

Chapter 3

Unlocking the Silence: Tori Amos, Sexual Violence, and Affect

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It was like I instantly knew what she was talking about. I locked my door, put the song on repeat, and just sat on the floor and absolutely sobbed. It was just so amazing to suddenly feel like I'm not all alone, and this is normal—to be feeling this way.—Shannon Lambert

This is how Tori Amos fan Shannon Lambert described the experience of hearing Amos's rape-narrative song "Me and a Gun" for the first time.¹ Shannon was raped at the age of 15 at a friend's party by an older boy from her school. For four years, she tried to "forget" the experience, an endeavor which left her depressed and suicidal. Then a university friend lent her Amos's debut album *Little Earthquakes*, and Shannon connected with Amos's narrative of sexual violence in a profound way. In 2005, I surveyed over 2,000 Tori Amos listeners, and found that the sort of connection Shannon described was a common and vital experience for them. This chapter aims to explore the ways in which these connections happen—by examining the song itself, Amos's personal role, and the chains of support that have sprung up in communities connected to Amos and her work.

Sexual Violence as a Human Rights Issue

Though this chapter aims to shine a light on the support so many have found through a song and an artist, it is important to note that the lack of support elsewhere is particularly shocking, given the ubiquity of sexual violence. Sexual violence is arguably the most pervasive human rights violation of our time, based as it is on the structural gender inequality that necessarily affects 50 percent of the world's population. In 2005 Amnesty International concluded, based on an amalgamation of 50 surveys from around the world, that at least one out of every three women has been forced or coerced into sex, beaten, or abused in some other sexually violent way in her lifetime. Similarly, the WHO World Report on Violence and Health in 2002 showed that one in four women experiences sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner, and that one-third of girls are forced

¹ From *Little Earthquakes* (Atlantic Records, 1992).

into their first sexual experience. The Council of Europe cited domestic violence as the primary cause of death, disability, and ill-health for women aged between 16 and 44, overshadowing cancer and traffic accidents. In addition to highlighting individual personal and familial experiences, there are many other sexually violent acts constantly occurring worldwide, such as the trafficking of women and young girls for prostitution, female genital mutilation, and rape as a weapon of war and conflict.

The pervasiveness of sexual violence is reflected in the sheer number of sexual violence representations in the media. Stories about rape appear not just in news media, but also in film, television, literature, and music. Much work has been done showing the ways in which an unrealistic view of rape is presented in the media (e.g., by predominantly showing stranger rape when the majority of rapes are committed by someone close to the victim, or by suggesting that false rape accusations are just as common as genuine rapes, when in fact they represent a maximum of 3 percent of cases reported to the police). These incorrect assumptions about rape, commonly referred to as “rape myths,” were explored by a UK survey commissioned by Amnesty in 2005. The results of the survey showed that a third of all respondents thought a woman was partially or totally to blame for rape if she had flirted, more than a third thought she was partially or totally responsible if she was drunk, and a quarter thought she was partially or totally responsible if she was wearing sexy or revealing clothing. Research has also shown that those who believe in rape myths are far more unlikely to be able to identify sexual violence, and frequently blame the victim (e.g., Varelas and Foley, 1998; Estrich, 1987). Moreover, findings reveal that jurors in rape cases are more likely to rely on popular understandings of rape (e.g., those they find in media representations and rape myth “talk”²) than on legal definitions (Epstein and Langenbahn, 1994).

Despite these disheartening conclusions about media and sexual violence, there are instances that do not fall into this pattern. In popular music, there are many women singing about sexual and domestic violence in ways that illuminate both the trauma itself and its long-term impact. These songs are often based on the artist’s personal experience, and examples of these artists include (but are not limited to): Suzanne Vega, Tracy Chapman, Ani DiFranco, Heather Nova, Christina Aguilera, Jamelia, Bananarama, Alanis Morissette, Sheryl Crow, and Tasmin Archer. However, the most significant song about sexual violence, in terms of its impact, is undoubtedly Tori Amos’s “Me and a Gun.” This chapter focuses on how “Me and a Gun” functions as a piece of trauma art, as well as looking at the work done by the song, by Amos herself, and by other connected chains of support, with regard to sexual violence.

² See also Soothill and Walby (1991), Benedict (1992), Greer (2003), and Gill (2007) for further analysis of the deployment of rape myths in news reporting of sexual violence.

Trauma Art and Affect

Jill Bennett's work on trauma, affect, and art (2005) is fascinating in its suggestion that memory through "trauma art" may actually be able to move the trauma from the body into a distinctive (and potentially global) political framework. In her analysis, which draws heavily on postcolonial theory to explore our interconnectedness, she suggests that in realizing a particular way of seeing and feeling, trauma art may allow certain critical and affective interactions to take place, which in turn constitute what she calls "empathic vision."³ This interaction of affect is reminiscent of Deleuze's notion of "the encountered sign" (2003), in which the art manifests itself in our senses, emotions, or bodies, and this experience pushes us into an intellectual inquiry. This intellectual inquiry forces us to examine the issue the art raises afresh, which may lead to a different understanding, and/or to the conclusion that some kind of action must be taken. This action can take several forms, ranging from an active remembering (like the post-Holocaust mantra "never forget") to a political protest for social change, or practical alleviation of the suffering of others. In addition to these potential consequences, there is one further type of affect to consider, that of the possibility of individuals *feeling better* as a result of their interactions with Amos's work. Such outcomes are, of course, deeply personal to the individual, but can include: feeling heard and having their emotional responses validated, finding others who have shared experiences and feelings, and "speaking out" about their experiences of sexual violence. These, in turn, can be connected to the less obviously personal responses, such as activism and work with other survivors, however, the chain begins with a strong emotional connection to the song. There are precedents to this in other art forms; for example, of Paul Celan's concentration camp poem, "Todesfuge" (Death Fugue), Primo Levi said, "I wear it inside me like a graft" (2001, p. 198). Trauma art, like trauma itself, can be (in the titular words of Jeanette Winterson's 1992 novel) "written on the body" and incorporated into the self, to such an extent that it resembles the graft Levi suggests. In short, there are three types of affect to consider when approaching Amos's "Me and a Gun": first, discomfort or anxiety leading to empathic thought and improved understanding or insight, second, validation of one's own experiences and "healing," and third, motivation to take action, such as helping others.

³ Bennett's "empathic vision" borrows from Dominic LaCapra's notion of "empathic unsettlement" (1994), which he defines (in relation to his work on representing Holocaust experiences) as an aesthetic experience in which "I" simultaneously *feel* for the other, *and* am aware of the gap between my perception and the other's experience.

“Me and a Gun”: How It Functions

In assessing “Me and a Gun” as a piece of trauma art, it is important to look at the ways in which the song works on its listeners. The song is essentially a descriptive narrative of an experience of sexual violence, without a great deal of room for interpretation. However, there are aspects of the song worth drawing out for particular examination. First, with regard to the song’s presentation there are two important points to note: the *a cappella* nature of the song, and the fact that the experience is described in the present tense. Both of these qualities render the song immediate, unsafe, and uncomfortable to listen to.

The narrator takes the listener deep into the heart of the violation by describing both the physical nature of the attack as well as her state of mind and thoughts during the attack. The listener is invited to join in with the narrator’s analysis of her own internal experience: “You can laugh/ It’s kind of funny/ The things you think/ At times like these/ Like I haven’t seen Barbados/ So I must get out of this.” Many people who have experienced some sort of life-threatening, or suddenly serious incident, whether it is an assault or a car accident, will know the ironic laughter the narrator reports here. Reactions to severe negative stimuli cannot be known in advance, and as a result, the thoughts that do occur can seem very random in retrospect. In this case, the narrator latches onto places she has never been as a reason she must stay alive; the recurring motif in the song is Barbados, but later she also mentions “Carolina/ Where the biscuits are soft and sweet.”

Amos moves from the general to the specific by returning to the very physical nature of the assault. This is best illustrated with the lines, “These things go through your head/ When there’s a man on your back/ And you’re pushed flat on your stomach/ It’s not a classic Cadillac.” When Amos sings the line “And you’re pushed flat on your stomach,” she emphasizes “flat” in a way that makes it sound as though she is being pushed down at that moment. She also uses “you” to its greatest effect here, making the listeners have some of the narrator’s experience for themselves. It is a lot easier for the listener to be included in “the things you think at times like these,” than it is when the narrator changes “a man on my back” to “a man on your back/ And you’re pushed flat on your stomach.” Whether the listener likes it or not, Amos is taking them into the depths of that experience with her narrator.

Although the song stands primarily as a personal narrative, there is one overtly political (feminist) comment about the politics of sexual violence which is worth including here: “Yes I wore a slinky red thing/ Does that mean I should spread/ For you/ Your friends/ Your father/ Mr. Ed?” The narrator is challenging the “she was asking for it” rape myth by saying that however provocatively she was dressed, she did not deserve to be assaulted.

The song ends with as much discomfort as it began. The final lines, “And I haven’t seen Barbados/ So I must get out of this,” leave us stranded with the narrator in the car, not knowing whether she gets out alive or not. Arthur Frank (1995) suggests that illness narratives fall into three categories: the restitution

narrative, in which the main focus is a return to health, the chaos narrative, in which there is a lack of order or mediation, and the quest narrative, which takes the form of illness as a journey with something to be gained at the end. Though sexual violence experiences are not “illness,” the ways in which both can affect mind as well as body, self-identification, and relationships with other people, mean that work on illness narratives is particularly relevant to work on trauma narratives.⁴ “Me and a Gun” takes the form of the chaos narrative, because of its immediacy and its nonresolution. The listener does not find out at the end of the song whether the narrator escapes her attacker or not, and is left with the details and the emotional panic of the experience, but no comforting, or otherwise explanatory context. Frank argues that the chaos narrative is the most embodied narrative of the three, existing as it does “on the edges of a wound” (1995, p. 101). It is the most difficult narrative for an audience to hear, because its lack of structure and resolution provoke anxiety, leaving the listener to face the narrative as a possible reality in their own lives. The story is unresolved and due to this, and the present tense used, the experience remains *currently happening* every time the song is played. The power of the song is undeniable.

What Has Changed as a Result of “Me and a Gun”?

For Deleuze, the “encountered sign” in trauma art that is felt or sensed, rather than recognized on a purely cerebral level, is the spark in a narrative that allows an affective connection to take place. Once this connection has been made, the listener is propelled into deep thoughts, engaging in the narrative with both mind and body, in a way that could not have happened without the spark of the encountered sign. In terms of “Me and a Gun,” this could be any part of the song that resonates with, or in some other way significantly touches, the listener. However, the outcome of this connection with the sign is that the listener, in encountering Amos’s narrative in these visceral and personal terms, is pushed toward a deeper understanding not just of Amos’s narrative, but of rape itself. Using questions from the Amnesty survey of (UK) public opinion and understanding of sexual violence, the listener survey sought to establish whether or not this was the case. That is, were Amos’s listeners less likely to accept rape myths than the general public? Across all of the rape myths that were explored (for example, that women bore some responsibility for being raped if they wore sexy clothing, flirted, or were drunk, etc.), the Tori Amos listenership consistently rejected these in significantly higher numbers (between 11 and 24 percent more, depending on the rape myth). Though further research would be needed before a claim that this link is causal could be made—and the survey established Amos’s listenership as a left-leaning, well-educated, liberal group—it is still worth noting the differences between the two sets of responses, especially with Deleuze’s notion in mind.

⁴ Also see Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* (1985), for further work in this area.

Though the song has been discussed here on its own merits, there is no doubt that its impact, and the amount of media attention it generated, was greatly increased by Amos's revelation that the song was based on her own experience of sexual violence. This experience occurred when Amos was in her early twenties and playing in piano bars in Los Angeles. She gave a fan a lift home one night after the show and the fan kidnapped and raped her. It was the combination of the starkness and honesty of "Me and a Gun" and Amos's own willingness to speak out about her own experience that brought the issue to the fore. However, when Amos helped to set up the first national sexual violence helpline in the United States, RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), her position as patron saint to the sexually abused was firmly established.

At the time of setting up RAINN, Amos gave a number of interviews in which she discussed the response to her song and her speaking out as her motivation for doing so. For example:

I got so many letters, not just from women, saying if they could have just had somebody to talk to ... and not just somebody who talks on the phone and goes, "Oh God, I know what you mean. I'm so sorry this happened to you." But someone who can give you steps toward healing, not just commiserating. And that's what this number will do. Wherever you are in the country, you can call the 800 number and be put directly in contact with (a professional) who lives close to you. I had to do something, because you wouldn't believe how many letters come in. It would blow your mind how many.⁵ (quoted in Morse, 1994, p. 63)

Though Amos often spoke in these general terms, there was one specific incident that remained at the heart of her decision to set up a more official, stable, and appropriate support than she could offer herself:

This girl showed up backstage. ... She just stood there and said, "Last night my stepfather raped me. He's been raping me every night for seven years." I said, "Get her on the bus!" When we were crossing the state line that night, [the tour manager] said, "The FBI's going to be on your ass so fast." And I'm like, wait a minute, what is right and wrong here? Where has the law failed? That this girl's only hope is an artist.⁶ (quoted in Press, 1996, n.p.)

⁵ Amos has stated on many occasions that at one point she was receiving hundreds of letters a week from listeners who had experienced some form of sexual violation.

⁶ Amos also recounted this story on the American news show *20/20* in 1999 (*20/20*, ABC, 1978- current). Amos said that the girl was so overcome during the show that she collapsed. After being brought backstage, Amos remembers, "I said, 'What's going on with you?' and she said 'I want to come and join the tour.' I said, 'what's so bad that you want to do that, now?' and she said, 'Because my stepfather raped me last night, he'll rape me tomorrow night, and he's going to rape me tonight when I get home.'"

Though Amos gave this interview in the context of her motivation to set up RAINN, it is interesting to see that there are several other things at work here. First, the point Amos makes about the law having failed can be taken in a wider context than simply an interpretation of being stopped by law from helping someone being victimized by something that is against the law. When Amos says “That this girl’s only hope is an artist,” she is referencing not just the failure of the law to protect this girl, but also the lack of service provision for those experiencing sexual violence, given the fact that this girl had come to Amos, a recording and performing artist, for emotional and practical support with sexual abuse that had been taking place for seven years. Second, it is clear that the girl felt that she could come to Amos personally and share her experience, as all the others who wrote letters had also felt. Third, it is also plain that it was Amos’s first instinct to help the girl personally. Only Amos’s tour manager prevented Amos from allowing the girl to come on tour with them, on the grounds that they could be arrested for kidnapping her, as she was underage and they would be crossing US state lines.

However, despite helping to establish an official source of support, Amos’s unofficial role as personal confidante to the sexually abused was, and to a large extent still is, overwhelming. It is very rare for an artist as successful as Amos is to meet fans before every show. Yet, Amos’s Meet and Greets have been a feature of her whole touring life, and are very important to her fans. They provide an opportunity for anyone who is willing to turn up a few hours before the show (usually just before sound check) to meet Amos and speak to her. This opportunity is often used by fans to request a song for that evening’s performance, have an album signed, or hand a letter or gift to Amos. However it also provides a space for other, more personal interactions. In attending several of the Meet and Greets in both the United States and the UK in 2005, I witnessed people telling Amos deeply personal things about themselves and their experiences, including narratives of abuse, rape, and attempted suicide, in this forum.⁷ Amos herself seemed to be touched by these interactions, and to engage with each person and their story, fully. On several occasions, I noticed Amos’s eyes well up with tears, or observed her taking and clasping the person’s hand as they told her their story.

Although I witnessed only a few Meet and Greets, the survey confirmed that these experiences are quite standard for Amos. Respondents were asked if they had felt supported by Tori Amos *in person*, and 22 percent said they had. This question was answered by 1,969, and 439 of them answered “yes.” Given that each person who answered “yes” had a personal interaction with Amos, in which

⁷ There is a significant degree of discomfort in “eavesdropping” on interactions as personal as this. However, the nature of the Meet and Greet makes it virtually impossible not to do so. An area is usually fenced off for the Meet and Greet by Amos’s security so that there is some sort of barrier between Amos and the fans. After each person has their interaction with Amos, they move away to let someone else take their place. The fenced area is usually crowded and somewhat pen-like, and a truly “private” conversation would be very difficult to achieve with this degree of proximity to others.

they spoke to her about emotional issues, and were responded to in such a way that they felt supported, the work Amos has done in this regard herself is something quite extraordinary (especially when taking into account the fact that the survey respondents only represent a small fraction of Amos's listenership). Twenty-two percent of respondents had also written a letter to Amos, and 8 percent of respondents said that they had told Amos something that they had never told anyone else in their lives.

The personal interactions between Amos and her fans on this issue have had quite extraordinary consequences. When Shannon Lambert, whose experience of listening to "Me and a Gun" was quoted at the beginning of this chapter, created a personal website, "Welcome To Barbados," peppered with Tori Amos lyrics and telling her own story of sexual violence, she received a huge response, including an invitation to speak about her experiences on a US national news show, *20/20*.⁸ After the *20/20* segment was filmed, Shannon and the two other sexual violence survivors who were with her were taken backstage to meet Amos. Of the experience, Shannon wrote:

I followed him into Tori's dressing room and there she was ... right next to me, the woman who has saved my life so many times, the woman whose voice helped me to find my own. For so long she has been my best friend, the one who keeps me company when I have nightmares, the one who validates every emotion I feel. I hugged her and introduced myself. We all sat down and she asked how we were ... I said I was terrified. Tori decided we needed a lip gloss boost so she dug through her purse to find some delicious vanilla flavored gloss which she shared ("don't worry, I don't have any diseases you can see"). I felt a lot better with Tori-lip gloss on :) We spent a few moments just chatting, looking at Tori's wedding ring, and talking about random things.

Kellie, another survivor, asked Tori a question, and then it was my turn. I needed to thank Tori for all she has done for me. The tears were rolling down my face as she held my hand and told me that I was strong, that I was amazing, that I saved myself. For a while, at least, I believed her. The *20/20* cameras were asked to leave, and then the real magic began as we all shared with each other. The four of us were sitting there, clutching each other's hands and strength, drying each other's tears, and we were all equal. It wasn't Tori, the musical superstar, and three of her obsessed fans; it was four equals, all fighting the same demons and holding on to each other. Tori shared with us so much, and that meant more to me than anything else. She convinced me that she needed us just as much as we needed her. All four of us were sobbing, and that beautiful moment will remain in my memory forever. (<http://welcometobarbados.org/goodyear.html>, April 5, 2010)

⁸ The segment can be viewed here, in two parts: Part 1: http://youtube.com/watch?v=UXKK2JeC_tY; Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBO9LTBW-k>, both accessed April 5, 2011.

Shannon described the conversation with Amos as “very healing, private and emotional.” After it was over Amos autographed a photograph for Shannon with the words “We’ll get there together,” a phrase Shannon admits became something of a mantra to her as she developed an idea for a support network for others going through similar experiences. Knowing that she would not be able to respond personally to everyone who would write to her after the *20/20* show aired, Shannon wanted to create a space in which people could talk to each other, rather than just to her. Originally integrated into her “Welcome to Barbados” site, that space eventually became “Pandora’s Aquarium” (named after Amos’s song of the same name), a significant and effective nonprofit organization. Since its inception, over 20,000 people have registered with the site for support. In addition, Pandora’s Aquarium runs a lending library of sexual violence resources for its members, provides factsheets and articles to rape crisis centers, and organizes survivor’s retreat weekends. In 2009, Lambert, now 30, was named one of L’Oréal’s ten national “Women of Worth,” and, after a public vote, was declared the overall winner, thus awarding Pandora’s Aquarium (now “Pandora’s Project”) \$25,000 to continue its work with survivors.

Lambert’s mission statement reads: “My hope is that Pandora’s Aquarium will be a place where rape and sexual abuse survivors break the silence, tell their stories, heal those most invasive, unseeable of scars, and begin to live again.” One such person who accessed Lambert’s forum for just these reasons was Lindsay, now 24. Lindsay was abused between the ages of 3 and 15 by her grandfather, and also raped by a family friend she was babysitting for when she was 13. The experiences had left her feeling that she had no one to trust or turn to, until she discovered Pandora’s Aquarium at the age of 17. Lindsay wrote:

I did not have much support in my real life, and Pandy’s [pet name for Pandora’s Aquarium among forum members] became my one main outlet. I found so much support around the social isolation I felt once I told about the rape at 13, and I began to make friends online, some of who became my friends in my life outside the boards. (quoted in Finding, 2010, p. 243)

Though Lindsay found Pandora’s Aquarium through chance and not via a prior relationship with Amos’s music, the other members of the forum quickly recommended Amos’s debut album *Little Earthquakes*, among others, to her. Lindsay found Amos’s music to be a great source of help in her recovery. Though Lindsay still struggles, she now feels that she has come through her darkest days, with a great deal of thanks to Amos, her music and Pandora’s Aquarium, and is now happily engaged to her long-term girlfriend and is studying to be a social worker:

There are still challenges that I face, particularly still having to deal with some of the aftermath of being a sexual assault survivor, but I am stronger than ever and love the fact that I am soon going to have my master’s in social work. I

may not have musical talent like Tori, but I know how important having a good therapist who is empathic to the needs of survivors is to the healing journey. I hope to be that therapist to many people, particularly to survivors of sexual violence. (quoted in Finding, 2010, p. 244)

Lindsay met Amos at a book signing, and was keen to tell her about the role that Amos had played in both her recovery and her life choices:

I went on to say: “Your music and story has been an inspiration to me on my healing journey. I have been able to turn my pain into activism, which includes participating in fundraisers for RAINN and by participating in a local colleges’ coalition against sexual assault, and I have you as a role model. I owe part of my journey to you.” Tori said, “Thank you Lindsay. You know, we survivors need to stick together and work with others to make sure this never happens to anyone else. I’m glad you are doing this work.” I almost nearly died that I got that recognition for the activism I had done up to that time by one of my heroes. (quoted in Finding, 2010, p. 244)

The Interconnected Chains of Affect

Both Shannon’s and Lindsay’s narratives illuminate the fact that there are three distinct but interconnected sources of support for survivors of sexual violence who come to be caught up in the music of Tori Amos: the music itself, Tori Amos herself, both in person and as an iconic survivor/healer figure, and the community of fellow survivors that springs up around them. In both stories, it is clear that the three sources of support *are* both distinct and connected. For example, though most people who received support from Pandora’s Aquarium did so by first discovering the music of Tori Amos, and then being referred to the forum, or finding it through an internet search connected to Amos, Lindsay discovered Pandora’s Aquarium by chance, and then came to the music, and Amos in person, as secondary sources of support. In comparing Lindsay’s trajectory of Tori Amos-connected support to that of Shannon, who found Amos’s music first, started writing about it online, and then received support from Amos herself, it is clear that the chain of support works in both directions.

The interconnectedness of these three modes of support is vital. For example, Amos would not be as iconic as a sexual violence survivor/healer without her music, but at the same time, she also offers both Lindsay and Shannon something more than is offered in her music alone. The connection that transpires between Amos and both Lindsay and Shannon transcends the expectation that both women seemed to have before the meeting—that they were fans meeting a singer who has also become the patron saint of sexual violence survivors. Rather, what happened in both cases, cements and deconstructs this role for Amos. Both Lindsay and Shannon get things autographed by Amos in their meetings—a marker of the star/

fan relationship at work there. However, in both meetings, it is Amos who takes a step away from that relationship, and toward a much closer one. In Shannon's story, after the cameras stop rolling, Amos shares her lip-gloss with the women, before all four tell their stories, hold hands and cry together. It is interesting to note that Amos shares two personal things with the women: the lip-gloss and her own story. We might discount the lip-gloss as trivial while lauding the story as significant, however, I believe there is more at stake here. In sharing something feminine, physical, and personal with the women, Amos underlines the message she might like to give in words ("you are not dirty," "you can still be a sexual being," "you did not cause this by making yourself look attractive") with her actions. The parallel with the Bible story in which Jesus heals the leper (Mark 1: 40-45) is clear: though Jesus does heal the leprosy, the significance of the story is often seen in his willingness to touch the man, which was forbidden, at a time when the disease was associated with a great degree of shame and social stigma. Likewise, for these women, that someone in Amos's position of power, both as a star and as the "patron saint" of sexual violence, showed willingness, not only to talk to them about sexual violation, but also to share with them something physically intimate, is as clear a message of acceptance as they could receive.

In Lindsay's story, Amos tells her, "We survivors need to stick together," which is reminiscent of Shannon's "we'll get there together" autograph. These words have resonance with both women's stories, as well as with the many other narratives that were shared during the research process about people's personal experiences with Amos. It seems that one of the major ways in which Amos has helped people with their experiences of sexual violence lies in her willingness to align herself with her listeners. Because of this, people are able to feel part of a community of which Amos is not just the figurehead, but also a member, living with and struggling with the aftermath of her own experiences. However, it seems to me that Amos's role as figurehead of this community is just as important as her role as active participant in it. Though it may have been both healing and useful, it seems unlikely that the 20/20 private meeting would have had such significance for the women involved had Amos not also been present and participating in it. Likewise, when Amos affirms Lindsay's work in their face-to-face meeting, Lindsay says, "I almost nearly died that I got that recognition for the activism I had done up to that time by one of my heroes." It is Amos's status as "hero," both in terms of her music and in terms of her iconic stature with regard to sexual violence, that makes both women feel especially validated, heard, and supported.

Though both Shannon's and Lindsay's stories are, of course, deeply personal and individual, they are also representative. During the course of my research, I met many of Amos's listeners who also shared personal stories about their encounters with Amos, her music, and the communities around them, with me. A common thread running through almost all of these stories was the (almost incredulous) gratitude that *someone like Amos* had taken the time to hear their story, interact with it in an emotional way, and offer some kind of personal support, in addition to the music that had already supported and sustained them. Their narratives,

and many of those written on the survey by respondents, had many structural similarities, as well as similarities in trauma-content. They began with a sense of (usually teenage) isolation, before moving to the ways in which Amos's music had made them feel not alone. After discovering the music, they attended live shows and Meet and Greets, which performed two functions. The first of these was to access Amos herself and get support that way. The second was to meet other like-minded, people with whom they formed friendships and in many cases, surrogate families. In the preface to his book, *The Wounded Storyteller*, Arthur Frank writes,

In wounded storytelling the physical act becomes the ethical act. Kierkegaard wrote of the ethical person as editor of his life: to tell one's life is to assume responsibility for that life. This responsibility expands. In stories, the teller not only recovers her voice; she becomes a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voices. When any person recovers his voice, many people begin to speak through that story. (1995, pp. xii-xiii)

Frank's image of a chain of silences being unlocked by narratives has particular resonance with Tori Amos's work. Whether in lyrics such as "Sometimes I hear my voice/ And it's been here/ Silent all these years" (from "Silent All These Years," on the album *Little Earthquakes*, 1992) or in her involvement with RAINN (whose subheading is "Unlock the Silence"), Amos has been inextricably linked with speaking out about sexual violence, which, in turn, has encouraged others to do likewise. All three narrators explored in this chapter, Shannon, Lindsay, and Amos herself, as "wounded storytellers," took their experiences of sexual violence and, after accessing support for themselves, went on to help others with similar experiences. Many more of the survey respondents also reported being involved one way or another in "healing work," whether or not they related these roles directly to a connection with Amos. As such, there are now many networks of support in place, both explicitly linked to Amos and only tangentially linked. Once again, these linking chains may have their roots in Amos and "Me and a Gun," but their range and reach now vastly extends this original spark. The ongoing vitality of these support networks, whether or not Amos continues to be directly involved or not, is surely the biggest testament to Amos's work she could receive. As Shannon said, when interviewed on *20/20* about the thanks she owed to Amos, "I won't say that she saved my life, because I don't think she'd like that. But she definitely helped me to find the strength to save myself."