ <u>you</u> (Id) are <u>stubborn and stupid</u> (Ir)” (p. 43)

	"if I say <u>you</u> (Id)'re <u>crazy</u> (Ir), you're crazy" (pp. 45-46)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>crazy</u> (Ir)" (p. 46)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am a <u>zombie</u> (Ir)" (p. 48)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>silent</u> (Ir)" (p. 49)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>no longer myself</u> (Ir). (p. 53)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>someone else</u> (Ir)" (p. 53)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>dead</u> (Ir)" (610)
	" <u>she</u> (Id)'s a <u>good worker</u> (Ir)" (p. 60)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am not <u>his daughter</u> (Ir)" (p. 65)
	"they say <u>I</u> (Id)'m <u>ungrateful</u> (Ir)" (p. 65)
	" <u>I</u> (Id)'m not a <u>saint</u> (Ir)" (p. 66)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am a <u>martyr</u> (Ir)" (p. 66)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am so <u>afraid</u> (Ir)" (p. 66)
	" <u>you</u> (Id) are <u>imaginary</u> (Ir)" (p. 70)
	" <u>you</u> (Id) are <u>crazy</u> (Ir)" (p. 70)
	"she says that <u>I</u> (Id) was always <u>an evil child</u> (Id) and <u>I</u> (Id) am <u>an obnoxious bitch</u> (Ir) as a woman. <u>Troublemaker</u> (Ir). <u>Liar</u> (Ir). <u>Bad, bad girl</u> (Ir)" (p. 71)
	" <u>you</u> (Id)'re <u>sick</u> (Ir)" (p. 76)
	" <u>you</u> (Id)'re <u>useless</u> (Ir)" (p. 76)
	" <u>I</u> (Id) am a <u>selfish monster woman</u> (Ir)" (p. 88)

Table 1. Danica's relational processes

The findings reveal that Danica endured male supremacist sexual abuse in a misogynistic household and society that heavily contributed to the construction of her identity. This misogyny is exemplified in the sentences "stupid is female" (p. 9) or "this is so you'll learn you are a woman" (p. 9). Since Danica rejected the historically and politically accepted performativity of gender (Butler, 1988), she was seen as maverick. At the time in which Danica endured these circumstances, women's role in society was mainly decorative. Women were supposed to be quiet, obeying, and grateful. Their only job was marrying and bringing children to the world, otherwise, they were seen as stubborn, crazy, or selfish as

Danica was. As depicted in Table 1, other relational processes in Danica's story identify her with a series of derogatory adjectives. Some of these include: sick, crazy, liar, useless, ungrateful, stupid, obnoxious, or evil child.

Admittedly, society has a great role in the perception of one's identity (Guilmore, 1994). The perception others have of an individual and the perception that individual has of himself or herself might vary. Nonetheless, childhood trauma victims struggle with the construction of their identity due to the high degree of stress and chaos in their lives. Danica's father's words impregnated her mind from an early age and compromised the natural brain's ability to construct identity through experience, religion, society and language. As a victim, Danica internalized her father's discourse due to extended physical and mental abuse which left her in a vulnerable position. This is exemplified with the quote "I am a selfish monster woman" (p. 88). Danica makes this statement because she had the strength to challenge gender stereotypes (hence why she uses the adjective *selfish*) but she was still greatly influenced by heteronormativity and essentialist views (Butler, 1988). Within the text, there are many instances of Danica talking about herself that portray how influential her environment was in the construction of her identity. Some of these include: victim, thing, unhappy, afraid, martyr, and dead, among others.

Furthermore, being an immigrant probably affected Danica's way of perceiving herself and the world. The abrupt change of country in an early age, along with the abuse that started around the same time, distorted identity-making mechanisms. This resulted in an alienated, vulnerable Danica with no-one to turn to: "Maybe when I am a real Canadian I will be able to live like that" (p.19).

In Smith's case, no instances of relational processes have been found in her narrative because, as I was stating above, the differences in format affect the different types of

utterances and expressions that authors can use. Having said this, I checked the comment section with the hope to find relevant data, and I was able to find the following relational processes (Table 2).

<i>Relational processes identifying Smith</i>	
<i>Participants</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Identified/Identifier	" <u>You</u> (Id) are <u>an inspiring woman</u> (Ir)"
	" <u>You</u> (Id) are <u>blessed</u> (Ir)"
	" <u>Ur</u> (Id) <u>awesome</u> (Ir)"
	" <u>You</u> (Id)'re so <u>strong</u> (Ir)"
	" <u>You</u> (Id) are such <u>a brave beautiful queen</u> (Ir)!"
	" <u>I</u> (Id)'m <u>healed</u> (Ir), <u>delivered</u> (Ir) and <u>free</u> (Ir) now!!"

Table 2. Smith's relational processes

Although Smith does not use relational processes of identity at any point, her identity is constructed through the narrative with the personal experiences she endured. Her narrative style, tone and diction along with the discourse and utterances created Smith's representation of identity, which were positively accepted by the public and did not originate backlash. Smith is perceived by the public as a blessed, strong, brave, and inspiring woman, positive traits that do not connote the fact that she was a victim of abuse. This could be a result of a well-delivered narrative with an empowering approach (Allen, 1998) focused on her strength and resilience. The only reference Smith makes with regard to herself is that she is "healed, delivered, and free" which goes in line with studies that show that blogging can offer cathartic release (Nagel & Anthony, 2009), and coincides with Zuk and Wetmore's (1993) transformational process from silent victim to active survivor. Therefore, it can be said that Smith benefited from the act of blogging and used her voice to heal and help many other women along the way.

4.4 Literary devices

After having analyzed the narrative elements and linguistic features of the texts, in this section I will focus on the literary elements. Literary devices are mostly used in fictional novels and poems. However, literary elements are present in almost all non-academic texts and are used to engage the reader and provide different nuances to the narrative. Moreover, literary devices allow us to understand meaning that might be underlying beneath the surface level of a text.

In Danica's *Don't*, there are many anthropomorphisms and similes, along with long, powerful anaphora and several anachronisms. One of these anachronisms can be found when she is narrating an instance with her father: "there are no visible bruises. Nobody will ever know. I'll kill you if you tell. I know. Twenty-five years since the last secret. Thirty-six years since the first secret. I know" (p. 9). The narrative quickly shifts from the time she was at her parents' house enduring the abuse to the moment she was writing the novel several years afterward. Danica uses anachronisms in many occasions to represent the fragmentation of memory as a result of trauma (Balaev, 2008; Ehlers & Clark, 2000; O'Kearney & Perrott, 2006).

Moreover, Danica portrays the experiences she went through by means of anthropomorphisms. For example, when she mentions her inability to talk about what happened to her, she refers to it as "silence wrapped around life like a cocoon" (p. 70). The meaning of this utterance is emphasized by her choice of words in *cocoon* which is an analogy for safety or comfort. Indeed, many victims are afraid of telling the truth, and find comfort in silence. Yet, eventually, they are faced with a lot of pain. Danica uses the simile of a mountain symbolizing growing pain to refer to the way being silent is affecting her – "pain like a mountain" (p. 7)– implying how great the pain is. Then, she morphs the simile

into yet another anthropomorphism in her expression, “the mountain never ends, it grows in me daily” (p. 7). This never-ending pain produces a negative effect on Danica’s psyche and results in a downward spiral of despair to the point in which she sees “life as a void. Life as a black hole in space” (p. 70). This powerful simile exemplifies how, during a certain time, life for Danica was dull and meaningless. These negative thoughts combined with constant abuse and derogative comments prompted persistent thoughts about death. At one point, she says that “death looks like the man my mother married” (p. 7). This simile shows the severity of the situation and portrays Danica’s thoughts about death every time she sees her own father. She refers to him as “the man my mother married,” implying she does not consider him her father.

Furthermore, Danica portrays her torment with the symbol of “the goddess Inanna on a meathook in hell” (p. 13). Goddess Inanna is a powerful Mesopotamian deity of war, sex, and justice. Danica uses this symbol to express that there was no hope. For Danica, there was no use in fighting against her family, provided that Goddess Inanna was condemned to death by members of her own family. It reveals how there is no comfort and support in religion for Danica (Ganzevoort, 2006).

It was not until several years later that she saw the first “year of light in darkness” (p. 13). This oxymoron reflects the first glimpse of hope Danica felt in a long time. After that, she commenced writing the first drafts of what became her most famous novel, and started a lengthy recovery process that helped many other women along the way. This scriptotherapy and cathartic relief, brought by reading and writing (Nance, 2006), is exemplified in the following anaphora:

Fill the space with books. Books about religion. Books about women. Books by women. Books about writers. Books about dreamers. Books to bring me real lives. Books to compensate for not

having a real life. Books as friends. Books as ships in which I journey. Books as anchors to keep me alive. Books as amulets. A life of books. A better reality. A way to reality. Books instead of life. Safer. Possible. (p. 89)

Having examined Danica's literary elements, I will center on Smith's video. Although it is not as rich in lyrical elements as the previous text, it also provides helpful insights. Perhaps one of the most powerful literary devices in Smith's narrative is an anaphora that portrays the way she felt when she was abused:

I thought I was about to die and I wanted to die. I wanted to die, I saw no reason to live I wanted to die and I thought I was dying but something, it, even though I didn't physically die, I did. Gosh that day I died something in me died, everything in me died. (06:44)

Constant thoughts about death are very recurrent in abuse victims and many explain how, even though not physically, something within them died or was ripped out of them at the time of the abuse. Smith explains that after this event she apparently heard God talking to her: "God wrote this book, I am NOT playing. I was the vessel. I was the tool" (25:22). These two metaphors, "I was the vessel", "I was the tool" symbolize how her book aims at bringing social change through religion. Moreover, it exemplifies how religion can offer relief and comfort, thus achieving a meaningful living and a new sense of life and inner being.

5 Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *Don't: A Woman's Word* and "Abused by Father at Age 14" shows that victims' identity is affected but also constructed through traumatic experience. Since undergoing severe trauma at an early age can produce psychological chaos, the ability of the brain to establish one's self is compromised. As a result, victims' identity is mostly constructed by people's perceptions and the prosecutor's oppression. Moreover,

victims of sexual abuse seek to find ways to release some of the pain. While some individuals find comfort in scriptotherapy, others encounter it in spirituality. This cathartic release can manifest in both written and oral texts. The differences between oral and written texts are mainly stylistic and arise from the format of publication (i.e. social media tends to be more concise and novels tend to be more lyrical). One commonality among trauma victims is their desire to help others through autobiographical storytelling. Autobiographical texts, whether written or oral, often deliver an empowering message that defies the socially accepted gender roles and norms. Not only do their narratives bring comfort and a more meaningful living for the victims, but they also offer hope for other women who have endured similar situations. Therefore, women might use writing or blogging as a tool for social change, thus advocating for women's rights and fighting against gender roles and inequality, as well as male dominance and abuse.

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