Remnants

Melissa Grace Kreider

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Remnants

by

Melissa Grace Kreider

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree of Art in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Bradley Dicharry
This is to certify that the Master’s thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee of
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
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To every survivor that I have had the honor of working with while making Remnants. Your courage, love, and willingness to stand up have moved me deeply.
"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own." —Audre Lorde

“…the most dangerous place for a woman in this country is her own home, and she’s most likely to be beaten or killed by a man she knows.”
—Gloria Steinem in an October 2015 interview with Terry Gross on NPR’s Fresh Air

“She knew I could tell with one glance, one look, one simple instant. It was her eyes. Despite the thick makeup, they were still dark-rimmed, haunted, and sad. Most of all though, they were familiar. The fact that we were in front of hundreds of strangers changed nothing at all. I’d spent a summer with those same eyes-scared, lost, confused-staring back at me. I would have known them anywhere.”
— Sarah Dessen, Just Listen

“[Referring to rape] It already is bigger than everything else. It lives in front of me, behind me, next to me, inside me every single day. My schedule is dictated by it, my habits by it, my music by it.”
— Daisy Whitney, The Mockingbirds
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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Remnants is an exploration of the successes or failures of the reactionary structures that are responsible for engaging victims of sexual and domestic abuse. The photographs range from sites of sexual and domestic assault, the sexual assault evidence collection kits survivors endure, to the backlog of rape kits in police evidence rooms, the crime labs in which these kits are tested, and finally the survivors themselves. All of these aspects create a complicated and intimidating maze of steps a survivor may maneuver if they choose to rely on the justice system for assistance. This work does not serve to trigger or create a negative response, but exists as photographic evidence of the reality many face when assaulted.
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PHOTOGRAPHY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Using photography as a tool to spark conversation or trigger change dates back to the early days of the medium. The most prominent example of photography being used in this way is Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (which appeared in book form in 1890), whose photographs uncovered what was previously unseen in a poverty-stricken slum called Mulberry Bend. Riis’s photographs were seen as a way to provide undeniable evidence of the existence disgraceful housing provided by the police for the poor, many of who were immigrants.

Photography as evidence continued strongly into the 20th Century. Examine the photographers of the Farm Security Administration (F.S.A. Photography Program, 1935-1944), who were sponsored by the United States government under President Roosevelt to visually represent the circumstances faced by farmers who endured the catastrophes brought on by drought and The Great Depression. Photographers such as Arthur Rothstein, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Marion Post Wolcott were tasked by the Roosevelt administration to depict unrelieved poverty for Congress. The F.S.A. photographs were considered truthful documents by some viewers and propaganda by others, but Americans were affected by them nonetheless. Now,
the photographs are seen as vital in our understanding of the impact of The Great Depression on rural communities.

The F.S.A Photographers were not the first individuals in the 20th Century to be working in this way. Before them came Lewis Hine, an American photographer born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin before moving east to New York, where he attended the Ethical Cultural School. Hine was trained as a sociologist before he became particularly interested in using the camera as an educational tool. He began photographing immigrants entering Ellis Island in the early 1900s. Hine felt strongly that the camera should be used as a tool to provide incontrovertible evidence and went on to participate in such social reform projects such as The Pittsburgh Survey, and was the staff photographer for the National Child Labor Committee, where he was tasked with documenting the baneful conditions that children were required to work in. The resulting images were disseminated in pamphlets, slide lectures, magazines, books, and had a large hand in creating Child Labor Laws.

According to Naomi Rosenblum, author of *A World History of Photography*, “this perspective reached a zenith between 1889 to 1949” with this type of work. The text goes on to read, “documentary style embraces two goals: the depiction of a verifiable social face and the evocation of empathy with the individuals concerned.” As an image-maker who works this way, I believe
that this is the most useful definition of the aims of social justice work that I’ve come across.

Despite living in an age of manipulated imagery, photography is still often perceived as the medium of ultimate truth due to the long history of photography being used for social change and photography’s ostensible objectivity. With the expansion of technology and the ability to have hard conversations, photography is used to spark conversation and shift perceptions more creatively than ever before. Images being made to serve this purpose range topically from race issues, gender identity, mental health, politics, or the environment.
INTRODUCTION

The discussion surrounding sexual and domestic abuse is rapidly changing. To my delight, Remnants has become more relevant due to the whistleblowers in Hollywood and in the US Government. In late 2017 and early 2018, it seemed like not a day would pass without more men or women coming forward with sometimes decades-old accusations against a famous actor, producer, or government official. This spawned the #MeToo movement, in which victims of harassment or assault would tweet or post the hashtag in solidarity but also to share how many people harassment or assault affects. It was through this hashtag that people began to realize that they know more than one victim of harassment or assault in their lives. People they love and know. #MeToo triggered the destroyed degrees of separation those who haven’t suffered assault often perceive between themselves and survivors of assault. It taught empathy in some, and forced others to reflect on how their behavior in the workplace, on the streets, or even in the bedroom could have been perceived as harassment or assault.

Change is often perceived of as glacial, but social media has given normal people the platform to have their voices and their stories heard while controlling their narrative. As we know, this can be both a blessing and a curse. It is thrilling to live in a cultural moment such as this. After decades upon decades of the failure of multiple systems set up to assist victims of assault, it is time that the discussion shifts away from victim-blaming to a more empathetic, survivor-oriented approach that challenges normalized “boys will be boys” behavior.
We are incredibly privileged in our definition of “rape” and “domestic abuse” in the United States. There are various countries in the world where spousal abuse and marital rape is widely accepted and there are no clear laws protecting victims of sexual or domestic abuse, married or not. The discourse surrounding domestic and sexual abuse in this thesis is Western-centric, but I will touch briefly upon the societal and cultural normalization of intimate partner violence in other parts of the world.

According to *Sex Crimes: Transnational Problems and Global Perspectives*, all sovereign nations have created their own definition of a sex crime or assault.¹ The data in this book surveys what sort of rape laws, intimate partner violence laws, marital rape laws, and the age of consent in a total of ninety-six countries. It shows that countries such as Afghanistan, Albania, China, Egypt, Myanmar, Russia, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates have no laws against marital rape, to name a few. However, there are many countries (Albania, Barbados, Ghana, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan) that have no marital rape or intimate partner violence laws. That means, within marriage or cohabitation, a resident of these countries are, by law, able to beat or rape their partner with little to no lawful repercussions. Most of the countries mentioned previously have ages of consent as low as 13, or no laws that apply within marriage. In fact, there are only nine countries that have sex offender-specific legislation (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, South Korea, United Kingdom, United States).

In the United States, the FBI definition of sexual assault is used to determine the frequency of sexual assault across the nation, but there is no statute defining sexual assault. Instead, each of the fifty states have their own statutes to define sex crimes. While the exact laws vary, every state has intimate partner violence, marital rape, and rape laws. Of course legislation gets incredibly unclear in parts that leave room for nuance. In states like Mississippi, Ohio, Maryland, Nevada, and Oklahoma, rape (especially in cases of marital rape and intimate partner violence) can only be punished if force is used and can be proven. In Virginia, the difference lies in the punishment. The perpetrator is admitted into a therapy program that replaces any punishment. In only 17 states is marital rape treated the same as non-marital rape. Even then, the US is steps ahead of countries like Ghana, Kenya, China, or Russia in terms of creating a space for justice and rehabilitation for survivors of domestic and sexual assault.

Still, there is a rampant victim-blaming and rape culture present in these United States of America. Often, domestic violence starts with micro-aggressions and ways to control the victim. An example given in A Troubled Marriage: Domestic Violence and the Justice System by Leigh Goodmark includes an anecdote about Bruce and Patricia Connors, who were married, but after they had two children together, Bruce forced “his wife to turn over all of the income from her home-based business, putting the proceeds first into a joint checking account to which she had no access and later into an account in his name alone. Bruce refused to give Patricia money for necessities, mandating that
she submit any request for funds in advance.”\textsuperscript{2} Certainly what she endured was domestic abuse, but the definition of domestic abuse in the eyes of the law depends largely on where you live; most domestic abuse laws focus on physical assaults and threats. The law has not evolved to keep pace with these types of abuse, and when Patricia tried to seek help, she was told she shouldn’t have had a joint checking account or children with him. There is often a mantra among those viewing domestic assault victims from outside who question why they don’t “just leave,” and Patricia’s situation is more common than not. She can’t leave because she’s financially dependent or doesn’t want to leave her children—she also is not seen as a domestic abuse victim in the eyes of the law.

One of the grossest injustices carried out over decades that has affected survivors of assault is the 400,000 untested rape kits sitting\textsuperscript{3} in police storage across the country, some of them decades old. When I began this work, I believed that all of the failings on terms of survivors would fall on the shoulders of the police. What I found, rather, was a complex and overwhelming failure of many systems from the police, detectives, governors, district attorneys, DNA testing labs, prosecutors, and even those


who have volunteered to assist survivors, of which will be discussed later in “Remnants,” pages 10 to 39, and “Dissemination,” pages 40 to 50.

In 2004 Mariska Hargitay established the Joyful Heart Foundation, whose mission is to offer retreat spaces in Hawaii\(^4\) for survivors of assault. End the Backlog followed soon after under the umbrella of the Joyful Heart Foundation. End the Backlog “focuses on shining a light on the rape kit backlog in the United States. Our goal is to end this injustice by conducting groundbreaking research identifying the extent of the nation’s backlog and best practices for eliminating it; expanding the national dialogue on rape kit testing through increased public awareness, engaging communities and government agencies and officials; and advocating for comprehensive rape kit reform legislation and policies at the local, state and federal levels. Ultimately, we seek to change attitudes about sexual violence and abuse, educate the public, improve systems to lessen the trauma survivors experience and ensure greater access to justice for survivors.”\(^5\)

End the Backlog has accomplished that and more. Not only have they collaborated with lawmakers and District Attorneys to clear individual’s states backlogs, but they’ve pushed to assess individual state’s backlog, a feat never attempted before. In the most extreme example of the push for assessment, an untested 11,431 rape kits were discovered across Detroit in late 2013. After years of testing, it was reported in


late 2017 that the testing of all of these kits led to 817 serial rapists, putting the estimated number of repeat offenders across the United States at 29,000.⁶

If the testing of victim’s kits were prioritized by detectives, prosecutors, and police, rapists could have been prevented from creating more victims of assault decades ago. However, it is the above-mentioned normalization of abuse and rape culture that leads to so many victims not reporting, or being ignored by law enforcement. Remnants seeks to put the viewer in the victim’s shoes, walking them step-by-step through each situation a survivor must go through in order to seek justice.

REMNANTS

I view myself in split versions. One cannot emerge from such a traumatic experience unscathed or unchanged. There is “Before It Happened” me and “After It Happened” me. As I put years between myself and “Before It Happened” me, I began to recognize flaws in the systems in place to assist survivors of assault. It is these realizations and my own personal experiences of sexual assault that drive me to make the work. Remnants emulates the points of contact for a survivor and a survivor’s DNA that viewers don’t often consider when realizing how intense and re-traumatizing it is to seek help from authorities.

Remnants is an exploration of the successes or failures of the reactionary structures that are responsible for engaging victims of sexual and domestic abuse. The images I’ve created range from sites of sexual and domestic assault, the sexual assault evidence collection kits survivors have to endure, to the backlog of rape kits in police evidence rooms, the crime labs in which these kits are tested, and finally the survivors themselves.

The first chapter of this body of work focuses on actual sites where domestic and sexual assault have taken place. The degrees of separation between survivors of sexual or domestic abuse and “us” are perceived to be
many. In truth, these instances of violence are not isolated to “bad neighborhoods” or remote areas. Domestic and sexual abuse happens in suburban homes, unassuming apartment complexes, on your street—everywhere. A quote from Gloria Steinem that I heard while driving back from Arkansas in my first semester resonates with me:

“...the most dangerous place for a woman in this country is her own home, and she’s most likely to be beaten or killed by a man she knows.”

-Gloria Steinem in an October 2015 interview with Terry Gross on NPR’s *Fresh Air*

By photographing these sites, I investigate a landscape where violence is omnipresent. I collect and travel to the addresses that have been reported as sites of abuse by excavating national police logs both online or through public records requests. I was lucky enough to stumble upon the Iowa City Daily Activity Police Log (figure 4) right when I arrived in Iowa City. Most cities have a police or crime log that you can find online, which certainly lent itself to diversifying the landscapes included in *Remnants* and enabled me to photograph houses across the United States.
Figure 1: Domestic Assault, Incident Report Taken, 8/2/2015, 11:42pm, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 2: Domestic Assault, Incident Report Taken, 9/3/2015, 3:15pm, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
Figure 3: Domestic Assault, Unable to locate assailant, 8/1/2015, 11:45pm, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 4: Iowa City Police Log, Screenshot, July 2017, iowa-city.org/icgov/apps/police/activitylog.asp
I began recording each address that I could find that had a call for domestic or sexual assault, traveling to them in the early hours of the morning, and making pictures.

I work in memorial for the survivors who have emerged from the landscape to show these occurrences are ubiquitous. The mundane nature of the scenes is disquieting to the viewer and myself as I’ve found the locations unsettlingly ordinary. This confirms that one can never assume the kind of behavior that materializes behind closed doors. These are pictures of the nothingness that history leaves behind. Yet they are haunted by the knowledge of the horror that has taken place there. It is a different type of violence and tragedy in America—the kind that is not sensationalized but covered up. The events that make these places unique have not altered the landscape in any way but represent lives that have been affected forever.

I continued logging the addresses each week and began noticing addresses being listed on the police log over and over again. I began to count the instances by month, which led to the titles of some of the images. In one particular apartment complex, there were 38 instances of domestic and sexual assault in August 2015 (figure 6). In another, 12 instances of domestic and sexual assault in August 2015 (figure 5).
Figure 5: 12 instances of domestic and sexual assault in August 2015, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 6: 38 instances of domestic and sexual assault in August 2015, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
Figure 7: Domestic Assault, Arrest Made, 10/2/2015, 11:46pm, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 8: Rape, Incident Report Taken, 10/4/2015, 5:55pm, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
Figure 9: Rape, Incident Report Taken, 6/1/2015, 8:40pm, 2015, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 10: Rape, Incident Report Taken, 10/21/2015, 9:23am, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
Each and every assault is complex and nuanced in its circumstances. The victims who reside in these spaces are often unable to “just leave” due to financial dependence, sharing children with their assailant, homelessness, or love. Victims want to believe that the ones they love will stop hurting them.

The perception that it should be simple for victims to leave their abuser is harmful to victims of both sexual and domestic assault and perpetuates the culture of victim-blaming, shame, and silencing that has prevailed for decades. However, due to whistleblowers and the #MeToo movement, we are living in a unique cultural moment in which the discussion surround rape and domestic assault is changing quickly to be survivor-oriented.
Playing off of a linear narrative, I then focus on each step of a state-issued sexual assault evidence collection kit (i.e. rape kit) as this kit is the next obstacle that a survivor could potentially come in contact with after leaving the site of a sexual assault. Many survivors never make it to this step. There are so many factors, too many to count, that contribute to a survivor choosing not to report: most commonly the fear of not being believed, suffering from the stigma of being sexually assaulted, or safety concerns. The list goes on, and each case is different. The first step is a questionnaire filled out by the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (figure 14). The questions on this form range from “did the assailant wear a condom?” to checkboxes to details pertaining to the victim’s body and assault such as penetration and ejaculation. At the bottom, there is a space for the victim to write their account of their assault.

Viewers are unaware of the invasive and re-traumatizing nature of a rape kit. If a victim chooses to report, the police will take the report and escort the victim to the hospital. It is here that the exam takes place, often taking hours to complete. There are commonly eight invasive steps in this exam where saliva, vaginal and anal swabs, and even underwear are collected and compiled into a Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, or a rape kit. These images of rape kits follow the sites of assault as it is the archiving of the crime that is both incredibly difficult yet essential for seeking justice.
A sexual assault evidence collection kit should only be collected by a highly trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE). However, there is a critical shortage of sexual assault nurse examiners across the United States. According to an article on Broadly written by Haley Potiker, nearly one in five nurses leave their job within the first year and one in three leave within two years equaling a .08 percent retention rate.7

SANE nurses typically stop administering exams due to vicarious trauma. The American Counseling Association defines vicarious trauma as, “compassion fatigue,” or, “the phenomenon generally associated with the “cost of caring for others.”8 Vicarious trauma can be heightened if the hospital doesn’t have a strong support system for the [sometimes] one or two sexual assault nurse examiners in the entire hospital. Therefore, the exam is often administered by two untrained nurses: one nurse to read the step-by-step directions (figure 13), and one to administer the exam.

This leads to low rates of effectiveness and improper treatment of the rape survivor in question due to lack of training. Rape kits are already difficult to receive and need to be treated by a nurse with adequate training.


Figure 12: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Front, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24"
Figure 13: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Directions, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 14: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Step 1, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
Figure 15: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Step 2, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 16: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Step 3, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
Figure 17: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Step 4, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 18: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Step 5, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
Figure 19: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Step 6, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 20: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Step 7, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
Figure 21: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Step 8, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”

Figure 22: State of Iowa Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit, Misc., 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 20x24”
After a collection exam is performed, the kit is then sealed and checked into an evidence room in a police department. As you might be starting to piece together, there is not just one structure in place that fails survivors, but many. Most jurisdictions do not have clear, written policies outlining the testing of rape kits. This results in decisions being made on a case-to-case basis, without any guidelines, and means that individual detectives may have discretion over whether to send a kit for analysis. The lack of standardized processing of rape kits has led to an estimated 700,000 rape kits sitting in storage today. This is referred to as the Backlog. The Backlog occurs when the above-mentioned manifests itself into reality: when detectives or prosecutors do not request DNA analysis and they remain in evidence indefinitely. The backlog also occurs in crime labs, where submitted rape kits are awaiting analysis. The Joyful Heart Foundation defines a “backlogged” kit at as one that has not been tested within 30 days of the receipt by the lab or the police evidence room.9

I have been working with police departments across the country to allow me to come in and photograph their evidence collection kits. I worked tirelessly for about a year until one police precinct allowed me to come in and photograph their backlogged rape kits. I found that by offering the department

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anonymity that ultimately led to gaining access. In each of the following images, every single number or name on the rape kits have been changed to protect the privacy of the victim whose DNA evidence is collected.

Figure 23: 124 backlogged kits in this location, 2016, Archival Inkjet Project, 20x24”
Figure 24: 2 backlogged kits in this location. Arkansas has statewide reform, 2016, Archival Inkjet Project, 20x24”

Figure 25: 24 backlogged kits in this location, 2016, Archival Inkjet Project, 20x24”
Following the images of the backlog are pictures of the crime labs in which kits are tested if they’re submitted for DNA analysis. If a victim is lucky enough for their kit to get sent to a lab, the quality of the lab depends largely upon where you live. Whether your criminology labs are well-funded either privately or publicly or at all affects the victim whose kit had been collected. A publicly funded DNA testing lab in Tulsa, Oklahoma (figure 23) is what one would typically expect from a DNA testing lab. Bright, white, clean, well-equipped. Unfortunately what I’ve found is that expectation is not a reality. I gained access to a DNA testing lab in Youngstown, Ohio, and was stunned at what I saw (figure 24). The crime lab depicted in this image is fully functional and represents essentially the same workstation as seen in figure 23. The crime lab in Youngstown is publicly funded, but Youngstown also happens to be a poverty-stricken area that is part of the rust belt.

Once a booming steel town, all industry has moved overseas and what is left is a town not unlike what one would imagine a ghost town in the Wild West would be. The town is a shell of itself, making room for drugs and crime to grow in the empty spaces, and in turn, a lack of resources for law enforcement. I grew up a mere fifty miles west of Youngstown in Akron, Ohio, and visited the city often with a former professor who was making work about the city’s current state
but knew nothing of the state of its law enforcement until I began making

*Remnants.*

The workstation depicted in figure 24 stands in stark contrast to the
workstation in Tulsa, Oklahoma (figure 23). The lab in Tulsa, Oklahoma is in
proximity to the University of Tulsa and is a learning facility for many forensic
science students, making it eligible for additional public funding.

*Figure 26: Workstation, DNA Testing Lab, Tulsa Oklahoma, 2016, Archival Inkjet Project, 20x24”*
Figure 27: Workstation, DNA Testing Lab, Youngstown, Ohio, 2016, Archival Inkjet Project, 20x24”

Figure 28: A machine which writes DNA profiles into the CODIS, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2016, Archival Inkjet Project, 20x24”
Figure 29: DNA Testing Lab Storage, Youngstown, Ohio, 2016, Archival Inkjet Project, 20x24”

Figure 30: Examination station, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2016, Archival Inkjet Project, 20x24”
The images of the kits, the kits in police evidence rooms, and the images of the crime labs serve to contrast the emotional and traumatizing nature of the crime with the archiving of a crime and in turn, the human body.

The final section of Remnants focuses solely on those who have survived sexual and domestic assault. We collaborate together to choose a setting and it is up to each individual if they wanted to remain anonymous or reveal their identity. By offering these subjects a space to be represented as a survivor, I attempt to allow them a safe space to feel empowered rather than oppressed by their past. Each image is titled with the amount of years since the subject’s
assault while withholding specific details to preserve privacy while putting the stress on the passing of time, and in turn, the identity of survivor.

Figure 32: Olivia, 2 years since assault, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 32x40"
Figure 33: Jenny, 18 years since assault, 2016
Archival Inkjet Print, 32x40”

Figure 34: Emily in her sukkah, 3 years since assault, 2016
Archival Inkjet Print, 32x40”
Figure 35: Misty, 16 years since assault, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 32x40”

Figure 36: Angela, 21 years since assault, 2016, Archival Inkjet Print, 32x40”
Figure 37: Anonymous, translating their notes from Spanish to English 1 week after assault, 2016, 32x40"

Figure 38: Grace, 3 years since assault, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 32x40"
All of these aspects create a complicated and intimidating maze of steps a survivor may maneuver if they choose to rely on the justice system for assistance. This work does not serve to trigger or create a negative response, but exists as photographic evidence of the reality many face when assaulted.
DISSEMINATION

Dissemination of Remnants has always moved beyond gallery spaces or museums in order to be accessible to those who are not familiar with a fine art discourse. Those in positions of power to enact real change might not find themselves in small art galleries in Georgia or Iowa, and constituents in the position to vote in politicians who have survivor’s best interests in mind might not live anywhere near an art museum. I strive to use Remnants as an educational tool as well as a call-to-action.

Initially, I designed Remnants for Congress as a hardcover book to push for the allocation of funds towards rape kit testing reform. There are an estimated 700,000 backlogged rape kits in the United States alone, and the processing of these kits have been proven lead to the identification and prosecution of serial rapists. 11,341 kits were found in a police warehouse where they were dumped without investigation in Wayne County, Michigan in 2009. After eight years, it was reported in December 2017 that the processing of these rape kits has led to identification of 817 serial rapists.¹⁰

Many precincts are unable to process their backlog due to lack of funds. It costs up to $1,500 to process one rape kit\textsuperscript{11}, and precincts are in desperate need of Federal or Private grants in order to process their backlog. Governors and members of Congress are in the position to allocate the adequate funds to clear the national backlog. The fact that 585 individuals (a majority of them rich, straight, white men) yield so much power is terrifying, but I feel the need to play the game in order to create real change.

Remnants in book form serves as photographic evidence to the traumatic steps a survivor endured, but represents an object that feels too precious and inaccessible to my target audience. The printing costs for such a book proved astronomical ($10,000 for 750 copies) and my first attempt at crowdsourcing met its goal by 67%.

After an unexpected loss following public support of the work, I decided to redesign Remnants as a newspaper; a format that I knew my target audience would be familiar with lower printing costs. When the Kickstarter ran again, I received 110% funding due to the costs being exponentially lower in a different format. Not only was the funding goal 40% lower than the initial request, but I had an already-established audience from the first crowdsourcing attempt. As of

February 2018, the preliminary draft of the newspaper has been ordered and can be seen in figures 37-51.

Figure 40: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, front, newsprint, 11x8.5”
Figure 41: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #1, newsprint, 11x17”

Figure 42: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #2, newsprint, 11x17”
Figure 43: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #3, newsprint, 11x17”

Figure 44: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #4, newsprint, 11x17”
Figure 45: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #5, newsprint, 11x17”

Figure 46: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #6, newsprint, 11x17”
Figure 47: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #7, newsprint, 11x17”

Figure 48: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #8, newsprint, 11x17”
Figure 49: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #9, newsprint, 11x17”

Figure 50: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #10, newsprint, 11x17”
Figure 51: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #11, newsprint, 11x17"

Figure 52: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #12, newsprint, 11x17"
Figure 53: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, spread #13, newsprint, 11x17”

Figure 54: Remnants: A newspaper designed for Congress, 2018, back, newsprint, 11x8.5”
ETHICS

I am hyperaware of the ethics of making work about people and using it in a fine art context. Sontag writes in *On Photography*,

“To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is sublimated murder—a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time.”¹²

The camera is inherently voyeuristic. Too many instances in both the history of photography and in contemporary discourse treat subjects without respect or dignity. While making Remnants, I put the privacy and safety of my subjects as my number one priority. From changing each and every number on each and every rape kit depicted in my images to meeting and listening to survivors of assault before I even touch my camera, it is apparent in my practice. I approached my subjects in this way not only because I’m a survivor myself, but because the camera has been yielded as a means for exploitation throughout the history of photography.

Around the mid-1800s, a growing number of Westerners had an interest in photographing the social problems of the lower classes around the world.

Willoughby Wallace Hooper was an Army Captain and is most known for photographing lower-caste Hindus in his travels. Most notable is his image “The Last of the Herd, Madras Famine” which depicts three famished figures: a cow, a man, and a child.

While photographers such as Willoughby Wallace Hooper and John Thompson may have had good intentions, it is approaches such as these that are problematic in their realization. In a talk that Ivan Illich gave at Southwestern University in Texas, he says, “To hell with good intentions. This is a theological statement. You will not help anybody with your good intentions.” Illich’s talk speaks to my working methodology deeply because there is a “white knight” syndrome among photographers. A “white knight” is defined by Merriam-Webster as “one that comes to the rescue of another” and is the term I’m referring to. It’s become more racially charged in the last decade, and rightfully so. Illich also states, “Next to money and guns, the third largest North American export is the U.S. idealist, who turns up in every theater of the world: the teacher, the volunteer, the missionary, the community organizer, the economic

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developer, and the vacationing do-gooders.” Illich is referring to missionaries, but this “vacationing do-good-er” dates back to the early days of the photographic medium, as mentioned above. The camera is referred to as a tool that can be used to capture something, turning all of its subjects into something to prey upon and ultimately consume.

I find National Geographic photography to fall under the category of work that Illich is referring to. Privileged photographers are traditionally tasked to photograph “othered” communities to give people a voice or photograph that which is visually compelling. The very notion that one can be in a position to give individuals a voice at all is frankly egotistical and ridiculous. Using the camera as a means to amplify the stories of individuals, yes. But granting them a simple mean of expression because the photographer in question has graced them with their presence and their equipment? No. This viewpoint plays into the missionary ideal that Illich is referring to. The assumption that communities who live differently than your own needs to be “educated” or “cultured” is damaging to a diverse worldview.

ON REFLECTION

As a survivor of sexual assault, making this work was often emotionally exhausting. While my research interests were certainly piqued through personal experiences, I was unaware of the emotional toll making this work had the potential of taking. I find it important to write an “On Reflection” piece of my thesis not as a career artist, but as an individual making sense of what it is I do. Much of what follows will be didactic.

I was assaulted when I was nineteen years old in November 2012; only three months after I returned home from living in Italy for a better part of a year, by someone I had dated for six years before I left for Italy. We weren’t together during my time in Italy, and when I returned as the first to leave my hometown and we reconnected. One thing led to another, and I was raped by a man in my childhood bedroom who I had dated for six years, and who I trusted when I told him I wanted to end our arrangement. I found it easy, then, to blame myself. This is more common than not in survivors.

I did not find it easy as a nineteen-year-old to report to the authorities because I knew they wouldn’t believe me due to my long history with my rapist so I didn’t tell a soul and I went to class the next day. I continued to deny the severity of what had occurred and moved out of my parent’s house where I was assaulted.
All of these elements in my life have amounted to my ability to understand and empathize with survivors of assault. I know firsthand it isn’t easy to leave. I know it isn’t simple to report to authorities. These firsthand and personal accounts have led me to be a better maker, advocate, listener, activist, and person. All of the above has been traumatic but have made me a better and more effective maker, and in turn, able to make Remnants.

There were many days that I found it a chore to get out of bed at 5 am and hastily dress to travel out into the freezing cold to drive to these spaces of sexual or domestic assault when I had been plagued by nightmares of my own assault the night before. Speaking to survivors in a bar or coffee shop left me shaken for days before I picked up my camera to photograph them. There were many triggering moments, traveling to these sites or listening to survivors. However, the work is bigger than me and as mentioned in the abstract on page vii, the work serves to educate the viewer of the complex and intimidating steps survivors must often endure when seeking justice.

Making Remnants was one of the first times that I openly spoke about my assault (in reference to why I wanted to make this work), so making the work was therapeutic for not only my subjects, but for me as well. In summation, making work that one is personally invested in due to life experience can be healing not only for the maker, but also the subjects involved.
Attending graduate school granted me the time to hone in on my practice as well as my research interests. I know that my work is based primarily in advocacy, change, and documentary-style. The work that I’m making serves to educate my viewer and move non-fine-art audiences to use their power to trigger change. While I recognize my place within the canon of the history of photography and work in a documentary/fine art way, I am in the business of convincing viewers to simply care. I am dedicated to making my work accessible for viewers who might not walk into a gallery.

Since completing Remnants, I have moved on to finishing the Research & Development stage of a new body of work to being able to start the work. I am now examining extreme instances of intimate partner violence in which the only way the abuse ended was with more violence. I have been contacting families who have lost daughters, mothers, and sisters to their abuser and working closely with women who have been incarcerated for killing their abuser in self-defense. In order to gain access to these subjects, I’ve been handwriting letters to families and incarcerated individuals (figure 60) to request their participation in the project.
Recently I was invited to Chariton, Iowa by the family of Jessica Deemer, who was murdered in 2008 by her estranged husband at the age of 24. She left behind a son, Ty, who was adopted by her parents. Arriving at their family farm and seeing all of the relics that remained of Jessica, as well as meeting her son who is now 13, was humbling. Their willingness to share details about their mother and daughter as well as the signs of abuse leading up to the murder was both heartbreaking and informative.

Figure 55: Lori Luedtke at her daughter Jessica’s grave, Chariton, IA, 2017

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Figure 56: Jessica Deemer’s son, Ty, aged 5, two weeks after his mother’s death, 2008

Figure 57: Jessica Deemer’s son, Ty, aged 13, Chariton, IA, 2017
Figure 58: Jessica Deemer’s college graduation cake, 2008

Figure 59: Jessica Deemer’s parents, 2017
Hello

I'm Melissa, a graduate student at the University of Iowa. I hope this letter finds you well and you will consider my request. I have photographed various topics related to women's issues for years, including my most recent series, Remnants, which you can see on my website. Remnants has been featured in many public forums both online and in gallery spaces to bring awareness about sexual and domestic assault. As I have continued along with this project, I have noticed that my heart has grown passionate about sharing the stories and working with families whom have lost loved ones. I read about your mother in the Des Moines Register. I cannot begin toathom or imagine what you have experienced, but I wanted to reach out to you to request your participation in this project. The photographs will serve as a celebration of life, as well as speak to the perseverance of her surviving family members. Outside viewers of the photographs will see that these crimes do not affect one, but many. My project will manifest itself in images of you, other family members, photos of her, or any other belongings or spaces that remind you of her. I will use the images in my graduate thesis in a gallery setting, but you will be able to rescind your images from the project at any point. To show my appreciation for your willingness to share your story, I will compile a small photo album of the images I make just for your family. Your participation would help bring public awareness to the struggles and realities of intimate partner violence. If you have any questions or want to speak further, feel free to call at or send an email at melissa-kreider@uiowa.edu. I will respond to any message when I am able. I hope to hear from you soon. Best, Melissa Kreider

Figure 60: Handwritten note to surviving family member, 2018
I am experimenting with ways in which to tell each victim’s story and
tackle the sequence of events that led to death as this body of work is brand
new. Remnants was a large sampling of the failures of the justice system, the
setting of assault, and survivors, and I’m cognizant of what I’ve learned from that
as I move forward with this body of work. As always, I am questioning how to
present the viewer with visuals that will create empathy but also inform them or
at least arm them with questions such as: Where were the police? The shelter
systems? The families? Not to place blame on one party, but to open up the
conversation and potentially equip viewers with the tools to recognize abuse in
their own and loved one’s lives to prevent abuse escalating to murder—or in a
perfect world, happening at all. My work does not serve to “save the world,” but
if it generates one productive conversation surrounding assault, I consider it
successful.

The work that I’m making moving forward would be impossible to tackle
had it not been for my trials and tribulations combined with my graduate school
experience. The time awarded to me to make my work and shift through these
ethical issues is invaluable.
REFERENCES


