

ARTS & POETRY

On “coming out” as a rape survivor.

Lines written on the publication day of “Shocking revelation! There are women survivors of sexual violence training as person-centred psychotherapists” *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 15(1), DOI: 10.1002/ppi.1396

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“Would you write something to introduce yourself as a new Associate Editor for *PPI*?”
And in December’s soft cocoon,
with everything slowly winding down,
when you don’t quite believe that January will come,
I write.

The Editor and I edit,
in his New Zealand daytime,
at 2 a.m. for me in the UK,
and, once we’re satisfied with our efforts, I fall deeply asleep.

For a while, it’s a dream.
It didn’t really happen.
Especially as I don’t tell anyone.
I’m not really “coming out” as a rape survivor in a journal article
that anyone can access any time,
even print off and leave on the bus.
With my photograph on it. (With my photograph on it!)

And then,
I’m waking up,
night after night,
with burning heat scorching to my fingertips.
What have I done?

Everyone will know.
What will they think?
And can I stand it?

"You could write and ask for it not to be published,"
a friend suggests, with care.
But I don't,
even though I fantasize about it:
"Dear Keith, I hope you are well. On reflection, I have decided . . ."

Pre-publication, I show selected people.
Some responses feel so empowering.
Someone says, perfectly nicely, that it's "brave",
and I'm terrified.
I stop sharing the words.
I talk a good talk about how I hope the piece will be helpful to psychotherapists-in-training
with herstories/histories like mine, and not.
But activism isn't changing the internal talk.

I decide that on publication,
I won't tweet a link.
If people find it, they find it –
On their own.
It's self-care – not shame.

And, no, I didn't quite believe that either.

I teach sexual violence;
I teach students that it's not survivors who should feel shame.
And yet . . .

There's a short publication delay,
and, within it,
I share my forthcoming article with a colleague.
I discover that, finally, I am not waiting for a response.
I'm "working through",
starting to see daylight.

Early on publication day,
I'm not only tweeting a link,
But pinning the tweet.
Look, look what I've written!

Of course, I'm alarmed.
Saying one is a rape survivor is still taboo.
But something that was hidden for a long time,

for which I wrongly felt to blame,
has been set free,
to find its own way in the world.

I'm not responsible for other people's reactions,
only my own.

And

I

feel

proud

of

myself.

Can you see me smiling?

(I know you can, because there's that photograph again!)



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